

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

**FAITH IN THE GAP**  
**FAITH FORMATION IN EMERGING ADULTS**  
**INVOLVED IN A ONE-YEAR INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME**

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**ABSTRACT**

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The research question answered by this thesis is: 'How can a one-year internship programme enable the formation of faith in young adults?' The programme investigated is in the Peterborough Diocese of the Church of England. I lead the internship that facilitates faith formation and vocational discernment. Whilst similar programmes are developing in the Church of England and elsewhere, it is an under-researched area.

The research is a qualitative, phenomenological project using a case study with a group of 7 young adults who were participants during one year. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the year, a focus group activity and discussion, and a photography exercise. Engagement with the literature analysed the nature of emerging adulthood, the impact of gap years in other contexts and theological perspectives on the formation of faith. The research aimed to discover the core influences on formation, drawing on practical theology, youth ministry practice and theories of emerging adulthood. The theological concept of habitus is proposed to address some of the challenges of a secular age and prior models of formation that emphasise cognitive processes.

Thematic analysis revealed three spheres of influence – relationships, encounter, and narratives of purpose. The concept of vocation is understood as discovering meaningful purpose that develops within the context of covenant community, practices of faith, and learning the story of God that together generate a habitus. The gap year and stage of life offer liminality, an ideal context for change. Faith is described as that which gives meaning and purpose, and formation is the process by which that kind of faith is discovered and shaped.

A unique contribution to knowledge is made in drawing together perspectives on faith formation, emerging adulthood, the gap year, and processes of change. Practical recommendations are made to improve my own practice and that of others.

Key words: faith, formation, gap year, habitus, vocation, community, Anglican

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## **Introduction**

A gap year changed my life! My last year at university had been difficult and confusing. I had studied English language and literature out of a love for language, literature, and theatre with a vague idea that I might use it in a career choice that I assumed would become clear by the end of the three years. It did not and in fact, I was probably even less certain than before. Furthermore, my dad had contracted cancer in the previous year and died the Easter before my finals. I was not in the best place to be making major life decisions. So, I took a 'year out' as a full-time volunteer in an ecumenical Christian youth and community centre in Romsey Town, Cambridge and then stayed for a second year. During this time, I grew up a lot more, my vocation became clear, I learnt valuable skills, grieved my father, grew in confidence, put my faith into practice, learnt to rely on God more than ever, and (most importantly) met my wife.

For the last nine years I have led a gap year programme for Peterborough Diocese in the Church of England. I recognise the same processes of life change happening in the 80+ young adults who have committed a year of their life to serve the church. The question I often asked was whether it was possible to quantify and account for this change in some way. I had faith in the gap year and could see that the gap influenced the lives of the young people, but I wanted to know why. Each year, I would gather feedback on the programme and collect a few stories of its impact on individuals. As a result, I would make some changes to the plans for the following year and hope that this improved the outcomes for the participants, but I had little evidence to support those changes or to know how effective they were. I also had questions over the purpose of the year and what processes and elements of the programme enabled change to occur. This research project has enabled me to complete a robust analysis of the programme to answer some of those questions.

The year itself comprises two connected programmes; one is a Youth Ministry Apprenticeship and the other a more general Ministry Internship. Both are based on a placement in a parish church where the young adult will serve as a voluntary worker and join in as much of the life of the parish as possible. The diocese provides a structured training programme in leadership, biblical studies and theology. In addition, the youth ministry apprentices complete a Level 3 Youth Work qualification that is delivered by an external agency. The participants are encouraged to view the year as an opportunity to explore their vocation, to experience church life usually through working closely with the incumbent, to learn new skills and knowledge of the Christian faith. Some of the interns live together in shared houses and are encouraged to form 'intentional community'.

As I began to outline the research project it became clear that I would need to narrow its focus, I could not evaluate the whole project, so I made the decision to concentrate on how the year enabled the development of faith in the lives of the participants. There is a gap in the literature around the impact of similar gap year programmes on faith development and this provided another motivation to address this issue. During the early stages of the research and after reviewing the literature on faith development, these questions crystallised into the research question, 'How can a one-year internship programme enable the formation of faith in young adults?' This included the formation of vocation because this is a core part of the year.

In the following chapters I have concentrated the discussion on the processes of faith formation and how change happens. In chapter 2, I will explore different understandings of faith development and formation, but my research journey has also led me to ask the question, what is faith? What do we mean when we talk about growing or developing faith, and in particular, I have been asking, does faith even grow at all? It is right to explore that question here before I explain the rest of my thesis.

### **Does Faith Grow?**

Is my faith bigger, stronger, better, more fully formed now than it was when I first began following Jesus? I know more about God. I have read more books and studied some theology. I have experienced many more church services, camps, and events where I have personally encountered God and seen others' lives changed. I have spent multiple hours talking about the things of God and sharing stories with others; I have worked full-time for the church and served local communities, I have served young people in full-time roles, worked with young offenders, the homeless, and children in care, all motivated by my Christian faith. But is my faith stronger as a result?

I am not sure.

It all depends.

It all depends on what we mean by faith, on what we mean by growing in faith. These are not just questions of definition and semantics, but they are theological questions that lie at the heart of this research project. Throughout the research process I have been looking to discover how faith grows without asking the fundamental question of whether faith itself grows. It just seemed an obvious assumption to make, of course we all grow up and develop and so faith must grow too. However, my epiphany moment came last summer when I heard the Salvation Army Officer, Danielle Strickland, speak on the way Jesus used the phrase, 'ye of

little faith'.<sup>1</sup> She explained that Jesus used that term four times when speaking to his disciples and rather than understand the words as a rebuke, as we often do, she suggested Jesus was commending his disciples. If it only takes the faith of a mustard seed to move mountains (Matthew 17:20) then why would they need more faith? Instead, Strickland proposed that Jesus was inviting the disciples to practice their faith in the moment when faith was required. This means that faith is rooted in the here and now as an activity or practice arising out of a trust in Jesus, who is God. This fresh perspective led me to explore the use of the word 'faith' in the gospels.

Jesus uses the word 'faith' thirteen times in Matthew's gospel,<sup>2</sup> once as 'the faith' and once as a comment on a lack of faith. Of the other eleven occurrences, 4 are the times mentioned above, one other time he seems to complain about having little faith, but this is the context for the saying about faith as small as a mustard seed. The other 5 uses are commending people for having faith or 'great' faith that results in them receiving healing. The faith implied in these examples is the practical expectation that Jesus can and will heal them or others in the immediacy of that moment. France (2008) records Matthew's use of the phrase, of little faith, 'denotes unbelief rather than inadequate belief' (2008, p.242) and refers to a practical trust in Jesus; when Matthew refers to the great faith of the centurion in 8:10, the meaning is 'an absolute practical reliance on God's power' (2008, p.159). Wright (2004) states, 'For Jesus, 'faith' often seems to mean 'recognising that God is decisively at work to bring the kingdom through Jesus' (2002, p.215). When Jesus talks of growth in the parables, often using farming metaphors, it is to refer to the kingdom of God not individual or personal faith. One of the themes of this research project is the need to move away from the dominant models of faith formation that have identified faith as belief in doctrines or creeds, a mental assent that does not change behaviour. These commentators confirm a view of faith as practice or action in the world based on a trust or belief in who Jesus is.

Commenting on a confirmation sermon given by Bonhoeffer in 1938, Root echoes this view by highlighting Bonhoeffer's assertion that faith can only be 'weak' because it takes the form of the crucified king (Root, 2014, p.149). Root reminds us that faith is not something that can be produced or forged by youth workers, but it is the gift of God.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, he argues that faith cannot be banked but only received as a daily gift. This is an argument he applies to youth ministry models that see their task as teaching faith and investing in young people while they are young so they will have reserves of faith to draw on in the future. Root's biblical image

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<sup>1</sup><https://breaksout.new-wine.org/sessions/impact-evening-celebration-with-danielle-strickland/>  
accessed 13/12/2020

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:30, 8:10, 8:26, 9:2, 9:22, 9:29, 13:58, 14:31, 15:28, 16:8, 17:20, 21:21, 24:10

<sup>3</sup> See Ephesians 2:8 and faith as a spiritual gift in 1 Cor 12:9

is the story of the manna in the desert that has to be collected each day; this parallels the Lord's Prayer in calling us 'to trust daily for the bread of faith' (2014, p.152).<sup>4</sup>

### **Faith forming Lives**

This idea of faith as the gift of God takes me to the Biblical concepts of covenant and calling, or vocation, that will be another theme emerging out of the data analysis.<sup>5</sup> At this point I want to notice how Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, later reminding them of the fact that, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you' (John 15:16). In his discussion of Mark's gospel, Burrige (2013) notes 'three classic steps of discipleship, to be called, to be chosen and to be sent out' (2013, p.46). The disciples are called and chosen to be with Jesus to do what he does and then sent out without him. In chapter 2, I will pick up this theme in relation to desire and how the things we love and long for shape us, and how God longs for relationship. The God of the covenant in the Old and New Testaments is the God who calls us into relationship, to follow him, and to know we are loved by Him. Our first vocation is to know we are loved and called out. In a society that idolises individual choice and encourages us to choose the meaning we put on the world; this is a counter-cultural gospel message that faith is not all about us but comes as a response to the call of a transcendent God. It entails that our sense of meaning, purpose and identity come from this faith. The questions: who am I? what is my calling? how do I live? are all answered by faith. This covenant faith forms us and our lives, so faith formation is not so much about shaping our faith in and of itself, but of shaping our lives as a consequence of what we believe.

It is this kind of faith that develops and is formed as we journey through life which we see in the call of Jesus to follow him and become disciples. The disciples followed Jesus wherever he went and learnt from him on the journey. Willard (1998) says that to follow Jesus meant to be with him, to learn how to be like him and how to live in the kingdom of God. Formation then describes that process of change and movement as we live out our daily, everyday lives in the service of the kingdom of God that comes through Jesus. Historically, the church identified a process of catechesis.<sup>6</sup> Catechesis not only means teaching but it includes the word 'echo' reminding us that the Christian life is 'about living lives that echo the life of Christ' (Mercer, 2020, p.15). As we keep travelling, we grow in our character and behaviour, learning what we, and others, believe, applying it as wisdom, and becoming part of a community of faith united by the Holy Spirit. In the joys and trials of this journey, we discover opportunities to exercise faith in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2.3, I observe how developmental approaches to ministry mean we may miss what God is doing in the present moment.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 8.1

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2.7.4

In this thesis I will explore what this journey of faith looks like during a one-year internship and apprenticeship for a group of people in a stage of life being called emerging adulthood. I will discuss how formation is about the whole of life and the whole person. I will identify an approach based on virtue and Christian practices that develop a habitus of faith. This habitus is part of a broader narrative of faith that is rooted in a vocation to be in covenant relationship with the Trinitarian God and discovers meaning in relationship with others who share this understanding. Habitus describes a way of wise living (Ford, 2007) that emerges out of knowing that we are desired and loved by God and in response we desire and love God; the resulting faith is about the whole of life, it is embodied, relational and practical. Faith formation describes this process of discovery of the God who can be known and knows us, who is known through community relationships and who locates our lives within his story.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

In the first section, I explore three contexts of the research. In chapter 1, I describe the context of my work and explain the gap year programmes that I lead and from which the research group is drawn. I locate this work in my professional context of youth work and youth ministry. This highlights some key issues of professional practice that influence my approach to the research material, I identify the importance of process and phronesis and introduce the concept of habitus.

In chapter 2, I explore the theoretical context of the research. I outline some important theories of faith development and ideas of stages of faith. I argue that a new approach is needed to address the challenge of previous models that have emphasised cognitive understanding and the challenge of the secular age. This new approach seeks a more holistic and embodied faith and draws on the work of James K. A. Smith (2009, 2013) based in a theology of desire. I argue that formation is towards a virtuous way of life and identify the concept of habitus as the goal of faith formation. I then consider how this works in practice.

Chapter 3 examines the demographic context of the relatively new theory of emerging adulthood. I consider the characteristics of this stage of life identified by Arnett (2000) and how this group, to which my research cohort belongs, understand faith and formation. I then consider the cultural context of the gap year and identify two core themes that emerge from literature and research studies on the impact of the gap year experience: meaning-making, and identity.

Chapter 4 steps back from the context and starts an explanation of my research, beginning with the research design and methodology. I describe an inductive, qualitative methodology that uses a case study method and interpretative phenomenology to analyse the data. The research was conducted over one academic year with 7 participants. The group were

interviewed at the beginning and end of the year using semi-structured interviewing. The data was supplemented by a mid-year focus group discussion and a later session using photographs to describe change.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 report the findings from the interviews, case study, and photography project. The data analysis revealed three themes that are explored in consecutive chapters – relationships, encounters with God, and narratives of purpose and practice.

In chapter 8, I bring all this together and develop an interpretation of the data and the literature from previous chapters and new material. Vocation, understood as meaningful purpose, provides an over-arching narrative and motivation for change in the emerging adults in the research study. The theme of relationships is understood in the theology of the Trinity and the implications for belonging and community. Encounters with God is interpreted in relation to the primacy of experience and authenticity in a secular age (Taylor, 2007) and issues of identity. I also observe the importance of liminality for the process of change. The third theme of narratives of purpose returns to habitus and the importance of practices and reflection.

In chapter 9, I propose my model for the formation of a habitus of faith, bringing together the empirical data and the theological and theoretical perspectives. I describe the principal concepts and practices that form a scaffolding for the model and therefore for the practice of faith formation in the context of a one-year internship programme. I suggest the model may be applied to other arenas of work with emerging adults.

The conclusion explains how I have answered the research question and the unique contribution this study makes to knowledge, practice, and my professional context. The research process has already influenced my practice and it is my intention to use my findings and conclusions to open up conversations with those involved in similar gap year or internship programmes, with those in ministry with emerging adults, and to explore its potential relevance to the formation of faith with other age groups.

This study is in practical theology and so it is important to note that it sits within a theological framework. Although I will be drawing on concepts and thinking from the social sciences, such as habitus and phronesis, I am interpreting them through a theological lens. This will become clear as I discuss these ideas in the relevant chapters.

## **Section 1 Context**

This section outlines the context in which this research project is situated. It describes my personal work history and professional practice, from which the research questions originated, and the community of practice that influences my thinking. In chapter 1, I outline my current work role, the intern programme and the context of youth work and youth ministry. In chapter 2, I explore the theoretical context of issues related to faith development and faith formation, identify challenges posed by inherited practices and the cultural context of a secular age, and make some proposals to counter those challenges. In the third chapter, I discuss the social and demographic context of emerging adulthood. I consider the characteristics of this stage of life identified by Arnett (2000) and how this group, to which my research cohort belongs, understand faith and formation. I then consider the cultural context of the gap year and identify two core themes that emerge from literature and research studies on the impact of the gap year experience: meaning-making, and identity.



# **Chapter 1 Professional Context - Youth Work and Youth Ministry**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter sets the stage for the research project. It describes the context of my work, both in my current role and in the historical and professional context of youth work and ministry in the UK.<sup>7</sup> I will explain how my work with young adults is part of a wider role in developing youth and children's ministry in the Peterborough diocese, how that fits with some of the goals of the national Church of England, and its location in a broader cultural frame of the 'gap year'. I then reflect on how my interest and work in this area has been shaped by my own experience as a teenager and young adult in following a similar pathway of vocational discovery through a gap year experience. This leads to an exploration of some key principles that have guided my youth work practice, introducing the ideas of phronesis and habitus, leading to an explanation of my research question which has arisen out of this work and experience.

## **1.1 Professional Role**

The research project has grown out of my work as Diocesan Youth Officer and then Director of Children and Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Peterborough in the Church of England. The diocese includes over 350 parishes in Northamptonshire, Rutland, and part of the Cathedral city of Peterborough. My primary responsibility is to lead the 'Gen2'<sup>8</sup> children and youth team, overseeing the support and development of work with children and young people in parish churches. I have lead responsibility for the Diocesan Internship Scheme and Youth Ministry Apprenticeship as well as developing training for young leaders, aged 10-18 years. The other two full-time team members are involved in the support and development of local children and youth ministry at parish, benefice, or deanery level. We work together with the goal of growing work with children, young people, and young adults in the diocese both numerically and in quality. I am part of the Bishop's Leadership Team for the diocese, and I am supervised by the diocesan bishop. I work collaboratively with the Vocation and Formation team and the Mission and Development team, and we are developing a closer relationship with the Education (schools) department.

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<sup>7</sup> I will also refer to youth ministry elsewhere, especially North America, that has influenced or informed practice in the UK context.

<sup>8</sup> Gen2 is an abbreviation of 'Generation to Generation' as in Psalm 145:3-5 'One generation shall praise your works to another'.

## 1.2 The Internship Programmes

A core theme of all my work with children, young people and young adults is faith formation and development. In particular, I have been conscious of the responsibility for this in the one-year programme I lead with interns and apprentices. This is closely allied to the work on vocations as we help young people to discover their calling to serve God in whatever they do. The focus of this study is on this one-year programme and exploring the nature of the growth in faith and vocational understanding that occurs during that time.

The Internship Scheme and the Youth Work Apprenticeship run alongside each other and participants join for training and support. Both involve a one-year placement in a parish with practical experience of ministry alongside a programme of training and formation delivered centrally. In addition, some interns live together in one of two diocesan properties with the aim of forming 'intentional community'.

The Apprenticeship programme was started in 2011 as an internship but was made an apprenticeship in 2016. It is known as 'Xpect' – the name is meant to convey the sense of hope that young people represent for the church. It is aimed at young adults (aged 18+) who want to work with young people and receive training in youth work and ministry. The placement in the parish involves at least half their time working with young people (11-18's) and the rest of the time is used as needed by the parish or in line with other interests of the apprentice.

The second programme is known as 'Echo' and is focussed on wider ministry in the church and often attracts young adults exploring ordination. The name draws on ideas of imitation, connected to the discipleship goal of becoming more like Christ. The word 'echo' has the same Greek root as the word 'catechesis' which is significant as this is frequently the term applied to systems of training and instruction for disciples. This aim of formation as to live more like Christ is at the heart of the programme.

The core of the programme is practical service in a parish church. This will involve working alongside the incumbent (vicar), lay leaders and volunteers in the everyday activities of the parish. This will include Sunday worship services and activities, preparing for, leading and sometimes preaching in services, and helping with children's and youth groups. During the week they may be involved in a variety of activities such as home-visits to the sick and elderly, sharing home communion, visiting care homes, lunch-clubs, playgroups and toddler groups, school's ministry, youth clubs or groups, home groups, and courses such as Alpha.

The interns from both programmes meet once a month for training and twice during the year for short residentials. The monthly training includes some theology and biblical studies delivered by members of the diocesan Vocations and Formation team and a leadership course

using material from CPAS called 'Growing Leaders' (Lawrence, 2004). The two residentials serve first as an induction and team-building exercise at the start of the year and the second as a mid-year retreat where the focus is on rest and contemplative prayer.

In addition, the two programmes have specific training – Xpect interns complete a Level 3 Certificate in Youth Work in a faith-based setting. This course is provided and taught by the YMCA George Williams College. Funding is provided from the Government under the Apprenticeship framework. Echo interns complete modules from the Diocese training programme for lay readers and ministers. These are evening courses and interns normally do one per term (3 over the year). They are also meet once a month in a group focussed on developing the practice of theological reflection.

Interns live in one of the two intern houses, with a family or in independent accommodation within the parish where they work. The intern houses are in Kettering and Northampton and serve parishes nearby. It is an important part of the scheme that interns living together aim to live together as an intentional community. We provide each house with a 'chaplain' whose role is to assist the interns to live together and form a communal rule of life.

The young adults who join our schemes are primarily aged 18-30 years; however, we often include people over 30 who are considering a change in vocational direction, but they will be one or two per year out of a group of 10-15 people.<sup>9</sup> The participants come from a variety of backgrounds and stages of education and career development. Some are directly from school or college aged 18 or 19 years often with a view to going on to further study at university or elsewhere, some come after university with uncertainty about their future career and others come after periods of work or unemployment. What the interns have in common is the desire to try out and experience working in church ministry and to explore their sense of vocation.

The purpose and opportunity provided by the scheme is summarised in the three words: Serve, Train, Grow. 'Serve' is about giving interns an opportunity to work in a parish, to experience the normal working pattern of ministry, and/or youth ministry and to test their skills and abilities in day-to-day work. 'Train' represents the important aspect of both formal and informal training through taught sessions and in the coaching and informal learning whilst on placement. The third area 'Grow' represents the opportunity for personal and faith development that occurs throughout the scheme and includes the specific role of a mentor who will encourage reflection through the experiences of the scheme.

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<sup>9</sup> The group size has fluctuated from 15 and 16 respectively in 2014 and 2015, and then reduced to 10 in 2016, and then 7 in 2017, the year of the research study. This was partly to do with a 'tighter' selection process but also a decline in applicants linked to the expansion of intern programmes in other dioceses (see 1.2.1).

### 1.2.1 National Church Priority

The Echo ministry intern programme was one of 4 programmes involved in the national pilot scheme overseen by the Ministry Division of the Church of England. This is now expanding to more dioceses throughout England and Wales. The national programme was initially known as the Church of England Ministry Experience Scheme (CEMES) but now is just referred to as the Ministry Experience Scheme. The MES was developed in response to a priority set by the Archbishops' Council to encourage younger vocations to ordination in the light of decreasing clergy numbers (Archbishops Council, 2013, p.11).

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has made it one of his priorities to increase the number of people offering for ordination and especially the proportion of young people. 'Young' is defined as under 32 at the start of ordination training and the target is for 50% of all candidates by 2020. Figures for 2017 suggested that this target could be reached with 28% of those accepted for training in this age group<sup>10</sup> but in 2019 this had dropped to 24%.<sup>11</sup> The overall number of new young ordinands was up by 39% on 2016, an increase of 42. In order to achieve this there is a National Young Vocations strategy and a working group to oversee it. Ministry Experience Schemes have been included as part of this strategy.

At its outset there was an emphasis on vocation to ordination with the scheme being described as giving young people "the opportunity to get a taste of life as a priest" and with "the potential to make a significant contribution in increasing the number of young ordinands" (Archbishops' Council, 2014, p.11). I am keen for our scheme to recognise that vocation has a wider meaning than just priesthood and we aim to support young people to clarify calling to a wider range of employment options within the church or elsewhere. This has now been recognised in the national scheme and it is being promoted with greater clarity.<sup>12</sup>

Alongside this, Justin Welby supported the development of a similar one-year programme aimed at encouraging vocations to the monastic life. The community of St Anselm was started in 2015 at Lambeth Palace and 16 young adults (aged 20-35) join the residential community each year, and a further 20 are part of an extended community in placement parishes (The Community of St Anselm, 2020). Interestingly this initiative was not connected to the MES initiative and the two are run completely separately.

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/ordinand-increase-factsheet.pdf> accessed 22/7/18

<sup>11</sup>[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Ministry%20Statistics%202019%20report%20FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Ministry%20Statistics%202019%20report%20FINAL_0.pdf) accessed 10/08/20

<sup>12</sup> This is accepted in the wider MES and since 2016 Grant Application forms use the term vocation to 'ministry' rather than just ordination.

The MES has identified the goals of increasing representation of women, BAME, and those of lower education. However, the focus is primarily on the goal of increasing clergy numbers to sustain a church that is growing older and a clergy workforce where 25% are due to retire in the next 5-10 years.<sup>13</sup> The danger here is that we become motivated by an anxiety to protect the future church and miss the reality of what is happening in the present. If the goal of the year-long scheme is merely to provide people for future ministry roles, then we may miss addressing the question, how are we preparing those young people for these roles? What are we doing now that will equip them with a robust faith and sense of calling that will give them a secure foundation that will serve them well in whatever future God has for them – in church ministry or other forms of service? I am certain that I am not just running a programme to provide future ministers for the church, nor is it just to fill in a 'gap' but the year itself is a positive formational experience, a time of growth and development that will be life-changing, life-enhancing and faith-developing.

### **1.2.2 Outcomes and Formation**

As I consider how the current programme contributes to faith formation, the three areas of serve, train, and grow offer a framework for assessing the content of the scheme. It is expected that each intern sets personal goals with their manager at the start of the year and reviews them as the year progresses. These goals use a general framework based on specific skills or areas e.g. of youth work, vocation, discipleship, that the intern identifies.

The CEMES programme goes a step further in identifying outcomes based on the '9 Criteria for Selection for Ordained Ministry within the Church of England'. These are the criteria that are used for considering applicants for ordained ministry and provide another framework for faith formation on the programme. A list of the criteria and a summary explanation of them is included at Appendix 1.

This list represents a clear description of the qualities, character and aptitudes of those people who are deemed best able to serve in the role of priest. They have been applied to the CEMES programme and supervisors of interns are expected to use them in assessing progress through the year. It would not be too big a jump to ask whether the criteria could serve as a description of the outcomes of Christian formation with a wider application to all disciples. However, on closer examination most of the criteria have a specific application to the work and role of a priest or minister and only 'faith' and 'spirituality' are directly relevant to my purpose here. As the research progressed, I became aware that the language of outcomes was not helpful, and an understanding of life-long change or process was more important. I

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/6-september/news/uk/growth-in-clergy-vocations-slows> accessed 11/08/20

will explain this in 1.3.1 and this idea will become clearer in the next chapter when I consider models of faith formation.

It is relevant to note that during the period of this research, the Church of England has revised the '9 criteria' and is moving to a new method for the discernment of calling to the priesthood based on 'qualities to be inhabited' (Church of England, 2020, p.2) and an understanding of a life-long process. I will demonstrate that my findings support this new approach which also makes use of the term "habitus" that is a significant theme throughout this thesis. The new framework can be found in Appendix 12.

### **1.2.3 The 'Gap Year'**

My programmes can be understood as part of the phenomenon of young people taking a 'year out' or a 'gap year' before committing to university or a regular job. I will explore this in more detail in chapter 3 but it is pertinent to note it here as an important context of my work.

The development of the gap year idea has been traced back to the 'Grand Tour' of aristocratic young men in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (O'Shea, 2014). Older teenagers would travel European cities to experience the arts, history, and culture. Morley (2019) suggests that National Service in Britain in the post-war years served as a form of 'enforced two-year gap year' for those aged 18 years. It meant young people left home and had to learn to look after themselves. The universities noticed a rise in the level of maturity compared to those joining straight from school. When National Service ended in 1957, with the last 'de-mob' in 1963, Morley describes how the admission process for Oxford and Cambridge universities took place in the autumn term leaving a 'fallow' nine-month period before starting at the university the following September. The Headmaster of Wellington School devised the GAP - 'Gap Activity Projects' – that included travel within the UK and overseas as well as manual work and a social purpose. This idea gradually spread beyond the elite schools in the 1970s.

So, although this is not new, there has been a steady increase in the number of young people taking a 'year out' before or immediately after university in the last thirty years or more.<sup>14</sup> Often this includes time to relax, take a break from study and frequently involves travel to holiday or gain experiences in different parts of the world. Many travel companies and charitable organisations arrange short-term experiences for young people. Christian charities have offered short-term mission experiences for many years, pre-dating the popular gap-year. Often these experiences were to serve a specific mission project in a needy part of the world, giving the workers an extra group of willing volunteers to help develop the work and inject new energy. At the same time, it gave the young people an insight into another culture and the

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<sup>14</sup> See 3.6.1 for details on this increase

work of the mission organisation. However, some doubt the efficacy of such visits, arguing that they serve as another form of imperialism and create cultural tourism (Simpson, 2004, 2005).

In the booklet, 'Give it a Year' (White, 2014) I identified four key motivations for young people taking a year out: self-discovery, discipleship, and character development; new experiences, travel, and adventure; short-term mission, serving others / giving back; vocational exploration and training (2014, p.16).

The last group is those that opt for an internship or a training placement that lasts for 11-12 months. Technically this is not a 'gap year' as I've described it as it may not be something completely different from whatever has gone before or will come after but more a 'stepping-stone' or a means of trying out a possible career path. It is likely to be tied into a particular field of work and provide a way of developing new skills or a way into further training or employment. Obviously, this is the category that includes my programmes.

Whatever the motivation, the benefits are immeasurable and can lead to self-discovery and the making of important life decisions based on experience and knowledge. It may help to avoid a decision that does not work out, that is difficult to undo, or have far-reaching consequences. This works well for 'emerging adults' who are taking longer to decide about career pathways in a time of increased choice and uncertainty as will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **1.2 My Own Experience.**

As researcher researching my own work it is important to be aware of my own history and perspectives that I bring to the research. 'By being reflexive, case study researchers self-critique their frame of reference, cultural biases, and the ethical issues that emerge in field work' (Begoray & Banister, 2012). At this stage, I will highlight how my own history has shaped my interest in the gap year opportunity as well as reflecting on the personal and professional motives that were involved in the development of the programme.

In my final year at university, I still had no idea what I wanted to do for a career. I was about to graduate with a degree in English language and literature, something I had pursued because I was fascinated by language, enjoyed studying literature and loved the theatre. I knew I did not want to teach but that was all I knew, and I had no idea what God might have to do with it!

I had been volunteering at a local Boys' Brigade (BB) during term time, spending my holidays helping with Christian camps and involved with national level training and events with the BB. Someone suggested I consider a career in youth work. I applied to Careforce, a Christian gap

year agency with the intention of spending a year to test whether this could be for me. The year was significant in my personal development as I grew in confidence and discovered more about myself and it confirmed that youth work was where I felt most at home; my vocation became clear. My commitment to the idea of a full-time immersive experience to test a sense of calling is rooted in that time.

However, there were other key formative experiences that also play out in my current work. My time in the Boys' Brigade had seen me encouraged as a young leader and I was fortunate enough to be selected for a national officer cadet training scheme. This involved two separate weeks of residential training at the beginning and end of a year's course. This happened during my time at university and proved to be formative as I discovered new confidence, friendships, and competence in leadership. This experience of being away from home in a new environment with people I did not know took me way out of my 'comfort zone'; it was a liminal space although I did not realise it at the time.

I became involved in organising a national event for young adults in the Brigade and was mentored in a key role by an older member of the national staff team. This experience of being trusted with significant responsibility whilst being supported by a mentor has remained with me ever since. It is one of the things I try to emulate as I work with young adults, believing that as we share responsibility, we encourage growth.

These three areas: the gap year, leadership training, and active responsibility at that key stage of my life as a young adult are themes that I find echoed in my work now.

When I was developing the intern programme in 2010-11, I was not conscious of those influences in the design of the programme. The ideas for the programme had been tested in an internship that I had run for up to two young people at a time in my previous role as Youth Minister at St Giles' Church, Northampton. Here I had responsibility for youth and young adults and the programme had grown out of the youth work in the church. We recruited young people from the church who wanted a gap year and were keen to serve the church and learn more about youth ministry. The scheme was based almost entirely on gaining experience and there was no formalised training programme.

The motivation for the diocesan scheme was to help develop youth work in churches and my post replaced a previous Diocesan Youth Officer after a 2-year vacancy. The postholder was not replaced due to cost and the agreement to fund a half-time role was to pioneer a different way of supporting churches to develop youth work. The idea of churches having a full-time volunteer intern grew into the strapline, "Growing youth work by growing youth workers". The tone of the year was set as a training programme and the hope was that young adults would



stay on after the year and train to be a full-time youth worker, with churches offering continued employment and financial support.<sup>15</sup>

The programme and structure of the scheme was formed after several visits and discussions with similar programmes elsewhere in the country. Most of these were gap year schemes run by para-church groups such as Youth for Christ and Urban Saints but none of them included formal youth work training as part of the year. It was all about the experience and the informal learning that would come from that. In my view, many of these programmes were less focussed on the development of the volunteer, and more on providing a resource for ministry in churches and communities. I wanted to ensure the year was an opportunity for growth and learning for the individual as well as providing help to our churches. Thus, I was keen to include not just youth work training, but personal development and discipleship opportunities as well. The involvement of a mentor for each intern was added to give space for intentional reflection on this aspect of learning.

When I considered expanding the scheme to include a broader experience of church ministries, especially the priesthood, the programme was developed to include a focus on vocational exploration beyond youth ministry. I debated with my colleagues whether to expand the Xpect programme to incorporate this wider experience but decided to create a separate group. I was concerned not to lose the clear emphasis on youth ministry that is frequently neglected in the Church. There was, and still is, no formal youth ministry training offered by the Church of England whereas there is a clear pathway and provision for those training for ordination. This separation proved helpful when it became possible to translate the internship into a youth work apprenticeship programme in 2016 and as the national Ministry Experience Scheme developed. The model I developed with the three elements of serving, training, growing, became the pattern for the national scheme. My desire for both 'Echo' and 'Xpect' to be about vocational exploration in its broadest sense and not just about a calling to ordination was a constant theme of discussions with the national steering group. Whilst they were concerned solely with ordination, I was eager for the scheme to enable young people to explore calling to a variety of ministries: ordained, lay, in church or elsewhere. It was helpful that our Diocesan Director of Ordinands was on the national steering group and lobbied strongly for that position. It took several years before this was accepted.

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<sup>15</sup> This did not happen to the extent I had hoped. In 2018, the diocese achieved £1.1m funding from the Church Commissioners to develop this by offering degree-level training and employment to 7 apprentices who wish to stay on to train and work as youth ministers.

### **1.3 Youth Work, Youth Ministry and Formation**

The context of youth work and youth ministry is my professional home, and its theory, practice and theology are ingrained as part of my identity and shape how I work and reflect on my practice. In the terms of my later discussion, it could be said to be my professional habitus.

In Appendix 2 I have set out a simple chronological history of the development of youth work but here I want to discuss the purpose of youth work and ministry that inform and shape my approach to this research project. As I explained above, my own history involved work in local authority youth services as well as church-based youth ministry and therefore I have been immersed in the practices of both fields and draw from both in understanding my professional role and practice.

Any view of the history of youth work and ministry will highlight the tensions around the purpose of work with young people that still exist today both within the church and the state sector. Youth ministry tends to be understood in terms of the two tasks of Christian education, based on a theology of nurture, or as evangelism, based on a theology of mission (Cannister, 2001). There are comparable themes within the history of the youth service as successive governments have debated the purpose of youth work. An early concern for education, often using the language of character development and morality, sits alongside the concern for reaching those who are socially excluded or delinquent and, more recently, to the rise of targeted provision.

Most of the time in both fields, the language and ideology is based around young people as a problem or at least in need or having some form of deficit that must be redressed. In the church this equates to an anxiety over church decline, resulting in questions over what works in youth ministry (Shepherd, 2016). The common theme is the idea that youth work and youth ministry are concerned with the development and education of young people. There is a consistent interest in the formation of young people, helping them to discover who they are and why they are here, to find a voice and purpose in the communities and society in which they live. Youth work and ministry has always been concerned with identity, meaning, and vocation and it has always worked through relationships.

In the secular youth work context, Young (1999) explains how youth work is about personal and social development and is 'an exercise in moral philosophy', in so far as it enables young people to explore what is a good life and how they should live. This is achieved through a reflective process that works with young people through relationships. The process enables them to learn from experience, engage in conversation and dialogue that develops critical

thinking, and make sense of themselves and their world through telling their story (Young, 1999, pp.79-89).

In youth ministry the process is expressed as a practical theological task (Borgman, 1995; Dean et al., 2001) rooted in theological reflection. The Church of England (1996) set out a theology of youth ministry that affirmed the themes of development, identity, story, dialogue and relationship, but setting it all within the context of discipleship. The report said that young people need help to understand their identity that is also a social identity and they need to find their individual story as part of the grand story or meta-narrative of the gospel (1996, p.34). The report goes on to describe youth work as incarnational and relational. Incarnation means 'entering into the young person's world, treating it with discerning respect rather than suspicion, sharing their joys and sorrows, genuinely engaging with their questions while bringing the challenge of Christian discipleship to them' (1996, p.35). The call to discipleship is included to acknowledge that youth work is not just a call to conversion but to an ongoing life of conformity to God's will and the formation of Godly character. Lastly, the authors identify that youth work is community-building; that the Christian gospel is about reconciled relationships and so 'one aim of Christian youth work must be that young people become fully participating members of Christ's Church' (1996, p.38).

Brierley (2003) argues that youth work and youth ministry go together, and that youth ministry is a specialism within youth work, acknowledging that all youth work is about change or conversion (2003, pp.10-12). To the four values of youth work (voluntary participation, informal education, empowerment, equal opportunity) he adds 'incarnation'. The pattern of incarnation in the life of Jesus directs us to take the initiative to engage with young people in their world. Ward (1997) explains how incarnational, relational ministry is a missionary endeavour that is about 'being with' young people and contextualises the gospel story in their culture. Root (2007) takes this further by proposing that the theology of the incarnation is a theology of relationship. It means that the relationships between people can become the location of Christ's presence, which he calls, 'place-sharing' (2007, p.83). It is in these relationships that we are transformed (2007, p.106).

Shepherd (2016) offers an insightful and helpful analysis of the religious environment in the UK and young people's attitude to church and religion. He identifies a third approach within youth ministry that has developed more recently out of pastoral theology and an emphasis on 'Christian practices' and the contemplative tradition (Shepherd, 2016, p.42-3). Shepherd defines youth ministry as 'a combination of Christian education, cross-cultural mission and contextual pastoral care' (2016, p.33). He identifies three priorities that have come out of those

approaches that shape the methods of ministry: distinctive learning, intentional relationships, and transformational practices (2016, p.33).

The first, distinctive learning, places youth ministry clearly within the tradition of Christian education. However, it recognises the distinctive approach of informal education that characterises youth work and the importance that the whole faith community plays in shaping Christian identity and socialisation. 'Intentional relationships' refers to the incarnational approaches to mission, engaging young people through forming relationships. These two approaches have been identified in my prior discussion, but Shepherd's third approach is new. Shepherd proposes that pastoral care lies at the heart of youth ministry. He includes in this approach models of ministry that develop intergenerational relationships but also the work of people such as Dean (2004) and Bass (2002) who have argued for engagement with Christian practices. Shepherd states that this is 'pastoral-mission' (2016, p. 45) that takes us away from the roots of Christian education into the realm of faith formation and, more importantly, to transformation.

These core themes across the two fields of youth work and youth ministry - of relationship and community, of development and change, of sense-making and story within the context of the existential questions of identity and living the good life set the stage for my later discussion on the factors that influence the formation of faith. I will return to them in the discussions of the research data in chapters 5, 6, and 7. However, first I need to discuss one other defining issue for youth work that easily gets lost in the concerns of Christian education for doctrine and knowledge which is the priority of process over product.

### **1.3.1 Process and Product**

One of the recurring themes in discussions about the purpose of youth work and ministry is how we know it works, or in government terms, whether it gives value for money. In the church, the anxiety over declining congregations puts pressure on youth ministers to increase numbers at church. This emphasis on outcomes usually means counting numbers attending different groups and activities since outcomes such as attitude or behavioural change are harder to measure let alone predict (Ord, 2014). Youth work has always been about the process, and for me, 'process not product' is a personal and professional mantra derived from one of the earliest books I read on youth work.<sup>16</sup> Jon Ord (2014) critiques the political pressure to move youth work to an outcomes-based model that began with the rise of neoliberalism and an emphasis on usefulness in education policy. This began with the Thatcher government but continued under New Labour with the introduction of Connexions and 'Transforming Youth

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, M. (1980) *Creators not Consumers*

Work' (DFES, 2004) that brought in targets and accredited outcomes for workers and young people. In youth ministry, an over-emphasis on the educational approach can lead to a curriculum of knowledge, of the Bible and doctrine, that must be taught and so focuses on the 'product' not the process. Lief (2015) asserts that fear and anxiety over young people leaving the church has led to an emphasis on doctrinal beliefs and approaches to discipleship and faith formation that focus on 'measurable moral, theological, or cultural outcomes' (2015, p.15). Melvin (2016) commends an evaluation based on the quality of the intervention by the youth worker rather than a focus on the learning outcomes of the young person. Instead of an input-output model, the focus shifts to what is happening in the present moment, an idea I will return to in the next chapter (2.6) as it relates to a theology of formation.

In faith formation, there is a tension between having an end-goal or outcome and the process that works through relationship. It could be argued that the apostle Paul had a clear goal in mind when writing of his desire to 'present everyone as fully mature in Christ' (The Bible, Colossians 1:26). Loder (1998) speaks of the goal of a 'Christ-centred life' (1998, p.277) and Hauerwas (1989) argues that following Jesus has a telos, an end-goal which is the transformation of the character (1989, p.61). However, to suggest that this can be reduced to measurable outcomes is problematic. Whilst Lief argues it is the influence of the 'global technocapitalist paradigm' (2015, p. 69) that emphasises productivity and performance, Pattison (2007) states it is because the church has unquestionably adopted managerial techniques that wants aims, objectives and measurable outcomes.

Alternatively, a focus on process fits with the notion of continual transformation and 'becoming' as well as understandings of the Christian faith as a journey. Beard (2015) proposes that discipleship is an organic process, an ongoing journey which ebbs and flows rather than being a linear direction. The journey is never complete, but it is possible to look for fruit and signs of change along the way. Shakespeare (2011) notes, 'Ministerial formation, including spiritual growth, is organic rather than mechanistic. It might be described as the development of an art form rather than a set of skills' (2011, p.68). Young (1999) described youth work as art centred in relationships with young people. If we view faith formation as an art-form rather than a core curriculum then this is obviously less tangible in terms of pre-planned outcomes, but it reminds us that the purpose of our work is the development of persons. Young reflects that this is both individual, their identity and values, and development 'as social beings in a social world' (Young, 1999, p.3). The youth ministry task is then to stimulate organic growth for example by preparing the soil and creating the right conditions, generating dialogue and conversation in which young people reflect on their experience and learn from it. This may generate new possibilities and outcomes that may not have been foreseen or pre-planned, it releases the imagination and creativity to produce something new. This is the process of informal education

(Jefferies and Smith, 1996) which is how the emphasis on process is realised in youth work practice and this can be useful in youth ministry and faith formation. It is here that I recognise the importance of my youth work background in shaping my thinking about formation and where I believe youth ministry has over-emphasised the content or product.<sup>17</sup> Nigel Rooms (2012) makes the connection between practical theology and process, stating that 'all good theology is learning theology, theology in process' and it is based in phronesis, it is about 'developing practical Christian wisdom for living' (2012, p.84-5). This idea of phronesis and the related concept of habitus are important themes for this research project and will serve to hold together the importance of process over product, a phenomenological focus on lived experience, and the concerns of practical theology.

### **1.3.2 Phronesis and Habitus**

Ord's (2014) discussion of alternatives to an outcomes-based approach in youth work leads him to propose that Aristotle's concept of phronesis provides a basis for understanding youth work. He defines phronesis as practical wisdom or prudence, connected to an ethical concern for living a good life. This term appears regularly in the literature of those seeking an alternative to the knowledge or cognitive-based approaches noted above and that I will explore in the next chapter (see 2.3). Bass et al. (2016) report the renewed interest in practical wisdom in a variety of professions, such as law and nursing as well as in education, and adopt the phrase 'Christian practical wisdom' to clarify the distinction (2016, pp.7-8).

Phronesis is a word used by Aristotle to differentiate from two other types of knowledge, episteme/theoria which is theoretical knowledge as an end in itself, often equated with scientific knowledge, and secondly, techne/poesis which is related to a craft or production, of how to make things. Phronesis is a practical knowledge, often translated as "practical wisdom" or "practical common sense" (Ord, 2014, p.62). Miller-McLemore describes it as the 'practical knowing of how to live' (in Bass et al., 2016, p.200), it brings together reason and action resulting in the ability to 'do the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time (Bass, 2016, p.5). It is thus related to questions of how we live a good life and concerned with lived experience. As such, Ord argues this is appropriate to youth work that is concerned with the personal, social, and spiritual development of young people and resonates with Young's (1999) description of youth work as about moral philosophy and enabling young people to make informed decisions.

This does not mean that outcomes do not occur but in Ord's view they stem from the dominance of 'techne', a belief that that youth work should be about product, about acquiring

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<sup>17</sup> In the next chapter I will explore this as an emphasis on cognitive knowledge (the 'product') that has dominated youth ministry.

tangible knowledge and skills. Alongside this, episteme is increasingly present, emphasising the quantifiable and measurable and leading to the demand for outcomes. In a phronetic approach, attention is paid instead to the context and qualitative change. This change can be demonstrated (and celebrated) afterwards through story or examples of practice and so youth work can maintain its person-centred and process-focussed ideology.

Habitus is a related concept that Veling (2005) suggested is the theological equivalent of phronesis. However, whilst used in similar ways, especially to counter the emphasis on theoretical knowledge in theology and faith formation, they are different. In the next chapter I will explore the use of the term by Farley (1983) to describe, 'a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals' (1983, p.35). This is more than a practical wisdom, it is describing the nature and character of a person; Shakespeare (2011) suggests habitus is a 'theology of being' that is focussed on the individual and who they will become, it is a way of being in the world (2011, p.54). Smith (2009) describes dispositions as 'precognitive tendencies to act in certain ways and towards certain ends' (2009, p.55) and recognises that others describe them as "habits" or "virtues" that become 'hard-wired' in us so that we act in a certain way without thinking, automatically doing the right thing (2009, p.56). This instinctive and intuitive action comes from an identity shaped by faith, this is habitus.

Therefore, the concepts of phronesis and habitus serve as a bridge connecting my background and understanding of youth work and youth ministry. They move us away from anxieties about outcomes and end-products and bring us back to a concern for the processes of formation. Although these concepts originate in a non-theological framework, I am using them in an overt Christian theological frame and I will draw on the work of Farley and other theologians who have used habitus specifically as a theological term, particularly within practical theology to connect my background in youth work with the practical theology of youth ministry. I will adopt the phrase, "theological turn" to describe this move in chapter 2.6. First, I will explore the idea of habitus in more depth in the next chapter as a response to the over-emphasis on cognitive models of formation, that generate the focus on knowledge and product and then return to it in relation to the research data in chapters 8 and 9. The research originated out of this professional context and so it will be pertinent here to summarise the issues I set out to address before considering the theoretical context in the next chapter.

## **1.5 Research Question**

After several years of leading the intern programmes, I wanted to ask some questions of my work in a way that was more robust and in greater depth than the annual review that I conducted with the programme participants. This process was always helpful and led to some

learning and minor changes to the programme in the following year. However, I wanted to be sure that the programme I was offering was the best that it could be and that the content and methods were appropriate. The increasing culture of measuring outcomes in the church and in youth work that I noted above contributed to the sense of needing to be clear about what I was doing and why. At the same time, the national Ministry Experience Scheme was being developed and my model was being adopted as a pattern for the scheme but without any robust theological rationale. I wanted to address these issues through the research.

At the heart of the intern year is the aim to see young adults grow in their faith, discipleship, and character, leading to an increased self-awareness and a clarification of vocation, higher levels of confidence and new skills in ministry. I was fully aware of the difficulty of measuring such growth and change and the complexity of trying to set out the learning that is required to facilitate this kind of growth. However, that is the area of research that I wanted to explore – in what ways can we identify the growth or formation that is expected from participants in the scheme and is it possible to organise or structure the programme to maximise the growth that will happen? If it is possible to identify, is it also possible to measure it in any objective way? Thus, my focus is particularly on the third area of the programme aims (see 1.2), i.e. ‘Grow’ as we consider how faith and character develops through the experience of the year, but this will inevitably be connected to ‘Train’ as the more overt and formalised aspect of the programme and to ‘Serve’ as the practical arena in which practice is developed. One of the key questions is whether it is possible to organise the training and serving aspects of the scheme to effect growth and formation in faith and character.

I have already described the difficulties with questions of outcomes and measurement and these and other reflections led to a refinement of the research question into a focus on faith formation. The question that emerged was, ‘How can a one-year internship programme enable the formation of faith in young adults?’. I will describe this in more detail in chapter 4 and the process that narrowed the question to the issue of faith formation. Given this focus on faith and formation, the next chapter will consider the theoretical context of faith formation and the challenges we face in a secular age.



## **Chapter 2 Theoretical Context - Faith Formation**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the meaning of faith formation that might apply in the context of ministry with emerging adults who are spending a year working for the church with a view to discovering vocation, learning about themselves, and growing in faith.

The aim of the research project is to identify the factors that influence the formation of faith in order to improve the programme design and experience for future participants. Here, I will consider some theoretical perspectives on faith formation and the frameworks that might help to give structure to the process of formation. I will discuss Fowler's (1981) stages of faith based on natural development before moving to theological constructs. The practice of faith formation raises two challenges based first on the historical and present over-reliance on cognitive methods and second, by the cultural context of a secular age. In answering those challenges, I discuss a theology of desire as a way towards identifying a more holistic and embodied approach to formation. This leads me to the concept of habitus that I introduced at the end of the previous chapter, which will include character and virtue as essential to the work of formation. This moves the discussion back to theological perspectives that focus on the present work of God in formation, on being, and the work of the Holy Spirit in transformation. The last section of the chapter considers how habitus is developed through faith formation practice.

### **2.1 Faith Formation**

Spiritual formation, faith development and discipleship are terms often used to mean the same thing or in a way that assumes a common understanding. Beard (2015) uses spiritual formation and discipleship interchangeably whilst bemoaning the lack of a clear definition of discipleship within the missional church movement. If he differentiates at all, Beard implies that spiritual formation is part of discipleship and uses the phrase to refer to the *process* of growth and change that are part of 'missional discipleship' (2015, p.192). Willard (2000) proposes that spiritual formation is a largely catch-all term referring to the formation of the human spirit and it is frequently used in the arena of a range of spiritualities and so it is not exclusively a Christian term. He moves to using Christian spiritual formation and offers a description of what this involves to which I will return later. I have chosen to use the term faith

formation for the purposes of this study to avoid the more general term “spiritual” but also to highlight that my discussion is about formation in the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 Stages of Faith

It would be difficult to discuss how faith is formed without exploring the seminal work of James W. Fowler who first set out his stages of faith in the book of the same name in 1981. Fowler draws on developmental theories, notably of Erikson, Kohlberg and Piaget and sets out a similar stage-theory that shows how faith develops during the life story of individuals. It is age-related but the later stages may not develop according to chronological age. Fowler’s understanding of faith is not tied to religion but is defined in relation to a person’s search for meaning and coherence (1995, p.4), the search for ultimate concern as identified by Tillich (1957, cited in Fowler, 1995, p.4) or the search, identified by Niebuhr (1996) for ‘an overarching, integrating and grounding trust in a centre of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and meaning’ (unpublished manuscript cited in Fowler, 1995, p.5). Fowler goes on to address the place of religion which is not the same as faith but the ‘cumulative traditions’ that awaken faith (1995, p.9). He proposes that faith should be understood as a verb - faith is an active way of living in line with a set of beliefs. It is important to note that faith is also relational; we have faith in, or to, another and ultimately this is to someone or something that is transcendent.

Fowler’s theory has six stages<sup>19</sup> but the two of most interest here are stages 3 and 4 that typically occur during adolescence and into emerging adulthood. Stage 3 is labelled ‘synthetic-conventional’ and describes a faith that synthesises the beliefs, values and meanings from a more complex range of relationships than experienced in childhood. It is conventional in that it is shaped by the expectations of others. A young person will be forming their own sense of faith identity with some strongly held beliefs and values, but these will be ‘tacitly held’, without an explicit or objective understanding of why these views are held. Stage 4 is individuated-reflective and marks a stage where the adult develops a more explicit understanding of her faith and starts to separate from a reliance on the authority of others. Movement to this stage is triggered by a change or challenge to previous authority, often linked to leaving home – emotionally and/or physically. This leads first to a distancing from the previous value system and secondly, to the emergence of the executive ego – an individual arbiter of decisions. The

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<sup>18</sup> It could be argued this is still too general in that other religions may lay claim to the term faith formation, but I want to assume that it is clear here that I am exploring formation within the Christian faith context.

<sup>19</sup> The 6 stages are ‘undifferentiated (0-2yrs), intuitive-projective (3-7yrs), mythic-literal (7-12yrs), Synthetic-conventional (12+yrs), Individuated-reflective (21+yrs), Conjunctive (35+), Universalising (45+yrs?)’ (Fowler, 1995).

young adult is able to reflect critically on values and meanings and differentiate her own view of self (identity) and outlook (worldview) from those of others (Fowler, 1995, p.182).

It is pertinent to note that in a later work responding to critiques of his theory, Fowler states,

It should never be the primary goal of religious education simply to precipitate and encourage stage advancement. Rather, paying attention to stage and stage advancement is important in helping us shape our teaching and involvement with members of religious traditions. Movement in stage development, properly understood, is a by-product of teaching the substance and the practices of faith (Fowler, 2004, p.417).

The temptation in my work is to seek to structure my teaching and formation practices to hasten progress through the stages in order to see young people growing in their faith. This is a salutary note at this stage and may be a difficulty caused by Fowler's linear mapping of faith formation. Fowler goes on to state that, 'Faith development occurs where working theologies are being hammered out in practices of care for the common good, and for those in need' (2004, p.419). This helpfully moves our consideration of faith formation away from the theoretical concerns of religious or theological education and more towards practical theology and the arena of practice, to which I will return.

Streib (2001) proposes an alternative model based on religious styles. Streib's argument is in response to Fowler's emphasis on the cognitive and the perceived lack of recognition of the social context in faith formation. Although Streib does not reference Hauerwas, there is some similarity in drawing on the importance of narrative or life story and the context that he calls 'life world' (2001, p.145) drawing on phenomenology. In place of the hierarchical stages Streib prefers the idea of milestones but these are multi-layered as each style builds on the previous style. The styles however still follow a linear progression linked to age and psycho-social development and he continues to compare his stages to those of Fowler. In an article in the same journal, Fowler (2001) answers this proposal with the acknowledgement that his stage theory is not the whole story and argues that type theory could be used alongside or crosscutting stage theory.

