Young Apprentices: Communities of Practice as a 21st Century Model for Youth Ministry in U.S. Catholic Communities

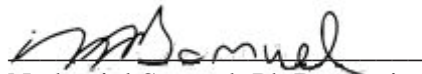### By: Ricardo Gonzalez

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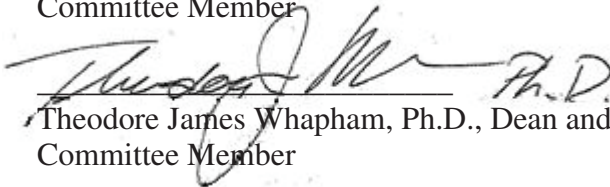
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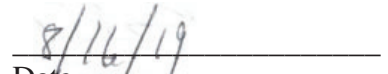
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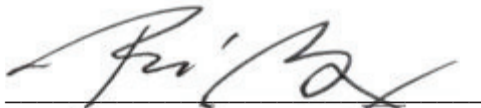
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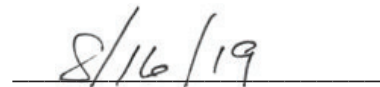
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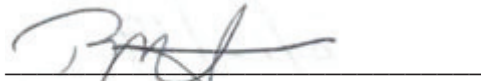
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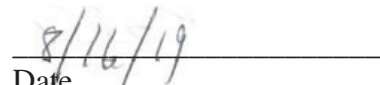
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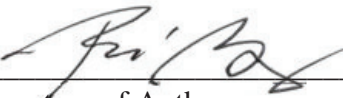
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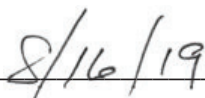
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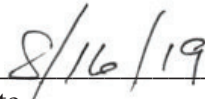
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Abstract

Disaffiliation of youth is considered one of greatest pastoral challenges facing the

Catholic Church in the United States. Parishes across the United States have been

searching for best practices that can lead to greater youth involvement in the life of the

Christian community in light of the downturn in youth participation. This dissertation

proposes a discipleship model of youth ministry as a formidable response to these

concerns and proffers a "communities of practice" social learning model to reinvigorate

current youth ministry efforts. The work will lay out fundamental elements of a working

theology of youth ministry based on this community model and will propose best

practices for effective programs and innovative ways of engaging younger millennial and

generation Z students.

Keywords: disaffiliation, discipleship, faith formation, practical theology, youth ministry

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the product and culmination of a life's journey through youth ministry from the initial invitation at seventeen years of age to lead my parish youth group at St. Benedict Joseph Labre in Richmond Hill New York to my current work in South Florida. This work has been informed by many experiences, contexts and individuals which are regrettably too many to mention in the limited space provided. To the many dear colleagues in ministry I have had the pleasure to call friends: I hope you find this study helpful to your current work.

I offer my deepest gratitude to the professors and colleagues in the doctoral program as part of the School of Theology and Ministry at St. Thomas University. In particular, I am deeply grateful to my dissertation chair, Mary Carter Waren who has been of great support and encouragement during the writing process as well as Ted Whapham and Nathaniel Samuel for their insight and encouragements throughout. Thanks also to Art Canales, a veteran scholar in the field of youth ministry who served as a helpful springboard for the development of many ideas in this work. A special mention must be made to the many adults and young adult peer ministers at St. Edward that have served the IGNITE youth ministry for the past five years. As a genuine Community of Practice, their deep faith and love for the Lord has been a great inspiration and source of great learning and personal spiritual growth.

There have been two primary theological influences in my life. The first my mother, Luz Maria Rodriguez, of beloved memory, was one of the finest practical theologians I have ever known. Jose G. Polonia, also of fond memory, taught me many important lessons about communities of discipleship. As a young person, Jose

accompanied me through the many questions and struggles I had about my faith and became a mentor, father figure, and the man of God I hope to be some day. I am grateful to Fr. James Massa, now Bishop, who encouraged me to study theology as an undergraduate at Queens College.

Lastly but most important, this dissertation is dedicated to Helen my loving wife of 25 years and our children; Ricardo, Daniel, Christian and Caroline. Their love and patience for all the many missed weekends and evenings and their undying support through the many hours of research and writing served as a constant buoy during this journey. The many conversations about my discoveries served as daily reminder of the reason for this work. My prayer is that more than just best practices for youth ministry for the 21st century, this work will benefit the church in tangible and practical ways. Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.

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Abbreviations

BO	Benedict Option
CARA	Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
CMD	Center for Ministry Development
CoP	Communities of Practice
GCD	General Catechetical Directory
GEN Z	Generation Z
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
NFCYM	National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry
NYSR	National Study of Youth and Religion
PT	Practical Theology
RTV	Renewing the Vision
SCC	Small Christian Communities
USCCB	Unites States Conference of Catholic Bishops
YCA	Young Catholic America
YCOP	Young Communities of Practice

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Scholars in the area of youth ministry and faith formation have identified

disaffiliation as one of the most important pastoral challenges of the Catholic Church in

the United States with parishioners often expressing the familiar lament, "Why aren't our

kids coming to church?" Research studies in the area of youth and religion are yielding

less than desirable results as to whether current program offerings are working to keep

youth connected to the church. The growing concern involves waning church attendance

among a significant percentage of Catholic youth (teens ages 13-19 and young adults 20-

35) as indicated by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NYSR) which reported

that Catholic teens have the lowest participation rate in youth groups (32%) among the

denominations surveyed.[1] The most recent Barna youth ministry study also revealed that

a sobering 60 percent of youth brought up in the church are leaving.[2]

The Pew Research report, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" in 2014 revealed

that "nones," a group comprised of those persons who list their faith as "unaffiliated," is

the "fastest – growing religious demographic in the United States." Equally troubling is

that 36 percent of those surveyed are young millennials (born between the years 1990-

1996).[3] More specific to the subject population, a recent study of the Center for Applied

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[1] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52.

[2] "A Sneak Peak at The State of Youth Ministry Report," Youth Specialties, April 16, 2016. https://youthspecialties.com/blog/sneak-peek-at-the-state-of-youth-ministry-report/.

[3] Michael Lipka, "Millennials Increasingly are Driving Growth of 'Nones,'" Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/.

Research in the Apostolate (CARA) shows 63 percent of young Catholics surveyed left the church between ages 10 and 17.[4]

In their document on youth ministry *Renewing the Vision* (RTV), the United States bishops expressed their alarm about declining youth participation in parishes in the following way:

> We are deeply concerned by America's neglect of young people. The United States is losing its way as a society by not ensuring that all youth move safely and successfully into adulthood. All across America, far too many young people are struggling to construct their lives without an adequate foundation upon which to build. We are also concerned about the consequences of the social and economic forces affecting today's families. The effects of consumerism and the entertainment media often encourage a culture of isolation. Far too many families lack sufficient time together and the resources to develop strong family relationships, to communicate life-giving values and a religious faith, to celebrate family rituals, to participate in family activities, and to contribute to the well-being of their community.[5]

After more than twenty years since the release of RTV, many parish youth and faith formation ministries have sought to create programs that respond to the call to make disciples with mixed results. RTV defines youth ministry as the "response of the Christian community to the needs of young people and the sharing of the unique gifts of

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[4] Mark Gray, "Young People are Leaving the Faith. Here's Why," *Our Sunday Visitor News Weekly*, August 27, 2016, https://www.osvnews.com/2016/08/27/young-people-are-leaving-the-faith-heres-why/. Also see Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2017), 74, Fig. 12.

[5] G. Patrick Ziemann, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference Publishing Office, 1997), 5.

youth with the larger community."[6] Additionally the RTV asserts that effective youth

ministries should: (1) respond to the needs of young people *empowering them to live as*

disciples of Jesus, (2) *draw them into responsible participation in the life, mission and*

work of the faith community, and (3) *foster their total personal and spiritual growth*

leading to mature faith and practice.[7]

In response to the decline, the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry[8]

(NFCYM) and the Center for Ministry Development[9] (CMD) collaborated with the

United States Bishops to implement the goals of *RTV* by providing training programs for

youth ministers and faith formation coordinators to implement the comprehensive

ministry framework with the focus on making disciples. The comprehensive ministry

approach follows the basic premise that the whole parish and all its ministries must be

engaged in attracting youth. While this approach has had success in certain contexts, in

many others it has met resistance by leaders and primary stakeholders who see youth

involvement as relegated to the youth minister or youth group.[10]

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[6] Ziemann, *Renewing the Vision*, 1.

[7] Ziemann, 1. Italics used for emphasis.

[8] "Mission, Vision, and Values of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry," National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry, accessed April 12, 2018, http://www.nfcym.org/about/.

[9] "About Us," The Center for Ministry Development, accessed February 22, 2016, https://www.cmdnet.org/about-cmd/about-us. Founded in 1978, this organization has assisted the United States Conference of Bishops in the implementation of the *RTV* document through training of church leadership and conferring thousands of certificates of Youth Ministry Studies during this period. Over the twenty-year period, CMD claims to have served over 150 US Dioceses and Territories.

[10] Tom East, "Living the Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry: Celebrating Renewing the Vision," Center for Ministry Development, 2017, 16-18, https://www.cmdnet.org/images/easyblog_articles/166 /Living-the-Vision-for-Catholic-Youth-Ministry--Tom-East.pdf. In his commentary on the 20th anniversary of the publication and dissemination of RTV, East remarked that the term "youth group" is often used to pigeonhole or limit parish initiatives toward the comprehensive youth ministry culture. Instead, all parish ministries should be youth ministries in the sense that they engage and welcome youth participation. With the same spirit of creating a culture for youth ministry to flourish, the term *youth minister* should be used to refer to all the individuals or members of a community that minister to youth, not just the paid coordinator of youth ministry. This dissertation will use the term with this broader connotation. By way of extension this welcoming culture should recognize that all ministries of the Christian community should by youth ministries in the way they embrace the gifts, talent, and enthusiasm of young people.

Creating a youth friendly environment is certainly a worthy goal for Christian communities by promoting active participation and representation of youth in parish ministries (i.e., parish council, carnival, stewardship, etc.) but is not an assurance of their involvement in the future or that through these initiatives they will have grasped the true meaning of discipleship or mature Christian living. It must be admitted that these efforts have not remedied the underlying cause of the decline in youth participation. That said, scholars researching best practices in youth ministry in the United States suggest that the current efforts have fallen short in attracting and retaining youth due to the lack of institutional and human resources currently being invested in Catholic youth ministries leaving well-meaning and insufficiently trained volunteers to coordinate these initiatives.[11] Though not exhaustive by any means, Tom East summarizes the most prevalent youth ministry program offerings in U.S. Catholic parishes in the following five categories: 1) *weekly "Youth night" model*, 2) *small faith communities*, 3) *weekly religious education* which serves as continuing faith formation classes, 4) *monthly events*, 5) *parish involvement*.[12] Due to the popularity of the Steubenville satellite Catholic youth conferences, resources such as *Life Teen*[13] have become very trendy in certain circles but not without reservations and drawbacks.

Many of the aforementioned program formats are designed for larger populations of teens and are so chock full of whimsical games, icebreakers, scavenger hunts, lips sync battles and broad social interactions that they do not engender a culture of

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[11] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 210-213.
[12] Tom East, "Effective Youth Ministry Practices and Models."
[13] See http://lifeteen.com/about/ accessed February 17, 2016. Founded in 1985, the website features the mission statement and indicates that currently 1646 parishes in the United States use the resources from the program in addition to 31 countries.

"intentional relationships". In his book *Engaging A New Generation*, Frank Mercadante maintains that

> much of today's parish youth ministry, while espousing in theory the value of
> significant relationships (with adults), seems, in practice, to operate in large-group
> programs . . . Many leaders, primarily operating from a spirit of fear, have
> sanitized humanity from ministry by prohibiting any meaningful interpersonal
> contact.[14]

As will be shown in the forthcoming chapter, recent generational studies suggest that younger millennials (born between 1982-2002) and "Generation Z" (2003-2022) are longing for meaningful relationships of trust and experiences of God that are difficult to cultivate in large group dynamics.[15] Thus, a second contributive factor to the growing disaffiliation of young people is the need for youth initiatives focused on cultivating intentional relationships. Ultimately, many of the current programs are incredibly effective in keeping teens safe and entertained but need a small group discipleship and relational ministry component which is essential for developing a mature self-appropriated faith characteristic of young disciples.

In order for more church resources to be invested in the potential youth possess, visionary leadership is needed in order to adapt to the changing environment and the many new challenges of emerging youth and young adults face and thus; fresh wineskins are needed (Mark 2:22). In his book dedicated to Catholic youth based on the NYSR Christian Smith concludes quite adamantly that present efforts in youth ministry represent the vestiges of an "old system of faith transmission which relied on

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[14] Frank Mercadante, *Engaging a New Generation: A Vision for Reaching Catholic Teens* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 52.
　　　[15] Mercadante, 64-65.

concentrated Catholic residential neighborhoods, ethnic solidarity, strong Catholic schools, religious education classes designed to reinforce family and parish life, and 'thickly' Catholic cultures, practices and rituals—had drastically eroded by the time this generation (the parents of our emerging adults) came of age."[16] The fact is that the social structure that allowed for the environment Smith describes no longer exists. He argues more emphatically that "no alternative approach to effective inter-generational Catholic faith transmission had been devised and instituted to replace the old system—and indeed *it is not clear that any such effective system has yet been put into place even today*."[17]

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Impelled by the challenge of disaffiliation and the urgency to devise alternative approaches which will engage the yearnings of modern youth and emerging adults this dissertation will seek to bridge the lacunae between the proposed goals of RTV's vision for youth ministry as the making of disciples and the current U.S. parish reality in light of the predominance of programmatic formats which continue to embrace the old paradigms. This dissertation will propose a discipleship model of youth ministry as an optimal method to respond to these downward trends. The primary research question will be: How can a discipleship model of youth ministry effectively respond to the growing trend of disaffiliation and declining participation among emerging adults and what are the characteristics of such a model?

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[16] Christian Smith et al., *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 26. Italics added for emphasis.

[17] Smith, Hill, and Longest, 26. Italics added for emphasis. While this study is not intended to present the state of youth ministry in any definitive way it does endeavor to propose by way of consensus in the literature that large group youth ministry programming is not sufficient to sustain effective practices and that alternative methods are needed to supplement these efforts.

A secondary research question is: In what ways can the Communities of Practice (CoP) social learning theory be adapted to develop a discipleship/apprenticeship approach to youth ministry? In response to this area of inquiry, the study will present fundamental elements of a theology of youth ministry as discipleship/apprenticeship of the life of Christ. The underlying presupposition of these questions is first that the discipleship model proposed by the Gospels was a learn-by-doing approach to following Jesus in the context of the community of disciples; making it a social and situated pedagogical, not a theoretical approach. The second presupposition is that discipleship cannot be learned in classes but must be employed situationally in the context of the Christian community. This is the reason for borrowing the Communities of practice methodology.

The result of this study will be to provide recommendations for a discipleship approach to ministry based on a small faith sharing design patterned after "communities of practice" (CoP) which can bolster any current "large group" ministry format. CoP is a learning model based on social participation among persons who share a certain trade or professional acumen which can be suitably adapted to faith formation and youth ministry as an apprenticeship model. Moreover, this apprenticeship model for youth ministry will foment an environment where participants are encouraged to articulate their spiritual journey in such a way that brings about Christian maturity.

The primary assertion that will be made in this dissertation is that youth ministry can be an optimal "place" for young people to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. When youth ministry programs are at their best, they provide a nurturing environment for adolescents and teens to become apprentices of adults, other emerging

adults, and peers in the craft of discipleship and the practices of ministry. Church communities have the resources and individuals with the passion to bring about these types of environments despite declining numbers in youth participation and lack of resources. This potential is often unrealized due to a lack of understanding of the purpose of youth ministry and the surplus of approaches that flow from misconceptions which will be described henceforth.

Toward a Practical Theology of Youth Ministry

As an exercise of practical theology, this dissertation will approach the challenge of disaffiliation and the urgency to make Christian disciples by analyzing the current practices of the Christian community and bringing these in conversation with the culture and experiences of young people today. The burgeoning field of practical theology (PT) sets itself apart from other theological disciplines in its emphasis on *orthopraxy* "right practice" over orthodoxy which is the focus on right belief. Within the field of practical theology, praxis is understood as lived practices that embody a particular theology. Practical theologians have many varied definitions of praxis such as "the domain of lived religion and focuses on what people do rather than on official institutionalized religious traditions."[18] For Gustavo Gutierrez, practical theology is "a critical reflection on Christian practices in light of the word of God." The primary act is the experience of the Christian community, illumined and grounded by God's grace with theological reflection as the "second act." Theology then cannot effectively be done without critical reflection on the practices of the community.[19]

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[18] R. Ruard Ganzevoort and Johan Roeland, "Lived Religion: The Praxis of Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no.1 (2014): 91.

[19] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll: NY, Orbis Books, 1988), 11-12.

Thus, praxis focuses on what people do beyond official institutionalized religious traditions. All religious expression is manifest in practices—the rituals, prayers, gestures and religious dispositions are taught to us from the moment we are small children. Over time these practices are reinforced (or revised) by explanations about God and the influence of sacred stories and scriptures within particular traditions. This interplay between practices and beliefs or theological reflection upon these practices leads to and lived *praxis* or reflexive action. This means that the expressed practice is intentional, meaningful and leads to action. Said more succinctly, a praxis approach to youth ministry must take seriously the current message and practices of the Christian community and their effect. That said, three important sources must be considered and brought together in conversation.

Reflecting on Experience

First, as a praxis-oriented approach to youth ministry, PT must seriously consider the lived experience of youth to be a primary point of departure for authentic theological reflection to take place. Accordingly, the General Catechetical Directory states that "experience is a necessary medium for exploring and assimilating the truths which constitute the objective content of Revelation".[20] Of course, this process of exploring personal experience needs to be brought into conversation with the Christian tradition. That said this proposed working theology of youth ministry will be an exercise in ordinary theology or "the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind" or "the content, pattern and processes of ordinary people's articulation of their religious

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[20] Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1998), 152b.

understanding."[21] With that in mind this dissertation will first seriously consider the many questions, concerns and areas of disconnection that young people are currently experiencing by exploring the recent social science data on disaffiliation as well as scholarship in the areas of practical theology, faith formation and Christian education will be studied in order to delineate root causes. The hope is that some key insights will be gained from inquiries such as: What perception do young people have of the church? What Christian practices resonate most with Millennials and Generation Z?

Reflecting on the Practices of the Christian Tradition

Second, a praxis-oriented theology for youth ministry moves to explore the Christian tradition and the Scriptures as its primary source in order to understand the purpose and end of the rituals, practices and teachings. In the context of youth ministry, a praxis approach is a dialectical process in which participants engage in critical reflection on Christian practices and their meaning. Young people must be invited to not only enact the rituals, prayers and actions of Christian disciples but must be encouraged to reflect on their shared meaning in the context of the faith community. Not engaging in critical reflection on these ritual actions renders them devoid of meaning. Thus, reflection upon the Scriptures and the passing on of Christian practices as manifest in tradition ultimately lead to critical interrogatives such as: What constitutes being a disciple of Christ? What are the practices of Christian disciples? Do the current practices of the church resemble those of the original communities? And, most pertinent to this study, how are the current practices of the Christian community being taught? Is effectively

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[21] Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking Listening and Learning in Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 56.

mentoring or apprenticeship taking place with young people today? What practices can lead to greater engagement of young people?

Reflecting on Culture

Third, praxis implies a context or a particular frame of reference. One of the foremost proponents of the notion of contextual theology, Stephen Bevans argues that there is no such thing as a context-less theology or pure theology. All theology is contextual because human beings that seek to understand these questions of faith are situated in a culture with its various systems of meaning. Contextual theology "realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth are to be considered, along with Scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.[22] The Bible represents a plethora of cultures, languages, traditions and worldviews that must be understood within the particularity of their varying time periods and situations in which they were written. Context specifically can refer to situations individuals experience personally or socially, social location such as gender, socio economic status, culture, and many other factors.[23] One cannot truly judge, define, understand or interpret the Christian story without acknowledging the place and the various conditions from which he or she is viewing it. Bevans argues elsewhere that contextual theology "is a way of doing theology that takes seriously both the experience of the past (the record of divine revelation in the Scriptures and the tradition of the Christian people) and the experience of the present

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[22] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.
[23] Bevans, 4.

(what might be called the "context" in which present-day Christians live, work, and minister)."[24] He concludes arguing forcefully that the purpose of contextual theology:

> Is not so much to make the gospel message understandable or reasonable within a
> particular context as it is to move people in a particular context to deeper faith and
> to equip ministers more faithfully and effectively to preach the gospel.
> Contextualizing theology is not a watering down of the gospel or an attempt to
> find a lowest common denominator that will make the gospel message and the
> challenge of Christian practice acceptable. It is rather a search for the best way to
> invest the gospel with its full power in a particular situation.[25]

A practical theology of youth ministry must facilitate this search for the best way to understand the Gospel message in light of the cultural climate young people live in today. A scholar who has written extensively on the intersection of practical theology and youth ministry, Andrew Root defines youth ministry as "the ministry of the church that seeks to participate in God's action with and for a culturally identified group called adolescents."[26] In concurrence with the RTV document, Root proposes a vision that sees the whole parish as a community of youth ministers called to facilitate spiritual introspection by "being honestly human before and with young people, calling them into their own humanity, inviting them to contemplate and search for God in the barren empty spaces of their own lives."[27] Some questions considering the source of culture include: In what ways can pastoral leaders facilitate a conversation between the faith tradition and

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[24] Stephen Bevans, "Contextual Theology as Practical Theology" in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan & Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2014), 63.
[25] Bevans, "Contextual theology," 64.
[26] Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 39.
[27] Root, 46.

culture? How can pastoral leaders facilitate this process of inviting youth to see God in

and through culture and not diametrically opposed notions?

Viewed through the lens of practical theology, this study will offer alternative

readings of two archetypal Gospel passages for understanding the challenge of

disaffiliation and pastoral response; the first will be the story of the "Rich Young Man"

(Mark 10:17-31; Matt. 16:24-28; Luke 18:18-30) and the second is the "Emmaus Story"

(Luke 24:13-35) respectively.[28] First, the plight of the downtrodden young man who

walks away is paradigmatic of the many young Catholics that are currently leaving the

church. Thus, the first chapter on disaffiliation will feature an alternative reading of the

Rich Young Man story pointing to the plethora of religious worldviews as those "riches"

he refuses to relinquish. This reading will reprise the story and ask: What if walking away

was not the only option for the young man? What if instead of letting young people walk

away pastoral leaders took the important step of accompanying them along their journey

of questions and discovery of faith? What if pastoral leaders allowed for an open

environment to those young people that leave and wrestle with their questions with the

knowledge that the Christian community will receive them no questions asked? The

challenge of 21st century ministry is to reflect theologically on current methods of

dissemination of faith formation and ministry in an effort to respond to the areas of

disconnection of current generations of young people. This study proposes that a

formidable response to youth disaffiliation is a dynamic and authentic presentation of the

church as a learning community of disciples. An exemplary model of such a response is

observed in the story of the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples on the road to

Emmaus.

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[28] All Scripture references taken from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV).

The second Gospel story of the two disciple's journey along the road to Emmaus will be used to ground a discipleship approach of a truly synodal church; a church that walks with, listens to and accompanies young people. In this case we also find two discouraged and potentially disaffiliated followers of Jesus who are returning to their former way of life when they are encountered by a strange man on the road. As the veiled Christ, youth ministers are invited to be the unnamed companion on the road, who must have the willingness to listen and invite youth to enter into their personal faith quests.[29] A youth ministry of pastoral listening allows young people to struggle with aspects of the faith they do not understand or agree with. By not providing the answers but the appropriate questions and religious frame of reference, this environment can lead to moments of awakening and genuine insight and authentic experiences of God. Jesus as the exemplary youth minister engages in conversation with the disciples by asking them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?"[30] Jesus engages in deep pastoral listening as the disciples share their grievances about the crucifixion and the fact that they are dejected. We also see Jesus asserting the faith tradition as "he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."[31] As has been said, the call of ministers to interpret the Scriptures with young people requires a healthy balance, a conversation, a dance between seeing the powerful influence of media culture and seeking to draw out that which is meaningful, redeemable and connects to the Christian message. The result of this discipleship approach to youth ministry is to engage young people in the craft of practical theology or theological

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[29] Sahaya G. Selvam, "The Unnamed Companion on The Road: Spiritual Accompaniment in the Context of Youth Ministry." *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 11, no. 2 (2013): 41-55.
[30] Luke 24:17.
[31] Luke 24:27.

reflection, providing a healthy intersection between faith and lived experience as an ongoing pursuit.

Thus far what has been asserted is that in order to facilitate this conversation between the faith tradition, culture and experience, pastoral agents must become students of youth by engaging in what Vanhoozer calls this a "Christian hermeneutic of culture," or cultural exegesis.[32] Youth culture is a highly complex world which church leaders should seek to understand in order to translate their realities in light of the Gospel message in the same way they have developed plans of enculturation for various ethnicities. Youth culture is defined as "those processes and symbolic systems that young people share that are, to some degree, distinctive from those of their parents and the other adults in their community."[33] It would be irresponsible here to suggest that there is one "youth culture" to be understood and interpreted. Ultimately, the best translators of those meaning systems that attract youth today are themselves. That said it is imperative for pastoral leaders to "interpret the current time"[34] by engaging in conversation with youth about those meaning systems that impact them today in order to discover how the Gospel message still speaks through these cultural trends and their own experience.

With these three important sources in mind this dissertation dreams of developing of a working theology of youth ministry with a vision to produce budding practical theologians—individuals who are able to reflect upon and articulate their understanding of God's activity in their lives in and through the everyday; in their homes, relationships,

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[32] Kevin J. Vanhoozer ed., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends (Cultural Exegesis)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 17. In his opening chapter he defines cultural exegesis simply as "everyday theology" or faith seeking understanding of everyday life.

[33] See Encyclopedia.com, s.v. "youth culture," accessed June 5, 2016. http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Youth_culture.aspx. For the purposes of this study, the literature review section of the dissertation will address the socio-cultural influences on youth that would challenge the CoP approach.

[34] Matthew 16:3; Luke 12:56.

through social media and popular culture and in turn bring these experience into conversation with the culture and the faith tradition in the context of the Christian community. This environment of authentic fellowship and conversation between the faith tradition, the culture and individual experience can lead to healing, forgiveness, and ultimately human flourishing as mature Christians. This is the goal of ministry. In order to adequately respond to these critical areas of a practical theological approach, a twenty first century model of youth ministry must offer an environment of openness, "pastoral listening", inclusion and freedom rather than of fear and rejection—a ministry of accompaniment.

Method and Organization of the Remainder of the Study

In keeping with the above mentioned reflections on practical theology, the chapters of this dissertation will be ordered using the framework of the Method of Theological Reflection (Whitehead Method) of James and Evelyn Whitehead as outlined in their book *Method in Ministry*.[35] The Whitehead Method proposes a "conversational" approach between three primary sources of a) Christian tradition, b) culture and c) personal experience with the following two important assumptions; first that "God is revealed in all three sources" and second "the religious information available in each source is partial."[36] In order for these three sources to be effectively considered the Whiteheads suggests that pastoral issues be raised using the following three stages. In the *attending* stage, groups must first seek out information on a particular pastoral concern and how it is perceived in the culture, experience and the Christian tradition.[37] In the

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[35] James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1995).
[36] Whitehead and Whitehead, 13.
[37] Whitehead and Whitehead, 13.

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assertion stage groups seek to bring the perspectives gathered from these three sources into a lively dialogue of mutual clarification to expand and enrich religious insight.[38] Once these first two stages have been adequately addressed one can then move toward a *pastoral response*—which is "moving from discussion and insight to decision and action."[39]

As a way of structuring the conversation about youth ministry in the United States, the stages of *attending*, *assertion* and *pastoral response* will also be used to frame the chapters while the sources of Christian tradition, culture and experience will be woven throughout each. Representing the "attending" stage, this first chapter has served as the "statement of the problem," drawing briefly on recent social scientific data on youth and religion in order to identify various areas of disaffiliation among youth and the need for a practical theological approach to these challenges by consulting the influence of culture, experience and the Christian tradition as valuable sources of theological reflection.

The second chapter will delve more deeply into the various areas of disaffiliation beginning with the NYSR and the major concern that young people are no longer able to articulate the basic tenets of the Christian faith. The Barna group study raises a number of areas of disconnection including the growing aversion to the "country club" environment of nominal Catholicism, and the tendency to commodify the Christian message. The most recent CARA survey on disaffiliation among youth called *Going, Going, Gone*[40] will be featured and characteristics of the three major categories of disaffiliation which are

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[38] Whitehead and Whitehead, 14.
[39] Whitehead and Whitehead, 15.
[40] Robert J. McCarty and John M. Vitek, *Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2017).

described as "The Injured," "The Drifters," and "The Dissenters" respectively with insights from several theologians on the reasons for these negative trends. This research will bring to bear the key conclusion that effective youth ministry initiatives, particularly those which emphasize small group dynamics and the cultivation of intentional relationships, can counteract the downward trends and lead to increased retention. Such an approach will be described under the alternative paradigm of youth ministry as discipleship or the apprenticeship of the life of Christ. The conclusion of this chapter will offer an alternative reading of the Rich Young Man story in the Gospels as the archetypal disaffiliated youth.[41]

Representing the stage of "asserting," chapter three will seek to present foundational Biblical principles of a working theology of youth ministry as apprenticeship. It will assert discipleship or the making of disciples as the primary imperative of the Christian life and the principle mission of the church. Introducing the Emmaus story as the foundational metaphor, all prospective followers or seekers of the way experience three transformative moments along the journey of discipleship or what will be termed "the discipleship continuum." First, youth ministry is an apprenticeship of the life of Christ for young people which begins with an encounter with the Lord. Pope Francis describes this invitation as a "culture of encounter" which is characterized by threshold or *kairos* moments of personal awakenings, a seeking faith and authentic conversion. Second, as youth are invited to encounter Christ they are presented with the message of the *kerygma* and are exhorted to a life of service with other disciples. Third, in this learning environment youth will naturally desire *koinonia* or fellowship with other in the context of the Christian community. The author will assert that when communities

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[41] Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30.

foment a culture of discipleship individuals may experience recurrent moments of kairos, kerygma and koinonia the spiritual journey leading to ongoing conversion. Drawing on the work of Terrance Tilley, Alasdair MacIntrye and others, the conclusion will make the case that this environment of dynamic discipleship living will naturally lead to the transmission of tradition and the formation of Christian virtue.

In keeping with the apprenticeship vision chapter four will explore the notion of community as koinonia; a move away from the often sterile and impersonal notion of church as the larger body of believers gathered at the Eucharistic celebration to an emphasis on small group and intentional relationships. Parish communities that reorient their focus on small group intentional relationships have the potential to become "learning communities," a ministry culture characterized by deep pastoral listening which can reinvigorate a deeper sense belonging. In this learning community, young people will essentially learn the craft of becoming disciples of Jesus by observing and serving alongside other more experienced peers and older adults. Furthermore, it will be established that small faith sharing groups, small Christian communities, base communities, cell groups are the most effective way of establishing a sense of belonging and connection to the larger church community. In order to delineate the positive effects of this reorientation, the notions of "holding environments"[42] and "mentoring communities"[43] will be addressed with the desired result of bringing young people to self-appropriated faith and Christian maturity.

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[42] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self*: *Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[43] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossy-Bass Books, 2011).

Also representing the stage of "asserting," Chapter Five will reiterate the problem statement that the current youth program offerings are ill equipped for small group discipleship and relational ministry and thus will advance the Communities of Practice (*CoP*) model as a formidable response to making disciples for the 21st century. Based on the foundational work of social scientists Lave and Wenger who are credited with having coined the phrase "communities of practice," this chapter will explore learning theory as social participation and identity formation. These scholars establish quite clearly that communities of practice are essentially a community of learners. Learning is not a separate or private activity—although cognitively we know that each person's perception of learning is unique—we learn primarily in community. They propose in this seminal text a social theory of learning that has broad academic and ministerial implications.[44]

Prominent in this chapter will be practical theologian Jane Regan who draws out the theological and pastoral implications of CoPs in her recent work *Where Two or Three are Gathered* within a Catholic context.[45] This dissertation will concur with Regan, that CoPs are an effective way of developing this sense of belonging. The elements of CoPs; mutual engagement, shared enterprise and common repertoire will frame the remaining portion of the chapter as guideposts for fully engaged small group interactions. To provide a context for such a model for youth ministry, the conclusion of this chapter will feature the St. Edward Catholic Church evangelizing cells system which has served as the impetus for this research. The conclusion of this chapter will be proposing specific

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[44] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[45] Jane Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016).

strategies for incorporating a Communities of Practice model into present parish youth ministry initiatives.