Willard (2000) proposes a model that focuses on transformation evidenced by 'fruit' – the persons we become and the actions that flow from us. He suggests three ways in which this formation occurs – through practices of obedience to Christ's commands that train the whole personality, through indirect spiritual disciplines, and thirdly through the work of the Spirit in us as we are immersed in and apply the word of Christ.

Hauerwas (1989) has a similar emphasis on the insufficiency of intellectual approaches and instead argues for faith formation as being about transformation and changed lives. For Hauerwas the church is most important in formation and he draws on Aristotle to describe the

church as *polis* whose purpose is political and counter-cultural and whose task is the 'formation of people who see clearly the cost of discipleship and are willing to pay the price' (1989, p.48). Disciples are those who are on an adventurous journey that leads to transformation in character. Elsewhere, Hauerwas (1980) has offered a critique of the developmental theories of Kohlberg and Fowler, suggesting that they are reliant on a Kantian description of people and morality that is both independent and un-storied. In contrast, Christian moral formation is less about duty to principles and more about imitation of another where the how of living is as important as the what to do, and where conversion and transformation are more appropriate ideas than that of development (1980, pp.221-226).

Both Hauerwas and Willard suggest a process of transformation and change in which practice and the church are important. This points towards an understanding of faith formation based in practical theology and it is this perspective I find more helpful and will focus on rather than the psycho-social development theories. However, the emphasis on practice raises the question about practical approaches to the formation of faith and what works. I suggest there are two significant challenges that must be addressed posed first, by a reliance on cognitive models and second, by a changing culture.

## **2.3 Challenges for Faith Formation**

Faith formation is a major function of the church as it seeks to nurture the faith of believers. This function is often equated to the teaching role in ministry; in evangelical traditions this leads to an emphasis on the sermon and Bible teaching and in more catholic traditions, the role of catechesis. These approaches focus on knowledge and cognitive awareness that is intended to produce a change in behaviour and whilst often claiming to be biblical, it can be argued that they rely on a post-enlightenment and modernist mind-set. Theologians such as Hauerwas (1989) and Willard (2000) point out the lack of transformation and change that results from such approaches. Willard argues that past approaches have relied on preaching and teaching, knowledge and information, to lead to faith that will then result in changed behaviour and an inner life. But it has not worked, 'The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less others' (2000, p.254).

Hauerwas (1989) argues that theology has focussed on the intellectual and especially on apologetics in response to the scientific worldview in the modern post-enlightenment world. The result is a people who may think differently but the real challenge is political not intellectual (1989, p.24). Fowler's (1995) work from a psycho-social perspective also offers a cognitive-based model that observes how faith develops and so raises similar questions in how it might be applied in designing programmes aimed at faith formation. Recent writing on discipleship

is recognising the need for more holistic models and I will refer to some of these later in the thesis.<sup>20</sup> However, I believe these are still minority voices in a culture dominated by the intellectual and cognitive approach to formation.

### **2.3.1 Cognitive Models of Formation**

The culture of the church and of society present challenges to the process of faith formation. The first challenge is the belief that most of our formation has been aimed at changing thinking in order to change behaviour. This is largely based on the primacy of rationality that followed the Enlightenment and Cartesian philosophy, 'I think therefore I am', that continued through modernity. Cognitive models of formation arise from this. Smith (2009) summarises many writers when he says, 'Protestant Christianity ... tends to operate with an overly cognitivist picture of the human person and thus tends to foster an overly intellectualist account of what it means to be or become a Christian' (2009, p.42). Bennett et al. (2018) make the same observation about Christian theology that has neglected the non-cognitive, relational and practical in favour of the cognitive, but what matters most for the life of the church is 'what is embodied in its practices' (Bennett, et al., 2018, p.72).

Other writers express a dissatisfaction with cognitive models of formation and discipleship, such as Willard, 'The doctrinal struggles of many centuries ... had transformed saving faith into *mere mental assent* to correct doctrine' (1988, p.23); Hauerwas, 'The theological assumption ... that Christianity is a system of belief must be questioned' (1989, p.21); Frost and Hirsch, '...the problem of Christendom – the reduction of Christianity into science and scholarship' (2009, p.155). The church relies on a model of formation based largely on teaching through preaching or lectures in the hope that intellectual knowledge and assent changes behaviour. Together with the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, it assumes that Christian disciples will be made. The Alpha Course developed by Holy Trinity Brompton, London exemplifies this approach. Alpha is a course of 11 sessions that explore the core doctrines and some practices of Christianity with session titles such as 'Why did Jesus die?' and 'Why and how do I pray?'. The approach is discussion-based but includes the 'Holy Spirit Weekend' (often shortened to a day). It is only at this point that it becomes experiential with the expectation of the Spirit's work in the lives of those who have been exploring the ideas of faith.

The concern that this approach does not form Christian disciples is demonstrated by the work of Christian Smith with Melinda Denton (2005) in the USA. They identified a peculiar form of

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<sup>20</sup> In particular, I will draw on the work of James K. A. Smith, and specific to youth ministry – Dean (2004, 2010, Root (2007, 2014, 2017) and Shepherd (2016) but also note the work of Bass and Richter (2002), King (2006) and Yaconelli (2006).

belief that was professed by Christian young people; Smith named this 'moralistic therapeutic deism'<sup>21</sup> and although it masquerades as orthodoxy it is far from it. Dean (2010) argues that young people have this faith precisely because it is what they have been taught in a church that is heavily shaped by the surrounding consumerist culture. This secular culture has affected both the content and methods of faith formation<sup>22</sup> and is the second challenge to address.

### **2.3.2 The Challenge of the Secular**

The rise of secularism is popularly cited as the cause of a decline in religion and Christianity, but it is not always clear what is meant by the term or its usage. Taylor (2007) explores the development and impact of secularism. Taylor identifies three ways in which we use the term 'secular' (2007, p.1-3). The first, 'secular 1', concerns the loss of religion from the public square – the state and institutions – making religion largely a private matter. The second, 'secular 2', is the loss of religious belief and practice amongst individuals; they no longer believe in God or go to church. The third sense of 'secular 3' is the conditions of belief, 'the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place' (2007, p.3).

Taylor focuses on this third sense which is about our lived experience rather than the more popular second definition - the decline of belief in relation to new theories of science and reason. He argues that all beliefs are 'held in a context or framework that is taken-for-granted' (2007, p.13); this is usually not recognised or formulated but forms the background to our thinking and living. Taylor uses the term, social imaginary to describe this background that is shared by large groups of people, not necessarily everyone. This is the background and implicit context of our social world, an intuitive understanding of how the world is. 'It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another; the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices which make up our social life' (2007, p.172). It is not a social theory but an imaginary because it is largely unstructured and not espoused in theoretical terms. It refers to the way people imagine their social environment and is primarily expressed through stories, images, and legends.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I explain this in 2.3.3 below but briefly it is an alternative faith based on a belief in a god who wants people to be good, nice to each other and happy but makes no demands on them.

<sup>22</sup> American youth ministry professor, Kenda Dean has popularised this concept and study in the UK and had an important influence on youth ministry here.

<sup>23</sup> It is relevant to note that the descriptions and theories of secularisation are not accepted by all but it is outside the scope of this study to discuss this. See Rob Warner, 2010, *Secularisation and its Discontents*.

### 2.3.3 The Immanent Frame

The social imaginary that is important for my discussion is what Taylor (2007) labels the immanent frame. It refers to a world that has lost the transcendent, a disenchanted universe, missing the presence of the divine. It is driven by exclusive humanism and expressive individualism. Taylor charts the historical processes that have led to this change in thinking including the rejection of sacramentalism by Calvin and other reformers which started to disenchant the world and move us towards naturalism; the rise of incarnational spirituality which emphasised God meeting humanity in history that ironically meant a loss of the transcendent and the rise of the primacy of the individual. The result is that God is reduced to a creator, and religion to morality (Smith, 2014, p.51). Taylor (2007) describes this as an “excarnation” of Christianity, ‘a transfer out of embodied, “enfleshed” forms of religious life, to those which are more in the head’ (2007, p.554).

For Taylor, the stage is set for the rise of exclusive or atheist humanism with human flourishing as its goal, but for the purposes of my discussion here, it seems that the natural result of this secularising process on Christianity is the rise of ‘moralistic therapeutic deism’ in the USA and the ‘happy midi-narrative’ in the UK. Moralistic therapeutic deism is the informal and unacknowledged ‘creed’ that I reported previously, identified by Christian Smith and his research team through the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) conducted in the USA during 2002-5.<sup>24</sup> In her response to this and further research with Christian young people, Dean outlines the ‘guiding beliefs’ of moralistic therapeutic deism:

A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.

God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.

Good people go to heaven when they die. (Dean, 2010, p.14)

Smith and Denton (2005) propose that this may have become the dominant religion in the USA. A study of teenage belief in the UK (Savage, et al., 2006) discovered a worldview amongst 15-25 year olds that they described as a ‘happy midi-narrative’ (2006, p.37). A follow-up project identified some similarities and used the description, ‘immanent faith’ to refer to a

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<sup>24</sup> The NSYR interviewed over 3,300 teenagers aged 13-17, plus surveys of parents between 2002-2005 plus follow up surveys with 2500.



spirituality that relied on trustworthy relationships with family and friends and the expression of authentic selfhood (Collins-Mayo, et al., 2010, p.32).

#### **2.3.4 Immanent Faith**

Savage et al. (2006) discovered a limited knowledge of, and engagement with, religion but instead they discovered meaning and significance in the day to day lives of young people; they suggested an underpinning coherent narrative, a happy midi-narrative that they expressed as, 'This world, and all life in it, is meaningful *as it is*' (Savage, et al., 2006, p.37). Happiness is the goal of life, to be achieved in this world rather than a future heaven and the resources offered through friends and family, as well as from within the individual, are enough to cope with any difficulties. Although there is an individualistic element to this, it is a relational and communal vision. It is a positive vision that views the world as ok and largely benign (2006, p.40). They identified an ethical code that was formed around the 'virtue of tolerance', such that the individual pursuit of happiness should not hamper that of others. Truth is understood in pragmatic terms not as an absolute; experiential knowledge and feelings are decisive in working out moral issues (2006, p.41).

Savage et al. identified a considerable overlap with the reports on the religious attitudes of American research and with moralistic therapeutic deism. What this revealed was an 'immanent faith', a phrase from earlier research by Collins. Belief focused not on the transcendent but on the here and now, organised around family, friends, and the reflexive self (Collins, 1997, cited in Savage, et al., 2006, p.51).

A follow up study (Collins-Mayo, et al., 2010) examined faith amongst Generation Y. The research involved questionnaires and interviews with 300 young people aged 8-23 years old who they classified as unchurched or dechurched (2010, p.3). Following on from the description of the happy midi-narrative in the 2006 publication, the research team use the term 'bedroom spirituality' to describe the immanent faith that was referred to previously. This acknowledged the references made by young people praying in their bedrooms on their own in a context of a spirituality that was immanent or this-worldly. It was sustained by 'the 'secular trinity' of family, friends and the reflexive self' (Collins-Mayo, et al., 2010, p.32) and would draw on Christian belief and practice only when this let them down. At this point, they would rely on a 'cultural memory of Christianity' with few other resources to draw on and so they had to create a spiritual 'make-do-and-mend' (2010, p.38).

Family and friends provided security and material, emotional and moral support. They note the changing role of parents who have extensive involvement in their children's lives, often acting more as friends or critical companions (2010, p.35). The researchers note how this was formerly the role of a youth worker and instead the home becomes a form of intergenerational



youth club where the young person receives affirmation, and the parent validation (2010, p.35). The focus on self reflects the individualisation of wider society but requires a level of self-knowledge to discover the 'authentic self' as well as the need to find their own way and sense of purpose. This was all connected to the importance of autonomous decision-making, which Arnett (2004) observed as relevant to the emerging adulthood stage.

The notion of bedroom spirituality highlighted the interesting finding that 82% of the young people admitted to praying at least once a month or occasionally but this was in private, alone in their bedroom (Collins-Mayo, 2010, p.45). The prayer included traditional Christian forms such as the Lord's Prayer or Hail Mary, but other prayers were categorised as petition, confession, and thanksgiving. Prayers of petition meant a recognition of a reality beyond the immanent world but also helped them to feel calmer and more relaxed. Confession was often described in term of personal reflection and God was seen as a listening presence and confidant (2010, p.49). Thirdly, thanksgiving prayer cultivated a sense of gratitude. In all this, there were signs of a transcendent faith especially for those involved with a Christian community, however, 'the emphasis tended to be on a subjectively rewarding relationship with God' (2010, p.50).

The research team state their discovery of 'a generation of people without a cohesive Christian story to underpin their place in the world' (Collins-Mayo, et al., 2010, p.108). The young people were not concerned by this nor did they have the same 'cultural hang-ups' with the church as older generations. This meant they were willing to access the resources of the church in times of difficulty, but the key issue was not propositional truth but the practical difference it would make to their lives. This means that lifestyle becomes an important issue and particularly questions of ethics. All decision-making was guided by the principle of authenticity (2010, p.81) which is an issue of identity, which we have already seen is key to this stage of life. However, authenticity is not just about being true to the self but being aware of the impact you have on others. There was some evidence that while the young people did not want to be told what to do, they did want guidance on how to think and make choices (2010, p.82).

My own experience and understanding of the faith of many young people and young adults in the UK church would mirror these findings. The analysis bears out the social imaginary of Taylor's secularised world that has lost sight of the transcendent God and reduced faith to self-fulfilment and happiness. Dean (2010) argues that this faith has been learned because

this is what churches practice and teach. In other words, the Christian church has not been immune from this secular social imaginary.<sup>25</sup>

This then is the challenge, of a secularised world and a secularised faith. A social imaginary and even a theological imaginary that have lost the presence of a transcendent God within the immanent frame. The way forward may be to reimagine ways of understanding our world that re-enchants it with the immanence and transcendence of God. To find this way, I believe we need to move away from the dominant cognitive model of faith and formation that is more suited to Taylor's world of secular 2 and instead consider one that is rooted in a theology of desire and the concept of habitus. This has the potential to generate a more holistic, embodied faith focussed on lived experience that addresses the challenges of Taylor's description of secular 3. In the next section I will explore how the notion of desire can offer this way forward and then how it leads on to the idea of habitus, following the work of American philosopher, James K. A. Smith (2009, 2013).

## **2.4 Answering the Challenge**

### **2.4.1 Desiring the Kingdom**

Smith's starting point is the question of who we are as people, proposing that we are not first of all 'thinking people' but 'we are primarily desiring animals' (2009, p.26). Smith describes his project as liturgical anthropology, that attempts to describe the 'pretheoretical navigation of the world' as well as the centrality of practice (2013, p.75). He argues that Christian education needs 'pedagogies of desire that form our habits, affections, and imaginations' (2013, p.13). The kind of people we are is shaped by what we love or desire, 'our identity is shaped by what we ultimately love or what we love as ultimate' (2009, p.27). In place of 'I think therefore I am' he asserts, 'I am what I love' (2009, p.46). Our ultimate love, he argues, is our vision of the good life, the ideal picture of human flourishing; it is what we desire above all else, in other words, what we worship. This is the kingdom that we desire. This desire is shaped by our actions, decisions and habits; these are the practices that then constitute liturgies and these liturgies are cultural, secular and religious.

The concept of desire takes us to the heart of what drives and motivates us as human beings and as spiritual beings. Desire is the origin but also points to the end-goal or telos of our existence. It emphasises an embodied faith that is more than cognitive and although it appears to emphasise individual desire, Smith explores how desire is shaped by the communities of

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<sup>25</sup> Further evidence can be seen in the annual survey of the most popular Bible verses shared through the YouVersion Bible app. The lists of top ten verses for 2014 and 2015 (Telusma 2014; Zylkstra 2015) are primarily about life in the world, about the mind, worry, anxiety and peace; about fear or plans for the future. None of them relate to the power or transcendence of God - surprisingly John 3:16 is absent.

which we are a part. He equates desire with love, proposing that desire is the way love is structured. However, Smith chooses not to distinguish between types of love – eros and agape - apart from suggesting in a footnote (2009, p.50:20) that agape is ‘rightly directed eros’ following Augustine. This feels inadequate - to brush over debates about eros and agape let alone acknowledge the different definitions of love leaves the reader to make up her own mind. At the same time, Smith notes that desire can be misdirected, but this risks the confusion over the sense of desire that is frequently construed as either sexual or in a negative light referring to worldly or sinful desires. Smith’s anthropological view means that he does not discuss whether desire emanates from God or is sustained by any relationship with God. We need to look elsewhere for a theology of desire.

#### **2.4.2 Agape and Eros – A Theology of Desire**

In ‘Life Together’ Bonhoeffer (2005) paints a picture of a binary division between the spiritual reality created by the Holy Spirit and the reality that comes from the human spirit. ‘The basis of the community of the Spirit is truth; the basis of the community of spirit is desire’ (2005, p.31). Human desire is described using various adjectives including, dark, turbid, disordered. Bonhoeffer clearly identifies that *eros* is ‘the dark love of good and evil desire’ and *agape* is ‘the bright love of brotherly service’ (2005, p.13). This understanding may have owed much to the influence of Karl Barth who ‘portrayed eros as a ravenous desire’ (Black, 2003, p.111). Black identifies Anders Nygren as another key influence for this oppositional understanding of eros and agape. According to Black, this characterisation of eros as selfish and its association with the erotic and sexual desire that contrasts it with agape has been a prime cause of the loss of eros from Christian ethics.

Sheldrake (1994) reports that where human love features in Christian spirituality it is ‘the disinterested, universal love of agape rather than the engaged, passionate, particular love of eros’ (1994, p.2-3). He states that this hierarchy of the two kinds of love and their separation is unhelpful. Desire is usually associated with eros-love and erotic power, but it needs to be ‘rescued’ from its reduction in meaning to sex and sexual power. Instead ‘desires involve a positive and active reaching out to something or someone ... and touches upon deeper questions of our identity and ideals’ (1994, p.4). Sheldrake sees both kinds of love rooted in the Trinitarian God who reaches out to all in universal, agape love but also specifically and particularly in eros. He quotes Pseudo-Dionysius who defined God as eros and described the reciprocal movement of God out towards creation and drawing creation and human beings back into union with the life of God. This leads Sheldrake to propose that agape and eros are not two kinds of love but in fact, complementary aspects of ‘Love’ itself and both express the same drive towards union with God. This opens the possibility of a more mystical experience

of God and exposes the opposite of a faith without eros that is 'reduced to moral values and dutiful rituals' (1994, p.28).

Sheldrake notes how the connection between desire and identity also informs our sense of vocation. This will be important for my later discussion about vocation in chapter 8. Sheldrake proposes that an awareness of our deepest desires helps us to know who we are and also what we want. They point us to our true self and become vocational guides as we seek to become who we are called to be and to do what God desires of us (Sheldrake, 1994, p.13).

Black (2003) helpfully traces the roots of eros back to Plato and Greek mythology. He explains how in the Symposium, Plato describes the origin of desire in our lack – it is a natural response to being incomplete, 'we desire another object or person to make us complete and that desire can be love' (2003, p.109). However, that desire moves from the material to the spiritual and 'to the contemplation of Beauty itself' (2003, p.109). He traces the aligning of agape and eros in the writings of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to show how eros was used to describe the excess of love and the divine love that agape was unable to describe. Black's discussion focusses primarily on sexuality and sexual ethics but draws some pertinent conclusions about eros and spirituality. Defining spirituality as the search for ultimate reality and personal wholeness, he proposes two approaches based on views of eros. In the first where eros is viewed with suspicion, there is a stress on 'detachment, denial of desire and the power of the intellect' but where eros is embraced the emphasis is on 'attachment, the release of desire, feelings and the body' (2003, p.121) leading to an embodied spirituality rather than one dependent on reason alone. An appreciation of these two roles points us towards another cause of the dominance of the cognitive and a solution in the rediscovery of eros within spirituality.

The Patristics are also a source for Coakley (2013) in her exploration of the concept of sexual desire, and the desire for God as well as God's desire for people. She explains a theology of the Trinity and locates an understanding of desire within the practice of contemplative prayer. Coakley offers insight into the way that desire emanates from God, moves within the Trinity, and is imprinted on humankind made in the image of God. In her view, we are desiring creatures because we are made in the image of God.

Coakley describes her fundamental conviction that we cannot understand the Trinitarian God without exploring desire. Desire is closely related to both spirituality and sexuality. However rather than setting these up in binary opposition as many views of desire seem to do – desire for God is good, desire for sex (or the 'world') is bad – she recognises their close relationship. She highlights the significance of the 'intense desire for God' as well as the allied 'often problematic feelings about sexual desire' (2013, p.3) that were present in the writings of the

early church fathers. These fathers, such as Origen and Augustine, were responsible for developing the doctrine of the Trinity. Coakley aims to present a 'contemporary Trinitarian ontology of desire – a vision of God's Trinitarian nature is both the source and goal of human desires as God intends them' (2013, p.6). She proposes that desire is first a characteristic of God and secondly is applied to humans created in the image of God.<sup>26</sup> God is the creator of desire but also works on us to transform them when these desires are misdirected.

Desire in humans is usually indicative of a longing for something we do not have, something lacking or even lost. In God, the opposite is true. Desire in God 'connotes that plenitude of longing love that God has for God's own creation and for its full and ecstatic participation in the divine, Trinitarian life' (Coakley, 2013, p.10).

In this theological light, issues of sexuality (and gender) are secondary to the desire for God and the ascetic transformation leading to participation in the Trinitarian God. The path to this participation is one that risks the intensification of human desires but also the 'purgation of the human desires' (2013, p.13). Coakley highlights how the draw towards union with God, can be understood as erotic and analogous to the attraction of human sexual love. At the same time, it is the work of the Spirit to provide checks to the human desires and break their power through the work of Christ on the cross.

The rediscovery of desire in the form of eros or passionate love may therefore offer a way forward from the seemingly passionless, secularised faith of moralistic therapeutic deism. Instead of a faith based on doctrine and creedal assent we focus more on experience and emotion. Writing about adolescent faith, Dean (2004) proposes that young people are searching for a faith to die for, a faith worth living for, a passionate faith. Passion includes but transcends desire because it involves suffering as well as longing. The passion of Christ reflects the divine desire to love us even to the point of willing sacrifice. 'Made in the image of God who passionately seeks us, we are created to seek God passionately and sacrificially as well' (2004, p.21). Dean suggests that the core of youth ministry should be 'the practices of the Christian community' (2004, p.161) that are a means of grace and transformation. This is an active, embodied faith based on doing not just thinking. It creates 'a way of life that gives the church its distinctive identity as a community conformed to the passion of God' (2004, p.152).

Both Coakley and Dean provide a rejoinder to Smith's emphasis on our desire for love by asserting that desire and love comes from God first. Rather than 'we are what we love', we

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<sup>26</sup> This of course begs the question over whether we create the image of God we want to see and how we know who God is. There is not space here to explore this but if we are created in the image of God, how we understand that image will be crucial especially if Smith is right, that we become what or who we worship.

could say, 'we are because we are loved'. Nouwen states, 'Being the Beloved expresses the core truth of our existence' (1992, p.28). Commenting on the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3, Ford (2007) states that Jesus is the 'beloved' and this is 'the fulfilment of divine desire in human existence' (Ford, 2007, p.158). He explains that to be loved by God and to please God is the 'ultimate in desirability' (2007, p. 158). This is an important distinction that reminds us that faith is a gift of God and not just something we work at or develop in ourselves. This understanding of desire is rooted in the mutual love of Father and Son in the Spirit and 'draws together the desires of mind, heart, soul and body' (Ford, 2007, p.158). Ford demonstrates how Jesus' life is an embodiment of his teaching on the transformation of desire and his ministry can be seen 'as teaching and enacting a God-centred wisdom of desire' (2007, p.159). This desire is first of all for the kingdom of God; his disciples are learning how to follow Jesus in his desire for the kingdom. This understanding of desire and wisdom offers a possible route to an embodied passionate faith that is a way of life or lived experience and will help us to face the challenge of "secular 3".<sup>27</sup> To understand what this wisdom might look like in the practice of faith formation I want to turn again to the notion of habitus.

## 2.5 Habitus

Farley (1983) seeks to recover a practical understanding of theology as *theologia* – a 'theological understanding both as a *habitus* of sapiential knowledge and as a dialectical activity' (1983, p.178). He describes the history and process by which theological understanding has moved from being about our relationship with God to an academic scholarly discipline that became focussed on the content of the habitus disposition and 'became a term for doctrines, beliefs, or systems of beliefs' (Farley, 1996, p.39).<sup>28</sup> He identifies an emphasis in theological training on ordained ministry and the resulting dominance of the 'clerical paradigm' that has led to a divide between theory and praxis. He argues that theology is not about technical knowledge but 'a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals' (1983, p.35). It has the nature of a habit with 'the primary character of wisdom' and as such is related to a practical knowledge of God. This is a call to return to the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and others who recognised that the telos of theology is the 'salvific union with God' (1983, p.42). *Theologia* does not discount the importance of cognitive knowledge of scripture, traditions, the mythos (stories) and doctrine but incorporates them through critical reflection on the life of faith. Farley suggests there is a 'pre-reflective insightfulness or cognitivity' (1983, p.156) that he terms, belief-ful knowing and this becomes self-conscious through reflection and inquiry. The process of reflection and theological reflection is an important aspect of formation identified by the research participants

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<sup>27</sup> See 2.3.2

<sup>28</sup> A longer exposition of this history is provided in Farley, 1983.

and I will discuss this in chapters 6 and 7. Farley describes the Greek idea of *paideia* as the 'culturing' of people in virtue and proposes that a Christian *paideia* is required not to lead to virtue but to wisdom that comes from grace and knowledge of God, this is the cultivation of a habitus of faith.

In her examination of pastoral theology, Graham (2002) recognises a similar emphasis on rational moral discourse and theological ethics as well as the more limited focus on individual virtue and salvation. This resulted in the dominance of the clerical role of pastoral care as highlighted by Farley. Whilst supporting Farley's use of habitus, she argues that his proposal risks being an irrelevant retrieval of a theological model from a different cultural context, that of monasticism, and to avoid this it needs to be reinterpreted. 'However, we need a model of practical wisdom that is both "indwelt" and "constructed": *habitus* as handed down and reinterpreted anew for each generation' (2002, p.95). Graham proposes that this new model is one that has practice as its focus, but this practice is 'Christian practice' in its broadest sense and not just focussing on the ministry of the church or the role of ordained ministers. In this sense, purposeful practices carry the habitus, embodying and enacting the meanings, values and norms of the culture.

Graham's discussion of practice draws on the social theorist, Bourdieu and his work on the concept of habitus. She suggests that Bourdieu's understanding differs from Farley in allowing for practical wisdom to be understood as influenced by history. Habitus is thus both the product of past actions, knowledge, and practice but also subject to change through creative human agency. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is central to Smith's (2013) exploration of a liturgical anthropology that I noted above. Smith describes how Bourdieu sought to describe a theory of practice arising from a critique of theoretical reason. This is not to deny the importance of theory or reflection on practice but to recognise that practice has its own logic of practice. Reflection can often impose intellectual ideas and assume that practitioners are thinking and reflecting when they are not. Instead, Bourdieu suggests an understanding of what it is to be "native". The practical knowledge of the native is that of someone who is embedded in a community of practice and acts un-self-consciously or pretheoretically. The native has a practical knowledge that is not thought about, they are primarily actors doing, rather than thinkers expressing themselves through action. At the same time, this practical knowledge is influenced by habits and inclinations that guide actions, which is habitus, the 'habituated inclinations that spawn meaningful action' (Smith, 2013, p.80).

Habitus is that set or system of dispositions by which we construct our world, without conscious awareness (Smith, 2013, p.81-2). It is frequently handed down or acquired as an embodied tradition, a way of being that 'inclines me to constitute the world in certain ways,

conditioning my construction of meaning' (2013, p.81). This habitus is always communal or collective and as such enables us to be a part of an institution or "community of practice" with those who share the habitus: 'I learn how to be *in* community by acquiring *from* the community and its institutions a *habitus*' (2013, p.82). This disposition is present primarily without conscious awareness. It was evident in my research that many of the responses demonstrated this 'taken for granted' nature of their Christian view of the world and as a result not spoken or thought about until it was questioned.

Bourdieu uses a second phrase to describe habitus, practical sense, which is a practical 'know-how, a proficiency or "a feel for the game"' (Smith, 2013, p.86) rather than knowledge about the game. This sense applies to all kinds of action, from everyday tasks to moral decisions and guides the way we respond by inclining us to certain ends. Habitus means that we become 'the kind of person who is inclined to respond in certain ways to certain situations' (2013, p.87) because of the way we make sense of the world. Smith describes how Bourdieu sees practical sense as a form of belief but not in the sense of 'assent to propositions but rather a functional, enacted trust and entrustment to a context and a world' (2013, p.87). This comes close to my description of faith that is more about praxis and action in the present moment<sup>29</sup> and one that does not rely on the application of cognitive knowledge but instead opens the way for a more holistic understanding of faith and its formation.

It is here that Smith's discussion is most pertinent to my study as he poses the question as to whether the acquisition of a Christian habitus could be the goal of Christian education and formation. This starts to answer my question about the place of cognitive belief and emotive, embodied faith. Habitus understood as practical sense, or better still practical *wisdom* as defined by Farley, offers a way to find meaning in, or to make sense of, the world that is not just an intellectual assent to propositional truth (2013, p.87). However, this use of "practical wisdom" as shorthand for, or equivalent to, habitus is problematic in that it is also used to define phronesis and I suggested earlier (1.3.2) that habitus is more than phronesis, it is about character, the kind of person we are, and a way of being, of who we are, and how we live in relationship with God. As I noted earlier, Bass et al. (2016) suggest using the phrase "Christian practical wisdom" to include the aspect of faith but this still does not incorporate the idea that habitus is about our whole being and not just the way we act in the world. Bennett et al. (2018) following Bourdieu, suggest that practice is *embodied* habitus. Ford's (2007) definition of "wise living" is helpful in bringing together the concept of desire discussed in the previous section with the idea of a lived, active response, 'Wise living before this God involves a faith that above all acknowledges being desired and loved by God, like Jesus at his baptism, and that in

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<sup>29</sup> See my Introduction.



response desires and loves God' (2007, p.380). Thus, habitus could be understood as wise living before God, an embodied, relational way of life that is motivated by desire for God that in turn shapes our character and being to be people of virtue who instinctively live out a practical wisdom. It is an issue of identity - who we are, of vocation - what we do, and of ethics – how we live.

### **2.5.1 Developing Habitus**

To understand how we acquire a habitus, Smith develops Bourdieu's metaphor of being a native – the habitus is second nature, absorbed into the plausibility structures and of knowing automatically how things are and the way to behave, it all becomes 'natural'. This is all acquired through a slow process of social and cultural practices and repeated rituals by which we are initiated and incorporated into a social body. The significant role of the community is noted in the previous section above but is also echoed in the work of Ford who describes the church as 'a school of desire and wisdom' (2007, p.252f), by Hauerwas, for whom church is a 'community of virtues in which we remember and tell the story of a crucified saviour' (1983, p. 103) and in Smith's (2013) emphasis on the power of worship and liturgy in formation. Bennett et al. (2018) talk instead of the importance of communities of practice in carrying tradition and generating wisdom. In his study of the apostle Paul's use of the word *phronesis* in Philippians, Rooms (2012) asserts that Paul's understanding of unity in Christ means there is a communal practical wisdom, *phronesis* is a community enterprise that leads to a corporate Christian habitus (201, p.89). The priority of the community for developing practice and plausibility are important for my later discussion of the research findings in chapter 6 and I will discuss communities of practice in chapter 8.

This discussion of *theologia* and habitus locates the task of theology in the realms not just of knowledge and information but in the lived experience and practices of faith formation and the shaping of character, becoming the kind of people who act in ways consistent with the habitus of the Christian faith. It means that a significant goal, (if not the goal) of faith formation is the habitus of faith. At the same time, recognising this as a practical theological task moves us beyond Fowler's understanding of faith connected to psychological and social development into the framework of spirituality and a specifically Christian theology.

## **2.6 The Theological Turn**

The case for the move away from the social sciences as the primary lens for analysis and instead towards theology is argued by Wesley Ellis (2015). Although he focusses on youth ministry his argument can, in my view, be applied to emerging adults. Ellis suggests that the reliance on developmental models of faith and adolescence has wider consequences than just enabling us to understand teenagers better; it sets us up with a view that sees young people

as unfinished, incomplete and on the way to somewhere. This can mean that we miss the intrinsic worth of the present and current experiences; the youth pastor spends her time primarily working with those young people with future potential. We are so focussed on their becoming that we neglect that they are being. Ellis draws on Moltmann's eschatology that recognises it is 'not about what is becoming in the world but what is *coming* into the world' (2015, p.133) and so our focus should be on 'the presence of God in the depth of lived experience' (2015, p.133) and recognising that redemption not development should set the agenda. So, he proposes that we should be asking not 'how can I develop them' but 'how can I participate in God's ministry in their life' (2015, p.135).

Whilst I do not think Ellis is suggesting that we ignore the fact that young people are in a period of growth and transition, he wants to propose a focus more on theology than on psychology for defining how we minister to young people. It seems that this point is just as applicable to the emerging adult age group.

The work of Root and Dean (2011) on the 'theological turn' is relevant here. They make a similar argument to ground ministry practice in practical theology using methods of theological reflection. Dean argues, not that we jettison psychological and sociological understandings but that we recognise the role of theology that goes with them, 'Christians have always maintained that the search for self is simultaneously a search for God' (2011, p.65). Too frequently we have forgotten to make that connection in our practice.

Loder (1998) makes a similar theological turn in stating that 'a Christian theological interpretation must be allowed to influence our studies of human development' (1998, p.xi). Loder argues that questions of meaning and purpose are central to human nature and so cannot be ignored. They are issues of the human spirit and are best understood in the context of a Christian theology of the Holy Spirit (1998, p.xiii). Loder recognises a similarity in the role of the human spirit and that of the Holy Spirit in bringing transformation. The human spirit is 'inherently creative', and the Holy Spirit is '*Spiritus Creator*' whose role is transformation (1998, p.35).

### **2.6.1 Transformation**

Transformation has several theological connotations: conversion, repentance, and the apostle Paul's call to the Romans to 'Be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (The Bible, Romans 12:3). As I have considered formation, I have recognised a process of change that takes time; the word transformation could be taken to imply a change that happens quickly. This is not always the case, for Loder transformation is a different type of change, one that produces a significant change. This change could be called conversion or 'metanoia' to use a biblical term, often translated as repentance and signifying a complete change of mind and

life. For transformation to happen, it must involve the work of the Holy Spirit and not just the human spirit.

Where change occurs in the human spirit, the ego remains in control but when the Holy Spirit as '*Spiritus Creator*' is involved, then the ego itself can be transformed (Loder, 1989, p.4). In other words, the Holy Spirit transforms all human transformations and for Loder, it is central to the Christian faith for this to happen as part of Christ's redemption of the world. In his later work, Loder explains this as a move from 'an ego-centered existence to a Christ-centered existence' (1998, p.277). This transformed ego finds expression in love; a love that is patterned after the cross and resurrection (1998, p.252, 270). It is interesting for this study to note that Loder comes to this conclusion in the chapter describing the developmental stage of young adulthood. He records that for Freud and Erikson this stage is about intimacy versus isolation and Loder also recognises that this love is about deepening intimacy in Christ and in 'the koinonia, the communion-creating presence of Christ' (1998, p.270). This reminds us of the importance of the faith community and relationships in the process of faith formation that is essential to the development of habitus. The significance of relationships to my research participants will be explored in chapter 5.

Loder's work moves beyond stage theories and towards an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in formation. He notes the importance of stage theories in understanding human development but observes that 'most of life and growth is carried on not at stages but between stages' (1998, p.126). The transitional period is where transformation happens. He suggests that the processes of change are more fundamental than the stages themselves because we spend more time in transition than we do in equilibrium (1998, p.131). The process of transformation can both transcend and bypass any stages and thus the stages become secondary to the process. The added dimension of the Holy Spirit's transforming work means that the kingdom of God may break in 'on development at all levels and stages with apocalyptic suddenness' (1998, p.154).

## **2.7 The Practice of Faith Formation**

### **2.7.1 Habitus and the Virtuous Life**

So far, I have followed Smith (2009, 2013) in proposing desire and habitus as an alternative frame for our understanding of faith rather than systems of belief. Desire and a spirituality based on eros may offer clues to re-enchanting the immanent frame. My discussion has pointed towards a more active, experiential, and emotive (passionate) approach to spirituality, the importance of community, and to more embodied forms of prayer and worship that maybe point towards sacramental, mystical, or contemplative practices. These are practices of faith that shape us in our desires and our thinking. In considering how all this might translate into a

programme of faith formation, I will explore Wright's (2010) work on the virtue tradition that resonates closely with the idea of habitus (although he does not use this term) and its emphasis on habits, character, and a way of living.

Wright (2010) applies Aristotle's theory of virtue to a church and Christian context. He explains Aristotle's 'threefold pattern of character transformation' (2010, p.30) as first, the *telos*, which is *eudaimonia*, defined here as flourishing; secondly, the strengths required to achieve the *telos* which are the virtues; and thirdly, the process of training or practising habits that develop the virtues and enable us 'to become the kind of person who would be able to act in the right way automatically' (2010, p.33). Wright proposes that Jesus and the New Testament writers offer us a richer, fuller model, one with an extra dimension. Jesus' goal is not just human flourishing but people of the whole world being part of God's coming kingdom. Jesus' vision of the virtues highlighted different moral strengths, notably love, forgiveness and humility. Jesus and Paul would have agreed with the idea of training of habits but offered a different way that Wright describes as "virtue reborn". The theological virtues of faith, hope and love offer a modified pattern of virtue, the arrival of Jesus represents the in-breaking of the 'telos' now and followers of Jesus can begin practicing those 'habits of heart and life that correspond to the way things are in God's kingdom' (Wright, 2010, p.91). Wright also emphasises that the Christian virtues will not produce 'grand isolated heroes, leading a nation in politics and war, but integrated communities modelling a life of self-giving love' (2010, p.188). Wright's final chapter outlines a model, 'the virtuous circle' that shows how virtue can be practised. Before this he reminds us of the important role of God, the Holy Spirit, in everything the Christian does, drawing on words from the Easter prayers in the Book of Common Prayer that ask for two things. The first is for 'good desires' and second, for help to 'bring those desires to good effect' (2010, p.222).

The virtue tradition interpreted by Wright demonstrates the importance of desire for the good life, and the cultivation of character virtues through habits and training. This resonates with the concept of habitus and so I can now return to this idea and the writings of Smith.

### **2.7.2 Habitus and Cultural Liturgies**

In Smith's paradigm, Christian discipleship is not a matter of right ideas and beliefs but 'of being the kind of person who loves rightly – who loves God and neighbour and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love' (Smith, 2009, p.32). The key is that we are made into these people through 'immersion in the material practices of Christian worship' (2009, p.33) that shapes hearts and minds. He draws on Aristotle, Aquinas, and Macintyre to describe how habits are formed and become pre- or non-cognitive dispositions that means our desires are translated into our actions and decisions which happen without reflection or cognition, 'This

precognitive engine is the product of long development and formation' (2009, p.56). Smith prefers the label habits to virtues, defining good habits as virtues and bad habits as vices. These habits become the fulcrum of desire, 'the hinge that "turns" the heart, our love ... in certain directions' (2009, p.56). In the second book of his trilogy, Smith (2013) focuses on the shaping of the imagination. Smith reiterates his thesis that we are driven by what we desire or love and that our desires are shaped by formative practices. A pedagogy of desire is a strategy for holistic formation that is aimed at producing agents or actors not just thinkers. 'The driving centre of human action and behaviour is a nexus of loves, longings and habits that hums along under the hood, so to speak, *without needing to be thought about*' (2013, p.12 his italics).

Smith's pedagogy of desire occurs within the context of 'cultural liturgies'. Liturgies are the combination of images, icons, rituals, and practices that influence and shape our vision of the good life. These liturgies can be secular or faith-based. Examples of secular liturgies are found in the shopping mall, sports stadia and universities. Christian worship then functions as counter-formation, 'Christian worship needs to be intentionally liturgical, formative and pedagogical in order to *counter* such mis-formations and misdirections' (2009, p.88). Smith asserts that worship comes before doctrines and beliefs in shaping who we are. If, as he argues, our formation in Christ is more a precognitive matter of the heart then 'Christian worship that is full-bodied reaches, touches and transforms even those who cannot grasp theological abstractions' (2009, p.136). Worship is the 'matrix' of the faith, not just its illustration and therefore the real place of formation and transformation (2009, p.138).

This formative power of worship is explored in detail by Hauerwas and Wells (2006) in relation to Christian ethics. They describe how ordered worship shapes character and corporate Christian life, it is 'the most significant way in which Christianity takes flesh, evolving from a set of ideas and convictions to a set of practices and a way of life' (2006, p.7). This set of practices is found within the Eucharist service and they identify these in five groups that form the structure of the book. This is a strong argument, but it begs the question as to whether worship as practised in many of our churches has this formative power. I sought to elicit an answer to this in my research interviews and will return to this in chapter 6. In my earlier discussion of the virtuous life, I noted the importance of having a telos and the role of practices in shaping habitus. The Christian community meeting together for worship may be an important place for these practices to occur but, as Graham (2002) observed, the practices of faith can be continued outside of congregational worship. Although Smith insists worship is the main forum, I suggest his ideas of how formation happens are helpful but must be applied in other contexts. His description of poetics and kinaesthetics are useful for this purpose.

### 2.7.3 Poetics and Kinaesthetics

For Smith, the process of formation happens in two ways. First through a vision or picture of the good life which is often transmitted through story and becomes part of our 'adaptive consciousness' (2009, p.58). Secondly, habits are formed through embodied, material practices and rituals that train the heart to desire certain ends or telos (2009, p.58). In his later work, Smith (2013) introduces the two terms, poetics and kinaesthetics to describe these two elements. Kinaesthetics are embodied practices, and poetics refers to the storied imagination. The stories that we absorb or captivate us shape our imagination and character; these are the stories that guide our thinking about life and especially what constitutes 'the good life' (2013, p.32). This can, as previously noted, be a function of secular liturgies and stories but in Christian worship, the Holy Spirit makes this the place of divine action as the incarnate God inhabits our practices and lifts us to union with Christ (2013, p.15). God meets us where we are, inviting us into the life of the Trinity through the practices that are inhabited by the Spirit. 'The sanctifying Spirit condescends to meet us as narrative, imaginative, ritual animals, giving us practices and liturgies for our sanctification' (2013, p.33).

Smith proposes that we learn stories with our bodies, hence the role of practices; there is an 'inextricable link between imagination, story, and embodiment' (2013, p.39). Embodiment recognises the emotional response to the world that frequently precedes thinking as well as the fact that we live in the world through our bodily presence (2013, pp.37-38).<sup>30</sup>

Smith's interpretation of all this leads him to some practical suggestions for faith formation based on desire that is both kinaesthetic and poetic (2013, p.15). As I noted above, worship is the primary place of formation for Smith,<sup>31</sup> however, he allows some room for practices in other contexts to have a formative effect. He affirms the importance of monastic practices, citing Calvin's phrase monkhood of all believers, and the tradition of Christian paideia, the treasury of spiritual disciplines that will serve to shape our habitus. However, he brings this back to the context of liturgical worship rather than exploring how these practices might be developed in everyday life. His reference to mystagogy points us towards the important theme of reflection that will emerge out of the research data.<sup>32</sup> Mystagogical preaching in the Early

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<sup>30</sup> Smith explores the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty with ideas of perception and of 'being-in-the-world' that propose a different kind of knowing, 'preconscious knowledge' located in the body. He draws on the term 'erotic comprehension' that links back to an understanding of desire and later uses this term to describe a Christian perception of the world governed by the imagination not the intellect. This argument justifies Smith's position but is not essential to my discussion here.

<sup>31</sup> Smith acknowledges that this will only happen 'provided that the practices of Christian worship intentionally carry, embody, enact, and rehearse the normative shape of the Christian story' (Smith, 2013, p.163).

<sup>32</sup> See 7.6 and 8.4.4

Church is included now in the Catholic Rites of Initiation of Adults (RCIA).<sup>33</sup> In the Early Church this was the process of catechesis immediately following baptism when the mysteries of the sacraments and practices were fully explored through a process of reflection on the experience; a process that was aimed at the senses and emotions not the intellect (Satterlee, 2002). For Smith, it means generating an intentional awareness of what is happening and why, when people gather for worship (2013, p.188). This reflective approach connects the emotions and activities of the faith community with the understanding needed to motivate us in our commitment to worship and practices of faith. It means that cognitive understanding follows experiences of faith which is the opposite order of the models I described in 2.3.1 above, but also affirms the place of both cognitive and affective in faith formation. An alternative model that brings these strands together can be discovered in recent writings about catechesis.

#### **2.7.4 Catechesis**

The above reference to mystagogy takes me to the practice of catechesis that was a fundamental part of the introduction and initiation of new Christians in the Early Church. Its practice continued throughout history but declined in the twentieth century. The Catholic church revived it after Vatican II and the Anglican church has given it more attention in the last 30 years, influenced in part by the report, 'On the Way' (Church of England, 1995) that considered approaches to welcoming new Christians into the church. Croft (2017) identifies the importance of catechesis in the history of the church for its role in teaching the faith. He emphasises the importance of the four key texts – the Apostles Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and the Beatitudes that were highlighted by the 1995 report which seem to suggest an emphasis on cognitive knowledge. However, 'On the Way' acknowledges the significance of belonging, questioning and 'experienced faith' in formation, especially related to children (1995, p.82). Croft describes 'the Emmaus road disciplines of listening to create community, attending to scripture, prayer and the sacraments and engaging in mission' which he develops in his later book as the 'four essential elements of catechesis' (Croft, 2019, p.xi) offering a more holistic model for catechesis. This includes being Christ-like, contemplative, compassionate, and courageous, part of a community, and nurturing encounter and relationship with God. Mercer (2020) identifies catechesis as 'holistic discipleship' that invites us to live in the way of Jesus, recognising that we learn by doing as much as by thinking. Both Croft and Mercer report that 'echo' is part of the word catechesis<sup>34</sup> and how our lives are to echo, or imitate, the life of Christ.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://rcia.org.uk/> accessed 11/12/20

<sup>34</sup> See my chapter 1.2 for the use of the word Echo as the title of the intern year.



### 2.7.5 Social Liturgy

This understanding of holistic discipleship opens up the possibility of formation beyond the confines of Christian worship to something that takes place in our everyday lives. This is the proposal of Alan Roxburgh (2012, 2013) and is implied by Nick Spencer (2016) in his term “social liturgy”. Roxburgh argues that the impact of modernity has led to a personal and privatised faith that has little social impact. The language of spiritual practices has not helped, ‘It is a narrative of the inner, private self that fundamentally lacks the capacity to grasp that in the economy of the gospel, Christian practices form a people, they are *social practices* that establish and shape a culture offering an alternative way of life’ (Roxburgh, 2012, p.5). Drawing on Luke 10, the sending out of the seventy, Roxburgh argues that the Christian community has an important role to play in shaping society and, like Smith, notes that this must include the imagination – re-imagining what it means to be God’s people and offering a different narrative to that of late modernity. He includes worship as a social practice that forms us as a people who shape the world.

In a later article Roxburgh (2013) goes further in proposing that we need to abandon previous models of formation that have been ecclesiocentric and instead focus on God’s agency in the world, ‘The triune God is known, discerned and present in the local and everyday. The God we confess in Jesus Christ is on the ground in neighbourhoods that thirst for God in a world that desperately misses God’ (2013, p.3).

This is what Spencer (2016) suggests will be the first point of engagement with Christianity for many in the 21st Century (2016, p.38). He notes the dual meaning of the Greek word ‘Leitourgia’ (liturgy) that ‘captures the idea of generous, even selfless service, which could be directed at both the human and the divine other’ (2016, p.5). Social liturgy is the practice of social action ‘rooted in and shaped by love of God’ (2016, p.6). It may then be that faith formation happens not just through church worship but in the worship of our whole lives.

This chapter has outlined the challenges and potential responses for the formation of faith in our cultural secular context that will reappear in my later discussion of the research data. The next context I will consider is the demographic context of emerging adulthood and the cultural context of the gap year.



## **Chapter 3 Demographic Context - Emerging Adulthood and the Gap Year**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The subjects of this research study are young people aged 19-26 years and therefore fit the relatively new descriptor of 'emerging adulthood' that was first used by the American psychologist, Jeffrey Arnett (2004). His argument is that the life of those in the age range 18-29 years has become so different from previous generations that this time should be viewed as a distinct life stage in between adolescence and young adulthood. I will outline his theory and the characteristics of this age group. I will explore Arnett's insights in the area of general religious, and specifically Christian, faith, its belief, practice, and formation. We will see that this age group is often understood as being in transition from adolescence to adulthood, an in-between place and a time of freedom and exploration. It is in this context that the rise of the gap year has grown as another in-between space, a more intensive time of exploration, sometimes involving travel and literal exploration of areas of the world or sometimes as a time of voluntary service (White, 2014). I will end this chapter with an overview of the potential impact of the gap year on emerging adults' development.

### **3.1 A New Life Stage: Emerging Adulthood**

Arnett (2004) states that his seminal book on emerging adulthood brought together ten years of research into the transition from adolescence to adulthood (2004, p.v). In May 2000, he summarised his previous research and proposed the conception of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) to describe the prolonged period of transition to adulthood that he had identified as a new characteristic of young people aged 18-25 years. His research focussed on young people in America, and he recognised the application of his idea related to industrialised countries or, in other words, those with 'cultures that allow young people a prolonged period of independent role exploration during the late teens and twenties' (2000, p.469).

He bemoans the fact that because this age group is either seen as part of adolescence or as young adulthood, it had not received the research interest that it deserved. He expresses the hope that by creating a new paradigm, it will lead to an increase in the scholarly attention that it merits (2000, p.477, p.479). This hope was realised, and the concept of emerging adulthood is now widely known and discussed. In 2013, the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood was formed and a new journal, 'Emerging Adulthood' published by Sage.<sup>35</sup> In 2015, Oxford

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<sup>35</sup> The journal can be found at <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/eax> accessed 29/04/20

University Press published *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*, edited by Arnett (Arnett, 2015).

However, at the same time Arnett's theory has not been accepted by all. It was observed that 'The criticism of emerging adulthood, however, came just as quickly as the celebration' (Syed, 2016, p.11). Syed asserts that all the criticisms can be summarised as suggesting that emerging adulthood is nonsense. However, that is not to dismiss their claims and he lists six key themes before addressing the two he considered most powerful. For the purposes of this thesis, it is helpful to note the debate around Arnett's proposals, but my view is that there is much that resonates with, and little that threatens, the validity of his description of the period of life in which my research cohort are to be found. Therefore, I will move on to discuss the detail of Arnett's ideas.

## **3.2 Understanding Emerging Adulthood**

### **3.2.1 Social and Demographic Change**

For many years it was relatively easy to know when a young person became an adult. Syed (2016) cites Settersten's list of 'the 'Big Five' markers of adulthood: leaving home, finishing school, getting a job, getting married, and having children' (Settersten, 2011, cited in Syed, 2016, p.15). Arnett reported that demographic changes in the previous fifty years meant that all those markers were being delayed until the mid to late twenties. Consequently, he proposed that the late teens and twenties had become a distinct period or life stage particularly in America and other industrialised countries.

These demographic changes are described and contextualised within broader social change by Furlong and Cartmel (2007). They summarise the significant changes in the lives of young people since the 1980s. They see the changes as driven by the economic change in the west where the move from Fordian manufacturing to service industries led to the transformation of the youth labour market. Instead of 'collective employment experiences' (2007, p.139), what was needed was 'flexible specialization' and the use of part-time and temporary employment. A move that has been furthered by the development of the gig economy which a Trade Union Congress study in the UK (Sharp, 2019) documents as having doubled in the three years to 2019 and includes 10% of the workforce and 60% of them are aged 16-34 years.

The changes in the labour market resulted in a need for more advanced educational qualifications meaning that young adults remained in full-time education until a later age. In the UK, the law changed in 2013 making education or training compulsory until the age of 17 years and then in 2015, to 18 years (Goddard, 2008). This included plans to develop the national apprenticeship programme. At the same time, numbers of young people attending

university was increasing. In February 2002 the Blair Labour Government set a target for at least half of 18-30 year-olds to be in higher education by 2010 (Lunt, 2008). In 1997, it was at 30%. Although this target was not reached by 2010, in 2017/18 the Higher Education Initial Participation Rates (HEIPR) was estimated to be 52% showing a steady rise since 2006 (Department for Education, 2019). However, Brant (2019) observed that this figure is a projection and an estimate and proposed that the reality was closer to 43% (Brant, 2019). The important point is that more young adults are attending higher education and it is no longer the preserve of elite groups.

This increase in the time spent in education means that young adults are spending longer in a 'state of semi-dependency' (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.140) meaning they are more likely to live alone or cohabit and marry later. At the same time, legislative changes and costs made access to housing more difficult and the removal of state support compounded the reliance on family and created 'new forms of vulnerability' (2007, p.141). The average age at marriage for opposite sex couples has increased since 1970 by 11 years to 38 years for men and 35.7 years for women (Heath, 2020). Stripe (2019) reports that in the early 70's, 91% of women were married by the age of 30, 28% by the age of 20. At the same time, the average age for having a first child has risen by four years to 28.8 years old and 88% of couples are cohabiting before marriage (Stripe, 2019).