As a pastoral response to the areas disaffiliation and utilizing the learning from previous assertions on discipleship and community, the concluding chapter will present a method for forming young disciples using elements of CoP. Revisiting the Emmaus story as the original "cell" or small group, the conclusion will also explore three elements of conversation, narrative and insight that make small group dynamics effective in creating meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging. This closing section will propose the necessary paradigm shifts in pastoral vision and implementation of ministry initiatives that would foster best practices.

It must be said in conclusion that while there are many theologians writing on discipleship within the evangelical and mainline protestant denominations, the field is quite limited among Catholic scholars. The intention of this dissertation is to make a small contribution to the literature within Catholicism on the subject of youth ministry in the United States. Though not exhaustive by any means, much of the literature within the fields of sociology of religion, practical theology, and religious education suggest a shift is needed from a schooling/ instructional model to one which focuses on intentional relationships and the role of the community in the formation of youth.

Defining Key Terms and Developmental Framework

Throughout this dissertation several terms such as adolescents, teens, young people, young adults, youth, emerging adults will be used to describe individuals which are typically bracketed as between the ages of 13-25. The purpose of this study is not to revisit the many volumes of writings providing definitions of these terms based on

developmental stages such as are provided by Erikson, Kegan, Fowler, Gilligan and others.[46] Many of these scholars will be cited throughout for their import in understanding mature faith development, but due to space and time limitations this dissertation will not try to revisit these findings. In line with the work of several scholars that will be mentioned throughout this study will argue that in light of the generational characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z featured above, the term "emerging adult" is a more adequate and fluid term that encompasses some younger teens (ages 15-18) and young adults (19-25), based on psychological and cognitive maturity. Particularly this study will rely on the important work Daloz Parks has done in using the term within faith formation. Thus, the term phrase "emerging adult" will be used throughout as an all-encompassing term to reference younger populations of Millennials and Generation Z in addition to some of the other terms mentioned as needed.

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[46] For stages of psychosocial development see Erik Erikson and Joan M Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed (Extended Version)* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997). For a treatment of the stages of human development see Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self*: *Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). For stages of faith development see James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000). Influenced by the thought of Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan develops a theory of moral development from a feminine perspective in her work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

CHAPTER TWO. DISAFFILIATION AND YOUTH

This chapter will explore some of the underlying causes of disaffiliation among
Catholic youth in the United States with a view to developing an adequate pastoral
response to these challenges. In keeping with the Whitehead method, this chapter will
represent the "attending" phase of theological reflection in which one considers the
voices of culture, experience, and the Christian tradition on a particular pastoral matter.
Representing the source of culture, the first section will briefly analyze generational data
on Millennials and Generation Z in order to ascertain ideological trends and needs of
these populations as well as the impact of the internet and social media on personal and
religious identity.

Representative of the voice of experience, the second section will consult social
scientific research related to the decline in youth participation by analyzing three of the
most recent studies on disaffiliation and various root causes of these challenges; what
will be called "causalities of disaffiliation." This study will first turn to the
groundbreaking National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) and its publication *Soul
Searching*[47] which revealed pivotal factors for understanding the recent decline in youth
participation many of which are still applicable to current generations being served. The
most recent publication on the study *Young Catholic America* will be featured for its
helpful conclusions more pertinent to the subject population. This section will also
evaluate and critique Smith's notion of *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* as a proposed
causality of disaffiliation in light of current scholarship.

Second, and concurrently with the findings of the NSYR, latest findings of the
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) as published in their work,

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[47] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*.

Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics raises many important concerns about the relationship of youth to the church and the message of Christianity. The researchers have identified three important classifications of disaffiliated youth: the *injured*, the *drifters*, and *dissenters* which point to important pastoral implications.[48] David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, summarized the conclusions of a series of national studies on youth in the book *You Lost Me* in which he brings to bear a pervasive pastoral challenge known in protestant circles as bar-code or nominal Christianity.[49] In order to understand what these studies reveal about the moral development of emerging adults, the concluding section will take a broader approach to disaffiliation by inserting the work of Robert Wuthnow who proposes a spirituality of practice as a suitable pastoral response in order to reconnect with modern generations.[50]

As the archetypal disaffiliated youth, the concluding section will offer an alternative reading of the Rich Young Man story in the Gospels as an important metaphor for reflecting on the challenge of youth disaffiliation and some of the sentiments identified in these studies and will suggest pastoral implications for attending to the root causes.

Attending to Culture: Characteristics of Millennials & Generation Z

In order to develop an adequate approach to youth ministry in the 21st century, and as a prelude to exploring disaffiliation in the forthcoming chapter, it is imperative at the outset of this study to identify characteristics of Millennials, also known as

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[48] Robert J. McCarty and John M. Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2017).
[49] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church…and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).
[50] Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950's* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

Generation Y which are individuals born between 1982-2004 and Generation Z also given names such as Homeland, iGeneration or "Post-Millennials which are those born from 2005 to the present generations.[51] While no generation, culture group or youth themselves can be monolithically categorized, social scientific research has been able to discern some distinguishing traits which are worth investigating. These remarks do not intend to be exhaustive of these particular groups and their purpose is to briefly identify ideological tendencies of these groups in order to formulate an adequate response to these needs. For a more robust understanding of these age groups, William Strauss and Neil Howe, considered the foremost experts in generational studies in the United States, have written extensively on the characteristics of these age groups.[52]

The term Millennial was first coined by Strauss and Howe in 1988, the year this emerging generation entered their kindergarten years and was heralded the class of 2000.[53] These scholars identify seven core characteristics of Millennials which will be briefly described now:[54] First, younger millennials are well cared for and considered special being that they would be born at the dawn of the 21st century. Second, they are a sheltered generation in light of growing reports of child abuse, safety rules and technologies being developed in the 1980s and 90s, the Columbine High School tragedy and other factors which led to the emergence of "helicopter parents" who hovered over their educational and social wellbeing.[55] Third, this group demonstrates great confidence

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[51] Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials and Pop Culture: Strategies for a New Generation of Consumers* (Great Falls, VA: Life Course Associates, 2006).

[52] Neil Howe and William Stauss, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584-2069*, (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1991).

[53] Howe and Strauss, *Millennials and Pop Culture*, 17.

[54] Howe and Strauss, 43-44.

[55] Coined by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 1990), 23-25. The term describes the overprotective nature of parents of this generation of children.

in their parents and future and their optimism translates into a high level of trust and connection to relationships with their family, friends and any adults that take an interest in them. Over 90% of these youth stated that they "trust" and feel close" to their parents.[56] As a fourth characteristic it would follow that their collective trust and receptivity to relationships make Millennials to effectively collaborate with others in groups. Fifth, millennials are considered the most educated generation and at the same time the least religious.[57] Despite this, many believe they have an important purpose in the world. Sixth, with high expectations levied from parent and themselves, this generation experiences high levels of stress and pressure to succeed and, at times an inability to make definitive decisions or commitments. Lastly, millennials are comfortable with many of the values their parents and support general societal conventions as helpful for their lives.

To sum up, generational data presents a profile of Millennials who lean toward less religion or no religion; progressive to liberal political values with permissive and relativistic moral tendencies such as adults living together before marriage, having children outside of marriage, same gender marriage and adoption and ambivalence on abortion. Lastly, Millennials tend to follow many of the religious practices of their parents because of their strong relationships with them.[58] That said the data also presents a portrait of young people who consider themselves special and who expect to make an

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[56] Howe and Strauss, *Millennials and Pop Culture*, 42.

[57] Pew Research Center, "How Millennials Today Compare with their Grandparents 50 Years Age: Millennials On Track to the Most Educated Generation to Date," March 17, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/ft_millennials-education_031715/. Also see Michael Lipka, "Millennials Increasingly are Driving Growth of 'Nones,'" Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12 /millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/.

[58] This conclusion is also consistent in both research studies of the NSYR and brought to bear in the two books by Christian Smith, *Soul Searching* and *Young Catholic America.*

impact on this world. As spiritual seekers they recognize the importance of religion and spirituality in their lives but no longer see the Christian worldview as the only means of developing a relationship with God. While attending weekly services, many do not see the urgency in learning about Jesus exclusively, having at their disposal many different philosophies, religious teachers, and spiritual exercises from which to choose. Achieving happiness and a healthy sense of self is no longer derived from an exclusive source of enlightenment.

Some of the characteristics of emerging Generation Z (Gen Z) include being the most culturally diverse generation in the United States. Second, they have never known what it is like without the Internet, Wi-Fi, cell phones and social media. Therefore, they consider internet access to be a basic human right along with food, water, shelter and education.[59] Third, Gen Z youth are used to having access to multiple sources of information at their fingertips and are thus more adept at multitasking than the previous cohort. Fourth, as more of this generation is producing their own content by way of the many social media and internet apps they manage; they also prefer a more hands-on, visual, learner-based style of instruction. According to *Forbes*, other characteristics include being more private, preferring social media such as Snapchat and, compared to the Silent Generation (born before 1943) being more pragmatic in their career choices and wary of risky social choices.[60]

Perhaps the greatest challenge by far will be to stay abreast of the constantly changing landscape of technology Generation Z youth are exposed to. In just a few years social media has exploded onto the world wide web and enraptured the minds and hearts

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[59] Thomas Koulopoulos and Dan Keldsen, *The Gen Z Effect* (New York: Bibliomotion, 2014), 17.
[60] Ryan Scott, "Get Ready for Generation Z," November 28, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/causeintegration/2016/11/28/get-ready-for-generation-z/#e2a1bfa22048.

of many young people—from the hundreds of "selfies" that are taken to the constant need to check in with Twitter or Instagram status updates in order to feel "connected" to friends and acquaintances. The Pew Research Report titled "Teens, Social Media and Technology" stated that 92% of teens reported "checking in" daily on social media and 24% said they check their social media status constantly.[61] A CNN study, "#Being 13: Social Media and the Hidden world of Young Adolescents' Peer Culture" revealed that:

- 61% of teens said they wanted to see if their online posts are getting likes and comments.

- 36% of teens said they wanted to see if their friends are doing things without them.

- 21% of teens said they wanted to make sure no one was saying mean things about them.[62]

Often bereft of meaningful relationships other than immediate family, social media has provided a means for young people to clandestinely explore the lives of others while creating a virtual persona quite different from their public one. Many have developed exceptional skill at texting and instant messaging many friends simultaneously and yet increasingly have struggle with face-to-face interactions.

Social media has become the virtual "school yard" or "hall way" where young people decide who to relate to and which groups to associate with producing negative effects with escalating reports of cyber-bullying, sexting and adolescents taking their lives by suicide. Issues of image, beauty, identity, sexual orientation and many others are

[61] Amanda Lenhart, "Teens, Social Media and Technology," Pew Research Report, April 2015 http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/.
[62] Chuck Hadid, "Why some 13-year olds check social media 100 times a day." CNN, October 13, 2015. http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/05/health/being-13-teens-social-media-study/index.html.

openly expressed through countless tweets, likes, blog posts, Facebook live posts, YouTube videos and other mediums without fear of judgment and, through the use of privacy settings, can control who has access to these ideas. Through these polyvalent virtual means, young people express their beliefs in God, political issues, opinions about movies, music and popular culture and hope to gain followership with those who agree with them. Youth ministry programs must engage their teens and young adults in these various media and seek to integrate these innovations into worship, teaching and congregational dynamics.

Frank Mercadante sums up the challenge of ministering to this emerging generation saying that

> In order to reach the most technologically savvy generation, we will need to shift our catechesis in a digital direction . . . Many of our present youth ministry assumptions, approaches, and methodologies originated during the Generation X teen years, and they simply do not meet the needs of Millennials or the approaching Gen Z teens. Parishes that take the time to understand their present-day teens and renavigate their ministries accordingly will awaken a sleeping giant of a generation—a generation that has the potential to be one of the greatest in Church history.[63]

As has been previously stated, the current methods of faith formation and youth ministry continue to embrace many of the old paradigms which do not effectively engage these emerging generational groups. The growing number of Generation Xers now taking on roles as coordinators of youth ministry must turn their attention to methods and delivery of content which will impact these emerging generations, not those employed

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[63] Mercadante, *Engaging a New Generation*, 64-65.

while they were in youth group. The generational gaps experienced between ministers and youth is not merely issue of technology but most importantly in terms of ethics and morality as younger generations are exposed to a plethora of worldviews which are diametrically opposed to Christianity.

The research of Howe and Stauss on generations Y and Z have yielded a consonant profile of young people who are seeking more intentional relationships with peers and other adults in the context of smaller community or virtual gatherings. While true that all young people cannot be rigidly categorized in the above described tendencies these traits can prove of great value in fostering an intergenerational approach to youth ministry which fosters the building of intentional relationships with youth, their parents and other adults as mentors. This yearning for meaningful relationships in this age groups presents a crucial moment of pastoral opportunity for this discipleship model of youth ministry which will be set forth in the forthcoming chapters.

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Attending to Experience: NSYR, CARA and Barna

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NSYR: MTD or Emerging Adult Faith

Considered the groundbreaking study on youth and religion in the United States, the NSYR was a mixed-method study conducted from 2002 to 2008 and which included national telephone surveys of three thousand three hundred seventy respondents of teen and young adult years and their parents follow up surveys, and 267 personal in-depth interviews in 45 states.[64] For the purposes of this work, some important conclusions of the NSYR include the following. First, the study found that the vast majority of U.S.

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[64] National Study of Youth and Religion, "Research Design," accessed April 24, 2019, https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/research-design/.; Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 71.

teens practice their faith occasionally and do not attend youth groups.[65] As mentioned

previously, of those denominational groups surveyed, Catholic youth have the lowest

youth group participation rate.[66] In a later, more expansive publication dedicated on the

data pertaining to Catholic youth, *Young Catholic America* (YCA) Smith identified

categories used to describe reasons for their disassociation with the church. Only twenty

five percent of those Catholics interviewed fell under the category of engaged or actively

participating in practices of the faith.[67] Thus the majority would be considered "lapsed

Catholics" meaning they no longer attend church, practice the faith nor identify as

Catholics. A subgroup identified as "dormant" represented those respondents who

claimed to be taking a break from Catholicism and would likely return when they marry

or have children.[68]

Smith attributes low participation among Catholic youth to sparse investment of

resources in youth ministry programs compared to other Christian denominations and

poor ministerial formation of lay volunteers compared to religious sisters and priests of

30 years ago who were the principle disseminators of faith formation.[69] His chapter

dedicated to Catholic teens concludes in the following way:

> Getting from where the majority of U.S. Catholic teens currently are with regard
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> to their religious faith and lives to achieving the huge religious potential that
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> appears to exist for them would seem to require that the church invest a great deal
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> more attention, creativity, and institutional resources into its young members—

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[65] Smith and Denton, 68-69.
[66] Smith and Denton, 52.
[67] Smith et al., *Young Catholic America*, 91.
[68] Smith et al., 91.
[69] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 210-13.

and therefore into its own life. Undeniably, the future shape of the U.S. Catholic church vitality depends on it.[70]

A recent CARA study reported that 76% of Catholic parishes in the U.S. offer youth programs while only 12% have paid staff dedicated to the ministry.[71] While Smith's conclusion here would seem to indicate that investing more toward professional staff and training of youth ministry would lead to greater engagement, he also believes that the lack of involvement is systemic in nature.

It would be necessary in subsequent section to explore some of the reasons for lack of engagement of young people. Smith will argue next that parents have a significant influence on youth participation and retention.

A second important conclusion of the study found that parents have the strongest influence on teen and young adult religious adherence. Smith indicates that "of parents who report that their faith is extremely important in their daily lives, 67 percent of their teens report that faith is extremely or very important."[72] Other influences include friends and peers as one half of respondents reported that their friends have a strong influence on their religious beliefs and practice. By way of extension, those youth that surround themselves with non-religious individuals would be influenced by these practices as well. The correlation between youth participation and the influence of parents and peers is significant to understanding causes of disaffiliation and potential responses to the lapsed and unengaged. A third important conclusion showed that half of the NYSR respondents

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[70] Smith and Denton, 217.
[71] Mark Gray et al., *Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership: The Changing Face of U.S. Catholic Parishes* (Washington, DC: National Association of Lay Ministry, 2011), 64.
[72] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56-57.

expressed that religious faith is important.[73] When asked whether it was necessary to belong to a particular religious congregation or church in order to be religious or spiritual two-thirds of respondents said it was not.[74] Along with this finding, Smith observes that that "majority of American teenagers appear to espouse rather inclusive, pluralistic and individualistic views about religious truth, identity boundaries, and the need for religious congregation."[75]

These findings would indicate that the institutional church has a diminishing role in the religious formation and imagination of young people. Despite this, young people are not losing their sense religiousness or spirituality; tragically they are no longer seeking the church for answers to their spiritual questions nor do they see participation in the institutional practices of the faith tradition to be of importance. Instead, the internet, social media, and popular culture have taken on a significant role in the formation of young people in their understandings of faith, religion, and God. The increased media exposure to diverse religious traditions and spiritualities has engendered an open and tolerant disposition among younger Millennials and Generation Z resulting in a forfeiture of the notion of Christianity as the exclusive or sole means of salvation or spiritual transcendence. Thus, no longer passive recipients of doctrine given to them by their parents or the institutional church, current youth populations are concocting their own brand of faith through the increased exposure to these traditions. Smith concludes that this pluralism of religious worldviews and perspectives young people are associated with yields an amalgamation of feel-good ideas and a watered-down version of Christianity which he has dubbed Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.

[73] Smith and Denton, 68.
[74] Smith and Denton, 76.
[75] Smith and Denton, 115.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)

Scholars studying the above cited conclusions of the NSYR such as Smith, Snell,

Creasy Dean attribute the decline in youth participation and eroding sense of faith and

understanding of the basic tenets of Christianity to what they would call Moralistic

Therapeutic Deism (MTD) which is the product of pervasive post-modern tendencies.[76]

Smith coined the phrase "moralistic therapeutic deism" to describe this shallowness of

the youth interviewed for the NSYR stating many "tended to be rather religiously and

spiritually indifferent, uninformed and disengaged."[77] The five points of moralistic

therapeutic deism creed are as follows:

1. A god created and ordered the universe and watches over human life on earth.

2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible

and most world religions.

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

4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is

needed to resolve a problem.

5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[78]

According to Smith, this worldview is first moralistic because the focus is on

being good to self and to others. The most important aspect of a happy life is to be a good

person. This moral vision is clearly tolerant and inclusive of most world religions.

Second, the term therapeutic connotes that the emphasis is not on adherence to norms or

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[76] In addition to the various works of Smith based on the NYSR, another author who attributes decline in youth participation to post-modern influences include Kenda Creasy Dean. See, for example, Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). She dedicates a large section to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism with similar conclusions to the Smith works cited throughout.

[77] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 195.

[78] ChurchPop Editor, "The Largest Religion in the U.S.? Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," Church Pop, December 26, 2014, https://churchpop.com/2014/12/26/religion-us-mtd/.

particular practices. There is no need to submit to rules because ultimately one's

relationship with God should lead to feeling good and being happy. To further accentuate

the idea Smith makes the following comment:

> It is thus no wonder that so many religious and nonreligious teenagers are so
> positive about religion, for the faith many of them have in mind effectively helps
> to achieve a primary life goal: to feel good and happy about oneself and one's life.
> It is also no wonder that most teens are so religiously inarticulate. As long as one
> is happy, why bother with being able to talk about the belief content of one's
> faith.[79]

Third, Smith argues that teen spirituality is deistic because it describes God as

aloof, impersonal but always willing to please us and answer our prayers—the genie who

grants our requests. The following teen statement epitomizes MTD: "God's all around

you, all the time. He believes in forgiving people and whatnot and he's there to guide us,

for somebody to talk to and help us through our problems. Of course, he doesn't talk

back."[80] Therefore Smith believes that the ubiquity of MTD thinking has left modern

youth and emerging adults "morally adrift" as unable to articulate their views on morality

as they express at the outset of the third book expounding on the research of the NSYR:

> We think it is good for people to be able to think coherently about moral beliefs
> and problems, and to explain why they believe whatever they do believe . . . for
> people to be able to understand different moral positions, to consider how

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[79] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 164.
[80] Smith and Denton, 165. Chapter 4 explores moralistic therapeutic deism further.

different assumptions shape moral beliefs…And almost no emerging adult today

is able to do much of that, as we show below. We think that is a problem."[81]

Tracey Lamont levels a strong critique against MTD arguing that Smith

prematurely attributes the moral ambiguity of young people to the influence of

postmodern philosophical tendencies. She remarks that Smith and others "believe

postmodern philosophy has negatively influenced contemporary young adults' ability to

reason morally" leading to moral relativism.[82] She argues further that in the third book

expounding on the research of NSYR, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging*

Adulthood, Smith presents a grim portrait of the moral lives of emerging adults arguing

that they "do not have a good handle on what makes something a moral issue or what the

specifically moral dimensions of situations are."[83] Lamont also criticizes the bleak

language used in the book to describe young people as she states further:

> Smith and his colleagues describe the moral character of contemporary young
>
> adults as 'a problem,' based on an 'anemic view' of morality, something 'not
>
> acceptable,' revealing an overall 'impoverishment,' the 'degeneracy' of 'a people
>
> deprived.' The authors believe that moral relativism and individualism are
>
> 'morally wrong' and 'not reasonably defensible.'[84]

In contrast to Smith's view, Lamont argues that this seeming ambivalence to faith

matters is not a product of the influence of post-modern philosophical trends on popular

culture but a product of the developmental process of self-discovery and individual

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[81] Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6-7.

[82] Tracey Lamont, "Taking Seriously the Moral Development and Deep Culture of Young Adults," New Orleans: Loyola University, October 5, 2018, Unpublished work, 9. Also see Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 60-61.

[83] Smith et. al., 59.

[84] Lamont, "Taking Seriously the Moral Development and Deep Culture of Young Adults," 6. Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 44, 65, 60, 31, 68, 69, and 31-69 respectively.

appropriation that is suggestive of emerging adults, citing the work of social and

behavioral scientist the likes of Kegan, Cote and others.[85] Using Kegan's demarcation of

stages of development from the teenage years, stage three in which the individual is

moving from a "traditional or social level of knowing" to stage four which is the "modern

or self-authoring way of knowing." Lamont maintains that this transitional moral

relativism is a natural part of human development as individuals move from a faith which

is based on the authority of others or institutions to a self-appropriated faith.[86]

Sharon Daloz Parks in her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* also unpacks the

development of the emerging adult self from the place of authority bound knowledge

which is characteristic of adolescent faith development to unqualified relativism which is

described as a transitional period toward emerging adulthood.[87] In this transition, the

individual is moving from the form of knowledge which is accepted based on sources of

authority outside the self-such as parents, teachers, religious leaders, cultural traditions or

norms, media, celebrities, entertainers, athletes, scientists, or other admired peers. It is

important to include social media outlets which have a particularly influential role in

meaning-making in young adolescents. This type of knowledge is also acquired and

confirmed by stories, symbols and myths which hold meaning for these individuals.

The journey toward this "unqualified relativism" described by Daloz-Parks begins

with an awareness of other truths and sources of knowing in addition to what was

previously understood. The individual begins to discover that the patterns of thinking and

sources of this once held authority do not always fit lived experience. She argues that a

"cataclysmic shift occurs in the revolutionary moment when the relative character of all

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[85] Lamont, "Taking Seriously the Moral Development and Deep Culture of Young Adults."
[86] Lamont, 15.
[87] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*.

knowledge becomes the only truth."[88] Thus an important characteristic of emerging adult faith is one which grapples with the "truths" one has received through these authority figures in light of the exposure to other sources of knowledge and thus must compose their own sense of reality. The ground upon which one has tread becomes shaken and leads to a journey toward finding a place to stand. This process of inquiry, questioning and self-discovery is essential to achieving an adult or mature faith, one that begins to take responsibility for ones thinking and knowing; a search for coherence.

To sum up, while the NSYR presents helpful conclusions on the decline in youth participation and determining factors Smith's proposal of MTD as a causality of disaffiliation has recently met with increased scrutiny among scholars in Christian education and ministry. What Smith describes as an inability to articulate the faith, Lamont, Daloz Parks and others present as the struggle for coherence, understanding and owned faith that is characteristic of emerging adults. This author concurs with the above two scholars on these characteristics of emerging adult faith as the more adequate interpretation of the ambiguity described by Smith in the NSYR research. Despite scholarly discord with regard to MTD as a factor of disaffiliation, there have been many helpful indicators in the NSYR research which point to the need for the church to take more of a decisive role in the lives of young people. Consistent with the findings of the NSYR, the Barna group has conducted a number of studies on disaffiliation among young Christians in the United States and has offered some equally illuminating data which will be shared in what follows.

You Lost Me-Barna Group National Study

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[88] Parks, 75.

The Barna group, considered one of the most important research organizations addressing the intersection of faith and culture in the United States, produced the findings of a five-year study of youth and young adults in the book *You Lost Me*.[89] The research was comprised of eight national studies, including interviews with teenagers, young adults, parents, and pastoral leadership, focusing on those young adults who attended church regularly and explored their reasons for disconnection from church life during their teen years.[90] The following examines some common themes which are resonant with the NSYR and CARA research.

First, young people expressed the lack of relevance of the church's message to the culture and its off-putting country club environment as contributing factors to their withdrawal. More than a third of youth in the Barna survey expressed the following sentiment: "I don't feel that I can ask my most pressing life questions in the church." A third of the respondents of the Barna study featured in the book *You Lost Me* claimed they no longer go to church because it is "boring" with twenty percent stating that "God seems missing from my experience of church."[91] The pervasive sentiment among young people is that the message, music, and practices of many churches is no longer relevant and more suitable to older generations; those who are "members" in the "club," know the "secret handshake," follow the rules and fit the profile of a good Christian. Twenty-two percent of pundits surveyed opined that "church is like a country club, only for insiders."[92]

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[89] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.
[90] Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," Research, September 27, 2011. https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/.
[91] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 116.
[92] Kinnaman, 175.

Chris Shirley surmises that this sentiment raised by young respondents is symptomatic of an "identity crisis" which is "forestalling spiritual growth among believers and is eroding the health of the local church."[93] The ubiquitousness of country club congregations stems from a disassociation of the term "disciple" from the designation "Christian" leading many churches to develop a safe alternative brand of nominal Christianity known pejoratively as 'bar-code' Christianity.[94] Bar-code or nominal Christians are those individuals who base their religious adherence to their faith primarily on ideological not pragmatic concerns. There is a strong emphasis on personal faith divorced from engaging in the practices of discipleship. Their "practice" consists in going to church every week, reading their Bible, paying their tithes and offerings to the church, giving to charity, and helping others when possible.

Bill Hull describes a bar-code Christian as

someone who by faith accepts Jesus Christ as savior, receives eternal life and is safe and secure in the family of God; disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others…the longer we perpetuate the myth that disciple is a secondary identity reserved for the elite, the more we will continue to produce 'bar-code Christians' who are following after a 'non-discipleship' Christianity.[95]

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[93] Chris Shirley, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no.2 (2008): 210.

[94] The term "bar-code religion" was first coined by Dallas Willard in his book *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998). Willard referred to modern American Christianity as "sin management" (ch.2); not the brand of Christianity based on discipleship living.

[95] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 33.

Hull concludes with an important caveat that there is "no biblical evidence for the separation of Christian from disciple."[96] The term *disciple* is thus relegated to an elite status referring to those individuals who make religious professions, missionaries and the like. The pervasiveness of such a separation is often seen in many church ministry fairs where individuals are asked to volunteers for various ministries but shy away from the use of the word disciple as this word implies for many sacrifice, commitment, responsibility, and denial of self. Additionally, the non-discipleship culture created in many churches presents the *disciple* as a person who has been immortalized in statues or on a prayer card with well-meaning Catholic youth programs presenting the lives of saints as examples to follow but which are often unattainable.

Stanley Hauerwas offers an analogical approach to understanding this disconnection of young people as a matter of churches not teaching the necessary disciplines of discipleship which should be the foundation of Christian practice. In his essay "The Politics of the Church: How We Lay Bricks and Make Disciples," Hauerwas' primary argument is that churches that emphasize the value of discipline and the adherence to certain ethical standards stemming from Christian convictions is no longer an attraction to the modern-minded person.[97] Many churches according to Stanley Hauerwas have become service and volunteer-oriented communities or "country club" gatherings of people who share common interests and thus have lost the fundamental mission of making disciples.[98]

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[96] Hull, 33.

[97] Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of the Church: How We Lay Bricks and Make Disciples" in *Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, and Craig Hovey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 657.

[98] Hauerwas, 658.

Hauerwas calls for a retrieval of what it means to be a Christian and offers a

strong critique of Churches that have stylized themselves as "country club" gatherings of

people who share common interests making common convictions secondary and in some

cases irrelevant.[99] Instead, the model of faith formation proposed by Hauerwas cultivates

mature Christians that are able to base their beliefs not on mere propositional beliefs but

because they are invited to act and experience a relationship with Christ. He would

maintain that one cannot simply theologize about sin and forgiveness, one must

experience the power of forgiveness and "be trained to be a sinner."[100]

As the son of a bricklayer, Hauerwas shares his personal experience of learning

his father's craft of brick masonry through a watch and learn approach. His early age

apprenticeship with his father provides easy, yet profound insight into this process which

requires the laying of a foundation and the development of a craft without which

authentic discipleship cannot be achieved. He makes the point that personal conversion is

the essential "brick" or corner stone which must be laid for true discipleship to be

experienced.[101] David White captures the sentiment of bar-code/ nominal Christian

environment young people are immersed in:

> In reality, our youth live in a culture increasingly incongruous with the gospel of
>
> Jesus, making difficult the practice of Christian discipleship, and making obsolete
>
> routine youth ministry approaches of simply attracting and inspiring youth
>
> without helping them to adequately discern the powers and principalities that
>
> share their outer and inner life. In such a hostile cultural climate, youth ministers

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[99] Hauerwas, 659.
[100] Hauerwas, 670.
[101] Hauerwas, 672.

must think deliberately about how to form youth for a life attuned to the profound

call of God upon their lives, which is always a bit at odds with the culture.[102]

A second major area of disconnection identified by the Barn study regards the

tendency of churches to create an antagonistic relationship between the faith tradition and

the culture. The effort of churches to keep separate the religious from the secular renders

the message of the Gospel to seem incongruent to the challenges young people face today

according to the study. Twenty three percent expressed having "significant intellectual

doubts" about their faith.[103] Almost one fourth of the 18 to 29-year-olds opined that

"Christians demonize everything outside of the church" (23 percent indicated this

"completely" or "mostly" described their experience). Other perceptions in this category

include sentiments that the "church ignoring the problems of the real world" (22%) and

"my church is too concerned that movies, music, and video games are harmful" (18%).[104]

Kinnaman attributes this negative stance of the church to the influence of

"helicopter parenting," prevalent in modern circles. "Is it possible that our cultural

fixation on safety and protectiveness has also had a profound effect on the church's

ability to disciple the next generation of Christians?"[105] It would appear that the

overprotective nature of the church, much like the effect of "helicopter parenting," is

causing young people to consider alternative moral and religious worldviews outside the

traditional boundaries of Christianity.[106]

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[102] Brian J. Mahan, Michael Warren, and David F. White, *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 36-37.
[103] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, see chart on page 190.
[104] Kinnaman, 98.
[105] Kinnaman, 96.
[106] Kinnaman, 99. Twenty-seven percent of those interviewed, said they tried other religious traditions or spiritual practices.

Similarly, many youths in this survey expressed concerns that the church is against science with 35% claiming that "Christians are too confident they know all the answers." Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background felt that "churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in" (29%). Equally disconcerting is the perception of one quarter of those interviewed who said that "Christianity is anti-science" (25%) while others said they had "been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate."[107] Additionally in this hyper-sexualized society youth are exposed to, living up to the expectations of chastity seems to be one of the biggest challenges in the relationship between the church and young people. Despite significant exposure to chastity talks at youth group and abstinence presentations during High School, the Barna study indicates that most young Christians are just as active sexually as their non-Christian peers. One-sixth of young Christians (17%) said they "have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them."[108]

A sobering conclusion that can be drawn from the sentiments of the Barna study that due to a lack of pastoral listening, authenticity and spiritual accompaniment through moments of crisis; combined with the exposure of recent generations to a pluralism of religious worldviews, young people no longer regard the message of Christianity to be an exclusive means of salvation but one among many others. Barna concludes that the absence of spiritual accompaniment and the indictment that the church is a country club is due to the pervasive culture of nominal or barcode Christianity. An additional contributing factor to disaffiliation is the tendency for churches to present the message of the Christian tradition as an either/or proposition which leaves young people with

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[107] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, See chart on page 137.
[108] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, See chart on page 137

insufficient reason to the prevalence of church communities who espouse a non-discipleship or nominal brand of Christianity is antithetical to a discipleship approach to ministry. We will now turn to consult the most recent study of the Center for Advanced Research in the Apostolate CARA which also draws similar conclusions as what has been cited above.

CARA: The Injured, Drifters & Dissenters

The most recent CARA study on disaffiliation *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* indicated that three out of four pundits said they left the church during their teenage years with a third no longer wishing to identify with any particular religion.[109] The CARA research team made some summary observations of the rationale for disaffiliation which are worth enumerating as these are consistent with the aforementioned sentiments and the findings of the NSYR taken a few years ago. First, in some cases disaffiliation is precipitated by life altering events which triggered a period of questioning for which the church did not have answers. Second, their disaffiliation reflects the pluralism of religious offerings that are now available to them. Third, there is a sense of relief in disaffiliating with the Church. Fourth, because religion was forced upon them, they will not force a particular religion on their children and will give them freedom to choose. Fifth, being moral or ethical does not depend on the influence or adherence to a particular religious tradition. Sixth, these individuals are open to religious belief if rational arguments are presented to support these.[110] Despite

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[109] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 6.
[110] McCarty and Vitek, 25-30.

some admitted limitations of the study, these summary sentiments are also resonant with the generational research findings shared previously in the introduction.[111]

These broader considerations led the research team to identify three major categories of disaffiliated youth which they named "The Injured," "The Drifters," and "The Dissenters." The first group named *the injured* identified youth who distanced themselves from the church due feelings of abandonment or lack of pastoral presence when experiencing moments of crisis in family dynamics such as divorce, illness, or death. The following personal testimonials of two youth featured in this category demonstrate the need for such presence. "Amy" remarked:

> When I reflect back, I think my initial doubts began with my childhood diabetes. I would always ask, 'Why me? Why would God do that to somebody? Why would he let that happen to somebody who has been going to church religiously and doing everything they were supposed to be doing?[112]

Adam describes his disaffiliation as stemming from "watching my whole mother's family . . . pray for my grandpa's lung cancer. And everyone is praying for him, probably over 150 people. Personally praying for him and still there was nothing done to help him and that was my first skepticism."[113] Also included in this category are those who felt members of the church or their own family were inauthentic and hypocritical.

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[111] McCarty and Vitek, 9. It is worth noting that the Hispanic reality and growing population of immigrant young Catholics in the United States was not included in the study. Based on experience of the author in various multigenerational Hispanic contexts, the data collected from these populations would skew the results as many young people in these communities remain connected to their faith due to generational ties and practices of popular religiosity. Also see Hosffman Ospino ed., *Hispanic Ministry in the 21st Century: Present and Future -El Ministerio Hispano En El Siglo Xxii: Presente Y Futuro*, (Miami, FL: Convivium Press, 2010). Ospino presents a very optimistic profile of Latino young people in the United States in terms of church involvement through "Encuentros Juveniles" which is a rapidly growing ministry based on retreats and small faith-sharing discipleship groups.

[112] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 17.

[113] McCarty and Vitek, 17.

Fran stated: "It was like the feeling of not feeling like you are part of something because sometimes you have these people that are extremely religious and then they become extremely hypocritical. And they think they are better than everybody else."[114] Some youth mentioned often being forced to attend church or Catholic schools.

The Drifters group represent those youth that are often trying to find the relevance of Christian faith to their lives. There is a clear disconnection between religious belief and practice and their connection to lived experience. In the initial phases of the study conducted by CARA, senior research associate Mark Gray asked young people why they were leaving the church their parents attend or are choosing other religious traditions or spiritualities. Here are the most popular sentiments given:

"Because I grew up and realized it was a story like Santa or the Easter Bunny."

"As I learn more about the world around me and understand things that I once did not, I find that the thought of an all-powerful being to be less and less believable."

"Catholic beliefs aren't based on fact. Everything is hearsay from back before anything could be documented, so nothing can be disproved, but it certainly shouldn't be taken seriously."

"I realized that religion is in complete contradiction with the rational and scientific world, and to continue to subscribe to a religion would be hypocritical."

"Need proof of something."

"It no longer fits into what I understand of the universe."[115]

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[114] McCarty and Vitek, 15.

[115] Mark M. Gray, "Young People are Leaving the Faith. Here's Why," *Our Sunday Visitor News Weekly*, August 27, 2016, https://www.osvnews.com/2016/08/27/young-people-are-leaving-the-faith-heres-why/.

It appears that these sentiments stem from a perceived incongruity of the church's message to the reality young people experience. The CARA report contends that this professed incompatibility between scientific knowledge and religion could be due to a lack of understanding of the relationship between the Church and science and perhaps symptomatic of the decreasing number of millennials being exposed to a Catholic education.[116] Additionally there seems to be no value found in personal faith or the need for the community in these groups. The gradual drift away from the church community triggered a number of respondents to feel abandoned, not having family members modeling faith or "companions on the spiritual journey."[117]

The third category of *The Dissenters* represent those youth who have intentionally disaffiliated from the church due to disagreements with church teaching or practice. "Dissenting young people who actively leave the Church express disagreement with Church teaching on many social issues, particularly same-sex marriage, abortion, and birth control."[118] As was the case with the NSYR, the influence of peers was highlighted in this section of respondents in terms of whether these would resort to atheism/agnosticism, science, or another religion. Also consistent with the previous studies mentioned, the CARA research team stated that for dissenters "disaffiliation from the Catholic Church—or any religious denomination-is not necessarily equivalent to rejecting the spiritual dimension in life. For many, rejection or dissent does not necessarily rule out the possibility of belief in something else or a returning to the Church

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[116] According to Gray's report, 42% of millennials were never enrolled in Catholic schools. This is a significant increase compared to previous generations.

[117] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 18.

[118] McCarty and Vitek, 21.

in the future."[119] Thus youth in this category were disaffiliated because they had not been

offered sufficient evidence to understand certain positions of the church regarding moral

or doctrinal issues thus calling for a healthy apologetic. Young respondent Barb

expressed her disappointment in the following manner: "In social studies as school, I

learned Christianity as, like, opposed to Judaism or Islamism. But I wasn't like, fully

understanding the differences between Catholicism and other forms of Christianity,

because nobody would fully explain that to me, I guess."[120] The researchers surmised

that:

> Though many in this group were involved in Catholic education, parish religious
>
> education, and youth ministry, they expressed deep disillusionment and
>
> frustration that their questions were never answered or that they didn't have the
>
> opportunity to voice their questions in the first place.[121]

Pope Francis argues that the church has not provided young people adequate

answers to their many questions and concerns due to what he called becoming

theologically narcissistic. In a pre-conclave meeting, then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio

expressed a call for the church to decide whether it will be continue to be self-referential

or a church which comes outside of herself.[122] Becoming self-referential, church leaders

have focused too heavily on imparting the teachings of the faith tradition and information

rather than formation based on an encounter with the Lord. Evangelizing is the antidote

to the self-referential posture that has plagued the church for so many years. In his

encyclical the *Joy of the Gospel*, Francis echoes this previous sentient declaring:

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[119] McCarty and Vitek, 24.

[120] McCarty and Vitek, 22.

[121] McCarty and Vitek, 22.

[122] Vatican Radio, "Bergoglio's Intervention: A diagnosis of the Problems in the Church," Ecumenism in Canada, March 27, 2013, https://ecumenism.net/2013/03/bergoglio-intervention.htm.

Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points

out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone

in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel."[123]

The Pope's injunction to "come out of our comfort zones" applied to youth

ministry is a clear call to reassess current methods. It is imperative that pastoral ministers

seize this short window of opportunity to engage these groups of disaffiliated youth in

order to facilitate the journey from ambivalence to relevance. In order for this mentorship

process to take place a new method of transmission and dissemination of the faith is

crucial.

Summary Themes of Research on Disaffiliation and Youth

The research data on disaffiliation conducted by NSYR, Barna, and CARA

reveals three major themes which have caused the gradual to precipitous decline of young

people in churches in the United States. The first theme deals with the lack of pastoral

presence during crucial moments. Many pundits have expressed concerns that the church

through its ministers have not been able to adequately respond to important existential

questions or provide pastoral care during moments of crisis such as divorce, illness, or the

loss of a loved one. One might summarize the sentiment of these youth with the question:

Where was the church when I needed them?"

A second major area concerns the relevance of the Christian message. In this

increasingly globalized society and influenced by diverse cults, religious traditions and

spiritualities of peers, celebrities, internet and social media outlets, young people no

longer see Christianity as the sole means for spiritual transcendence, but one among

many. Some crucial questions young people seem to be asking in this area of relevance

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[123] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium,* Vatican.va, 20.

are: Is the message of Christianity still relevant? How does the message of Christ connect

with culture today? Is the Christian worldview an adequate response to the questions

young people have? Already identified as among the most educated of populations of

young people, a third major challenge posed by these studies points to the need for

evidence or coherence of the Christian theology with scientific inquiry and the perceived

incongruous moral stances of the church with certain nonconformist lifestyles.[124]

    While not providing solutions to these pastoral challenges Robert McCarty, long

time director of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry and one of the lead

authors of *Going, Going, Gone* summarizes the findings of the research by identifying

five fundamental hungers that are not being fulfilled by the church in its current

approaches.[125] He maintains that emerging adults are hungry for 1) meaning and purpose

in life; 2) connection to an ideal or cause that is higher than themselves; 3) recognition of

the gifts and talents they possess and a desire for these to be heard and expressed; 4)

fulfilling experiences of encounter with the holy; and 5) justice for self and others;

especially those who are marginalized in society today. [126] By not responding to these

hungers pastoral leaders risk the continued decline of young people in our churches. The

areas of harm caused by the church will continue to be experienced unless a new

ministerial paradigm based on engagement is undertaken. McCarty argues that alternative

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[124] Pew Research Center, "How Millennials Today Compare with their Grandparents 50 Years Age: Millennials On Track to the Most Educated Generation to Date," March 17, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/16/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/ft_millennials-education_031715/.

[125] McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 32.

[126] Robert McCarty, "Going, Going, Gone…Now What? [Webinar]," NFCYM Webinar Series, March 12, 2019, https://www.gotostage.com/channel/3137548062961020934/recording /c96232939c704b7d8329ce579e0c7eda/watch?source=CHANNEL.

approaches to accompanying young people through these questions and yearnings will be necessary in order for youth to return to finding a place in the church.[127]

Throughout his pontificate, John Paul II was known for his deep affection for young people with the creation of the bi-annual World Youth Day celebrations and his many writings on youth. In his seminal interview *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* refers to the Rich Young Man as an important Gospel story for reflecting on the hungers that young people experience in modern society:

> The young are searching for God, they are searching for the meaning of life, they are searching for definitive answers: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' (Lk. 10:25). In this search, they cannot help but encounter the Church. And the Church also cannot help but encounter the young. The only necessity is that the Church have a profound understanding of what it means to be young, of the importance that youth has for every person. It is also necessary that the young know the Church, that they perceive Christ in the Church, Christ who walks through the centuries alongside each generation, alongside every person. He walks alongside each person as a friend. An important day in a young person's life is the day on which he becomes convinced that this is the only Friend who will not disappoint him, on whom he can always count.[128]

The imperative posed by John Paul that "the Church have a profound understanding of what it is to be young" is light of their need for presence, relevance, and evidence.

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[127] McCarty, "Going, Going, Gone…Now What?"
[128] John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994), 125-126.

The next section will serve as an alternative reading of the Rich Young Man story in the Gospels, a scene which is paradigmatic of the reality of disaffiliation of young Catholics in the United States.[129] It will briefly provide some exegetical notes on the passage as featured in all three synoptic Gospels followed by a contemporary reading of the story as one might perceive the plight of the downcast young man who walks away as he receives the challenge of discipleship by Christ. These remarks can best be described as a contemplative exercise in the style of Ignatius of Loyola who for centuries instructed Christians to situate themselves in the place of the young man interacting with Christ in the story in an effort to capture the emotions or concerns this young man would have been facing as he encountered the Lord. Seeking to walk in the shoes of disaffiliated youth, the reflections shared will endeavor to provide fodder for important pastoral conversations toward a deeper understanding of what it means to be young.

The Rich Young Man as the Archetypal Disaffiliated Youth

General Structure and Context in the Synoptic Accounts

The exchange between the rich young man and Jesus is presented in the synoptic Gospels as a story pertaining to the demands of discipleship and the obstacles associated with riches for entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus seems to use the rejection of the young ruler as a teachable moment about the danger of attachment to earthly treasures and an affirmation of the lifestyle undertaken by the disciples who had forsaken everything to follow him. Some remarkable characteristics of the passage include the level of intimacy with which Jesus interacts with the man as Mark describes a moment of

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[129] Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30.

eye contact (Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:24) as well as the common Talmudic hyperbolic reference to the "eye of a needle" in response to the young man's rejection.[130]

In terms of the general structure and context of the passage the synoptic authors place the pericope strategically to suit their particular audience or agenda. Matthew's Gospel situates the story in what McKenzie calls book five which narrates the final teachings, healings and parables leading to the intensifying drama of the journey to Jerusalem, eventual crucifixion, death and resurrection.[131] Luke's Gospel situates the story as part of the itinerant travels of Jesus and the disciples, a common theme woven through the Lucan texts including the Acts of the Apostles. Likewise, Mark's Gospel presents Jesus setting out on a journey but with Matthew provides an additional insight by describing the person as a young man (Gk. *neaniskos*).[132] Fitzmeyer identifies the man as a Palestinian magistrate who asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life.[133] Additionally, there are varying details in the three accounts such as the identity of the person who approaches Jesus in Luke as a ruler, "a certain person" in Mark and a "young man" in Matthew, as well as the order and enumeration of the commandments.[134] Luke omits that "Jesus fixed his eyes on him and loved him" and Matthew adds the reference to the

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[130] W.F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1971), 233.

[131] John L. McKenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary-Vol II: The New Testament and Topical Articles* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), 96.

[132] Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 1197. Also see C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1986), 399.

[133] Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke*, 1196.

[134] Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary-Vol II: The New Testament and Topical Articles* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), 151.

Deuteronomic moral code "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor (Matt. 19:21).[135]

Commentary

Edwards proposes that the descriptive language used by Mark, "a man ran up and knelt before him" (Mk. 10:17) "suggests his earnestness to be a disciple."[136] Most Biblical scholars are also in agreement that the greeting "good teacher" is not typical of rabbinical times as the term could be attributed to God alone and thus could be interpreted as extreme flattery bordering on blasphemy.[137] What is easy to surmise from the passage at first glance is that Jesus represents an authority figure of the time and thus the young man is drawn to ask this important question about what must be done to obtain eternal life.

Jesus' response, "why do you call me good?" is consistent with the rabbinical tradition that only God is good.[138] He then proceeds to instruct the young man on the need for adherence to the commandments. In Matthew's Gospel the rejoinder is presented as a conditional statement, "if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). In all three Gospel accounts the young man appears reassured as he responds "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."[139] Mark's Gospel captures one of the few moments in which Jesus has eye contact with an individual. One is

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[135] Matt. 5:48; Deut. 18:13. Also see Philip Van Linden, "Mark" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 924.

[136] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 309.

[137] C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Mark,* 399. Also see Leon Morris, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 292. Also see Edward J. Mally, "The Gospel According to Mark" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary-Vol II: The New Testament and Topical Articles* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), 45.

[138] C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Mark,* 399.

[139] Mark 10:20; Matt. 19:20; Luke 18:21.

immediately drawn to the tenderness with which Jesus "looked at him, loved him" (Mark 10:27). Edwards remarks that the "word for 'looked at' (Gk. *emblepein*) is an intensified compound of the normal word for 'look,' meaning 'to look at intently,' 'to examine,' or 'to scrutinize."[140] In this intensified gaze, Jesus is able to perceive that the young man is prepared for a greater challenge commanding the young man sell his possessions due to strong attachments to wealth and social status. Harrington suggests that in this injunction to the young man that "Jesus invites him to a new stage…For this person, perfection as a disciple of Jesus involves distributing his wealth to the poor and sharing in the insecurity and the trust that were characteristic of the earthly Jesus and his first followers."[141]

The young man is clearly not prepared for the response, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matt.19:21). In the very next moment however one is also left perplexed as Jesus does not seem to care that the young man has left and uses the incident as a teachable moment about the dangers of trusting in riches. On further thought, Jesus look of love suggests a vision and understanding of a deeper poverty in the young man. This young person clearly is not able to see his need to detach from his material possessions and status. Vaage argues that "Had the man been able to do this, he would shortly have learned, together with Peter and his colleagues, that the result of such complete renunciation…is not a perpetual homelessness but, instead, another kind of domestic life."[142] The life of discipleship in which an individual abandons house, family and material wealth is presented as the highest ideal which the young man has rejected.

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[140] Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 312.
[141] Daniel J. Harrington, "Matthew" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 890.
[142] Leif E. Vaage, "An Other Home: Discipleship in Mark as Domestic Asceticism," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 71, no. 4 (2009): 758.

That said Biblical scholars are mixed in their opinions as to whether or not the young man walks away without later returning. For example, Fitzmeyer notes "that in the Lucan Gospel we are not told that he 'turned away.' We do not know precisely the status of this magistrate: Was he a disciple of not? Does his sadness imply that he ceased being a disciple?"[143] In a similar way the message that has been conveyed thus far about disaffiliation is that young people are turning away but it may not be too late to initiate a return through an effective ministry of accompaniment. Could they be leaving because they are not being given a sufficient reason to return and live the life of discipleship? As has been shown, the research on disaffiliation shows that young people are seeking answers to ultimate questions about God, salvation and spirituality but they are no longer seeking these answers from the church due to feelings of abandonment, judgment for certain non-conformist behaviors or lifestyle choices, and a deepening mistrust in clergy as allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse continue to surface.

A Contemporary Reading of the Rich Young Man as the Archetypal Disaffiliated Youth

As part of a modern reading of this passage, one first wonders if young people today would have been drawn to the person of Christ or pastoral ministers today to ask such existential questions as this young man posed. Would he have demonstrated the earnestness of the young man who ran up to him and knelt before him? Young people these days are experiencing what would seem to be a crisis of wonderment due in large measure to the many ways in which this globalized, technology driven society has quieted desires to discover the world and sense the numinous. Creativity is often stifled by the many innovations designed to make life easier. In this "Google generation," youth

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[143] Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke,* 1197.

prefer pragmatic and scientific responses to questions of ultimacy with religious answers seemingly taking on less importance. Popular culture and movies portray youth as indifferent to such visually enrapturing wonders as the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls and preferring instead what is currently trending on their handheld devices. It would appear that young people are becoming increasingly self-absorbed, often preferring to text a friend they have next to them instead of engaging in face to face conversation.

Despite this, young people are drawn to films that feature superheroes and villains such as the Avengers or fantasy worlds of adventure and survival such as the Hunger Games, Star Wars, and Insurgent series of books and movies, and dark worlds of horror and the zombie apocalypse because of the deep-seeded urge to explore questions of ultimacy and purpose. One could surmise that at the heart of this curiosity (or in some cases obsession) with these films is a deep-seeded desire to be extraordinary, to experience adventure in the midst of their often mundane, seemingly uneventful existence. While some may opine that youth are losing their sense of religiousness or reverence, this deep seeded desire to be extraordinary and go beyond the confines of their reality represents a restlessness which can only be truly satisfied by God.

Returning to the scene one has to wonder what was the urgency that drew him to seek spiritual guidance from this man? We read that the young man addresses Jesus with the title "good teacher" and the enquiry: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"[144] In chapter one of his groundbreaking encyclical Veritatis Splendor John Paul reminds us that:

> For the young man, the *question* is not so much about rules to be followed,
>
> but *about the full meaning of life.* This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every

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[144] Luke 18:18.

human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life.[145]

Thus, for purposes here, the youth minister must recognize that when youth bring these queries to the church's ministers, they are hoping for an answer that will satisfy their longing for God, purpose and direction for their life. This is a prime opportunity to come along side young people in understanding their questions and their reasons for asking. Young people are similarly not able to appreciate the riches of the life of discipleship without an experience of encounter with Jesus. Instead they are presented with a Gospel message as an either-or proposition in very much the same way this young man was challenged by Jesus. Faith formation classes and youth group sessions can often be perceived by young people as judgmental and inflexible to nonconformist positions.

Jesus' rejoinder to adhere to the commandments (v.19) represents the opportunity ministers have to present them an aspect of the faith tradition that can be the root of their inquiry. The young man's response "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth" (v.20) represents affirmation or denial we may get from youth in response to church teaching. To this Jesus responds with the radical challenge of discipleship. The Gospel writers all agree that at the challenge to sell all his possessions and follow Jesus, the young man became saddened. Mark uses the phrase that the man was "shocked and went away grieving for he had many possessions."[146] One can imagine the downcast young man saying to himself, "this is too hard, I can't part with my wealth, position and status

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[145] John Paul, *Veritatis Splendor*, Vatican.va, 8.
[146] Mark 10:22.

to follow this man Jesus." In a similar way, young people are leaving the church because they are not willing to part with many of the riches they have discovered in the world. On the other hand, the need to hold onto the riches of wealth, position and status could also represent the reticence on the part of the church and its leadership to meet young people where they are. In the midst of this shocking story, we do not see Jesus running after the young man to say, "Hey buddy, I didn't mean that." Instead we see Jesus talking about how difficult it is for a person with riches to enter the kingdom of heaven.[147] The young man walks away and is never heard from again in the Gospels or in the remainder of the New Testament. This cliffhanger leaves the reader wondering: "what happened to him?" Did he return after some thought, did he do what the master told him and return to follow the Lord, or did he go back to his life of wealth, status and following the cultural and religious norms of society?

As an introductory group activity for my Junior Christian Morality course at Monsignor Pace High School, students were invited to read the passage of the Rich Young Man and perform a role play in order to enact what they think happened next after he walked away. What is telling from this activity is that while some portrayed the young man unable to leave his current lifestyle due to his strong attachments, the majority of the groups portray him giving away his possessions and returning to the Lord after a time.

What is implied in this exchange with the young man is the freedom and flexibility ministers are to give to youth to respond and act in a loving environment, to reject and even walk away, but with the hope that he will return. As mentors, pastoral leaders must be able to allow for push back and struggle to occur with patience, encouragement and love without turning them away. In order for the Gospel challenge to

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[147] Mark 10:23.

truly be received by young people today in an effective way, pastoral agents must first look inwardly and must reassess and reimagine through its leadership, vision, worship, preaching, and witness what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Only after this commitment to living a life of radical discipleship are young people going to take the church seriously enough to see and appreciate the power of the message that is being presented and embrace it instead of walking away. Like Jesus, pastoral leadership is called to look attentively and lovingly at the many young men and women who are walking away and some of the contributing factors to their flight.

The Synod on Youth concludes with the following imperative:

> The young are crying out for an authentic, radiant, transparent, joyful Church: only a Church of saints can measure up to such requests! Many of the young have left the Church because they have not found in it holiness, but rather mediocrity, presumption, division and corruption. Unfortunately the world is outraged by the abuses of some people in the Church rather than being invigorated by the holiness of her members: hence the Church in her entirety must embrace a decisive, immediate and radical change of perspective![148]

The portrait of the crestfallen young man who walks away must be a constant reminder the need for radical change of perspective and culture which should begin with pastoral leadership and permeate every ministry and individual active in the faith community. The young man was genuinely seeking answers to deep questions and believed that by following the dictates of the religious tradition he could obtain a heavenly reward. In order for young people of today to understand and appreciate the true

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[148] *XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, "Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment," October 2018, 166, http://www.synod2018.va.

riches which are found in following Christ and the beauty of the Christian tradition and its teachings, they must first come to an experience of encounter. Cultivating a dynamic "culture of encounter" provides and environment for youth to recapture a sense of the uniqueness of life and message of Christ.

Conclusion and Pastoral Implications

Surveying the major studies on youth and religion brought together with generational data present a portrait of young people who consider themselves special and who expect to make an impact on the world. These populations seem to recognize the importance of religion and spirituality but no longer perceive the Christian worldview as the only means of developing a relationship with God, having at their disposal many different philosophies, religious teachers, and spiritual exercises from which to choose. However, Millennials and Generation Z have also yielded a consonant profile of individuals who are seeking intentional relationships with peers and other adults in the context of smaller community gatherings. The collective yearning for experiences of God and meaningful relationship with others should be considered a moment of pastoral opportunity.

The apparent inability of youth to describe their relationship with God characterized by Smith and others as MTD has been refuted by presenting this period of inquiry as the product of emerging adult faith not the influence of post-modern tendencies. Many of these young people have received a peripheral understanding and not an experiential knowledge of the Christian tradition, what Kinnaman calls "shallow faith" due to the gap between preaching and instruction of the faith and the lack of effective enculturation:

The faith too many of them have inherited is a lifeless shadow of historic Christianity, which insists that following Jesus is a way of life, not a laundry list of vague beliefs that have little meaning for how we spend our lives. I think the next generation's disconnection stems ultimately from the failure of the church to impart Christianity as a comprehensive way of understanding reality and living fully in today's culture.[149]

The characteristics of bar-code Christianity described above have thus led to the indictment made by youth that church is like a country club instead of a school of discipleship. How can young people be inspired or attracted to the witness of a bar-code Christian? What will it take to reclaim discipleship as an essential characteristic of being a Christian? Particularly, how do youth ministers bring their emerging adults to an understanding of discipleship in the midst of the pervasive bar-code Christian environment that many are immersed in?

Pope Francis attributes the challenges raised above including the rampant culture of nominal Christianity to what he describes as a self-referential posture. In a pre-conclave meeting, then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio expressed a call for the church to decide whether it will be continue to be self-referential or a church which comes outside of herself.[150] Becoming self-referential, church leaders have focused too heavily on imparting the teachings of the faith tradition they believe are most important for youth. For years, catechetical and youth programs have prided themselves on providing solid faith formation by directing their efforts toward the dissemination of the key doctrines of the church rather than to introduce adolescents to a personal relationship with God

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[149] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 114.
[150] Vatican Radio, "Bergoglio's Intervention: A diagnosis of the problems in the Church," March 27, 2013, http://www.radiovaticana.va. Italics added by the author for emphasis.

through Jesus Christ. Evangelizing is the antidote to the self-referential posture that has plagued the church for so many years according to Francis. In his encyclical the Joy of the Gospel, Francis echoes this previous sentient declaring: "[e]ach Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel".[151]

Pope Francis' injunction to "come out of our comfort zones" applied to youth ministry is a clear call to reassess current methods in three significant ways. As has been reiterated throughout, the first way first involves active and deep listening which cannot be accomplished with a two-hour religious education class or large format youth group session. Providing an environment for young people to share their faith journey and understanding of what God is doing in their lives is indispensable. This environment must be created through establishing opportunities for developing intentional relationships within the course of the youth group format. Small group dynamics, one-on-one sessions with a peer, youth counselor or adult core member can provide these opportunities for authentic sharing.

The second area involves a shift from a catechetical to a kerygmatic approach to faith formation. What is needed is a practical Christology which reintroduces the uniqueness of the Christian message and the person of Christ through a kerygmatic approach. The term *kerygma* (κῆρυγμα), translated "preaching" or "proclamation" is used throughout the New Testament and refers to the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. Essential to this proclamation is the central tenet of the Christian

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[151] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium,* Vatican.va, 20.

faith that Jesus was not simply a good moral teacher but a person who claimed unity with the Godhead. Practically speaking, if it can be safely assumed that most faith formation programs in the United States provide the basic structure of propositional doctrines and sacramental preparation leading to reception of confirmation, then youth ministry should be focused on delivering the message of the kerygma—an acknowledgement of one's need for salvation and to be united to the preaching and life of Jesus Christ. This is an essential element of youth ministry—to provide a healthy environment of encounter with the Christ learned about in Sunday school.

Thus, the goal and purpose of all ministry, and youth ministry in particular, is kerymatic in nature. That is to say that ministry must seek to facilitate a move of the heart from a peripheral knowledge of the faith to a personal encounter with Jesus. This crucial encounter becomes the basis for authentic encounters with others in the context of Christian community. More specifically this deepening is sought through experiences of encounter with the Lord which includes prayer experiences, retreats, community outreach, intentional small group sharing, and service which leads to discipleship.

A third shift involves taking a practical theological approach to ministry with youth in order to effectively respond to the aforementioned objections where youth claim that the church is antagonistic toward culture. A practical theology of youth ministry proposes a "both/and" approach—a radical turn toward the world and culture as places where God is also revealed, inviting youth to see the Gospel through their everyday lives in conversation with popular culture and their own experience instead of creating an "us against the world" mentality. This turn toward the world was precipitated by the Second Vatican Council which called for a "synthesis" between our faith tradition, and culture

that young people seek which ultimately leads to authentic human flourishing. Specifically, *Gaudium Et Spes* declares that:

> This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age…Christians should rather rejoice that, following the example of Christ Who worked as an artisan, they are free to give proper exercise to all their earthly activities and to their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises by gathering them into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory.[152]

A practical theology for youth ministry facilitates this freedom to 'give proper exercise to all earthly activity' through its emphasis on experience. It is a vision that sees the whole parish as a community of youth ministers called to facilitate spiritual introspection by "being honestly human before and with young people, calling them into their own humanity, inviting them to contemplate and search for God in the barren empty spaces of their own lives."[153]

As a way to counteract the negative perceptions that the church is anti-culture, many pastoral agents have sought to respond to the above illustrated disassociations by taking marketing approaches to reaching the youth demographic of their churches which has led to development of promotional devices in an effort to make the weekend message more relatable to younger audiences. Mega churches have marketing teams to assess products, branding and other strategies initiatives for attracting youth. Some have tried creating concert-like or coffee house environments in hopes that teens and twenty

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[152] Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican.va, 43.
[153] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 46.

somethings will be drawn to their church in the way they would to their local Starbucks resulting in the negative perception that churches are businesses selling commodities to customers. More the language of "shopping" is used by church goers and financial contributions or membership in a particular congregation is often determined by the "service" provided; whether the music or the homily was good or if the atmosphere was uplifting or entertaining. Unfortunately, in this consumer culture young people are immersed in, Christianity is another competing commodity to be purchased or discarded. Most are not buying. David White also shares a crucial warning about treating youth ministry programs with a purely consumer or gimmick mentality:

> While youth ministry has been successful, to some degree, in introducing large numbers of youth in the commitment to Jesus, we often contradict our hopes of forming youth in the way of his gospel by reinforcing their relationship with popular culture and habits that engage young people as passive consumers of sensational products like concerts, CDs, T-shirts, and an easily consumable gospel. These commodities, like junk food, address immediate cravings, but do not adequately evoke their deepest hunger for God and neighbor.[154]

The caution White issues here is crucial to effective youth ministry as there must be a balance between engaging the culture youth are immersed in while not undermining the purpose of bringing youth to a personal experiential knowledge of who Jesus is in their lives. Youth programs that strive to compete with popular culture by providing an alternative Jesus-culture will in the long run find they cannot compete. The draw of any youth ministry initiative has to be an authentic presentation of Jesus. Many well intended

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[154] Mahan et al., *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture*, 36-37.

youth programs fall by the waste side by being overly focused on the media and popular

culture side of ministry and thus lose their sense of identity.