This social and demographic change is critical for Arnett's observations, but he makes other justifications for his argument from related disciplines.

### **3.2.2 Theoretical Perspectives**

In arguing for emerging adulthood to be seen as a distinct period of life, Arnett (2004) refers to the significant work of three psychologists working in the field of social or developmental psychology. He proposes that Erikson's (1968) life stage theory includes the possibility of a period that is neither adolescence nor young adulthood. He suggests that Erikson comments on a 'prolonged adolescence' and a 'psychosocial moratorium' in some industrialised societies that serve as a period of 'free role experimentation' without the full commitments and responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, p.470). He finds further evidence in the work of Levinson (1978, cited in Arnett, 2000) who described the ages of 17-33 in men as the 'novice phase' in which there is much change and instability. The third source is Keniston (1971, cited in Arnett, 2000) who labelled the period of the late teens and twenties as 'youth'. Arnett described this as a time of 'continued role experimentation between adolescence and young adulthood' (Arnett, 2000, p.470). Arnett suggests that the idea was not widely accepted in part due to its description of characteristics that reflected the historical moment, and the term 'youth' being in more popular usage to refer to adolescence. The age range covered by 'youth' is itself not

universally agreed. The United Nations (United Nations, n.d.) uses 15-24 years for statistical purposes whereas people in the UK consider youth to end at age 30 (Smith, 2018). The National Youth Agency<sup>36</sup> defines youth work as normally for ages 11-25 years but recognises it may start from as young as 8 years. In my organisation and many churches, youth ministry begins at age 11 years in line with the transition to secondary school and ends at 18 years when they leave school. With such differences, it is not surprising that Arnett was reluctant to use this term.

Arnett recognises these writers laid the 'theoretical groundwork for emerging adulthood' (2000, p.470). He goes on to explain three key features of this age group that justify identifying this as a new life period with the label 'emerging adult'. The first feature is the demographic changes that he reported from the earlier sources noted above but he suggests the following twenty years has made the period more obvious. Arnett repeats the significance of delays in getting married and parenthood as well as the increase in numbers attending higher education but also that many more stay on for further study. He adds the instability of 'residential status' noting the frequency of moves between accommodation including returns to the parental home.

The second distinctive feature is that young people themselves feel that they are no longer adolescents but are also not quite adults and yet there is no label for them to use to describe this period. He describes this as 'subjective conceptions' (2000, p.472). Perhaps the most important change is reported here. Arnett identified a shift in the conceptions of what it means to reach adulthood. Instead of the traditional markers of marriage, parenthood, settling into a career, he discovered that 'individualistic qualities of character' (2000, p.472) mattered most. He notes three primary qualities: accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent. Becoming an adult is thus about self-sufficiency and this is a process that can take until the end of the twenties to accomplish.

The third feature of this stage is 'identity explorations in the areas of love, work and worldviews' (2000, p.473). This marks a departure from the work of Erikson (Erikson, 1950, cited by Arnett, 2000) whose stage theory identified adolescence as the period when identity was to be resolved. Arnett is challenging a very influential theory.<sup>37</sup> Arnett notes that Erikson believed in a prolonged period of exploration, but he argues that the period now extends to the late twenties. Furthermore, in the three areas of love, work, and worldviews, he proposes that although the process may begin in adolescence it takes place mostly in emerging adulthood. The area of worldviews includes religious beliefs. This is obviously significant for this study

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<sup>36</sup> <https://nya.org.uk/careers-youth-work/what-is-youth-work/> accessed 14/02/21

<sup>37</sup> Creasy Dean (2004) records that almost all developmental theorists since have followed this theory and she also notes its influence on practical theology (2004, p.12).

and I will explore this more later<sup>38</sup> but the key point that Arnett observes is that, during this time, emerging adults re-examine the beliefs inherited from family in order to form their own independent views. UK research in 2017 stated that 85% of people self-report the age at which they became a Christian as under the age of 19 years and only 2% in the following five years (Savana, ComRes, 2017). However, of those aged 19-24 years at the time of the survey, 6% reported coming to faith in that age period. This may mean that young adults do not see a reappraisal of their faith as the significant time when they make their decision, but it is still a critical time for personal and faith development.

Arnett concludes his paper arguing that other terms for this age group are inadequate – ‘late adolescence’ or ‘young adulthood’. He proposes that adolescence is generally agreed to cover the years from 10-18, emerging adulthood should be 18-29, but especially 18-25 and young adulthood applies to those in their thirties (2000, p.477).

### **3.3 Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood**

Arnett (2004) identifies five main features that distinguish emerging adulthood from the preceding period of adolescence and the following stage of young adulthood. These are,

1. The age of identity explorations
2. The age of instability
3. The most self-focused age of life
4. The age of feeling in-between, neither adolescent nor adult
5. The age of possibilities, time of opportunity to transform their lives (Arnett, 2004, p.8).

#### **Identity Exploration**

As noted above Arnett questioned Erikson’s theory of identity development and argues that identity formation is rarely completed by the end of high school. Here he suggests that in the two areas of love and work, ‘the process of identity formation begins in adolescence but intensifies in emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000, p.9). In love there is a focus on a deeper level of intimacy, exploring identity-focussed questions around the qualities of themselves and potential partners, about the kind of person they are and that make them attractive (or not). In work, there is a more serious exploration of the kind of work to which they are suited and will find satisfying. They may try out different jobs to learn more about themselves, their abilities, and interests. This is an important area for consideration in respect of the role of the gap year as a space to explore work options and vocation and I will return to this theme in 3.6.

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<sup>38</sup> See 3.5 below

### Instability

Instability refers to the uncertainty that comes with the explorations during this time as plans change and are adapted. For Arnett, this is best illustrated by the frequent house moves for the purpose of attending college, starting work, or moving in with a partner; all of which are subject to change.

### Self-focus

If this is a period without commitments and responsibilities, then emerging adults are free to focus on themselves. Rather than this being pejorative, Arnett explains it is 'normal, healthy, and temporary' (2004, p.13). It allows the person to learn about themselves and work towards the goal of self-sufficiency.

### Feeling In-between

Here Arnett picks up the theme of subjective conceptions in his earlier (2000) work. He repeats the recognition that emerging adults suggest that they are moving towards adulthood, but they have not arrived yet. The use of the words 'in-between' suggest the concept of liminality which I will return to in chapters 6 and 8 as it relates to the young adults on the intern programme. However, this would suggest they are in another liminal space by virtue of their age and stage in life.

### Possibility

Emerging adulthood is a term of openness and opportunity, either to make a fresh start and break with a more negative past or else to dream dreams and create hopes for the future.

## 3.4 Becoming Adult

In all of this, Arnett points out that this is a unique period of life; it is not a time of transition to adulthood which would focus on what they are becoming rather than who they are now. It is dependent on the cultural context that sees the demographic change particularly in the raised age of marriage and parenthood. There is also the proviso that variations in socio-economic status and life circumstances will mean not all in this age group will have the same experience (2004, pp.21-23). Although he rejects the idea of transition, Arnett explains that there is a goal – to achieve adulthood. There comes a point when the threshold is crossed. Based on ten years of research in America, he concludes there is a strong consensus that 'Becoming an adult today means becoming *self-sufficient*, learning to stand alone as an independent person' (2004, p.209, his italics). There is here, and in the 3 criteria noted above (3.2.2), a clear emphasis on individuality and, taken with the feature of self-focus that points towards an emphasis on self-development, we may be right to assume this also means they are selfish.

However, Arnett observes that this is not always the case; responsibility includes concern for others and learning to be more considerate of others. The emerging adults in my research cohort could be seen as taking a year to focus on themselves and interpret that as selfish, or else we could recognise their giving of a year to serve others as a non-selfish act.

Having provided this general overview, I can now explore insights into the issues around faith, religion, and spirituality for emerging adults. This will then lead on to a discussion of more specific research in relation to Christian emerging adults.

### **3.5 Emerging Adults and Faith**

Arnett (2004) writes that, after love and work, the 'third pillar of identity' is about developing a worldview or ideology that makes sense of the world. This includes religious beliefs as well as values that will guide moral decision-making. Emerging adulthood is a critical time for the process of forming these views, when questions are addressed most directly and when 'most people reach at least an initial resolution to their worldview questions' (Arnett, 2004, p.166). In line with other areas of life, there is a pattern of emerging adults wanting to think for themselves, make their own choices and decide on their own beliefs (2004, p.187).

Arnett found a wide variety of responses to issues of faith and offered four categories: atheist/agnostic, deist, liberal believer, and conservative believer, with an almost even spread across the categories (2004, p.167). His research also pointed towards other characteristics of this age group that are noteworthy but not found in my research group. First, the individualism of emerging adults makes them sceptical of religious institutions. They might believe but they do not belong, to borrow Grace Davie's terminology (Davie, 1990). Sometimes this was based on negative experiences of church or other religious groups but often it was because they did not see the need for others to shape their belief or practice. Secondly, Arnett discovered a lack of connection between the family faith of children and that of emerging adults. He suggested this was 'most interesting and surprising' (2004, p.174). Whatever the level of exposure to religious training in childhood, there was no correlation with the beliefs of the emerging adults. He explained this was due at least in part to an exposure to new ideas but also to the recurring theme of the felt need to make independent decisions.

In discussing values and morality, the emphasis on independent thinking was present but Arnett also found a care and concern for others. They wish 'to live a personally fulfilling life while also doing some good for others' (Arnett, 2004, p.187). This reflected the fact that some young people, especially those from ethnic minority groups, demonstrated more collectivist values of care and concern for others (2004, p.183-4). It is unclear whether this reflects a



degree of altruism or is more akin to the theme of moralistic therapeutic deism where being good, nice, and fair to each other is a key tenet (Smith, 2009, p.154).

### **3.5.1 Souls in Transition**

Perhaps the most in-depth study of the faith lives of emerging adults is that conducted as part of the third wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) in America. The study includes all religions. The research findings were published by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell (2009). Smith and Snell support Arnett's theory and thus use the emerging adult label to describe the young adults in the survey who are aged 17-23 years. In agreement with Arnett, they describe this period as one of change that mitigates against any regular commitment to religious communities.

One of the main, and surprising, findings is that the suggestion that religious faith and practice is declining amongst this age group is inaccurate or, at least, overstated. 'The myth of overall religious decline amongst emerging adults must be dispelled' (Smith and Snell, 2009, p.283). While they concur that there is decline in frequent church attendance by Catholics and mainline Protestants, they argue that emerging adults are no less religious than previous generations of this age group. They suggest the narrative of decline is true in that the actual numbers of those whose faith wanes outweighs those who become more religious and so the statistics mask the underlying facts. Instead of a narrative of change between adolescence and adulthood, Smith and Snell report a sense of continuity in the level of religious commitment and practice in just over half of those surveyed and a small minority showing an increase or being new converts. This is a sizeable group and not a 'struggling remnant' (2009, p.283). I will return to consider reports of this decline in 'mainline protestants' in the next section.<sup>39</sup>

Smith and Snell are concerned by the lack of social support for emerging adults during this period of their life. This contrasts with the high support offered by churches and groups during childhood and adolescence; instead, emerging adults are largely left to work out their faith on their own. They report on the importance of parents as part of this support, citing Smith's previous findings that most adolescents want parental engagement more than most parents realise and this continues during the emerging adult years (2009, p.284-5). They go on to stress the relevance of 'nonparental adults' such as other family members, youth ministers or other adults in church congregations. These relationships are crucial socialising influences on

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<sup>39</sup> This viewpoint is reinforced in the research of Clydesdale and Garces Foley (2019) who also used the word 'continuity' and identified 71% of American 'twentysomethings' affiliate with a religion (2019, p.16).



emerging adults through which their faith is formed. This is a recurring theme in research with this age group and an important component of development in the gap year.<sup>40</sup>

Whilst there is much variation in the views of emerging adults about religion, Smith and Snell identify a 'dominant outlook' (2009, p.286). Although most would be largely indifferent to religion, they would recognise it as a good thing when it helps people to be good. Once they have learnt this, they move on from religious involvement. Authority and power come from personal feelings and inclinations, 'religious beliefs do not seem to be important, action-driving commitments, but rather mental assents to ideas that have few obvious consequences' (Smith and Snell, 2009, p.286). The relativity of their culture makes it hard to judge what is true and knowledge is more likely to be sought from verified empirical facts rather than religious belief. However, Smith and Snell suggest emerging adults are stuck in the overarching narrative of pluralism and competing claims that means no one really knows what is true, right, or good (2009, p.287). The result is emerging adults who are, 'sovereign, autonomous, empowered individuals who lack a reliable basis for any particular conviction or direction by which to guide their lives' (2009, p.294).

### **3.5.2 A Narrative of Decline**

In considering the reported decline in church engagement, I will draw attention to two writers, one from a European context and the second from a North American setting.

One of those reporting on the decline in religiosity during this stage of life is the German theologian Friedrich Schweitzer (2004). Schweitzer uses the term, 'postadolescence' to describe the third decade of life as a new stage of the life cycle (Schweitzer, 2004). He points to empirical research that concludes that this is the time at which 'dropping out' of church or a distancing is most likely to happen. The research he cites is not just from the USA but includes European countries, particularly Germany and focuses on the Christian religion (2004, p.68). Whilst he recognises age is not the only factor, he suggests it is significant enough to warrant further investigation.

Schweitzer identifies several possible factors that lead to this decline. He notes the wider context of secularisation but observes that the causes of decline are more complex. He suggests that this period in the life cycle may be a temporary move away with a potential return later. He cites Erikson's concept of the moratorium that adolescents need before taking on full adult obligations (Erikson, 1958, cited in Schweitzer, 2004, p.70) with the suggestion that they will come back to church in the future. However, he observes that other factors may mitigate

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<sup>40</sup> This will be borne out in my research data and the subject of chapter 5.

against this happening in the way that it has in the past.<sup>41</sup> These factors include the developmental effects of this stage of life, (again as already noted above) leading to cognitive and moral development that causes more critical and individual ideas about truth and religious meaning. He identifies the changing demographic factors around later marriage and parenthood but also the effects of generational factors.<sup>42</sup>

What is significant is Schweitzer's hypothesis that the church may be to blame as well. The lack of understanding of this age group has resulted in 'the absence of attractive possibilities for their participation' (Schweitzer, 2004, p.76). This has created a vicious cycle where the church perceives a lack of interest and so does not offer suitable programmes which means post-adolescents do not get involved. Instead, an understanding of this as a specific stage of life must lead to new spaces and programmes designed for this age group that allow for critical questioning and that are open to learn from the 'experimental lifestyles' of postadolescence.

In 2011, David Kinnaman published research from the Barna Group<sup>43</sup> that explored the reasons that young adults gave for leaving the church (Kinnaman, 2011). The research would appear to concur with Schweitzer's hypothesis that the church itself was largely to blame. The title of the book, *You Lost Me*, is an apt description and 'reflects their disdain for one-sided communication, disconnect from formulaic faith, and discomfort with apologetics that seem disconnected from the real world' (Kinnaman, 2011, p.11).

The study is placed within the context of the 'mosaic generation'<sup>44</sup> rather than addressing the broader issues of emerging adulthood and life stages. It is also more focussed on the perspective of the church than on the lives of young adults, as in the previous studies I noted. However, his observations are relevant here as a comprehensive analysis of young adults leaving the church, particularly from the viewpoint of the catholic and mainline protestants that Smith (2009) referred to as seeing the most decline.

Kinnaman proposes that the 'drop-outs' can be categorised in three groups: Nomads, those who leave the church but still consider themselves Christian; Prodigals, those who lose their faith and no longer count themselves to be Christian; and Exiles, those who still have a faith but struggle to find it between the culture and church (2011, p.25). The reasons for 'disconnection' from the church are due to the perception of the church as overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive and doubtless (a place where doubts are not allowed to be expressed (2011, p.92-3). The negative analysis leads to a final chapter that

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<sup>41</sup> In 2015, Michael Lipka reported research showing the rise of the 'religious nones' that suggests the young adults do not return to church (Lipka, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 3 on generational theory and aspects that apply to current emerging adults.

<sup>43</sup> [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org) accessed 07/05/20

<sup>44</sup> Kinnaman prefers to use this label for Gen Y.

offers 'fifty ideas to find a generation' (2011, p.213). He summarises these in three categories: rethinking relationships, rediscovering vocation, and reprioritising wisdom. This moves us into the area of how what we know about emerging adults might affect our approach to faith formation.

### **3.5.3 Emerging Adults and Faith Formation**

Having considered the status and characteristics of emerging adults, the next question is what can be learnt to help understand the processes of faith formation that could inform my work with this age group.

This time of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, liminality, and possibility means this is a really important time for the formation of views about faith and religion. Parks (2000, 2011) suggests the 'twenty-somethings' is the time to ask 'big questions and discover worthy dreams' (2000, p.5). Parks was writing around the same time as Arnett was publishing his first paper on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and she was also identifying a new stage of life but identified the term 'young adults' as most appropriate.<sup>45</sup>

For Parks, faith is defined in terms of meaning-making which is part of what it means to be human, 'all human beings compose and dwell in some conviction of what is *ultimately* true' (Parks, 2000, p.20) and faith then is 'the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience' (2000, p.7). The emerging adult years are, she suggests, 'especially ripe for vital transformations in meaning-making and the re-formation of faith' (Parks, 2011, p.7). This is due to the growing ability to be critically aware of how they understand reality, the ability to engage in dialogue about truth and the ability to respond in action (2000, p.6). This leads to new explorations and a re-evaluation of meaning in relation to three big questions of purpose, vocation and belonging (2000, p.65).

If Smith (2009) is right to identify the loss of support networks for emerging adults, then Parks pre-empted this with an emphasis on the importance of belonging and particularly of mentoring communities. Mentors are those who offer 'authoritative guidance' to assist the development of critical thought and a committed faith (2000, p.128). However, one person may be enough to mentor into the status quo, but if young adults are to bring change, then what is needed is a wider community or environment of mentoring. It is essential for young adults to have 'a viable network of belonging' (Parks, 2000, p.91) but meeting the need to belong is not enough. What matters more is that a group supports the process of meaning-making, offering both challenge and support.

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<sup>45</sup> Parks adopted the label 'emerging adults' in the 2011 revised edition.

Kinnaman (2011) speaks of rethinking relationships that means recognising that the church is not meant to be divided by age, but it is to be an intergenerational community. This includes young adults being mentored by elders who can pass on wisdom but also the idea of 'reverse mentoring' that gives younger leaders the opportunity to challenge and renew the church (Kinnaman, 2011, p.205). The second area identified by Kinnaman as key is vocation. For Parks, this is part of developing a 'worthy dream' but also recognises their everyday employment is their vocation (2004, p. 85, 205). Kinnaman suggests that we have lost this important theological concept that means young adults do not realise their faith connects to their life's work. Instead, a theology of vocation would give meaning and a sense of purpose. Thirdly, Kinnaman suggests this age group needs God-given wisdom rather than just information. This wisdom will give 'a blueprint for what life is meant to be' and it is 'the spiritual, mental and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others, and to our culture' (2011 p.210).

David Setran and Chris Kiesling (2013) address the issue of spiritual formation in depth. Their aim was to fill a perceived gap in the literature by offering a practical theology for ministry with emerging adults. They seek to address the challenge posed by 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' (MTD)<sup>46</sup> which they describe as 'imposter religion' (2013, p.7). Instead, they state that the call to discipleship is costly, and a call to self-denial, but one that provides 'a pathway to true life and flourishing' (Setran and Kiesling, 2013, p.40). There is much similarity in their conclusions with Smith and Snell (2009), Parks (2000, 2011) and Kinnaman (2011). For them, emerging adulthood is a significant 'hinge' moment, a 'pivot point for the soul' within the 'liminal space' between adolescence and adulthood (Setran and Kiesling, 2013, p.205). They highlight issues of identity formation, the role of the church as a 'community of truth' (2013, p.75) that offers meaning, plausibility, love and support, a sense of purpose gained through vocation, and a virtue-centred approach to morality. They give significant space to a discussion of the importance of mentoring within an intergenerational community. They cite the work of Parks and recognise the roles of both parents and nonparental adults as well as the need for 'mentoring communities'. Mentors provide the relationships and role models with older adults that counter the reliance on peers. They define the mentor's role as having a 'dual pursuit: to envision and model adult belief and responsibility while also bringing them to a sense of continual and humble reliance on the work of God in and around them' (Setran and Kiesling, 2013, p.238).

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<sup>46</sup> See my discussion of this in chapter 3; MTD was identified by Christian Smith in his first report on the NSYR research in America (Smith and Denton 2009).

Ruth Perrin (2020) focussed her UK-based research on the faith lives of emerging adults on protestant Christians known as 'Active Affirmers',<sup>47</sup> those who are committed and 'for whom faith is central to their identity' (Perrin, 2020, p.xii). Perrin uses the framework and terminology of emerging adulthood to help her exploration of millennials who are currently in this stage of life and so uses the term inter-changeably.

Perrin summarises three core values of the emerging adults in her study: authenticity, tolerance, and collaborative participation (2020, p.9). Authenticity is about integrity and sincerity; hypocrisy is anathema, and this is a problem for any in positions of authority, including the church, when their actions and values do not appear to match up. This also works out in a 'strong desire for community' (2020, p.10) noting the importance of family and friends and social contacts. Tolerance derives from their upbringing in a liberal and pluralistic context, where the individual right to choose is paramount. Taken together with authenticity, it means that experience matters more than objectivity. She suggests the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal churches is partly explained by the experiential, therapeutic and empowerment that they offer. The third value means that millennials expect to be listened to after having experienced pupil-centred learning and the extra attention from parents and adults. They are encouraged to make their voice known through social media and in political debate. They want to be valued and included and have meaningful relationships with their elders; this has implications for work and religion where deference to hierarchy may not be given automatically.

An important addition to this research is that of Vincett and Olson (2012) on young people growing up in poverty. They discovered young people with little contact with religious institutions but nonetheless who expressed a range of religious experiences. They identified young people having a belief in God who was 'loving, personal and interventionist' (2012, p. 200) but this faith was easily shaken by difficult circumstances. There was a belief in ghosts and guardian angels that was used to explain 'sacred experiences' or in relation to people dying. It is a 'hidden' faith - unspoken of in front of peers - but this does not mean it is self-focused but it is limited by the 'bounded agency and mobility of young people in poorer areas' (2012, p.201). This includes access to church or mosques, that while seen at best as places of safety, they could also be unwelcoming, and accessibility required a level of confidence they did not possess. There is some similarity with the hidden 'bedroom spirituality' of Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) and some similarities in the view of God but a lack of mention of family.

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<sup>47</sup> Active Affirmers is a label taken from the research by Matthew Guest et al. (2013) amongst university students in the UK.

Vincett and Olson do however recognise a convergence with the 'crisis religiosity' and 'make-do-and-mend' faith identified by Collins-Mayo et al. as referred to in 2.3.4 above.

### **3.5.4 Faith Formation and Gen Y**

There is some correspondence between emerging adulthood and the specific generational group known as Gen Y (see Appendix 3). Here it will be helpful to note some specific similarities in relation to faith formation including mentoring and an emphasis on the role of the church and congregations as a place of belonging and community.

Wuthnow (2007) states that a sense of community is the most attractive quality for young adults, they are not looking for salvation but for love (2007, p.237). As others have observed, young adults do not have the same structures of support that are around for adolescents and 'vital congregations' need to provide what he calls a 'surround-sound' of support. Hilborn and Bird (2002) recommend working towards more intergenerational ministries within churches and include mentoring as part of that. Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) note the importance of extended family and that the church is uniquely placed to be 'communities of belonging' generating supportive relationships across generations (2010, p.112). Perrin also observed that young adults want faith community because they value relationship highly. She highlights the significance of family and peer relationships on young adult faith and encourages relationships with elders as mentors.

Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) draw attention to the idea of sacralised youth work proposed by Nash (2009) that draws on the importance of place and its links with tradition and ritual. This might include pilgrimage but also to drawing attention to the sacred within everyday ministry. It suggests making good use of church buildings.

A third area concerned the key question, 'Does it work?' Collins-Mayo et al. suggest that lifestyle questions can offer ways into faith and having people as living examples of faith is important. The need to work out a moral code can be helped by having an 'Odyssey guide' who will accompany them on the journey through this period of transition. This idea of journey resonates with Perrin's observation of the significance of opportunities to explore, to expand their horizon and discover new experiences and ideas. This might come from leaving home and going to university or through a gap year experience. She notes that the gap year and short-term trips can be transformative but recognises that there is very limited research on the effects on spiritual development (Perrin, 2020). This brings me to a discussion on the context of the gap year in the lives of emerging adults.

## 3.6 The Gap Year

### 3.6.1 Definition and Brief History

I have previously discussed some of the motivations for emerging adults undertaking a gap year in Chapter 1. Here, I will observe the rise of the gap year in recent years and I will identify some research on the effects of the year out on emerging adults. The terms gap year and year out are frequently used interchangeably in the literature and websites whilst some Christian organisations use the phrase, short-term mission<sup>48</sup> as shorthand for time out of education or work and for time periods of up to a year or longer. Jones (2004) proposed the definition, 'any period of time between 3 and 24 months which an individual takes 'out' of formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory' (Jones, 2004, p.8).

O'Shea (2014) reports the gradual increase in the numbers of young people taking a year out before university in the UK from an estimate of 5.5% in 1986 to 12-13% in 2006; a trend reflected in other countries such as the USA, Australia and Japan. In 2010 the numbers of young people entering higher education at age 19, a year after leaving school was 11% (Crawford and Cribb, 2012). Crawford and Cribb suggested that the steady rise in the previous decade was now levelling out. In a 2017 survey, the Year Out Group (2018) claimed there were 230,000 young people aged 18-25 years old taking a gap year break. The numbers of young people on first degree programmes in 2016-17 was 1.6 million suggesting the percentage of 'gappers' might have increased to 14% in the UK. It is difficult to find an accurate number as there is no single source of this data (Jones, 2004) but what is clear is that taking a year out from academic study is still popular amongst emerging adults.

In 2003, the UK government recognised the rising numbers of young people taking part in gap years over the previous 15 years and commissioned a review to consider policy and definitions, understand current activity, access and barriers and identify standards for quality assurance (Jones, 2004). Jones identified six types of activity during the year and that participants usually undertake a mix; the types are organised travel, learning, voluntary work, paid work, leisure activities and independent travel. The activities are either in the UK or overseas and structured or unstructured. Jones identified 85 specialist organisations catering primarily for gap years in the UK but approximately 800 organisations offered volunteering placements overseas (2004, p.15). There were others offering paid work and travel and leisure opportunities. All this paints a picture of a 'niche gap year industry' and one that is 'subject to

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<sup>48</sup> e.g. <https://www.shorttermmissions.com/> in UK, or <https://soe.org/> in USA accessed 22/05/2020

increased regulation (Heath, 2007, p.90). One organisation, the Year Out Group<sup>49</sup> serves as a quality assurance and information portal to many organisations offering gap year experiences and volunteering opportunities in the UK and overseas. There are also many Christian organisations offering gap year programmes in the UK and overseas, partnering with churches or Christian organisations; the Christian Vocations ministry as part of Global Connections offers a similar information and advice service for those considering short-term mission, that includes gap year programmes.<sup>50</sup>

The UK government has also been keen to promote the gap year as part of an emphasis on volunteering and active citizenship. Heath (2007) notes the significance of the Russell Commission in 2005 that emphasised the place of full-time UK-based volunteering. The 2006 White Paper, 'Youth Matters: Next Steps' encouraged all young people to volunteer in their local communities as part of a 'commitment to community engagement' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006, p.17). A national programme of volunteering would be created. In 2011, the UK government developed the International Citizen Service (ICS)<sup>51</sup> for young people aged 18-25 years. ICS offers 12-week volunteer placements overseas with 90% funding from the Department for International Development.<sup>52</sup> Although it is not advertised as a gap year project it is clearly aimed at young adults considering time out from study or work.

Jones (2004) and others do not include the category of paid or unpaid internships within their review of gap year programmes, although many would suggest this is one option for a gap year break.<sup>53</sup> Internships are opportunities to gain experience in the workplace, possibly some qualifications or an opportunity to test out an interest in a career. These have grown more recently and subject to some controversy in whether they constitute exploitation of young people who end up working for free or for very little financial reward in the hope of gaining a future job; the lack of opportunity to those who cannot afford to work for free and therefore affecting social mobility. The criticisms have been levied at both large companies and the voluntary or charity sector (Panel on Fair Access, 2009; Milburn, 2012; Unite the Union, 2013; CIPD, 2015). Many churches and Christian organisations offer internships, and this is the label I have used in the context of my work and this research. I have sought to ensure that the criticisms do not apply to my programmes, the interns are paid an allowance based on the minimum wage rates for apprentices, and I aim to create as much open and equal opportunity as possible.

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<sup>49</sup> [www.yearoutgroup.org](http://www.yearoutgroup.org) accessed 22/05/2020

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.globalconnections.org.uk/vocations> accessed 22/05/2020

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.volunteerics.org/> accessed 22/05/2020

<sup>52</sup> Volunteers are expected to fundraise the remaining 10%, a minimum of £800.

<sup>53</sup> [www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com) a UK-based company advocates for, and lists, overseas internship placements that could be combined with other travel or activities.



Before considering the potential impact of gap years on emerging adults, it is important to note that there is some disagreement about their value. O'Shea (2013) cites the chief executive of UCAS<sup>54</sup> pronouncing the end of the golden age of the gap year as well as several UK newspaper reports that suggested the whole project was a waste of time and indulgent (O'Shea, 2013, p.6). This is not new, O'Shea cites Adam Smith, writing in 1776, complaining that young people travelling instead of going to university as, 'spending in the most frivolous dissipation the most precious years of his life' (Smith, 1776 cited in O'Shea, 2013, p.5). Snee (2014) highlights the frequent criticism of inequality and access. Gap years, especially those involving overseas travel, are the privilege of the middle classes who can afford it; a claim she recognises as true for the group in her study. International travel to developing nations has been criticised as a form of colonialism, perpetuating false images of the 'third world other' and for promoting simplistic notions of development (Simpson, 2004, 2005).

### **3.6.2 Outcomes for Emerging Adults**

Much of the research on the effects of gap years focuses on the pre-university or college experience and on the impact on educational and vocational outcomes (Birch and Miller, 2007; Heath, 2007; Tenser, 2015; Parker, et al., 2015). Heath (2007), for example, argues that the gap year provides young adults with an important advantage over their peers at both the point of entry to university and into the labour market after graduation. She proposes that the benefit of the gap year is the development of 'the personality package', the soft skills and character traits that will supplement the 'academic package' that means 'employers favour gappers' (Heath, 2007, p.94). Other research considers the impact of overseas travel or "volunteer tourism" (Simpson, 2004; Butcher and Smith, 2010; Griffin, 2013). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider this aspect of the gap year. However, there is further research that considers the sociological or psychological effects of different aspects and contexts of the gap year experience which are relevant to my previous discussion on emerging adulthood, maturity, and the transition to adulthood that I will consider next.

#### **3.6.2.1 Meaning-Making**

The impact of international gap year experiences on university students in the UK was researched by O'Shea (2013). His study was based on the premise that people grow most when faced with people and ideas that are different from them and challenge their understandings of the world. Since there was no clear theoretical framework for gap years, he located the findings of his research within the concept of meaning-making that he suggested integrated theories of constructive developmental theory and transformative learning. He observes that his view of the significance of the task of meaning-making resonates with the

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<sup>54</sup> The UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

transitional period of emerging adulthood as described by Arnett.<sup>55</sup> O'Shea borrowed a definition of meaning-making from Kegan (1994, cited in O'Shea, 2013), as the 'activity by which we shape a coherent meaning out of the raw material of our outer and inner experiencing' (Kegan, 1994, cited in O'Shea, 2013, p.119).

O'Shea (2013) demonstrates how the international gap year experience created 'cognitive dissonance' or provocative and disruptive experiences that catalysed growth towards 'self-authorship' (2013, p.121). This term was coined by the developmental psychologist Robert Egan and developed by Baxter Magolda (2009, cited by O'Shea, 2013) and refers to the development of an 'internal voice to co-ordinate external influences and manage one's life' (Magolda, 2009, cited by O'Shea, 2013, p. 122). There is some resonance here with Arnett's proposal that emerging adults are seeking independence of thought and discovering their own beliefs. According to O'Shea, the gap year gives space for young adults to discover new ways of thinking, to engage emotionally and not just rationally, to learn to self-reflect and be placed in challenging situations that, taken together, provide a place for growth.

Kegan described self-authorship as 'the mental making of an ideology or explicit system of belief' (Kegan, 1995, cited in Magolda, 2009, p.321) which Magolda describes as a journey towards self-transformation, that includes cycles and movements that recur and intertwine within each person's overarching storyline (Magolda, 2009, p.322). There are three different meaning-making structures (Barber and King, 2014). The first is a reliance on external formulas or authorities, values and perspectives from authority figures or societal expectations. Second is the 'crossroads' which is entered as individuals start to question those values or recognise shortcomings in them. There is a tension between those influences and the internal voice. The third structure is self-authorship, where beliefs, identity and relationships are grounded within an individual's internal world and they have the ability 'to listen to the internal voice to guide decisions regarding their beliefs and values, identity, and social relations' (Magolda, 2009, p.322). The process between the structures is not always linear but includes movement back and forth as previous structures of meaning are explored and evaluated against new ideas and viewpoints.

Magolda (2008) proposes there are three 'dimensions of development': cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal (2009, p.9-10) and Taylor (2008) helpfully adds a simple question to each dimension that summarises the process of change. Cognitive development relates to the beliefs and values we hold or assumptions about knowledge. This is passed on from family, teachers or faith leaders. As we seek to grow in this area (at the crossroads), the question asked is 'How do I know what is true?' Intrapersonal development is how we view

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<sup>55</sup> see my discussion of Arnett at 3.5 and on Parks 3.5.3

ourselves and leads to the question, 'Who am I?' Interpersonal development concerns our relationships and the task to answer the question, 'What type of relationships do I want to have?'

Although it appears to be an egocentric model, Magolda refers back to Kegan who stated that self-authorship leads to more authentic and enhanced relationships with others (Magolda, 2008, 2009). Bishop and Argue (2012) propose that self-authorship is compatible with Christian discipleship and theology because it is a model of transformation and the three developmental questions are lifelong questions that we all ask and translate to questions of identity, belonging, and mission. I will return to this in chapter 8 and suggest that our goal is not self-authorship but being 'in Christ' and the questions of identity, belonging and mission are answered through a theology of covenant.

The concept of self-authorship is used by Tenser (2015) in her analysis of the effect of pre-college gap years on the experience of students in their first year of college. Tenser proposed that challenging experiences or encounters during the gap year created the crossroads described by Magolda (2009) as the key point of transition from external to internal authority. The most significant change resulted from the most challenging and different experiences (Tenser, 2015, p.108). These encounters meant the young adults had to focus on their own values and beliefs, their self-awareness and reflect on their understanding of meaning. My research will point to the significance of the disruptive experiences of the gap year and in chapter 6 I will draw on the concept of liminality to explain this.

These aspects of meaning-making relate to my prior discussion of the task of emerging adults to make sense of their world and generate a worldview. They are directly related to questions of faith and formation and making meaning will be an important theme for later discussion in relation to the experiences of my research group.

### **3.6.2.2 Identity**

A second outcome in the research of gap years focuses on issues of identity formation; an important element for Arnett (2004) in the life stage of emerging adulthood. Bagnoli (2009) asked whether the experience of travel in young people's lives could also be a journey of self-discovery as it was in ancient myths and other literature, and possibly linked to the process of rites of passage. Bagnoli included four different types of travel undertaken by young people with the majority being in the category of a year out. Contrasting a group of Italian young people with an English group, she describes the English year out as an 'institutionally granted 'moratorium' phase' after Erikson (1980, cited in Bagnoli, 2009, p.329). It is a time out with no responsibilities and an opportunity to 'experiment with a variety of possible selves' (2009,

p.329). Comparing the year out to the Grand Tour (see 3.6.1 above) the year out has become a 'middle class youth ritual' in England (2009, p.331).

King (2011) demonstrated how young people reported on the gap year as a time of growth in confidence, maturity, and independence as well as a means to transition to university. However, he observed that this identity work continued into the university years. He recognised his findings concurred with Arnett's (2000) emerging adult theory as a life stage of continued 'identity play and lifestyle experimentation' (King, 2011, p.23).

Peterson (2019) set out to explore the identity development of young adults during structured gap years in the USA. She explains identity in terms of decisions about a career path as well as answering the question, 'Who am I?' and considered the types of experience that has most effect on the 11 participants in her study. Peterson records a concern over the high numbers (75%) of college students who are either undecided about, or change, their 'major' during the first year; an issue identified by others in the US context (Heath, 2007; Flowers, 2015) and suggests a structured gap year can better prepare students for the challenges of college. Peterson discovered that those involved in gap year programmes grew in self-awareness, confidence, and in relationships with others. The main catalysts for change were the separation from family, challenging situations, and 'being forced to reflect on themselves and their beliefs through interactions with new people in new contexts' (Peterson, 2019, p. 75). She recorded the importance of faith development for many, which in turn contributed to their self-confidence.

The emphasis on identity formation agrees with Arnett's (2004) observations that identity work is not completed during adolescence but continues into emerging adulthood. It is evident that gap years can serve as liminal space or as a moratorium in which emerging adults learn more about themselves, the world, and their place in it. Liminality describes the threshold or in-between space, a place of possibility and change and I noted that this description is used to refer to both emerging adulthood and the gap year. This is an important concept that emerged from the research (see chapter 6.1) and will be discussed in chapter 8.3.3. There are some further pointers to the elements of experience that contribute most to personal development including, being in new situations, away from home and the usual support networks, facing new and challenging situations, having the opportunity to reflect and learn, and being supported by mentors and guides. There is a clear gap in the literature for research into the effects of the year out experience on faith formation which this study seeks to address.

## **Section 2 Research Design and Methodology**

## **Chapter 4 Research Method and Methodology**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The approach to this research originated in my own professional commitment to reflective practice and the continual improvement that this brings. At the heart of youth work practice is the concept of reflection. Enabling youth workers and ministers to be reflective practitioners is a core aim of all youth work training. For years, I have reflected on my practice by myself or with others, with colleagues or with an external mentor or 'non-managerial supervisor'. This process has included a desire to read widely in my field and to study the theory and practice of youth work and ministry. The motivation for all of this is to constantly improve practice and to become a more effective worker.<sup>56</sup> This research project is driven by the same desire. As I developed the intern programme and led several cohorts of students through it, I was continually asking questions over how well it was working; feedback was gathered at the end of each year and changes made as a result. Most of these alterations were to the content of the training or methods of delivery, sometimes change was forced by the availability of tutors and trainers meaning course content was either presented differently or new material introduced. The main structure of the programme has not changed and if the first interns were to visit the programme now, my guess is that they would feel at home in familiar surroundings. This could be viewed as an informal process of action research, but it did not have the rigour of a formal research project and left some questions unanswered.

I frequently felt a desire to ask some bigger questions around the effectiveness of the programme and its impact on the interns. In the wider context of the church, questions were (and still are) being asked around the nature of youth ministry and especially discipleship. When young people were leaving church in large numbers, questions were being asked about what we were doing wrong. Since I was working with young people who had decided to stay, I wanted to ask, what had we done right? Furthermore, these young adults had also chosen to consider committing to working for the church for at least a year and many of them, for the foreseeable future. What was it that led them to this point and how was my work helping (or hindering) them to become life-long disciples of Jesus?

### **4.1 Defining the Research Question.**

My original starting point was to ask whether it was possible to measure spiritual growth and identify the key elements of a programme that would best facilitate such growth. Through the

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<sup>56</sup> The concept of 'effectiveness' in youth ministry is itself a topic of constant discussion including whether it is possible to measure or gauge in any way; an issue that becomes more relevant when related to funding and outcomes-driven approaches noted in Chapter 1.

initial literature research, I concluded that rather than focus on measurable outcomes, the issue is more about fostering conditions in which growth can take place and then evaluating the change that happens. I decided to move away from developmental models of faith formation<sup>57</sup> that suggested young people were defined by moving towards the next stage and instead to focus on the here and now; to move from mechanistic models to an organic one. This located the project in a (practical) theological frame rather than in the social sciences and placed the emphasis on the process of formation rather than being outcomes-driven. This approach opens up the possibility for transformation by the Holy Spirit and different outcomes from those envisaged at the start, all of which aligns with my professional youth work ethos and practice that relies on the process or informal education that develops out of relationship, as I explained in chapter 1.3. This led me to consider the processes that lead to formation in faith and to start to identify a framework that could be applied in my work with emerging adults.

#### **4.1.1 Research Question**

From this work, I defined the research question as,

How can a one-year internship programme enable the formation of faith in young adults?

Having decided not to look for quantifiable outcomes, it was necessary to discover some means of identifying when and how growth occurs in qualitative ways. This begged the question about how we define growth and who identifies it. For the purposes of the research, growth would mean any change in perception or understanding of faith alongside a change in behaviour. It aimed to map start and end points of the intern year and identify the processes that made an impact and resulted in change. In this way, any change would be self-identified. The expectation was that this would lead to new perspectives and the adoption of new practices. Since a key aim of the year is also vocational discernment, an increase in clarity over calling for the participants would be a critical part of the research process. The aim of the research was to identify the influences on faith in a specific group of young adults, not to highlight measurable outcomes but the processes of change, formation, and transformation in their specific context.

#### **4.1.2 Additional Questions**

There are subsidiary questions that are explored on the way that came out of my earlier work experience and were substantiated in the literature research outlined in chapters 1 to 3. My hypothesis is that models of Christian discipleship have over-emphasised the importance of

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<sup>57</sup> See 2.5

cognitive understanding to the detriment of the role of the emotions and experiential learning.<sup>58</sup>

The two questions that stem from this are:

1. Can we move away from the dominant cognitive model but still satisfy the need for emerging adults to be informed about the tenets of belief?
2. How will the young adults respond to models of discipleship that will require practices and how will they interpret the impact of experience on their formation?

This became the core subject matter for the focus group activity and discussion that I conducted mid-way through the year.

It is possible that many of the participants will want to know more about their faith and without a core understanding of biblical concepts, doctrine and theology then it may not be possible to reflect meaningfully on their faith. However, as I argued in chapter 2, the Western church has overly emphasised cognitive understanding of faith and presented Christianity primarily as a system of belief. Emerging adults have grown up in this context but also live in a culture that emphasises experience which creates a tension. It may also be true that, for some, the experiential has been more significant, and they have not received teaching that helps to understand or make sense of their experience.

There was an ongoing question for me as researcher that permeated the research process concerning my interpretation of their experience and reflections. Given that I come from an older generation and have a different perspective based on the research so far, I tried constantly to be aware of the interpretive lens I was using to ensure it remained valid. Using interpretive phenomenology assisted in this and I explain this in the methodology section below.

## **4.2 Locating the Research within Practical Theology**

It could be possible to describe my research, at least in part, as ‘the pursuit of an embodied Christian faith’ (Miller-McLemore, 2011, p.5). Furthermore, Miller-McLemore’s four-fold application of the term, ‘practical theology’ resonates closely with the aims of my research. The first describes it as an ‘activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday’ (2011, p.5). I was keen to discover how faith is not just intellectual assent but lived out in practice and how daily activities serve as ‘sites of religious formation and transformation’ (2011, p.5). The second use of the term is as a method of study that gives ‘a way to understand the practice or experience of faith and to affect its transformation’ (ibid). Here my aim was to comprehend the experience of young adults and to discover how their faith may be formed

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of this.



and transformed. The third application is as a curriculum within theological education that focusses on the practice of the minister. My search for a pedagogy and curriculum of formation is rooted in the practical ministry experience of the participants and the training we provide is clearly theological education. The research project and the writing of this thesis serves the fourth application which is as an academic discipline that serves the previous three. Both practical theology and my research are concerned with lived experience and embodied faith, it is both descriptive of this experience but also aims to help people to live the life of faith more fully (2011, p.14).

#### **4.2.1 Habitus**

Having discussed habitus in earlier chapters, it is now important to recognise how habitus is used within practical theology and locates my research in this field. My research is substantially located around the habitus model as described by Ballard and Pritchard (2006). As I described in 2.5, habitus was a term first used by Edward Farley (1983) to identify theology not as just a cognitive exercise but as a practical knowledge of God that is more like a habit.

Ballard and Pritchard (2006) develop this idea as a model for practical theology that fits perfectly with the scope and nature of my research. They describe habitus as a good habit that is formed through training and becomes a virtue, a disposition to act that goes beyond deliberate choice and becomes part of our soul. The task of theology in this model is to provide 'a training of mind and heart' (2006, p.74), a process that involves the whole personality, intellect, emotions and will, and as Farley says, it is ultimately about wisdom. In the context of ministerial training, faith formation becomes primarily about developing the Christian character – including self-awareness, disciplines of prayer and devotion, and 'discovering the path of pilgrimage and growth' (2006, p.75). Ballard and Pritchard make the connection of this approach with virtue ethics whereby ethical norms are derived from the community and culture in which the Christian disciple lives and through this life develops a habitus. 'To be a Christian is to be a disciple (a learner) who by participation in the life, ritual and educative processes of the community of faith is drawn into its ethical understanding and practice' (2006, p.75).

Ballard and Pritchard (2006) conclude that the overall purpose of any model of practical theology is to facilitate habitus, 'that disposition of mind and heart from which all Christian action flows ... From who we are comes what we do' (2006, p.177). This idea is also suggested by Veling (2005) who argues for practical theology to be understood as about living and doing theology rather than something that is studied and applied. He cites Karl Rahner's view that theology 'indwells practice' and it is through participation in the practices of faith and life that we understand the theology. In his view theology is a verb, something that is practised and therefore we lose the distinction between theory and application. 'Theology is always shaped

by and embodied in the practices of historical, cultural, and linguistic communities. Our understandings always emerge from our practices, or from the “forms of life” in which we participate’ (2005, p.4). He goes on to describe this way of living as a ‘craft’ that shapes and forms a way of life and compares it to the philosophical term, *phronesis* or practical wisdom, however, he suggests this is best summarised for practical theology by Farley’s notion of *habitus* (2005, p.16).<sup>59</sup>

Shakespeare’s study of the Salvation Army (2011) examines similar questions in the context of the training of Salvation Army officers. Shakespeare identifies the notion of *habitus* as central to training for practical ministry that ranks spiritual life and character first. She notes that Catherine Booth talked of three areas of ‘head’, ‘heart’, and ‘hands’ and explores how these still form the basic components of Salvation Army training (2011, pp.61-62). These are the areas of her thesis title, knowing, being and doing and there is correspondence with the three areas of my programme – train, grow, and serve respectively. Shakespeare however is keen to recognise that the three areas need to be interdependent in order to form a true *habitus*, the question then is how do we work out an equity between the areas or does one area take precedence? (2011, p.65).

I have discussed this holistic model of faith formation, including drawing on ideas about character and virtue in chapter 2. Ballard and Pritchard conclude that the overall purpose of practical theology is to facilitate *habitus*, I propose that this too should be the purpose of faith formation. Therefore, *habitus* becomes the key concept that locates my research within the realm of practical theology.

### **4.3 Methodology**

My research question identifies the search to discover what young adults are learning through their experiences and to explore how this process of learning can be influenced and developed to ensure learning takes place. This is both a question of pedagogy and of epistemology; my concern about learning is not about objective facts but subjective understanding. This means that my research is located in the domain of qualitative research.

Swinton and Mowat (2016) identify qualitative research as based on the recognition that human beings are ‘interpretive creatures’ (2016, p.28) and research seeks to understand the complexity of meanings and interpretations that people place on their experience of the world and of God. Furthermore, not only is the subject of the research the interpretation of experience but the process of qualitative research is set within an ‘interpretative paradigm’ (2016, p.33). The research is led by a set of beliefs and values, especially that of the

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<sup>59</sup> I have discussed the *habitus* and *phronesis* in 1.3.2

researcher. I will return to my role in the research later, but it is important to note here that my entire project will be interpretive.

#### **4.3.1 The Search for Meaning**

In chapter 8 I will discuss how the search for meaning is an essential part of the vocational quest of emerging adults. My research task included exploring questions around cognitive and affective knowledge and holistic learning. It therefore seems apposite that the research process itself is a search for meaning and recognises different ways of knowing.

This difference between forms of knowing is used by McLeod (2011) in his definition of research. He states the purpose of research is to enhance knowledge (2011, p.25). He identifies that Western culture and society has two broad styles of knowing (citing the work of Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990, 2002): paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic knowledge is the objective knowledge of physical science. In research, observable facts are related to causal factors. Narrative knowledge gives account of the everyday world of human action and it is often described through story. It is this narrative knowledge that is the subject of qualitative research that seeks to gather stories and accounts of human life and interpret it. However, it can also be used to test the cause-effect models of paradigmatic knowledge. Furthermore, both forms of knowledge may complement each other in mixed-method research.

McLeod goes on to identify 4 key activities of qualitative research:

Describing – the process of ‘constructing a comprehensive account’ (2011, p.81) of the activities being investigated. This he terms phenomenology.

Interpreting – the process of understanding the meaning of the account. This is hermeneutics.

Persuading – writing or presenting the account in order to convince others of its credibility. He labels this ‘rhetoric’.

Committing – ‘to the creation of a better world’ (2011, p.81). This is social justice.

The use of the term social justice as the final activity is an interesting one. In the context of this professional doctorate, the research is expected to contribute to professional practice and knowledge. This may be a similar sentiment but the idea that qualitative research might lead to a better world adds a seriousness of intent and purpose that I would wish to adopt and fulfil.

In an earlier work, McLeod (2001, cited in Swinton and Mowat, 2016, p.33) identified three types of knowledge that qualitative research opens up: knowledge of the other, of phenomena and reflexive knowing. All three are relevant to my research. First, in that I focused on a specific group of individuals undergoing shared and separate experiences. The second category, phenomena, relates to the processes of change that were at work through the

experiences offered during the year. The third category of reflexive knowing is relevant to my own work as researcher. Inevitably the process has led me to reflect on my own understanding of faith and the world and to compare my experience with that of the participants. The participants also gained reflexive knowledge through their engagement with the programme in which reflective practice was taught and encouraged,<sup>60</sup> but it is important to note that the research processes also demanded reflexivity of the participants.

Thus, the quest of qualitative research is for meaning and deeper understanding of situations, recognising that people are creative agents generating different meanings and interpretations out of their experiences. As I discuss in chapter 8, this search for meaning by the participants is part of a larger quest for meaning in their lives. My purpose was to observe and discern the different meanings that young adults placed on their experiences and then try to identify the reasons for these interpretations. This places the research within the realm of phenomenology.

### **4.3.2 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology originated in the work of the philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1931). Husserl describes phenomenology as a new science, a 'science of essential Being' that brought 'a new way of looking at things' (1931, p.43-44). It was important to distinguish from old viewpoints and ideas and 'to learn to see what stands before our eyes' (1931, p.43). He described a method of 'phenomenological reductions' by which we set aside previous ideas and assumptions to get to the essence of things. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state the founding principle is that experience is examined in its own terms, 'bracketing out' the 'taken-for-granted world' in order to 'go back to the things themselves' (Smith, et al., 2009, p.12).

To explain this, Bakewell (2016) gives an example of describing a cup of coffee. This can be done in terms of its chemistry, its origins or manufacturing processes but what matters to the phenomenologist is the smell, colour, taste, and anticipated sensations of the experience of the coffee-drinker (2016, p.719). Husserl called this process, 'epoché', the reduction or setting aside until we are left with just the phenomenon itself. Bakewell (2016) suggests this is liberating as it gives the researcher freedom to talk about experience; she notes it is useful for the discussion of religious and mystical experiences without having to prove empirical accuracy. Denscombe (2007) describes phenomenology as dealing with perceptions, meanings, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and emotions. It seeks to describe personal experience, the thinking and ideas of participants and the way they make sense of their experiences (2007, p.77-9).

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<sup>60</sup> For discussion of reflective practice see 8.3.5 and 9.4.4

### 4.3.3 Interpretive Phenomenology

Husserl's quest for the essence of things was critiqued by those that followed him. Philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty argued that it was not possible to get to the essence since experience is always interpreted. I recognise that perspective and so my research will draw on interpretive phenomenology as a methodology more suited to my aims and context. Munhall (2013) writes that interpretive phenomenology is not just a research method but also a way of being-in-the-world, following Heidegger.<sup>61</sup> People who reflect on and seek to understanding the meaning of experience and being human could be said to adopt a phenomenological perspective. In chapter 8 I will discuss the role of reflective practice in the intern programme and in chapter 3, I explored the importance of seeking meaning in emerging adulthood both of which affirm the relevance of this approach for my research. The intern year itself is essentially about understanding meaning and purpose (vocation) and reflecting on the experiences of the year.

Patricia Benner (2012) describes interpretive phenomenology as an approach that stands against the mind-body dualism of Descartes and is more holistic. It recognises that humans are embodied and sentient, living in a particular social and cultural time and place. This is 'a world of common meanings, habits, practices, meanings, and skills' (Benner, 2012, p.2) that are socially situated, and it is this world that is the subject of inquiry in interpretive phenomenology. The interpretive researcher examines and analyses her subject as evidence of "thinking-in-action" and looks for patterns of similarities and difference. She will seek to understand the world of the participants and present this as truthfully as possible without trying to reduce the experience to abstract theory. Benner suggests those involved could comment, 'the research has put into words what they had always known but had not been able to say or describe.' Benner's method relies on three discovery and presentational strategies: paradigm cases, thematic analysis, and exemplars. Paradigm cases are strong examples of the phenomenon being studied; analysis traces any patterns that emerge, and exemplars illustrate the common patterns or situations.