Rachel Held Evans, a millennial blogger, has written extensively on the subject of

young adults leaving the church. Evans issues a strong indictment against marketing

ploys to attract this dwindling population in the church. She maintains that what is

missing is an environment that is genuine, and which focuses on relationships:

> Millennials aren't looking for a hipper Christianity . . . We're looking for a truer
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> Christianity, a more authentic Christianity. Like every generation before ours and
>
> every generation after, we're looking for Jesus—the same Jesus who can be found
>
> in the strange places he's always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the
>
> Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these. No coffee shops
>
> or fog machines required.[155]

This authentic sense of Christianity is found not with redesigned sanctuaries or

with trendy youth ministers, and entertaining programs but with an atmosphere that

promotes belonging. In her Op Ed article, Held Evans shares a similar sentiment of

fellow blogger Amy Peterson: "I want a service that is not sensational, flashy, or

particularly 'relevant.' I can be entertained anywhere. At church, I do not want to be

entertained. I do not want to be the target of anyone's marketing. I want to be asked to

participate in the life of an ancient-future community."[156] She argues further that the

community Millennials and Gen Zs long for must

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[155] Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2015), xiv.

[156] Rachel Held Evans, "Want Millennials Back in the Pews? Stop Trying to Make Church 'Cool,'" *Washington Post*, April 30, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e_story.html?utm_term=.e9249cd6cde8.

be safe places to doubt, to ask questions, and to tell the truth, even when it's

uncomfortable. We want to talk about tough stuff—biblical interpretation,

religious pluralism, sexuality, racial reconciliation, and social justice—but

without predetermined conclusions or simplistic answers. We want to bring our

whole selves through the church doors, without leaving our hearts and minds

behind, without wearing a mask.[157]

More than a gimmick or creative approach, young people are longing for relationships

that are authentic, no nonsense approaches to the faith.

The good news is that most of the research posed by Smith, Barna and CARA

point to effective youth ministry as a deterrent of these trends. In his article "5 Reasons

Millennials Stay Connected to the Church," Kinnaman suggests ways the church can

respond to the above described areas of disaffiliation.[158] The first reason youth were

likely to stay pertains to acceptance through meaningful relationships. According to the

study, almost sixty percent of those interviewed said they stayed connected to the church

because of a relationship with an adult or youth church member. A second important key

to youth retention was described as "cultural discernment" or the ability to navigate the

cultural trends in light of the Gospel message. Barna maintains that:

Millennials need help learning how to apply their hearts and minds to today's

cultural realities. In many ways, pop culture has become the driver of religion for

Millennials, so helping them think and respond rightly to culture should be a

priority. Although, such development must also take care to avoid the

overprotective impulses that are driven by fear of culture. Rather, Millennials

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[157] Rachel Held Evans, *"Want Millennials Back in the Pews?"*

[158] Barna Group, "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to the Church," Research, September 17, 2013, https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church/#.VvGPZRIrLMV.

need guidance on engaging culture meaningfully, and from a distinctly Christian perspective.[159]

The third reason young millennials stayed connected to the church was because they felt they were being listened to by pastoral leaders. This healthy give and take between pastoral leaders and youth or "reverse mentoring" speaks to the importance of allowing youth to be heard and to express their understandings about God in a conversational dynamic; the result being a discovery of a personal sense of mission and purpose. Fourth, "vocational discipleship" refers to the ability of pastoral leaders to engage in discussions on discernment to ministry, profession or relationships. Kinnaman describes such crucial conversations as ways "to help Millennials connect to the rich history of Christianity with their own unique work God has called them to."[160] In other words, effective youth ministry can heighten an individual sense of purpose as connected to the meta-narrative of salvation history. The fifth and final reason provided by Barna that leads to greater retention is an emphasis on facilitating a personal encounter and connection with Christ. Almost 70% of those millennials who remained active in the church attributed their participation to their personal relationship with God which had been cultivated through effective youth ministry initiatives.

Thus, based on the areas of disaffiliation and conclusions presented in this chapter a more robust and engaging youth ministry effort that is focused on cultivating intentional relationships with peers and other adults is needed. If young people are not provided an environment where they can be formed in the Christian tradition which is in conversation with culture and their personal experiences they will not be equipped to

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[159] Barna Group, "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to the Church."
[160] Barna Group, "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to the Church."

understand its purpose of their faith nor will they be able to articulate it. Any effective

youth ministry for the 21st century must not forget the hundreds of young men and

women who are leaving the church because they are so full of an abundance of voices

from culture and media that the message of Christianity is faint at best. It has been the

assertion of this dissertation that a discipleship model of youth ministry can effectively

meet these five criteria for retention of youth. In order to delineate the characteristics of

such a model of faith formation with young people it will be necessary in the next chapter

to address the nature of discipleship and the benefits of these proposed shifts.

CHAPTER THREE. DISCIPLESHIP

The concerns raised in the previous chapter undoubtedly pose an enormous pastoral challenge as some youth described their experience of church as boring, anti-science, anti-world, and "a country club", while others posed questions about the relevance and methods of the Catholic Church with statements such as "God seems to be missing from my experience of church" and "I don't feel that I can ask my most pressing life questions in the church."[161] The aforementioned studies conducted by the NYSR, CARA and others have emphatically concluded that the current youth ministry methods, while reaching a small percentage of youth and not leading to retention and active participation in later years. The resounding conclusion of much of the social science data is that a shift in approach is necessary in order to address the matter in question.

In remembrance of the rich young man, this chapter now turns to ask the question: What must we do? How do we respond to these areas of disaffiliation in a way that is effective in drawing young people to re-embrace the message of Christianity? What paradigm shifts are necessary to change the pervading church culture of nominalism to an environment of authentic Christian witness? The decline in youth participation has raised noticeable alarm among Catholic leadership both globally and locally leading to the calling of the Synod on Youth in 2018 and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* in which Frances called for the development of youth ministry initiatives

> Capable of being inclusive, with room for all kinds of young people, to show that
> we are a Church with open doors. Nor does one have to accept fully all the
> teachings of the Church to take part in certain of our activities for young people. It
> is enough to have an open mind towards all those who have the desire and

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[161] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.

willingness to be encountered by God's revealed truth. Some of our pastoral activities can assume that a journey of faith has already begun, but we need a "popular" youth ministry that can open doors and make room for everyone, with their doubts and frustrations, their problems and their efforts to find themselves, their past errors, their experiences of sin and all their difficulties.[162]

In order to garner the characteristics of openness, inclusivity of this "popular" youth ministry described by Francis, this dissertation will propose a discipleship paradigm. The essential shift that will be proposed here is a turn or "return" to discipleship as the primary method of ministry in the church. A shift in pastoral approach that is willing to listen and dialogue with young people about the aforementioned questions and frustrations.

Hence, corresponding to second stage of the method of theological reflection, this chapter will strive to *assert* a discipleship model of youth ministry as a formidable response of the church to disaffiliation and the questions and concerns of emerging adults in the 21st century. Through the lens of practical theology, it will first propose an understanding of discipleship as a way of life based on practice as shown by social scientist Robert Wuthnow. Taking a broader approach to the disaffiliation previously, Wuthnow maintains that the changes in the spiritual landscape of American youth are symptomatic of a broader shift from a spirituality of dwelling to one of seeking. Additionally, this introductory section will draw parallels between the characteristics described by Wuthnow and the experience of the early Jesus movement.

Using the early Jesus movement as the preeminent and archetypal model of the Christian life, as gathered from the writings of the New Testament, the second section

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[162] Francis, *Christus Vivit*, Vatican.va, 234.

will investigate key dispositions and moments that are characteristic of discipleship. This process involves training in the practices of ministry and growing in Christian virtue which leads to maturity. That said, what will be proposed is a discipleship vision for youth ministry that incorporates practical theology; one which seeks to retrieve those characteristics that caused the first followers to be drawn to Christ and which incorporates the practices of disciples.

The post-resurrection account of the disciples' journey to Emmaus[163] reveals three essential moments in the process of transitioning from nominal Christianity to transformational discipleship. Along the journey toward becoming disciples they would be presented the basic kerygma or proclamation of the Gospel which is centered on repentance for sin and acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ. This presentation facilitates an encounter (*kairos*) with the living Jesus and the realization of his identity as the son of God. This kairos event has been called a "moment of recognition," illumination, or insight best illustrated in the various professions of faith throughout the Gospels. As the crux of discipleship living, this deeper understanding of Christ brings about a natural desire to seek koinonia, which is to live with and take part in the practices of the community known as the church. That is to say that the normative or ordinary locus for discipleship to occur is in the context of the living community of practitioners who are the bearers of the Christian tradition. As apprentices participate in these practices, they become a part of the Christian community which embodies a particular set of shared values and commitments.

Any comprehensive ministry initiative with young people must seek to incorporate these moments of kairos, kerygma, and koinonia for a genuine culture of

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[163] Luke 24:13-35.

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encounter to be created. It goes without saying that these moments cannot be humanly orchestrated but are the working of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the individuals and collective gathering of two or more in Christ name.[164] Based on the aforementioned moments, this section will advance a simple yet multi-layered definition of disciple as an apprentice of the life of Christ. A more elaborate working definition of discipleship is an individual learner who, having been impacted by the person and revelation of the Christ event seeks to live out the practices of other disciples in the context of the "living" community of practitioners. If disciples of Jesus are those individuals who seek to live as Christ did, then young apprentices must seek peers or older mentors who are modeling such practices. It is an understanding of Christianity as a gathering of knowledge, a craft that is disclosed through participation and practice within the Christian community. Integrating notions of practice and tradition, Stanley Hauerwas' notion of discipleship as a "learn by doing" approach will figure significantly here. These reflections brought together will create the groundwork for subsequent sections on the church as community of disciples and school of Christian virtues.

Characteristics of Discipleship

Our foundational understanding of Christian discipleship is found in the gospels. By way of definition, the term disciple/s (mathétés-μαθητής, οῦ, ὁ) is translated to mean learner or pupil who followed the way of a master teacher or sage and appears in the New Testament 261 times referring to those followers of Christ.[165] In the Hellenistic inflected culture in which Christianity emerged, the original connotation of the term referred to those first followers who lived with and began to adopt the ways and practices

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[164] Matt. 18:20.

[165] James Strong, *Strong's New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: Abingdon World Bible Publishers, 1986), 356-57.

of their teacher similar to other ancient Socratic and Chinese philosophical traditions. Over time however, Christian discipleship developed some unique characteristics as compared to these other traditions.

The invitation "follow me" issued by Jesus to his first disciples not only connotes the idea of accompaniment along a road (*akoloutheo*) but more importantly the challenge to forgo their own way for his way of life. While there appear to be no special qualifications to be a disciple, Christ himself lists three non-negotiable dispositions of any followers of the way. These are to 1) "*deny themselves*"- or to embody the self-less virtues of agapic love Jesus epitomized which would lead one to 2) "*take up their cross*"- or to respond to the life of the beatitudes and the persecutions associated with being a witness for Christ and 3) "*follow*"- the commitment to be life-long learners of the master teacher (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

The Gospel of Luke also recounts an instance in which Jesus declared that anyone who wanted to be his disciple would have to renounce family and possessions to follow him (Luke 14:25-34). An ultimatum of sorts, Jesus uses the illustration of the builder (v.28-29) as an exhortation to anyone who wishes to be his disciple to "count the cost" before undertaking the task. To be a disciple in the Christian worldview meant more than just an intellectual and moral commitment but one which involved a total giving of self to the person of Christ and his cause.

As was seen in our reading of the Rich Young Man story in the previous chapter, those disciples that would be willing to leave behind their livelihood, family and wealth for the kingdom of God would not be without eternal reward.

An additional distinguishing feature of Christian discipleship as compared to other philosophical and religious traditions described above is that disciple of Jesus not only understand the propositional truths and philosophy of life of this master teacher but also seeks to emulate his life and imbibe his spirit. Christians are invited to embody Christ himself. Paul champions this notion of embodied discipleship when making such declarations as "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."[166] Paul claims that Jesus' followers, by virtue of their baptism, have "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and by the work of the Holy Spirit have clothed themselves with Christ.[167] These dispositions are essential for establishing a posture of humility and willingness to be a lifelong learner as Christ himself asserts, "a disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher."[168]

A second unique characteristic of Christian discipleship can be likened to the relationship between the apprentice and master in that there is a "learn by doing" approach in which the apprentice observes the master tradesman perform the task and then later imitates it with guidance. After enough practice, the apprentice is able to perform the task adeptly and over time the skill set become second nature. As the son of a brick layer, Stanley Hauerwas reflects on his early age apprenticeship with his father and makes some insightful correlations for understanding the role of disciples and helpful applications for modern times.[169] Hauerwas argues that "the teacher's authority must be accepted on the basis of a community of a craft, which embodies the intellectual and

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[166] Gal. 2:20.
[167] Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27.
[168] Luke 6:40.
[169] Stanley Hauerwas, "The Politics of the Church."

moral habits we must acquire and cultivate if we are to become effective and creative

participants in the craft."[170] While some may argue that this notion of apprenticeship is a

weak illustration because ultimately the apprentice becomes a master, no longer needing

his tutelage, it should be noted that Jesus understanding of discipleship is different.

As the master teacher, Jesus requires of his disciples (apprentices) that: A) the

apprentice learn from the teacher first and then do and B) that they learn what is good and

what is best to do in particular circumstances based on their level of training. This type

approach can be gleaned from the Gospels as the disciples, after being called, were

"trained" by observing Jesus as he ministered to the people, were assisted in

understanding his teachings (Mt. 13:36f), were corrected when they were not able to

carry out certain tasks (Mt. 17:15-18); and then later are sent out two by two with

instructions on how to proceed without him (Lk. 9:1-6; Mk. 6:7-13). Along these same

lines, youth ministry experts are advocating this learn by doing approach to ministry with

young people by working alongside adults who serve in various capacities in the church.

The youth are trained by working with the adult on that particular ministry with a four-

step leadership process: 1) Master/mentor does the task, participant watches; 2)

Master/mentor does it, participant does it; 3) Master/mentor watches and makes

observations, participant does it; 4) Participant does it.[171]

Thus, the terms disciple(ship)/ apprentice(ship) will be used synonymously as the

relationship between the two is essential. To be a disciple is to be a lifelong learner of the

way of Christ which has as an inherent quality the amenable disposition of an apprentice.

Assisted by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the Christian journey is essentially a life-

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[170] Hauerwas, 668.
[171] Jason Gant and Adam Hamilton, *Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 30.

long apprenticeship with Christ as the master teacher, Scripture and church tradition as our manuals, the Christian community as the "trade" school where we receive essential training with the world as our backdrop for which to understand God's ongoing activity and revelation.

The craft of making disciples; sharing faith, initiating an encounter and living in community become the staging ground, the workshop space in which the Holy Spirit can act in the life of the individual moving the from the periphery or inquiry stage toward making a decision to become a follower of the way. How can this craft be reintroduced in the current church climate as a way to counteract the decline in youth participation? In contrast to the negative picture presented by the sociological data on youth and religion in the previous chapter, Robert Wuthnow provides a varying perspective on this issue and makes an important contribution to understanding the paradigmatic shifts occurring in the spirituality of America.

Discipleship as a Response to Disaffiliation

While the previous chapter surveyed social science and generational data for answers to the declining youth participation in churches and provided a rationale for these disassociations, Robert Wuthnow one of the most prolific researchers in the area of religion in America, takes a broader approach to this pastoral concern. As the director of the Princeton University Center for the Study of Religion, Wuthnow describes the challenge of ministering to these generations of youth lies in the changing landscape of religious adherence in the United States. He described it as a shift from a spirituality of dwelling to more of a spirituality of seeking. In his book *After Heaven*, he argues that since the 1950's, there has been a cultural transformation in the way people understand

religious experience due in large measure to the influences of world wars, atheistic existential philosophies and the reemergence of enlightenment thinking which placed an emphasis on science as a viable alternative worldview to religion.[172]

In line with the aforementioned studies on youth and religion, Wuthnow contends that this shift can be attributed to the increase in cultural diversity, religious pluralism and post-modern trends of thinking in American society as well as the recent trend that religion expressions be practical and consumer friendly. He described the change thusly: "a spirituality of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking— that people have been losing faith in a metaphysic that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom."[173] Spiritual dwelling is oriented toward security, rootedness in traditions, clearly outlined rules and boundaries and a shared sense of community. Spiritual seeking, on the other hand, is oriented toward freedom of expression, discovery of new places, quests, dreams, mysticism, and non-constraint. He concludes that both these spiritual orientations have merit and that all human beings oscillate between them. It cannot be denied that any careful reading of the scriptures captures this purposefully ambiguous oscillation between spiritualities of dwelling and seeking as well.

After drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the spiritualities of dwelling and seeking respectively, Wuthnow proposes a "spirituality of practice" that integrates the best parts of both these orientations. A spirituality that is practiced according to Wuthnow "means that people engage intentionally in activities that deepen their

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[172] Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 1-18.
[173] Wuthnow, 3.

relationship to the sacred. . . In many cases, these activities are life-transforming, causing people to engage in service to others and to lead their lives in a worshipful manner."[174] Many of the activities listed by Wuthnow that characterize this "spirituality of practice" have been experienced through small Christian communities including prayer, meditation, contemplation, study of sacred texts, devotional reading, and service. A practice-oriented spirituality, according to Wuthnow, places a strong emphasis on the intentional and contextual nature of Christian practices which have the following characteristics. Christian practices 1) are intentional, disciplined and long-term, 2) they require discernment and self-reflection, 3) use everyday life as material for growth and nourishment, with the goal being that "one's practice of spirituality becomes indistinguishable from the rest of one's life," 4) have a social dimension that depends on a community of practitioners, 5) are guided by rules, 6) naturally leads to a life of service, 7) are greatly enriching and rewarding.[175] Suffice to say that Wuthnow is suggesting that a healthy spirituality is one that strives to integrate the desires for permanence, security, order, meaning and purpose with a faith which is not static but ever seeking, dynamic and developing. An Anselmian faith, (*fides quaerens intellectum*) or a faith which seeks understanding necessarily is enriched by glimpses of the presence of God as moments of "dwelling" and abiding and yet is always seeking deeper "understanding" of the acts of God through everyday life. In order to propose such an approach, we must return to some important passages in the Gospels which highlight this holy oscillation between dwelling and seeking.

Discipleship as Dwelling and Seeking

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[174] Wuthnow, 169.
[175] Wuthnow, 168-71.

The Gospels also present a similar picture of this dynamic of dwelling and seeking from the very first exchanges Jesus has with potential disciples. While Jesus did have many pivotal moments teaching and debating in the temple, most of his ministry was performed itinerantly. The great theologian and "angelic doctor," Thomas Aquinas points out that the first words that Jesus utters in John's Gospel is "What are you looking for?" (Jn. 1:38). The disciples of John the Baptist respond to Jesus with an inquiry of their own: "Where do you live?" Jesus' response of "Come and see" gathers with it the entire mystery and adventure of the life of discipleship. Aquinas brilliantly captures the nature of discipleship as this tension between dwelling and seeking:

> First he says, Come and see, that is, where I live. There is a difficulty here: for since the Lord says, "The Son of Man does not have any place to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), why does he tell them to come and see where he lives? I answer, according to Chrysostom, that when the Lord says, "The Son of Man does not have any place to lay his head," he showed that he had no home of his own, but not that he did not remain in someone else's home. And such was the home he invited them to see, saying, Come and see. In the mystical sense, he says, Come and see, because the dwelling of God, whether of glory or grace, cannot be known except by experience: for it cannot be explained in words: "I will give him a white stone upon which is written a new name, which no one knows but he who receives it" (Rv. 2:17). And so he says, Come and see: Come, by believing and working; and see, by experiencing and understanding.[176]

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[176] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Part I: Chapters 1-7*, trans. James A. Weisheipl (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1998), #292.

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In these two verbs *come* and *see* the disciple is invited to follow, to live with, and to share life with Christ and other disciples. These key words describe the nature of discipleship as dynamic and active. One does not truly understand discipleship as a concept but a lived experience. Jesus did not deny the transient, "now and not yet" nature of discipleship living. In response to a scribe who announced: "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" he replied "Foxes have dens, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Mt. 8:19-20). The great commission found in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 speak of the impermanency of the *missio dei* as the disciples are told to "go and make disciples", to preach the kingdom of heaven, to baptize and to teach people to follow Jesus teachings.

Jesus' description of the newly inaugurated reign of God was not one which necessitated a physical space to dwell but a desire to abide in relationship with God and others as he declared to the Samaritan woman: "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his [*sic*] worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."[177] In contrast to the Zionist mindset of the Old Testament which necessitated the physical presence and adherence to temple worship, the Jesus movement would invite followers to experience worship and communion with God without walls, each member representing the temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Worship in spirit and truth would not be limited to temples as the primitive church was fortified by house churches or any gatherings of two or more.

The Discipleship Continuum—Proclamation, Encounter, Community

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[177] John 4:21-24.

The Gospels also describe three discernable moments in this process of becoming a disciple; what is being called "the discipleship continuum." In the first moment, the individual hears the basic proclamation of the Gospel (*kerygma*) and is emboldened to embrace its message of forgiveness and reconciliation. The second moment describes a personal encounter which involves a moment of enlightenment, an "aha" moment; a personal life-altering and decisive moment of recognition (*kairos*) and proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. This is followed by the third moment which is the desire to seek and live in communion with (*koinonia*) other disciples in order to embody the skills and practices of other Christ-followers—essential dispositions and virtues learned for the purpose of extending the Christian community into the world. In these three ways, Christian disciples resolve to be lifelong apprentices of the way of Christ. Discipleship begins in the Gospels with the development of intentional relationships. These divinely appointed moments will be expanded upon in what follows.

Proclamation *(Kerygma)*

The term *kerygma* (κῆρυγμα), translated "preaching" or "proclamation" is used throughout the New Testament and refers to the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ.[178] Essential to this proclamation is the central tenet of the Christian faith that Jesus was not simply a good moral teacher but a person who claimed unity with the Godhead. The content of the preaching about Christ was simple yet profound: "repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near."[179] That was essential for one to be a Christian—namely, the need to acknowledge one's shortcomings and belief in Christ as savior and harbinger of the new age of the kingdom of grace.

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[178] Strong, *Strong's New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1083.
[179] Matthew. 4:17.

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Paul further outlines the essential content of the kerygma in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians which is adherence to the doctrines of Christ's redemption and resurrection. "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures."[180] This proclamation of faith and assent to God through Christ was believed to be essential for salvation and represented a pivotal moment in the life of the believer. From this personal adherence to the kerygma, believers are then commissioned "to go and make disciples of all nations," thus transforming the world for the purpose of ushering in the reign of God. Notwithstanding, Pauline theology takes the notion of Christian discipleship a step further. Hence, the initial reception of the content of preaching about Christ, proclamation of faith in Christ and the goal to ultimately embody Christ himself represents a "discipleship continuum" or spiritual journey which young apprentices can be invited to embrace in the context of small Christian communities.

The central purpose of ministry therefore is the proclamation in word and deed of the kerygma in service of evangelization. Said differently, ministry seeks to facilitate a move of the heart from a peripheral knowledge of the faith to a personal encounter with Jesus. Pope Francis avers that "[T]he kerygma has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others."[181] He continues: "From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work

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[180] 1 Cor. 15:3-4.
[181] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, Vatican.va, 177.

of evangelization."[182] This initial announcement and preaching of the Gospel is the essential message that leads to repentance, forgiveness of sins and the deepening and self-appropriation of the principles learned in faith formation.

Encounter (*kairos*)

While it is well known that Jesus addressed massive crowds of people who sought healing or miracles, those who would become his followers were individuals whom he encountered one-on-one or in small group settings. The first four chapters of the Gospel of John provide a clinic in relational ministry as essential to making disciples. One of the principle lessons gleaned from these chapters is the importance of presence. Spending time with people allows for developing the discernment necessary to identify gifts and potential disciples possess. It is difficult to read the latter part of the first chapter of John without being struck by the encounters Jesus has with Peter and Nathaniel. Andrew, a former follower of John the Baptist who probably is the one that asked Jesus: "Rabbi, where are your staying?" saw the need to bring his brother Simon to meet him. The moment of first encounter with Peter is one of the very few passages in the Gospels which describe Jesus making eye contact with his disciples. Aquinas describes the event as a moment of profound insight in which Christ's divinity is revealed:

> The consummation of this fruit is given when he says, 'Looking at him intently Jesus said.' Here Christ, wishing to raise him up to faith in His divinity, begins to perform works of divinity, making know things that are hidden. First of all, things which are hidden in the present: so looking at him, i.e., as soon as Jesus saw him, he considered him by the power of his divinity and called him by name, saying, 'You are Simon.' This is not surprising, for as it is said: "Man sees the

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[182] Francis, 179.

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appearances, but the Lord sees the heart" (I Sm 16:7). This name is appropriate

for the mystery.[183]

The changing of Simon's name to Peter (John 1:42) shows the ability of Christ to

see that beyond the brash and uneducated façade of the fisherman before him to the

leader he would become. Ministers have the ability to name these potentials as well but

only to the extent they take the time to know those that have been entrusted to their care.

Upon Philip's invitation to meet "him about whom Moses in the law and also the

prophets wrote" (1:45) Nathaniel remarks: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

This objection represents the many verbal and non-verbal cues which emanate from

youth except these are articulated in such comments as "church is boring." It is crucial

that youth ministry programs seek to notice every participant as Jesus noticed Nathaniel

under the fig tree. While it is true that ministers do not have the ability of the incarnate

son of God to *see* a person and immediately discern what is in their hearts, taking the

time to develop relationships of trust with our youth will in time reveal the many talents

they possess. Like the experience of Nathaniel, young people will be more likely to

accept who Jesus is through authentic relational ministry. Aside from the twelve, the

encounters Jesus has with Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman provide very helpful

insights for developing intentional relationships and also reveal key characteristics of

effective ministry despite objections of youth. Nicodemus in the third chapter of John

may represent those young people that are curious about faith matters and may often

question or challenge youth ministers. The Samaritan woman represents many youths

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[183] Aquinas, Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, #303.

who often deal with struggles or feel disconnected from the church due to their own sense of guilt or lifestyle choices.

These moments of encounter with the Lord ultimately led to a personal proclamation of faith and commitment to him. In one of the most profound examples of such an encounter (Mark 8:27-29; Matt.16: 13-16), Jesus polls his disciples asking them "who do people say that I am?"[184] making a clear distinction between popular opinions of him and those who had the benefit of walking with him. While it is clear from this exchange that Jesus was curious about the popular opinions of the time which they provided in response to the first question, he was more concerned with his disciple's beliefs about him, thus the reason for the follow up question: "Who do you say that I am?"[185] In one of his most fiery addresses to the Catholic youth of the world in Denver, Colorado then Pope John Paul II stated that this is the fundamental question that any disciple of Jesus must come to answer.[186] Peter's proclamation: "You are the Messiah" represents the moment of revelation, or insight (*kairos*) that is hoped for in the encounter of every Christians which leads to a life following after him.

In several addresses since this beginning of his pontificate, Francis has used the phrase "culture of encounter" as the cornerstone of his ministry in the church and the world. It all begins with an encounter with Jesus and then the other in the context of community. In his address to ecclesial movements on the feast of Pentecost, Francis expounds further his intention behind the word *encounter*:

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[184] Mark 8:27.
[185] Mark 8:29.
[186] John Paul II, "Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II During Vigil Prayer Service"- Cherry Creek State Park, Denver- 8th World Youth Day, August 14, 1993, accessed June 4, 2017, Vatican.va.

For me this word is very important. Encounter with others. Why? Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others. We live in a culture of conflict, a culture of fragmentation, a culture in which I throw away what is of no use to me, a culture of waste…Yet on this point, I ask you to think — and it is part of the crisis — of the elderly, who are the wisdom of a people, think of the children... the culture of waste! However, we must go out to meet them, and with our faith we must create a "culture of encounter", a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters, in which we can also speak with those who think differently, as well as those who hold other beliefs, who do not have the same faith.[187]

Soon after this Pope Francis in his encyclical, the *Joy of the Gospel* issues the following greeting:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.[188]

The point being made in these Gospel stories and papal pronouncements is that the heart of discipleship lies in this moment of encounter and personal revelation in which the individual recognizes who Christ is and the magnitude of what a relationship with him means. It can be best described as a threshold moment, a *kairos* in which one's relationship with God has moved from mere peripheral knowledge of doctrines to a

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[187] Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at Vigil of Pentecost with Ecclesial Movements - May 18, 2013," accessed July 25, 2017, Vatican.va.

[188] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium.* Vatican.va, 3.

personal, experiential and transformative knowledge. It is an encounter which leaves the

believer enthralled with the deep knowledge that this relationship is the most essential

one of their entire existence. Worship and the practice of ministry transcends beyond a

mere item on the weekly itinerary of activities to an experience deepening intimacy with

God and community toward human flourishing. After coming to the moment of insight of

who Christ is, we are invited along the path of ongoing conversion which is represented

by another phrase uttered by Peter, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of

eternal life."[189] Thus it can be said that authentic conversion of heart leads to the desire to

abide with Christ through the Christian community which seeks to perpetuate this

environment of mutual support and love known as koinonia.

Community (*koinonia*)

Continuing this brief discursive look at the New Testament texts provides a

portrait of the early Christian community and the importance of koinonia (κοινωνία)

translated "fellowship, association, community, communion" as an essential aspect of the

framework in solidifying Christian virtues and practices.[190] The Gospels provide

glimpses of the itinerant journeys of Jesus and those followers with whom he shared life

over a brief three year period. Transcending familial and blood ties, Jesus invites his

followers to be willing to forsake conventional understandings of community in order to

embrace the life of the kingdom of God. Whoever does the will of God is his brother,

sister, and mother.[191] As was shown in our brief study of the conversation Jesus had with

his disciples after the rich young man walks away, those that would be willing to leave

family, children, and livelihood for the sake of the Gospel would be rewarded a

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[189] John 6:68.
[190] Strong, *Strong's New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 462.
[191] Matt. 12:50; Mark 3: 34-35; Luke 8:21.

hundredfold.[192] This life of community, family or koinonia can best be understood

through an appraisal of the early Christian communities.

The Church as Community of Disciples

Despite being battered by the initial shock of Christ's death but invigorated by the

Good News of the resurrected Lord and experience of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost,

there is substantial Scriptural and extra-testamentary evidence to suggest these disciples

continued to meet in homes and to encourage one another. Earliest communities of

Christian disciples fomented faith through four distinctive activities which are

summarized by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. "They devoted themselves to the

apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."[193] There are

other such summary statements made by Luke which are used to provide a portrait of the

church in its effort to preserve those traditions given to them by Jesus and indicate a

household or family motif. It was in this house church setting that the practices described

in chapter three were exercised; namely exorcising and healing, table fellowship,

forgiveness of sins and teaching.[194] In these particular expressions, the communal identity

of the early church developed and the sense of belonging intensified leading to deeper

experiences of communion and familial relationships.

Throughout the New Testament, the term Oikos (oikoß) or "household" is also a

term used to describe the community of believers and which included the four elements

of kinship: those who make up one's family, location: those living in the geographical

proximity, interests: those who have similar interests or hobbies and vocation: those with

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[192] Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29.
[193] Acts 2:42-46.
[194] Terrance Tilley, *The Disciple's Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

whom one interacts regularly through work. Some scholars suggest the terms

"fellowship" *koinonia* and phrase "breaking of the bread" are inherited by Pauline

literature, in which the apostle provides a doctrinal treatise on the eucharistic celebration

as a seminal part of early church worship.[195] This sign of unity in the body of Christ is

part of a tradition which Paul himself had received from the apostles and was now

delivering to the Corinthian community.[196] The Acts of the Apostles also testifies to the

home-church movement that led to the incremental growth of the early church.[197]

In his letters to the communities in Corinth, Paul addresses the larger Christian

body of believers as well as the individual *ecclesia* which met in the home of Aquila and

Priscilla.[198] Research from New Testament scholars suggests that both the "house

church" and "wider community" structures existed and fed into each other. Gregory

Linton argues that the temple and house church served as the two primary institutions in

the life of the early church but gradually the emphasis was placed on the household

communities due to the growing hostility to the Christian movement.[199] John H. Elliot

concludes on this note that:

> In the remainder of Luke's account, the temple plays no positive role as a place of
>
> Christian assembly or symbol of Christian identity... By contrast, the story of the
>
> Jesus movement concentrates positively on the household as the focus of the

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[195] 1 Cor. 10:16. See Raymond E. Brown's helpful explanation of this passage as the passing on of the eucharistic tradition. Raymond E. Brown, ed., *The New Jerome Commentary*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 176.

[196] 1 Cor. 11:23.