This perspective resonates with the ideas expressed in chapter 2 where I critiqued the over-reliance on cognitive models of faith formation and identified a need for more holistic approaches and an emphasis on lived experience and ways of being summarised by the concept of habitus. This alignment with the methodology is appropriate. Furthermore, a development of Benner's approach proposed by Sherril Conroy makes this even more applicable. Conroy (2003) proposes that Benner's 3 strategies are not sufficient and suggests

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<sup>61</sup> Munhall states the philosophy of Heidegger and those that followed him, including Merleau-Ponty, underpins the interpretive research tradition.

the need to account for paradigm shifts.<sup>62</sup> By this she means changes in a person's thinking and interaction with the world and recognises that our lives are not static. Instead of the hermeneutical circle, she offers a spiral. For Conroy, not only are our lives one of interpretation but also of re-interpretation. She also highlights that this occurs in the context of relationships with others, 'our lives are not constructed in an individualistic fashion' (2003, p.37). The role of the researcher moves to one of looking for changes in values, beliefs, and attitudes and for how these changes occur. It is not just providing description but interpretation as well. It is a more dynamic approach that, she argues, should use the metaphors of footprints and pathways rather than the more scientific and static terms of 'data' and 'method' (2003, p.38). 'In the research process ... many footprints join together through interpretation to create a new pattern of understanding' (2003, p.38).

Conroy's approach resonates well with the context of my research. My research question asked that I record changes in thinking and belief and the context is one of ongoing change over the course of the year. Thus, the idea of a spiral, with change influencing change as interpretations are made, makes complete sense. The intern group were not just individuals in isolation but, as will be seen in my analysis later, were affected by a range of relationships with each other, supervisors and tutors, members of church congregations, and more, including myself as course leader and researcher. It is helpful to recognise my role as that of interpreter, observing changes and helping those involved to make sense of the changes in themselves. This leads us to consider the process of analysis and the idea of the double hermeneutic found in the research method, interpretative phenomenological analysis, which I will consider next.

## **4.4 Research Method**

### **4.4.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

One research method that applies the principles of phenomenology is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that was developed by the psychologist Jonathan Smith. The approach explores 'how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith, et al., 2009) aiming to focus on the experience on its own terms as Husserl (1931) identified, 'the things themselves'. Smith describes how IPA researchers are interested in the significance attached by people to everyday experiences, the meanings that the experience holds and their personal perception of them (Smith and Osborn, 2015). This means that the aim is not to

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<sup>62</sup> Conroy's work draws on Benner's earlier publications in 1984 and 1994 rather than the work I have cited.

discover some objective statement of reality but to describe personal perceptions and meanings.

It is interpretative as it seeks to understand those meanings. What is important for me is that IPA affirms the role of the researcher as interpreter and that being an 'insider' and close to the lives of the participants is seen as an advantage rather than as a bias to be eliminated. Smith and Osborn (2015) highlight the active role of the researcher in a 'dynamic process' that includes the views and ideas of the researcher in the activity of interpretation. It recognises two levels of interpretation, a 'double hermeneutic' or two-stage process of interpretation, 'The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants making sense of their world' (Smith and Osborn, 2015, p.53). This process is both empathic and questioning; empathic as it seeks to identify with and understand the world of the participant, questioning as it takes a critical stance to make sense of that world and the descriptions provided. The double hermeneutic means that analysis is centred first on the explanation and descriptions of the participants and then secondly, on the interpretation of the researcher. This approach concurred exactly with what I wanted to do – to listen closely to the meanings that the participants attached to their experiences and then to question and draw out more general themes based on what I had heard. The research method that enabled me to do this best was the case study.

#### **4.4.2 Case Study**

Smith and Osborn (2015) state that the IPA approach works best with a small group, 'for whom the research question will be significant' (2015, p.56). It is an ideographic method that does not aim to make generalised claims but instead to focus on the individuals involved.

Robson (2011) defines the case study method as, 'a strategy for doing research which involves empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence' (2011, p.136). He emphasises that it is not just a method but a strategy that includes the option of utilising different research methods, both quantitative and qualitative as appropriate to investigate the specific situation. Denscombe (2007) identifies the case study approach as the investigation of one example of something. It is based on the premise that this in-depth consideration may yield insights that would be missed in a large-scale study. The method focuses on relationships and processes in a holistic way in order to explain how certain outcomes result. Campbell-Reid (2016) recognises that the case study method has been shown to be useful in formation contexts. All of this points to the appropriateness of this method to my research – the context of a small group of people in a specific stage of life and work situation, of the emphasis on relationships and process rather than hard outcomes, and its attested use in formation.



Furthermore, Campbell-Reid (2016) explores the historical roots of this method and its use in learning. She draws on the work of the Danish philosopher, Bent Flyvbjerg, to trace the roots of learning through case examples in Aristotle's phronesis or practical wisdom. Flyvbjerg proposes that social learning and skills are developed through seeing and doing. It is not decontextualised knowledge, rules, or values but the 'embedded, embodied, relational knowing' (2016, p.43) that means we can act without thinking. Learning through case examples that involve the emotions is critical in developing phronesis. Since phronesis and habitus are key elements within the conceptual framework of my research<sup>63</sup> it seems particularly appropriate to utilise a method that is conducive to this kind of learning.

However, there are limitations and even dangers (according to Campbell-Reid) in using the case study method. I will record three of these but also note how using IPA counters these criticisms, further affirming the use of these two approaches together. The first critique of the method is also raised by Denscombe (2007) and refers to the question of generalisability. Because the focus is a small instance it is difficult to make wider generalisations about the outcomes of the research. Just because it is proven in this instance does not mean it will be true elsewhere and therefore there is a danger of it being seen only as a pre-cursor to more research rather than as 'real research' (Campbell-Reid, 2016, p.45). Denscombe (2007) argues against this view. He suggests that although the case may be unique, it could be seen as an example or a type representing other similar cases. He proposes that the extent of generalisation depends on the amount of similarity based on identified factors and that it is possible for the reader to decide how it compares. Thomas (2011) argues that although generalisation may not be possible, it may not be what is wanted. Instead, the gain is a rich and full description that can create a strong and insightful example of others in the same class. Whilst I would be keen for my research to have a wider application to others leading similar projects, I agree with Thomas and recognise that I am more concerned to provide an in-depth description of a smaller group than offer a more limited survey of a larger cohort. My aim as part of the professional doctorate is to generate better practice and this method should help to achieve that goal. I am hopeful that some of the lessons learnt will have a wider application to other one-year schemes but that may not be for me to draw out, rather for those involved to assess and interpret. As I noted above, IPA favours the small group study and Smith and Osborn suggest it is for the reader to make the connections between the study and a broader context, drawing on relevant literature and other experience. This may be true, but it is part of my work to make those links, and this is the purpose of chapter 8.

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<sup>63</sup> See 2.5



The second danger in the case study method is that of bias; due to the small scale of the research it is hard to identify or avoid bias on the part of the researcher. However, my use of IPA as described above recognises that the involvement of the researcher on the inside is helpful and necessary in order to achieve the double hermeneutic.

The third difficulty in case study research is the influence of the researcher and the possibility for the misuse of power. This is probably the most important yet most difficult to address. It may not be possible to rule out what Denscombe (2007, p.53) calls the “observer effect” that recognises the impact the presence of the researcher can have on those being observed but it should be possible to identify the power dynamics at play and take appropriate action. This third danger was the hardest in my research given that my role was to lead the group and direct many of the learning opportunities available to them. My role was not just that of an independent observer but someone who was actively involved in encouraging growth and challenging attitudes and thinking. In the interviews I drew attention to this and encouraged the participants to be as honest as possible and try to set aside my other role and just to see me as a researcher. The perspective of IPA would suggest that my insider role is an advantage, giving me insight into the lives of the participants beyond the interviews and a deep knowledge of the context of the programme. I also worked hard to be reflexive in my own practice, aware of the power-dynamic in my relationship with the participants and being explicit about the different roles I played. For example, I made it clear when I was talking to them as a researcher and ensuring those times were distinct from other sessions where I had a different role. My general approach to relationships as a youth worker is one of empowerment and treating people as equals, I trust that this also contributed to ensuring that power was not a barrier in the interview process.

In relation to practical theology, Schipani (2012, p.91) suggests that the case study is one of the most valued methods. He also proposes that it is possible to use it as a tool for either building theory or demonstrating theory. Denscombe (2007, p.38) argues that case study is more often ‘discovery-led’ rather than ‘theory-led’. I started the research with some theory in mind and so in some respects I was testing theory, especially in the focus group discussion. However, I was open to the possibility that new ideas might emerge, and this proved to be the case as will be seen in later chapters when I explore the data.

## **4.5 Ethical issues**

The Ethical Review form was completed and passed by the Anglia Ruskin University before the research started. Details of the ethical approval process are included in the appendices,

including the letters of approval and consent forms.<sup>64</sup> A letter of approval for the research was obtained from my employers, Peterborough Diocese. Each participant was verbally invited to opt into the research project in the first week of the intern year. The project was explained to them and they received written information explaining the nature of the project and the research. They were asked to sign a consent form and given the option to opt-out at any point in the year.

The interviews, the focus group and discussion sessions were recorded digitally, and the files stored securely on my home computer. Written transcripts and other notes were similarly stored at home.

The important ethical issues that I encountered were:

1. Confidentiality. The research participants were asked to disclose personal information about their lives and experiences. It was important to protect their information and to be clear about how the information would be written up. There were other individuals mentioned in the research such as managers and mentors but also significant others who impact the lives of the participants. Given the small scale of the research and the case study approach, it would be difficult to guarantee anonymity and this was made clear. I decided not to ask for permission to use real names but those referred to in the research have all been assigned a label, participant (P) - P1, P2, etc. To fully protect the identities of all involved, the names of placement churches have also been changed.
2. Consent. All participants were invited to join the research cohort and given the right not to join in. This was explained in a special meeting with the group during the induction residential in the first week of the course. It was made possible to opt out during the year, but no one asked to do this. Each participant received a letter of explanation and signed a consent form. Copies of these are provided in Appendix 4 and 5. The use of photographs is made with the permission of the people taking them and those appearing in them.
3. Information recording. Appropriate permission was obtained for the storing of information and photographs and clear information given to explain information storage protocols.
4. Power and my role as researcher. This was the most important issue given that the case study was of people who have some accountability to me for their involvement on the programme. Although their day-to-day work was managed by others, I co-ordinated the training and oversaw all those involved in the scheme which gave me

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<sup>64</sup> See appendices 3, 4, 5, 6

power in the eyes of those involved. This would become more evident if there were difficulties in the placement when I would be called in to help resolve problems and if necessary, I was the person who would ask people to leave the programme. There was no other assessment involving me and I may write employment or college references but only at the request of the participant. I was aware of that and sought to encourage an equality in the interviews, keeping them separate from other discussions about the programme. There were no instances of problems during the year with the research group that involved this kind of intervention.

5. Ethical clearance was requested and granted from the University during the summer preceding the start of the research phase. Copies of the forms are provided in Appendix 6 and 7.

## **4.6 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection utilised several methods in line with the case study approach. This allowed me to plot the journey through the year but also to give participants different means of articulating their views. The methods were: a short initial questionnaire, individual interviews at the start and end of the year, a focus group discussion and a session using photographs. Each of these methods will be explained below.

### **4.6.1 Questionnaire**

An initial survey questionnaire was used at the start of the year. This was given during the residential in September after an explanation of the research project and request for consent. Time was given for the participants to complete the survey and they were asked to do this on their own without discussion or consultation with others. The survey included questions about their faith journey so far, their sense of calling/vocation and the nature of their current faith. The aim was to identify some of the important influences on their faith formation as well as current practices and attitudes that could then be explored in the semi-structured interviews.

The survey was based on the 'What helps Disciples Grow?' questionnaire developed by Saint Peter's Trust, Saltley.<sup>65</sup> This was used with some amendment and with the permission of the trust.

The survey gave me a broad view of the background of the participants and an initial profile of the group that was useful in devising the questions for the interview stage. It is relevant to note that the group were already known to me through the recruitment process for the intern year. The application form and recruitment interview also asked questions about their background and faith story and we would have had some prior conversations about vocation

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<sup>65</sup> <http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg/> accessed 03/07/2017

and expectations for the year. However, none of this was recorded or used as part of the research process.

A copy of the survey is included at Appendix 8.

#### **4.6.2 Initial Interviews**

The survey was supplemented with semi-structured interviews at the beginning and the end of the year with the same young adults to explore the issues raised more fully. The interview at the start of the year identified a baseline of where the young adult saw him- or her-self in terms of understanding of faith, how they would judge their faith-maturity and their expectations for the year. The interviews identified some themes for exploration later in terms of the influences they already felt had been significant in their prior faith formation.

The initial interviews took longer to set up because I had not factored in time to analyse and draw on the surveys in order to set the questions for the interviews. It was also a busy time for the participants settling into new placements and, not least for me, my work-load at the start of the academic year put me under pressure. The interviews therefore did not take place until early November. There were seven participants and each interview lasted about an hour with four main areas of discussion. The interview was semi-structured with a pilot interview held with a previous intern to test out the questions. A few changes were made as a result.

A semi-structured interview was used to explore three key areas: their faith journey to date, in which the aim was to identify their perception of the formative influences on them; their understanding of vocation in order to identify how clear this was for comparison later in the year; and lastly questions around their expectations for the year in relation to their hopes for change and learning.

There were 3 sections with subsidiary 'prompt' questions that were used as needed. The sections covered previous faith journey, vocation, and expectations for the year.

The interviews were transcribed and then manually coded using *in vivo* coding and key themes identified. Copies of the interview questions are provided in Appendices 9 and 10.

#### **4.6.3 Focus Group**

This took place in March, halfway through the year during the second residential which is more of a retreat than a training event. It was used specifically to examine the relationship between cognitive understanding of faith and more emotional and experiential aspects. I organised a morning session that included a group work activity followed by presentations and then open discussion that extended into the lunch break. The session was recorded and transcribed.

The session included an interactive activity involving the participants devising a programme of faith formation for new young Christian disciples. A discussion ensued about why they had included the different elements of the programme and how they understood the relative importance of teaching or learning knowledge and gaining experience.

The focus group enabled the group to explore some of the research issues and enabled them to feedback directly into the questions I was exploring. It also gave the opportunity for them to interact with each other and to share their views. As Campbell-Reid (2016, p.56) observes, participants should be able to feedback and interact with the research.

#### **4.6.4 Photographs**

It had been my hope that some of the group would choose to keep a photographic journal during the year, however this did not happen. The choice to do this, and how, was theirs. I was hopeful that in a more visual and digital age, the use of photographs would be one chosen by several participants. I anticipated visual journals utilising social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook where these were already used. This would involve young adults recording visual images of significant events or markers of their faith journey during the year.

Using photography as a method for gathering data would yield more subjective and non-cognitive responses. Holm (2008) notes how photography has been used in research to document facts and give information but proposes it be understood more as performance. She recognises that images are normally used to illustrate text or to document evidence rather than for what they say directly. Photography as performance means the image is open to be experienced and to multiple meanings. Citing Leavy (2008) she describes how images may elicit a range of emotional and psychological responses and not just stimulate the intellect. Furthermore, whilst photographs taken by the researcher will focus on what she or he finds important, those taken by participants are seen as reflecting their views. These images may show a world unidentified by the researcher and even reveal hidden views and values (Warren & Karner, 2005, cited in Holm, 2008, p.171). This method thus suited my desire to explore non-cognitive forms of knowledge and the 'poetic' in faith formation.

I was first inspired to use photography as a research method by the work of Sarah Dunlop speaking at a conference about her work, which she later published with Pete Ward. Dunlop and Ward (2015) describe the development of visual research methods for gathering data. They argue for, and demonstrate the application of, a new approach called 'narrative photography' in place of PEI – photo elicitation interviews. Their approach entails participants producing a narrative around photographs taken by themselves; the narrative is achieved through interviews or focus groups and as such is a collaborative and empowering process with the researcher. The narrative and the photographs are then exhibited or presented. Visual

research can capture subjective information and communicate it in both visual and textual forms, it makes 'the intuited concrete and open for study' (2015, p.31).

Although I did not adopt this method in full, I drew some key principles from it. First, that the photographs were produced by the participants themselves<sup>66</sup> and then interpreted by them in conversation with myself as researcher. Second, it is an interpretive process and so works within the IPA approach since it relies on the interpretation of the participants as they describe the photograph to the interviewer. Dunlop and Ward also note that this method can be appropriate for research with young people who are used to taking photographs for social media.

In practice, most of the participants found it hard to keep a journal and this was not something I could enforce. None took up the offer to keep a photographic record which was surprising and disappointing. As an alternative, I organised a session where I asked the group to bring an image or photograph that represented something significant that had impacted their formation during the year, to present the photograph and explain its significance. Some of them found this difficult to do but the session was helpful and revealing. This was an important exercise to give an opportunity to those who were less articulate to express themselves in a different way. The session was recorded and transcribed. The comments made confirmed comments made in the interviews but also gave more detailed descriptions of experiences. As the literature suggested, the descriptions were more emotional as the participants told the narrative of the picture. Several suggested the image served as a metaphor for wider experiences, for example one person said how the picture of a walk represented how the whole year had been a journey.<sup>67</sup> This meant the exercise was useful and worked well as a research method. If I were to repeat the study, I would make this activity a regular event.<sup>68</sup>

#### **4.6.5 Final Interviews**

The end of year interviews took place in July as the students were about to complete the year. The interviews were semi-structured, but the participants were given the questions beforehand so they could prepare their answers. This meant that I had to ask fewer subsidiary questions to clarify meanings or to explain the questions. This resulted in shorter and more concise interviews. There were 10 questions, and they were kept short and specific. The participants agreed it was advantageous to see the questions beforehand and to be able to prepare.

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<sup>66</sup> In PEI, images are produced by the researcher and then discussed in the interview. Participants producing their own photographs belongs to a method known as 'photovoice', 'narrated photography' draws on both to use the participant's images in an interview setting (Dunlop & Ward, 2015, p.32-33).

<sup>67</sup> The photographs are included in the discussion of findings in chapters 5.3.1, 5.3.2 and 7.5

<sup>68</sup> In Chapter 9, I will propose using this as method of reflective practice as part of the intern year programme.

Several referred to their journals to jog their memory. The questions revisited the areas explored in the first interview. The questions asked about realisation of expectations, formative influences, and sense of vocation. The focus was on their self-perception of change. The interviews were transcribed and then coded using NVivo software. Several key themes were identified through this method.

## **4.7 Data Analysis**

Having collected the data, the first step was to analyse the interviews. The first interviews identified some key themes to explore further as well as some interesting questions. This was the first level of interpretation that raised questions for further exploration. Some of these questions related to the issues of cognitive and non-cognitive approaches and influences on formation and these were addressed through the focus group activity and discussion. At this stage I was also bringing my own interpretation to bear, the second level of the double-hermeneutic of interpretive phenomenological analysis. I was able to use the second interviews to test out some of this interpretation.

The end of year interviews were the most significant in discovering indicators of change that occurred during the year. I was encouraged by the university to use NVivo software rather than relying on manual coding methods as I had done for the first interviews. This proved to be a challenge but helpful in identifying core themes. I coded the data twice because I could not get the software to group the codes into broader themes. However, this proved useful in becoming familiar with the data and ensuring I did not miss anything. The next step was to produce short memo's highlighting the issues raised in each theme and how this related to the research question. The memo's identified the theme and started to list the specific issues and quotes from participants that could then be used in the analysis chapters. Again, I was able to record the lived experience of the participants and ask for their understanding of what had happened to them during the year. As I started to write up the analysis from the coded data, I was aware of applying my own hermeneutic lens, bringing together the codes to produce the three themes and interpreting them in the light of my own experience of the year and my understanding based on prior experience and the literature.

### **4.7.1 The Research Participants.**

To better understand the data, the following gives a broad account of the participants.

The group consisted of 7 young adults aged 18-27 years. All except one, were raised in Christian families with a habit of regular church attendance. The other came to faith as a teenager through influences at school. One participant was married and so stayed in his home church, all the others moved to a new area, either from within the diocese (3) or from a different

area of the country (3). Unusually, this year was the first year in which the gender balance has been unequal with only one female participant in the group.

#### **4.7.1 Participant Biography**

Participant P1 - Male, 24 years old, White British. Echo Ministry Intern. Previously lived in the diocese and worked in IT. Exploring a call to ordination and possible chaplaincy. Lived in shared house. Evangelical charismatic background and moved to a different church of similar tradition.

Participant P2 - Female, 18 years old, White British. Xpect Youth Ministry Apprentice. Moved within the diocese to a new placement church and to live in one of the shared houses. Exploring full-time youth ministry, traditional rural Church background, moved to urban, 'middle-of-the-road' church.

Participant P3 – Male, 19 years old, Mixed race. Echo Ministry Intern. Moved to the diocese after completing A levels. Exploring possible call to ordination. Church background mainly through school chaplaincy, moved to a small town, 'semi-rural', liberal, Anglo-Catholic church.

Participant P4 – Male, 26 years old, White British. Xpect Youth Ministry Apprentice. Married and stayed at home church. Previously working as an Outdoor Activity Instructor following a degree in Sports Coaching. Evangelical church background and placement.

Participant P5 – Male, 27 years old, White British. Echo Ministry Intern. Part-time intern alongside paid employment. Exploring ordination, half-way through the discernment process. Previously commuting to an evangelical charismatic church but moved to a placement at the rural church where he lives.

Participant P6 – Male, 21 years old, British Asian. Echo Ministry Intern. Moved to diocese after completing a theology degree, exploring ordination. Evangelical background, moved to urban middle-of-the-road church.

Participant P7 – Male, 22 years old, White British. Echo Ministry Intern. Returned to the diocese after university and church internship with an evangelical network church. Placement in a large, town centre, charismatic evangelical church.



## Section 3

### Research Findings and Analysis

The themes emerging from the data were grouped around 3 core factors that influenced the formation of the participants before the year but became significant and important during the year as well. These 3 factors are:

1. Relationships - including significant individuals but also, during the year itself, the sense of community became clear as an important influence.
2. Encountering God - experiences and events. These were specific times that the participants could remember as having an effect on them but also the sense of being in a different space and experiencing something for the first time became clear markers for the process of change and development.
3. Narratives of Purpose and Practice. There was a recurring theme around the decisions and choices that participants made to do something particular that resulted in changed behaviour. I have articulated these as stories that explain their motivation and learning through the year.

All of this resulted in the changes that the participants described in themselves, their faith and their understanding of their calling.

The findings represent the responses from the initial interviews undertaken at the start of the year and a second interview at the end of the year. It includes information from the focus group activity and photograph reports. The focus group took place at the mid-year retreat in March. In two small groups, the participants were tasked to design a programme of faith formation for new Christians and then we discussed their ideas and rationale. The discussion focussed on the different emphasis placed on cognitive and experiential learning. The photographs were used in a session during June when the group were asked to bring a photograph that represented something about the year that had been formational in their faith.

Each chapter will describe the lived experience of the participants, listening to their voices and interpretation and then apply the 'double hermeneutic' of my interpretation as part of the IPA method explained in chapter 4.

In the following descriptions of the responses, the direct quotes from the participants are shown in italics and indented so they are differentiated from other quotes.

## Chapter 5 Factors affecting Faith Formation: Relationships

### 5.0 Introduction

This theme emerged strongly from the research data. Given its central significance to the practice of youth ministry as described in chapter 1, and its importance in the literature about emerging adults outlined in chapter 3, I should have been prepared for it to appear. The participants described relationships with a variety of others that had an impact on their faith formation, either before the year or during the year. I have grouped these into four: parents/friends, significant adults, the intern group, and the church community.

### 5.1 Family and Friends

Collins-Mayo et al. (2010) record the importance of family and friends in the lives of Gen Y young people and this was true in my study. In the first set of interviews, I asked interviewees to think back over their life before joining the scheme. I asked them to identify the most formative influences on their faith, in terms of people and events or experience. They all identified specific adults by name, some due to a specific role such as a vicar or youth leader or others due to relationship such as parents, brother, or godparents. Three of the respondents reported that Christian parents were a big influence. They described this in terms of going to church, being encouraged to have faith, reading Bible stories, and seeing how their faith developed.

Another noted the role of his parents but also extended family and godparents,

*I had my aunts and uncles and one of my Dad's and Mum's best friends were my godparents. They would always take an interest in my faith and spurred me on. (P7)*

A fourth interviewee talked more of his brother's influence than his parents, suggesting that it was talking to his older brother that really helped him, there was little sense of family sharing faith together,

*as a family I think we would sometimes say grace, but it was kind of 'do your own thing'. If you want to read Christian books or study them then do that and we didn't do it as a family. (P1)*

Research in both the UK and the USA agree on the importance of parental influence. In the research of Collins-Mayo et al. (2010), family and friends were cited as the source of material and emotional support but also that relationships with parents were changing. They suggest that parents have become more like friends and often 'end up taking the role of 'critical companion' that has traditionally been the role of the youth worker' (2010, p.35).

The National Youth and Religion Survey in the US has stated clearly that parents are still the most formative influence on the faith of young people, 'Research is nearly unanimous on this

point: parents matter most in shaping the religious lives of their children' (Dean, 2010, p.112). The Theos report, 'Passing on Faith' states: '... high quality relationships in the home are key to successful faith transmission' (Olwyn, 2016, p.12).<sup>69</sup>

## 5.2 Significant Adults

All the respondents told stories of the influence of older adults in their lives and on their developing faith before joining the programme. Six of them mentioned either the vicar, chaplain, or youth minister – people in leadership roles within the church. Often, they also mentioned volunteer leaders in youth groups or Sunday schools as well.

In describing the influence they had, they talked of people giving them time, being role models, helping them to understand the Bible, inspiring or encouraging them or just being '*someone else to go and talk to, not like my mum or dad*'. These people gave them: '*room to explore*' and ask questions, '*a real passion for the Word*', '*to critically think and look at text*', '*someone who discipled me and got a lot of the Bible knowledge from head to heart which then changed my actions*'. Often these people were important influences on all areas of life and not just faith; one spoke of feeling affirmed and respected when he worried about being overweight; another spoke of an older man who had '*just taken an interest in me, like, how's the rugby going?*'

The other participant not included above did not have a youth group but spoke of a young woman in her 20's who was '*strong in her faith*' and was '*like an inspiration to me*'. She also referred to her godmother, a family friend, who prayed for her and took an interest in her.

This theme continued in the second interviews, with new relationships forming with adults in the placement churches and with tutors on the training courses.

P7 singled out one of the training course tutors remarking on her approach to teaching that she found helpful. She went on to comment on the style of teaching which was to get the group to research a topic beforehand, present to the rest of the group and then to discuss and explore it in more detail which she found engaging.

P4 also noted the teaching style of a tutor on his youth work course,

*... because he talked a lot about his experiences as well. Like for me, that's the bit that I find really interesting.... it's a bit more like, you know, like stoking the fire, you get really more excited about that side of it.*

Others picked out the tutors from the evening modules; P6 noted the relational style of the tutors but also feeling accepted by the group of lay ministry students on the course,

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<sup>69</sup> There is much work and resource currently focussing on supporting parents to develop faith in the family see especially, <https://kitchentable.org.uk/>; <https://parentingforfaith.org/>. (accessed 13/04/20).

*It was also just having A and C there as well and just felt so much love from them and also from the rest of that the community of the lay readers and that's been a really good space to be.*

And P2 likewise identifies the personable nature of the tutor,

*I found C quite influential. I've never met anyone so encouraging. The first time we met her, she told us 'I love you because you're all interns and it's great you are here' but she was also very challenging.<sup>70</sup>*

For others, it was the line manager, usually the incumbent, or else their mentor who had a key influence not just in managing their work but in discipleship and modelling ministry,

*E has been really influential and just our discussions sitting down with her and speaking to her but also her kind of discipling me along. (P1)*

*I guess first one N. So being my line manager actually meeting, seeing her quite a lot; pretty much about every day, So, seeing how she puts her faith into practice, especially like when we go into schools and we do like crafty stuff. (P4)*

*... but it was the way that he supervised me that I, he won my trust very, very quickly. ... Watching him lead, watching him preach, do school assemblies, everything he allowed me to shadow him in and then things that he supported me through. He was just incredibly influential. ... it felt like a Paul-Timothy relationship in many ways. ... he was a brilliant model to follow so it's, it influenced how I showed my faith and then through challenge, very simply, he's brought me on in how I engage with God personally as well. (P2)*

Each intern was assigned a mentor who was not connected with any of the line management or supervision structures, and several found this useful, especially around issues of vocation,

*I think what changed was the meeting I had with C ages ago. I think it's just I think that's what I needed was just like rather than me thinking it through in my head was actually voicing it with someone else; ... just nice having the sounding board type of thing. (P4)*

*... my mentor's been really good. Kind of just generally talking about church and problems with church. But actually, my mentor's probably really the only person I've had deep and serious conversations about vocations with and that was really helpful to have him outside the parish. (P3)*

One participant recognised how both the mentor and manager had helped towards the same goal in discerning vocation,

*I think it's been the case of particularly through what S and N have helped to do with me is trying to unpeel, peel off the things which I guess within me or the thought process that once you've unpeeled it you get to see to the layer and see the heart and calling which is deep inside you that God has placed inside you. (P6)*

As I noted in chapter 1, youth work is predicated on the relationship between adults and young people, '... by its nature, youth work is based on a voluntary relationship with young people' (Young, 2006, p.5). Nash (2011, p.xvii) writing on behalf of a group of youth work trainers states, 'our belief that young people need supportive and encouraging relationships with a

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<sup>70</sup> See also reference to this tutor in chapter 8 3.3.4

variety of adults.’ Her book sets out twelve metaphors for youth ministry, eleven of which describe these supportive relationships between the youth minister and young people. Youth workers often talk of ‘mentoring’ or ‘accompanying’ young people (Green and Christian, 1998). Mentoring relationships were highlighted by several writers that I reported in chapter 3 as being particularly important for the emerging adult. In 3.5.1, I noted Smith and Snell’s (2009)’s observation on the lack of social support for this age group and the need for ‘nonparental adults’. Kinnaman (2001), Parks (2011) and Setran and Kiesling (2013) all stress the necessity of mentors for faith formation (see 3.5.3).

The intern programme has included the provision of a mentor from its inception as an important part of the support structure around the interns. However, only three spoke positively of this person in the interviews and one said they had not ‘clicked’ and another commented,

*... the relationship took time to develop and I didn’t feel as directly challenged or disciplined as I would have liked to have been. (P1)*

However, it appears that all of them found someone to fulfil that role, either formally or informally. I did not explore that choice in the interviews but developing a close, trusting relationship with a pre-identified person is not easy in the short time period of the year. A more naturally evolving relationship with a self-chosen person may be more appropriate. What is apparent from the data is that each participant found people who could offer the support they needed. For most, it appeared that the placement supervisor was the key person and offered more than just management of the work but as one participant said, they also offered guidance on personal and spiritual matters.<sup>71</sup>

### **5.3 The Intern Group**

This second group of responses came during the end of year interviews and relates to the friendships and sense of community that developed between the members of the intern group during the year. In some ways it should fit in the above category of friends and family, but the importance attached to the group by all the interns means I wanted to record it as a separate category. One of the most significant things discussed was the influence of the other interns on the programme either through living together in the shared houses or on the training programme but also through independent gatherings that were not planned as part of the programme structure. The influence of the intern house was a planned part of the programme and so it was reassuring to know that this part of the programme design was effective.

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<sup>71</sup> I provide a training session for Placement Supervisors and offer a model of pastoral supervision that includes accountability, support, and development. Leech and Paterson call this the ‘three-legged stool of supervision’ (2010, p.19).

### 5.3.1 Intern Houses

I encouraged the whole group to consider how they could form 'intentional community' with some guidance given at the induction residential. This applied specifically to those living in the intern houses who were encouraged to form a shared 'rule of life' based on monastic or even 'new monastic' practices. Over the previous years, this part of the programme had not always worked well, and I was unsure why this was. I was therefore keen to assess its impact as part of the research project.

To encourage the group to take this seriously and to reflect on this, I asked them to read 'Life Together' by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2005) during the first term. None of them mentioned this (and only two mentioned any of the other books they were asked to read) in their interviews, however, I did not ask specific questions about them which was an oversight on my part. The books were discussed informally on the monthly training days, but I did not keep a record of these conversations. My recollection is that some of the group engaged with the text and others found it very difficult to read and understand. However, the three in the intern house reported that they had read it and discussed some of the content together. It is therefore worth noting Bonhoeffer's views on community in this context.

Bonhoeffer has no doubt that community is part of the normal Christian life, it is 'a priori', 'Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ' (2005, p.21). He states that, 'The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer' (2005, p.19). Whilst my participants did not use such extravagant terms it is evident that the effect of other Christians on them was profound and something most of them recognised. Bonhoeffer suggests that, 'There is probably no Christian to whom God has not given the uplifting *experience* of genuine Christian community at least once in his life' (2005, p.89). The interview reports suggest that many of the group received this gift during the year.

Five of the group lived in two 'intern houses', with 2 in one and 3 in the other. The house with only two interns found it difficult to create a shared rhythm of life but the second house made a determined effort to meet each morning for prayer and to eat together as much as possible. P6 was probably the most articulate about how he saw the effect of the group on each other. In response to a question about people who have influenced his faith,

*I think primarily I'd also put just the other interns and the community of support and faith that we've been, both in the house and as a wider group within the diocese. ... It's become quite an intimate relationship between all of us. It's gonna be, sort of, to encourage us really to be a family of people that want to support each other, encourage each other, stretch each other, challenge each other, share our gifts with each other and support each other in our weaknesses.*

He goes on to use that idea of a close bond that developed suggesting it was a decision to do so, but not one just for the year but recognising it as something that came out of his identity as a Christian,

*I think just as Christians that want to love and support each other and be communally one in how we operate and how we serve together naturally when we come together, we're going to be doing the iron sharpens iron, those sort of things. So that's been really so amazing.*

And then focussing on the house, the impact of living together and the intentional actions of eating and praying together, which can be seen in the example of Jesus,

*Obviously, we do try to make regular prayer and eating a part of what we do in the house, ... and it's been great that it's been something we've been able to instil. I think that's been really helpful for all of us for our walk and journey this year. Having that regular, ... let's check in on each other in prayer. And it's doesn't have to be super serious. And other different ways of supporting each other - regularly eating together; Jesus did all or most of his ministry around food, so it makes sense that we build our lives around food and prayer like he did.*

He picks up on the idea of journey to describe the change that's occurred in each of them,

*It's been an ongoing journey of hearing people's stories over the months that have gone past and seeing what God is doing in them and seeing how he's saying new things and hearing the development of those journeys.*

During the year, a previous intern returned to the second house after a difficult life experience in the hope that the environment would be helpful to her. This changed the dynamic considerably, especially when she decided not to fully participate in the rhythm that the others had adopted. In describing the difficulty posed by this, P6 returns to the ideas of family, loyalty, choosing to be community, and committed to one another based on their common faith in Christ. This was brought into focus when the 4<sup>th</sup> person did not engage in the same way, and the lack of commitment to the principle felt like a personal rejection.

P1 reflected on the importance of praying together each morning and how that sustained both him and the group through the difficulties,

*And it's just yeah, been a time as well to come together as a community. I think it's the biggest thing that's really helped us as a group stay in some relation. I think tensions have built up and come down and stuff like that, but it's been a steady thing that we've always gone through and no matter what ... we just yeah we do it. It has been really good to bring us closer together as well.*

Towards the end of the year the group were asked to bring a photograph that represented something from the year that had been formational for them. Two of them brought photographs that emphasised this impact of community living.





P6 described a picture taken on a day trip to Cambridge of the three participants who lived together in one of the houses. He explained how their different poses highlighted that they were all very different people and in theory living together should not work but it '*became our little family*' despite the difficulties and their different approaches to even basic things like how they do food.

P1 brought a picture of himself in the kitchen which represented cooking, eating and living together that '*started something in me*',

*I think yeah, my faith now revolves around what is community to me and how to live that out.*



### **5.3.2 Informal Group meetings.**

The final interviews revealed an interesting element of the year that had happened spontaneously when the group started going to a local McDonald's restaurant after the evening training sessions. These sessions, for the 'Echo' interns, involved taking a 6-week course once per term. The courses were held in the evenings and were modules of the diocesan licensed lay ministry training known as 'Living Faith'. The intern group joined in as part of their theological training for the year. This was a surprising and unforeseen finding as I was unaware that such gatherings had taken place.

What emerged from the interviews was that while the courses and the trainers were significant in their impact, of more importance seems to have been the informal discussions that happened afterwards. P6 explained to me what had happened,



*This year McDonald's was the place where, as a group of interns, we would go and we would be at McDonald's for like two hours chatting about church and thinking and that and for me that was the thing. That was, I think, so significant for me because it came together as mostly a bunch of young people trying to understand God's calling on their lives together and how can we figure out what and how we can serve God? What is God calling the church to be and wrestling these things out. And I think it was in those moments where we like laid the ground and the foundation for how you built understanding what faith is going to be and how we can support each other.*

He returns to the notion of journey but also the sense of equality in offering help,

*I think of the deep conversation that's had and the journeys that each of us have been on as we talked things over in McDonald's, ... the progress in hearing some people's stories, and say this is where I'm at but God's doing this for me, so let's chat about this and prayerfully reflect on these things together, and yes, we're just, we're just friends, just chatting in McDonald's.*

John Westerhoff (2012) proposes that belonging is characteristic of one 'style' of faith in his developmental model first proposed in 1976, describing it as 'affiliative faith'. He suggests this is particularly important during childhood and adolescence. In the 2012 edition, he adds an update in which he proposes that the learning process can be understood by the metaphor of pilgrimage (2012, p.103). He suggests that learners and teachers are co-pilgrims on the journey of faith. This is based on the acknowledgement that 'human beings are persons in relationship' (2012, p.103). The descriptions of the participants reflect this idea of them being co-pilgrims, sharing a journey, supporting, and learning from one another on the way.

Another of the group was not part of that informal gathering but found the support of the others in the group important during a theological reflection meeting. This was a group session that met one afternoon per month to learn and practise theological reflection. The group was facilitated by one of the placement incumbents and some of the sessions involved the interns talking about an incident or situation they were in and the group would reflect on it together. One session was especially memorable for P5,

*I was talking about one of the difficult times here at the office here and that theological reflection was really quite significant for me in terms of I've been really in a rut with my faith at that time, really struggling.*

Others spoke of the informal and ongoing support of the group that happened throughout the year in more general terms. It is evident that there was a strong sense of trust and supportive relationship amongst the group. P7 explains how her faith has been affected by the influence of the views and opinions of the others in the group, again noting the sense of equality that builds trust,

*... we're friends we spend a lot of time together socially outside the training and stuff, um to sort of have that sort of that relationship where you know that you're friends so you can have those sorts of discussions and then it's like okay, see you next week. Like it's you can sort of just draw a line under it and that's been really good, ... because it's*

*your friend and you trust their opinions and you go, actually like, I know this person, if they believe it may be I should look into a bit more maybe. So, the other interns have definitely been a massive influence on me this year.*

In the photograph session, the idea of pilgrimage or journey was raised by P7 who brought a photograph of the group whilst on a walk together at the mid-year retreat. The journey through the year was sometimes easy and sometimes difficult just like the walk. However, she also wanted to emphasise the importance of 'fellowship' and friendship,



*It's a whole manner of things that have helped me to grow as this person and it's yeah been you guys really that have been the main angle of that and so to walk through the countryside which is one of my favourite things to do in the entire world with some of my favourite people in the entire world. I think perfectly sums up this year for me.*

The theme of community appeared in the focus group exercise and discussion. The group were divided into two groups and asked to devise a programme of faith formation for new Christians. Initially it appeared that each of the programmes were heavy on content and the teaching of information. However, in discussion each group was keen to stress that all learning would take place in a relational context of small groups or longer sessions where community could grow and conversation, including over food, could happen. During the focus group discussion, the emphasis on community was seen as having its roots in the Bible,

*If I think about a really functioning discipleship community, I think of the end of Acts chapter 2 where they break bread, they minister to the community, they sell their possessions, listen to teaching and then it says the Lord added to their number daily. It's really simple.... they agreed to focus on the community. (P2)*

The discipleship programme that they devised reflected their own positive experience and the importance they attached to community,

*and in our thing we've built in prayer partners, prayer triplets based on relationships, and then small groups that's relationships in a broader sense, and then service which is living out. (P5)*

*I think though our focus on what we're trying to put in is very knowledge-based, to some extent we wanted to, in the context of relationship, of trying to do it in small groups and doing it within community and fellowship one with one another and I think within a small group, our small groups aren't just, just doing Bible teaching the whole time. They do the fun stuff, go out for dinner, we check, 'How we doing?' and do life together. (P6)*

### **5.3.3 Community of Practice**

These reports describe co-pilgrims 'doing life together' but could also be interpreted as developing a community of practice. The concept of communities of practice originated in learning theory and was coined by the anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. It is pertinent to note the idea developed out of a study of apprenticeships and how social relationships between the master and student and other apprentices became a community that served as a 'living curriculum' (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The definition of a community of practice fits well with what developed for this group over the year, 'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A community of practice can be formed with the intention of learning together or just happens informally as with this group.

The evolution of this group may have been helped by elements of the programme that encouraged good relationships to form, such as going away together, meeting regularly for training days, and maybe the training in theological reflection assisted in the process of discussion. However, none of the group specifically identified or acknowledged that influence on their behaviour. It is impossible to assess whether the openness and trust developed because of the ethos and relationships that were forged through the programmed activities or just that their shared passion and concerns gave rise to this desire to learn from each other.

### **5.3.4 Plausibility Shelters**

Another function of this level of engagement with one another points towards another characteristic of emerging adulthood – that of sense-making. The search for meaning is aided by what the British sociologist Duncan MacLaren (2004) describes as plausibility shelters. These are places that can demonstrate the plausibility or credibility of the Christian faith in a sceptical world. He suggests that churches need to prioritise 'community over congregation' (2004, p.131) and belonging is essential. Nick Shepherd (2016) develops this idea to suggest that youth ministry can offer such shelters to young people.

The fact that the sense of community was reported by my group as so important and the way in which it supported their faith formation would suggest that these groups could be described as plausibility shelters. They offered a bounded space where faith was encouraged and supported, where people felt 'at home' and safe and where ideas could be tested and explored and where the life of faith could be witnessed and tested.

## **5.4 Community and Church**

The fourth category of the relationships theme relates to the sense of belonging experienced by being part of the church community. In discussing the impact that going to church had on

them prior to joining the year, all spoke of the importance of belonging to the community. Joseph Myers states, 'The search for community is a fundamental life search. We need to belong' (Myers, 2003, p.30). Of course, young people and young adults will find this sense of belonging in many ways and places and not just in church. However, in terms of the formation of faith, belonging to a church community is particularly significant and this is shown in the interviews at the end of the year.

The word 'safe' was used twice and other phrases such as, '*like the default setting*' and '*part of who I am*' emphasises the importance of church to them. The community gave them not just a safe haven, but people to talk to, and learn from as well as friends.

One described his experience of going to the university Christian Union,

*It felt like the other guys on my course they had less friends and that they didn't have that connection, like the community bit type of thing.' (P4)*

And for P1 the opposite was true at his university C.U. and so he did not get involved,

*I didn't go to the Christian Union because I didn't engage with anyone there, I didn't really feel welcomed or had any similarities or interests at all apart from my faith. (P1)*

One spoke of the absence of Christian friends as a challenge during his teenage years,

*it can feel quite isolating, you stop having some encouragement in your faith. (P6)*

Another had left the church as a teenager but remembers going back to a different church and being shocked by the welcome,

*One of the first things was someone bounded over to me and said hello. Which coming from the rural church I've been in at the age of 12, this was bizarre, someone actually saying hello to me and wanting to know who I am. That was a shock. (P5)*

P2 who had grown up in the church was most positive and descriptive of the church community,

*... it's a community that's unlike any other really. One thing I have really appreciated is the ability to talk to people who were older than me and you know when you're at school or at other places. ... And I think the church is a great way to understand community, without any boundaries and then it's just a great place to have friends. It is a safe space, it's fun.*

In the later interviews, several participants spoke of the influence of the church congregation on their faith and as a source of change. Two of the group described church feeling like home, for example,

*I really felt at home rather than a placement church because like, this is my church rather than my work-place, or just somewhere I'm going to be for a while and then leave. (p1)*

But when asked how church had affected him, he found it hard to describe,

*I think it's important. I just yeah, I think it probably has affected me but I don't think I know how because it's been for me quite gradual in my change. I think, yeah, a lot of it maybe yes, in faith-wise sticking through, just when everything's going okay and still committing and still going it's been pretty good. I think. So, that's how I've changed because I think before I'd quite easily get apathetic towards it. (P1)*

This was someone who had previously described being ambivalent about church and had stopped going for a while as an older teenager. Therefore, the idea of sticking with it was significant.

P3 felt it was 'cheating' to suggest his congregation were the most influential rather than an individual, but it felt important that the effect on him was bigger than one person,

*I want to kind of cheat and say 'my congregation'. I can't really pick out an individual, or I could if I wanted to, but it's been really helpful getting to know individuals in the congregation and seeing how they live out their faith. Not only within Church but also in their lives, just their whole approach to, it's been really just, at times, inspiring because they, you know, it's been really kind of useful to get that insight and y'know the faith of some congregation members, it's just kind of, when you compare it to yourself. It's almost like wow, you know, it's, inspiring, really inspiring.*

He went on to give an example, again downplaying its influence but recognising the value of serving together in a community event,

*It was a Christmas Fair. Y'know, we come to church, all the congregation were there trying to help with the Christmas fair and lots of members of community; we're all offering our kind of service of some sort and it's just seeing the gladness in people's hearts doing that, you know people who you just didn't really see smile; y'know quite elderly who don't really smile but they really came to life. It's not particularly, influential on my faith but, but it's something which has stuck with me this year.*

This example of seeing the faith of others in action encouraged P2 to be more prayerful,

*I've really enjoyed the prayer central event which is a group, every 2 or 3 months we come together as a church to pray one evening. And they've been great to kind of grow a spirit of intercession. It's something I've felt God say that this is a year that he wants me to grow in intercessory prayer.*

One of the group spoke of the impact working with young people had on him and his faith,

*I'd say that the group of kids that I've been working with in my youth group have been most influential on my faith because I've watched them come from a point of being not totally sure where they're at, and seeing them change and transform but also seeing them, changing, transforming their faith and understanding of faith but also, then relaxing with each other and developing a relationship with me and the other leaders and feeling free to be inquisitive. (P5)*

Dean (2010) reports her findings that 'consequential faith ... is far more likely to take root in the rich relational soil of families, congregations, and mentor relationships where young people can see what faithful lives look like and encounter the people who love them enacting a larger story of divine care and hope' (Dean, 2010, p.11). The stories represented by the comments from my group would support this view. The change reported during the year itself and the

path to the year, all depend on a wide range of relationships and the sense of belonging to the church community.

## **5.5 Summary**

This chapter has described the significant impact on the formation of faith of a wide range of relationships. These relationships provide a rich context for faith to grow. Some of this was through older people offering wisdom and guidance or space to reflect, some was through their peers journeying together through a shared experience and some was through the sense of belonging and the witness of a church community. The example of others offered an insight into what a consequential, life-changing faith looks like, provided a plausibility shelter whilst trying to make sense of life, giving safe space to question and explore and learn about themselves and faith, and demonstrated that community is integral to the Christian life. I will return to these core themes in chapter 8.

## **Chapter 6 Factors Affecting Faith Formation: Encountering God**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter will explore the second main theme emerging from the data which I have called 'Encountering God'. It picks up the participants' descriptions of the importance of experience in their formation. In the interviews and the focus group discussion it was evident that their personal experience of God and of life events were particularly important to each individual. These were usually specific times that the participants could remember as having an effect on them. The sense of being in a different space and experiencing something for the first time became clear markers for the process of change and development.

This discussion is thus located within the questions explored in chapter 2 around cognitive and embodied faith and starts to explore whether a habitus of faith exists for the participants. In terms of the factors influencing the formation of faith, the data will point to a context of liminality, the importance of authenticity for this age group, and the relevance of spiritual practices. The theme of meaning-making is relevant as the participants describe their reflections on their experiences and situate them within their story.

The analysis of the data led to the identification of five sub-themes. There was a consistent theme in the interviews of the impact of being in a new location or of being presented with new ideas, new cultures/ways of doing things and new perspectives; for some this meant a dislocation, letting go of former ideas and entering into the experience of the new. Therefore, I will begin by discussing this using the concept of liminality.

### **6.1 Encountering God in Liminal Locations**

According to La Shure (2005) liminality was first used in anthropology by Arnold van Gennep in the context of studies of rites of passage. He noted a three-stage process of separation, transition (liminality), and incorporation. Most of our interns leave the security of home to join the scheme and are unclear about their future, it is a time of transition. They are unsure about their future and come in the hope that they will discover more about themselves and their calling before moving into whatever is next. Liminality describes the threshold or in-between space, a place of possibility and change. It is suited to the gap year but also Arnett's (2004) description of emerging adulthood as 'in-between' could also merit the concept of liminality.<sup>72</sup> The prevalent term used by the participants in the interviews was "different", recognising how

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<sup>72</sup> See 3.3

being in a new or unusual place or situation, what might be described more colloquially as 'out of their comfort zone', created space for change.

In the interviews at the start of the year, participants were asked to talk about events, church activities, and times away from home that were formative for them. Most of them spoke of summer camps or weekends such as 'Soul Survivor Festival'<sup>73</sup> or 'Spree'<sup>74</sup> but also family camps like 'New Wine'.<sup>75</sup> One mentioned returning to church as a significant event, and others spoke of baptism and confirmation.

P2 spoke clearly about the importance of summer camps when he was growing up and especially the experiences they offered,

*They were my sort of top up at the time and I always had really profound experiences on them. So, the stuff from there that just sticks with you. And you can't forget it ... it's a place where I know that I will experience God.*

As a student, a denominational summer school served a similar purpose,

*They were amazing kind of place where we would get an amazing level of teaching, great time to serve the community but also God would really speak profoundly to a lot of people ... And throughout the week two times a day every day for a week someone would say to me 'I just feel like God wants you to know that he loves you.' And that's such a cliched phrase but when you hear it 14 times. I got the picture by the end of it.*

That expectation may have been important and so we explored why those events were more formative than times at home or in the home church. Was it significant that these experiences happened when he was away from home?

*And maybe it's because home was constant and is similar and church was the same even if it was, if it was good, it was true, integral, it was important but it was the same. Whereas these were one-off experiences and they offered me something new.*

This notion that the summer camps offered something new and different was important for others and, for P7, this was also about experiencing a more charismatic and evangelical spirituality that she did not witness in her home church,

*... and the worship, it's really sort of quite an evangelical sort of worship and it was just amazing for me to see such, flatly it was so different because I grew up singing along to an organ and it was traditional hymns and then suddenly to be exposed to all this sort of like really modern music, like these sort of live bands, and it was just amazing sort of to see that the church isn't sort of like this traditional little old village church that throws the odd fete.*

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<sup>73</sup> Soul Survivor was a 5 day summer camp that originated at St Andrew's Church, Chorleywood led by Mike Pilavachi. Over 25 years it grew accommodate up to 15,000 young people over 4 separate camps during July -August each year. It closed in 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Spree is a weekend camp for 8-15 year olds held in July each year. It is organised by Urban Saints in 4 different locations combining outdoor activities with Bible teaching and worship.

<sup>75</sup> 'New Wine' is an evangelical family camp, originating from St Andrew's Church, Chorleywood.



She goes on to describe how this affected her faith and how it suited her personality and the ability to engage different emotions and express herself in different ways,

*I'm quite like this passionate person and quite in touch with my emotions. So, I do really get into it, like the sort of like the Holy Spirit really hits me and I cry and I sort of get really affected by it.*

*... with this evangelical sort of you can be really loud and you can really dance and you can sort of really express yourself more I feel. ... I get a lot from that sort of being able to really just let God say what he wants to say to me and then let that affect me in whatever way it is; whether that's just an understanding or whether that's tears or whether that's like joy or however that is going to affect me, to have that time to really process that.*

It is this issue of having dedicated time and space away from the distractions of everyday life that makes these events so important to her,

*It's a period of time that is fully devoted to God and to prayer and worship and there isn't any distraction ... it's time which you set aside just to be with God.*

P6 also highlighted summer camps as an important influence, noting that the difference from weekly church was key,

*So that was really important, influential for me. I think going back each year offered a different exposure to church and Christianity which you won't always necessarily see in day-to-day life of church.*

And again, the sense that making time and space for God was important,

*The idea of going away for where there's a period of time intentionally to have time to spend with God growing and listening. I find that in those times more often than not God responds in a more overt way.*

However, he also observed that he was able to encounter God in other places and times,

*I think, at home, I have had moments where, when you're sort of, praying and there's that song which just for some reason just brings you to tears and you're a mess on the floor.*

This participant grew up in a church where charismatic worship was more normal and so for him, the sense of difference from the ordinary was not so great but the importance of the camps was having the concentrated time to focus on his faith.

The last participant to discuss the effect of camps was P4. He grew up going to a regular weekend camp each summer. He describes regular Sunday School as boring and he did not engage but it was at the Spree camp when he was quite young that he remembers making a decision,

*it was just showing things in a fun way. One of these 'Sprees' when I was nine that I actually decided I wanted to give my life to God. ... I had the previous year, just a little voice in my head going, 'stand up stand up' but I was still quite shy and I didn't want to*

*stand up in this big tent in front of everyone. But then that year I actually 'yeah, you should probably stand up.'*<sup>76</sup>

When asked to explain why he felt this camp influenced him, he also picks up on the suggestion that it related to the difference from his home church,

*I think it was more how they did things. Like how they did the worship, and how they did the teaching just because it's different, I think. Yeah, it's hard to explain. I think it's because it's just slightly different, something that maybe I wasn't used to from my church back home; but had like a bit of similarity with the Sunday school.*

The references to being in a 'different' place or having 'new experiences' or 'new perspectives' were repeated in the end of year interviews. The comments reflect the uncertainty and dislocation as the scheme participants moved to a new environment and church context. This is most marked where individuals moved to a church of a different tradition from their previous experience,<sup>77</sup> in other words where there was a greater sense of difference and dislocation. One participant stayed in his home church and his only reference to new experiences is to those that were created or chosen as part of his work. He does not describe these as having the formative effect on his faith that others describe.<sup>78</sup>

One member of the group reflected on learning from the differences of his placement church to the church he had grown up in, particularly in the style of worship services. He describes the effect it had on him, recognising the limitations of his previous viewpoint and being open to learn a different perspective,

*I've really found being in a different church environment and perspective, particularly non-evangelical environment. It's been helpful for me sort of stepping back and evaluating my, my very much black and white evangelical perspective that I have and I come with. (P6)*

Participant 3 reflected on his desire to learn about different styles of worship and how that has affected him,

*I remember at my interview I talked about, ... church, about wanting to explore different styles. Or at least can I be exposed to different styles? And coming from what I call a middle of the road Anglican church which really was kind of dead from my experience. It's been really helpful even within my church being exposed to different varieties of worship.*

He explains what has been helpful and starts to express the effect on him,

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<sup>76</sup> In evangelical services, standing up or walking to the front is taken as a sign of decision or commitment to be a Christian. A practice that probably owes its origin to the Billy Graham crusades.

<sup>77</sup> The young people are offered a choice of placements and some of them opted for a church that was in a different tradition, for others the placement church might have been similar in style but it was still new.

<sup>78</sup> This participant described the sense of difference more in terms of his role and profile in the church, that placed him in new situations and having to relate to more people in different situations. The impact he described was in terms of personal skills and confidence rather than on his faith.

*... it has broadened my mind of what is worship. ... they have quite a lot of variety at St Chad's from Christian meditation to kind of evensong. ... because our church really only had one service each week at 9.15; you didn't have much choice. So yeah, just experiencing different worship styles, affirming in myself that you can reach God in more than one way; you don't even need to be in a service to reach God.*

He tries to express this in describing the impact of the Easter services,

*... the Easter services they were yeah, Maundy Thursday, stripping of the altar, watching the passion. That's, that kind of whole period was quite reflective.*

*It's very easy when we go through, especially with communion and stuff we talk about you know, Christ died for our sins, and the whole kind of the last supper type of thing, ..., it just prompts you to re-evaluate how you've been brought up with it ... Again, you know most of my faith has been kind of through teaching and learning and reading books but actually to sit there and contemplate and just, ... it's a bit like communion you can't put it into words kind of thing. And then y'know, finishing with Good Friday Walk and Dawn Eucharist. It's just, I can't put it into words, but it's, I don't know how to describe it.*

Maybe he is touching on the mystery of God that no words can describe but this highlights the move from a cognitive faith to one that is more emotional or embodied that words cannot express. He described this experience as a moment of change when there was,

*a shift of y'know deeper understanding or probably deeper experience.*

P5 recalled going to the Cathedral for a Christmas service, deliberately choosing this because it would be different,

*I went to the cathedral which is much more experiential than communion in a local parish. And it speaks to you on a different level and so being open to doing that which previously I wouldn't have been open to. ... this might not be my churchmanship so to speak but I'd quite like to experience that, see what God's saying in that and so I was open to go and do that.*

He went on to describe how the experience with 'the incense and singing' was different from his home church that is 'very safe'. However, he too was placed in a church that was different from his previous evangelical tradition and he was able to describe this using the metaphor of a river,

*When you move into a rural parochial church, things slow down. That also might be because the people are also older so everything is slower than but there's more of a stillness and the rhythm is just more I'd say it's more like the wide part of the river rather than the sort of beginnings; at beginnings water moves very fast, right, and everything sort of is jumping and there's a white water and the spring is bubbling out of the ground and that's what a large evangelical church can feel like. Sometimes it's the everyone's sort of racing and its very Spirit, very amped up and spiritual. And then you move out into the rural things and everything starts to become like the wide bit of the river where everything moves slower, but it's still moving and it's it shown me a different pace of faith life.*

He then explained how the liturgy was hard to get used to and presented a challenge but when asked if he still found God there, he said,

*Definitely encountered God. Yeah. Definitely. It's just a very different experience. It's probably just as vivid, but it's different.*

P7 also recognised how she could experience God in the different style of worship, even though it was not her preferred style,

*because it's still experience of God so it's always good. Um, and then it's been good for me to sort of see the different ways things can be done and like how things differ and like and how God is still in all of that regardless of where that is or how that's done. It's like God is still in all of that.*

There is a common theme here of the participants being in a different space, either deliberately or as a result of choosing to be on the intern year, and that leads to them being open to discovering new ways to worship and to encounter God. On reflection they can see the significance of being in a place that offers a new experience and somehow this offers a new way to encounter God. As noted already, what they are describing is the benefit of being in a liminal or threshold space which I will return to in chapter 8. However, it was also clear that change happened in other more familiar locations.

## **6.2 Encountering God in a Familiar Space - Church**

For some of the group, significant and formative encounters with God happened within their normal experience of church; for some this was as well as the summer camps but some either did not go to camps or else did not mention them. Smith (2009) writes that 'immersion in the material practices of Christian worship' shapes our hearts and minds to become 'the kind of person who loves rightly – who loves God and neighbour and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love' (2009, p.32-3).<sup>79</sup> This is shown to some extent in the responses of the group. P5 spoke of his experience in church,

*It was during that service that I first encountered the Holy Spirit. ... I started to pray for the first time in a long time. ... and that was really quite powerful. And really changed everything.*

*I think the time that when I got confirmed when I actually did rededicate my life to Christ. That was quite a big event as well*

For P7, the experience of taking communion is important,

*I like the traditional Eucharist and I get a lot from that like taking the bread and wine. I like it's sort of quiet, you are really focused on like what you're saying. ... to really sort of take the time you like sit there in this, cause like traditional churches are beautiful and quiet places especially in villages. and there's those moments of quiet and peace that is really nice to spend time with God.*

*The communion of course is really key, is quite big and for me, from a young age I decided that I was going to get confirmed. ... I feel it brings me really close to God, to sort of take part in that and do something we create, something we know Jesus did.*

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<sup>79</sup> For my discussion of Smith, see 2.7

Participant 3 spoke of his view on worship in the sacramental tradition with which he was most familiar,

*I believe it's quite powerful, ... it keeps the locks hot.*

*Worship for me, it's a tradition and it's very much about the mystery of God and having that space to really focus on God. ... You can sense God working in the congregation.*

P1 described how his experience of the Eucharist in a different church setting helped his understanding,

*I feel the Eucharist for me makes me very aware every time, ... It's the very moment of, you're there. This is what this represents, you need to come to God and ask for forgiveness and confess to him and build that relationship with him. It's what I like about the high church stuff, now I've been to some high churches. I like the way they do it, it's very, very, formal and they make you very, very aware of the situation and it's not just they learn a routine. Probably 'cos it's different to how I've done it before and that's what's brought it out of me.*

For another, what seemed to matter more for her was the church building as a place where she could experience God and to find that time and space away from Sundays,

*You don't just have to be in church on a Sunday. I like I've always had a fascination with churches. I just love them, the buildings, I just like church as a building and I've just always found them really peaceful and quiet and just going to church just when it is empty and just being there has an amazing kind of experience because it's almost like, it's your, it is there just for you. Because you go in because of the heavy stone and the heavy doors that shut out all the sound and it's just still and peaceful. And so, I think it is, yeah, it can be difficult when you're working for the church to have those experiences. (P7)*

I noted the importance of place in chapter 3.5.4, where I highlighted the phrase “sacralised youth work” adopted by Nash (2009). There is a sense here that the building meets a personal and spiritual need for peace even though she does not use the word spiritual or refer to God directly.

### **6.3 Encountering God in Uncertainty**

The second group of encounters are those that provoked uncertainty, a questioning of core beliefs and values or even of the presence of God. John Westerhoff's (2012) model of faith development proposes four styles of faith starting with 'experienced faith' then 'affiliative faith'. I have reported so far in this chapter on how experiencing faith appeared significant to my research group and on affiliation in the previous chapter on relationships. The third style identified is one that is characteristic of adolescents that he calls 'searching faith' and includes doubt and questioning as well as experimentation (Westerhoff, 2012, p.96). This is characteristic of adolescence which is the period the group described in the first interviews. P2 speaks of a time when all his friends were affected by the Holy Spirit at a camp meeting

and he was not, he questioned whether this meant he was not loved by God. He was motivated to go away and study, think and pray, and this renewed his relationship with God.

There seemed to be an interplay between feelings, circumstances, and active choice to reflect on his relationship with God and not just to passively accept what happened to him. It was important to know the truth but also to experience it,

*I really wanted to know more of the experience ... just how it feels to know that God loves you and knowing God's love first and foremost is a choice. But then, yeah, there is this the feeling, there is the warmth, the things going just right that confirmed it for you. ... the more I meditated on the truth simply the more I knew it.*

For P7, the questioning related more to herself and her struggles with having dyslexia especially during exam periods,

*Like why am I struggling so much? why God? why do I have to be dyslexic? why did God sort of, why was I made like this?*

But some reflection and a choice to pray meant she could see it differently. She recognised that she was blessed in other ways, and she knew God answered other prayers,

*Whether that was me contradicting myself or whether God was saying I've blessed you in other areas ... I mean I don't know.*

*I think I prayed a lot during my exams... I prayed for calm and focus in exams and I was. And I got the grades I needed and passed and I'd prayed about that.*

When asked to identify a Bible character or story that they identified with, she picked out the story of the walls of Jericho, reporting on the theme of prayer when facing difficult or seemingly impossible situations,

*And I think that really resonates because although the thing may seem impossible and really difficult and daunting, if you just pray to God and God will tell you what to do and if you do that with like the power of God, you can overcome this...*

P1 describes a time in his teenage years when he was depressed and fell out with his friends at school, at the same time he disengaged his faith,

*I wouldn't say I had no faith or I'm not a Christian anymore. I was just like, I'll go to church on Sundays and that's what I do ... I wasn't seeking to get involved in stuff.*

*Whereas now, I don't like not being involved in stuff, I want to go, like, 'let's talk about Jesus'. I want to encourage other people in it.*

He describes how he came to a point where he recognises that he goes to church even if he does not feel like going and recognises it as a source of help.

In the end of year interviews, I asked the participants to describe times of difficulty that they had faced during the year. I was interested to know how the year might have stretched them and how that affected their faith. This was out of recognition that challenges often present us

with opportunities to grow and the hard times force us to draw on other resources and even to question our faith.

Two of them discussed the difficulties in the house that I referred to in the previous chapter on relationships. For them, the resource to get through came from the commitment to one another and to supporting one another. P1 reflected that he would withdraw from the situation and talk to others, but he also had to draw from within himself,

*I think that what really got me through is just knowing I have to get through it. I don't have an option sort of thing and just having to dig deep and just carry on and try and not let it frustrate me and make me angry.*

Another two spoke of the busy-ness of working and parish life, leading one to feelings of exhaustion during the Christmas season that made him realise the importance of self-care and the pressures of ministry. The second, participant 5 was working part-time, doing the intern programme in his parish, and preparing for the 3-day interview process for ordination training with all the anxiety and uncertainty amongst the busy-ness. He described how he coped was through 'prayerful practice',

*I made sure it was quite strict, the prayer-time during the day using a bit of Taizé and a bit of Bible study, and just some sort of space, just alone, in the middle of the day.*

P7 also points to prayer as the thing that helped her through times when she struggled which were due to feeling homesick and when a family member died,

*I think it was it was prayer, a lot of prayer ... praying like, you know, I'm in the right place that ... I can just ... focus on what I'm doing this time of year now like because I've only got a year.... So, prayer has been a real like help.*

She acknowledges that this prayer is often with others who provide support, echoing the importance of community I noted in the previous chapter,

*It's been a mixed thing lot of prayer on my own, prayer as a house. I was in a huddle group this year, lots of prayer with them as well.*

The approach to the difficulties during the year was different from that described in the first interviews. Rather than question their faith as they suggested in the first interviews, they were able to draw on other resources to help them. This included the relationships with one another, their knowledge of, and reading the Bible, and prayer.

Shepherd (2016) proposes that faith for young people has to make sense and emphasises the need for places where they can raise questions and find answers. I have discussed this previously in reference to plausibility shelters<sup>80</sup> but it is interesting to note here that in the first interviews, none of them reported that they had worked out their difficulties with others. All of

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<sup>80</sup> See 5.3.4

the responses reported that they worked through it by reading books, in prayer, or reading the Bible and one suggested he had disengaged completely from his church community. In the second interviews, there was a mix of drawing on the support of others in the house or in prayer or other small groups as well as drawing on their own resources.

## **6.4 Encountering God through Teaching and Learning**

Given the amount of time churches spend preaching and teaching children and young people, it would be surprising if this did not come up as a key factor of formation. Several mentioned sermons or teaching but it was not as frequent as discussions around other activities as noted above and so may not be as important as the time committed to it. This bears out my concern with the over-emphasis on the cognitive in discipleship and formation.

Only one participant recalled a particular talk, at a camp, that was the time he can identify when he decided he wanted to be a Christian. Another talked about exploring the Bible and doctrine with his vicar in the context of individual meetings with him and another adult who helped him to look at the Bible and 'to critically think and look at text' (P5). This was when he was in a church that was 'quite a teaching-focussed church' which gave him a 'real passion for the Word' (P5).

A third participant was asked about the place of teaching and responded,

*Good teaching and good Bible exegesis has always been quite important for me. The church I grew up in was mostly centred on expository preaching. ... So I think I hold scripture and teaching that way in quite high regard. (P6)*

The lack of mention of Bible teaching by most of the group was interesting and something I returned to later in the focus group, but it was almost taken for granted as a part of their Christian life and its effect seemed almost invisible to them.

In trying to gauge the effect of Bible teaching, I asked them to call to mind any bible stories or characters that they felt resonated with their own lives and faith journey. The characters they chose, and their explanations also had the potential to throw further light on their faith journey.

The young woman in the group was the only one to identify a female character and spoke of Mary, the mother of Jesus as being 'quite powerful for me'. She described how Mary was a young girl who faced many hurdles but kept going, doing what God asked her and being brave and faithful. She also explained how the story of the walls of Jericho had a similar message to keep going despite the difficulties, keep praying and God's power will break through.

King David was identified by four others and for this idea of faithfulness. David was someone who messed up but came back to God, he runs away and hides and shows vulnerability. One



participant spoke of David being a worship leader as an example to him, but someone who was honest and unashamed of God.

The idea of people who made mistakes and ran away was also important for two participants who identified Jonah, acknowledging that, 'I like to run away at times' (P1). Another described Moses as someone who 'was filled with mistakes' (P6) yet he kept pursuing God.

All of these reflect stories that are frequently taught in traditional Sunday schools; the only participant who could not identify anyone was also the one who came to faith later in his teenage years without being involved in church as a child. This possibly points to the importance of this early teaching that was not formally acknowledged by the group members but nonetheless was not insignificant in its formative effect.

The last group of comments about formative experiences relates to the structured training and learning sessions that were arranged for the group. Several interviewees highlighted the impact of specific sessions.

P7 explained how the introductory Bible course made her question the text and explore the context and this has changed the way she reads the Bible,

*Which has really influenced the way that I read my Bible now; rather than just reading at being like 'Oh, yes, that's what that says' like also looking at like well what's going on in the church? What was the context of this? Like, why did they do this? Like what has been the history of this...*

For P6 the training days as a whole were really important, not least for the sense of being together with the rest of the group as noted in the previous chapter but also for meeting a need for Bible study that was missing from his church placement,

*I love it when we have our Thursday training day, both engaging with the other interns and learning together about different things. Particularly when we do the Bible stuff. I really enjoy that and thrive off that I think especially if I'm not getting as much Bible stuff in my own church context as I'd like to, having those conversations and that going deeper together. So, I really enjoy that and value that.*

For him too, the Mission of God module was significant in the way the teaching was not just about understanding the subject but challenged him to think about his identity and calling,

*It really spoke to both an understanding of what church, trying to think about what church is, what our current understanding of church is, our ideas of what the mission is too, but then sort of speaking into understanding who we are and the kind of mission that God is calling us to.*

This connection between theory and practice was an important part of all the training sessions offered to the group, not least because it was based on practical theology. The organised sessions for theological reflection were a more overt expression of this and were mentioned by two members of the group as having an important effect.

For P2, the visits to other parishes enabled him to understand more about the diversity within the Church of England and helped to clarify his own sense of calling,

*I found the theological reflection days, going to different parishes really helpful, going to see vicars of different backgrounds, different styles and different contexts, and they're all using their unique set of gifting and character; That's helped me reconcile a lot of feeling I was called into the CofE through seeing these people.*

Others valued the general encouragement to reflect and learn from their experiences throughout the year,

*Just like things like um in our placement saying like because you encouraged us this, to sort of reflect on our placement like to write a journal and that was sort of like a sort of to be like, well, I want you to reflect on your learning process what sort of what's happening. (P7)*

*You've been quite good at doing reflective stuff with us as well. ...this is kind of an example, that was like the books that asking what we got out of the books and stuff. Yeah, which feeds on to developing as well. (P4)*

When asked to describe my role with them during the year, one participant picked up on this aspect of reflection,

*You kind of maintained a kind of pastoral role, that's those practical kind of checking on how we are but also giving us some space away from the vocations teams or the parish to talk about stuff, sort of, kind of, guiding; maybe you can call it director, yeah spiritual director you could say. ... to make us think.(P3)*

#### **6.4.1 Story-formed Community**

It is interesting to note the memory of bible stories and the personal identification with the story and characters in them. Stanley Hauerwas asserts that we are a 'story-formed community' (Hauerwas, 1981, p.9). He uses the story of Richard Adams's novel, *Watership Down* to illustrate the importance of story in shaping a community. Hauerwas is writing about social ethics but his point is to argue that we have reduced faith to formulas that do not help us to know how to live as followers of Jesus. Instead, 'the gospel is the story of a man who had the authority to preach that the kingdom of God is present' (1981, p.37). In a later work, he asserts, 'We know who we are only when we can place our selves - locate our stories – within God's story' (Hauerwas, 2003, p.27).

In the second interviews, the impact of teaching was reported in terms of the understanding that it gave about how to live and not just for its own sake. The group highlighted the importance of reflective practice and told their own stories of its effect on them. This brings together the relevance of understanding the story of God but also how our own stories are part of it, and this may, at least in part, be achieved through reflective practice. The importance of story will be seen in the theme of narrative in the next chapter, but it also raises a question

around the practices of faith and what Smith (2009) calls 'cultural liturgies' that shape how we live, which brings me to the last category of responses.

## 6.5 Encountering God in Practices of Faith

This category emerged out of the second interview data and so can be interpreted as directly related to the experiences offered on the year programme. The programme intentionally sought to encourage the development of spiritual practices through participation in the life of their placement church, through the teaching sessions<sup>81</sup> and through the mid-year retreat. I will discuss practices in chapter 8 and particularly the practice of prayer. Here I will focus on two practices that several participants reported as significant in encountering God in new ways.

The first is the practice of silence. For some of the group the mid-year retreat proved to be significant in introducing them to stillness. The retreat was over four days and involved a few organised sessions and plenty of free time. These were times of prayer, worship and reflection aimed at stimulating or encouraging the participants to spend time on their own or with others in rest or quiet.

For P7, this was an important time to stop and reflect; she recognised she had got out of the habit of reflecting and things had become more routine and so it was having the time, and possibly more importantly, being given permission to stop and pray,

*I know that I get out of the habit of like you get out the habit of reflecting and just having that time to sit and be quiet with God because I know I definitely feel like if I do try and sit and have that quiet time with God, I feel like I should be doing something else rather than just sat there. So, sort of not have anything else to do and be like, like this is all I can really do was good, really getting to think and stuff.*

P2 echoed a similar thought about having time to stop,

*Then go on to Buckden, just to be quiet and resting and all that, I really valued Buckden just to get away and stop.*

And although the times of quiet were not the usual practice for many of them, being directed to do it was useful, P4 comments,

*I think the session on the second residential when we went off and had that however long being quiet that was, I found that really helpful because that bit is something that I've never been great at.*

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<sup>81</sup> Spiritual Disciplines are specifically taught in the Growing Leaders Course but were encouraged in other training as well, including a session on developing a rule of life at the first residential.

It is important to note the value the young people placed on being still and quiet when the rest of life is busy, however, they either seem to feel guilty if they stop and do nothing or they do not know what to do.

The second practice is more one of an awareness of God in the everyday rather than a specific practice. This theme came through in the focus group discussion when I tried to encourage the group to explain more about how they experienced God. Rather than talk about specific events or encounters in church, the responses showed a more ordinary and everyday relationship with God. P7 identified two different types of experience; in the way God answers prayer or offers guidance and in a sense of wonder,

*... if something you've been praying about and it resolves itself or if you are looking for guidance and you, you're saying, 'I don't want to do' and then like doors open and opportunities that you can take, that is also you having an experience with God.*

*it can be the littlest thing, as you're out for a walk and then like you see like a bird that lands really close to you and you're like wow, this is amazing. Look at this creation that God has created and that can be an experience with God ... It can happen on your own, at home, just in the car, it can happen anywhere, anytime.*

P2 also recognised God's guidance using language of hearing God speak, and then linked his experience of God with a sense of enjoyment, again in the 'natural events' and 'normal life',

*There's other times where I'm just getting on with life, just not thinking about it as much but then God will speak to me and prompt me to do something and you get a little nudge and I go okay if God's saying that it's a two-way relationship; I'm listening to him and he's listening to me.*

*I think I experience God in the things that I enjoy and he also enjoys. So if I'm listening to a piece of music and there's something like I just go, that I really liked but that just like I can kind of feel that God says 'yeah, I enjoyed that too'.*

For P1, there was an unpredictability in encountering God but recognised a different feeling as a way of knowing God,

*it's a very personal thing and it's often not what you expect because I think he likes surprises. um I think it is, it's definitely, it's a feeling, it's like another sense. It is a God-sense. I think you can just tell this isn't from me. This isn't from someone else. This is God speaking to me.*

*The difficult thing about experience of God is trying to explain it, as trying to explain the nature and character of an indescribable being, which is a little difficult.*

Three of the group emphasised they had a responsibility to be open or available to God in order to have a relationship or any experience of God,

*For me, part of that is you do experience God some ways, anywhere and everywhere, but ... do we have the willingness to say to God, 'look God, be a part of what's going on right now, be a part my day-to-day, do this walk with me. I know you are there with me anyway', ... sometimes it takes a part of us to say, 'God I want to let you and I'm willing to let you be present with me in this moment'. (P6)*

*God is always with us, he always is. Every moment of life is about God when we experience, when we intently go, 'Oh, yeah, God is with me'. I think he's there always waiting for us to step out and go, do it together. He wants a relationship. (P1)*

*Where do I meet with God is everywhere; my experience of God and experiencing God is everything. And making time to hear God is important in the rhythm of life. So that's why every day, I make time to hear God, break my day at a time. If I don't hear him, then how can I experience and discern his plan, how can I experience his creation without listening? (P5)*

## **6.6 Summary**

The five categories of encounter with God reveal an embodied faith that is more than just cognitive; there is an expectation that they will encounter God in their daily lives and that these encounters produce change. This is not the god of the immanent frame or the divine butler of moralistic therapeutic deism, but a transcendent God who is worshipped, who speaks and makes challenges and demands of them. There is an expectation that God is there to help and maybe to make them feel better, but also one who is alongside them in the difficult times, even when prayers are unanswered. In the next chapter I will discuss the third theme that I discovered in the data. This is around the narratives that the interns constructed for the year that expressed their desire and intention to grow and helped them to make sense of the changes that they were experiencing.

## **Chapter 7: Factors Affecting Faith Formation: Narratives of Practice and Purpose**

### **7.0 Introduction**

Arnett (2000) states that emerging adulthood is a significant time in the exploration of worldviews, including religious belief that he describes as the third pillar of identity; it is a critical time for personal and faith development.<sup>82</sup> Parks (2000) describes the emerging adult period as a time for re-formation of faith and transformations in meaning-making related to purpose, vocation and belonging.<sup>83</sup> This chapter explores the third theme arising out of the interview data that relates to those questions of meaning and purpose. It will identify the participant's narratives about themselves and the world that they brought to, and discovered during, the year. It is also related to the influences on faith formation of desire, understood here as the desire to change, of having a telos, and to intentionally engage in practices of faith that help them towards that goal. In chapter 2, I discussed the role of desire and how our deepest desires drive us towards a goal and, in terms of vocation, can serve as guides to how we live and who we are.<sup>84</sup> Sheldrake (1994) proposes that being people of desire means we are always open to possibility and that discerning our desires through reflection is part of the Christian tradition. The participants do not refer to desire specifically but arguably it is present in the use of the language of heart, passions, feelings.

I have chosen to frame this theme as narrative because it is through the stories that we tell ourselves and others, and through our imagination and life experiences that we make sense of our world. This also relates to the dominance of the theme of relationship and community, that I discussed in chapter 5. Accepting Hauerwas' proposal that we are a story-formed community means asking the question, what is the story that formed this community? The data presented in this chapter points to several key narratives: a story of a journey of exploration, of learning, of serving others, and a search into faith and vocation. To identify these stories, I will consider the participants' hopes for the year and their reflections on what they learnt and how they perceived change in themselves. This will raise issues of their motivation or their action-driving narratives which is linked to how they define a telos or end goal for their faith. One of these is the important issue of vocation and how the year helped them to discover a deeper understanding of calling accompanied by a richer sense of identity through a process of self-discovery.

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<sup>82</sup> See my discussion of Arnett and other perspectives in 4.3 and 4.5

<sup>83</sup> See 4.5.3

<sup>84</sup> See 3.2.2

## 7.1 A Story of Vocation

All the group came to the year with a key motivation to discern whether they were being called into some form of church ministry, including youth ministry. These young people were keen to serve God but wanted to be sure of where that vocation might lie. Most of them described a sense of God's guidance or calling to join the programme in the first place and how they hoped the year would reveal a sense of call for the longer-term. Some described this as not just about a specific call but also a desire to learn more about God and gain experience,

*I hope for a greater sense of discernment over, what I think my calling is. ... secondly, I'm here to learn, and getting new experiences, different opportunities. I realize that I've got a lot to learn. (P6)*

*Knowing about God but also where he wants me to be. (P4)*

At the end of the year, they were able to reflect on how this sense had developed,

*I feel that that's become clear, that my heart really centring around the heart and passion for serving within the Church of England, and towards more specifically within that centring a heart and a call to serve in a priestly vocation. (P6)*

Another highlighted how his ideas had changed,

*That wasn't what I was then exploring. ... it kind of yeah evolved and yes that to be this community living and new monasticism which I definitely didn't expect at the beginning of the year. (P1)*

P4 discovered a more specific call within the general call he felt he had before,

*I went into this year wanting to find out which was what's calling is because yeah, I've always had the thing like it's definitely something to do with youth, children, but in like, you know, what way I think it's definitely in I think it's in sport now. (P4)*

But for two of the group they were still unsure. P3 outlined his questions from the start of the year,

*... I did have two questions at the start of the year, one was about, ... sort of learning more about ordination, hopefully gaining a sense of whether it fits in my calling and tied in with that is this idea of what does my vocation look like, is it kind of a full-time, essentially is it full-time or part-time? (P3)*

He suggested he had moved forward but there was still work to do,

*this year has been helpful because it's clarified what that kind of vocation looks like ... I have a better understanding of what kind of ministry or ministries I am gifted for and what I feel content with. (P3)*

Whereas P7 felt she was no further forward but felt 'more comfortable' with that,

*I had this idea I was gonna come out of this year knowing exactly what my calling was. And I've come out at the end of the year with still no idea what my calling is from God. But in the process of the year, I've become more comfortable with the idea. It's okay if I don't know what my calling is. (P7)*

The role of mentors or supervisors was key for some in helping the discernment process,

*I think it's been the case of particularly through what S and N have helped to do with me is trying to unpeel, peel off the things which I guess within me, or the thought process that once you've unpeeled it you get to see to the layer and see the heart and calling which is deep inside you that God has placed inside you. (P6)*

*I think what changed was the meeting I had with C ages ago. I think it's just I think that's what I needed was just like rather than me thinking it through in my head was actually voicing it with someone else. (P4)*

Participant 1 reflected on the process of the year and how the programme had enabled the group to grow in a broader vocational sense of leadership and at the same time implies the idea of developing habitus,

*it's a year where, not in a bad way, but in a controlled manner we're taught and kind of I don't think we fully realize it we're put in situations that will make us think and be given time to reflect on it, and kind of get into those habits of what it is to be a leader and what you need to do. Whether that means it's a formal some people go off to be a vicar or not, but in our daily lives how we can be a Christian leader. (P1)*

One observed his understanding of vocation was located within the broader vocation of God's mission although that did not make it easier to know what to do,

*I'm much more sure in what mission God has for the Church and myself. What he calls us to be, what he calls us to do in my vocation stuff. At the same time, I've left this year with more questions, that might be a good measure of faith - does growing in faith mean more questions? (P3)*

This aspect of questioning faith is significant. I noted in chapter 3.5 that emerging adulthood is a time of re-examining beliefs (Arnett, 2004) and later the importance of programmes that give permission for critical questioning (Schweitzer, 2004). This participant's recognition of the validity of questions and the further recognition that faith might mean having more questions, both affirms those statements and underlines that questioning is an important part of the narrative of faith formation.

Because exploring vocation was an integral part of the advertised purpose of the year, it is easy to ignore the importance of this aspect for the participants. Following the call of God was significant for these emerging adults both in joining the year in the first place as well as its focus during the year. In chapter 8, I will propose that this narrative of vocation is the one that is the over-riding narrative of purpose for the group.

## **7.2 A Story of Maturity**

In the initial interview process, I explored the question of what the young adults see as the end goal or telos of faith. This was couched in terms of how they define faith and how they would describe a mature Christian. This was also followed with a question about what they wanted to see changed in their own life and their hopes for the year ahead. There were three aspects



of maturity identified by the group: character, relationships, and openness. Character included qualities of compassion, loving like Jesus did, wisdom, holiness, prayerful, servant-hearted and humble,

*To live in a way that's holy, in a way that lives for Jesus, the way that loves like Jesus did, to try to mirror him the best I can. (P6)*

Relationship was described as being centred on God or Jesus, with having God as 'a constant', and showing confidence in hearing God. This was demonstrated by having a 'passion for Christ' (P5) or being zealous and choosing to 'satisfy the desires of God and the spirit and not the flesh'(P2),

*I think a mature Christian is someone who has a better connection with God. Someone who's able to connect with God better and someone who's really allowed him to become this sort of constant in their life. (P7)*

Openness was about a respect for the theology of others, not being dogmatic and a willingness to question and explore for oneself, and not just accept what they are told. The quality of questioning was likened to being like children, which was a good thing,

*Someone whose life is centred on Christ. Someone who understands the way people access God is different for each person and that everyone has a personal relationship. And being able to respect other's personal relationships. I think that's a sign of a mature Christian. (P5)*

*a mature Christian is ...you know, be quite open and probably quite sure what their theology is, but still aware of appreciative and respectful of different views... That sort of summarises it for me - sure but not dogmatic. (P3)*

Knowledge of the Bible and doctrine were not mentioned except by one person who identified maturity as living by the principles and teachings of Jesus.

My expectation was that the idea of a mature Christian might be what they would want to aim for during the year. There was an expectation that they would change but the correlation was not exact; the two sets of answers showed some general rather than specific overlap. Their hopes for the year reflected the aspects of character and relationship with God. Character qualities included, being more Christlike, faithful, empathetic, loving,

*I'm hoping I'll be a better person at the end of the year. ... more faithful. more empathetic, more loving of the world kind of, I can, you know, just be a better moral person. I hope there'll be some kind of formation, the sense that you may get at the end of the process. (P1)*

There was an emphasis on developing a relationship with God expressed in phrases such as 'going deeper with God' and 'knowing God more'. This was related to more behavioural aspects such as developing a rhythm of life, practising spiritual disciplines, specifically prayer, Bible study and reading other books.

The openness to learn was evident in the hope of discovering vocation and on gaining knowledge or understanding – primarily in terms of bible knowledge and theology but also of the church, specifically the Church of England and the different traditions and styles of church. Only one person mentioned anything about benefitting others through their work or ministry. This respondent said she hoped she could,

*use my faith to sort of really encourage other people especially like young people ... just really encourage them in their faith. (P7)*

These three aspects of maturity, character, relationship, and openness come close to describing the idea of habitus that I highlighted in chapter 2 as being the goal of formation. The vision of maturity and a desire to change reflect my discussion of desire and having a telos, noted above and in chapter 2. The desire to change and to learn is most evident in the willingness to be open to learn and this was overtly present in the interview data.

### **7.3 A Story of Openness**

The young people started the year with a clear desire to learn and to grow. There were some obvious similarities in the areas of growth – in knowledge about the Bible, in spiritual practices, but also in knowledge of God not just about God. There was a recognition that they would be exposed to new experiences and that they saw these as opportunities to develop. This desire or attitude of openness to learning is significant as a motivation for change and growth and it was a shared understanding across the group. As I demonstrated in chapter 5, this openness extended to include learning from one another, but the group identified other places of learning – experiences in the placement church, training days and sessions, and engaging in spiritual practices. What they hoped to learn was about themselves and their vocation, the Bible, the church, and ministry, as well as their relationship or understanding of God,

*I'm hoping to have a better understanding of myself. I think like I'm not a very knowledgeable Christian. I don't know a lot about the Bible. (P7)*

All these responses were focussed on their own development and very little on what others might gain from their work. It is possible to interpret this as self-centred. Arnett (2000) highlights emerging adulthood as a self-centred period, which he considers as necessary for development to happen.<sup>85</sup> However this may be due to the framing of the questions around personal formation as well as a possible humility in not promoting their work to serve others. This is something that I did not pursue in my questioning and would be useful to explore in further research.

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<sup>85</sup> See 4.3.3

In the responses, there is a clear emphasis on the experiential that seems to be most important in defining faith and in growing towards a deeper relationship with God. At this stage in life, it seems that maturity is more about having a depth of relationship with God and questions of identity - the type of person you are, your character attributes.

This narrative of openness extends to include a sense of tolerance towards the views of others. The responses about maturity noted above, included comments about not being dogmatic. Perrin (2020, p.11) reports the importance of tolerance as a core value of Millennial young adults in the UK reflecting the moral culture of ethical liberalism that emphasises the authority of experience and individual choice. She records that theology and doctrine do not feature in the factors influencing the choice of church, noting a lack of denominational loyalty (2020, p.17-18). In understanding my group, this may be due to the multi-cultural and pluralistic context in which they have grown up, but it is also worth considering the inbuilt 'tolerance' of the Anglican culture of being a 'broad church'. For some of the group, this understanding emerged during the year. Commenting on his experience in a rural church where there were people of Anglo-Catholic, and evangelical tradition worshipping together,

*I think really what being in that kind of placement helped me see is a broader spectrum of the church. I see a lot more of the differing wings of the Church or parties of the church. (P5)*

Another recognised how his view of the wider church had changed from intolerance to tolerance, and now to seeing the benefits of collaboration,

*If I was a vicar in a parish, I'd want to have a collaborative spirit. And that really helped me understand again how Anglican ministry is, in terms of being a vicar, it's not just your own parish but uniting with other vicars in the wider church, and different denominations, different styles in your own denominations, all for the cause of the gospel. (P2)*

There is an apparent driving narrative of tolerance and non-judgemental acceptance of others views even if different to their own, as well as a focus on their individual or personal faith. This fits with Taylor's view of the culture of authenticity (Taylor, 2007, p.475) in which we each have to find our own way in a world where soft relativism means we cannot criticise the values of others (2007, p.484). It is difficult to discern whether this is the cause or whether there is a theological root to this view in being inclusive of others that is integral to the gospel message. I will return to explore this further in chapter 8.1.

## **7.4 A Story of Service**

There is an evident narrative of a concern for serving God and others, to learn about ministry and service that I will explore in this section. Many spoke of the opportunities they had and how they learnt from them. They identified how they had learnt practical skills such as planning

and organisation but the impact on their faith was expressed in different terms. For several, it was the ability to see things from a different perspective,

*I think especially from a leadership point of view you get a different aspect of the church than if you're just part of the congregation. ... like if you've got like a big service that you're organizing, if you're a member of the congregation, you go along and it's nice and then you go home. Whereas the leadership you see how much work goes into it and you can see how much effort and like devotion there is about and it's really nice to see that. (P7)*

*Being able to be involved in the worship team in the church has been really great; to help other people in leading or when I'm playing and someone else is leading that's been really great to do, yeah, church has helped me to get some vocal coaching to help me as a worship leader, to support me in leading a band. (P2)*

*I think just the experience of it (has helped me to grow), like knowing, because now I'm having to plan assemblies and doing, say, next Sunday evening with the youth group and things like that. (P4)*

The example of their placement supervisor was influential for many. Most of them would have spent considerable time with their supervisor, shadowing them or involved in leading activities alongside them,

*Where I've sort of really grown in my faith and understanding of Jesus this year is seeing (the vicar's) heart for pushing as a church, we need to meet people where they're at. I've seen so much through that of Jesus heart to meet people where they're at. (P6)*

*I think particularly where (the vicar) and I have a different way of seeing things. So by seeing his way of how we interpret practising faith and doing church and ministry is seeing that a different way. That's been really helpful for me to, stretching me challenging me, learning through that. (P6)*

*... seeing her quite a lot; pretty much about every day, so seeing how she puts her faith into practice, especially like when we go into schools and we do like crafty stuff. And even like just putting it into like sentences where like, you know, it might not be the first thing that you talk about the actually feeding then into talking about your faith. (P4)*

*Watching him lead, watching him preach, do school assemblies, everything he allowed me to shadow him in and then things that he supported me through. He was just incredibly influential. (P2)*

But others learnt much from the people they were working with and seeing that they could have an impact on the lives of others was noted by three of them, all in the context of work with young people,

*seeing the impact it had on them. It was the Sunday night youth group I do. ... it's like really interesting seeing their facial expressions when I say that bit. Because like they're, 'oh! why haven't we thought of that?' so yes, I think that was that was a really good one because actually I think I that's when they first started, as well like the knock-on effect of, that was when they started opening up a bit more. (P4)*

*I'd say that the group of kids that I've been working with in my youth group have been most influential on my faith because I've watched them come from a point of being not totally sure where they're at and seeing them change and transform. But also seeing them, so, changing transforming their faith and understanding of faith but also, then*

*relaxing with each other and developing a relationship with me and the other leaders and feeling free to be inquisitive. That's been very rewarding. (P5)*

Much of these comments seemed self-centred. This may have been due to the way the questions were framed or that they just did not see the formative role of their work in the church and community. However, some reflected on the way that their service of others helped grow their faith, including how being given responsibility for others helped to take responsibility for developing their own faith. Likewise, one of the groups in the focus group exercise included 'service' as an area of their programme. This included serving in the local community – foodbank, soup kitchen, street pastors as well as in the church - welcome team, rotas etc. They clearly saw the importance of '*service which is living out ... acting out the teaching*' (P5).

Perrin (2020) reports that religious volunteering and activism were characteristic of the young adult Christians that she studied. This is opposed to the view of this generation as 'Generation Me' and self-indulgent.<sup>86</sup> As I noted above, it was not my purpose to explore the commitment to serve others versus the benefits to self, indeed it is difficult to extricate motives of altruism from those that seek to satisfy a desire in us to help others that make us feel good about ourselves. What can be said is that the group were motivated to serve others and committed a whole year of their life to do so. This confirms Perrin's view that 'Active Affirmers' (engaged Christian young adults) were 'highly involved in religious volunteerism or community service in some form' (2020, p.7).

## **7.5 A Story of Relational Learning**

As I recorded in chapter 1, the programme for the year included a substantial investment in opportunities for formal teaching and training in biblical studies, theology and aspects of leadership and spiritual life.<sup>87</sup> This included monthly training days, 6 weekly courses offered once per term, and other occasional events. Despite this emphasis only two of the participants mentioned the courses as having the most impact on them at the end of the year. The relative lack of references to the impact of the formal training sessions was surprising, given that this was an important part of the offer for the year and of the programme. In the initial interviews, several participants stated that this was something they thought would be important for their development. When I asked them to design a training programme as part of the focus group exercise, there appeared to be an emphasis on formal teaching. However, when I questioned this, their responses emphasised the intention for this training to be relational and using non-formal styles of learning,

*Most of the knowledge and teaching will come through small groups, bible study, sitting with mature Christians, being with mature Christians and being together. And so that's*

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<sup>86</sup> See Appendix 3

<sup>87</sup> See chapter 1.2

*why we built that into there. So even though we've got like recommended reading lists at the doing the Bible, the Bible's just part of that course, it's the relationship that you form by going through it as a cohort. (P5)*



In addition to the focus group, the training was mentioned by two of the participants when asked to bring a photograph that represented a formative influence on them during the year. P2 offered an image of the tutor of the LF8 Mission of God module who had really challenged him at the start of the year to consider how he was going to challenge himself to grow during the year. He recognised this alongside the continued conversations in the group during the year as a key influence on the change he had seen in himself. What

was most important was the people rather than the content, the conversations with others in the group, including the interns but also older people doing Lay Reader training.

In chapter 2, I reported how our models of discipleship have been cognitive-driven and the work of James K.A. Smith and others who are proposing alternative models. The research group recognised learning as more holistic and not just cognitive. The continued discussion in the focus group highlighted how they saw this working out in practice. The experience needed explanation and knowledge to help interpret and understand but that cognitive knowledge such as of doctrine and the Bible were important to help make sense of the world of faith rather than as ends in themselves. I previously highlighted the 'Mission of God' module in its effect on the group in terms of community and learning from each other (see chapter 6). What was important to them was the relationship of the information to their own situation, sense of vocation and identity. Ford (2007), commenting on the story of the Emmaus Road,<sup>88</sup> observes that the point of the teaching given by Jesus on the road was not the teaching but how it prepared them for the recognition of Jesus that came in the breaking of the bread (2007, p.37). The intern group identified this understanding of teaching being given to enable them to practice their faith. This was aided by learning to reflect, in a general sense on what was happening during the year but also more specifically in the theological reflection group. The importance of reflection in learning from experience is the next important narrative.

## **7.6 A Story of Experiential learning**

In the previous chapter I reported on the primacy of experience and encounters in the lives of the intern group. Helping them to make sense of those encounters was an important part of

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<sup>88</sup> Luke 24:13-33

the training offered during the year. Perrin (2020) observed that for young adults, 'Their challenge is not a lack of information but how to make sense of it in order to develop a coherent system of belief that will help them negotiate the demands of adult life' (2020, p.13). I aimed to give them the tools to become reflective practitioners to benefit their ministry but also their personal and spiritual development. I highlighted the importance of reflective practice in youth work and ministry in chapter 1 and I will discuss it further in chapter 8.<sup>89</sup> For the three members of the group learning to be youth workers, reflective practice is a core skill that was taught and practised. For the others in the 'Echo' group, a monthly meeting was organised to learn and practise theological reflection which two of the group noted as being significant for them.

Three others commented on how they had seen my role as one that encouraged them to think about what they were learning, to take time to reflect possibly by using a journal, but also by building in time to reflect on reading and other activities during the training days,

*Because you know, like our days can be quite busy and a lot can happen and that was sort of there to be like, well, I want you to think back on that process and what's happened and go to think about what you can learn from that. (P7)*

It may be that I could have asked a more specific question to elucidate a view of the impact of the formal training sessions, but I was more concerned for the young adults to highlight the things that were uppermost in their minds.

The structure of the year included an emphasis on experience, and as noted above, a stress on reflection – whether through meetings with mentors, supervisors or on the training days where I would encourage feedback on activities. This is very much a part of my own professional identity as a youth worker where informal education is a core value or principle.<sup>90</sup> It may be that this ethos that I brought to the programme influenced the participants but nonetheless, it is evident that learning to reflect on experience was an important part of creating the story of the year.

## **7.7 A Story about God**

I explored relationship with God in Chapter 6 in terms of 'encounters', but here I want to explore the understanding of God that the participants described and how that changed during the year. In chapter 2, I discussed the loss of transcendence in what Taylor (2007) termed the 'immanent frame' and in chapter 3, I commented on the 'bedroom spirituality' of Generation Y. It is relevant to ask if the focus on the immanence of God was evident in the narrative frame of my research group. I did not ask a direct question about this but have elicited some views

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<sup>89</sup> See 1.7 and 9.4.4

<sup>90</sup> See for example Jeffs & Smith 2005; Young, K 2007

from the interview data. There is an awareness of the immanence of God in phrases that speak of a personal relationship with God,

*You know I've always had an understanding of who God is to me and his relationship with me, like his importance in my life. It's always been the same. It's just now I'm engaging with him more. (P7)*

P3 stated his understanding of God had been 'doctrinal', as a distant God in the sky but now it was more 'experiential', so a move towards immanence was a positive move towards the God who can be known,

*P3: But you're more in relation with God. ... it's just learning to rely on him more, listen to him more, and kind of like go, work out, what it is, what we want to do and also what he wants to do, ... I suppose God's less of a man in the sky you could say.*

*Pete: So, what is He instead?*

*P3: He's Emmanuel God With Us. That's the way to put it. Doing my prayer walking, pastoral visiting people, doing that kind of stuff you realize that actually God's with you in that moment and the people you're talking with or you're praying for you know, it's much more real and, forgive the phrase but down to earth.*

In discussing prayer, P1 identified a change in his understanding of God that was more transcendent,

*It's a conversation that needs to be like when you read like Revelation or Isaiah and stuff how it describes God is not some slightly tall bearded white dude on a fluffy cloud. It's this being of sheer majesty and wonder and that I think has really changed me. (P1)*

And P2 expresses faith in a God who makes him feel whole which may suggest the therapeutic God of MTD<sup>91</sup> but he explains this is a God who is powerful and at work in his life in ways that take his self 'out of the picture', and so, producing change,

*... he wants me to be full and complete and whole and I really have to rely on him. If I'm operating from my strengths, I'll never see him work, if I'm operating from my weaknesses, I'll see his power, his miracles, his Holy Spirit move in my life and other people's lives and I think I've limited the amount that God could work in my life. I think I was living in a Christian way in Christian circles and doing Christian things which makes it look like God's working in your life but you're just doing what you understand but the more I've taken myself out of the picture and allowed God to speak through me I realised there's so much more I've been able to do when I've allowed God to take control. Which changes completely the way I think about ministry, discipling, pastoring, praying, everything. (P2)*

It is interesting to observe here that all of the group spoke of God as 'God' and sometimes of the work of the Holy Spirit but rarely was 'Jesus' mentioned. This may have been in response to the language I used in the questions, but it may indicate something about their theology. I did not explore this further in the interviews and it would be useful to do so in any further

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<sup>91</sup> MTD moralistic therapeutic deism, see 2.3.3



research. In chapter 9 I will propose a trinitarian theology as critical to our understanding of community and relationships.

## **7.8 Summary A Story of Purpose**

In chapter 2, I considered the notion of a telos or end-goal and the role of desire in motivating us towards our goals. I concluded with the suggestion that a theology of desire might help us to discover a faith based not just on doctrine and creeds, but one that includes experience and emotion. The group appear to be guided by a desire to grow and to learn, to become better people or at least have a deeper faith described in terms of a personal relationship with God. When asked to describe what they thought I had been trying to achieve for them during the year, one response was,

*I feel that this year you've, you try to create, build, I guess people, practices, and support around us, to help us as we journey with our own spiritual eyes and sense of God's calling as we figure out what God's been doing with us. (P6)*

'Figure out what God's been doing' may be a good way to describe the journey through the year and the process of growth and learning. In describing the purpose of the year, both at the start and the end, the group identified the key themes as discussed, all of which point to the desire to grow and to learn. That included growing in faith, character, and openness to others and new ideas, discerning their vocation, learning about the context of the church and what ministry looks like, recognising that practical and theological reflection helped them to understand themselves and the work of God within them and through them. These stories come together in a larger narrative that shape the tasks of emerging adulthood and faith formation. In the next chapter I will bring these stories together to make sense and meaning out of the data presented in these last three chapters.

## **Chapter 8 Making Sense of Faith Formation**

### **8.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explore how the real-life experience of the research group supports or is informed by, the theory outlined in chapters 2 to 4 as well as where there may be an alternative version or new perspectives to consider. I have referred to some of this theory as I explored the themes, but I can now consider this in more detail. This will enable me to draw together a framework for future action for those involved with similar programmes and potentially other contexts of faith formation with emerging adults; this will be the subject of the next chapter.

I will start by identifying an underlying driving narrative that will serve to unify the themes using an interpretation of vocation based on the work of Brueggemann (1979) and Fowler (2000). This locates my discussion within a broader concept of meaning-making that I recorded earlier as a significant task during the period of emerging adulthood, hence this chapter is about making sense, both of my data and of the way faith develops in emerging adults. This will provide a context for a deeper exploration of the three themes that emerged from the research.

### **8.1 Making Sense of Driving Narratives**

In chapter 7, I highlighted the narratives and intentional actions of the participants that affected the level of participation and learning outcomes for them. It has raised questions over the social imaginaries that were driving them to join the programme in the first place but also sustained them throughout the year. One of these was the issue of vocation and the desire to explore their sense of calling. The second was the subject of identity and self-discovery; each participant was concerned to learn more about themselves, to grow in confidence and maturity. They all talked about learning more about God and deepening a personal faith and relationship with God as an important goal for the year. I will suggest that these two are not separate but are closely connected through the theological concept of covenant, drawing on the work of Brueggemann (1979) and Fowler (2000). First, however, I return to the idea of social imaginary and its potential influence on the research participants.

In chapter 2, I explained Charles Taylor's concept of the social imaginary (Taylor, 2004, 2007) and his proposal that we live within an imaginary of the immanent frame. I suggested this could be seen in moralistic therapeutic deism (Smith and Denton, 2009) and the happy mid-narrative or immanent faith (Savage, et al., 2006). Davie (2015) observes that responses to new religious movements can help us to understand wider societal views of religion. She proposes that 'new age or self-spiritualities' (2015, p.158) share themes of an emphasis on self and self-discovery – seen in understanding the 'God in me' and a focus on fulfilment and potential - alongside the desire to connect – with the whole person and the wider universe.

This further illustrates the move away from transcendent understandings of God towards the immanent.

My participants showed a degree of resonance with the idea of immanent faith in the reliance on family and friends, a focus on their personal relationship with God and using prayer to ask for God's help. It was also seen in my discussion in chapter 6 where encounters with God were mostly framed in terms of feeling good or blessed, reassured, or just 'knowing God is with me'. However, there were also frequent descriptions of their encounters with God that included a sense of something more transcendent and a willingness to be challenged by God to move beyond a self-focused desire to meet their own needs and instead to serve a larger purpose. Several spoke of times of 'meeting with God' or tried to describe the mystery of God encountered in the eucharist or through the Holy Spirit. There were frequent references to God having a plan for their life or to doing what God wanted and several spoke of the importance of obeying God. This was most frequently seen in discussions about vocation which appeared to be a significant driving narrative for each participant. The concept of vocation therefore has the potential to challenge the dominance of the immanent frame.

### **8.1.1 Vocation**

Vocation is used in different contexts to mean different things, even within the church, as I observed in chapter 1.2.1. Here I will explore how vocation can be understood through the theology of covenant and our calling to partner with God in his purposes for the world.

In chapter 2, I discussed the ideas of Smith (2009) around desiring the kingdom and then the virtue tradition that pointed towards how we are motivated by the end-goal or telos of our existence. This desire is the vision of our ultimate love, what we worship, and it is shaped by the practices and habits of our lives. In relation to understanding vocation, we can recognise this as what Lawrence (2004) describes as our first or primary calling. Lawrence explains this as the call to faith and discipleship, to relationship with Jesus, summed up in the biblical command to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matthew 22:37). The secondary calling is a specific purpose that God has for each individual. For Lawrence, this call is strongly associated with our identity as chosen people of God. Guinness (2003) cites Kierkegaard as saying, 'The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wants me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die' (no citation, Guinness, 2003, p.3). According to Guinness, this search is to discover the 'ultimate why' (2003, p.4), the question of meaning and purpose for our lives.

Arnett (2004) describes the importance of work and meaning-making for the identity formation of emerging adults. Writing from a sociological perspective, he argues that work is related to

the identity questions such as, 'What do I want to do?' and 'What am I best at?' and so making a career choice is about finding the best fit with who they are (Arnett, 2004, p.146-7). Emerging adulthood, he explains, can be a period of active exploration although he suggests for most it is more a process of unstructured drifting. My research group would fit into the category of active explorers, having made a definite choice to use the year to explore in a very structured way.