[197] Acts 5:42 refers to meetings that were held in the temple courts as well as from house to house. In Acts 20:20 Paul says that he held back nothing of value from the believers: "how well I have preached to you, and that I taught you publically and throughout the houses."

[198] 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Cor. 16:19.

[199] Gregory Linton, "New Testament Evidence for House Churches," Paper presented at the Esplorando la Bibbia Conference, Policoro, Italy, August 2016, https://www.academia.edu/30863806 /New_Testament_Evidence_for_House_Churches

movement's recruitment, the locus of its assembly, worship, and mutual support, and the basis for the social embodiment of its evangelical message.[200]

It can be surmised that these house churches were effective in keeping the church invigorated during periods of intense persecution during the first three centuries of Christianity but took a secondary position to the larger community gatherings once Christians were granted freedom of religious expression through the Edict of Milan (313 AD) which led to the further institutionalization of many Christian communities. Kleissler and Lebert argue that small Christian community experience continued to flourish despite the orientation to the wider community with its new church buildings under Constantine and may have contributed to the emergence of early monastic communities which continued through the middle ages.[201]

While it may seem that the small faith sharing "house-church" gatherings had slowly taken an inferior role to larger congregational worship there are differing opinions among historians as to the causes of the gradual dissipation of "house churches" among the laity. However, the practices of small faith sharing groups were not entirely lost as emerging religious order monastic communities of Benedict, Scholastica, Francis, Dominic, Clare, Ignatius, Teresa, and others continued to promote this life of discipleship. There is also strong evidence of house church movements among Protestant groups during the post-Augustinian period of Martin Luther's ministry as well that of the brothers Westley. The New Testament references cited above establish quite definitively the importance of small faith sharing communities in the establishment of common

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[200] John H. Elliott, "Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 216-7.

[201] Thomas Kleissler, Margo A. Lebert, and Mary C. McGuinness, *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 12.

Christian identity and the spread of its teachings and practices throughout the ancient world.

As learned from history, these later expressions of community experienced by religious communities of men and women were essential to the continued proliferation of Gospel values and virtues training which led to the development of schools, hospitals, community outreach to disadvantaged communities and arguably the preservation of Christianity throughout Europe.[202]

Discipleship as Virtues Training

In tracing the nascent stages of the early Christian movement, one can clearly draw connections to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, particularly the connection between the good life and the beatitudes. No one can deny the Hellenistic influences at the time of the founding and early centuries of Christianity; from the writing of the New Testament Koine Greek, to the influence of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy on early Christian theology. The philosophical underpinnings of the cause to make disciples within Christianity stems from the Greek notion that through the exercise of virtue one can achieve the "the good life," what the tradition referred to as *Eudaimonia* (translated well-being) or human flourishing. In the Greek tradition, the goal of practicing virtues was to develop good practical or moral wisdom (*phronesis*) good character or excellence, known as *arête*. Influenced by the writings of Aristotle and great thinkers including, Plato, Cicero, Ambrose, and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas addresses this theme of the

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[202] While a review of these findings is not within the purview of this dissertation, the following texts can be helpful. See Halvor Moxnes, ed., *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997). Part I on the Social Context of Early Christian families is particularly helpful. John H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*, (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 1992). John R. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission*, (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck Publishing, 2003). This nuanced study proposes that the Apostle Paul's emphasis on evangelization was shaped decisively by his Jewish heritage.

good life as the telos of the Christian life. In part two of the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas asserts that the good life can be sought through the exercise of the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude as well as the three theological virtues. He argues that the cardinal virtues can be attained through human action and effort by exercising good habits. The virtuous person, in choosing to execute good acts is forming his or her character and is striving toward human fulfillment.[203] Aquinas would add that the theological virtues, infused in the soul from baptism impel Christian disciples to seek moral excellence as a way of becoming like Christ. Christian virtue stems not merely from the desire to imitate or learn practices from other Christians but to imitate Christ.

Besides the key dispositions and characteristics of Christian discipleship which have been laid out thus far, it is quite evident that the New Testament writings contain pastoral recommendations and teachings which underscore the urgency for Christian communities to train of young disciples in the practice and exercise of Christian virtues. The New Testament features a wide assortment of lists of virtues. Of course, the beatitudes are presented in the Gospels as the ideal to which all Christians must strive.[204] Considered the *Magna Carta* of Christian moral living, Pope John Paul II states that these eight statements are not necessarily moral imperatives but essential dispositions of those who wish to follow him. John Paul further pontificates that as an extension and fulfillment of the Decalogue, Jesus presentation of the "New Law" of the reign of God

> Demonstrates the openness of the commandments and their orientation towards the horizon of the perfection proper to the Beatitudes. These latter are above all *promises,* from which there also indirectly flow *normative indications* for the

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[203] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.II, q.55, a.2, c. , trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3.htm.
[204] Matt. 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-26.

moral life. In their originality and profundity they are a sort of *self- portrait of*

Christ, and for this very reason are *invitations to discipleship and to communion*

of life with Christ.[205]

Said more emphatically, the beatitudes are presented as the goal of the life of

discipleship. Through this life of communion with Christ, disciples are invited on this

journey toward Christian perfection by exercising Christian virtues.

Following from the essential teaching of Jesus with love as the primary ethic of

the Christian moral worldview, the thirteenth chapter of the first letter of the Corinthians

draws out the characteristics of Christian love (ἀγάπη) known as Agapē. Verse thirteen

culminates with an exposition of the three theological virtues. Another popular Pauline

verse which captures the essence of acquiring Christian virtue is found in the fourth

chapter of the letter to the Phillipians: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is

honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is

commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,

think about these things".[206] The fifth chapter of Galatians (13-26) presents the contrast

between the works of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit: love, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. [207]

Paul describes the acquiring of Christian virtues as "to put on the Lord Jesus

Christ", a process by which the individual seeks to embody the mindset of Christ and

other Christ followers.[208] Van Hoozer describes this process well:

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[205] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, Vatican.va, 16. Italics added for emphasis by the author.
[206] Phil 4:8.
[207] Gal. 3:27.
[208] Rom. 13:14.

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When Paul commands his Roman readers to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14), he is asking them to do more than merely go through dominical motions. When Paul exhorts his readers, he is urging them to adopt in their inner being ("spirit") Christ's habitual attitude of humility, his disposition to look to the interests of others before his own (Phil. 2:3-4). Paul asks his readers to put on Christ only because he views them as those who have already been baptized into Christ.[209]

He later makes the important point that "putting on Christ is not an exercise in moral striving, something we do, but something made possible only by a prior work of the triune God."[210] Thus one does not strive to be virtuous for the mere purpose of achieving moral perfection or excellence in the Aristotelian conceptualization, but as a response to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The pastoral letters of first and second Timothy and Titus, attributed to Paul can be seen as treatises in the type of discipleship training young disciples received from their more seasoned teacher/master. Paul begins his instruction of Timothy with the words: "the aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith."[211]

Moreover, the first chapter of the second letter of Peter provides another list which seems to prioritize the virtues early Christians should seek to acquire. In keeping with the Hellenistic tradition the early Christians were immersed in, Peter states that excellence or aretē (ἀρετήν) should be the primary virtue to be sought followed by

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[209] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship", Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care 8, no. 2 (2015): 160.
[210] Vanhoozer, 161.
[211] 1 Tim.1:5.

knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.[212] There

are many other lists of virtues and exhortations for Christian living throughout the

Pauline corpus which contributed to the moral charter and Christian ethos of the early

house churches and later developing communities of the Jesus movement.[213] Based on

the thesis that is being brought forth about the heavy emphasis on the exercise of

Christian virtue as a personal acumen that is the product of the training and mentoring

relationship with a community. These were more than lists to be repeated as heart-

warming words of encouragement or wishful thinking. Much of the metaphorical

language of athletic training employed by Paul and other New Testament writers

indicates that these virtues required effort and were to be practiced with a view toward

mastery.[214] They would also learn and grow in these virtues by observing the practices of

others in their personal pursuit of excellence.

Practically speaking, there is a growing body of literature which makes a

connection between discipleship and virtues-based education thereby providing a

rationale for a discipleship model of faith formation and youth ministry. In their book

Jesus and Virtue Ethics, Daniel Harrington & James Keenan for example make the

following statement about this connection:

> Who more than Jesus beckons us to consider the question about the people we can
>
> become? In Scripture, Jesus invites us to become his disciples…Christian ethicists
>
> saw then, in the virtues an enormous opportunity for answering the challenge of
>
> Vatican II (*Optatum totius* 16), which admonished moral theologians to draw

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[212] 2 Pet.1:5-9.
[213] Rom.12: 9-21; Rom. 13:8-14; 1 Thes.5:12-22; Col. 3:1-17; Eph. 4:25-32; 5:1-10; 1Tim. 3:2-11; 6: 3-12; 2 Tim. 2:22-26; Titus 1:6-9; 3:1-3.
[214] 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:5.

more fully on the teaching of Scripture and to throw light upon the exalted vocation of the Christian.[215]

It would seem to be a logical fit that Christian education and youth ministry would involve virtues formation as an essential aspect of its curriculum but as we have seen, it should be the collective effort of parents working collaboratively with ministry initiatives and the entire community at large. Other scholars who contribute to this thinking include Manning, Spohn, Wadell, Lamourex, O'Meara, Dykstra and Hauerwas. For the philosophical and pragmatic basis for understanding discipleship, we will turn to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre who integrates the notion of virtue as practice in the context of community.

Considered one of the most influential Catholic moral philosophers of the 21st century, Alasdair MacIntyre provides great insight into the connection between the Aristotelian notion of the good life through acquiring of virtues and practices of discipleship. As Thomistic philosopher himself, MacIntyre presents the Aristotelian virtue tradition as the only suitable alternative, in his estimation, to "Enlightenment individualism" of modern liberal societies. In his book *After Virtue* he defines virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving and such goods".[216] That is to say that virtue is excellence in human activity; a quality which enables an individual to move towards the achievement of the specifically human goal (*telos)*, which under the Aristotelian model would lead to

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[215] Daniel Harrington and James Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 24.

[216] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191.

obtaining the "good life" and for the Christian following the New Testament, the "blessed" virtues which lead one to heaven.[217]

For the purposes of our exposition on discipleship, what is essential about MacIntyre's contribution here is the intrinsic relationship between virtue and practice from which there are three salient points. The first is that, it is not enough to rationalize living virtuously as has been done by the great thinkers; it must be embodied through practices. So that essential to acquiring virtue is the need for practice. Virtues cannot be learned as mere propositional statements which must be memorized. They must be internalized, embodied, and enfleshed through practice by watching other practitioners' model virtuous behavior. Implied in his definition of practice is the influence of community. He defines practice as:

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellent which are appropriate to and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that such human powers to achieve excellent, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. [218]

The second idea derived from this definition is that the life of virtue is learned and shared within the social experience of community. The various social contexts toward which human beings are oriented include the family, school, church, athletics, political advocacy groups, and even certain businesses in the workplace. Moreover, actively participating in these practices, means forming part of the body of practitioners and,

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[217] MacIntyre, 185.
[218] MacIntyre, 83.

necessarily, with a tradition of practice. These practices are learned within a community with a shared vision of the common good.

The third point McIntyre makes which differs from the Aristotelian tradition is the notion that this type of knowledge developed through practices is never for the sole benefit of the individual. The knowledge gained by the individual is a product of the collective knowledge of the community. He further elucidates this relationship between the individual practitioner and the community of practitioners in the following statements:

- For I am never able to seek for the good or exercise the virtues only qua individual. This is partly because what it is to live the good life concretely varies from circumstance to circumstance even when it is one and the same conception of the good life and one and the same set of virtues which are being embodied in a human life.[219]

- The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.[220]

- What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.[221]

These statements stem from his concern that pervasive Enlightenment attitudes have slowly eroded traditional institutions of community and family. The result of the erosion of the influence of communities has spawned what MacIntyre calls "modern

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[219] MacIntyre, 220.
[220] MacIntyre, 221.
[221] MacIntyre, 221.

individualism" which has led to a perception of society as a "collection of strangers, each

pursuing his or her own interests under minimal constraints" leading to plurality of

religious worldviews, and varying notions of morality, making it difficult to find

consensus.[222] In order to perpetuate the modern myth of individualism, what contributes

to this moral deficiency according to MacIntyre is the tendency of modern society to

abandon of its own sense of narrative history and the impetus to fragment persons from

their communities. He uses examples from "modern Americans who deny any

responsibility for the effects of slavery upon black Americans saying 'I never owned any

slaves.'"[223] He intimates in the conclusion of this major work that the Aristotelian

tradition of virtue ethics has stood the test of time because it is still being exercised,

though not optimally, by church and religious communities. Thus, MacIntyre avers that a

society is able to flourish based on a virtue-based system of community activity. He

concludes in the following way:

> If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for
>
> some time now we too have reached a turning point. What matters as this stage is
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> the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the
>
> intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are
>
> already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors
>
> of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time
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> however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontier; they have already
>
> been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this

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[222] MacIntyre, 251.
[223] MacIntyre, 220.

that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.[224]

What is also implied in this conclusion is not just the idea that the Christian community can preserve the virtues traditions but that it is an essential part of her message. The reference to St. Benedict could be a call for a retrieval of those values of the monastic tradition with its emphasis on community, accountability, mutual love, and discipline in the life of Christian virtue and service as well as a return to ecclesial community groups as the most effective model for making disciples. Rod Dreher calls MacIntyre's comment prophetic. He elaborates thusly:

> The philosopher meant an inspired, creative leader who will pioneer a way to live the tradition in community, so that it can survive through a time of great testing. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI foretells a world in which the church will live in small circles of committed believers who live the faith intensely, and who will have to be somewhat cut off from mainstream society for the sake of holding on to the truth.[225]

His recent work *Benedict Option* claims that Christian communities should reclaim aspects of the Rule of the early monastic community as a way to continue to be church for the world today in light of the Post-Christian culture American have been immersed in. He argues that in the same way that Benedict and his disciples left Rome in the midst of decline and corruption, the Benedict Option (BO) is "a strategy that draws on the authority of Scripture and the wisdom of the ancient church to embrace "exile in place" and form a vibrant counterculture. Recognizing the toxins of modern secularism,

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[224] MacIntyre, 263.

[225] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 4.

as well as the fragmentation caused by relativism, BO Christians "look to Scripture and to Benedict's Rule for ways to cultivate practices and communities."[226]

While offering BO groups as an alternative to larger community gatherings Dreher is often criticized for suggesting a voluntary exile of groups of Christians who wish to purify themselves from modern tendencies toward assimilation to the culture at large rather than the Christian message having an impact on society. He calls for Christian groups to seek out local forms of community in an effort to retrieve moral and religious disciplines. If these steps toward conscious separation from the world are not taken, he argues that the church as originally intended will no longer exist. While embracing the ancient practices of the Benedictine spirituality including the following of rules, disciplines of prayer, work and recovery of Christian ascetical practices such as fasting (which to many Catholics is reduced to giving up chocolate during Lent) are noble pursuits for the church today, the suggestion that Christian groups voluntarily exile themselves from societal notions is quite problematic.

This author, along with many other scholars, level a serious concern about the potential danger for small Christian community group such as BO to disassociate themselves from the larger church community. In his recent apostolic exhortation on the implications of the New Evangelization and weary of this potential danger with small Christian community groups, Pope Francis declared that:

Basic communities and small communities, movements, and forms of association are a source of enrichment for the Church, raised up by the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors. Frequently they bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed. But it

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[226] Dreher, 18.

will prove beneficial for them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church. This kind of integration will prevent them from concentrating only on part of the Gospel or the Church, or becoming nomads without roots.[227]

Discipleship as Reconciling Practices

Terrance Tilley has made a significant contribution to both academia and the church at large through his work *The Disciple's Jesus*, where he describes the Christological nature of praxis as related to discipleship thusly:

In participating in the practices of the tradition, the participant learns what the tradition is and teachers, typically from exemplary practitioners who are the teachers and leaders in the community that carries the tradition. Christian discipleship then is the practice of following Christ. A person learns how to follow Christ; in learning how to be a disciple one learns who Christ is. To be a disciple is to learn how to have faith in God by following Christ. Discipleship involves, indeed *is*, a way of life.[228]

In particular, an individual learns to be a disciple through the particular community in which they have their identity—a community of practitioners. Faith is described as the relationship between one (a community or a person) and the irreducible energizing source of meaning and center of value in one's life that is God. Tilley stressed from this definition that only way to discern the shape or validity of an individual or community's faith is through their practice. [229]

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[227] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, 29.
[228] Terrance Tilley, *The Disciple's Jesus*, 14.
[229] Terrance Tilley, "The Practices of Discipleship," January 13, 2016, YouTube video, 56:06, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkQ3S_BRLdI.

Essentially, discipleship for Tilley hinges on the question: do our practices follow Jesus' practices? Not only does Tilley provide a suitable lens for understanding discipleship in terms of the early practices of the Jesus movement but he takes these to their logical conclusion by issuing a challenge that any ministry that makes disciples must engage in reconciling practice. They are narrowed down to four primary reconciling practices: 1) exorcising and healing, 2) table fellowship, 3) forgiveness of sins, and 4) teaching. The Christian community's effective exercise and transmission of these practices brings about the reign of God through the experience of liberation by which each member of the community becomes an agent of reconciliation. Our initiation into this process of becoming disciples of reconciling practice begins with our own repentance. This repentance, Tilley maintains

> is a turning around to become a person who engages freely in the practices of reconciliation, practices that realize the *basileia tou theou* (reign of God). Such a commission is to empower many with the Spirit, not necessarily to induct them into a club. The injunction to teach should then be understood as an injunction not to teach what to believe but to teach how to engage in the practices Jesus empowered the disciples to perform.[230]

Moreover, Tilley characterizes the participatory nature of discipleship as reconciling practice using language akin to the small group elements of "communities of practice" previously described: "By engaging in the practices, participants develop a shared vision; that is a web of convictions regarding both the goal(s) of human life and how such goal(s) can be reached."[231] In his work *Inventing Catholic Tradition* he argues

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[230] Tilley, *The Disciple's Jesus*, 254-55.
[231] Tilley, 254-55.

that Christian disciples, reflect on the life and teaching of Christ and participate in

practices of disciples within the context of a living communities of practitioners, who by

their shared vision and network of convictions become bearers of tradition which are

passed on for the preservation of the same. He argues that individuals "learn these

practices of a tradition as we learn skills: by apprenticeship, if not to a "master" of a

tradition, then by simply learning how to live in the tradition itself."[232] Thus, an

individual learns and passes on traditions of following Jesus through a particular

community from which they have their identity.

     As apprentices, the receivers can "reshape traditions as they receive them by

enacting them."[233] Faithful transmission of faith then occurs primarily and most

effectively within these individual communities who share common practices with the

desire to pass on their shared meaning to future generations of disciples. Traditions are

invented and reinvented as new practitioners embrace and enact these and make them

their own. Clearly, this iteration of tradition lies in stark contrast to the proclivity among

Christian theologians to reify the term as a body of knowledge and teachings that are

static and unchanging. It is similar to the common church axiom "we always do it this

way" referring to traditional church practices. To treat tradition as such according to

Tilley, "is to fail to understand the ways traditions develop in general, and, more

particularly, the history of Christianity; the teaching of the Catholic Church in the Second

Vatican Council; the historical evolution of Catholic consciousness; and the insights of

recent communication theory."[234] On the contrary, Tilley, as the term implies, chooses to

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[232] Terrance Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), 46.

[233] Tilley, 46.

[234] Tilley, 25.

emphasize the dynamic nature of tradition as enduring practices of the followers of Jesus which are continually unfolding and developing over time as generations of Christians respond to the promptings of God's revelation. He continues this line of argument in the following statement:

> Traditions are 'communication systems' that provide both relative stability and relative flexibility to cope with novel situations or data. However much instability and innovation scholars may notice in traditions, people generally dwell in them as though they were stable and find such scholarship disturbing at best. Traditions provide a sense of stability, a communal space in which people can dwell, and a set of practices that shape how the participants live in the world, even though many people who dwell in those traditions realize that they have evolved from what they were then they were founded. [235]

To further elucidate this claim of the dynamic nature of traditions, Tilley makes two salient arguments which are worth sharing for the purposes of this work.

First that traditions (from the Latin term *traditio*- to pass on), are necessarily historically embodied, appropriated and passed on. In other words, for tradition to be passed on there must be a communicator or communicators of this practice or practices, the content which is presented, and the person/s or community that receives and interprets the meaning thereof. Thus, traditions have a particular context from which they are to be understood and assimilated and then passed on to future generations. Second, and most important to this work, "*traditio* is communicative practice," borrowed from Dominican theologian Yves Congar meaning that "its particular content may be the traditional material communicated, but that content is subject to a process of communication,

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[235] Tilley, 43.

including transmission and reception."[236] What cannot be denied is that these convey a shared meaning, a historical trajectory, a journey if you will that is part of the identity of the people embracing and imparting the tradition. These two points imply that every transmission of a particular aspect of the tradition is not the same nor is transmitted in the same way because the receivers of these practices perceive and communicate them within their individual experience. The content of such traditions is not static; neither in interpretation, replication, assimilation, or application. Tilley further suggests that this malleability or oscillation between the perceived static and flexible nature of tradition is what allows for receivers to reshape or adapt them as they enact them.

Convincingly he concludes, "if Christianity is to be the living faith of the dead, and not the dead faith of the living, to paraphrase Chesterton, its practices and the doctrines are the grammar of its practices will change in response to internal and external changes . . . To be faithful members of a religious tradition is to engage in *traditio* faithfully, the practice of passing to the future our inheritance from the past.[237] Young people as apprentices of the faith will receive traditions and teachings of the faith that are part of the shared convictions of the community but will necessarily seek to understand and interpret these in light of their own particularity and context. Pastoral leaders must not feel threatened by young people who are seeking to understand and embrace the faith within these particularities. Instead they are to see this process as an expression of church's intention to listen as a patient and non-judgmental guide.

Conclusion and Pastoral Implications

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[236] Tilley, 36.
[237] Tilley, 185.

As a "spirituality of practice" Christian discipleship is a process by which followers of Jesus continually seek to understand the richness of the Christian traditional in light of personal experience and the culture. As a dynamic spirituality, the dialectic relationship or oscillation between a spirituality of dwelling; reflecting on the central claims of the Christian tradition and a spirituality of seeking where an individual strives to enter into meaning conversation between said Christian tradition and personal lived experience, represents the heart of the practical theological agenda. Christ invites disciples to be his witnesses in the midst of their personal journey, even in those times when life does not make sense, with the resolve to continue to seek after him and not make excuses (Luke 9:57-62).

The description provided by Wuthnow resonates strongly with the experience of countless youth ministers when assessing the spiritual needs of young people today—that they oscillate or vacillate between community structures within which they have formed their identity (spirituality of dwelling) including their family, church community, cultural background and those they wish to belong to (seeking). Some of these in latter category include groups of friends in school and neighborhood, virtual community groups they associate with through social media as well as others. The process of negotiating meaning between these influences and the dwindling role of the church in providing key answers to many existential questions creates what would seem to be an insurmountable challenge for youth ministries.

A discipleship model of youth ministry must embrace this healthy tension and this holy oscillation drawing from the stability of dwelling through access to Christian tradition and learning the practices of the Christian community while also assimilating

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and interpreting these through the spirituality of seeking which draws on lived experience and which allows freedom for self-exploration and self- appropriated faith. Practically speaking, this necessitates a ministry vision without walls; one which is willing to leave the safety and security of the boundaries of the institutional church in order to bring the church to young people. It is a ministry posture which sees the church community not as limited to the physical structure but to the gathering of disciples of Jesus in a coffee shop, after a sporting event, at the mall or online community groups such as WhatsApp, Instagram or in the Twittersphere.[238] It is a ministry vision of abiding itinerancy; a holy oscillation between the desire for order, permanency, stability, meaning and purpose for life while also embracing the tension of the not yet—the impermanence, the chaotic, the uncertainty and changing nature of everyday life. Christian blogger, Joel Mayward describes this tension quite well:

> In ministry, we must embrace the tension of being deliberate, careful, and purposeful while having open hands, open ears, and open hearts with a humble willingness to be led by the Spirit of God in a given moment. We become purposefully receptive to giving up our purposes and deliberate about God's will being above and beyond our own. *What does it look like to embrace the tension?* Live with a posture of open hands, holding two seemingly-opposing ideas, circumstances, or feelings in each hand--the present and future, suffering and hope, the kingdom being now and not yet, grace and justice, my plans and God's plan. Live into the paradox and mystery of our reality with honesty and

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[238] Term used to describe the collective number of individual users of the social media application known as Twitter.

humility. Have a vision of the world with colorful discernment over and above

simplistic black-and-white thinking.[239]

A practical theology of youth ministry embraces the crucial tension between the

now and not yet by assessing the message of the Christian tradition in light of experience

and the culture. Long time educator and spiritual writer, Parker Palmer describes this

dynamic of holding both the now and not yet as "standing in the tragic gap" which sees

the sometimes harsh realities around us but which holds on to the hope of what is

possible.[240] Especially in light of the continuing decline of trust in the role of priests and

bishops due to the continual surfacing of sexual abuse scandals, more than ever genuine

grassroots approach to discipleship living and practice is needed to sustain the church

during this trying time.

Additionally, it has been argued that for ministry initiatives to resemble the

practices of the early Jesus movement, several characteristics are needed. First and

foremost, a community of Christian disciples creates an environment where individual

seekers can have an encounter with the Lord through the preaching of the kerygma.

Therefore, what is being proposed is a shift from a catechetical to a kerygmatic approach

to faith formation. Pope Francis declares that shift involves a rediscovery of

> the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the
>
> centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... On the lips
>
> of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ
>
> loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day

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[239] Joel Mayward, "Intentional: The Youth Ministry Buzzword," *Joel Mayward* (blog), November 7, 2013, http://www.joelmayward.com/search?q=intentional+youth+ministry. Italics for emphasis.

[240] Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2011), 191-92.

to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things.[241]

Practically speaking, besides the whimsical side with games and entertainment, youth ministry initiatives should be focused on cultivating intentional relationships with young people, their peers and other adults, creating a "culture of encounter;" another trademark phrase recently popularized by Pope Francis. More specifically these experiences of encounter with the Lord are sought through retreats, community outreach, intentional small group sharing, and leadership formation and ministry development which ultimately lead to service. In order for such ministerial changes to take shape, additional training for catechists and youth ministers as well as financial resources for salaries, certifications and theology and ministry degrees will be of paramount importance.

Reflection on the experience of the early church community has yielded a portrait of the Christian community characterized by "house churches" which served as a catalyst for the expansion of the Jesus movement throughout the ancient world. The sharing of these reflections has drawn attention to the communal character of early Christianity through "house churches" and how modern manifestations of small Christian communities are attempting to recapture the dynamism of this period. Moreover, a return to a house church ministry orientation fashioned after the early Christian church can create an atmosphere of mentorship whereby more seasoned disciples can share faith practices younger inexperienced apprentices. These early church communities gather many of the characteristics described in the CoP framework such as a sense of inter-

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[241] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium,* 164.

relatedness between individual and group as well as a strong sense of belonging and identity created in relationship to the community of faith through adherence to the apostolic teaching, communal worship through the breaking of the bread and fellowship.

Many scholars have proposed a return to a virtue-based form of education and social learning through community groups as a way of counteracting modern individualism; some maintaining that small Christian community gatherings and the monastic movement served to preserve semblances of a Christian society until the Enlightenment period. MacIntyre's notions of shared historical narrative and practice provides a very helpful correlation to Tilley's notions of Christian tradition and reconciling practice. Practically speaking, in order for youth to desire a virtues-based formation process it is important to provide opportunities to learn these skills through effective liturgical practice, parish ministry opportunities that welcome young people to observe more seasoned practitioners.

As learned from the research of Terrance Tilley, these liberating and reconciling practices including table fellowship, healing, reconciliation and teaching are essential to make disciples. For our purposes here, Tilley is stating that in the process of forming young people to be disciples, and by engaging in these essential reconciling practices, the church and its leaders are performing the fundamental task of creating practical theologians; individuals who are able to the learn the practices of the Christian community from peer and adult mentors and thus to acquire practical wisdom for life. Tilley has also reminded us that the life of Christian disciples, are visible and embodied through the practices of the Christian community. Practitioners will always enact these skills based on their own particularity and mode of expression but will always be

influenced by their relationship or lack thereof to the community that has instilled these practices. Thus, in the sense that each individual practitioner is a bearer of the tradition, said practices will not always look the same because they continue to be shared in different times and places.

In terms of the practical implications of the particular reconciling practice delineated above, personal reconciliation dovetails with the moment of recognition (kairos) and acknowledgment of the proclamation of the Gospel (kerygma). A youth ministry that seeks to engage in reconciling practice must be about the work of healing of the many struggles young people have with personal identity, questions of sexual orientation, and feelings of inadequacy, being unloved or unwanted, exclusion from peer groups, and verbal, physical, psychological abuse in relationships including cyber bullying which has become quite prevalent. Familial issues such as lack of communication, feelings of abandonment due to divorce or separation, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, alcoholism, or drug use figure strongly in small group or individual conversations.

A ministry of deep pastoral listening has the potential to provide reconciliation, healing and practical measures for dealing with these concerns. A youth ministry of pastoral listening allows young people to struggle with aspects of the faith they do not understand or agree with. By not providing the answers but the appropriate questions and religious frame of reference, an environment which fosters open dialogue can lead to moments of awakening, genuine insight, and authentic experiences of God. Hence, for young people to be attracted to the life of the discipleship, they must observe the Christian community living out these Gospel values through their practices in and out of

church. The Christian community acts as the school of discipleship whereby individuals develop a sense of belonging and seeks to learn and embody these practices. As lifelong apprentices enter this process of being transformed into the image of Christ as they *watch, reflect, learn and do*. The young disciple learns essential skills; dispositions and virtues that inspire them to serve and go on mission. In order to create the necessary staging ground or workshop for discipleship training to take place it will be necessary in the next chapter to delineate the elements of the Communities of Practice framework and the rationale for choosing this small group sharing model over others.

CHAPTER FOUR. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Fifty years after the Second Vatican council there is much about the complexion
of the church that is different. Vatican documents such as the Dogmatic Constitution on
the Church, *Lumen Gentium* exhorted the laity to reach out to the new world with the
message of the Gospel and to reexamine its role in the church as the *Body of Christ* and
the *People of God*.[242] This proposed ecclesiological shift from a predominantly
hierarchical structure to a community orientation brought about the development of
various sodalities or confraternities and also opened the doors to the emergence of
diverse ecclesial movements such as Cursillo, Charismatic Renewal and other such
evangelizing ministries. These groups served to accentuate the critical role of the laity in
engaging the culture with the good news through the power of personal witness and small
group sharing. Thus, Vatican II called for a return to a community-oriented way of being
church characterized by the burgeoning of varieties of small Christian communities.
Avery Dulles describes the shift in the following manner:

> Since Vatican Council II, the Church in several continents, including Latin
> America, has been revitalized by the development of thousands of basic ecclesial
> communities, which at their best promote discipleship in its full range. Something
> analogous has been occurring in various prayer groups and covenant communities
> in our own country. But all too many Christians, deprived of such contacts, still
> look upon the Church only as a huge, impersonal institution set over against its

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[242] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican.va, 3, 7. Chapter 2 of the document focuses on the notion of Church as the People of God.

members. Even Catholics who are faithful to their religious obligations rarely experience Church as a community of mutual support and stimulation. [243]

Some nominal Christians prefer and are accustomed to high masses with their elaborate liturgies and highfalutin sermons enjoying a sort of "privatized version" of Christianity. Going to services becomes part of the weekend checklist along with laundry, chores, and other family recreational activities. The Whiteheads describe this "self-serve" modern style of church this way:

> North Americans are individualist: we prize our independence and flinch at any
> infringement of our privacy. Often we worship in large, anonymous parishes. We
> meet our Sunday obligation in staid or rushed liturgies, standing next to each
> other, unknown individualists. We hear the Word of God but remain unmoved;
> we take Communion but leave unnourished.[244]

Due to the prevailing, impersonal feel of some Catholic liturgical celebrations, many individuals and families perceive themselves to be strangers in their own parishes often not having their particular spiritual needs met. As was alluded to in the previous chapter, the pervading nominal Christian culture in many Catholic churches is one of the many reasons young people feel disconnected from the Christian community; one might argue that it is a significant cause of disaffiliation for many adult Christians as well. The buzzword "community" is often used in church circles with the best of intentions but does not often convey the experience of attendees. As Jane Regan keenly observes:

> While we often use the term parish community, most of our parishes are simply
> too large to be communities in any meaningful way. Their size makes mutual

[243] Avery Dulles, *Models of The Church* (New York, NY: Image/Double Day, 2002), 209-210.
[244] Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *Community of Faith: Crafting Christian Communities Today* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992), 7.

engagement across the whole parish impossible; their complexity precludes the possibilities of members being able to grasp, much less participate, in a single shared enterprise.[245]

There is still much work to be done in order to engage lapsed or nominal Catholics toward active participation and nurturing a sense of community. According to the 2014 CARA study of lapsed Catholics in the United States, one of the key factors in church attendance and participation is the community atmosphere created through small group experiences and ministry involvement.[246] Echoing with the claims that have been stated from the outset of this study, the reality Regan and others point to is that weekly mass attendance is not sufficient to create a sense of vital and sustainable Christian community.

This dissertation has set out to present elements of a discipleship model of youth ministry as a formidable response to the growing trend of disaffiliation among emerging adults. The first chapter set out to present the problem of disaffiliation among young people and the need for systemic shifts in pastoral approach in order to remedy these issues. The second chapter identified some of the underlying causes of disaffiliation drawing on the social science data on youth and religion in the United States. It also intended to present some of the challenges to these disaffiliations and endeavored to present a ministry model focused on cultivating intentional relationships as an effective response to these downward trends. Chapter Three asserted key characteristics of discipleship which could serve as an effective pastoral paradigm for youth ministry.

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[245] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 53.
[246] Mark M. Gray, "Lapsed Catholics weigh in on why they left the Church," October 22, 2014, *OSV News Weekly*, https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID /16269/Lapsed-Catholics-weigh-in-on-why-they-left-Church.aspx.

Rooted in the rich treasure of the Christian Scriptures, such a paradigm envisions youth as apprentices of the life of Christ who learn the practices of discipleship by observing other more seasoned adult or peer mentors in the context of the Christian community. In keeping with the apprenticeship theme in which Christians learn the skills of discipleship through everyday life with other disciples, the working definition of church or Christian community will not be limited to institutional church services for communal worship but will be used broadly to encompass "where two or more are gathered" to describe any gathering of Christians acting in the name of the church. In the context of youth ministry, a small group sharing faith at a local coffee shop, at a sporting event or a Bible study in a home could be considered a meaningful gathering of the Christian community. A discipleship based youth ministry model is one which facilitates a *kairos* or an encounter with the Lord, dynamically presents the *kerygma* or the basic proclamation of the Christian tradition through personal witness, and which seeks to integrate the individual into a life of *koinonia* or a sense of belonging within the Christian community.

Following the Whitehead method of theological reflection, this fourth chapter will assert the role of the Christian community as the school or "workshop" for the formation of disciples. As such it will serve as a pastoral response to these previous sections and will seek to provide a *rationale* for a Communities of Practice (CoP) model for current parish youth ministry initiatives. The primary assertion which will be made hereafter is the understanding that the small faith sharing model, also known as small Christian communities, base communities or Communities of Practice, is a more effective way of building community than the larger gathered liturgical community. A shift in focus

toward small group intentional relationships has the potential to create "holding environments," a ministry culture characterized by deep pastoral listening and "conversation" or the intersection of the Christian tradition, culture and personal experience. The desired effect is to bring young people to self-appropriated faith and maturity.

Chapter Structure

The first section will provide a working definition of community from the perspective of the social sciences as a foray into identity formation through the dynamic relationship between individuals and particular community groups. The second section will delineate the characteristics of a Communities of Practice (CoP) model of social learning as a suitable framework for the desired apprenticeship model of youth ministry. Simply put, Communities of Practice can be described as a gathering of like-minded professional or practitioners of a particular craft with the goal of creating networks of common knowledge, the sharing of best practices, successes and strategies for further developing the craft and passing on these skills to future generations.

The notion was first coined by cognitive anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* to describe groups of people who share common interests, profession or who participate in a particular craft.[247] They propose a social theory of learning that has broad academic and ministerial implications.[248] While CoP groups or committees have been used in business models and for the formation of professional

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[247] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[248] Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, 6.

guilds, this dissertation will make the case for the viability of this model for parish

ministries, and in particular ministry with youth. As a model which fosters common

goals, mutuality and shared practices, it serves as a suitable model for apprenticeship

environment where young people can learn the practices of the Christian community and

develop intentional relationships with peers, and other adult mentors.

Relying on the work of practical theologian Jane Regan the third section will

establish how the three dimensions of practice described by Lave and Wenger as mutual

engagement, shared enterprise and common repertoire can be incorporated into a pastoral

context. Quite fitting with the notion of youth ministry as apprenticeship of the life of

Christ, these scholars establish quite clearly that communities of practice are essentially

communities of learners. Learning is not a separate or private activity—although

cognitively each person's perception of learning is unique—we learn primarily in

community. Her recent work *Where Two or Three are Gathered* argues that

implementing CoP as a model of reorienting parish committees, ministries and small

group dynamics can radically transform parishes by developing a more genuine sense of

belonging in the church leading to more fully engaged and mature Christians.[249]

With the aforementioned elements gathered, the concluding sections will suggest

that a significant benefit of developing such a culture has the potential to transform CoP

groups into "mentoring communities" as well as "holding environments;" safe places

where young people can share struggles, questions and concerns about the faith tradition

as they engage these Christian ideals in conversation with culture and their own

experience.

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[249] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*.

Toward a Definition of Community

In order to adequately address how CoP cells can enhance youth ministries, it is necessary at the outset to subscribe to a particular working definition of community from which we can draw important conclusions in regard to belonging. From the perspective of Sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Talcott Parsons provide helpful definitions of community which illuminate two essential dimensions of experience; that of the relationship between the influence of family and broader public. Tönnies for his part describes community as the "mutual connectedness expressed in family and relatives, villages and town, through common value and religious convictions", whereas Parsons provides a broader understanding of term, describing it as "all interactions between people, wherever and however it takes place."[250]

There would seem to be a natural relationship between the broader definition of community provided by Parsons and Tönnies' more narrow description. While the Tönnies' definition suggest stronger affinity and greater degree of commitment created in family and other smaller communal dynamics more so than the influence of the larger community, both definitions are equally necessary and part of the human experience. These two definitions describe the process by which individuals confirm those values and truths gleaned from their immediate and intimate gatherings with family and community groups with the larger body of lived experience. Robert Bellah and others describe the household as a crucial institution in which values are acquired for basic human existence.

> Institutions . . . mediate our ultimate moral (and religious) commitments. Not only
>
> are our moral and spiritual beliefs and attitudes learned in institutional contexts

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[250] Johannes A. Van der Ven, *Ecclesiologies in Context* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eersdman, 1996), 254-255.

(however informal the contexts and however we may modify those beliefs and attitudes in terms of our individual experiences), but institutions themselves are premised on moral (and religious) understandings, what sociologists call ultimate values.[251]

Johannes Van der Ven uses the two aforementioned definitions to describe the dynamic interchange between the larger *community* of believers gathered in worship and the particular *communities* individuals associate with. He argues that formation occurs as individuals negotiate meaning between particular groups who embody practices of the Christian traditions and the broader church community. Said differently, one's sense of church community can more effectively be perceived through particular communities or groups. Religious experience brings the individual into dialogue between what is experienced in groups with the larger context of worshipping communities and what is spiritually grasped through individual devotions and reflection.

In his own way Van Der Ven provides a very instructive understanding of group dynamics and belonging through his notion of *integration* which deals with the process by which we understand how the church holds together by way of the formation of groups. His assertion is that the "collectiveness of convictions does not take place in individuals, or in a number of individuals who have nothing to do with each other."[252] He argues that the core process of identity formation have their grounding in interpersonal interactions. He further asserts that personal, collective identity and integration share an integrally synergistic relationship that serves as the glue that holds congregations together. Groups form based on the degree of interaction, action and affection between

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[251] Robert Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York, NY: Alfred Knopf, 1991), 288.
[252] Van der Ven, *Ecclesiologies in Context*, 229.

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people who come together for a common goal. Networks are created as groups relate to one another and the local church is here defined as a network of relations between groups—a web, if you will, of connections between smaller groups with the larger ecclesial community.

The educational theorist known coining the term "Communities of Practice," Etienne Wenger argues that this process of negotiating meaning described above is the level of discourse at which practice occurs creating a connection between the individual and the particular community. He suggests that practice of the individual begins with a situated and peripheral posture with the group but with time experience a level of comfort and participation through engaging in the practices of the group. This peripheral stage of participation allows the individual to participate at whatever level they feel comfortable including the choice to no longer participate. Furthermore, Wenger describes three distinct modes of belonging that occur during this process. These are 1) engagement-active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning, 2) imagination-creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our experience, and 3) alignment-coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises. [253] Engagement describes the process by which the individual participates in the shared history, learning and practices of a particular community and develops relationships within groups. An individual sense of self and identity begin with the family unit, our neighborhood and community associations, whether civic or religious.

According to Wenger imagination plays a critical role in identity formation. He describes it as "a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and

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[253] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 173-174.

creating new images of the world and ourselves."[254] This process of expanding or

projection of self leads the individual to visualize connections with the past and future. It

moves the individual beyond the mere practices of engagement to envision potential

realities. The imagination allows individuals to move beyond *what is* to *what can be*, as

personal experience is viewed "as reflecting broader patterns, connections, and

configurations," practices are understood as "continuing histories that reach far into the

past," giving way to "conceive of new developments, explore alternatives, and envision

possible futures.[255] Alignment refers to the efforts undertaken to perform particular tasks

or actions as an expression of the shared enterprise. This seems to Wenger to be a natural

progression from the engagement in the shared meaning of the group and imagination

which envisions one's contribution to said group. Participation through performing the

acts of the group represents the moment or perception of belonging and identification

with the particular group and ensures future involvement with its members.

Communities of Practice for Youth Ministry

The phrase "Communities of Practice" (CoP) was first coined by cognitive

anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in their book *Situated

Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* in which they describe the learning as

social participation.[256] He poses crucial questions at the outset which provide further

insight into his social learning theory as an apprenticeship:

So, what if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the

context of our lived experience of participation in the world? … And what if, in

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[254] Wenger, 174.
[255] Wenger, 178.
[256] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning*.

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addition, we assumed that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing? What kind of understanding would such a perspective yield on how learning takes place and on what is required to support it?[257]

In a later development of this work, Wenger further articulates that "Communities of Practice presents a theory of learning that starts with this assumption: engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are."[258] Wenger is proposing that as social beings, individuals learn naturally by observing the practices of others, mimicking these behaviors with the prospect of coming to understand the reason for these practices; he argues that we learn essentially in the context of groups, beginning with the family unit and expanding to other groups including, school, work, church and other community groups. CoP are everywhere from the sports team to the book club, to the association of accountants group to church choir. One learns what it means to be a member of the group through participation or doing the activity with those who are more experienced.

Turning first to the experience of the individual in relation to the group Wenger described it as an experience of "situated learning" in which person "A" participates in a "hands on" experience of the activity or practice with another person or group of persons. The notion of legitimate peripheral participation is described as "a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice." For these theorists, legitimate peripheral participation concerns the process by which newcomers become a part of a community of

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[257] Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 3.
[258] Wenger, 3.

practice.[259] They are "legitimate" in that they are invited members of the CoP. The term "peripheral" describes the level at which the individual is connected to the group at the outset as they are learning what it means to belong to the group.

From the perspective of the group dynamics there are three primary elements of CoP; namely 1) Domain; 2) Community; 3) Practice. He argues that all CoP possess or share a certain domain of knowledge. Domain creates a common ground and sense of common identity. It also affirms its purpose and value to members and stakeholders.[260] Domain best describes an organization or community group's "sense of purpose" in that it guides the learning and inspires members to participate and contribute their gifts to the common cause. Domain gives meaning to the action of the group and communicates what the group cares about.

Community creates a social environment for learning to take place. This sense of community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages the sharing of ideas, the willingness to be vulnerable and ask difficult questions, and the openness to expose individual ignorance with the goal of arriving at consensus. It is an environment which also fosters mutual accountability. Community describes "who we are" and "what we care about" as it "is an important element because learning is a matter of belonging as well as intellectual process involving the heart as well as the head."[261]

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[259] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 29.
[260] Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 27.
[261] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 28-29.

The practice is "a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share."[262] The easiest way to summarize this element is the phrase "what we do" as practice gathers the activities that embody and demonstrate the purpose of the group. It represents the tacit knowledge that experienced in the group. It is in the practice that individuals move from the peripheral learner to the more experienced through the coaching and encouragement of experts or more seasoned members of the community. Wenger maintains that "when a community has been established for some time, members expect each other to have mastered the basic knowledge of the community."[263]

These three elements of domain, community and practice are what define group dynamics. Without embracing domain there is no clear direction or purpose for the meeting making these merely social gatherings among friends. Without community there no real sense of belonging or mutual commitment to the cause of the group. Without practices, there is no sense of shared common knowledge or grasp of history or learning that incorporates the skills of the past with the modern or future advances. Wenger states that

> a community's practice explores both the existing body of knowledge and the latest advances in the field. As a product of the past, if embodies the history of the community and the knowledge it has developed over time…At the same time, the practice is oriented to the future.[264]

Thus, the three elements of CoP just described provides definition and purpose to the gatherings and is what makes these groups effective in business and many other

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[262] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 29.
[263] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 29.
[264] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 38.

settings. He concludes that "the most successful communities of practice thrive where the goals and needs of the organization intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants."[265] It is not surprising that Jane Regan would see the value these types of groups could potentially have in parishes where a sense of community is rarely sought or experienced.

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Regan: Communities of Practice in a Pastoral Setting

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As a way of integrating the work of Wenger into a pastoral setting, we will now move to discuss practical way of implementing and cultivating these groups within churches. Wenger argues that active participation in a CoP occurs through what he calls "three dimensions of the relation" to the group which become the "source of coherence of a community." These are: mutual engagement, joint/shared enterprise and common/shared repertoire.[266] One of the first practical theologians to suggest the CoP framework for a pastoral setting, Jane Regan, in her book *Where Two or Three are Gathered*, describes these dimensions of relationality within groups. Communities of Practice for Regan are "a sustained gathering of people whose interactions are marked by *mutual engagement* around a *shared enterprise* with a *common repertoire*, and where the collective learning involved in thriving as a community leads to practices that enhance the members' identity and further the groups' goals."[267] Both Wenger and Regan argue that these three dimensions sustain and keep participants connected.

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[265] Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 32.

[266] Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, 72-73. Also see Jane Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 30. The author has taken the liberty of separating terms joint/shared and common/shared with slash symbols as Wenger and Regan do not use the same terms in their listing of these dimensions.

[267] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 30. Italics used for emphasis by the author.

According to Regan, *mutual engagement* (community) describes the process by which individuals engage in dialogue and collaboration with other members of the group in a reciprocal and respectful manner through which they discover the strengths and contributions each can bring to the enterprise. *Shared enterprise* (domain) describes the common endeavor to which the members are committed and defines the scope and focus on the work of the members of the community. In other words, common repertoire expresses the common values, goals, and level of engagement of the group. Having a clear sense of the purpose of the group is essential to providing meaningful interaction. In order to clearly express the goal or purpose for which the group is gathered, and functions requires a measure of mutual accountability to the cause and the commitment of members to the same. Finally, *common repertoire* (practice) refers to "those words, actions, and objects that explicitly address the shared enterprise of the group." [268]

Regan then focuses on how the parish through its various ministries and small groups fulfill the mission to church integrating the three elements of Communities of Practice by Wenger and Lange, mutual engagement, shared enterprise and common repertoire, into the framework of these committees. By introducing these elements, she endeavors to provide a healthy way of connecting parish committee work within the overall vision of the church community. If the liturgy committee, for example, could envision the common goal of growing as effective evangelizers within their particular task or function and how their committee function within the larger framework of the church, and every ministry did the same thing, our parishes would be transformed. This shift in vision that Regan is proposing where the parish carnival committee, for example, sees their event as contributing to the larger vision of the community to evangelize its

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[268] Regan, *Where Two or Three are Gathered*, 37.

members requires a pastoral leadership model which has this understanding permeate all its ministries.

She asserts that "to foster a mature, evangelizing community of adult believers requires the commitment and active engagement of all the members of the pastoral staff, and indeed of the whole parish."[269] The vision of such a parish relies on individuals who are rooted in the three basic aspects of our common faith journey: our relationship with Jesus, how this relationship is nurtured and sustained within the Christian community, and how this commissions us to participate in the mission of the Church in the world. Far too often however, church committees are islands unto themselves, often not seeking to collaborate with other groups, with members taking on unhealthy ownership and stifling any spiritual growth of its members. At her own admission, many of the committees that make up the constellation of parish groups are not fully engaged CoP. Lacking a clear sense of purpose many groups within the church function merely as committees designed to accomplish a task with no vision or value placed on those that participate. Despite this pessimistic assessment of Regan's presentation on CoP for parish committees which often serve a limited function within the parish framework, there is great merit on what she is proposing for groups focused on evangelization and faith formation. Adopting such a vision as is described above can make every committee a potential CoP. Some practical implications are set forth here by Regan as follows.

Essential to establishing a CoP mindset for a parish requires that all members gain the essential insight that we learn to be a Christian disciple by participating in community of disciples who practice their faith. The situational learning that occurs through these interactions becomes crucial to gaining cognitive or theoretical knowledge of faith. The

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[269] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 7.

principle ethos of fully engaged CoP she argues is to be intentional about understanding the church as a community of disciples and as such each parish group must primarily embrace its faith dimension over any particular function. In other words, the parish council, in order to consider itself a CoP must not merely consider its function to make decisions concerning the financial and ministerial priorities of the community but first and foremost how it is fulfilling the mission to build a community of disciples.

Regan argues that one effective way to truly experience a sense of belonging to the church community is by being engaged actively with particular communities within the parish who share life together. A welcoming community experience creates a culture of belonging that is contagious and which people are drawn to. If therefore young people do not have an entry into particular groups or communities of practicing Christians and parishes are not providing opportunities for these smaller "communities" to be created, it can be surmised that they will not feel any connection to the broader experience of church as the gathered "community" nor will they feel the need to be informed or formed by it. Each CoP must recognize its role in welcoming and belonging, especially to new members. Each must facilitate collaboration across CoP in order to avoid that these groups become islands unto themselves and therefore undermine their purpose. In this way the church can be seen as a constellation of faith communities; a community of communities.

Lastly, as a result of the already mentioned characteristics, fully engaged CoP provide opportunities for individuals to discern gifts and further development of ministry

within the community and beyond.[270] Thus what is being proposed here is a major paradigmatic shift which no longer sees individuals participating in committees as volunteers but fellow ministers and disciples. To change the vision or purpose of committees toward discipleship driven ministry is not to exclude the seeking individual who wishes to experiment with a particular committee at the church. On the contrary, ministries or committees with a clear sense of purpose and mission, and which create an environment of mutual engagement and belonging will be most attractive to nominal or inactive Christians looking to get involved.

Thus, both Wenger and Regan are proposing that learning is primarily a social activity and that most learning happens in the context of community of gathered knowledge. As social beings we learn naturally by observing the practices of others, mimicking these behaviors with the prospect of coming to understand the reason for these practices. If the heart of CoP or social learning theory is that owned knowledge is acquired by social participation, then it would follow that effective faith formation should involves social and community participation. Referring to Lave and Wenger's example of the apprentice tailor, Regan points out that through this process of participation in social groups, the individual is not only learning information about becoming a tailor, he or she is learning to *be* a tailor.[271] In the same way we could say that young people as apprentices of Christ are learning to become Christians by observing, interacting and participating in the practices of other disciples.

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[270] Jane Regan, "Where Two or Three are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice," October 26, 2016, YouTube video, 01:16:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpeBgSKQtaE&index=2&t=0s&list=PL5Hwa42iOa23CbSBfMNmGV_ffYmvR2gAc.

[271] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 42.

Regans's application of social learning theory provides an alternative approach to youth ministry as an apprenticeship in the life of Christ and the practices of the believing community. According to Regan, there are four aspects to situated learning that can be applied to lived or experiential faith. First, learning is grounded in the actions of everyday life. Second, experiential knowledge is acquired situationally. Third, situated learning is problem-driven rather than content driven; and fourth, learning is multi-modal, involving the full person and developing skills across multiple domains.[272] Implied in these assertions by Regan is the understanding that effective faith formation is grounded in propositional claims of the Christian tradition but with the necessary grounding of experiences and practices which validate these understandings. Lived faith is one that is not only accepted propositionally and intellectually but experientially. Thus, a crucial aspect of the faith formation process is not just the content that is shared but the "texts" of individuals with which they have the opportunity to share faith.

This is an essential shift from envisioning youth as objects to agent-subjects in the process of being formed in the Christian faith. These CoP's can thus serve as "schools of apprenticeship" where they can be formed in the practices of discipleship including prayer, Scripture reading, growing and living faith through the everyday, witnessing, belonging to a community and participating in a particular ministry with the assistance of a more experienced peer or adult mentor. As apprentices, they learn the practices of Christianity by practicing Christians, adults and seasoned young adults as gift and ministry facilitators whose job it is to accompany them along their journey toward full, conscious and active participation in the life of the Christian community. The negotiation

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[272] Jane Regan, "Where Two or Three are Gathered: Transforming the Parish through Communities of Practice."

of meaning between the young disciple in training or apprentice and the community of practice which embodies the Christian tradition allows the community to take on the important roles of mentoring communities and holding environments. These two notions will be drawn out next.

Reinvisioning CoP as "Mentoring Communities"

Akin to the apprenticeship model of youth ministry that has been maintained throughout this work, Sharon Daloz Parks argues that teens and young adults need mentoring communities in order to facilitate personal spiritual growth. Among the qualities needed for today's youth, Daloz-Parks argues that mentoring communities offer a "trustworthy network of belonging" which "serves as the community of confirmation and contradiction" or the environment whereby individuals can test assumptions consider important decisions.[273] They should also be open to Big-enough questions, or questions of ultimacy or purpose. Mentoring communities should not shy away from these types of inquiries which are at the root of meaning making for youth during this time. Mentoring communities facilitate encounters with others "to see through another's eyes, to feel through another's heart, to know something of another's understanding" in an effort to transcend the typical dichotomy of I and thou, *us* vs. *them* to a common ground which seeks to "create a new *we*".[274] She argues vehemently that "one of the most significant features of the human adventure is the capacity to take the perspective of another and to be compelled thereby to recompose one's own perspective." [275] These mentoring communities allow for genuine and meaningful dialogue which leads to critical thinking

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[273] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams,* 176.
[274] Parks, 181.
[275] Parks, 181-182.

and the ability to grapple with complex questions including the many issues of moral ambiguity young people face today.

Daloz Parks also describes mentoring communities as Communities of Practice which she describes as practices of hearth, table and commons. By hearth she describes a setting in which individuals wish to dwell, linger, spend time and reflect; a third place. Practices of table include the many community experiences that involve shared meals where everyone is invited. The practice of commons refers to places where people gather to share life. She argues in a previous work that this sense of commons is becoming eroded as our typical gathering spaces have gone from the home, agora or the town square to the mall or restaurants where people pay more attention to their phones than one another.

Many sociologists argue that "third place" have become virtual as young people seek to create associations based on common interest through the various social media platforms they have at their disposal.[276] The danger of such interactions is the tendency to create "virtual personas" which often are an idealized version of themselves with some resorting to catfishing which is the recent phenomenon of individuals creating fabricating false online identities or stealing the identity of others in order to attract strangers. Justin Dailey states quite poignantly:

> It is a tragic testimony to the state of our churches that many people experience virtual community as more real than that of the offline world. People need embodied relationships and real space to build true intimacy. Without this intimacy, concentrated disembodied interaction breeds emotional promiscuity.

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[276] Stuart Butler and Carmen Diaz, "Third Places as Community Builders," *Brookings*, September 14, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2016/09/14/third-places-as-community-builders/.

The church should be a place where vulnerability is welcomed in redemptive relationships, a reconciled community that listens to each other's stories and engages one another with the hope of the gospel.[277]

Daloz Parks argues that retrieving a sense of commons is essential to creating this sense of belonging and genuine community, as "an active practice of the commons can bring together in fruitful tension and celebration the disparate elements of a community. It is a place within which to confirm a common, connected life, and in combination with various forms of story and ritual it can become the center of shared faith and grounded hope."[278] Her primary argument in this work is that religious faith communities can provide an essential service to teens and emerging adults by becoming "mentoring communities", providing a space for answering important questions about meaning and purpose with the language of spirituality and the power of story.

Reinvisioning CoP as "Holding Environments"

The claim that has been made thus far is that fostering an environment where youth are invited to encounter Jesus and learn the craft of discipleship in the context of a vibrant faith community can engender mature faith. James Schaefer keenly describes two marks of mature faith: first is the ability to "arrive at conscientious decisions prayerfully and carefully, weighing church teaching as well as the practical realities of the situation" can be an indication of Christian maturity, not a sign of defiance. Secondly, "it is also a mark of religious maturity to realize that one person's decision does not necessarily apply

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[277] Justin A. Bailey, "Welcome to the Blogosphere," in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Text and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 184.
[278] Parks, *Big Questions*, 201.

to others."[279] An atmosphere where young people can cultivate these two essential dimensions of mature faith; that is where they can freely express their dissent of certain faith matters in a loving non-judgmental way, where they are given the space to wrestle with teachings that seem alien to their experience only to return once they have self-appropriated them is what Robert Kegan describes as a "holding environment."

The concept of holding environment was first coined by English pediatrician Donald Winnecott to describe the way a mother physically and emotionally holds her child and was later used by Kegan in his Constructive-Developmental Theory to describe a culture's way of confirmation, contradiction and continuity. More specifically with regard to the role of the church, Kegan describes the community as a "holding environment" which provides "support for each meaning-system that resonates to, and makes publicly shareable, its own appropriation of ultimacy."[280] Furthermore, he avows that envisioning the church community as a holding environment can have a huge impact on the development of identity in our young people.

> Religious educators, and all those who educate in the context of the student's participation in a community need to understand the special challenge that development poses for the individual's continued participation in the community—hence, for the very survival of the community itself. The community must be able to serve as a "holding environment" for each

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[279] James R. Schaefer, "Tensions between Adult Growth and Church Authority," in *Christian Adulthood: Catechetical Resources* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1982), 27-28.
[280] Robert Kegan, "There the Dance Is: Religious Dimensions of a Developmental Theory" in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity*, ed. J.W. Fowler and A. Vergote (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdette, 1980), 439-440.

developmental meaning-system; if it cannot, the repudiation of an old meaning-system will mean the repudiation of the community as well.[281]

This environment must have the ability to 1) "hold on"—offering support to individuals, 2) "let go"—allowing the freedom to explore and even leave the grasp of the holder, and 3) remain in place—providing a sense of rootedness; a safe place to return once the separation period has ended.[282] In other words, a holding environment implies "not keeping or confining but to supporting (even 'floating', as in an amniotic environment) the exercises of who the person is.[283] In the context of faith formation, Mike Carrotta describes holding environments as "the sturdy and trustworthy place where people can do the difficult and intimate work of examining their beliefs, actions, attitudes, and values".[284] To hold without constraining may be the first requirement of authentic pastoral care with young people.

Conclusion

This brief search for an understanding of community brought to bear several key indicators from social scientists studying local churches on the experience of the individual in dialogue with a particular community. To counteract this feeling of alienation perceived by young people, the church must seek to create an environment whereby effective conversation between the Christian tradition, experience and culture can lead to theological reflection, transformation and action. Young people are seeking to

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[281] Kegan, 440.

[282] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self*: *Problem and Process in Human Development*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 124-132. This section describes the three functions of the "culture of embeddedness."

[283] Kegan, 162.

[284] Mike Carotta, *Teaching for Discipleship: The Call, The Challenge, The Difference*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), 39.

understand the relevance of the word of God in their lives and thus the role the church plays in being a vehicle of transmission and negotiation of these understandings.

A Communities of Practice framework of social learning can greatly benefit youth programs in developing the desired ethos for a community of apprentices where young people can be formed in the practices of discipleship including forms of prayer, Scripture reading and study, witnessing, exercise of particular parish or liturgical ministries with the assistance of peers or adult mentors. The gathered learning of social scientists Lave and Wenger with practical theologian Jane Regan have provided a backdrop for providing a CoP model for parish ministry in two significant ways. First, the fundamental claim that learning is primarily done through situational social interactions with other practitioners has the potential to radically change faith formation and youth ministry from the current schooling-instructional model to a problem-driven, collaborative and social learning format using the small group process as the environment from which to provide instruction. Within the context of youth ministry programs, small group interactions as part of a "youth night" can be helpful but will not have the impact that a "cell group" or CoP "discipleship groups" can have. The process of developing intentional relationships through discipleship groups have the potential to radically transform youth programs as they utilize the CoP model which has been proven to effect church growth.

Second, the CoP framework of domain, community and practice can provide a sense of purpose and vision for ministries and small group interactions. The key to effectively development of CoP into true mentoring communities is to establishing the Domain- establishing a clear purpose and common ground for participants; Community- creating a healthy social fabric for learning and the creation of intentional relationships,

and Practice-focused on actions, rituals, shared stories, and formative other practices that will enhance the learning and growth of each individual in an environment of mutual respect and accountability.

As mentoring communities, these healthy interactions can foster networks of belonging and a return a lost sense of "commons" which was experienced through the village and neighborhood. Additionally, these groups have the potential to become "holding environments" providing a space where young people can freely express their struggles with faith matters in a loving non-judgmental way. As holding environments, small group interactions should be geared toward deepening connections with Christ and the church through the sharing of individual faith journeys. They must be safe places to air concerns and share personal struggles without judgment or malice.

The most recent shared summaries of the English-speaking delegate groups that attended the recent Synod of Bishops on Youth echo the clarion call for church communities to create more welcoming environments for young people in the following sentiment:

A lot of young people feel alienated from the Church; they lack a sense of belonging and community; partly due to their transient stage of life, perhaps because often they are one of the few young people found in the congregation. However, for those young people who do feel a sense of belonging to the church community, it is a strong one; for them, the Church is home, it is family. These young people are often engaged in the church community through youth masses, gatherings and events, while many find a sense of belonging and community in the new movements and organisations. We need to work hard to change the

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perception of the Church family, which for too many people is perceived not as a hospital for the sick and broken but rather a house for the saints, which for many can feel unwelcoming and judgmental. However, the Church is seen a very positive light in the way it helps those in need, often reaching out to the poorest and marginalised in our society and in protecting our common home.[285]

Regan maintains that one effective way to truly experience a sense of belonging to the church community is by being engaged actively with particular communities within the parish who share life together.[286] A welcoming community experience creates a culture of belonging that is contagious and which people are drawn to. If therefore young people do not have an entry into particular groups or communities of practicing Christians and parishes are not providing opportunities for these smaller "communities" to be created, it can be surmised that they will not feel any connection to the broader experience of church as the gathered "community" nor will they feel the need to be informed or formed by it. What can be surmised from the statement above is that a parish that is able to create a healthy environment of belonging can satisfy this essential need in youth harness their enthusiasm and which in turn will result in effective practices of discipleship.

Much of the literature suggests that in order for local churches to return to becoming a vital source of community that was in the past experienced in neighborhoods and villages with its sense of "commons," "a third place;" they must retrieve an understanding of church as a community of disciples on mission—they must become incarnational communities. "Third Place" is a phrase coined by sociologist Ray

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[285] XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment, "Pre-Synodal Meeting –Synthesis of 9 English Speaking Groups," Vatican.va, 4.
[286] Regan, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered*, 53.

Oldenburg to describe places where people spend time between home and work/school.[287] Contingent to this effort to make the Christian community third place, the previous chapter stated the importance of creating an environment where young people could learn the practices of the Christian tradition in an apprenticeship model; making these practices not private or to be done in isolation, but cultivated in the context of the living community of practitioners. Tilley poses a poignant question "where would Christ be without his body?" and then describes the role of the church to be "the body of Christ, the Jesus-movement," which "carries on the work of incarnating atonement."[288]

The next chapter will provide a contextual look as Communities of Practice for youth ministry and the potential benefits of such an approach.