In chapter 3.5, I noted the phrase 'worthy dreams' that Parks (2000) uses in her description of meaning-making in young adulthood. For her, 'The Dream in its fullest and most spiritual sense is a sense of vocation' (Parks, 2000, p.148). She describes how vocation is about meaningful purpose affecting the whole of life and develops out of a 'deepening understanding of both self and world' (2000, p.148). In this sense, vocational exploration is the key narrative lens through which we can understand the motivations and actions of the young adults in the research group. It serves to address the question of immanent faith and transcendence and bring together the search for identity and purpose. In terms of immanent faith, it is when speaking about vocation that the group members most often referred to a reality beyond themselves but also several spoke of being obedient to the call of God, to doing God's will or conforming to his purposes. This contrasts with the self-oriented beliefs that Davie (2015) describes or the happy midi-narrative that is more self-centred. In relation to identity and purpose, vocation connects the question of 'who am I?' to that of, 'why am I here?'. This is explained helpfully by Brueggemann's (1979) description of covenantal living which helps me to make the 'theological turn' and not to rely purely on social science for insight. Fowler (2000) develops this further in a broader description of a theology of vocation in the light of selfhood and community.

### **8.1.2 Vocation and Covenant**

Brueggemann (1979) outlines an approach to pastoral care that relies on the metaphor of covenant to understand human personality. He argues against the perspective of modernity and social science that promote self-groundedness; the view that 'the self is the essential unit of meaning' and that we find 'sources of wholeness and well-being' from within (1979, p.116). Instead, he argues that the biblical stance is best understood through covenant. This means that 'human persons are grounded in Another who initiates personhood and who stays bound to persons in loyal ways for their well-being' (1979, p.116). The God of the Bible is one whose act of creation is one of covenant-making with the creation; when God says, 'I will be your God' he also says, 'You will be my people' (e.g. Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 7:23). In the Bible therefore there is no human autonomy, instead, being a person, 'means to belong with and belong to and belong for' (1979, p.120). These individuals form a covenant community that orders life around this understanding, which then becomes the function of pastoral care. The

important point for my discussion here is that Brueggemann makes the claim that this view 'transposes all identity questions into vocational questions' (1979, p.125). He argues that all questions about identity are wrongly based on the premise that people are self-grounded but instead identity is a gift in the calling of God that defines the purposes of people in relation to the purposes of God.

I noted above that the research group identified two main tasks for the year as exploring calling and discovering identity. For many, the discussion of vocation was tied up with the questions of identity as they wanted to discover the gifts they had, to grow in confidence, and live out the life of a disciple of Jesus. As one participant expressed his hope that he would become 'the person Jesus intended me to be' (P2) and then described his faith journey as,

*...through belief in God, discovering how I can live the way that he intends me to, and the more awake I become to that, the more I will flourish in who I've been created to be.*  
(P2)

In most of the conversations, the call to be a disciple of Jesus and to have a relationship with him related to a desire to serve God and to live a life that reflected his love. These young people are the minority in the culture and fit Perrin's (2020) description of 'active affirmers'. Their faith could be described as committed transformative spirituality (Savage, et al., 2006), and contradicts the trend towards the immanent faith found elsewhere.

However, despite Brueggemann's insistence that the metaphor of covenant assumes a commitment to a community of others seeking the same understanding, the inherent individualism of our modern social imaginary is still present. The participants still spoke of their own personal relationship with God and the practices of faith in terms of their own responsibility. The significant value placed on community, relationships and belonging that I highlighted in chapter 5 are indicative of a yearning for something beyond themselves that may indicate the shortcomings of individualism. If Brueggemann is right, the covenant relationship with the divine Other is, by definition, a call to belong to others and this desire is reflected within the research group but it sits in tension with the individualism of the social imaginary. Before discussing this further, it will be helpful to understand the rise of individualism in the social imaginary as outlined by Taylor (2004, 2007).

### **8.1.3 Expressive Individualism**

Taylor (2004) charts the process of the transformation of the social imaginary in which a new self-understanding emerged that gave 'unprecedented primacy to the individual' (2004, p.50). This included a move towards personal religion and away from the ideas of early religion that was always social and relating to God was always collective. In early religion, understandings of identity were embedded in society – people were defined by their family role or in relation

to their place in the tribe, and worship was through collective ritual and corporate action on behalf of the whole community. Taylor describes the 'Great Disembedding' that revolutionised the moral-social order; no longer do we understand ourselves as part of the 'cosmic sacred' or the 'social sacred' but as free individuals (Taylor, 2004, p.65). As such we have our own relationship with God and our own experiences and an emphasis on personal devotion and discipline within a moral order directed towards human flourishing.

In his 2007 work, Taylor describes how expressive individualism has shaped the new 'Age of Authenticity' that developed in the late-eighteenth century out of the Romantic expressivism. He defines the culture of authenticity,

'that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find out and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority' (Taylor, 2007, p.475).

It is evident that this definition plays out in the developmental models of life stage theories and particularly the transitions of emerging adulthood that I discussed in chapter 3. These theories suggest the end goal is independent discovery of our own way and purpose for life. The refusal to conform to the models of previous generations is also implicit (and sometimes, explicit) in generational theory.<sup>92</sup>

It is not insignificant to my discussion here that Taylor sees the rise of this age of authenticity taking shape within a developing consumer culture that focussed on the new youth market in the post-war years. The creation of youth as a life-stage was not especially new but advertising and consumerism led to a new kind of consciousness of youth as a social reality (Taylor, 2007). Root (2017) develops Taylor's idea further in exploring the way churches have 'glorified youthfulness' as the measure of authenticity in an age when 'authenticity is king' and this is the cause of numerous problems for the church (2017, pp.13-15). I will return to authenticity later in this chapter (8.3). It is in this context of individualism, and the issues it raises for faith formation, that I can consider a response that seeks to counter this culture.

#### **8.1.4 Vocation, Community and Meaning-Making**

Having chosen previously not to use Fowler's faith development theory as a framework for considering faith formation,<sup>93</sup> his later work (Fowler, 2000) on vocation combines psychosocial developmental perspectives with theological insights and offers a particularly useful perspective on my findings and the situation of emerging adults.

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<sup>92</sup> See Appendix 3

<sup>93</sup> See 2.2 & 2.3

Fowler (2000) seeks to define a Christian understanding of the human vocation which he expresses as the calling to partner with God in his purposes for the world. He states that this calling is linked to identity, 'God's calling us into being constitutes each of us in our uniqueness and in our special purposes for living' (2000, p.74). Drawing on the work of Brueggemann (1979), he highlights the connection between identity and vocation and wants to reclaim the power of the concept of vocation. He explores further the 'serious modern heresy' (2000, p.82) that we are self-grounded by considering ideas of destiny, eudaimonism<sup>94</sup> and self-actualisation.<sup>95</sup> Each of these is based on the individualistic assumption that we have within us all the resources we need to reach fulfilment in life. Instead, a Christian understanding of vocation means we can only find fulfilment in relationships, in giving ourselves to others in pursuit of the common good. This is the covenant existence identified by Brueggemann that recognises life is a gift and trust from others and God, thus creating a 'triadic pattern' (Fowler, 2000, p.90). This pattern includes the role of others and, for Fowler, community is essential and non-negotiable because of our created social nature. 'There is no selfhood apart from community, no faith apart from community, no destiny and no vocation apart from community' (Fowler, 2000, p.92).

The Christian community is, for Fowler, one whose identity is shaped by the story of Jesus as the Christ and the presence of his Spirit. Faith is formed in these communities through the shared story and identification with its passion, the forming of its guiding emotions and virtues, and participation in vocation (2000, pp.93-4). His outline of the formation of virtue and of emotions resonates with my previous discussion in chapter 2 and it will not be helpful to rehearse those discussions here. However, what is most useful is that Fowler identifies three 'vectors of meaning' that must be brought together in any intentional approach aimed at helping people to form their lives around the Christian story and vision rather than self-groundedness. The three areas are very similar to the three themes I identified in the lives of the research group and may serve as a way of bringing them together under the concept of vocation and meaning-making. The three 'vectors' are:

'(1) the dynamism and direction of their personal life narratives, (2) the web of social interchanges in time that constitute their evolving life structures and (3) the perspectives on the divine praxis and purpose offered in the core story of the Christian faith' (Fowler, 2000, p.112).

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<sup>94</sup> I discussed eudaimonia in chapter 2, Fowler here takes a different understanding that suggests the goal is to live in response to the guiding of one's personal daimon (Fowler, 2000, p.80).

<sup>95</sup> Self-actualisation is at the top of Maslow's pyramid of needs and is frequently included as a staple part of youth work training. I also discussed the notion of self-authorship in 3.6 which has is similar to self-groundedness or self-actualisation.

The first, personal narratives equates with my description in chapter 6 of personal experiences and takes into account the context and perspective of life stages that I explored in chapter 3. The second, Fowler calls our 'social and corporate existence' and so relates to chapter 5 on relationships and belonging. The third, is our understanding of the work of God in the world and our lives and how this relates to the overarching narrative of the Christian faith. In chapter 7, I described the stories that gave purpose to the year.

Fowler proposes that as these three meanings interact and interplay, transformation happens away from self-groundedness and towards vocational existence. It is here that he brings together the psychosocial theories of development and faith development theory. Life stage developmental theories account for change through time and adapting to the seasons of life; changes in faith occur through disruptions or dissonance that alter the way we make meaning. However, the move away from self-groundedness is not automatic but instead, needs conversion. Conversion is an ongoing process of growth whereby people 'gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith' (Fowler, 2000, p.115). This is a work of God's grace in our lives which in the Western Church is termed sanctification, but Fowler prefers the Eastern tradition's idea of 'divine synergy'. This synergy combines the divine love with our love, gifts and strengths that brings us to wholeness.

This perspective recognises the importance of the emerging adulthood stage of life for my research group but highlights the significance of the experiences provided by the intern year that provoke disruption and dissonance.<sup>96</sup> However, it also reminds us that the theological viewpoint is consequential in terms of the formation of faith; this is not something that is achieved through human effort alone but is, as Fowler describes, a partnership with God.

This view helps us to understand the purpose and process of faith formation as being about vocation, the calling to be loved and known by God and the call to partner with Him in serving his purposes in the world.<sup>97</sup> The process of faith formation shapes meaning and purpose, it moulds identity and character, and it takes place in and through relationships. I can now return to the three themes identified from my case study to explore the processes of faith formation in more depth.

## **8.2 Making Sense of Relationships**

The first theme identified the importance of relationships and belonging for the group – to family and friends, to significant adults, and also to the intern group itself and wider

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<sup>96</sup> See 6.1 on liminality

<sup>97</sup> See 2.4.2



communities of the church. Despite many emerging adults choosing not to belong to church; for this group, being part of a larger group had a significant impact on their formation.

To explore this further, I will start with the theology of the concept of union with Christ as noted in chapter 2 and in the previous section. This is 'theosis' or 'deification' and is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity, which I will move on to explore. Theosis is relevant to my discussion of vocation and meaning-making because it defines the goal of the Christian life; Basil of Caesarea said, 'The human being is an animal who has received the vocation to become God' (cited by Clément, 1993, p. 76). The doctrine of the Trinity, understood as *koinonia* and *perichoresis*, reminds us that God is relationship and that we are called to live in communion with God and one another. This understanding of the Trinity will provide the theological frame for reflecting on the importance of both relationship and selfhood that emerged from my data.

### **8.2.1 Theosis**

Theosis or divinisation is a doctrine associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church rather than Western Christianity. It is frequently summarised by the statement made by Athanasius, 'He became man/human, that we might become god/divine' (Young and Teal, 2010, p.55). This is rooted in the words of Psalm 82:6 (and John 10:34) 'You are all gods and sons of the Most High' and also 2 Peter 1:4, '...so that through them you may participate in the divine nature'. Russell (2009) states that the assertion originally belonged to Irenaeus of Lyons and was rephrased by Athanasius. The important point is that it derived from reflection on Scripture, including the description of the incarnation in Philippians 2:5-11, Paul's teaching on the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians and Psalm 82 (Russell, 2009, p. 24). Russell explains that it is then through the 'adoption of baptism' and the eucharist that participation in the body of Christ is achieved. In the second to fourth centuries, this meant the idea was both a theological theme referring to the mystery of the incarnation as well as a spiritual teaching that set out the task of the Christian life 'to attain likeness to God' (2009, p.24). Russell summarises this as participation, sharing in Christ sacramentally, and imitation, 'a striving to reflect God in everyday life' (2009, p.26).

Thus, it can be said that union with God is both mystical and practical, in the sense of being about everyday life; it is both transcendent and immanent, allowing for the otherness and closeness of God. Ballard and Pritchard (2001) make the connection between divinization and *habitus*. They observe that the mystical contemplation of divine grace and the practical expression of that grace in our whole being works towards the glory of God becoming part of our nature, 'it becomes a 'habitus' ... what Eastern theologians call 'divinisation'' (2001, p.54).

Union with God is also personal and relational because of the Trinity. To be made in the image of God, to become like God and imitate God means that we need to understand that God has

a 'unique mode of existence, which is at the same time Unity and Person in communion; and we are called to realize this unity in Christ' (Clément, 1993, p.65). Clément, a Russian Orthodox theologian, explains how the Church Fathers understood the circulation of love within the trinity using the terms, perichoresis and kenosis. Perichoresis is the exchange of being so that each person exists only in relationship with the others and could be described as 'joyful kenosis'. Kenosis is a Greek word used by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2:7 to refer to Christ 'emptying himself' out of the foolishness of love in the incarnation. Clément proposes that the purpose of the incarnation is 'to establish full communion between God and humanity' (1993, p.37). I will return to the idea of kenosis later but there is more to explore first about perichoresis and koinonia.

### **8.2.2 Perichoresis**

Loder (1998) explains the etymology of perichoresis as 'peri' meaning 'around' and 'choreo' meaning 'to proceed' or 'to make room' with the implication of movement among the persons of the Trinity. Others have defined this as 'the dance of God' (Ward, 2002) or the 'great dance' (Kruger, 2005) and the 'divine dance' (Rohr, 2016). Each of these writers share the conclusion that we are invited to join the dance of God, 'In our worship and in our mission, we participate in the intimate life of God' (Ward, 2002, p.53). Gunton (1993) explores this perspective on the Trinity. He states that perichoresis expresses both the unity and plurality of God with the implication that the three persons 'exist only in reciprocal eternal relatedness' (Gunton, 1993, p.164). He suggests that this makes possible for the whole of reality to be conceived as perichoretic, having a 'dynamism of relatedness' (1993, p.165). He identifies three levels of being and meaning in the world: the personal, material, and cultural worlds; culture refers to knowledge, action and art. All three are inter-related. For the purposes of my discussion, the first realm is the most important. Gunton proposes that if humans are made in the image of God, then it is easy to recognise that we are perichoretic beings, closely connected with others, 'persons mutually constitute each other, make each other what they are' (1993, p.173). Gunton observes that this stands opposed to individualism which emphasises our separation, and collectivism that risks losing our particularity through involvement with others. He is keen to point out that this view does not mean we lose our individual self, or particularity, but we are drawn by the Spirit into a new network of relationships, with God and with the community of Christians called the church. This community is best described using the biblical term, koinonia, which Gunton defines as communion or sociality (1993, p.215). The church is intended to be the 'medium and realisation of communion' first with God and then with other people. He recognises that for much of its history, the church has been more of an institution than a community.

My previous discussion<sup>98</sup> of emerging adults suggested that institutionalisation of church is a feature that keeps them away from the church, even though it is community and relationship that they seek so this is a critical issue for this age group. Gunton traces this notion of communion through the Gospel of John and in the theology of Paul, especially his use of the term, 'in Christ' and the metaphor of the body. He suggests that 'in Christ' is not about 'Christ-mysticism' but about 'being-in-relation', in communion (1993, p.218). This is not to suggest the loss of the transcendence of God and a flattening to immanent relationships. For Gunton, transcendence is, at least in part, about otherness which is affirmed by the theology of the Trinity, and he decries the way that modernity has shifted the 'locus of the divine' away from a God who is 'other' to a 'this worldly reality' (1993, p.6).

### **8.2.3 Hypostasis and Kenosis**

It is important for Gunton, that the Trinity is a communion of persons, and therefore, he argues that the concept of hypostasis deserves more consideration than it has had. Hypostasis means that individuality is still central and is neither lost in the Trinity nor in the koinonia of the church. This is important for my discussion as it holds together the need for personal experience and identity alongside the search for community and relationship with God and others. Gunton then reminds us of the biblical word for such social relations is covenant, which 'expresses above all the calling of the human race into free and joyful partnership with God, and so with each other' (Gunton, 1993, p.222). It is a relationship characterised by giving and receiving, between the three persons of the Trinity and then mirrored in human relationships. Relations within the Trinity are revealed in the self-giving of Christ and this is not merely reciprocal but asymmetrical, including the idea of sacrifice. This is seen worked out as an ethic for us in Paul's letter to the Romans, 'Present your bodies as a living sacrifice' (Romans 12:1). Although Gunton does not use the term, this echoes the idea of kenosis. It counters the view that individual self-fulfilment is the goal, and places covenant relationship at the centre of what it means to be human.

It is this sense of openness and reliance on (covenant) relationship that I think the research group identified with, particularly the group living together but the significance of community was strong for all of them. When asked to describe a time of difficulty during the year, two of the group focused on the hurt caused by a person living in the shared house who did not engage with them and seemingly rejected their offer of support and relationship. There is a sense in their descriptions of having tried to give and persevere, but it became tiring and 'emotionally draining' (P6). The question remains over whether there are limits to the level of sacrifice and self-giving that can be achieved within the human realm. Part of the answer to

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<sup>98</sup> See 3.5

this question may be provided by Rohr (2016). He highlights the risks of being hurt inherent in vulnerability in relationship, noting that vulnerability derives from the word for wound. However, the opposite is possible, and we can receive the gift of love in return. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to keep us vulnerable and open to life and love.

Root (2017) goes further in developing a pattern for ministry based on kenosis and entering 'death experiences'. Root's work helpfully connects my two themes of encounter and relationship in stating that faith cannot be separated from experience whilst being 'bound in a relational personhood' (Root, 2017, p.142). His reliance on the term ministry to describe the action of God in the world is central to his proposal but needs explaining given the multiple meanings this word has. He argues that 'God is revealed as minister, as one who reaches out to embrace and *be with* humanity' (2017, p.120). Thus, ministry is defined as the 'act of sharing in the life of another for the sake of love and communion' (2017, p.120).<sup>99</sup>

Root describes divine action as ministry that starts in the perichoresis of the Trinity that is a pattern of ministry between the three persons. He suggests that perichoresis is much more than a justification for relationality to be at the centre of Christianity but is instead 'the deepest form of presence and sharing' (2017, p.158). It means ministry creates a hypostatic union, bringing the divine and human together in Jesus as he shares in our person and ministers through our death experience. This translates into ministry with other people in the notion of 'place-sharing' based on Bonhoeffer's concept of 'stellvertretung'. He explains this in an earlier work (Root, 2007) as when we place ourselves fully into the reality of others, acting on their behalf and suffering with them as Jesus was our place-sharer. This means that our relationships become the location of God's presence in the world (Root, 2007, p.83).

All of this gives us a theological frame to understand why relationships are so important and it is something of this that the research group discovered in their year, without using this language to express it. It is possible to interpret the role of the significant adults including parents, as place-sharers. The description of relationships within the group revealed a depth of empathy and care, of giving and receiving, that shows the love and presence of God and to which the label, *koinonia*, would not be misapplied.

Having explored a theological perspective on relationship, I will next discuss some views on practice that will guide my discussion towards the factors affecting the formation of faith. The first of these is the sociological perspective on the place of belonging; second, the significance

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<sup>99</sup> Samuel Wells argues that 'with' is the most important word in theology and that 'God is with us' describes the purpose and goal of God's life, his name and nature. This is also based on a trinitarian view of God who is 'with' the three persons but also with us (Wells, 2015).

of tolerance; and third, the concept of plausibility shelters and communities of practice that help develop a habitus of faith.

#### **8.2.4 Belonging and Believing**

The phrase 'believing without belonging' was coined by the British sociologist Grace Davie (1994) to describe the reduction in church attendance amongst people who still held onto some form of belief in Christianity. Voas and Crockett (2005) disputed this analysis and instead proposed that people were neither belonging nor believing. This was based on a definition of belonging as active or regular, meaning at least once a month. This led to the claim that those in middle age at the time have, 'produced children who are half as likely to attend church' (2005, p.22). The same was true in terms of belief and so they proposed that the believing without belonging phrase should enter retirement. However, by that time Davie had already revised her view and instead offered the phrase 'vicarious religion' to describe the way that people (not just young people) appreciate the place and activity of the church but do not wish to participate other than at times of crisis, religion is 'performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number' (Davie, 2015, p.6).<sup>100</sup>

Day (2011, 2013) takes a different, broader view of belonging and reports on its continued significance for young people in terms of their views of religion. She suggests that social relations are the key source of meaning, happiness, and moral frameworks; this agrees with the research of Savage et al. (2006) and Smith and Denton (2005) that I cited in chapter 3. However, she disputes some of Smith and Denton's claims that young people are individualistic and self-oriented, arguing instead that for many, 'their sense of community was often strong' (Day, 2013, p.112). Her earlier work observed that while people may not belong in forms of institutional religion or believe in shared propositional beliefs, there is a strong association with Christian nominalism (Day, 2011a). This describes a self-identification as Christian in name, based on 3 types of belonging – ethnic, natal, and aspirational. Ethnic refers to those who count themselves as Christian due to nationality or culture; natal describes those who take their identity from parents and family; aspirational relates to those who see Christianity as offering respectability. For each group, the institution of Christianity appears important but is expressed in relation to others; Day describes this as 'anthropomorphic' rather than 'theocentric' (2013, p17).

My purpose in highlighting these studies briefly is to observe the UK context in relation to faith and church. Day's work suggests that belonging and social connection or relations are important and underlines the theology that asserts we are made to be relational beings. However, Day's categories refer to the community of the 'like-minded', describing how people

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<sup>100</sup> Davie cites her previous uses of this phrase in 2000, 2007 & 2008.

are connected through similar views and values; what she does not account for is how this connection might lead to change. In my research context, it was clear that the group were participating in order to develop, grow or change, to be formed in their faith. It appears for them that belonging and believing go together in forming faith. Therefore, I need to look elsewhere to understand the significance of community for change and growth. The work of another sociologist, Duncan MacLaren (2004), on plausibility shelters and then the idea of communities of practice will offer perspectives on this. However, first there is another issue of relationships that needs to be addressed based on the research, that of tolerance.

### 8.2.5 Tolerance

There was a regular occurrence in the interview responses of comments that revealed an attitude of tolerance and openness to the views and values of others. I noted earlier in this chapter that Perrin (2020) listed tolerance as a core value of Millennials which she attributes to pluralism and ethical liberalism that makes moral authority the right of individuals, and the power of choice that extends from lifestyle to beliefs and worldviews.

In my first interviews, I identified various comments that indicated a sense of tolerance and openness to the views and values of others, although the word tolerance was not used directly. When asked to identify the characteristics of maturity in faith, two of the group spoke of people who were 'appreciative and respectful' of different theologies and views, or of being able to accept challenges to their views with grace. This could be interpreted either as part of the pluralistic culture or a theological commitment to inclusion and a natural consequence of the commitment to relationship that I have reported already. In the final interviews, one participant who had spent several years in a non-Anglican church prior to the year, recognised that he came into the year being intolerant of different streams of faith, particularly within the Anglican church,

*and my challenge to my self was to move from intolerance to tolerance, from tolerance to appreciation and then from appreciation to collaboration. (P2,)*

He explained that over the year he had examined his views, partly through a training day on different 'streams of spirituality' and in conversation with others and recognised there was a 'spectrum of Anglicanism' and wherever they are,

*... they should still be respected and valued and if possible, to be collaborative with them. (P2, interview 2)*

This adds another dimension to the issue of tolerance and that is the context of the Anglican church in which the intern year took place. The Anglican church is 'An inclusive or broad church' (Billings, 2013, p.114). If the Church of England is the church of all the people in England, then it has to embrace a 'wide spectrum of theological opinion' (2013, p.114). Billings

continues to bemoan the fact that contemporary Anglicans cannot cope with pluralism and uncertainty but instead need definitive teaching. I am reminded of Fowler's stages of faith<sup>101</sup> where the early stages are marked by simplicity and a non-questioning faith; the later stages give rise to complexity and taking responsibility for one's own faith. The last stage implies the openness to the views of others that we might describe as tolerance. The attitude of openness and tolerance to the beliefs of others could be a positive sign of maturity and/or of acceptance of the Anglican way rather than a negative suggestion of assumption of the dominant culture.

### **8.2.6 Plausibility Shelters**

While tolerance is one response to the challenges posed by pluralism, there is also a danger of losing confidence in any differentiated beliefs. How do we maintain a commitment to the truth claims of Christianity, its values, and practices amongst the plurality of belief and lifestyle options? The concept of plausibility shelters offers a way forward and a practical understanding of the function of the community in the faith lives of emerging adults. It provides a way of understanding the impact of the community on the faith of my research group.

The phrase is used by MacLaren (2004), based on the ideas of Peter Berger, who used the term plausibility structure to refer to 'a social base to buttress the reality of those beliefs and the 'world' they represent' (Berger, 1979, cited in MacLaren, 2004, p.43). The family and the church are examples of such structures that are social and not ideas, or worldview structures. The challenge is that the world now offers a multitude of plausibility structures and options for belief and life-style choices that make it difficult to both maintain the boundaries of groups and easier to migrate between them. All this increases uncertainty especially in the realm of religious belief. This leads MacLaren to suggest that we create shelters instead, these are more temporary and less robust; like a bus shelter, they offer some protection for beliefs but 'no guarantee of immunity from a hostile climate' (2004, p.46). As such, 'shelter' may be more appropriate than 'structure' especially when we recognise the temporary nature of the community experienced during the year for my group, without diminishing its potential formative action.

MacLaren argues that the plausibility of religious belief relies more on social structure, which he labels 'reasons of the home', than the 'reasons of the head' or 'reasons of the heart' (2004, p.96). The reasons of the head point to the role of reason but it is not enough on its own. MacLaren points out that 'all thinking takes place in community' (2004, p.98). This community includes the historical 'tradition of thought', as well as the beliefs of the people around us. He defines the reasons of the heart as the needs that are met through belonging and highlights

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<sup>101</sup> See 2.2

three specific needs – identity, community, and meaning – that are emotional and psychological needs. This provides an interesting perspective on my discussion about the value of cognitive and affective dimensions of faith and the identified needs concur with my discussion so far. The ‘reasons of the home’ include the wider social structures in society, of which the home is just one, and to explain the significance of this he follows the work of Berger (1967 cited in MacLaren, 2004). MacLaren describes the loss of the ‘sacred canopy’, Berger’s term for the way that religion gave an ‘overarching explanation for social reality’ (MacLaren, 2004, p.107). Modernity caused the gradual collapse of this canopy, causing religion to retreat to their own worlds and institutions, huddling under umbrellas instead, as he extends the metaphor. The consequences of this are that religion is now plural and a competitive space, but it is also precarious in the face of competition from other worldviews and so need to be actively maintained. This maintenance is the role of the plausibility structure.<sup>102</sup> This structure has the two-fold function of providing ‘cohesion and exclusion’ (2004, p.109). Cohesion creates the walls around the community for faith and belief; exclusion protects from outside threats or influences. Cohesion comes from the relationships within the group, significant others and the agreement about beliefs that creates a ‘cognitive subculture’. This sense of cohesion was evident in my research group in their conversations about their shared faith, how they discussed their beliefs and drew strength from each other. I also reported the importance of significant adults, including supervisors and tutors that helped to support the development of faith and belief. MacLaren notes that living in community facilitates the cohesion process.

It is harder to see how the notion of exclusion fits with this group. MacLaren paints a picture of exclusion as intentional efforts to limit or censor contact with the outside world and strategies to eliminate threats. He acknowledges that few structures are this efficient, but most are weak and therefore the idea of shelter is more suited. Whilst some of the placement churches could adopt some of this exclusionary focus, it was not a deliberate part of the programme but in many ways the opposite was true. The intern group were encouraged to think about engagement with the outside world, in terms of ‘mission’ or outreach; inclusion rather than exclusion was emphasised.<sup>103</sup> MacLaren recognises that exclusion is not always possible, especially in European contexts; what is needed instead of exclusion or ‘fortification’ is education, a process that will equip and enable people to handle competing views.

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<sup>102</sup> MacLaren’s description is similar to the secular 1 and secular 2 models that Taylor proposes as I discussed in chapter 2. He does not offer anything similar to secular 3 which means his solutions are aimed at secular 2 modes of faith or the problems of modernity. These problems may still be relevant although I suspect that Taylor (and Root following him) would beg to differ.

<sup>103</sup> The ‘echo’ group participated in a module entitled ‘The Mission of God’ with this emphasis and was the course that was cited the most in the interviews as having a positive impact.



MacLaren's notion of plausibility and the importance of social relationships in community provide an important descriptive of the experience of the intern group. The emphasis on community and relationship reported in the interviews concurs with this theory of plausibility. It is essential to note that plausibility relies on cognitive, affective, and social processes in order to fully operate as a shelter, but within that shelter confidence in faith and belief can grow.

### **8.2.7 Communities of Practice**

The second theoretical frame that can be applied to the research group is that of communities of practice. 'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger-Traynor, 2015, p1). As the name implies, there is a focus on practice and in a Christian context, Shepherd (2011) suggests that the church can be understood as a community of practice when it 'sustains the memory of the gospel and seeks to make this known to others' or in other words, it provides a place where people can 'engage in the task of "trying to be Christian"' (2011, p.36). He draws on Graham's (2002) description of 'Intentional Christian Community' that engages in practices of faith 'that seek to make sense of their experience of faith and seek to encounter God in meaningful ways to their situation of life' (Graham, 2002, p.147). It is relevant to note that the intern programme describes the community houses as a place for intentional Christian community, where the residents are encouraged to develop shared practices of prayer, worship and sharing stories.<sup>104</sup> The interview responses point to both the houses, and the intern group, as fitting this description of community of practice. The characteristics of communities of practice as defined by Wenger-Traynor will make this clearer.

The three characteristics are the domain, the community, and the practice (Wenger-Traynor, 2015). The domain is a shared area of interest and a commitment from the members to that area with an implied shared competence. My research group shared a commitment to Christ and to serving the church for the year. The community means that members interact, help each other, and learn together through joint activities and discussions. This was clearly a key part of the experience of the year for the group in both formalised sessions and informal gatherings of the group. Third, the practice entails being practitioners and developing a shared repertoire of resources and stories that support the growth of a shared practice. This domain is harder to demonstrate from the interviews, but it was part of the youth work certificate course and the theological reflection activities to talk together and share practice, whether that was ideas to try out with a youth group or exploring ways to resolve a difficult problem. It is

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<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 1.2

interesting to note that the concept of communities of practice originated through the study of apprenticeships conducted by Lave and Wenger. Whereas most people understand that learning takes place through the relationship of the apprentice and the master, their study revealed 'a more complex set of relationships' (Wenger-Traynor, 2015, p4) including other apprentices and those further on in their training, through which learning took place. Thus, this community acts as 'a living curriculum for the apprentice' (2015, p.4). My expectation prior to the interviews was that the church community and its life might be this formative environment as suggested by the theoretical perspectives in chapter 2. However, the group gave more weight to the influence of each other and external relationships above that of the church community.

This theme of community echoes throughout the next two themes of encounter and narrative, providing a core context for the resulting formation.

## **8.3 Making Sense of Encounter**

### **8.3.1 Experience and Authenticity.**

Perrin identified authenticity as a core value of millennials which she framed in terms of 'aspiring to a life that has meaning and integrity' (Perrin, 2020, p.9). She suggested that this works out as a desire for depth and sincerity but also in a need for genuine relationship and community. It is hard to separate out the theme of community and belonging, but for the purpose of my discussion of authenticity and the theme of personal experience or encounters arising from my research, the insights of Taylor are useful.

As I wrote in 8.1.3, Taylor (2007) describes the culture of authenticity that characterises our current age arising from expressive individualism. This move towards authentic self-fulfilment is played out in the religious realm by a move away from connecting with the sacred through church to the right to choose a religious life or practice that makes sense in terms of individual spiritual development (2007, p.486). Wuthnow (1998) described this as a move from 'dwelling' – based on the inhabitation of sacred spaces to experience the presence of God, to 'seeking' – a self-oriented approach to spirituality that seeks to make sense of spiritual understanding and social reality. The limitation of the seeking approach is the loss of 'doctrinal rigour'. Taylor identifies an emphasis on passion in movements such as Pietism and Methodism in the eighteenth century that caused a shift towards a prioritisation of 'deeply felt personal insight' or feeling over the authority of reason; 'to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn't seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life' (Taylor, 2007, p.489).

Again, this brings me to the discussion about the role of the cognitive and affective domains in faith formation that I have identified as problematic. In chapter 2, I argued that the dominant model of faith formation has emphasised the cognitive understanding of belief and doctrine over the emotional. Taylor's thesis suggests that the age of authenticity means that personal insight and feelings are more important than intellectual orthodoxy and are alienated from the churches, who 'find it hard to talk to people in this mindset' (2007, p.495). Taylor suggests that young people are searching for spiritual depth and an experience of the sacred out of a dissatisfaction with the immanent frame. This is couched within a narrative of wholeness of the self, 'and a reclaiming of the place of feelings, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason' (2007, p.507). He describes an 'ethic of authenticity' that focuses on discovering wholeness and spiritual depth through focussing on individual experience. Therefore, 'spirituality must speak to this experience' and the new 'mode of spiritual life is thus the quest' (2007, p.507-8). The search takes place outside the formal structures of institutional religion that threatens to pre-empt, limit, or dictate the terms of the quest. This idea brings me back to the search for meaning and vocation as discussed above, and the concept of a quest would fit with the narrative offered by the participants. However, the participants in my research were conducting their search within the frame of the church rather than outside these structures. Whether or not this had any limiting effect, as Taylor suggests, was not part of the research and so would need further investigation.

It is relevant to note that Taylor argues against those who state that the personal search for self-discovery is ultimately selfish and superficial and thereby rules out the possibility of self-denial or sacrifice that would be part of the Christian faith. Whilst this may be true for some, it is entirely possible that the journey of self-discovery will lead to a life lived in relation to a transcendent order. His interpretation of two kinds of 'religious sensibility' (2007, p.512) in terms of the relation to external authority is helpful. The first kind is the new form of quest which is put off by sources of authority and refuses to give in to them; the second puts authority first but risks foreclosing on any exploration. Taylor observes that these are extremes and most spiritual life is found in the middle ground (2007, p.512). In relation to my research my own inclination in designing the programme was to encourage an openness to explore different ideas and approaches to church, the Bible, and theology as sources of authority and to be wary of those who join with more closed and conservative views. It was evident in the research findings that this openness to new experiences and ideas existed for each member of the group and this contributed to the process of change.

In pointing to a way forward towards a deeper religious engagement in this context, Taylor would agree with Wuthnow (1998) who proposes that spiritual practice is key. Wuthnow suggests that intentional, consistent, self-disciplined practice leads to a discernment of

timeless truth and an awareness of being part of something beyond the self. Taylor lists examples of practices such as meditation, charitable work, prayer, or pilgrimage. Taylor highlights the practice of pilgrimage as representing the quest for faith and meaning in general but specifically describes the attraction of pilgrimage to the Taizé community in France. This represents not only the continued importance of community, and the fact that Taizé encourages faith exploration without prejudice to the outcome. It also draws attention to the important role of what Taylor calls, the 'festive'; describing the place of events such as World Youth Days – the equivalent to the summer camps described by my participants – as well as more secular events such as rock concerts that offer a powerful experience with the potential for the transcendent to 'erupt into our lives' (Taylor, 2007, p.518). Taylor concludes this discussion by observing that the 'momentary sense of wow' is not enough and the search for ways to take it further makes practices 'their main access point to traditional forms of faith' (2007, p.518). I have noted the important role of spiritual practices in chapter 6 and will return to this theme later.

### **8.3.2 Experience and Personhood – Faith in a Secular Age**

The American youth ministry professor, Andrew Root (2017) applies Taylor's work to the field of youth ministry and the church in the USA. He addresses the rise of moralistic therapeutic deism and how the response of the church can be understood in the light of Taylor's understanding of secularity.<sup>105</sup> Root offers a practical theological response that leads to a proposal for faith formation.

The problem, as Root defines it, is that faith has been rooted in the narrative frame of 'secular 2' whereby faith is defined as 'participation in religious institutions and consent to certain beliefs' (Root, 2017, p.148).<sup>106</sup> 'Secular 3' and the immanent frame makes the reality of transcendence and divine action in our lives seem like an improbability. However, in Taylor's idea of the age of authenticity, Root sees a way forward. The difficulty with the age of authenticity is that it idolises 'youthfulness', the spirit of the young who are seen to be the most authentic. It risks making reality all about desire, individualism, and wants, that have no space for transcendence. However, Root also finds hope within the age of authenticity that can challenge the narrative of secular 3.

This is where Root turns to theology and finds an understanding of faith based on the apostle Paul's phrase 'in Christ' that is worked out in the two areas of experience and personhood. First, this affirms the importance of experience alongside belief; the apostle Paul was changed by an experience of the risen and living Christ that transformed his life; so too we need to trust

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<sup>105</sup> I discussed this in Chapter 2.3

<sup>106</sup> This suggests another reason for my argument that faith formation has focused on the cognitive.

experience and 'follow the experience of the living Christ' (Root, 2017, p.136). However, Root does not advocate for all experience but claims that the experience that creates the mystical union between the divine and human is 'cruciform', this is the experience of death. He explains that this includes experiences of loss and rejection, fear, and isolation. For Paul, new life only comes from death because through these experiences Christ ministers to us in a shared experience of the cross. For this experience to lead to an openness rather than reaffirm an expressive individualism or subjectivism, Root argues that we need to recognise the significance of personhood.

Personhood reminds us that the experience of being 'in Christ' is 'an experience of the person of Jesus encountering our own person' (2017, p.137). It reminds us that we live in a personal world not an impersonal reality as secular 3 insists; and furthermore, that authenticity seeks something more than the impersonal. Root, following Taylor (2007), identifies the theological term, hypostasis, to represent this sense of essential personhood that calls us into relationship with God and others. Taylor describes how the Cappadocians developed a new theology of the Trinity of persons in communion (koinonia). God is a personal being who has both agency and the potential for communion. God's purpose in the world, especially through the incarnation is to bring us into communion, to effect deification or theosis. 'Salvation is only effected by, one might say is, our being in communion with God through the community of humans in communion, viz. the church.' (Taylor, 2007, p.279). This makes communion or love the central defining feature of God and our relation to him. It affirms that the body, heart and emotions are all important (not just the head) and this communion 'has to integrate persons in their true identities' (2007, p.279).

This theological frame brings together the themes of my previous discussion, the search for identity and selfhood, the primacy of personal experience and the importance of relationships and belonging. The significance of story is addressed next by Root as holding together experience and personhood in the way that Paul is taken into Christ (2007, p.142). Story, as Root explains it, has both a human and divine aspect. At a human level it is 'the expression and explanation of our deepest experiences' (2017, p.143) through the telling of which, we open ourselves up to others and invite them to share in our being.

But Paul's encounter with Christ also invites him to join the story or narrative arc of Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul's experience is a mystical one that takes him through the negation or death of his own story – losing both identity and meaning, being transformed to the new life of Jesus. Therefore, Paul can say, 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). It means that faith is not to be understood as knowledge of information or participating in a church, something that we do or create, but it is a gift. This gift comes through

negation in the experience of the cross and resurrection that shapes the story of our lives through the Holy Spirit. Root describes the implications of this as being a call 'into God's action' which is ministry. God ministers to us, and we minister his mercy, love, and compassion to others. Faith then, is about being open to the transcendent, divine action that comes through negation and 'the act of being ministered to and ministering to others' (Root, 2007, p.150). This is where Root's argument returns to the relations between persons, (see 8.2.3 above), and, in its focus on action, it also resonates with my argument for vocation to be at the centre of faith formation. Root does not use the term vocation but instead defines faith as ministry, stating that as we receive ministry or minister to others, we experience divine action. This is close to my view (following Fowler, see 8.1.4) that vocation is about being in partnership with God in His purposes for the world.

In chapter 2 I explored the concept of desire that leads us to union with the trinitarian God, a faith not based on assent to doctrine, but one based more on experience and emotion. Root's focus is similar in terms of emphasising being 'in Christ', but he suggests desire and want can be part of the problem with authenticity that means we focus on the drives of the id and so lose sight of the transcendent. His emphasis on negation as the place of divine action would seem to point in the opposite direction; who would naturally desire those experiences of death? However, my conception of desire is not that of self-fulfilment but a recognition of the longing for the transcendent, divine reality that opens us to the action of God. This longing is part of the definition of wise living that I proposed as part of the habitus of faith (see 2.5), but earlier in chapter 2.4.2 I noted the idea of passion as a basis for faith, a faith based on the passion of Christ that includes suffering and recognises that following Christ involves sacrifice, and as Dean observes, in the process 'his desires become their desires, his story becomes their story' (Dean, 2004, p.51). Dean's argument is that young people are looking for a faith to die for and a faith worth living for, a faith that calls them to live for God with passion and sacrifice. This is an embodied lived experience of faith and that which I hoped to engender in the participants on the intern year.

This leads to the question of whether there is a resonance or dissonance with the interview responses that might identify the role of negation or sacrifice in the stories of faith. In the first interviews, descriptions of encounters with God in their childhood and adolescence were mostly couched in terms of positivity and feeling a sense of love, warmth, and acceptance. Two spoke of God helping them through difficult times. However, when asked to identify bible stories that they identified with, most of them gave accounts of people like Jonah, Mary, and David who they stated were people who had kept going through difficulty. Although I asked the group to describe times of difficulty, the answers pointed to a deeper reliance on God through spiritual practices such as prayer or else to support from others. It is possible to

suggest that the whole experience was one of negation and sacrifice, in terms of the disruption and dislocation involved in moving to a new environment and the challenges posed. I have discussed this in relation to liminality and I think it would not be stretching Root's definition to suggest that negation might include liminal experiences. They are of course involved in ministry and service but, as noted already, most did not make much reference to this. It would be true to say that this involvement was in response to God's call to action but whilst there were reports of meeting God in the everyday, not many of the group talked about their ministry as being a place of encounter with God. Root's work was published after the research was completed and so it was not possible to explore his perspective with the group more specifically.

### **8.3.3 Experience and Liminality**

As the research group members described the experiences during the year that had brought about change in them, the word 'different' came to the fore. The sense of being in an unusual place or 'out of their comfort zone' caused the disruption and dissonance that I have noted as significant in bringing about transformation. This is the experience that Van Gennep (1960) termed liminality, but its full impact is made through the involvement of others. For Turner (1969), this is in *communitas* and as such this theme interacts with the first theme of relationships and does not stand alone in producing change and growth.

My discussion of research on gap years in chapter 3 revealed a regular theme of change and growth happening because of young adults being in new, unusual, or challenging situations away from home or their usual environment; this can be described as an experience of liminality. The anthropologist, Van Gennep (1960) explains rites of passage by which groups of people engage in various rituals with the goal of ensuring 'a change of condition or passage from one magico-religious or secular group to another' (1960, p.11). He identified three categories of rites that make the process of transition, rites of separation (preliminal), rites of transition (liminal), and rites of incorporation (postliminal). Each category may not have equal importance in specific rites, for example marriage ceremonies will emphasise incorporation, whereas funerals highlight separation. The liminal which is the period of transition and may be understood as taking place on the 'threshold', either literally or symbolically. Van Gennep explains how the three-stage pattern can be seen in broader aspects of social life, including the crossing of thresholds of life stages. The view that emerging adulthood is itself a time of transition (see chapter 3) suggests that this whole period could be viewed as liminal. This may be helpful in some respects but, for my discussion, the shorter period represented by the intern year is more appropriate for consideration as liminal.

The work of Turner (1972, 1974) gives further insight to this application. Turner, an American anthropologist who studied primitive tribal customs, describes those in liminality as “threshold people” (1974, p.81) whose status and characteristics are ambiguous, neither ‘here nor there’, ‘betwixt and between’ the normal positions ascribed by society, laws, culture, or tradition; it is likened to ‘being in the womb, ... to the wilderness ...’ (1974, p.81). Turner proposes that those in liminality, for example in initiation or puberty rites, possess nothing in terms of material goods, status or position and have to be humble and passive. ‘It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life’ (1974, p.81). Although this does not apply to the intern programme in absolute terms, there is some similarity in that they are given a relatively small income and have a low status in most of the placements and have very little power. This is not deliberate to provoke the sense of liminality but the idea of change and preparation for later life is a more intentional aim.

This experience of liminality is not encountered alone but Turner describes how the process creates a specific relational bond. This brings us to the concept of ‘communitas’, a term that Turner prefers to ‘community’ to emphasise that it is a different ‘modality of social relationship’ (1974, p.82). It is an unstructured bond forged in the liminal period between equal individuals sharing a common experience. The rituals of the liminal transition are characterised by ‘egalitarian and cooperative behaviour’ where ‘distinctions of rank, office and status’ are suspended (Turner, 1972(a), p.398). This leads to a more ‘primordial’ way of relating, free of role-playing and based on the recognition of shared humanity. Turner adds that *communitas* is often equated with love in a religious sense, both the love of God and others. He relates this in relation to the weakness and poverty of the liminal period, and how this has been emulated by groups including monastic orders, in order to convert liminality into a way of life (Turner, 1972(b)). This sense of intense social togetherness in *communitas* is used by Hirsch (2006) as a model for mission in the church in opposition to the patterns of ‘huddle and cuddle’; *communitas* offers an alternative of people coming together around a daring adventure of action in the world. Rather than seeing this as a temporary experience, he states that liminality and *communitas* are the ‘normative situation and condition of the pilgrim people of God’ (2006, p.222).

It is arguable that the group of interns experienced something close to *communitas*, particularly the three who lived together. The experience of liminality may have been amplified by the disruption of being in a new place, of losing status and experiencing ‘voluntary poverty’. However, the difficulty in following this idea through is the postliminal stage of re-incorporation. My research did not extend to what happened next, nor is it part of the project to oversee the next stage. However, there is a clear ending marked by a religious ritual – a service of



eucharist, presentation of certificates and a celebratory party – that may serve to mark the end of the transition period, but it does not serve to integrate to the next stage.

Both the idea of liminality and the prior discussion of negation raise questions about how the participants experience of difficulty and uncertainty affected their faith formation.

#### **8.3.4 Experience and Uncertainty**

In my discussions so far, I have emphasised the positive formational effects of experience on the intern group. In chapter 6.3 I reported the effects of times of uncertainty and questioning in relation to questions I asked about times of difficulty during the year. I noted how questioning faith is part of Westerhoff's (2012) model of faith development and how it is important for young people to ask the difficult questions and the significance of a community in creating plausibility as well as support. In 8.3.2 above, I described Root's (2017) proposal that ministry is about negation and 'death experiences' that related to my discussion in chapter 2.4.2 about desire and mysticism. When we understand desire as a longing for what we do not have, it means that desire for God leads to the search for God. However, the idea of a search implies that God may not always be found, and this is a theme that mysticism may help us to understand.

In the mystical tradition spirituality is often described using the words "kataphatic" and "apophatic". Apophatic is sometimes known as the *via negativa*, or the way of unknowing that recognises the mystery of God (Heath, 2008, p.17). Heath relates this to the concept of kenosis, self-emptying that means we lose our attachment to idols, images, and human traditions in a process of cleansing or purgation. Kataphatic spirituality is the *via affirmativa*, an affirmative way, described by Heath as 'a path of spiritual advancement' leading to union with God (Heath, 2008, p.18). What is important is that 'for all mystics, there is a process of growth into increasing holiness' resulting in 'an ever-increasing capacity to love God' (Heath, 2008, p.19).

There is some suggestion in the data, reported in 6.3, of struggle and difficulty but it was not described as apophatic experiences of absence or doubt. Instead, these times were met as a challenge to find the resources to keep going and these were found in the support of others (*communitas*), and in the Christian practices of prayer and Bible reading. Dean's (2004)<sup>107</sup> discussion of passion in youth ministry points to the ancient pattern of purgation, illumination, and union. Purgation and illumination are characterised by practices of faith through which a *habitus* is shaped and where union is marked by contemplation and communion with God (Dean, 2004, pp.161-172). There was some suggestion in the use of Taizé-style worship of the use of contemplative prayer, but this was not an avenue I explored in the interviews.

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<sup>107</sup> See 2.4.2

My interpretation of the data has led me to the view that all of the experiences described were taken as opportunities for growth and even difficult times were formational, and this is borne out in my discussion of liminality and disruption in the previous section. In this sense, the experiences of uncertainty and difficulty moved them on the *via affirmativa* rather than the *via negativa*. During the intern year I encouraged an atmosphere of openness and questioning, of exploration and enquiry, and this appeared to yield a positive impact on formation.

It would need another study to consider whether there are specific things or barriers that would serve to counter the positive formation that I have described or experiences that might serve to negate the process of growth.

This brings me to the next section on narratives of purpose, and a return to the theme of community as *communitas* that both provides an important context for growth and learning as well as being part of the learning itself. But how else can we understand the learning that happened?

## **8.4 Making Sense of Narratives of Purpose and Practice**

In Fowler's (2000) model this is about the core story, how we understand the overarching narrative of God's story and our role in it. The formal and informal training opportunities offered gave the group the chance to learn about theology and the Bible but also to develop personal practices that would help them to make the connections with their own lives and calling. In this section I will make sense of the tension I proposed exists between the cognitive and other ways of knowing. Having suggested we have over-emphasised cognitive knowledge; how do we redress the balance without undervaluing the significance of knowledge about the faith?

The first answer lies in the notion of *habitus* that I outlined in chapter 2 that gives a basis in practical theology. The practical outworking comes through an understanding of story and narrative that relates what we know about God and theology to the reality of our lives. We then work this out through the practices of faith. It is important to tell and re-tell those stories and to engage in reflection to help us discern the presence and action of God in our lives, so this section will end with a discussion of reflective practice.

### **8.4.1 Habitus**

I discussed the concept of *habitus* in Chapter 2 based on the writing of Farley (1983) and then located it within a practical theological frame and noted how Smith (2013) draws on the same concept but follows Bourdieu. I will recap on this briefly before considering its relevance to the research group.

Farley's motivation is to recover theology as a practical understanding rather than an academic pursuit. As such his concern reflected mine and so his answer in the form of habitus is one that I wanted to include. Farley uses habitus to describe theology as 'a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals' (1983, p.35). It has the nature of a habit with 'the primary character of wisdom' and as such is related to a practical knowledge of God. Smith, following Bourdieu, uses the term, 'practical sense', the achievement of which is 'to have absorbed communally shared plausibility structures that constitute the world in certain ways' (2013, p.89).

This is not just applied knowledge, but the knowledge is gained through action. Habitus is about an embodied Christian faith that Miller-McLemore (2011)<sup>108</sup> describes as the ultimate purpose of practical theology. It relies on a community that serves as a plausibility structure and enables practice. This means that habitus is a helpful concept in the light of my discussion so far on community and plausibility and a discussion in the next section on practices. Bourdieu's description of habitus as practical sense or a 'feel for the game' is helpful, however, where Bourdieu's account is problematic is in his view of reflective practice. Smith (2013) explains that Bourdieu's understanding of the priority of action rules out the idea of reflection that would translate the practical knowledge or 'know-how' into propositional, theoretical knowledge. He gives the example of 'rites' that 'resist conceptualization' (2013, p.91) and have their meaning in themselves. This is partly in resistance to religion becoming purely 'a system of ideas and propositions', which I am also keen to avoid but it seems to suggest that we should not even try to understand rites and rituals. This contradicts the principle of reflective practice that was reported as significant to my group. Farley (1983) argues, 'human beings rarely if ever exist in the world without reflective responses' (1983, p.160). The denial of reflection also undermines the practice of mystagogy that I discussed in chapter 2, whereby rituals such as baptism and the eucharist are discussed and explored as part of catechetical training after the ritual event.<sup>109</sup> As I discussed in chapter 7.6, reflective practice is an essential part of the process of meaning-making and making the connection between cognitive and affective faith, or in Smith's terms, between the kinaesthetic and the poetic (see 2.7.3).

This still leaves me with the question of whether habitus was formed in my group. Smith states Bourdieu's description of the process of acquiring a habitus is one of 'becoming a native' in a community of practice through 'a slow process of co-option, initiation and incorporation' (2013, p.93). Smith uses this to demonstrate his argument that we are formed through embodied actions through sacred and secular liturgies – the repeated words and ritualised actions that

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<sup>108</sup> See chapter 4.2

<sup>109</sup> See chapter 2.7.3

incorporate us into a social body. This is a process that is not cognitive and happens without us realising it. As an example, Smith suggests that being told not to hold a knife in the left hand is passing on a social imaginary and an image of how our social world operates. The same principle applies to being encouraged to kneel for confession.

The difficulty with this is it is hard to prove or at least to evidence. If it happens sub-consciously then we cannot describe it. My questions to the research group about the impact of the practices of church worship yielded little insight or awareness of any effect on them. In the light of Smith's (and Bourdieu's) claims this should not be a surprise. What is evident from the research is that the group articulated a growth in their faith, in confidence and understanding; of a strong sense of belonging to a community of practice; and an immersion in the practices of the church community. All of this would point to the conditions for habitus to develop. My attempt to lift the hood and to reveal the engine running underneath (Smith, 2013) may have failed to identify the influence of formational liturgies as Smith describes, but the descriptions of their faith and incorporation to a community would suggest a habitus exists. Given that all but one of the group had grown up as part of church communities, this is not surprising, but the year offered each member of the group a more intense immersive experience that would confirm and hopefully solidify the habituation of earlier experiences.

The concept of habitus is connected to history, to past knowledge and experience of both the individual and the social structures that form the context of our lives. One of the most important ways in which we construct meaning out of experience is through story. This brings me back to a consideration of narrative and story that appeared in my discussions of the work of Fowler and then Root earlier in this chapter.