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[287] Ray Oldenburg, "Every Community Deserves a Third Place," April 13, 2014, New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/04/13/the-pros-and-cons-of-gentrification/every-community-deserves-a-third-place. Also see Stuart Butler and Carmen Diaz, "Third Places as Community Builders."

[288] Tilley, *The Disciple's Jesus*, 236.

CHAPTER FIVE. A CONTEXTUAL LOOK AT COP

Throughout his pontificate Pope Francis has been a strong proponent of major pastoral reform in the church. Particularly the apostolic exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium* has served as a catalyst for various pastoral initiatives toward cultivating a culture of discipleship. Pope Francis articulates a retrieval of a sense of church as missionary discipleship in the following way:

> I dream of a "missionary option," that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself.[289]

This "dream" articulated by Pope Francis represents an ongoing effort on the part of the Church to retrieve a sense of mission in the midst of the rapidly changing climate of faith in the modern times. It also represents the mission of this work; to provide recommendations for a return to mission on the local level with an emphasis on becoming a community of disciples.

Following his lead, the United States Bishops have created documents such as *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* as well as conferences held in hundreds of Diocese throughout the country in order to address the need to create

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[289] Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, 27.

communities which cultivate discipleship.[290] One can even argue that it became the

impetus for the calling of the present Synod on youth that is culminating at the time of

the writing of this dissertation. However, as often happens with ecclesial documents,

many of the directives or conclusions found therein do not reach common folk and it is

difficult to find practical resources or directives for implementing these in a pastoral

setting. One is left to wonder how notions of discipleship translate into average parishes.

Perhaps a number of questions could serve for further reflection here as a discipleship

survey for parishes to discuss with their leadership:

Are individual parishioners cognizant of their call to become disciples of Jesus?

Have Catholic Christian churches in the United States come to fully grasp their vital

mission to become communities of disciples? Are they cognizant of the church's mission

to live as missionary disciples by engaging in the practices of Jesus and experiencing

God's redemptive grace through them? Are pastors and associates aware of their role in

cultivating this important mindset and environment through their own commitment to

radical discipleship through their vocation? Do churchgoers attend services with the

expectation that they are to encounter the redeemer? How is this culture of encounter

created in the context of community and what is the relationship between individual

experiences of encounter and communal revelation and discernment? Is discipleship

presented as a goal or objective through the various programs, ministries, and committees

of the particular church? Getting at the heart of these questions will be pivotal to grasping

the potential effect communities can have with young people.

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[290] USCCB, *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* (Washington, DC: USA, 2017).

This section endeavors to propose practical ways of implementing a culture for discipleship to flourish. Following the Whitehead method of theological reflection, this chapter will serve as a pastoral response to the previously made assertions and will seek to apply gathered learnings in order to propose ways in which a Communities of Practice framework can benefit youth ministry initiatives. As has already been stated, in order for the Christian communities to create the proper environment for such a model of discipleship to flourish with young people they must enter a process of recapturing their mission and role. Toward this end, it will propose a small faith-sharing group model of ministry; an essential shift in pastoral approach that will transform the parish from ordinary gatherings of strangers and sacramental filling stations which perpetuate a culture of "nominal Christianity" to communities which nurture mature Christian faith.

The first section provides an illustration of the Emmaus story in the Gospel as a helpful model for a discipleship approach to CoP and how the moments of proclamation, encounter and community can be experienced through small faith-sharing dynamics. As a particular feature of the small group sharing dynamic of YCoP, the stages of attending, asserting and pastoral response of the Whitehead method can be particularly helpful in creating the desired atmosphere of belonging and purpose. Similarly, YCoP groups incorporate elements of kerygma, catechesis, and apologetics in conversation with culture, personal experience and the faith tradition.

As the impetus for this study, the concluding section will take a contextual look the effect of intentional small groups on youth ministry by exploring the small Christian community model employed by St. Edward Catholic Church in Pembroke Pines, Florida known as "Evangelizing Cells."

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Emmaus: The Grand Metaphor of a Ministry of Accompaniment

As the quintessential illustration of such as pastoral approach, the next section will reflect on the post-resurrection narrative of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.[291] Downcast in appearance, the disciples seem to be disaffiliating from the early Christian movement making their way to Emmaus as if to return to their former lives prior to becoming followers. This story in Luke's Gospel provides essential earmarks of a truly synodal church; a church that walks with, listens to, and accompanies young people. It has been used in constructing youth ministry models in the past[292] as it contains one of the most dynamic conversations between Jesus and two of his disciples who are distraught following the events of the passion and serves as the quintessential model for a youth ministry of accompaniment with youth. The rich language of Luke's Gospel describing the "eye-opening" experience of the disciples on the way to Emmaus attests to the reality that authentic spiritual insight does not occur in isolation but through the exchange of two or more. Samuel argues that the Emmaus story:

> Serves as a pedagogical model for the kind of narrative encounters that, with the help of grace, may re-story a person's life of faith in accordance with the unfolding drama of God's salvific plan in history. The story also serves as a teaching tool for the kind of community that the gospel writer aimed to perpetuate: the community formed and nourished by the bond of shared

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[291] Luke 24:13-35

[292] The Wedge Model of youth ministry is based on this story. See Tom Zanzig, "Youth Ministry: Reflections and Directions" in *Readings and Resources in Youth Ministry*, ed. Michael Warren (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1987).

narrativity – in its sharing of the Word, in its Eucharistic worship and in its

practice of radical hospitality.[293]

Since each individual experience is contextual, the community is a determining

factor in how one frames reality and everyday perceptions including religious ones. This

story perfectly captures the role of pastoral agents working with youth as they are invited

to be the unnamed companion on the road, who must have the willingness to listen and

invite youth to enter into their personal faith quests.[294] The elusive identity of the veiled

Jesus allows for an environment of authenticity of personal expressions and opinions

which might otherwise cause restraint. In representation of this veiled Christ, youth

ministers are invited to be the unnamed companion on the road, who must have the

willingness to listen and invite youth to enter into their personal faith quests.[295] We will

first turn to some brief exegetical considerations of the passage followed by practical

theological implications toward the proposed youth ministry paradigm.

Exegetical Notes on the Passage

The story of Emmaus is the second of three resurrection appearances in Luke's

Gospel. Fitzmeyer connects it to the brief Marcan reference: "Afterwards he made

himself manifest in another form to two of them walking along, making their way into the

country."[296] There are details that are exclusively Lucan such as where the dialogue took

place, 60 stadia from Jerusalem (about 7 miles; a stadion was 606 ¾ feet) which can no

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[293] Nathaniel Samuel, "Story-Making: A Narrative Pedagogy for Transformative Christian Faith" (PhD diss., Boston College, Boston, 2013, http://hdl.handle.net/2345/3403.

[294] Sahaya Selvam, "The Unnamed Companion on The Road: Spiritual Accompaniment in the Context of Youth Ministry," in *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 11, no.2 (2013): 41-55.

[295] Selvam, 41-55.

[296] Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, 1554; Mark 16:12-13.

longer be identified and is still debated among scholars.[297] Another detail is the name of

one of the disciples, Cleopas which would not have been invented by the Gospel

writer.[298] They appear to be bewildered and unable to recognize the individual who walks

along with them.[299] Many New Testament scholars draw parallels between this passage

and that of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 which features similar

events in the story, these being the encounter along a road, the need for an explanation of

the Scriptures, a moment of revelation and a disappearance.[300]

Fitzmeyer identifies four major Lucan theological motifs. The first is

geographical in that Luke is often presenting his readers with a location; revelatory

because the identity of Christ is veiled until they "see" him with the eyes of faith;

Christological in that Jesus' death and resurrection is presented as fulfilling of Old

Testament prophecy and Eucharistic through the language employed by the Gospel writer

as "he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."[301] He also remarks that the

exclamation found in Luke 24:34, "It is really true! The Lord has been raised and he has

appeared to Simon" is an echo of the kerygma which would have been commonly used in

the early church.[302] With these comments providing the framework for the passage, the

next section will explore how the Emmaus story provides the basis for the elements of

making disciples.

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[297] Leon Morris, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to Luke*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 367. Also see Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 1051.

[298] Carroll Stuhlmueller, "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary-Vol II: The New Testament and Topical Articles* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 163.

[299] Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984), 1051.

[300] Stuhlmueller, 162.

[301] Fitzmeyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke*, 1557-1559; Luke 24:30.

[302] Fitzmeyer, 1555.

Along the road toward Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion would be presented the basic kerygma or proclamation of the Gospel which is centered on repentance for sin and acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ. This presentation facilitates an encounter (*kairos*) with the living Jesus and the realization of his identity as the son of God. This kairos event has been called a "moment of recognition," illumination, or insight best illustrated in the various professions of faith throughout the Gospels. Particularly important here is that the disciples' moment of recognition happens through observing and participating in one of the most important Christian practices of the early church; the breaking of the bread—referring to the Eucharistic celebration. This deeper understanding of who Christ is and the heart of the Gospel message brings about a natural desire to seek koinonia, that is to live with other disciples in community in order to partake in the practices of the body of Christ. The stages of attending, assertion and pastoral response of the Whitehead method of theological reflection concomitantly will also be used to frame the story.

Stage #1-Attending—"Walking With, Seeing and Listening to Youth"

> Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from
> Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had
> occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus
> himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes prevented them from
> recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?"
> They stopped looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in

reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"[303]

Jesus as the archetypal youth minister engages in conversation with the disciples by asking them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" Jesus engages in deep pastoral listening as they share their grievances about the crucifixion and the fact that they are dejected. We also see Jesus asserting the faith tradition as "he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Often one of the most gratifying elements of small faith sharing experiences involves the intersection of personal experiences with the teachings of the faith tradition in an environment of trust and openness that allows for genuine conversation to take place. The call of ministers to interpret the Scriptures with young people requires a healthy balance, a conversation, a dance between seeing the powerful influence of media culture and seeking to draw out that which is meaningful, redeemable and connects to the Christian message.

According to theologian David Tracy, "Conversation occurs *only* when the conversation partners allow the subject matter to take over. Conversation occurs only when we free ourselves for the common subject matter and free ourselves from the prison of our vaunted individualism."[304] This conversation revolves around what he calls the "religious classic." For Tracy, the "classic" is the "disclosure of reality in a moment which surprises, provokes, challenges, shocks and eventually transforms us: an experience that upsets conventional opinions and expands the sense of the possible;

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[303] Luke 24:13-18.
[304] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 101.

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indeed a realized experience of that which is essential, that which endures."[305] What

makes a classic piece of literature, art, or music a "classic" is not so much the medium

but how this medium affects the reader and interpreter. What then makes a religious

classic different from a "classic" work of literature or art? Tracy states, "For the actual

moment of response to a religious classic, religious persons are convinced that their

values, their style of life, their ethos are in fact grounded in the inherent structure of

reality itself."[306]

What makes the Christ event a "religious classic" in is its transcendental message,

which when grasped, leads to personal transformation. But in order to have a

conversation, you need more than one participant. One of the challenges however with

this "conversation model" is the tendency to make Scripture and church teaching the

predominant focus of theological reflection over experience and culture young people

experience every day. In this way, the message of Christianity can be considered by teens

and young adults to be imposing and off putting rather than inviting and attractive.

As an essential component of developing intentional relationship within small

faith sharing groups, pastoral agents must allow young people to air their grievances,

concerns and perspectives on the church, God and the relevance of their relationship with

God in light of their quotidian reality. This is a daily walk with young people which is

often more valuable that any faith content that is shared. Pope Francis describes

legitimate concerns of young people as experiences of the "periphery" or the margins of

society, not just geographically or economically but also existentially. The existential

periphery is described by Francis as pertaining to "the mystery of sin, of pain, of

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[305] Tracy, 108.
[306] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 163.

injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery."[307] To Francis, the voice of young people for many years has not been heard. In his closing address of the Synod on Youth, Francis declared to the youth delegates: "in the name of all of us adults: forgive us if often we have not listened to you, if, instead of opening our hearts, we have filled your ears."[308] Reflecting on the Gospel passage of the blind man Bartimaeus, Francis remarked that as Jesus, pastoral ministers must hear the cry of youth, take time to listen deeply and respond with urgency and great care.

The renowned liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez has also proffered a way of moving marginalized voices from the periphery to the forefront of the conversation by offering his unique definition of discipleship. Gutierrez defines discipleship as "learning to see, hear, walk with, share with and remove the poor from anonymity."[309] For Gutierrez, "Learning to see" is more than just the raised awareness of injustices and oppression but the choice to be committed to action; literally to *see inside ourselves* and the world around us. One of Gutierrez's foundational Gospel passages for understanding Liberation theology is the story of the widow's mite in Luke 21:1-4 which is pivotal to this new way of seeing. According to Gutierrez's exegesis, Jesus chose what door of the temple to observe from—he chose his point of view and then taught his disciples this new way of seeing: "for they (referring to the rich) all contributed out of their abundance, but she (the widow) out of her poverty put in all the living that she had" (v.4). He goes on to

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[307] Vatican Radio, "Bergoglio's Intervention: A Diagnosis of the Problems in the Church."

[308] Gerard O'Connell, "Closing Youth Synod, Pope Francis Highlights "The Three Fundamental Steps on the Journey of Faith," *America Magazine*, October 28, 2018, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/10/28/closing-youth-synod-pope-francis-highlights-three-fundamental-steps-journey-faith.

[309] Gustavo Gutierrez, "A Theology of Liberation" (lecture, Boston College, Boston, MA, July 16, 2004).

say that this ability to see clearly is what leads to a healthy spirituality or "the full development of the human person."

Developing this type of vision requires a shift from our own understanding of God, through institutions, concepts, doctrine, and personal biases to experiencing God *through* the eyes of the neighbor. Gutierrez calls this important shift a type of conversion *to* the neighbor.[310] Expounding on the story of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke[311] he argues that theology which liberates is one in which Christians encounter God in the neighbor, not just those who we meet in our churches and neighborhoods, but especially those whom God has preferred: the poor.[312] Moreover, the life of Christian discipleship is not only to be a follower of Christ but to be a disciple *for* the world and *in* the world; to see the entire world as our teacher. Hence, for Gutierrez the heart of "spirituality of liberation" revolves around conversion *to* rather than *of* the neighbor. "Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbor . . . it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ—present in exploited and alienated persons."[313] It is in this child-like openness to grace that we encounter God through our neighbor.

A concerted effort to *see* as youth see is crucial to developing transformational youth ministry experiences. Parishes and pastoral leadership must engage in the conversion to our young neighbors and seriously turn to their concerns, questions and hurts. By not responding to their angst pastoral leaders risk the continued decline and presence of young people in churches. Rather than insist that they learn the faith the way

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[310] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988). A more thorough exploration of this notion can be found in chapter 10 of his seminal work.

[311] Luke 10:25-37.

[312] Gustavo Gutierrez, "Theological Axis: The Gratuitousness and Exigence of Love," in *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 155.

[313] Gustavo Gutierrez, "Walking According to the Spirit," in *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*, ed. James Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 288.

we want it to be understood, pastoral leaders must to equip teens with the tools to ask the right questions which can lead to authentic searching for truth in the everyday. Contrary to the popular adage that "children are to be seen and not heard", young people want to be heard and if we don't let them speak, and if we do not notice them and remove them from anonymity, they will surely not be seen in our churches. Practically speaking, listening sessions can be effective ways of allowing young people to express the reasons they often feel disconnected to the church. These opportunities will undoubtedly reveal many of the areas of disaffiliation alluded to in Chapter One and must lead to action on the part of pastoral leadership to address these areas.

Stage #2-Asserting-Sharing their Story with The Story

> And he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all
> the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these
> things and enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,
> he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.[314]

Essential to providing an environment of trust, pastoral ministers must allow for the sharing of personal stories and struggles in order for healing and closure for certain unresolved emotions to take place. Johann Baptist Metz understands the power of personal memory and narrative as essential to developing a personal self-appropriated faith—an individual way of being a disciple of Jesus. According to Metz, memories and narratives are "the fundamental categories for getting a firm grip on one's understanding of identity and for saving it in the midst of the historical struggles and dangers in which

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[314] Luke 24:24-26.

persons experience and constitute themselves as subjects."[315] What he means is that

through the sharing of story an individual becomes aware that their experience is not an

isolated one. Thus, the individual becomes awakened to the suffering of others—those

living and dead—throughout history—what he calls "dangerous memories." The

archetypal dangerous memory is that of the death and resurrection of Christ; however,

there are other possible dangerous memories. These stories are dangerous and threatening

because they bring awareness to the many injustices and suffering that people face. It is

in the telling of personal stories that we are able to articulate our experience and find

commonalities in the struggles of others.[316]

The sharing of these stories becomes significant and potentially transformative as

they are shared in the context of the "grand narrative" of salvation history which can lead

to moments of deep conversion and personal transformation. Metz asserts that we are

able to reclaim our subjectivity (as well as the subjectivity of the dead) through the

recounting of narratives, and thereby find solace in connecting our stories to the "grand

story." Narrative is essential to practical theology because only in the retelling of the

stories are we able to account for suffering, which brings a "subjectivity" back to the

individual and leads to moments of deep conversion and personal transformation.

Francis argues that a truly synodal church must not only listen to young people

but see them as protagonists and agents of youth ministry.[317] Getting young people to

share their stories, as good, bad or ugly as they may be, is essential to this shift from

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[315] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 2013), 75.

[316] It goes without saying that the sharing of these personal stories must be received with the utmost reverence and respect and requires that an environment of confidentiality be established among the members of the small group.

[317] Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 203.

viewing emerging adults as perceived objects needing to be saved to agent-subjects with whom we minister.[318] As objects, youth are told what to do and how to behave in church. As agent-subjects, youth are invited to experience God through vibrant worship and to share their faith journey with others in creative and innovative ways. As objects, youth are asked to do menial tasks in the church in exchange for service hours. As agent-subjects, youth are invited to discern their gifts and talents in order to meet the genuine concerns they have for the real-world problems they see. As objects, teens are viewed as "young noble savages" who need to be evangelized by acquiescing to a set of propositional claims in order to gain the eternal benefits of heaven. As agent-subjects, youth are protagonists of God's activity in the world by identifying areas where God has acted in their lives.

Youth ministers must be engaged "faith partners" with the youth they minister with by facilitating a personal quest of naming their faith reality specifically by not providing the answers, but by providing the appropriate questions and religious frame of reference in order to weave and situate their personal story with *the story* of the Christian tradition. As was the case in the Emmaus passage, in addition to giving voice to their personal journey it is the role of pastoral leadership to connect it to the grand narrative of the faith tradition. The area of asserting the message of the Christian tradition seems to be missing from the language of the synod on youth according to some scholars. Leonard DeLorenzo argues that one of the drawbacks of the current Synod on Youth is that it focused too heavily on listening and not enough on asserting the Christian message. He

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[318] Frank Mercadante, *Engaging a New Generation*, 49. Also see Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 46-47. Ogden provides keen insights into the many obstacles to building communities of disciples that serve as healthy guideposts.

argues that "what has been missing from the start is a sense of the responsibility of the Church to form and empower young people for the fullness of the Christian life."[319] He argues that the synod focused so much on Jesus listening aspect of the story that they forgot that he also corrects and enlightens them by interpreting the Scriptures for them. "What was not addressed," he claims quite forcefully,

> but absolutely must be a clear priority for a Church that is dedicated to serving young people, *is how to form and prepare them for the kind of listening that is essential for attending to God's Word in the first place, or even to pay attention to the people around you.*[320]

Making these connections or asserting truths of the faith tradition is a matter of discernment on the part of the pastoral leader. There must be a healthy balance between deep pastoral listening and understanding while also imparting the wisdom of the faith tradition. A conversation which emphasizes the listening aspect of pastoral care turns the conversation into an airing out session while emphasizing the teaching and assertion part can do great harm to a young person to the point of no longer being receptive to what is shared. As in the case of the Rich Young Man story of the earlier chapter, there may be times in which a young person will need time to walk away and struggle with certain challenges of the Gospel in order to be led to a moment of conviction or decision. The hope is that this process of sharing personal journeys intersected with the message and asserting the kerygma will elicit grace-filled moments of encounter and spiritual insight.

Stage #3-Action-Pastoral Response- Insight Leading to Personal Conversion

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[319] Leonard J. De Lorenzo, "Unfulfilled Promise: The Synod on Young People," *Church Life Journal*, February 14, 2019, http://churchlife.nd.edu/2019/02/14/unfulfilled-promise-the-synod-on-young-people/.

[320] DeLorenzo, "Unfulfilled Promise." Italics added for emphasis by the author.

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking on the road, while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?'[321]

The description of the disciple's eye-opening experience and acknowledgment of Christ through the breaking of the bread leaves one to wonder how such spiritual insights emerge. Considered among the greatest theologians of the 20th century, Bernard Lonergan would define this "eye-opening" experience of the Emmaus disciples as moments of self-actualization, self-transcendence; what he would call insight or the "supervening act of understanding which allows the subject to; identify clear and distinct ideas; apprehend relations between things; rationalize without sense of empirical consciousness; unify and organize what comes to be known and thus create their own sense of the world."[322]

Lonergan argues that the individual as a rational self-conscious "knower" is able to make certain affirmations based on what is known—especially one's own cognitional activities along the lines of Descartes "Cogito Ergo Sum" (I think, therefore I am). This way of knowing is found in the subject—"the knower", who is able to make judgments about what is true, what is real and what is to be affirmed. Beyond the knowledge of self, everything else that comes to be known from outside the knower is "other." Spiritual insight or religious experience can only be held by the subject. Once the person arrives at moment of spiritual insight their real conscious knowledge of a particular truth becomes a part of their subject experience; thus the famous Lonergarian phrase: "true objectivity is

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[321] Luke 24:31-32.
[322] Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Vol. 3: Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 4-5.

authentic subjectivity."[323] Taken from the story of the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes of Syracuse, Tekippe identifies Lonergan's five characteristics of spiritual insight as those "eureka" or "aha" moments when we arrive at certain understanding without empirical evidence:

> Insight is the answer to the tension of inquiry; it comes suddenly and unexpectedly, often unpredictably; it is a matter of cognitional, not physical, circumstances; it mediates between the concrete of a particular problem and the abstract principles of specific gravity and displacement; it normally enters into intellectual memory as a permanent possession.[324]

This empirical approach to spiritual insight described by Tekippe is exactly what a discipleship model of ministry aims to do in that it seeks to create a space for youth to deal with areas of tension with regard to faith and life.

By way of extension, Peter's declaration "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" could be viewed as a moment of enlightenment (Kairos), of recognition, of spiritual insight (Mt. 16:16). Jesus' pronouncement that "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you" indicates that Peter had arrived at a depth of understanding that could not have been rationalized. Peter's allegiance to Christ transcended from peripheral knowledge "I am a knower" to a statement of faith: "I am a believer." The essential variable of these phenomena of spiritual insights is the work of the Holy Spirit who is the one who draws individuals to God. The atmosphere of open discussion allows for youth to ask questions which can lead to transformational learning experiences where they can move from

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[323] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 292.
[324] Terry J. Tekippe, *Bernard Lonergan: An Introduction Guide to Insight* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003), 26.

peripheral knowledge to spiritual insight that leads to conversion. For the individual, this is a movement that is essential for these awakenings to occur.

Practically speaking, this subtle shift in the method of questioning from yes/no or patent answers typical of the school-instructional approach to more open-ended problem-driven questions would allow for self-exploration and discovery. Relationship building questions such as those soliciting opinions based on personal experience can also be helpful in introducing important topics related to the faith. Simply changing the focus of the question from the cognitional to the relational experiential has the potential to illicit more active responses and personal reflection. For example, when sharing a lesson or discussion on forgiveness, one may typically ask "Why must Christians forgive a person that has done them wrong?" Two variations of the same question would be: "Can you share a time in which you forgave someone that did you wrong?" or "Is there someone in your life that you have a hard time forgiving?" This shift in manner of questioning often provides increased participation of members of the group and a livelier dynamic conversation. The benefit of this style of questioning is the emphasis on lived experience of these faith principles as the springboard for discipleship and mature faith as a seeking faith.

Mike Carotta suggests that rather than have catechists and youth ministers focus on providing faith content based on a catechetical style of questions and answers that the focus be on open-ended self-examination questions that lead to what he calls "awakenings." He explains:

> There is a difference between conversion and awakening. Our tradition and most
> spiritual traditions understand awakening to consist of a new way of

understanding, a new insight, an illumination, an "aha." Conversion is a change in attitude, behavior, values, ambitions, made after we have an awakening. Awakenings help a person see differently and then perhaps act or think differently. The tradition has always been that awakenings, these new insights, lead a person, with the grace of God, to make a change. Awakenings lead to conversion.[325]

Similarly, James Fowler refers to conversion not as a single transcendental change in attitude but a "series of important moments of perspective-altering convictions and illuminations" and "not so much a denial of our adulthood as it is the liberation and empowerment of our adulthood toward entering into partnership with God."[326] A seeking faith is "child-like" in that it recognizes that no one has "arrived" at the stature of the perfect Christian disciple. It is a faith thus must be renewed and reformed daily but with the hope that our God, the "horizon of knowing" will refine it along the journey of searching and seeking. The Bishop's document, "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us" describes self-appropriated faith in the following manner:

> A living faith is a searching faith—it "seeks understanding." Adults need to question, probe, and critically reflect on the meaning of God's revelation in their unique lives in order to grow closer to God. A searching faith leads to deepening conversion. Along the way, it may even experience doubt. Yet the essence of this quality of adult faith is not doubt, but search—trusting, hopeful, persistent

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[325] Carotta, *Teaching for Discipleship*, 61.
[326] Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, 115.

"seeking" of "hunger" for a deeper appropriation of the Gospel and its power to guide, transform, and fulfill our lives. [327]

Thus, the primary objective of faith formation and youth ministry is accompaniment that leads to self-appropriated faith; a faith that is ever seeking moments of enlightenment. The task is to lead young people in the direction toward Christ through moments of awakening—moving away from self-absorption to self-transcendence—moments that lead to a deeper search for personal meaning and fulfillment which can only be provided by God.

In a remarkable way, the movements described along the road to Emmaus between the veiled Jesus and the disciples articulate a personalized experience of discipleship which can be experienced in every Eucharistic celebration. At every mass, individuals encounter the Lord through the word proclaimed and expanded upon through effective preaching of the Gospel and community worship. The Gospel is read as the culmination of the liturgy of the word recalling the way in which Jesus interprets the Scriptures for the disciples. Through the breaking of the bread one can participate in the eye-opening experience of communion with Christ and other Christians. We hear the message of kerygma; we encounter Christ in community as we pray for one another. In the breaking of the bread we recognize the Lord and our hearts are enflamed with the desire to share what we have received. Van Hoozer argues that active participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist is sharing in the eschatological reality of what we are becoming in Christ. It is the process of becoming what we are called to be. The sacraments are graphic representations of what God is doing through our participation in this graced

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[327] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us,* 52.

encounter and thus what the church is becoming by its participation. Each individual participant is becoming a disciple of Jesus and collectively the community is becoming the body of Christ. As the veiled Jesus is made known to the disciples in the act of the breaking of the bread, so too Christians participate in the eye-opening experience of communion with Christ and other Christians as their hearts are enflamed with the desire to share what they have received.

By way of summary of the Emmaus story gathers the elements of kerygma, catechesis, apologetics that are part of the experience of encounter. Along the road to Emmaus, the disciples are able to share their frustrations and questions in an environment of deep listening and trust, open their minds to the exposition of the Scriptures and the exchange of ideas and personal experiences, and through the breaking of the bread their eyes are opened to revelation of Jesus. The desired outcome of these interactions is to create an environment for genuine insights to emerge. As with any method or approach to pastoral ministry, the following of technique or stages does not guarantee effectiveness; true insight is a work of the Holy Spirit. As the unnamed companion, youth ministers or facilitators introduce the message of Christ and the Gospel as the meta-narrative within which each participant can weave their story with the end goal begin spiritual insight and transformation. As incarnational communities the primary role of the church is to accompany individuals and families in their quest to understand God's activity through the ministry of presence, care, and support in the everyday moments of life.

In addition to the acumen of the theologians already mentioned who laud the benefits of small Christian Communities (SCC) there are others that are worth mentioning here. Robert Schreiter has called SCC an effective model for developing an

ecclesiology from below which is reminiscent of early Christian communities. He argues that:

> The experience of those in the small Christian communities who have seen the insight and the power arising from the reflections of the people upon their experience and the Scriptures has prompted making the community itself the prime author of theology in the local contexts. The Holy Spirit, working in and through the believing community, gives shape and expression to Christian experience.

He also maintains that:

> Theology is certainly intended for a community and is not meant to remain the property of a theologian class. The expression of faith in theology should make a difference in people's lives; otherwise it is a mere beating of the air. Reflection for its own sake may lead to contemplation, but contemplation should lead to action as well.

Regarded as one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century, Karl Rahner lauds SCC for their ability to create authentic communities of mutual support and discipleship. The church must make room for these groups where individuals are fed spiritually in more profound ways than the fulfilling of religious and sacramental services. The proliferation of SCC for Rahner represents a strong move of the Holy Spirit towards a "declericalized" church. The church of the future must develop "from below, from groups of those who have come to believe as a result of their own free, personal

decision" and their official leadership must see their role as in service of these emerging communities, not the contrary.[328] He further states that:

> parishes must be transformed from units of authoritarian ecclesiastical territorial administration, and service stations catering to purely individualistic needs, into true communities, in which Christians live in a brotherly and sisterly fashion, united in one Spirit who builds church.[329]

An example of such an effort has been undertaken by Fr. Michael Eivers and the community of St. Edward Church in Prembroke Pines, Florida. This model of small faith-sharing groups which they have termed "Evangelizing Cells" has served as the impetus for this dissertation due to its strong emphasis on missionary discipleship. Through its overall vision, meeting format and emphases on evangelization and birthing new cells, it gathers many of the best practices for effective CoP as will be seen next.

The Story Behind This Study: A Contextual Look at CoP

The youth ministry program at St. Edward Catholic Church has been revitalized as a result of the exposure and implementation of CoP model known as "Parish Evangelizing Cells." It will serve as a contextual example of Young CoP cells and an embodiment of the proposals made in this chapter. The "evangelizing cell" model of St. Edward Catholic Church has become a locus of profound theological reflection as these groups seek to integrate an evangelistic focus, openness to the gifts of the Holy Spirit with the drive to engage social concerns. In what follows, some of the characteristics that make the "evangelizing cells" model of small Christian communities will be featured.

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[328] Karl Rahner, *The Shape of The Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 57.
[329] Rahner, 317.

St. Edward Parish is a Catholic community situated in West Pembroke Pines

Florida and was founded by Fr. Michael Eivers in 1998. It has about 3000 families and

serves a wide variety of ethnic groups including, Black Caribbean, Hispanic, Haitian and

Anglo. The worship style is described by most as "charismatic" in that it was fomented

by Fr. Eivers through the establishment of cell groups, Life in the Spirit seminars,

charismatic prayer groups and the singing of many traditional Pentecostal hymns and

later contemporary Christian praise and worship. Considered the staple of the spiritual

dynamism of the parish is the establishment and proliferation of "evangelizing cell

groups."

Most Catholic scholars writing on the subject of small Christian communities or

cell groups credit Monsignor Michael Eivers with bringing the "evangelizing cell" model

to the Catholic Church. While Eivers experienced a deep conversion through Charismatic

Renewal prayer groups and life in the spirit seminars he felt that something was missing.