#### **8.4.2 Story and Narrative**

The importance of story or narrative in the search for meaning and identity has been a recurrent theme throughout this thesis. We can understand the social imaginary as providing a narrative and the 'happy midi-narrative' described in chapter 3 is a constructed story to make sense of the world. I have noted the role of narrative in Hauerwas' work on story-formed community<sup>110</sup> and Root's argument that story is the way we explain our deepest experiences but also how we affirm our personhood in the narrative of Jesus and find meaning in the two-part drama of death and resurrection. This is expressed well in the nuanced book title, 'The Story We Find Ourselves In' from Brian McLaren (McLaren, 2003).<sup>111</sup> MacIntyre (2006) expresses a similar view by using the metaphor of the stage; we did not design the stage nor write the drama of which we are a part, and we may be the main character in our drama but

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<sup>110</sup> See 6.4.1

<sup>111</sup> This book is one that the intern group were asked to read during the year.

have subordinate roles in those of others (2006, p.213). Again, we recognise the importance of relationship as our stories inter-connect and the role of the community, 'the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity' (2006, p.221). MacIntyre continues to state that we are all story-tellers, and it is through story and myth that we learn about the world and our place in it; 'I can only ask the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (2006, p.216). This locates the question of vocation within the meaning found through narrative, which was the theme of Fowler's (2000) work on vocation in his description of the 'core story' as one of the three vectors of meaning<sup>112</sup> to which I can now return.

Fowler offers an understanding of the narrative structure of the Christian story as a way to discover a perspective on human calling. He follows MacIntyre in noting that this structure, 'gathers and grounds the worldviews, beliefs, and values of a people and a culture' (Fowler, 2000, p.66). Fowler summarises the narrative based on the work of Fackre (1978, cited in Fowler, 2000) in seven sections: God, creation, fall, liberation and covenant, incarnation, church, commonwealth of love and justice.<sup>113</sup> The first, 'God', describes trinitarian relationship and how the theme of covenant partnership with this relational God continues through the other sections. Fowler uses the metaphor of drama or dance to explain how vocation involves being part of the drama, moving with others, making creative contributions, developing individual talents, and finding clues about the larger story. At the same time, we 'know and trust that the actor-director is also present – in masked or hidden form – sharing, bearing, and working to redeem and restore this anarchic corner to the goals of the larger play' (2000, p.113).

In the interview process I asked the members of the group to tell their stories of their own history prior to the year and then to reflect on the year itself. In doing so, I asked them to identify times of growth and change, the significant other actors in their stories, and their encounters with God. The formal training programme was aimed at enabling an understanding of the larger story and the encouragement to read the whole Bible<sup>114</sup> was aimed at helping them to gain an insight into the whole story. The monthly training days included time for sharing stories of experiences and this was reported by three participants in the interviews as being important.

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<sup>112</sup> See 8.1.4

<sup>113</sup> McLaren (2003) uses a similar 7-fold description: Creation, Crisis, Calling, Conversation, Christ, Community (church), Consummation.

<sup>114</sup> After several previous groups failed to read the whole Bible in the year, this group used 'E100' (Kuniholm, 2012), a Bible reading plan that gives an overview of the Bible in 100 readings. The group read this in the first 100 days of the year.

The descriptions of narrative as enacted story using the metaphor of drama or dance remind us that story-telling is not just a theoretical pursuit. The journey through the story is lived out in the daily activity and practices of faith, which was a dominant theme in the interview accounts of growth and change.

#### **8.4.3 Practices of Faith**

One of the major changes during the year revealed in the interview responses was the attention given to the practice of prayer. I noted in the first interviews that prayer was rarely mentioned and yet at the end of the year, each member of the group spoke of their prayer lives as being significant in their growth and encounters with God. This prayer was both individual and corporate, including morning prayer together in the community house, in small groups, or prayer meetings; none spoke of prayer in church services.

The other change in practice was silence and solitude. Four of the group related the time on retreat when they were introduced to this practice and how this has become a regular thing for them. For some the practice of prayer is also one of solitude. Other practices included bible reading, journaling, worship, and sabbath.

In 8.3.1 above I noted that both Taylor (2007) and Wuthnow (1998) regard spiritual practices as key to deeper spiritual engagement and to an awareness of the transcendent other. There is an important connection here with the theory of habitus as practice and the forming of habits of faith within a community of practice. In chapter 2, I discussed the views of Smith (2009, 2013) on cultural liturgies and how practice shapes our lives and our desires. Several responses indicated that these practices and the wider practice of service had led to a deeper and more engaged relationship with God; most spoke of God being more personal and closer, less of a distant God known through doctrine but known in a more experiential way.

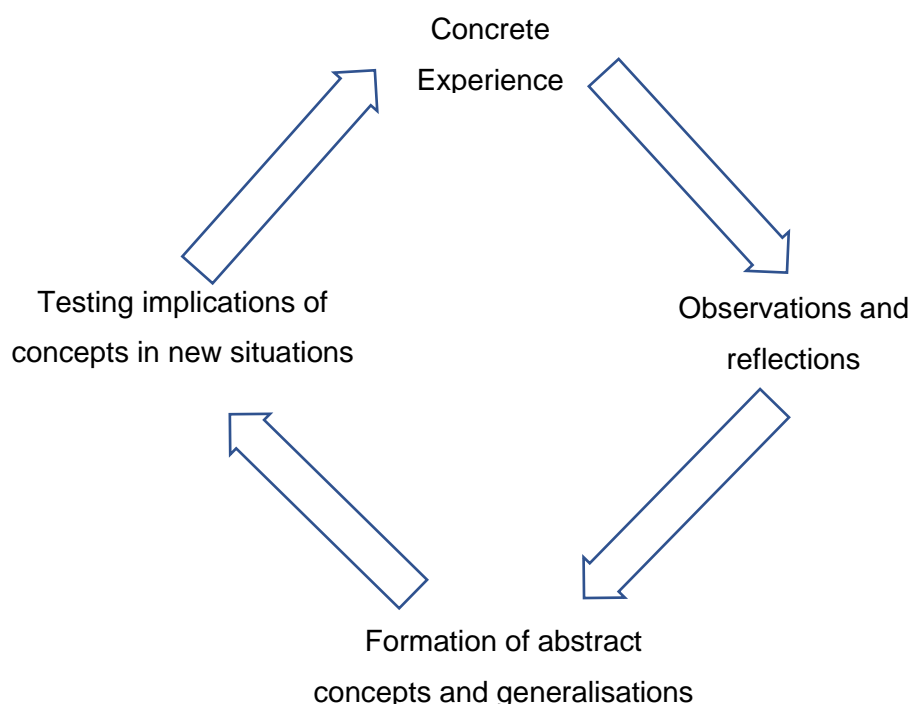
Setran and Wilhoit (2020) trace the historical development of the renewed interest in practices as part of faith formation. They cite the work of Willard, MacIntyre, and Smith amongst others and conclude that correct instruction is not sufficient but that it is 'repeated practices that gradually inculcate the virtues necessary for living a faithful life' (2020, p.10). Thus, the effective engagement with practices that I found amongst the research group goes some way to answering the question I posed in chapter 2 around the problem of over-emphasis on cognitive models of formation. However, Setran and Wilhoit highlight a critique of spiritual practices that may be valid in my group.

The critique is that spiritual practices can foster an individualistic posture, they may be tools for drawing closer to Christ, but they risk losing the disposition to focus on others and the social consequences of the gospel (2020, p.12). There is a clear focus in the interview

responses on the self and personal relationship with God; however, there is also an evident emphasis on relationship with others and the community of faith. What is missing from the interview responses is any significant account of how the daily practices of life and ministry within the church placement had any formative influence on the respondents. In Chapter 2, I reported the proposal of Spencer (2016) for a 'social liturgy' that is the practice of social action arising out of the love of God. I expressed the concerns of Roxburgh (2013) that an emphasis on spiritual practices could lead to a personal and privatised faith. The evidence from my research suggests he may be right; although these young adults were engaged in serving the church and in regular acts of service in the community, this was not expressed by many of them as places of encounter with God or as formative on their faith. The only place it was highlighted was in the focus group activity where service in the church and local community was stressed as important to discipleship training. This may be a weakness in the structure of the interviews that did not ask this question directly and therefore points to an area for further research. The unspoken assumption of practical service may be implied in the next section where the connection between practice and theory is made through the practice of reflection, something that was identified as formative by many of the participants.

#### 8.4.4 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a core skill of youth work and ministry. It is both essential for the youth worker to reflect on her/his practice, but it is also a critical part of the informal education method of working with young people. In this respect it goes together with experiential learning which, according to Kolb (2014) has its roots in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin



and Jean Piaget.<sup>115</sup> David Kolb (2014) is attributed with developing the learning cycle based on Lewin's model of action research (2014, p.63):

This process is frequently used as the basis for reflective practice (Young, 2006; Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Thompson, et al., 2008). Jeffs and Smith suggest that in order to engage others in reflection on experience we must look at our own (2005, p.60). Reflection is a process in which 'people recapture experience, mull it over and evaluate it' (Jeffs and Smith, 2004, p.59). Young suggests that reflective practice is essential to the 'art of youth work' and moves beyond reflection on experience to a question of values. As part of their work routine, youth workers need 'to constantly revisit, reflect on and renew their values' (2006, p.96). She argues that this is part of developing ethical practice and so should include philosophical reflection to understand themselves and their 'philosophy of life'. The aim is not just to know what is right, but to do the right thing; drawing on Aristotle's view of virtue, she proposes youth workers need to develop 'a clear set of values (understanding of 'virtue' and the 'habit' (disposition towards acting virtuously)' (Young, 2006, p.102). This is not a religious or theological text, but Young has established a connection between good reflective practice and the development of habitus that serves my discussion well.

Theological reflection is a similar activity that accepts theology as process rather than product (Graham, et al., 2005, p.5); it is about relating theory to practice and 'starts with experience and brings theology to bear on it' (Nash and Nash, 2009, p.35). Thompson et al. (2008) list five definitions of theological reflection with different nuances but Nash and Nash simplify this by offering two questions that theological reflection asks. The first requires us to discover resources from our faith that give insight to or critique a given situation; the second asks, 'What of God and the kingdom can be found in the experience?' (Nash and Nash, 2009, p.37). This understanding of theology arising out of experience and practice locates theological reflection as part of practical theology (Graham, et al., 2005). Graham explains three tasks of theological reflection: the formation of members, building the community of faith, and communicating the faith to a wider culture (2005, p.10). These tasks mean that 'talk about God' is made possible leading to the development of the practice of faith. As such, it is a core concept and tool for the formation of faith in the intern year.

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<sup>115</sup> Kolb acknowledges contributions of other 'liminal scholars' but these three 'stand as the foremost intellectual ancestors' (Kolb, 2014, p.47).



## 8.5 Summary

My research question set out to examine how a one-year internship programme can enable the formation of faith in young adults. I have identified the quest for vocation as an overall driving narrative or *raison d'être* for each member of the research group. This works out as a search for meaningful purpose in partnership with the God of the covenant. The three themes of relationship, encounter, and narrative were identified as the core influences on formation through involvement in the programme. This chapter has interpreted these themes in the light of a trinitarian theology and theoretical perspectives drawn from the social sciences that helps to explain the processes of formation and to point towards the practices that generate the formation of a habitus of faith. The next chapter will develop this into a proposal for practice that will generate a faith habitus in the context of the one-year programme in the future.

## Chapter 9 The Formation of a Habitus of Faith

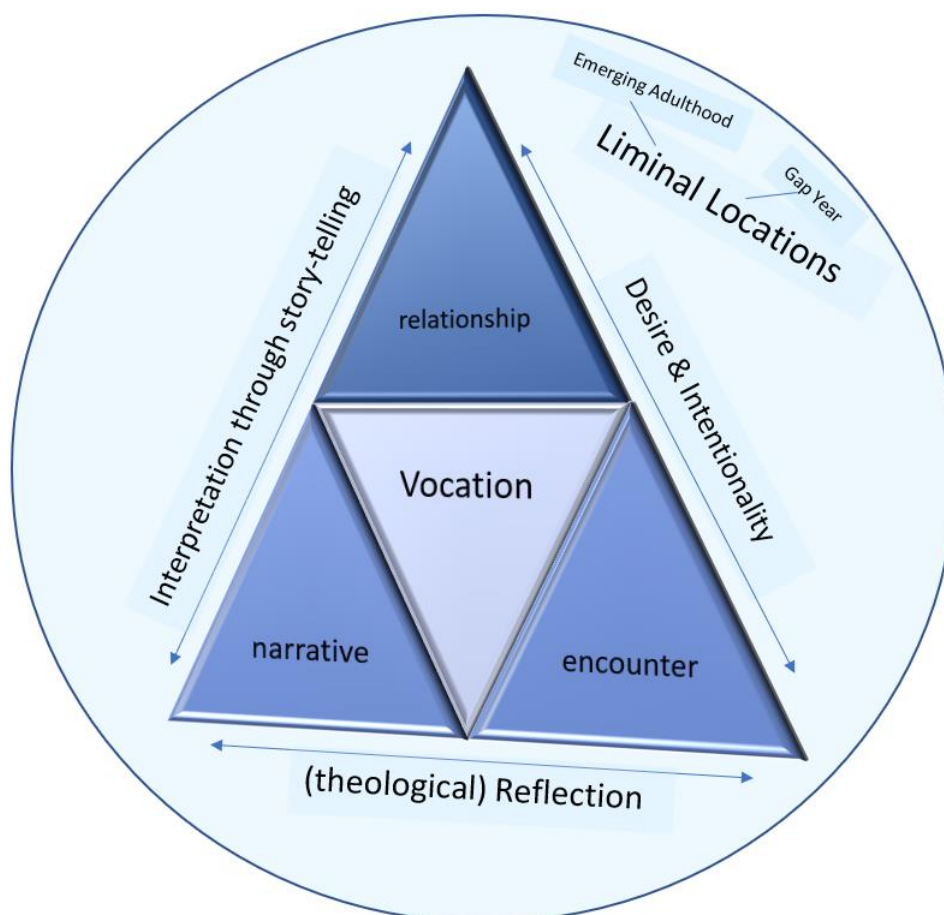
### 9.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will propose a model of formation and seek to draw out the important theoretical, theological and practical implications for future practice. This will begin to outline the contribution to knowledge and professional practice in the specific field of internship and apprenticeship programmes but potentially with a wider application to faith formation of emerging adults in other contexts.

### 9.1 Generating a Faith Habitus

The model I have developed is based on the understanding that vocation sits at the centre of the processes of faith formation, the calling to be loved and known by God and the call to follow Him and serve his purposes in the world. The process or journey of following shapes our meaning and purpose, it moulds identity and character, and it takes place in and through relationships. This is the creation of a faith habitus, a lived, embodied, relational, practical wisdom, a way of wise living and being in the world, learning and journeying in the purpose of God.

My Model for the formation of a faith habitus.



The diagram is a proposal for a model of formation based on the research data. The three factors of relationship, encounter, and narrative form the principles that will guide the curriculum of the programme. In practice this will include elements such as:

**Relationships:** the creation of intentional community by participants living together or spending purposeful time together; this will include communal spiritual practices as well as opportunity for relaxed social companionship. It will mean generating a community of practice, where practical ministry concerns are addressed and explored.

**Encounter:** the generation of disruption that creates liminality is important here. This may be through a placement in a different context but also through creating new experiences that stretch and challenge. Participation in, and development of, spiritual practices will give space to encounter the transcendent God. The experiences of practical ministry are included here as important sites of encounter.

**Narrative:** this includes recognising the desires and stories that motivate the participants to be open to new experiences and encounters, helping them to learn the story of God and to find their place in the story. Practices of faith are relevant here as well as the sense of belonging to a story-formed community.

Each of these three factors are inter-related and connected through the understanding of covenant vocation. The process of formation will be aided by patterns of reflection that identify desires and intentions, to interpret experience in the light of theology, tradition, and other voices through theological reflection and to learn from experience by telling stories of the work of God in their lives. These tasks are served within the group of participants themselves but also in the key relationships with significant adults such as mentors, supervisors, and trainers.

The next section summarises the theoretical and theological concepts from this thesis that are essential to making the model work in practice. They form the first part of a scaffolding structure that supports the model. The second part is the elements of practice that will be required.

## **9.2 Conceptual Scaffolding**

### **9.2.1 Purpose and Telos**

The research findings and studies of contexts lead me to assert the value of being clear about why the intern programme exists. It is important to understand the theoretical and theological context of any programme for emerging adults and to be clear about the aims of the year. This is crucial to manage the expectations of the participants as well as to guide the content and structure of the programme. My findings point to the significance of vocational exploration

linked to self-understanding and meaning and purpose; I sought to clarify the use of the word vocation as 'meaningful purpose' within the framework of covenant and the purpose of God for the world. This concept provides the driving narrative for the year itself, based on the theoretical perspectives of emerging adulthood and the feedback from the research participants who identified this as both an important rationale for joining the programme, and one of the outcomes for them.

### **9.2.2 The Trinity and Covenant**

This telos for the year is rooted in the practice and biblical principle of covenant. This draws on the significant value that the research group placed on relationships and community with others but also the fact that the programme is aimed at engendering relationship with the Trinitarian God of the covenant.

Alongside this, I would add the commitment to address the issues of living in 'a secular age', of emerging adulthood, and of a move towards a more immanent faith by offering a perspective on faith that is holistic, embracing mind, body, and soul. This entails understanding our relationship with Christ, not as a personal relationship based on individual choice but as being 'in Christ'. A theology of theosis, of union with the trinitarian God, understood through the metaphor of perichoresis will therefore provide the theological frame for the year. It will emphasise that faith is not individualistic but is relational and so is formed best within community.

### **9.2.3 Habitus**

The concept of habitus, a way of wise living and being in the world, captures the sense of a holistic faith that I was seeking when I started out on this research journey. It offers an antidote to the over-reliance on cognitive methods in faith formation. A habitus of faith means that faith is something that is so much a part of who we are and what we do that we do not have to think before we act; faith that is about living 'in Christ' means we can be and do no other. I propose that habitus is the goal of faith formation and this should underpin the design and execution of ministry internships and similar programmes.

The different parts of the programme need to work towards enabling participants to gain a habitus of faith through action and reflection. By identifying how their story before the year and their experiences during the year affects their faith, they will develop a path to wise living, an embodied, relational practical wisdom. This needs to be an intentional process and so attention will need to be drawn to the idea of faith formation, to raise awareness of the effect of 'cultural liturgies', and to actively engage with practices of faith.

### **9.2.4 Liminality and Communitas**

Generating a disruption or challenge through providing new and different experiences creates liminal space in which change can happen, often in ways that would not happen otherwise, and so careful thought should be given to creating challenge. The development of a close community of support, a *communitas*, will make this change possible and enduring. I will develop this further in the section below.

## **9.3 Practice Scaffolding**

### **9.3.1 Generating a Community of Practice**

The community of the other interns and relationships with mentors and supervisors emerged as the strongest formational influence. Some of this happened as a direct result of the programming and some indirectly at the initiative of members of the group. The structure of the programme included an emphasis on relationship, from spending time away together at the start and mid-point of the year, to living together in the 'intern houses' with an expectation of shared living, to the provision of mentors and supervisors with the skills and ability to listen, support and guide emerging adults, to the regular gatherings of the group. The unforeseen relational opportunities came from inclusion in training with older adults and the informal discussion group that resulted in McDonald's afterwards. Although I do not have research evidence for this, my hunch is that the house and the informal discussions worked because of the mixed age and experience of the group, ranging in age from 18-27 years; one of those living in the house was a second-year intern and so offered a lead in setting the tone for the operation of the house. The house with only two residents was not able to create the same rhythm of prayer and communal sharing, suggesting that a minimum of three is needed to make this aspect of the programme work.

### **9.3.2 Mentors**

The role of mentoring was a recurrent and dominant theme in the literature about gap years and emerging adulthood. This was also evident in my research, through those with a formal role of mentor, the placement supervisor or other significant adults who took on this role. Mentors need to be clear about their role and have some understanding of the needs of emerging adults and their cultural context, noting too the possibilities of reverse mentoring and being open to learn from the mentee. Given the importance of vocational exploration identified by the group, it would be appropriate for the mentor to have the ability to help this exploration and discovery of meaning and purpose through the year.

Creating community in the group echoes the covenant theology and *koinonia* of the Trinity but also reinforces the sociological need for belonging. It recognises that belonging is a core part

of believing and the provision of both a plausibility shelter and a community of practice. It is therefore important that the regular (monthly) meetings of the group for training include space to share stories, ideas and resources that will inform their practice whilst generating relational trust and commitment. During the intern year under study, these meetings included a short time for sharing stories about their work and lives and this was mentioned by three members of the group as important. In the light of my findings, space for this sharing should be more strongly emphasised.

### **9.3.3 Liminality and Disruption**

The concept of liminality, of being in a different place and being challenged was another important aspect in the formation of faith. This is obviously something that happens by default for those who join the programme from another area or move to a different church. It is likely to have a lesser impact on those staying in their own church. The significant word used by the respondents was 'different' and it seemed to express what O'Shea referred to as disruptive experiences that lead to change (2013, p.121). This disruption could happen purely by being out of the 'comfort zone' in a new place or church tradition but other steps might be taken to provide challenge and disruption in other ways. For those staying in a familiar environment, this could mean a short-term placement in another church context or joining a short-term mission trip to another culture.

This needs to be supported by reflection processes that help the emerging adults recognise the learning and the work of God in their lives. It also means that there needs to be space to discuss and explore questions, doubts or difficulties and struggles. This is a function of the community of practice as noted above, but again, space and time needs to be made available as well as generating a culture of acceptance that will provide a warm environment for honest conversation.

Several members of the group spoke of growing in confidence in their identity but also in relation to their ability to serve in ministry, developing new skills and abilities. This chance to grow comes from being challenged or given new opportunities to 'have a go' but in a supportive environment where feedback is given in a loving and positive way. The placements for interns should always be chosen with care in order to provide these opportunities, with sufficient others around to support and encourage.

### **9.3.4 Story and Narrative**

Learning the narrative of the Bible as the story we find ourselves in offers the potential to bring together learning at a cognitive level with the emotions of experience, affirming both our own identity as children of God, living 'in Christ', and the meaning of our vocation in covenant

relationship with our Creator. Understanding the story of God in this way will help with the purpose of meaning-making and understanding the call of God on the lives of the emerging adults.

Having this as the foundation of the formal training programme will give a base from which to launch into explorations of other aspects of theology and Biblical studies, that will help them make sense of the world. The content of such learning may be grounded in an assessment of prior knowledge and understanding rather than a set curriculum. The research group arrived with a range of levels of knowledge and understanding but it appears that the content was less significant to them than the process of learning with others and discussions with them. Thus, a tailor-made curriculum with relational discussion-based learning will be most appropriate.

### **9.3.5 Practices of Faith**

I have highlighted the significance of practice in the theory around habitus, embodied faith, and cultural liturgies as well as the impact of engaging in spiritual practices for the research group. Practices move the person from merely knowing about their faith to the reality of living a different kind of life. These practices need to be taught but also modelled, by others in the group but also in the church placements. Smith's (2009) theory of the impact of liturgy and worship was not demonstrated through the interview responses, but the effect of practices such as prayer, silence, and bible study were evidenced as significant. As I noted in Chapter 8, there was a lack of evidence of the impact of the 'practice' of ministry in their context or of an engagement with practices that had a social influence. Although I think this belied the reality of the work of ministry that was going on in the placements, it would be fair to conclude that the group did not generally see that experience as being formative on their own faith. The inclusion of ministry practice in this category should therefore be essential and reflection encouraged to see ministry as places of encounter with God.<sup>116</sup>

### **9.3.6 Reflective Practice**

Teaching the group how to reflect and then encouraging them to do so with each other proved to be an important part of the year and a significant factor in faith formation. It is likely that the interview process itself created further opportunities for reflexivity, as the group members were asked to look back over the years before the course and then over the year itself and try to identify the how and what of change in their lives.

Enabling reflection makes the process of faith formation something that is less hidden and passive and creates a coherent, intentional process over which the participants have some

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<sup>116</sup> Root's thesis discussed in 8.3 suggests ministry is the primary place of encounter.

control. By considering how and where they have changed and identifying the factors that have brought that change, they can continue to develop those practices or recreate experiences to generate more change, should they so desire.

Using photographs taken by the participants for the research proved to be a helpful exercise in reflection. I suggest that this could be a useful tool for enabling the interns to feed back on their placement experience as well as reflecting on the effect it has had on them.

## **9.4 Summary**

This short chapter has brought together the major themes emerging from the data and proposed a model for practice. I have highlighted the important themes for developing practice based on the research findings and analysis. It sets out theoretical and theological principles as well as a practical framework for use in the design and implementation of similar gap year programmes. There is the potential to draw on the principles and practice to inform faith formation with emerging adults in other contexts.

A summary for practitioners is provided in Appendix 10.



## **Conclusion**

Through this study I have answered the question of how faith is formed in the context of a one-year internship programme for emerging adults. In my introduction I asked the question, 'What is faith?'. I observed that Jesus and the apostle Paul both commended small or weak faith and so talk of faith growing appeared to contradict this teaching. Instead, I proposed an understanding of faith as that which gives meaning, purpose and shape to our lives and the way that we live; formation then is the process by which that kind of faith is discovered and effected in our lives. This is also a search for vocation, to know our calling as people loved by God and to live a life of purpose in response to that love. This love is based on covenant that means this search takes place within a community of fellow seekers, and arises from the desire to belong, to God and to one another.

My research has identified fresh insights for faith formation with emerging adults and for the way the church more widely engages with this age group. The primary context is the one-year programme, but much could apply to other contexts such as theological training colleges and universities where emerging adults are away from home and potentially in liminal space. Emerging adulthood is a relatively new concept, but it suggests that some of the tasks previously assumed to be completed in adolescence are being extended into the twenties as a consequence of demographic and cultural changes. The church needs to take notice of this.

Through the phenomenological analysis of empirical data, I have demonstrated how the circumstances of the one-year programme combined with the stage of life that is emerging adulthood creates fertile conditions for change and growth. This fertility is vastly improved when combined with a commitment and intentionality from the participants. The gap year creates disruption and dissonance, challenge and opportunity, new experiences, and new ideas. Emerging adulthood is a period of openness and possibility, identity exploration and search for meaning. The decision of emerging adults to give a year of their life to serve, train, and grow demonstrates a personal desire and intentionality for change and makes them teachable. A well-planned programme that considers these conditions can make the best of this opportunity for everyone involved. The curriculum must include the processes of formation that enable change, creates disruption and challenge, gives space for reflection, exploration of meaning, and stimulates learning and development. These are the processes that this thesis set out to discover and are described in the proposed model and scaffolding of ideas and practice in chapter 9. Here, I will summarise the core themes and ideas.

## **Research Question**

My research question was framed as, 'How can a one-year internship programme enable the formation of faith in young adults?'. I included two subsidiary questions. One asked how we move away from the dominant model of discipleship that emphasises cognitive knowledge and the second about the role of practices of faith and experience in the formation of faith. The need to move away from models of formation that focus on thinking and changing minds in the expectation that this will lead to changed behaviour has been a recurring theme throughout the thesis. In its place a pattern of formation emerged from the data that depends more on relationship, encounter, and narrative leading to a faith that shapes our identity, meaning and purpose.

## **Habitus**

This kind of faith is best explained by the concept of habitus, the wise living of everyday life that encompasses who we are (identity and character), how we live (virtue and ethics), and how we make sense of the world (meaning and vocation). Habitus is practical theology, theology that is lived as a habit, it includes the mind, soul, and body. As Farley writes it is, 'a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals' (Farley, 1983, p.35). It is a way of wise living, an embodied, relational, passionate faith that draws on the knowledge that we are desired and loved by God and responds with desire and love for God. This means that the goal of formation during the intern year is to see emerging adults who not only describe themselves as Christians but whose faith inhabits every part of them and changes their way of life.

## **Vocation**

In chapter 2, I argued for the importance of vision or a 'telos' that guides our lives. In terms of the intern year, the processes that lead to developing a habitus of faith are enacted within the vision or narrative of vocation. In chapter 8, I noted how this was a common and core aim for each of the participants in the year. I defined vocation as meaningful purpose following Parks (2000) and stated that it answers the search for identity as well as purpose. Brueggeman's (1979) framing of vocation within an understanding of covenant is helpful; vocation defines who we are, as people called into covenant relationship with God and his people. This means that questions of identity are ultimately questions of vocation, we know who we are through our calling into the purposes of God. This also answers another recurring theme within the thesis, that of the context of a secular age and the presence of the social imaginary of the

'immanent frame'.<sup>117</sup> Recognising our identity, meaning, and purpose as coming from the 'Divine Other' counters the claims that we are 'self-grounded' or 'self-authored' and that life is centred in the here and now. Instead, we are to be obedient to the calling to partner with God in his purposes for the world, giving of ourselves to others in pursuit of the common good. This emphasis on relationship brings me to the first theme in my discussion of the processes of faith formation that I identified from the research data.

## **Research Findings**

I used a qualitative research methodology because my subject matter was the subjective experience and understanding of the emerging adults participating in the internship programme over a 1-year period. A cohort of 7 interns, aged 18-27 years was the subject of a case study. I employed semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the year, a focus group activity and discussion and a photography exercise to gather data and worked with interpretative phenomenological analysis when examining the data. My purpose was to identify the factors or influences on the formation of faith during the year. Three main themes emerged: relationships, encounters with God, and narratives of purpose.

### **Relationships.**

This was the most prevalent theme and at times was difficult to disentangle from the other two themes because it is inherent in aspects of both. The research group all spoke of important relationships in their story of formation, these were with adults, parents and friends or their peers. The sense of community amongst the group of interns was strong and especially for those who lived together and had worked on forming intentional community by engaging with shared practices of prayer, study, hospitality and living together.

This demonstrated the centrality of community within the Christian narrative both in the doctrine of the Trinity and the understanding of the church as the Body of Christ, the gathered people of God. I reflected in chapter 8, on the concepts of theosis, perichoresis and koinonia, that ground our faith in the relationship and communion of the trinitarian God. This reminds us that faith is relational and about belonging. Emerging adults have turned away from the institutional church, yet they long to belong and so it is not surprising that this group identified so strongly with this theme.

In terms of developing practice as a result of this information, I identified the importance of creating community within the intern group as part of the programme. I argue for the generation of plausibility shelters and the development of communities of practice as part of

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<sup>117</sup> In defining a secular age and the social imaginary as the immanent frame, I have followed Taylor (2004, 2007). See Chapter 2.3.3

the intern year. Plausibility shelters create temporary but robust space in which faith and belief can be supported, questioned, and formed away from the potential threats of competing worldviews and ideas. Communities of practice are, as the term implies, focused on practice, and create space to discuss, explore and reflect on how to live the Christian life.

## **Encounter**

This theme emphasised the primacy of experience and particularly how the group felt that encounters with God had shaped their faith during the year. This goes to the heart of the question about cognitive models of formation as well as the question over the loss of transcendence in the immanent frame. Here the research participants identified emotional and affective experiences that they identified as encounters with God, the God who is both immanent and transcendent. One of the key words being used of the Millennial generation is authenticity and Taylor describes the current time as 'the age of authenticity' (Taylor, 2007, p.486f). This means that individual experience is all-important and especially so in the search for spirituality. The participants had an expectation of encountering God in the everyday, through practices of faith, in church and in community. One of the key areas of encounter was in new or different places and times of uncertainty. This is the important place of liminality that I noted at the start of this conclusion. The move to a new area and, for some, a different church tradition created an openness to change that proved to be significant in the process of formation for many. The intersection with the first theme of relationship is evident here as liminality is most effective when supported by a close community that Turner (1974) calls, 'communitas'. It is possible to create this intense social togetherness and, in my view, this was described by several of the participants, especially those living together.

In relation to developing practice, there is an obvious need to generate disruption and opportunities for the participants to be challenged. Where possible there should be a move to a new area and different church context. The encouragement to learn new spiritual practices is significant as is enabling the interns to have time to encounter God in as many varied ways as possible. It is important to be able to discern the presence and activity of God and so the role of reflection is important here but will be covered in the next section.

## **Narratives of Purpose**

This theme drew together the stories that the participants told to describe their motivation, learning and change that they felt had happened during the year. These stories became motivating or driving narratives that demonstrated the importance of personal intention and openness to change for the formation of faith. These stories included their understanding of the goal of faith or discipleship, discussed in terms of maturity; it included stories of their desire to recognise their vocation and to learn through experiences and teaching sessions. Again, it

was not possible to discuss this without reference to relationships and community. Story is important both in knowing the core story of the Christian faith but also seeing ourselves as part of that story. It can also be helpful to identify where other stories or worldviews impinge on us.

It is these stories that help us to discern the habitus of faith, knowing who we are and how we are to live. We are a story-formed community but we are also shaped by the practices and habits of our everyday lives. How we recognise and understand those stories is through telling those stories and being reflective, on our own or in conversation with others. The participants were taught the practice of reflection, including theological reflection and this proved a useful tool for them. It enabled the participants to take responsibility for their learning and growth.

The implications for practice of this theme are to encourage the telling of stories, about their own experiences and to teach the Christian story and to bring them together through theological reflection. One participant suggested that the purpose of the year was to help them to 'figure out what God's been doing with us.' (P6). That seems like a good way to describe the journey through the year and the process of formation.

## **Contribution to Knowledge.**

This research project makes a unique contribution to knowledge in an arena of growing interest.

The issues addressed and the recommendations have a wider application to church ministry and discipleship as well as to educational institutions concerned with the formation of faith and discipleship. 'Discipleship' seems to be a favourite buzz-word amongst youth workers and church leaders as many decry the lack of committed followers of Christ. The rediscovery of 'ancient paths'<sup>118</sup> and monastic traditions has led many to invest in developing a 'rule of life'<sup>119</sup> and many of these work on the basis that we have over-emphasised cognitive knowledge at the expense of whole-life discipleship.<sup>120</sup> I have directly addressed this issue and my proposal for the development of a habitus of faith has the potential for a shift in emphasis in our church programmes away from age-segregated, school-style programmes towards one that addresses the need for a holistic faith that makes a difference to the lives of young people and the faith-life of church congregations.

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<sup>118</sup> See for example Hirsch, A. 2009, *The Forgotten Ways* and the 'new monastics' such as Shane Claiborne (USA), Ian Mobsby (UK).

<sup>119</sup> Winchester and Ely dioceses are working on a common rule for all churches within their remit.

<sup>120</sup> See particularly the work of LICC who are championing this phrase in their work.

The evidence from the research pointed to the conclusion that there is no formation without relationship; that congregational life and personal relationships across age groups are significant. This is understood through a theology of the Trinity as relationship but also seen in the practice of the research group. The concern for community and experience outweighed the content and programme in the minds of the participants. Therefore, programme development needs to account for this and maximise the potential for opportunities to generate experience and relational capital.

Faith formation must be understood as a way of wise living, of growing in embodied, relational, practical wisdom and not just knowing and explaining belief. It is important to hold on to the history and doctrines of the historical faith and the rituals and traditions of the church. However, these are best learned and understood through a narrative approach that identifies the story of God and its intersection with the story of the lives of people in the Christian community. My research highlighted the identification of the participants with biblical stories but also the power of story-telling in the relationships within the group and with significant others in their placement churches. The important role of reflective practice was based on small groups telling stories of their ministry and life experiences. The third theme of the research was drawn together as 'narratives of purpose' in recognition of the value placed on story in terms of motivation and explanation of learning and change.

Young people are still largely missing from churches and the Anglican church is no exception. Where churches hold on to children into the teenage years, there is another loss at the age of 18-20. Emerging adulthood is an important concept that suggests the thinking and behaviour of this age group is changing. This is not being accounted for in any young vocations strategy that I have seen. Different methods will be needed if we are to engage with young adults growing older in a secular age where their social imaginary is inspired by cultural liturgies rather than those emanating from the Christian tradition.

### **Contribution to Practice.**

The insights from this research are already changing my own practice and are relevant to those leading similar programmes in the UK and potentially elsewhere where similar challenges to faith are found. There is a wider application to other discipleship or faith formation programmes especially those involving a gap year or significant time away from home. It will be for others to consider its application to other contexts but there are potential lessons for all involved with the formation of faith with emerging adults.

The three areas of relationship, encounters and narrative provide a framework for a programme of formation that leads to the acquisition of a habitus of faith. The model I propose

in chapter 9 is one that is based not just on the research case study but concurs with evidence from other research with emerging adults. The perspective of the year as a liminal location suggests the disruption and discomfort provide the best context for growth and development. Some of this will come as part of the move to a new area and a new context whilst other disruption is a result of the work of the Spirit. However, it should be possible to ensure that disruptive experiences are planned as part of the programme with appropriate support and reflection to enable the assimilation of lessons learnt into the faith and life of the individual.

Alongside the application to other contexts of ministry with emerging adults, there is more work to be done on its application to mission and ministry with adolescents. The majority of my professional practice experience is with teenagers and if we accept Arnett's view that emerging adulthood, at least in some ways, extends adolescence then the practice model I have proposed could apply to younger groups.<sup>121</sup> The concept of habitus as the goal of faith formation is one that works for all ages as the challenges of the redundancy of cognitive models and the secular age are not just applicable to emerging adults. The longing to belong, the desire for encounter with a transcendent other, and the importance of story cannot be monopolised or understood as issues only for the young. The opportunity for a gap year and the context of liminality may not be available to all ages and so the model will need some adaptation. However, as I write this, we are emerging from the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; most of us have spent a year in liminal space, our lives disrupted by lock-downs and facing uncertainty about the future. Whether the church has been able to make the most of this disruption as an opportunity for change and the formation of faith remains to be seen.

### **Contribution to Professional Context.**

The Church of England Ministry Experience Scheme has developed over the last 6 years without any theoretical or theological framework or justification for its purpose. The rationale is that giving opportunity to explore vocation in this way will assist the target to increase younger vocations to ordination. This is a narrow justification and focus that risks losing the potential of such schemes to impact the faith lives of hundreds of emerging adults. This thesis has addressed both the lack of such a framework and offered a more hopeful, broader vision of vocational exploration. I have provided a theological understanding of faith formation with the emerging adult age group that the programme targets based on habitus. It is holistic and relevant to the cultural context and addresses some of the problems that our over-reliance on cognitive models of formation have posed. It explores the characteristics of this stage of life that are relevant for providers to understand and offers a framework for a programme of formation based on the evidence collected and analysed in the research. This is the basis of

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<sup>121</sup> See 3.2 for a discussion of Arnett

the proposed model that takes into account both the emerging adult stage of life and the research findings.

My research also points to a fresh understanding of vocation within a theology of covenant that I believe places the formation of a faith habitus in a theological frame that has the potential to challenge the issues of our secular social imaginary and the needs of emerging adults for identity, belonging, meaning and purpose.

The Ministry Experience Scheme in the Church of England is expanding across dioceses and there is recording of hard data of numbers of participants and the outcomes in terms of vocational destination, especially ordination. There is no other work being done on evaluating their success in qualitative terms. With this area of work being developed at a fast rate there is a need to be asking questions about how we are preparing participants for their primary vocation of following Jesus as well as the specific call to an area of ministry. My research findings offer analysis of the potential impact of the programmes and recommendations for their development for greater effect on the life of faith of the participants.

Although this research has focused on the context of the intern year, the findings could have a relevance to issues of faith formation with emerging adults in other contexts. In particular, the Anglican context of formation for ministry through the work of theological colleges, and other training settings for both lay and ordained ministry. In chapter 1.2.2, I noted the criteria for selection to ministry and a revision of the discernment process in the Church of England that is due to be implemented in 2021. The new structure resonates with my findings and moves away from the idea of criteria for selection to one that identifies 'qualities to be inhabited'. The authors recognise that, 'inhabiting a quality speaks more of a life-long process that is ever deepening and it might offer a resonance with the ancient term "habitus" (Church of England, 2020, p2). It is satisfying to realise that similar conclusions have been reached in another area of the Church of England's work and suggests that my findings could be useful in the formation of ordinands and lay ministers beyond the intern year.

## **Further Research**

Given that the case study approach means that the research was limited to a small number of people in a specific context and time, it would be interesting to discover the application of the findings in other contexts and with other groups, delivering different programmes.

During the research I noticed several areas that I would like to research further:

Social liturgy and social practices – not just individual practices of faith but how does social action, practices of justice, hospitality, care for the poor etc impact formation?



Impact of the placement and practical service - did different traditions of church make a difference? What was the impact of the actual work done in placement, how varied was this across placements and was the formative effect different?

Trinitarian theology – the group would speak of God using the term ‘God’ and occasionally referring to the work of the Spirit, but they did not talk about Jesus or the Christ. Was this significant or just due to the framing of the questions? How do they understand the Trinity given the importance I attach to it in my analysis?

## **Faith in the Gap**

In the above discussion it is easy to lose sight of the fact that forming faith is not a science, it is an art-form and images of the dance of God and narratives of faith may help that view. However, it will always be the work of the Holy Spirit and faith is always fragile, enough for this day and not banked for tomorrow. All we can do is to make the space and create fertile conditions for God to work. It is a faith that is found in the gap – most obviously in the liminality of the gap year itself and emerging adulthood (see 8.3.3). But I have also alluded to other in-between spaces: in the present moment where God is at work between past and future or in the transition from one stage to another (see 2.6); in-between persons in relationship, where we engage in place-sharing (see 8.2.3); in between our desire for God and our encounter with the love of God (see 8.3); in between the beginning and end of our story that shapes us (8.4.2). It is here that we both need habitus and where habitus is shaped as we learn to live wisely.

This study has outlined the conditions that helped 7 emerging adults to grow in confidence in their faith, to develop a stronger sense of meaning and purpose, and to know they are called to belong to a community defined by the covenant love of the Trinitarian God. Those designing and leading internship or similar programmes can facilitate a habitus of faith by creating the conditions for growth through the three areas of relationship, encounter, and narrative. They will enable emerging adults to explore and reflect on their experience so as to discern their calling to partner with God in His purposes for the world and, in the process, they will discover faith in the gap.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **The Criteria for Selection for Ordained Ministry in the Church of England (Summary)**

#### **Criterion A: Vocation**

Candidates should be able to articulate a sense of vocation to the ordained ministry and reflect on the effect of this on their life. They should be able to speak of the development of their inner conviction and the extent to which others have confirmed it. They should be able to show an understanding of what it means to be a deacon or a priest. Their sense of vocation should be obedient, realistic and informed.

#### **Criterion B: Ministry within the Church of England**

Candidates should show an understanding of their own tradition within the Church of England, an awareness of the diversity of traditions and practice, and a commitment to learn from and work generously with difference. They should be able to speak of the distinctiveness of ordained ministry within the Church of England and of what it means to exercise public ministry. They should be able to reflect on changes in contemporary society and the implications of this for ministry and the Church.

#### **Criterion C: Spirituality**

Candidates should show evidence of a commitment to a spiritual discipline, which involves individual and corporate prayer and worship. They should be committed to a developing pattern of disciplined prayer, Bible study and the regular receiving of Holy Communion. They should be able to show how they discern God's activity in their life, how their spiritual practice may have changed over time and how it is changing them. They should be able to reflect on how engagement with the world and others both affects, and is affected by, their practice of prayer. Their spiritual practice should be able to sustain and energise them in daily life and future ministry.

#### **Criterion D: Personality and Character**

Candidates should be sufficiently self-aware, mature and stable to show that they are able to sustain the demanding role of an ordained minister. They should be able to demonstrate how they have faced change and pressure in a balanced and flexible way and how they manage stress. Candidates should be seen to be people of integrity who can generate trust and display honesty. They should be able to speak of how they have coped with difficult life experiences, how they have reflected upon them and incorporated them within their life and understanding.

#### **Criterion E: Relationships**

Candidates should show the capacity to build healthy personal, professional, and pastoral relationships. They should demonstrate an awareness of the need for, and ability to establish and sustain, appropriate boundaries between personal and professional life and within pastoral relationships. They should be able to manage conflict and show an ability to negotiate difficult relationships. Candidates should demonstrate good interpersonal skills, the willingness to learn from experience, and a commitment to building inclusive relationships

within diversity. They should show the potential to exercise effective pastoral care. Candidates must be willing to live within the discipline of Issues in Human Sexuality.

#### Criterion F: Leadership and Collaboration

Candidates should demonstrate an ability to offer leadership in the Church community and in the wider community as appropriate. This ability includes the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship which is inspiring to others and witnesses to the servanthood of Christ. They should show a commitment to identifying and nurturing the gifts of others and be able to collaborate effectively. Candidates should be able to identify their own leadership style, and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of this and of the different ways in which leadership may be exercised within the Church. They should be able to be flexible and adaptable in leadership and demonstrate ability to guide and shape the life of the Church community in its mission to the world.

#### Criterion G: Faith

Candidates should show an understanding of the Christian faith and a desire to deepen their understanding. They should demonstrate a personal commitment to Christ and a mature, robust faith which shapes their life and work. Candidates should show an ability to reflect critically on their faith and make connections between faith and contemporary life. They should demonstrate a capacity to communicate their faith engagingly and effectively.

#### Criterion H: Mission and Evangelism

Candidates should demonstrate a personal commitment to mission that is reflected in thought, prayer and action. They should show a wide and inclusive understanding of mission and the strategic issues and opportunities within contemporary culture. Candidates should be able to articulate the good news of the Kingdom appropriately in differing contexts and speak of Jesus Christ in a way that is exciting, accessible, and attractive. They should enable others to develop their vocations as witnesses of the good news. They should show potential as leaders of mission.

#### Criterion I: Quality of Mind

Candidates should have the necessary intellectual capacity and quality of mind to undertake satisfactorily a course of theological study and ministerial preparation and to cope with the intellectual demands of ministry. They should demonstrate a desire to learn through the integration of academic study and reflection on experience and a commitment to this as a lifelong process of learning and formation. Candidates should show flexibility of mind, openness to change and challenge, and the capacity to facilitate learning and theological reflection within the Church community.

## Appendix 2

### A History of Youth Work and Ministry

The table aims to give an overview of key developments in youth work, youth ministry, and the 'Youth Service' in the UK. While most of the activity is focussed on the UK, there are some references to influences from elsewhere such as the Taizé community in France and developments in the USA.

Date	Development	Method
1780	Robert Raikes, Sunday Schools Hannah Moore	General education, literacy & numeracy in context of moral and religious instruction
1835	Ragged Schools Field Lane was opened in 1835 by the London City Mission by the founder, David Nasmith and they were the first to use the term, 'ragged school' in 1840 to refer to children who were 'raggedly clothed'. <sup>122</sup> Nasmith was clear that the intention was missionary, to bring children to know Jesus Christ through the provision of free education and doing good. (Lee, 2014)	"Teach poor mothers how to clothe and bring up their offspring, to teach fathers their duties to their families and children their duty to their parents, to teach above all things that true wisdom is true religion and true religion supreme love to God." (Ragged School Union, 1857, p.26, cited by Lee, 2014)
1836	The Church Pastoral Aid Society CPAS is founded to give grants to churches to help meet the changing needs caused by the Industrial Revolution that put pressure on small parishes as populations grew. Grants paid for extra lay and ordained staff.	
1844	YMCA – George Williams forms the Young Men's Christian Association to enable young men in the drapery trade to meet for bible study and prayer. Later reading rooms and	Bible study and prayer in groups, plus lectures and education classes.

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.raggeduniversity.co.uk/2012/08/08/history-ragged-schools-2/>

	refreshment areas are created to help young men moving to the city.	
1867	The Children's Special Service Mission that originated in 1867 in London inspired by a visit of the American evangelist, Payson Hammond. The mission set up 'special services' in churches for children who were too old for Sunday School and when church services catered purely for adults. Josiah Spiers, its founder, concentrated his efforts on the wealthier families whilst other groups targeted the less well-off (Ward, 1996, p.28). The CSSM later became Scripture Union, reflecting the emphasis on daily reading of the Bible that was developed through the publishing of Bible reading cards.	Special provision for children outside of Church services and Sunday school, 'was a significant turning point in the Church's ministry' (Ward, 1996, p.29). Shift towards the better-off but also an emphasis on children and young people 'coming to Christ'
1870	Education Act – By the 1880's the Sunday School movement had grown to a point where 3 out of 4 children were attending on a regular basis (Springhall, 1983, p.22). The 1870 Education Act had removed the need for Sunday Schools to teach literacy and numeracy and so their emphasis became more on religious instruction and general education	
1873	The YMCA opens a holiday centre on the Isle of Wight followed by another 25 elsewhere due to their success.	Holidays and recreation opportunity.
1877	Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) formed and leads to spread of Christian Unions across university campuses. They had a pattern of daily prayer meetings, a Sunday evangelistic meeting and Saturday evening Bible reading. Students were brought	Emphasis on prayer, evangelism, and nurture through Bible study



	to faith, nurtured and then encouraged into leadership; many going on to ordination making it 'one of the primary culture formers of English evangelicalism' (Ward, 1996, p.34)	
1881	International Society of Christian Endeavour founded by Frances Edward Clark in the USA.	
1883	In 1883, William Smith started The Boys' Brigade in Glasgow. Smith was a Sunday School teacher and a member of the YMCA which catered for boys aged 17. There was a gap for those leaving Sunday School and joining the YMCA and Smith hoped to bridge that gap. The Boys' Brigade was to be a uniformed organisation, bringing together Christianity with a military ethos. The Salvation Army and the Church Army were already established and as Springhall remarks, 'religion in uniform was fast becoming an acceptable feature of late Victorian society.' (1983, p.24)	Spiritual and religious formation with physical and social activities. Its object being:  'The advancement of Christ's kingdom among boys and the promotion of habits of Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.' (Springhall, 1983, p. 39)
	'Muscular Christianity' The object of the BB specifies habits and aspects of character but also the idea of 'Christian manliness'. This idea of 'muscular Christianity' grew as the ethos of public schools and traced back to Dr Thomas Arnold of Rugby School. There was an emphasis on 'masculine' team games and athleticism rather than on the more 'effeminate' intellectual scholarship. Springhall records that in 1888, Smith wrote that by associating Christianity with 'what is manly in a boy's sight', he would disabuse the common notion	Emphasis on reaching boys and shaping them to be 'manly' Christians.

	that Christianity was effeminate and weak. (1983, p.25)	
1900	The emphasis on Bible study formed the basis for the Crusaders Union of Bible Classes started in 1900. The groups not only met separately from adult congregations but also on 'neutral ground', not in any church premises (Ward, 1996, p.35). The programme included hymns, Bible readings and a gospel talk with evangelism as a core aim.	Bible classes with a hymn and gospel talk, with an evangelistic aim.
	'Bash Camps' There has been a move by this stage towards working with more wealthy children and young people and this was further developed by the focus of CSSM on public schools and the rise of school camps under the leadership of Eric Nash, known as 'Bash'. The 'Bash camps' were aimed at the privileged in an unapologetic attempt to reach the future leaders of the country with the gospel. The camps not only brought people to Christ but also served as 'a training ground for the future leaders of the Church of England' (Ward, 1996, p.38).	Holiday camps for public schools Evangelism Training future leaders
	Sunday Schools - This also served to narrow the focus of youth work towards Biblical knowledge and Christian conduct. Naomi Thompson (2018) observes that with the rise of state provision of education after the Education Act 1879 and compulsory schooling after 1880, Sunday Schools had to change. Rather than teaching labouring skills as Robert Raikes proposed, they concentrated on religious education, teaching the catechism with the aim of increasing	Teaching religious education and catechism.

	church membership. The result has been a loss of social engagement, decline in numbers attending and its purpose 'defined by a narrow church agenda'.	
1927	Sir Sydney Nicholson, then organist of Westminster Abbey, started the School of English Church Music (SECM) in December. The SECM was a training college for church musicians (the College of St Nicolas), and an association of affiliated churches who committed themselves to attaining high standards.	Although not exclusively aimed at young people, the SECM supported the choral tradition and the training of choirs in the Anglican church.
1939	The state became interested in providing social and leisure activities for young people following the first World War. However, it was not until the Second World War that it gained momentum with the publication of Circular 1486 'In the Service of Youth' in 1939 bringing together 14 voluntary organisations to form new local youth committees. In the meantime, youth clubs and detached work projects had grown often in response to anxiety about young people or 'moral panics'	Youth work as informal and social education – groups aimed to fill gaps in leisure time but also to 'moralise' young people which meant instilling Christian faith (Davies, 1999a, p.20)
1949	Circular 1516 published, 'The Challenge of Youth' outlined the purpose of youth work as social & physical training towards the building of character.	'developing the whole personality of the individual boys and girls to enable them to take their place as full members of a free community'. (Davies, 1999a, p.20)
1944	Brother Roger begins the Taizé community in France with 3 other brothers. The community becomes one of the first Protestant monastic orders in history with an emphasis on ecumenism, peace and reconciliation.	Although not initially aimed at young people, the community attracted young adults (16-29) and this then shaped the way the

		community grew (Santos, 2008, p101)
1945	After being closed during the war, by command of King George VI, the SECM became the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM). Canterbury Cathedral allowed the school to function within the precincts of the cathedral, and the College of St Nicolas re-opened there in January 1946. By 1952 over 3000 churches were affiliated.	Encouraging young people in choirs providing training for worship through singing.
1948	The first Student Cross pilgrimage held at Walsingham beginning traditions that continue today. Each year students & young adults walk to the shrine during Holy Week carrying wooden crosses. In 2006, families joined and in 2012 a 'leg' for secondary school children began. <sup>123</sup>	Pilgrimage and camping, worship, and teaching
1960	The Albemarle Report echoed the importance of association and education with its three key themes, association, training and challenge. Youth work developed methods of informal education through group work and club work and was primarily concerned with social education – relationships at personal and societal levels.	Emphasis on social formation, social education and relationships
1965	Evangelical youth workers David Watson, Michael Seward & Michael Eastman and David Winter publish books outlining a vision for youthwork based on a nucleus of Christian young people.	'a call to disciplined living, to costly fellowship, to active evangelism, to training in the Lord's service.' (Seward & Eastman, 1965, cited in Ward, 1996, p.60)
	Mark Smith (2002) chronicles the work of the Methodist, Leonard Barnett, who promoted the church youth club as 'a community of	

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.walsinghamvillage.org/about/history-of-pilgrimage/> accessed 9/7/19  
<http://www.studentcross.org.uk/about.htm> accessed 9/7/19

	young people engaged upon the task of Christian education'. Barnett saw the importance of young people having space for association in an educative environment. For him education was about mind, body and spirit, education and evangelism went together in pursuing the good life, life in all it's fullness. Smith quotes Barnett, 'Our job is to provide such opportunities for development of body, mind and spirit, as will enable the boys and girls in our club to enter upon fullness of life as the sons and daughters of the living God.' (Barnett, 1962, cited by Smith, 2002)	
1970	The YMCA opens the George Williams College in London, providing training courses for professional youth workers.	
1974	The Taizé community opens a 'Council of Youth' over 60,000 young adults from across the world visit the community during the year.	Young adults join in the prayer, worship, Bible study and daily work of the community.
1982	Thompson Report: 'Experience and Participation, JNC standards. Several Government-led 'ministerial conferences' defined youth work but little action.	Learning through experience and active participation in decision making.
1985	International Youth Year declared by the United Nations. The main objective of the Year, which has the themes "Participation, Development, Peace", is to stimulate public awareness of the needs and aspirations of young people and ensure their active participation in economic and social development and the construction of peace. <sup>124</sup>	

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-4079783/international-youth-year-1985-participation-development> accessed 20/06/19

1987	World Youth Day instituted in the Catholic Church, at the direction of Pope John-Paul II, with an international gathering in Argentina. It aims to bring together youth and young adults aged 13-30 to worship and celebrate their faith. The gathering has continued every second year since meeting in a different country each time.	3 days of worship and celebration, includes an all-night prayer vigil and Mass celebrated by the Pope.
1989-1992	Government hosts series of 3 national conferences to define purpose and curriculum for youth services. Failure to agree a 'core curriculum' (Young, 1999, p.17)	Some consensus on redressing inequality, and values of participation, empowerment and education
1988	Andy Hawthorne launches Message '88 mission in Manchester, develops into school's ministry using dance music and preaching.	Emphasis on evangelism.
1990's	The 1990's saw a rise in church-based youth work including a growing trend to employ full-time youth workers in churches. In 1991, Oasis started running training courses for full-time youth workers, in 2001 they began an undergraduate degree course.	
1993	Soul Survivor started by Mike Pilavachi as an off-shoot of the New Wine festivals. Soul Survivor grows over the next 25 years to include over 20,000 young people at 4 events each year <sup>125</sup> .	Summer camps focussed on charismatic worship and Bible teaching.
1995	The Church of England publishes, 'In the Catholic Way' identifying the extent of work with children and young people in parishes identifying as catholic. Higher levels of contact with children and young people in choirs, as servers and bell-ringers (Francis & Lankshear, 1995).	Catholic churches responsible for above average proportion of baptisms, confirmations, youth clubs and Sunday attendance.

<sup>125</sup> <https://soulsurvivor.com/about/history/> accessed 30/04/19

1996	<p>Youth A Part. A report for the CofE General Synod responded to both the awareness of a decline in numbers of young people in churches and also the opportunity to reach out to young people. It set out a 'theology for youth work' and a series of recommendations for the church to adopt.</p> <p>Sadly, the report was never fully implemented.</p>	<p>Theology of youth work based on the mission of God, culture, incarnation, personal development and discipleship.</p>
1997	<p>The New Labour Government moved to work with young people 'at risk', an emphasis on social exclusion and 'services for youth'. Start of the Connexions service with personal advisers, case work and more 1-1 work.</p>	
1998	<p>Smith (2013) reports that in 1998, The English Church Attendance Survey recorded 21 per cent of churches with a full-time salaried youth worker.</p>	
1998	<p>The Centre for Youth Ministry is established in Oxford to train church youth workers. The CYM courses are linked to the JNC so youth workers are accredited to work in non-church settings.</p>	<p>Training for youth ministry and youth work in community-based settings</p>
2000	<p>Peter Brierley publishes statistics highlighting the loss of 1000 children under 15 from the church every week (Brierley, 2000)</p>	
2000	<p>Founding of the RSCM 'Millennium Youth Choir' by George Cary, Archbishop of Canterbury, for young people aged 15-23yrs.</p>	<p>A 'high standard' training choir to develop musical skills and foster 'friendships that will last a lifetime'.<sup>126</sup></p>
2000	<p>Soul Survivor joins The Message Trust for a city-wide mission in Manchester, seeking to encourage young people to serve through practical action and gospel proclamation.<sup>127</sup></p>	<p>Evangelism and social action</p>

<sup>126</sup> <https://www.rscm.org.uk/start-learning/national-and-regional-choirs/millennium-youth-choir/> accessed 27/6/19

<sup>127</sup> <https://www.message.org.uk/history/> accessed 08/05/19

2002	National Occupational Standards for Youth Work identifies purpose of youth work as social, personal and educational development, enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in society. (Young, 1999, p.18)	Youth work as developmental and educational
2004	The Children Act promoted 'Every Child Matters' with 5 outcomes that shaped children and youth services, emphasised partnership working across departments and agencies co-ordinated by local Children's Trusts. A new impetus and funding for children's services but with set targets and outcomes.	5 Outcomes: stay safe be healthy enjoy and achieve make a positive contribution achieve economic well-being
2006	In 2006, the Centre for Youth Ministry said there were more paid youth workers in churches than were employed by Local Authorities and around 100,000 volunteers. 'Churches had become the largest employer of youth workers in the country' (Mark Smith, 2004)  'Alongside this came a major flourishing in the literature including a growing concern with theological questions – especially under the influence of the north American tradition of youth ministry'	
2006	Northamptonshire County Council cut its entire Youth Service in favour of a commissioning model with reduced funding. Over the next years, others followed suit and Govt. funding for youth services declines considerably.	Outcomes and value for money, 'targeted' services for those most at risk; loss of universal services for young people



	In 2016 Unison estimates cuts in youth service spending to stand at £387m since April 2010. <sup>128</sup>	
2006	Government publishes 'Youth Matters' paper on youth services but austerity measures after the banking crisis in 2008 mean cuts and commissioning continue (DFES, 2006)	Vision to empower young people to influence services, information & advice, active citizenship.
2006	National Youth Agency (NYA, 2006) report on spirituality and spiritual development in youth work recognises expansion of faith-based youth work and the need to explore how faith and spirituality fit with wider youth work practice (Green, 2006).	
2006	Savage et al. publish research on Generation Y, identifying 'happy midi-narrative'.	
2007	The Crusaders Union celebrated its Centenary in 2006 and changes its name to 'Urban Saints' from 1 <sup>st</sup> January whilst reaffirming its commitment to teach children and young people the good news of Jesus Christ. <sup>129</sup>	
2008	Catholic Youth Ministry Federation is formed to develop and strengthen youth ministry in the church.	
2009	Christian Smith publishes results of National Study of Youth and Religion in the USA, identifying new belief 'moralistic therapeutic deism'.	
2010	Coalition Government commits to National Citizenship Service as 'a programme for 16 year olds to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens, mix with people from different	Voluntary service for young people

<sup>128</sup> <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1158579/youth-services-cut-by-gbp387m-in-six-years>.

Accessed 30/4/19

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.urbansaints.org/history> accessed 30/4/19

	backgrounds and start getting involved in their communities' <sup>130</sup>	
2010	Pope Benedict's visit to England gives fresh impetus to Catholic youth ministry.	
2012	The R.C. Church publishes, 'Called to a Noble Adventure', a new strategy for youth ministry recognising that youth ministry to young people is different to other ministry	'youth ministry is eucharistic at its core... always in community, it is nourishing, it is sacramental' (CYMFed 2012)
2014	Church of England report, 'Anecdote to Evidence' highlights lack of faith transmission from parents to children but suggests link between church growth and active work with children and young people.	
2016	'Rooted in the Church' research report published by the Church of England identifies factors that keep young people in church.	Inclusion, equality, creating safe spaces and leadership identified as core themes. Young people need to be included in whole church life not just in separate groups.
2016	Oasis College announce they will no longer run degree-level training courses due to a decline in student numbers. <sup>131</sup>	
2017	Soul Survivor announces it will stop running summer festivals in 2019.	
2019	Rise in knife crime raises issue of lack of youth provision. Government announces plans to create a new Youth Charter.	

<sup>130</sup> <https://www.ncsyes.co.uk/about-ncs> accessed 08/05/19

<https://www.ymca.org.uk/about/history-heritage/timeline> accessed 28/6/19

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.oasiscollege.org/students> accessed 28/6/19

## Appendix 3

### Generation Theory and Generation Y

The origin of generational theory is attributed to the German sociologist Karl Mannheim in an essay published in 1928 and translated into English in 1952. Mannheim introduced the idea of generation in the sense of 'cohort' to differentiate from the more usual structural usage to describe kinship, the relationship between parent and child (Pilcher, 1994). Pilcher observes that 'generation' as cohort is generally understood as contextualising people within an historical time period, and with others of the same age (1994, p.22). Pilcher explains Mannheim's understanding of generation as one that shares behaviour, thoughts and attitudes based on common experiences, crises, and events. She observes that this reflects the usual understanding of cohort within sociology, but Mannheim elaborates this by identifying youth as the 'key period of exposure' (1994, p.23) that affects their ideology, and she uses the phrase, 'social generation' to reflect this. Each social generation has a distinctive worldview that 'leads people of different ages to experience the *same* social and cultural events *differently*' (Pilcher, 1994, p.23). The terms cohort and social generation are helpful in being more specific but as Hilborn and Bird (2002) note, despite its multiple meanings, generation is still the most widely used term and so I will follow this lead here. Generational theory points us away from a focus on individualised worldviews and towards a recognition of shared experiences and collective understandings of the world and culture.

#### A Focus on Youth

Importantly for my discussion, Mannheim recognised that the most formative period was that of 'youth' which he defined as ages 17-25 (Hilborn and Bird, 2002). Hilborn and Bird observe that Mannheim was the first person to explain the significant role of youth in socio-cultural change and created the 'main explanatory framework for the seismic shifts, tensions and fissures which would ensue in the West from 1967 onwards' (2002, p.48).

It is apposite to note here that this conception of generation concurs with the view from developmental theory and my discussion of emerging adulthood above. However, Pilcher (1994) highlights that the weakness of the life cycle approach lies in its 'failure to take full account of social contexts' (Pilcher, 1994, p.18). The approach of generational theory may address this by considering the effects of wider social change, but it will not account for the impact of social inequality, gender, race and class divisions. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these divisions, but others have explored this.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> For example, see Abby Day (2013)

One of the key things to note here, is the focus on young people and the impact on the understanding of adolescence, youth work and church ministry. In her later work, Jane Pilcher records the ‘emergence of age as a basis for social differentiation’ in western cultures during the 1950-60’s (Pilcher, 1995, p. 66). Hilborn and Bird report the rise of the ‘generation gap’<sup>133</sup> in the late 1960’s, the rise of ‘youth culture’ or counter-culture and the difficulties this posed for the church that perceived it as ‘a threat to the authority and moral leadership of the church’ (2002, p.4). They document the response in the form of the ‘Jesus Movement’ and a subsequent growth in writing and activities aimed at young people.

Generational theory was popularised by the work of Neil Howe and William Strauss (1991) who worked in market research in America. They recognised the importance of generational difference for consumer markets as well as emphasising the importance of younger people as the ‘lead cohort’ in defining the identity and ethos of a generation (Hilborn and Bird, 2002).

Hilborn and Bird trace the corresponding rise of the ‘teenager’ in the post-war years to market research and the increased spending power of young people linked to the economic upturn. They note that not only do the marketers describe, but they also seek to shape, the consumer generation. However, they also note that the economic trend reflected a broader segmentation of society and a more ‘self-contained teenage subculture’ (2002, p.45) that was addressed in the Albemarle report and the establishment of youth clubs.<sup>134</sup>

Codrington (2008) offers a summary of the five living generations

Label	Born	Historical Events	Defining Values & characteristics
G.I. (World War)	1901-20s	World War 1	Civic-minded, conformity, hierarchical, clear male and female roles, frugal
Silent (Builder)	1920-45	World War 2 and Great Depression	Duty, hard work, delayed reward, ‘waste not want not’
Bay Boomer	1946- early 60s	Post-war, ‘drugs, sex, rock and roll’, Vietnam, Moon landings	‘conspicuous consumption’, workaholic. Optimism, idealism, team orientation, personal gratification, health/wellness
Boomer-Xer cusper	1964-69	Born in-between but influenced by both eras, choose characteristics of	

<sup>133</sup> They attribute the phrase ‘generation gap’ to Charles Kraft in 1967 (Hilborn and Bird 2002 p.3 fn 8)

<sup>134</sup> See my discussion of Albemarle in Chapter 1

		one or other; able to bridge the divide. Barack Obama & David Cameron cited as being 'cuspers' (Codrington 2008 p8)	
Xers (Gen X)	1960s-1989	Watergate, Vietnam, AIDS,	'latchkey' kids, children of divorce. Change, choice, global awareness, individualism, immediate gratification, survivors.
Millennial (Gen Y)	1989-2000s	Post-cold-war, fall of communism, new era of communication and wireless technology, 9-11	Optimism, confidence, high self-esteem, civic duty, ethical consumption, techno-savvy, global citizens.
Gen Z /iGen	1997-	Dolly the Sheep, Post 2008 recession, Google, Donald Trump. (And we can add) Covid-19 global pandemic	Digital natives, recession-marked, multiracial, sexually-fluid, post-Christian

### Characteristics of Millennials or Generation Y

According to Howe and Strauss (2000) the millennial generation has the potential to be 'America's next great generation' (2000, p.28). Writing as this cohort began to reach the age of 18, they suggested they were 'on the brink of becoming a highly effective social force' (2000, p.365). In both the UK and the USA this generation have seen a focus on child welfare and safety; in the UK, the murder of James Bulger, the attention given to child abuse and child protection, and the priority given to education by the Blair government are described as important influences by Hilborn and Bird (2002, p.144). However, they suggest that research in the UK does not point to an increase in civic responsibility but rather to a decreasing level of engagement with politics. This generally positive view is reinforced by Howe and Strauss (2000) who suggested seven traits of millennial young people: they are special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured and conventional (2000, pp.43-4).

A contrasting view on American young people is proposed by Jean Twenge (2013). She has the obvious benefit of another decade to research this generation and arrives at the conclusion that they are 'more 'Generation Me' than 'Generation We' (Twenge, 2013, p.15). Twenge presents research amongst college students conducted up to 2009 to demonstrate that 'young

people have more positive self-views, endorse more narcissistic personality traits, and are more self-focused' (Twenge 2013, p.12). She suggests there has been a generational move away from what she calls 'intrinsic values' such as self-acceptance and community affiliation towards 'extrinsic values' of money, image and fame which leads to symptoms of anxiety and depression (2013, p.13). They also showed less civic engagement than previous generations at the same age, subscribing instead to an individualistic morality that had no need to help others.

Jeffrey Arnett (2013) challenged this view and called for an end to negative stereotypes of emerging adults. Arnett disputes Twenge's research methods and conclusions by applying them to what he knows about emerging adulthood rather than just generational observations. Having high expectations for life is normal rather than being problematic, it serves as a psychological resource during this stressful period. Anxiety and depression are not the result of an 'inflated self-esteem' but stem from 'the identity struggles that are a normal part of the emerging adult life stage (Arnett, 2013, p.7). Arnett states that the actual behaviour of this generation of young adults shows that they are less selfish and impulsive, and they offer the hope of 'creating a more generous and accepting society' (2013, p.8).

Research from the UK (Savage, et al., 2006) examined the world view of 124 young people aged 15-25 year olds.<sup>135</sup> The key finding of this research was the proposal that the worldview of Generation Y could be described as a 'happy midi-narrative'. It is helpful to note that Savage et al. recognise their work was with young people who could be considered 'included' in society and so it may not be possible to generalise their findings to those on the margins of society' (Savage, et al., 2006). This difference in the lives of young people is easy to overlook but it is portrayed by Orr-Ewing and Orr-Ewing (2010).

Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing's short book is written out of their experience and observation of a changing culture amongst young people. They use the term, 'New Victorians' as an alternative label for the millennial generation suggesting that they 'reflect the social and aspirational inequalities of their Victorian forbears' (Orr-Ewing, 2010, p.17). They are optimistic in proposing this generation has great potential to achieve as much as the Victorians whilst also living in the context of poverty and brokenness. Thus, there are two groups – 'the empowered and the neglected' (2010, p.23). This is a significant observation and relevant to note that much research focuses on those who might be deemed 'included' with access to resources, especially the consumer goods and technology that are so important to this generation.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> I have previously referred to this study in my discussion of immanent faith in 2.3.4.

<sup>136</sup> A critique that could be applied to this research project and one I note in 3.7 is applied to internships in general.

## Appendix 4

### Participant Consent Form



#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Title of the project: Forming and Transforming Faith in a Secular Age

Main investigator and contact details: Peter White

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet for the study.  
I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
4. I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.
6. I understand that quotes from me will be used in the dissemination of the research
7. I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed, and this data will be stored securely.

Data Protection: I agree to the University<sup>137</sup> processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me\*

Name of participant (print).....Signed.....Date.....

Name of person

witnessing consent (print).....Signed..... Date.....

PARTICIPANTS MUST BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP  
ADD DATE AND VERSION NUMBER OF CONSENT FORM.

---

**I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.**

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please speak to the researcher or email him at x stating the title of the research.

You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.

Please let the researcher know whether you are/are not happy for them to use any data from you collected to date in the write up and dissemination of the research.

Date 01/09/2017

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<sup>137</sup> "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its Associate Colleges.



## Appendix 5

### Participant Information sheet



#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

##### Section A: The Research Project

1. **Title of project: Forming and Transforming Faith in a Secular Age**
2. **Brief summary of research.**

The research aims to consider the factors that influence the formation of faith in young adults participating in a one-year 'internship' programme. It will examine the formal and informal teaching and learning to identify processes that have the most impact on the formation of faith.
3. **Purpose of the study**

The research forms part of study for a Professional doctorate (DProf) at Anglia Ruskin University
4. **Name of your Supervisor** *Dr. Zoe Bennett*
5. **Why have I been asked to participate?**

You are asked to join the study because you are a participant on the internship programme in Peterborough diocese.
6. **How many people will be asked to participate?**

A group of 7 participants will form the core of the study.
7. **What are the likely benefits of taking part?**

It is unlikely that there will be any direct benefits to you except for an increased awareness of the learning and the processes of formation in which you are involved. This may make you more active and intentional in pursuing your own formation.
8. **Can I refuse to take part?**

Yes, you can refuse to take part without giving a reason.
9. **Has the study got ethical approval?**

The study has ethical approval from the ethics committee at Anglia Ruskin University.
10. **Has the organisation where you are carrying out the research given permission?**

The research is being carried out in full knowledge of the Bishops of Peterborough and Brixworth and with their full permission.
11. **What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will primarily be written up as part of the doctoral thesis. Interim findings may be used for training seminars, conference presentations and/or written in journal articles.
12. **Contact for further information**

## Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. **What will I be asked to do?**

There is an initial questionnaire survey. You will be interviewed twice, once at the start of the year and then at the end. A focus group discussion will be held during the March retreat. You are encouraged to keep a journal during the year, and this could be using photographs.

2. **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. They will only be used by myself and may be seen by my supervisors. Quotes will be used in the thesis but will be anonymised.

A short biographical outline will be included to give context, and you will be asked to approve the text for this. If you take photographs and these are used, additional permission will be gained from you and the subjects in the photographs. Photos of people will be pixelated.

It may not be possible to guarantee complete anonymity. It is possible that you may be identified by their colleagues or peers, given it is a specific study and in a particular context.

3. **Use of quotes.** Quotes from the interviews and other sessions will be used in the presentation of the data,

4. **Use of recording equipment.** As above the interviews and sessions will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings and transcripts will be kept in a secure computer file and paper copies in a locked filing cabinet.

5. **Withdrawal.** You can withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason. You do not have to answer any questions in interviews that you wish not to answer.

6. **Summary of research findings.** The research findings will be available to you if you wish to receive a copy.

7. **Contact details for complaints.**

If participants have any complaints about the study, they should be encouraged to speak to you or your Supervisor (for students) in the first instance. They should also, however, be given access to details about Anglia Ruskin University's complaints procedure.

Email address: [complaints@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:complaints@anglia.ac.uk)

Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,  
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM.

Date 01/09/2017

## Appendix 6

### Organisation Permission Letter



Diocese of Peterborough  
The Palace,  
Peterborough  
PE1 1YB

Anglia Ruskin University  
East Road,  
Cambridge  
CB1 1PT

17/07/17

Dear **Peter**,

***Student research***

This is to confirm that I give permission for you to carry out research at our organisation for the purposes of your DProf at Anglia Ruskin University.

I understand that by giving this permission I am granting you the use and ownership of data collected.

I understand that you will write up the results for your degree.

I understand that you may disseminate findings at Anglia Ruskin University and elsewhere, including for publication.

I give permission for our organisation to be named in dissemination.

I do/do not wish to see a summary of the findings prior to dissemination. If so, I understand that participants will be informed of this.

Yours sincerely

**Andrew Roberts**  
Diocesan Secretary



## Appendix 7

### Research Proposal Ethics Checklist (DBA, EdD, DProf, MProf)

[v.269]

Last Saved: 09/07/2017 by Mr Pete White

Form successfully saved

#### CONFIDENTIAL

This Ethics Checklist is designed to help you identify the type of ethical issues you need to consider for your research.

It is indicative only as we recognise that you will have more details when you make your ethical application and that some of your answers may change.

Please answer 'yes' to any of the following questions that you are not sure of the answer to at this stage. You must check all these answers are still correct when you make your ethical application.

**Please note that completion of this form does not constitute obtaining ethics approval. This form is for monitoring purposes only. The route for obtaining ethical approval is a separate process that you will also need to adhere to.**

#### 1. Name:

Peter White

#### 2. SID Number:

1534975

#### 3. Title of research project:

Forming and Transfo

#### 4. Faculty

Please answer YES or NO to all the questions below. Please consult 'Question Specific Advice' which can be accessed at [http://web\(anglia.ac.uk\)/anet/rdcs/ethics](http://web(anglia.ac.uk)/anet/rdcs/ethics)

Questions 1- 18 NO

Yes No

19. Present a risk of compromising the anonymity or confidentiality of personal, sensitive or confidential information provided by human participants and/or organisations? ☒ ☐

Yes No

20. Involve colleagues, students, employees, business contacts or other individuals whose response may be influenced by your power or relationship with them? ☒ ☐

Yes No

21. Require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the human participants (e.g. pupils/students, self-help groups, nursing home residents, business, charity, museum, government department, international agency)? ☐ ☒

Yes No

22. Offer financial or other incentives to human participants? ☐ ☒

Yes No

23. Take place outside of the country in which your campus is located, in full or in part? ☐ ☒

Yes No

24. Cause a negative impact on the environment (over and above that of normal daily activity)? ☐ ☒

Yes No

25. Involve direct and/or indirect contact with human participants? ☒ ☐

Yes No

26. Raise any other ethical concerns not covered in this checklist? ☐ ☒

**(STAGE 1 APPROVAL)**

**NO** answered to question 1-13

**YES** answered to any question 14-22 - Risk Category 2

i) Complete Section 4 of the Research Ethics Application Form (Stage 1).

ii) Produce Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Participant Consent Form (PCF) if applicable.

iii) Submit this form and PIS/ PCF where applicable to your Faculty DREP (where available) or Faculty FREP.

## **Appendix 8**

### **Initial Questionnaire**

#### **Forming and Transforming Faith**

#### **Questionnaire**

**September 2017**

This questionnaire forms part of a research project for a Professional Doctorate programme. Your answers will be recorded and used as explained in the Participant Information Sheet 17/0/7/17 v1.0.

Please answer all questions as honestly and fully as you are able. Do not think too long, your instincts will often give the best answer. Use extra paper if needed.

Please see the information sheet re confidentiality and anonymity and add your name here:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **1. God's Calling.**

a) How do you understand 'God's calling'? Please write one or two short paragraphs.

E.G. Do you believe that God calls everyone the same or do we each have a specific 'vocation' task/role/place?

b) How do you understand God's calling for your life?

#### **2. Your Faith Journey**

a) Looking back over your life, describe what has helped you to grow in your faith.

You might include specific times of obvious growth, ordinary things that have kept you going; times when you've been stuck or not grown, times you may have turned away from faith. Any times of difficulty, loss or pain or changed circumstances that have led to growth.

b). Describe the things or times that have hampered your growth in faith.

You could include daily business, laziness, not having others to help you, fear of commitment, doubts, difficulties with church, worship style, peer or family pressures etc.

3. a). Pick two of the following that are most important in your journey of faith and explain how and why they have helped you to grow

Attending church/worship <i>regularly</i> : Listening to sermons; Music and/or liturgy; Communion/Eucharist
Taking part in outreach (evangelism <i>and/or</i> social justice projects) or social projects not connected with church
Relationships - Being part of a small group, having a mentor, a specific person or a close friend
Spiritual disciplines on your own – praying, reading/studying the Bible, reading other books, listening to music, podcasts or sermons online,
Attending Christian events, festivals, conferences etc.
Leading others (in worship, Sunday School, small group, prayer etc.) or helping others at church or elsewhere

b). Where or when do you feel you meet with God?

e.g. on your own, outside, inside, times of quiet or in specific activity (sports, music, walking etc), in other people, in large worship events, in church, in social action or helping others.

Write briefly about *two* of those times or places.

4. I feel I am good at...

Tick one box in each line

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not certain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
praying deeply in a range of different ways					
understanding how to see the world and our times as God sees them					
worshipping with mind, body and spirit					
exploring the Bible					
putting my faith into practice in daily life					
nurturing & caring for others in the church community					
speaking about my faith/personal journey					

5. I feel most alive as a Christian when...

	show someone God's love in a practical way
	gain new understanding of the Bible and its teaching
	sense God at work in the world beyond my church (e.g., my workplace, neighbourhood)
	experience the power of the Holy Spirit moving within me
	feel God helping me to become more Christlike in my thoughts, words and actions
	feel close to God in prayer, meditation or silence
	experience God through those around me, in fellowship, conversation or activity

6. I felt a church community I have belonged to was most 'alive' when we were ...

	helping people to celebrate all that's good in creation and human life
	sharing the Gospel with people who are not Christians
	experiencing the power of the Spirit in worship, signs or spiritual gifts
	seeking God and deepening our experience of prayer together
	giving practical help or support to those in need in our community/wider world
	growing closer together in our shared life as a fellowship
	helping each other live more like Christ in our thought, speech and action

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your answers will be really helpful in my research and I hope you found the questions stimulating!*

*The next stage will be to discuss this and other questions in more detail with you as part of the interview stage. I look forward to that!*

Pete



## **Appendix 9**

### **Questions for First Interviews**

DProf: Forming Faith in a Secular Age

Semi-structured Interviews November 2017

Purpose of interview – to explore further answers to initial survey. To start to explore factors that have influenced formation of faith so far and what is likely to continue that growth during the year.

#### **1. Introduction**

Use the initial survey as a starter for discussion – ask questions specific to each person's responses in general areas. Add additional questions around areas of interest for the research.

#### **2. Faith Journey**

What or who have been the most formative influences on your faith?

Explore specific people – why are they influential and what did they give to you?

Specific events – what was it about the event that made an impact on you?

Role of church, incl worship/services- what part did they play?

Time away from home – uni/ mission trips/camps etc. How significant was it that you were away? How alone did you feel? How much out of your comfort zone? How did your faith help/hinder this? Were you more or less aware of God in that time? Why/how?

What got in the way?

Did you have a time when you gave up on faith or considered it? How did you cope with that and what has been affect now?

What feelings/emotions were strongest at that time?

What got you through it? How has that shaped who you are or what you believe now?

Are there stories of others in Bible or elsewhere that have helped you get through/resonated with your experience?

#### **3. Vocation.**

Questions in survey re general and specific calling. Clarify how they understand their specific call, and if not sure, how will they know. How did you feel called to the intern programme; has that been same or different to other times you felt called to do something?

How do you know God's will? What are ways God speaks to you and how do you test that?

What has been unhelpful to you in your vocational journey?

What do you think God wants you to do with your life?

What are you passionate about? (what makes life worth living? What makes you angry? When do you feel most alive?)

#### 4. Expectations

What hopes do you have for this year?

How do you want the year to change you (if at all)?

If I were to be interviewing you again at the end of the year what do you hope will have happened?

How would you describe a 'mature Christian'?

What were the main reasons for choosing to do this year?

(What aspects of the year do you expect to lead to most growth?)

(What do you need to do to help you to grow?)

## **Appendix 10**

### **Questions for End of Year Interviews.**

These are the questions we will discuss during the interview.

1. In what ways have your hopes/expectations for this year been realised?
2. Who has been most influential on your faith this year? Why/How?
3. Is there any one moment/event that stands out to you as more significant in its effect on you?
4. Has there been a time when things got really hard? What got you through?
5. What spiritual practices/disciplines have you used this year? Any new ones? Have they become regular/habits? How do you think they have helped you?
6. How has the worship life of your placement church helped your faith to grow?
7. Has your sense of calling changed? How? What helped that to change?
8. How has your understanding of, or relationship with, God changed over the year?
9. What has been the relative importance of learning about God & faith (head) and experiencing of feeling him (heart)?
10. What do you think I (Pete) have been trying to do with you through the programme this year?

## Appendix 11

### Example Interview Transcript

#### 180725\_Interview 2 – Participant 3 (P3)

**Pete:** Interview with P3 on the 25th of July.

In what ways have your hopes or expectations for the year been realized?

**P3:** Generally, my expectations weren't too high in the sense that but you know, it was meant to be, I was coming in at quite an early stage and quite young and just yeah just a sense of calling but just didn't know, I just wanted to explore. I I was more on the receiving end. Then I did have vocationally, I did have two questions at the start of the year, one was about, perhaps a bit overthinking it but one was about sort of learning more about ordination, hopefully gaining a sense of whether it fits in my calling and tied in with that is this idea of what does my vocation look like, is it kind of a full-time, essentially is it full-time or part-time essentially Yeah. To what extent does God want me fully in the church as such or does he want me kind of, between worldly and churchy kind of like.

**Pete:** Lay or ordained ministry maybe?

**P3:** Yeah, exactly. So those kind of questions came up. And in that way that this year has been helpful because it's clarified what that kind of vocation looks like and helped me think about areas I can now explore in the coming year, like vocationally, helpful. But also just kind of getting to explore the Church of England a bit more. I remember at my interview I talked about I think I talked about church, about wanting to explore different styles. or at least can I be exposed to different styles and coming from what I call a middle of the road Anglican church which really was kind of dead on from my experience. It's been really helpful even within my church being exposed to different varieties of worship and also within the diocese and the internship even different theologies. You could say different understandings. Yeah, that's been quite helpful. Yeah, really helpful actually. yeah, yeah.

I suppose just learning about parish life. I had no idea! I came in to this year with a it sounds bad but I didn't really understand what goes behind the service and what needs to happen and, actually, what does a vicar do Tuesday to Saturday or whenever their day off is. Is it just writing sermons and having tea. yeah, but yeah, yeah. So seeing the pastoral stuff etc.

**Pete:** Okay, so, who do you think's been the most influential on your faith this year? Can you explain why they might or how.

**P3:** I want to kind of cheat and say my congregation. I can't really pick out an individual, or I could if I wanted to but it's been really helpful getting to know individuals in the congregation and seeing how they live out their faith. Not only within Church but also in their lives, just their whole approach to it's been really just at times inspiring because they, you know, it's been really kind of useful to get that insight and y'know the faith of some congregation members, It's just kind of, when you compare it to yourself. It's almost like wow, you know, it's, inspiring, really inspiring. I don't know if that helps your question?

**Pete:** That's really interesting, so when you say congregation, you mean meet certain individuals?

**P3:** Yea but more than one. Yeah,

**Pete:** How has that impacted your faith do you think?

**P3:** I suppose it's made me re-evaluate what having a faith is. Y'know, there's as this kind of talk about this kind of whole life discipleship. Yeah, it's a sort of you read about it. You read about discipleship a lot but actually to experience or to view it, and looking at the lengths people go to for their faith, that's sort of. prompted me to kind of keep looking at myself; I think it's very easy when doing ministry not to.

**Pete:** So is there any one particular moment or an event time that stood out to you as most significant in its effect on you?

**P3:** I struggled with this one.

**Pete:** If there isn't that's fine.

**P3:** There were probably 3 it's just trying to, So probably one of them was one of them was, after the Living Faith modules, we'd but often go out and sit and chat with the other interns

**Pete:** At McDonald's.?

**Pete:** Yeah, that's it on the A45 that kind of Billing turn but you don't need to know that yeah. That was, they were really interesting conversations, but still kind of, challenging for all of us about what we'd learnt. I think that was primarily gold modules, God module but we didn't just focus on Mission of God but we kind of talked about Theology and Faith generally. And I suppose I've oiled. I just never had such a passionate talk or chat about faith and religion before. It's just something you don't do in your Sunday coffee break. Even at my Bible studies back at church, it's always kind of teaching as opposed to kind of thinking about theology and what that means for us. Yeah, and that's quite early on in the year and I was yeah, very special moments.

**Pete:** So was it one particular conversation or just all of them? .

**Pete:** Just collectively, there were certain moments that you probably want me to talk about.

**Pete:** Just say what you want to say okay. What are the other things?

**P3:** The other things not really a thing, I don't think but it was very sweet. It was a Christmas Fair. Y'know we come to church, all the congregation were there trying to help with the Christmas fair and lots of members of community ; we're all offering our kind of service of some sort and it's just seeing the gladness in people's hearts doing that, you know people who just didn't really see smile; y'know quite elderly who don't really smile but they really came to life. It's not particularly, influential on my faith but but it's something which has stuck with me this year.

**Pete:** So what was it about that that affected you?

**P3:** I don't know. I don't know. It's seeing the individual how I just haven't seen them before. My third thing I suppose is the Easter services they were yeah, Maundy Thursday. stripping of the altar. Watching the passion. That's that kind of whole period was quite reflective.

**Pete:** Okay, and how did that affect your faith do you think?

**P3:** I suppose that. It's very easy when we go through, especially with communion and stuff we talk about you know, Christ died for our sins, and the whole kind of the last supper type of thing, but it just really again, it just prompts you to reevaluate how you've been brought up with it and then actually how you actually realizing the significance of it. Again, you know most of my faith has been kind of through teaching and learning and reading books but actually to sit there and contemplate and just it is just make you really, it's a bit like communion you can't put it into words kind of thing. And then y'know, finishing with Good Friday Walk and Dawn Eucharist. It's just, I can't put it into words, but it's I don't know how to describe it.

**Pete:** Are you suggesting that your faith was very much sort of knowledge-based. Was this something that became very experiential and emotive, emotional maybe? I don't want to put words into your mouth.

**P3:** YES. That's a good framework perhaps to use.. Yes, yeah experience

**Pete:** Are you quite moved by thinking about it now?

**P3:** yeah. Yeah, it does just thinking about it is, you get that essence of what it felt back then.. Actually its probably I haven't thought about it for a while. So when I do it's yeah.

**Pete:** Would you describe that as a transformative moment a time when something changed for you in your understanding of your faith.

**P3:** Yes. Well. Yeah, transformative, how do you describe it? But it's arguing over words now, transformative, revelation or what?

**Pete:** I don't want to put words in your mouth so if it isn't that then say it isn't but did it feel like something shifted or changed in you?

**P3:** Yes, I think there was definitely a shift of y'know deeper understanding or probably deeper experience actually, experiences often lead to understanding. yeah, yeah. Yeah, so I won't dwell on that.

**Pete:** Was there a time when things got really hard in the year?

**P3:** definitely

**Pete:** And what got you through?

**P3:** Christmas. I don't envy vicars at Christmas time. It's yeah, it's difficulty in this very broad difficulty.

**Pete:** However you describe what it was It was kind of hard for you? What was hard? Why was it hard?

**P3:** For me is quite practical thing, just kind of the tiredness. I wanted to experience the whole Christmas thing I could've taken off early and missed the Christmas services where I really wanted to experience what was that like as a clergyman? And it was really difficult to be preparing all these carol services, not messy church but Christingle service and 9 lessons and carols. And it's just there's difficulty in being kind of just being exhausted especially Christmas Eve and Christmas Day doing 5 services in 24 hours, but then there's also trying to find that space for you to experience that good time at Christmas you know actually reflecting on what Christmas is as a Christian. It sounds quite, you know, so I definitely felt myself being kind of squeezed and pushed away from kind of being able to take part in the reflection as such much more kind of trying to organize it all and it's partly my fault because you know, I kind of put myself in that position but I didn't balance that and it's something which I learned for Easter time. Easter time I was much more intentional. Okay. Christmas wasn't great, I didn't have a pre break as such so by Easter time I had a good week off beforehand, a good week off afterwards? Yeah, so and that worked much better and I can really participate in the services and in the reflection as myself as opposed to as someone helping. Yeah, as someone doing the ministry.

**Pete:** So what got you through the hardship then?

**P3:** holiday at the end.

**Pete:** knowing that you were having a break at the end?

**P3:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, You just got to build some resilience. It's also quite difficult because theologically from a church perspective you just I dunno, more and more over the years I dislike Christmas. Just because you know after the kind of childhood kind of, you know fun of it, it does become rather, I don't just want to say over-commercialised which it is, but the whole has kinda seeped into the church, I think as well. Church can over-commercialise as well. Maybe I need to think about that a bit more but it's something I've noticed.

**Pete:** So what spiritual practice or disciplines have use this year and any new ones you've tried and any become some new habits or regular habits?

**P3:** Okay. No, not spiritual practices. So at the start of the year, I got my Time to Pray book, A church of England book, used that for a while, struggled with it. Just didn't have the time for it. It was just kind of hard to keep yourself with. I didn't particularly like the Liturgy, it's accessible liturgy, but , especially when it's just one person it's kind of not particularly helpful. The thing I use most regularly is 'Pray as you Go' and that's nice because you can listen to it. You don't need to read a book. I go for walks every day. And I pray on my walks and walk around the Racecourse. But I've never viewed it as a spiritual practice which is interesting. I dunno what it is?

**Pete:** So that's a regular discipline you do every day? to go for a walk and pray as you walk? Sounds like a spiritual practice to me.

**P3:** Yeah. Yeah

**Pete:** Is that something you've done before this year.

**P3:** No, I've never never really prayed on a walk before. no.

**Pete:** So you got into that habit this year.? Is that something you might carry on?

**P3:** Yeah definitely. Also like it's I sleep much better when I walk so it kind of kills 2 birds.

**Pete:** So a physical practice as well?

**P3:** Yea. exactly.

**Pete:** Any of the other practices that we talked about, have you tried any out.

**P3:** I can't remember what they are

**Pete:** Silence, Solitude giving serving fasting, Sabbath rest study, Bible reading.



**P3:** yeah, I just saw solitude and Bible reading is kind of combined in Pray as You Go' which is why I like it. Yeah. Sabbath's hard. I found it hard all year but I've got better at it. I suppose early on, cos we're enthusiastic early on and you've got lots of energy. yeah, yeah, I've got better but that's hard, I don't really, I never viewed it as spiritual discipline, but maybe I should.

**Pete:** Maybe. Do you think those things that you do regularly you have helped you this year? the prayer walking listening to pray as you go, and reading the Bible?

**P3:** Pray as you go's been helpful. So prayer walk yeah. Not particularly for kind of deepening faith, I don't really talk about deepening more I often talk about learning faith. But it's been helpful bringing God into a different part of your life so it's helped me avoid the whole kind of Sunday Christian aspect of it. And Pray as you Go that's been, I would say the biggest benefits of Pray as you Go is the actual Bible passages because otherwise I just wouldn't, hear them so that's the key benefit of pray as you go. Yeah, just hearing the Bible and reflecting on it. and having the questions asked.

**Pete:** So what about the actual worship life, congregational worship side of things in your Parish Church? How has that helped your faith to grow?

**P3:** Well. I talked about the Easter Services earlier, but actually day-to-day worship, it has broadened my mind of what is worship. but y'know, not just in styles and that kind of thing; they have quite alot of variety at Earls Barton from Christian meditation to kind of evensong. So yeah, which is a bit more ...because I've always been quite accepting of how people went about it. But I've never been like you have to do this liturgy otherwise it's not you're not reaching God. but I suppose it's just seeing that in the flesh I think because our church really only had one service each week at 9.15; you didn't have much choice. so yeah, just experiencing. different worship styles, affirming in myself that you can reach God in more than one way; you don't even need to be in a service to reach God.

**Pete:** Do you think your faith has grown through being part of that church?

**P3:** What do you mean by church? the congregation?

When you get together on a Sunday morning for worship. So I think before you talked about the importance of Eucharist to you and stuff. So when you meet together as a congregation, what impact does that have on your faith or has it not really this year or is it more other things that have helped shape your faith?

**P3:** I think it sounds bad, but you know, some Sundays can be really great, some Sundays can be y'know, yeah. it depends what you're doing on a Sunday. you know if you're serving at church and. sometimes that could be great but sometimes it would be really bad because all

the servers do is chat to each other. But part of the reason why I say that because I've talked about before the congregation being really powerful in my faith, particular services being really powerful in my faith so when you talk about the worship life, I suppose I include that. But it's hard to pinpoint. As I said the congregation have been fundamental in my faith.

**Pete:** But is it more the example and the testimonies of people rather than worshipping with them or doing stuff in church together with them that's affected you?

**P3:** If you include outside of Sunday worship both still being Church Life, then yes.

**P3:** So you mentioned your calling earlier. How's your sense of calling changed? And what do you think has helped that to change?

**P3:** Has it changed? do callings change?

**Pete:** maybe it hasn't?

**P3:** I dunno, do callings change?.

**Pete:** You weren't so clear when you came? you said what your calling might be, so how has it changed at all? Is it clearer or not clearer?

**P3:** Clearer, Yeah. yeah, definitely

**Pete:** so in what way has it become clearer?

**P3:** I have a better understanding of what kind of ministry or ministries I am gifted for and what I feel content with. And which kind of area of Church interests me. And also how that throws up vocation, what that can look like in terms of one's reality, of occupation. Do you want me to explain the changes?

**Pete:** What do you think helped you to change?

**P3:** Okay, Actually my mentor, my mentor's been really good. kind of just generally talking about church and problems with church. But actually my mentor's probably really the only person I've had deep and serious conversations about vocations with and that was really helpful to have him outside the parish because it's nice to be able to go to the parish y'know but vocationally talking to my mentor And then just also getting involved in the parish, you find yourself gravitating to more things, some things, than others. So you kind of see for yourself where you stand.

**Pete:** Okay, How's your understanding of God changed through the year or your relationship God Has Changed? How would you say you're different now in your relationship?

**P3:** I think I understand. God better. It'd be wrong to say God understands me better ... that might be heresy. Yeah, I suppose God's less of a man in the sky you could say.

**Pete:** So what is He instead?

**P3:** He's Emmanuel God With Us. That's the way to put it. Doing my prayer walking pastoral visiting people, doing that kind of stuff you realize that actually God's with you in that moment and the people you're talking with or you're praying for you know, it's much more real and forgive the phrase but down to earth but you know like yeah, down to earth, so yeah, I don't think I have any better understanding of necessarily who God is. Cos they're very difficult theological questions to talk about. And inevitably when you talk about who God is you start boxing him up,

**Pete:** Does that mean God is more than you thought or make him less because he's here with you, does that make him less powerful or different from the God that you thought he was?

**P3:** good question. I probably see him as more present, more down to earth, and more real than I thought he was. In many ways, I guess I'm more, I'm less eager to try and attach to God certain descriptions, if that makes sense. It's kind of it's kind of I suppose I've become more humble in my understanding of God. In the sense that before you could say God's this and this and this and he's up in the sky. I suppose I had a very kind of doctrinal view of God and I suppose I've moved towards more experiential view of God. Because doctrines very good, helping you try and find an answer or giving you an understanding of God but until you actually experience that it's difficult to believe I guess.

**Pete:** So can you describe the God you've experienced?

**P3:** I would argue once you start describing him these things start boxing him in.

**Pete:** Yeah, I know. Okay. so who is the God your experiencing?

**P3:** I don't think I can answer that!

**Pete:** Okay, so your relationship with God is changing; he's much more present and just close to you and with you.

**P3:** Much more of a personal God I guess as opposed to a kind of, yeah, I dunno what to call it,

**Pete:** more personal not distant, interested and involved

**P3:** not remote and defined,

**Pete:** This probably links a bit with this. So what do you think is the relative importance of what you've learned about God from how you've learnt of God and experienced God. So that sort of head versus heart bit.

**P3:** The whole concept of head vs. heart, you talked about that earlier this year.

**Pete:** yeah, we did. just for you what that been like? It feels like you're saying you've moved a lot more from knowing about God towards actually knowing and experiencing God. Is that right?

**P3:** Knowing about God, experiencing God. I suppose your knowledge changes as you experience; you have your set kind of understandings of kind of your construction of God, and as you experience God, that affirms in your heart your knowledge how that turns knowledge into belief. In terms of this year, my experience has been much greater this year than any other point. I don't think that's being kind of detached from the knowledge and learning. I mean this year even talked about in our mission of God courses we didn't go deep into theology of God, but we approached God with certain scriptures just trying to understand him and then transform that understanding into how we do mission.

**Pete:** If I was to ask you what what's been the impact of this year on your faith? would that be a better way of putting it, could you describe that?

**P3:** I'm much more sure in my faith than I was in September. I suppose I'm much more sure in what mission God has for the Church and myself. What he calls us to be, what he calls us to do. in my vocation stuff. and the same time I've left this year with more questions that might be a good measure of faith - does growing in faith mean more questions? Questions about theology, doctrine, y'know

**Pete:** On reflection on the year what do you think I was trying to do with you this year, through the programme, through my interactions with you. What do you think?

**Pete:** That's a good question. I think that'd be from training you set up , trying something new. I think we're meant to be challenged, or tested. That seems to have an Old Testament ring to it! Testing. But in terms of you know. vocationally, asked us to think about our vocation, not too explicitly but also our backgrounds trying to help us to understand about the Church of England. Theology, Doctrine. challenge our status quo - we all come from different status quo's and I think you've been trying to challenge our status quo. Or at least that's how it turned out. I think everybody yeah everybody feels we've all changed through the year. yeah, you kind of maintained a kind of. pastoral role, that's those practical kind of checking on how we are but also giving us some space away from the vocations teams or the Parish talk about

stuff. sort of kind of. guiding maybe you can call it director, yeah spiritual director you could say. Yes director, actually, that's a good word.

**Pete:** So that's how you see my role and the main thing you see me trying to achieve, is that sort of sense of pushing you, to challenge you,

**P3:** to make us think.

**Pete:** Okay, Thankyou.

## **Appendix 12**

### **Qualities for Discernment Priest and Distinctive Deacon**

Church of England 2020

#### **Qualities rather than Criteria**

In the grids which follow we have moved away from Criteria which are to be met to Qualities to be inhabited. This marks a different way of exploring a person's potential call to train for ordained ministry in the Church of England. Inhabiting a quality speaks more of a life-long process that is ever deepening and it might offer resonance with the ancient term 'habitus' which speaks of dispositions lived out through being immersed deeply in a wide variety of lived contexts and relationships, all of which shape our living and calling. The qualities are grounded in the Church of England's Ordinals. There are six Qualities: Love for God, Call to Ministry, Love for People, Wisdom, Fruitfulness and Potential. These qualities are explored in the context of a candidate's relationship to Christ, the Church, the World and the Self.

#### **Priest and Distinctive Deacon**

This document contains the high-level grids for both Priests and Distinctive Deacons. These high-level grids are likely to be the candidate-facing documents. We will work on presenting these as attractively as possible in digital format including using single words, pictures and images. In each case the high-level grid is followed by a more detailed breakdown of the qualities which is designed to help DDOs in the task of exploring the qualities with candidates to enable them to inhabit the high-level grid most effectively.

#### **Assistant Ministry and Incumbent Level Ministry**

The grids include what is needed in the qualities for those offering for Assistant Level ministry and for those offering for ministry at Incumbent Level. We have included incumbent level qualities for both Priests and Distinctive Deacons since there is no theological reason why a Distinctive Deacon cannot exercise ministry at Incumbent Level, even though this may well not be in traditional parish-based ministry. The question of whether a minister is stipendiary or non-stipendiary is separate from whether they are being considered for ministry at Assistant Level or Incumbent Level.

#### **A Clear, trusted, flexible and welcoming framework**

We hope that these qualities will be clear and communicable. We hope the framework will be reliable, transparent, rigorous and consistent. Above all we hope that it will be widely inclusive of all potential candidates across the widest range of contexts and that it will enable all candidates to give of their best, opening space for them to explore God's call in their lives, whatever shape that takes. We hope that within these two fundamental orders of ministry a

variety of different profiles of ministry might emerge, in response to the needs of the Church and to God's call on the lives of Christian disciples.

## **Priest**

### **Love for God**

*The candidate...*

### **Call to Ministry**

*The candidate...*

### **Love for People**

*The candidate...*

### **Wisdom**

*The candidate...*

### **Fruitfulness**

*The candidate...*

### **Potential**

*The candidate has potential to...*

## **Christ**

Is reliant on God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and lives out an infectious, life-transforming faith

Responds to the call of Christ to be a disciple

Welcomes Christ in others, listens, values and respects; cares for those in poverty and the marginalised

Is inquisitive, curious and open to new learning

Embraces the different and enables others to be witnesses and servants

Grow in faith and be open to navigating the future in the company of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit

## **Church**

Is rooted in Scripture, the worship of the Church and the living traditions of faith

Understands the distinctive nature of ordained priestly ministry

Builds relationships which are collaborative and enabling

Shows leadership that enables thriving and healthy churches, handles conflict, and can lead in mission

Shows the capacity to exercise sacramental, liturgical and an effective and enabling teaching ministry

Manage change, and see the big picture

## **World**

Whole-heartedly, generously and attractively engages with God's world

Is committed to being a public and representative person

Shows God's compassion for the world

Is robust and courageous and prepared to take risks

Shares faith in Christ and can accompany others in their faith

See where God is working in the world and respond with missionary imagination

## **Self**

Is prayerful and studies the Bible

Articulates an inner sense of call grounded in priestly service

Has empathy and is aware of how others receive them

Is a mature and integrated person of stability and integrity

Has resilience and stamina

Be adaptable and agile



## Appendix 13

### Dissemination of Findings – Summary for Professionals

A summary of the main findings from the research that have a specific application to professional practice in the field of internship and apprenticeship programmes and a more general application to faith formation of emerging adults in other contexts, such as theological training for ordinands and lay ministers, chaplaincy, and discipleship with emerging adults.

#### Principles

Emerging Adulthood is a significant period of life when questions are asked about identity, meaning, and purpose. It is an important time for faith formation and vocational exploration. There is much evidence of the value of the gap year for encouraging personal and spiritual growth and vocational direction.

It is important to be clear about the purpose of the year to ensure that expectations of the participants are managed, and that they are clear about what is expected from them. It will be useful for leaders, trainers, supervisors, and mentors to understand the theological and theoretical frame of the programme.

Faith formation is best understood as a process of forming a habitus of faith, developing a holistic faith that shapes character and leads to wise living, a way of life that reflects the way of Jesus. Through action and reflection, participants will learn an embodied, relational practical wisdom as disciples of Jesus.

The research identified the most important factors affecting faith formation were relationships (community), encountering God (experiences), and learning the story (narratives). The context of the year provided a supportive space where disruption, challenge and opportunity created the conditions for change and transformation.

#### Practice

**Generating a Community of Practice.** Relationship was the strongest formational influence on the entire group. This included relationships with supervisors, mentors, tutors, and other adults but also the peer community of other participants. The 'intern house' was effective for one group where there were three young adults and an intention to form community. Times for the whole group to meet together, formally and informally, are invaluable for fostering community and a sense of learning together. Sharing stories, ideas, and resources, and reflecting together are as important as formal teaching input.

The roles of mentor and House Companion need to be robust and clearly defined.

**Creating Opportunities for disruption and challenge.** Being placed in a new situation or encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and do different things develops confidence, skills, and reliance on God. These new experiences can lead to encounters with God in new ways and provoke change.

Good supervision and support are essential to maximise learning and growth.

**Narratives of Vocation and Purpose.** Learning the story of the Bible and theology can guide the process of meaning-making that is crucial to understanding vocation. The training programme needs to offer tools to help make sense of their world and experience, offering a 'plausibility structure' that will stand in the face of a secular and post-Christian world. The

processes of learning are as important as the content and this should include discussion, sharing, and debate.

**Practices of Faith.** The participants recognised the value of new habits and spiritual practices that they had not developed before. This practical spirituality needs to be encouraged and developed. The work of ministry and service in placements is important site of encounter with God and learning about self.

**Reflective Practice.** Teaching and enabling the group to reflect on their experiences and to learn from them is an important skill to develop. Theological reflection helped the young adults recognise where God was at work in, through and around them and to identify change in their own lives.

### My Model for the formation of a faith habitus.