One of the many parishes in the world that have adopted the Catholic version of the cell

system, Carrickfergus parish in Belfast, Northern Ireland recounts Eiver's story: "I was

searching for some way to lead my parish into ongoing spiritual growth. My great fear at

the time was that we were becoming just a "spiritual filling station" surviving from

Sunday to Sunday. Parishioners were crying out for spiritual growth, Bible study and a

deeper knowledge of their faith. I had a gut feeling that the answer lay in small groups

but did not have "the know how" to establish them."[330]

In 1980 he and his deacon Perry Vitale had both been very impressed by a book

called "Building Christian Communities" by Stephen B Clark, and about the same time,

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[330] Michael J. Eivers, "Parish Evangelizing Cells," CarrickFergus Parish, accessed October 13, 2014, http://www.carrickparish.org/cells_fr_eivers.html.

they had also been very inspired by lectures given by Jose Marins, an expert on "base communities", which had become very popular in Latin America.[331] Encouraged by this, Eivers recruited 70 parishioners and gave them a list of the Catholics in their neighborhood and told them to form neighborhood groups. The project failed dismally but the pair did not abandon the idea. Shortly thereafter they discovered Paul Yonggi Cho's book "Successful Home Cell Groups." Fr. Eivers traveled to Seoul South Korea in 1983 to visit the Yoido Full Gospel Church and be trained in how the cell system worked. This church had experienced unprecedented growth due to the "home church," small Christian community model with over 11,000 cell groups gathering on a weekly basis leading to membership of whopping 700,000 members at that time. In recent estimates, the church has an excess of 25,000 cell groups and over 1 million members.[332] He remarked: "I took Pastor Cho's methodology and structure and adapted it to a Catholic parish. It worked, and still works 19 years later in St. Boniface Parish, and now in St. Edward's where I have been pastor since 1995. I have no doubt about it - Parish Evangelizing Cells are a movement of the Holy Spirit in recent times in many Catholic parishes around the world, even more so in Evangelical and Charismatic churches."[333] From their Korean experience he and Vitale discovered that this was not another program but a return to the ancient way of being church. The experience of attending the Yoido church sparked the establishing of the cell system in Fr. Eiver's then parish of St.

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[331] In addition to many talks and workshops, Marins produced some of the earliest training manuals on Base communities with titles including: *Iglesia Local: Comunidad de Base*, *Entrenamiento Intensivo sobre comunidades de base* and others. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Bonum, 1971).

[332] Pastor David, Yonggi Cho of the largest church in the world was recently convicted of embezzlement according to an article in February 2014 edition of *Christianity Today*: Ruth Moon, "Founder of World's Largest Megachurch Convicted of Embezzling $12 Million," *Christianity Today*, February 24, 2014, http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/february/founder-of-worlds-largest-megachurch-convicted-cho-yoido.html?paging=off.

[333] Eivers, "Parish Evangelizing Cells."

Boniface with five cell groups which within a year grew to fifteen and multiplying the year after.

Eivers recalls that the initial campaign was an amazing experience, as they saw a church, where every member from young mothers to grandmothers, seemed to be on fire, determined to spread the gospel to their neighbors and friends. In addition to sound Biblical teaching from the pastor, as a way of providing a Catholic flavor to the meetings, cell meetings also placed a strong emphasis on studying important church documents including *Gaudium Et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* and most especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi,* Pope Paul VI's magnum opus on Evangelization in the modern world. In addition to perpetuating the cell system in his parish, Eivers and his team began to offer workshops around the country to train pastors and lay leadership in developing cells in parish. In 1986, among the attendees of the first workshops was, Don Pigi Perini, a parish priest from St. Eustrogio church in Milan Italy who became the catalyst for spreading Fr. Eiver's evangelizing cell system to parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America exceeding 34,000 cells.

It was Fr. Don Pigi Perini, who was responsible for getting the recognition of the Holy See for the Parish Evangelization Cell system whose statutes were officially accepted in 2009. At the synod of bishops for the New Evangelization in October 2012 Fr. Don Pigi was invited to be one of the auditors. Through his intervention a new element was added to Proposition 26 submitted to the Pope Francis to assist him in writing his post synod Apostolic Exhortation on the New Evangelization. In the proposition the term "cell" was used in the actual definition of a parish. It reads as follows:

The bishops gathered in Synod affirm that the parish continues to be the primary presence of the Church in neighborhoods, the place and instrument of Christian life, which is able to offer opportunities for dialogue among men, for listening to and announcing the Word of God, for organic catechesis, for training in charity, for prayer, adoration and joyous Eucharistic celebrations. In addition, the Synod Fathers would like to encourage parishes to find ways to orient themselves to a greater emphasis on evangelization which could include parish missions, parish renewal programs and parish retreats. The presence and evangelizing action of associations, movements and of other ecclesial realities are useful stimuli for the realization of this pastoral conversion. Parishes as well as traditional and new ecclesial realities are called to make visible together the communion of the particular Church united around the Bishop. *In order to bring to all people the Good News of Jesus, as required by a New Evangelization, all the parishes and their small communities should be* <u>*living cells*</u>*, places to promote the personal and communitarian encounter with Christ, experience the richness of liturgy, to give initial and permanent Christian formation, and to educate all the faithful in fraternity and charity especially towards the poor.*[334]

At the high point of Eiver's fifteen-year pastorate at St. Edward, there were more than 100 cell groups active with about a third of parishioners participating on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Most recently upon retiring Eivers intimated to the author with much dismay that number of cell groups had dwindled down to little more than half that number as the new pastor allowed the initiative to subsist with little or no support.

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[334] Holy See, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith," Synodus Episcoporum Bulletin: XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 7-28 October 2012," October 27, 2012, Vatican.va. Italics added for emphasis by the author.

Despite the declining numbers, the evangelizing cell system has impacted the community in lasting and profound ways. As a testament to this let us now consider what makes the cell system proposed by Eivers so different from many other small Christian communities around the country. The next section will provide a definition, meeting mechanics and purpose of cells followed by what makes these groups unique.

Pastor Joel Comiskey defines a cell group as "a group of people (5-15), who meet regularly for the purpose of spiritual edification and evangelical outreach with the goal of multiplication, and who are committed to participate in the functions of the local church."[335] Cells in the human body are living, vibrant, multiplying units. They are programmed to multiply or die. This also is an accurate description of Parish Evangelizing Cells. Evangelizing cells consist of faith sharing groups consisting of 8-12 members and can include couples and children. Cell groups have developed among like-minded individuals such as a nurse's cell, children with special needs, men's and women's young adults and many others. In early 2010 it was estimated that there were close to 100 cell groups operating on a weekly or by-weekly basis with about 20% of the parishioners participating. This accounts for the very welcoming and spiritual environment one experiences when attending weekly mass. The agenda and meeting mechanics for a fruitful meeting was worked out in the school of experience by Pastor David Cho 40 years ago and is very valuable in keeping a meeting on track. These groups meet weekly or bi-weekly for an hour and a half to two hours with a set agenda which will be set forth in what follows.

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[335] Joel Comiskey, *How to Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting…So People Want to Come Back* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 2001), 13.

The parts of the meeting described hereafter have been preserved by the St. Edward cells as well as the various Catholic parishes throughout the United States and other countries that have embraced these groups.[336] They are as follows: 1) Prayer and Praise (15-20 minutes) After the initial greeting and brief social pleasantries, the session begins with formal or informal spontaneous prayer and charismatic style praise followed by reading of Scripture passage, *lectio divina*, excerpts from encyclical letters or other readings as proposed by cell shepherds. 2) Evangelistic Sharing (15-20 minutes): Members of the cell take turns responding to the question: "How have I shared my faith recently, especially by inviting someone to my cell?" This can be simply by not being embarrassed to identify yourself as a Catholic and being open that you practice your faith and go to Church, or by saying "God Bless" and offering to pray for someone's situation; or it might mean giving a person an appropriate spiritual book or inviting them to a church event, or witnessing how God might have helped you in your life. 3) Teaching on CD or DVD (15 minutes): Teachings are usually produced by the pastor who is aware of the spiritual needs of cell members and which covers a variety of topics including Biblical or catechetical teachings, summaries of spiritual books, recent church documents or other lessons as selected by the pastor or cell system staff. 4) Discussion (15 minutes): The teaching is followed by group discussion stemming from questions posed by the pastor and which is typically facilitated by the group leader or co-leader. In some cases, transcriptions of the talks are also available as a reference for participants. 5) Cell Business and Announcements (5-10 minutes). These might include announcing any upcoming parish events or social needs among the community. As part of their

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[336] Michael Eivers, Perry A. Vitale, and Muriel Kroll, "Parish Evangelizing Cells: Leaders Training Manuel," accessed December 12, 2014, 74-75, http://www.cellules-evangelisation.org/sites/cellules-evangelisation.org/IMG/pdf/LeadersManual.pdf.

understanding of evangelization, there is a general orientation toward involvement in parish ministries and community outreach as concurring elements of sharing the Gospel.

The meeting usually concludes with the following parts: 6) Intercessory and Healing Prayer (5-10 minutes): Various types of prayers are offered including general intercessions for the community, healing, or physical or spiritual needs voiced by those present in the meeting. 7) The Our Father: A common practice of many groups is the recitation of the Our Father with members of the cell standing in a circle facing outwards as a symbol of their orientation towards the needs of the world. 8) Refreshments and Fellowship: The formal part of the meeting is now over and afterwards there is a time of refreshments and fellowship. The actual length of this time depends on the group, availability of the space and the members.

Purpose and Mission of "Evangelizing Cells"

Eivers identifies seven purposes of Parish Evangelizing Cells which are: 1) to grow in an ongoing intimacy with the Lord and love of one another, 2) to evangelize by word and lifestyle, especially by inviting people to join the group, 3) to grow to the point of birthing a new cell, 4) to inspire members to prepare for leadership in the future, 5) to give and receive support, 6) to be involved in parish ministry according to one's gifts and 7) to deepen our Catholic identity.[337] It is important to note that although the members are nurtured spiritually in teaching and sharing, the main focus should always be 'evangelizing.' A distinguishing feature of these groups has to do with the regular exercise of charismatic gifts including intercessory prayer for healing, speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and baptism in the Holy Spirit, modeled after the Pentecostal style of the Yoido Church.

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[337] Eivers, Vitale, and Kroll, 71-73.

Along with cell groups, there are several other ingredients Eiver's sees as the keys to the success and growth of ecclesial communities including "Life in the Spirit" seminars, regular participation in the sacraments, and Eucharistic adoration. In his estimation these elements feed into each other providing a continual process of spiritual growth and ongoing conversion.[338]

In parishes where the cell system is most fruitful, it is not just another program, but a parish way of life. This in Fr. Michael's estimation is the secret to the cell system's longevity and vitality in responding to the great commission to go and preach. Groups that focus purely on nurturing their members through intercessory prayer or Scripture study, while often very effective, usually have a limited lifespan or can take on a life of its own outside of the parish. These would be tantamount to "cancerous cells" for Eivers, who using the biological metaphor, says that as a human cell cannot function without the organism which holds it, so too the cell group cannot function without the pastoral support and guidance of the parish community—one cannot subsist without the other.

Some have argued that this "household" model of discipleship and being church is too inward focused and not geared to engaging the public sphere. While earlier manifestations of base communities in central and south America were thought to be subversive groups, having a preponderantly social character, the critique of many scholars who have studied the more modern charismatic manifestations such as cell groups opine that they lack a true public orientation because, as addressed earlier, they are too "me and Jesus" focused. A rejoinder to this commonly raised critique was

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[338] Fr. Eivers sermonized that *baptism in the Holy Spirit* as experienced in the Life in the Spirit seminars is analogous to "swimming" in the depths of the spiritual life and which nourish every other aspect of our lives as Catholics as opposed to standing in knee-deep waters of the sacramental life with no true lived experience of the graces of the same.

provided by the current coordinators and promoters of USA Cell groups, Ileana Iglesias and Claudia Sailsman, two lay pastoral ministers of St. Edward church that have been entrusted with the task of continuing the legacy of Fr. Michael Eivers. When asked about whether cells engage in social concerns the response of Iglesias and Sailsman was a resounding "YES." Throughout the year, each cell group is encouraged to discern an area of local social concern that they could respond to as a group. For example, the Respect Life cell was created by a group of parishioners who felt called to work in this particular area of social concern for the dignity of human life. In their understanding, engaging social concerns is a natural byproduct of the zeal of the evangelizing spirit of the group.

To safeguard against these two extremes: the overemphasis of personal devotion over social concern or the isolation from the larger parish community, Presentation Ministries has offered several helpful pastoral directives for CoP which are helpful to delineate here describing the codependent relationship between these cells and the larger faith community. It is essential that CoP:

- Seek their nourishment in the Word of God and *do not allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarization* or fashionable ideologies, which are ready to exploit their immense human potential;

- Avoid the ever-present temptation of systematic protest and a hypercritical attitude, under the pretext of authenticity and a spirit of collaboration;

- *Remain firmly attached to the local Church in which they are inserted, and to the universal Church, thus avoiding the very real danger of becoming isolated within*

themselves, then of believing themselves to be the only authentic Church of

Christ, and *hence of condemning the other ecclesial communities*;

- Maintain a sincere communion with the pastors whom the Lord gives to His

 Church, and with the magisterium which the Spirit of Christ has entrusted to these

 pastors;

- Never look on themselves as the sole beneficiaries or sole agents of

 evangelization — or even the only depositories of the Gospel — but, being aware

 that the Church is much more vast and diversified, accept the fact that this Church

 becomes incarnate in other ways than themselves;

- Constantly grow in missionary consciousness, fervor, commitment and zeal;

- Show themselves to be universal in all things and never sectarian.[339]

In particular, evangelizing cells have impacted youth ministry in two significant

ways. First, small group interactions within the youth night program are prolonged and

intentional. These intentional relationship groups (no more than 8-10 students) are

typically with many of the same members and leaders so that participants can develop a

level of trust in order to facilitate deeper listening, intercessory prayer, support and faith

sharing. These groups are led by upper-classmen or young adults.

Two other methods of creating these intentional relationships has occurred

through one-on-one meetings and small groups where an adult or peer minister visits with

the pair to facilitate discussion with all pairs gathering back to the small group for shared

learning and wrap-up of the session. Secondly, the sense of belonging to a family is

contagious and leads to additional gatherings outside of church through home Bible

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[339] Presentation Ministries, "Introduction to Small Christian Communities," *Presentation Ministries*, accessed November 9, 2014, http://presentationministries.com/brochures/IntroCommunity.asp. Italics added by author for emphasis.

studies, gatherings at school and evangelism to the broader community. While not a perfect process due the state of flux of typical youth participation, those youth that begin the small faith sharing process of YCoP continue to participate and stay connected with their peers. What started as a group of 15-20 teens has grown to 80-100 thanks in large measure to this emphasis on communities of practice.

Conclusion

As an example of an incarnational and intentional community, the evangelizing cells system developed under the pastoral leadership of Fr. Michael Eivers at St. Edward Catholic church has yielded a vibrant community of disciples. A reported third of the parish families have participated at some point in cells or still participate in the life of the church through its various ministries and other initiatives. Many among the leadership of the parish attribute the vibrant style of worship, deepening prayer life and understanding of Scriptures and commitment to evangelism and participation in ministry to cells.

The reflection on the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus provides helpful cues to developing an effective ministry of accompaniment with young people. The theological movements of attending, asserting and pastoral response woven through this brief analysis of the Emmaus story have potentially far-reaching implications for young ministry as these small faith sharing groups can potentially provide transformational experiences of faith. There are two important ways in which small faith sharing groups can be beneficial to youth programs.

First, small faith sharing groups must provide opportunities for young people to air grievances or express personal struggles in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. Active and deep pastoral listening along with the ability to change our point of view are

essential dispositions for this conversion to the neighbor and see the world and church issues as they see them. Second, they must have effective inter-personal and community building skills and respect for different learning styles and to allow for young people to articulate their faith journey in relation to the Christian story. They must never shy away from developing the conversation suggested by the Whitehead Method between the individual experience, culture and the Christian tradition. Youth ministry small faith sharing groups allow for questions of ultimacy and purpose to surface which can lead to moments of insight and transformation. Ultimately the objective of these gatherings, if they are to resemble the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is to lead young people in the direction toward a deeper relationship with Christ and the faith community.

In these ways, a discipleship model for youth ministry must develop an ethos of inclusivity and deep pastoral listening where all youth are invited to share their concerns and questions about God and the church. A discipleship model for youth ministry must meet the challenge of real people who are reflecting on and actively discerning God's activity in the world—"everyday disciples". An everyday disciple should not merely be a witness to those that do not know Christ for the purpose of converting and "saving souls". Everyday disciples are growing in Christian maturity by experiencing joy in the midst of quotidian realities and especially in the difficult struggles. Individual responses to tenets of the faith tradition are never cut and dry, black, or white, one size fits all applications. There are many grey areas that Christians must grapple with in their everyday lives. Trials and tribulations can be true opportunities of revelation in which God redirects or

straightens our path towards this partnering in God's creating, liberating-redeeming and reigning activity in the world.

CHAPTER SIX. A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

Introduction

What is needed today is *a Church which knows how to respond to the expectations of young people.* Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them and, through his Body which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice which will require a commitment of their lives. As Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become today the traveling companion of young people, who are often marked by confusion, resistance and contradictions, in order to announce to them the ever-astonishing "news" of the risen Christ. This is what is needed: *a Church for young people, which will know how to speak to their heart and enkindle, comfort, and inspire enthusiasm in it with the joy of the Gospel* and the strength of the Eucharist; *a Church which will know how to invite and to welcome the person who seeks a purpose for which to commit his whole existence*; *a Church which is not afraid to require much, after having given much; which does not fear asking from young people the effort of a noble and authentic adventure*, such as that of the following of the Gospel.[340]

This stirring statement delivered by John Paul II summarizes the undertaking of this dissertation which has endeavored to propose elements of a youth ministry approach which can foster the environment suggested. In order for the church and its ministries to return to the mission of making disciples, various personal and pastoral assessments must be made. A church for young people is one which is characterized by pastoral leadership who are willing to listen deeply to the concerns they express and through personal

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[340] John Paul II, "Message of his Holiness Pope John Paul II for the XXXII World Day of Prayer for Vocations," Vatican.va. Accessed July 10, 2017. Italics added for emphasis by the author.

witness of discipleship living are able to accompany them toward an encounter with Jesus Christ. This process of discovering the real concerns young people face is an essential first step to developing an adequate approach to youth ministry and allowing for these voices to be heard.

As the final chapter of this dissertation is being written, the 2018 Synod of Bishops was gathered in the Vatican for meetings with a focus youth. The pre-synodal meetings have advanced fifteen important topics including the influence of technology, the search for meaning through the everyday, how young people of the third millennia perceive Jesus and the relationship between personal faith and the ecclesial community among others. Polemical issues of most recent concern have also been voiced including the sexual abuse crisis in the church, how to respond to young people experiencing same-sex attractions, and, of particular importance to this work, the formation of community for young people. Other proposals include the creation of a pontifical council for youth on the level of other Vatican departments. These and other developments demonstrate a concern on the part of the church universal to give a hearing to the concerns of young people.

While these meetings are cause for optimism and the hope that a practical document will provide concrete strategies for building more welcoming communities for youth, these initiatives often do not have a trickle-down effect. The synodal document may be referred to by church groups, youth ministers and even from the pulpit, but often these comments do not translate into actionable results. The familiar phrase "youth are the future of the church" discloses the well-intended yearning of most pastoral leaders and adult congregants that young people can contribute in significant ways to the church

when they reach adulthood. The collective aspiration that youth become the leaders of tomorrow may not become a reality if pastoral agents do not seriously consider how they can contribute to the church of today. Contrary to the popular adage that "children are to be seen and not heard," young people want to be heard and if their voices persist in being among the marginalized, they will surely not be seen in church.

A critical assessment on the part of pastoral leaders concerns the many areas of disaffiliation discussed in the first chapter which is characterized by an increasing "None" culture.[341] The purported response to these downward trends involves changing pastoral dispositions which would foment a culture of deep listening through an emphasis on intentional relationships. As has been reiterated, the current programmatic models of youth ministry are not creating the desired effect of keeping youth connected to the church community. Social science data has established a correlation between the activism of parents in parish ministry and that of their children. Chapter Two served to outline the essential elements of discipleship in the New Testament and how these might be incorporated in a youth ministry setting.

Chapter Three suggested ways parishes could reinvigorate a deeper sense of community through a retrieval of the practices of early Christian communities which fostered genuine fellowship or koinonia. It was also established that small faith sharing groups, small Christian communities, base communities, cell groups are the most effective way of establishing a sense of belonging and connection to the larger church community. The foregrounding of these previous chapters served to make the case for the

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[341] The Pew Research report, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" in 2014 revealed that "nones," a group comprised of those persons who list their faith as "unaffiliated," is the "fastest – growing religious demographic in the United States. See Michael Lipka, "Millennials Increasingly are Driving Growth of 'Nones,'" Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/.

type of small faith sharing groups that are being proposed for youth ministry known as Communities of Practice (CoP). Based on the work of social scientists Lave and Wenger, and the practical theologian Jane Regan, chapter four established that a CoP model of youth ministry can effectively create a mentoring/ apprenticeship dynamic which can facilitate practices of Christian discipleship and lead to Christian maturity. This concluding section will also provide practical tools, model curricula and a proposed format for Young CoPs to be effective in parishes. The hope is that these strategies will serve to enhance youth initiatives already taking place and to contribute to the necessary cultural changes that need to be made for parishes to return to the mission of making disciples.

Methodology

Society today can be easily characterized as a "How-to" generation with the explosion of internet technologies and applications, search engines like Google, video sites such as YouTube and social media apps which promote online learning and specialized groups for seemingly any interest. With a few clicks of a mouse, individuals can learn how to prepare the latest diet recipe, teach themselves to play the piano, a new language, or how to solve the often-difficult problems of advanced mathematics. This chapter ventures to provide some of the "how-to's" of developing a discipleship model of youth ministry in US Catholic parishes for pastoral leadership at any level. As has been previously stated, discipleship in and of itself cannot be learned by purely mimicking a certain task or activity, the "how-to" aspect occurs through sharing life with disciples and participating in the practices of the community of faith. That said, just as many different search results may be sought on the World Wide Web and individuals may prefer a

certain method or demonstration of a particular task or approach, the recommendations provided hereafter may not apply to certain parish contexts or circumstances. As a life-long disciple in training, this author presents the following practical tools and conclusions as an agglomeration of the assertions made from the previous chapters, years of observation of youth ministry initiatives in diverse settings and first-hand experience of the benefits of effective pastoral care within the Christian community.

Vision

Designing youth friendly communities is no easy task. Many youth ministry experts argue that if the pastoral vision does not include a love and passion for including youth; any effort or program, no matter how great will be ineffective. A pastoral vision of inclusivity and welcome is essential for youth ministry programs to flourish. The most important point made by Regan in the previous chapter is that if all groups or committees saw their role, even as insignificant as it may seem, as part of the mission of the Church to evangelize and make disciples, parishes would be transformed. This must be the pervading attitude of the pastoral vision, staff, and all ministries of the church. The heart of the mission of each church is to make missionary disciples as an individual and a collective process beginning with the pastor, priests, religious, professional pastoral associates, ministry leaders and as such must become the culture of the entire community. This should probably be an essential element of any mission statement or presentation of the goals or objectives of the parish community to all stakeholders.

One of the foremost voices in Christian education, Westerhoff argues that "[U]ntil adults in the church are knowledgeable of their faith, have experienced the transforming power of the Gospel, live radical lives characteristic of the disciples of Jesus Christ, no

new curriculum no new insights on learning, no new teacher-training programs, and no new educational technology will save us."[342] Essentially Westerhoff is saying that the only way parishes, faith formation programs and youth ministry initiatives can create disciples among young people is by a firm commitment on the part of every member of the body of leadership to be committed to this life themselves. Otherwise we do a terrible disservice to the Gospel and the mission of the church.

A second aspect of fomenting a vision of church as missionary disciples involves personal accountability—the understanding that disciples make disciples. While it is not unheard of for disciples to emerge among youth in a community of nominal Christians, each member of the community must be committed in their personal and familial lives, in their profession, in their public and private lives to be a follower of Christ in order for discipleship to become the normative experience of young people. This effective modeling of behavior and Christian practices of the community allows for a mentoring environment to be created. When a culture of disciples/ learners is developed, the community itself becomes the primary vehicle of disciple-making. Proffitt and Church Young argue similarly that

> when learning is embedded in a relational matrix of faithful accountability to the
> image of Christ, the community itself becomes a catechist, opening youth to
> learning experiences that reveal Christ's grace and mercy and that catalyze deep

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[342] John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 86.

searching, honest sharing, and personal transformation. Immersed in a community of betrothal, teenagers "try out" the person God has already made them to be. [343] It is only in a community in which they feel a sense of belonging; a community of betrothal that teens can effectively engage in the adventure of the Christian life. In this way the small group sharing process of Young Communities of Practice (YCoP) can serve as this school discipleship where the practices of disciples of Jesus are practiced in a social learning, not a school/ instructional model.

In order to truly become the traveling partner that pastoral agents are called to be, it is essential to engage in cultural exegesis which means to read the sign of the times and seek to connect the real experiences of youth to the message of the Gospel in light of the culture. The discipline of practical theology plays a pivotal role in this shift which recognizes that young people as agents of ministry. The desired effect of such an approach is to bring young people to a self-appropriated and thus more mature faith. An essential first step in understanding the sign of the times is to know our audience. A training module on cultural exegesis (see Appendix-A) can be provided to adult mentors, youth ministers, catechists, and peer ministers as a prerequisite to creating the environment suggested. In order to adequately respond to these critical areas of a practical theological approach, a twenty first century model of youth ministry must offer an environment of openness, "pastoral listening", inclusion and freedom rather than of fear and rejection—a ministry of accompaniment.

Furthermore, CoP not only provide a rich and nurturing environment of mutual support described above but also can be a potential source of theological reflection as

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[343] Anabel Proffitt and Jacquie Church Young, "Catalyzing Community: Forming the Community as Catechist," in *How Youth Ministry Can Change Theological Education—If We Let It*, eds. Kenda Creasy Dean and Christy Lang Hearlson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdsmans Publishing, 2016), 69.

individuals acquire insight through the exchange of ideas within the small group dynamic. The qualifier *potential* is used here as a disclaimer that these groups are not a sure-fire way to achieve spiritual insight. Integral to the critique offered by many who study small faith-sharing dynamics is that there are plenty of modern manifestations of these groups that have become mechanical, "cookie-cutter" meetings and can come to be dry and lifeless. Spiritual transformations experienced by countless participants are not fabricated with some secret recipe or step-by step process. In many cases "insight" may not even occur during the meeting but after the individual has had an opportunity to reflect on the many exchanges that occurred for their deeper import. Implementing a CoP approach to youth ministry will result in two major shifts that are being proposed in what follows. The first is a move from a school-instructional model of faith formation and youth ministry to a social interaction learning model. The second major shift is a kerygmatic approach to disciple making.

Shift #1- From School-Instructional Model to Faith Formation Through Social Interaction

Many weekly faith formation and youth ministry programs in the United Stated still function under what is considered the traditional "banking" model of education or schooling-instructional paradigm in which the catechist or youth minister plays the role of teacher and participants are the students in a typical classroom setting. Paulo Freire describes the "banking" model of education as "an act of depositing", in which the teacher is the disseminator of information and the students are the repository of the data

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which must be recorded, interpreted, memorized and repeated back to the teacher for assessment.[344] He describes the traditional model of education in these terms:

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence.[345]

Freire vehemently criticizes this prevalent style of education as knowledge control which stifles the creative potential of students who are dependent of the information received and thus dehumanizes them. In contrast he describes the humanist educator as one who seeks to liberate and humanize students by inviting them to become critical thinkers. What he calls "conscientization" is the liberating process of acquiring wisdom or the tools for which to gain knowledge beyond that which is given by the teacher. He posits an alternative model which he describes as "problem-posing" education in which:

> The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is

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[344] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), 72.
[345] Freire, 72.

anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher.[346]

Despite the Marxist and subversive overtones used by Freire above, he arrives at an important conclusion that drives the discussion on present models of faith formation. Individuals in the context of education are not merely passive vessels or receptacles of learning to be filled by individuals more educated than they. Even in the "banking" model the teacher is impacted by the learning of the students and through the back and forth discussion is enriched. Students bring their perspectives, questions and experiences which inform their understanding of the world. These must necessarily be incorporated into the dynamic of instruction in order to allow for critical thinking to emerge in students.

This shift proposes a more social, dialogical, and even Hegelian dialectical model focusing on the exchange between all participants which becomes the holder of the knowledge not the possession of the teacher. The teacher is seen as the lead-learner, the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage".[347] This shift in environment fosters a more active and collaborative learning environment. An increasing number of school districts in the United States are slowly moving away from the traditional "banking" system of knowledge production to more collaborative learning environments through the use of technology, the emergence of one-on-one iPad school options, the growing availability of virtual school classes, the development of learning management programs which foster an individualized instruction and project based learning.

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[346] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 80.
[347] Alison King, "Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side" in *College Teacher* 41, no.1 (1993): 30-35.

Heavily influenced by Friere's proposals for a pedagogical shift in education, Thomas Groome argues conclusively that the future of religious education must undergo this shift from the "banking" educational model which sees students as passive receptacles of knowledge provided by instructors. Instead he argues that:

> To educate for human freedom that is whole and life-giving highlights the ontological task of Christian religious education: it is not simply to inform people about the freedom made possible in the paschal event of Jesus but to form people as well to participate in the transforming struggle to realize the Passover to freedom for all.[348]

A liberating humanizing education is one that seeks to bring out the full potential of participants which means that religious educators must attend to all dimensions of being, not just the cognitive. In order to acknowledge every person's humanity and dignity Groome proposes his Shared Praxis approach which incorporates the use of Christian story and vision to explain how each individual brings their own unique worldview and experience to their faith. His Shared Praxis method can be simply described as "bringing life to faith and your faith to life."[349] A holistic approach to religious education and youth ministry is one that seeks to integrate our stories with the Christian story and thus is necessarily a conversation and a partnership.

Groome asserts that this partnership places teacher and student as collaborative learners. It does not mean that "teachers forgo their responsibilities as enablers and resource persons; it means being willing to learn as well as to teach, to listen as well as to

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[348] Thomas. H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 25.
[349] Groome, *Sharing Faith.* Also see Groome's most recent work *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 261-297.

talk, to be questioned as well as to question, to use one's training and resources to empower rather than to control the teaching/learning partnership."[350] The goal of Christian religious education is conation or "activity which engages people's corporeal, mental, and volitional capacities, their heads, hearts and overt behaviors, their cognition, desire, and will as they realize their own 'being' in right relationship with others and the world and contribute in ways that are life-giving to all."[351] To be sure this proposal that religious educators and youth ministers be focused on educating the whole person, not just the cognitive learner is a monumental task as volunteer catechist have limited training and time to dedicate toward this goal.

Similarly, one of the principle voices in the field of Christian education in the past three decades, Westerhoff argues that because of its focus on disseminating content instead of fostering faith, the schooling-instructional model must be replaced with a more experiential, social learning model which fosters faith within the Christian community. He declares that

> Faith is expressed, transformed, and made meaningful by persons sharing their faith in an historical, tradition-bearing community of faith. An emphasis on schooling and instruction makes it too easy to forget the truth…No matter what the rhetoric of our purposes, the schooling-instructional paradigm, modeled after modern psychology and pedagogy, leads us to focus on religion rather than faith.[352]

According to Westerhoff, such an alternative model as a CoP has been proposed by American Pragmatists, particularly in the work of C.S. Peirce who talked about

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[350] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 143.
[351] Groome, 30.
[352] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 20.

"communities of inquiry" and education reformer John Dewey who called for "a developmental interactional view of education which stressed the importance of experiences that foster interaction between persons and their environments."[353] He further contends that religious educators in the 1950s and 60s spoke of dialogical education and more collaborative models but these ideas were shot down due to the prevalence and hegemonic influence of the schooling-instructional model. He and other religious education scholars such as Groome suggest that the influence has been experienced in the church since the Third Council of Baltimore in which the American Bishops decreed that all parishes to have a school.[354]

Additionally, Westerhoff argues that this alternative paradigm moves participants toward greater involvement and a sense of belonging within faith formation. He identifies four distinctive styles of faith development, namely experienced faith; affiliative faith; searching faith; and finally, owned faith.[355] Experienced faith describes interactions of individuals within the Christian community which take on superficial to deepening dimensions based on the level of interaction or active participation in said practice. He argues that faith in God through Christ is understood not through theological propositions but as an affective experience in which one encounters God's love and care through interactions with others. Through ritual practices and the sharing of the Christian story one hears of God taking the initiative to be near to his children through the incarnation. The presence of God is experienced through touch, embraces in the kiss of peace, through singing and reciting prayers, through taking and eating of the bread and wine.

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[353] Westerhoff, 83.

[354] Hugh Nolan, ed., *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, 5 Vols. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1989), 1:225.

[355] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith,* 90.

Experienced faith he concludes "results from our interactions with other faithing selves."[356]

Affiliative faith is a dimension of faith where an individual experience a sense of belonging characterized by strong religious affections, and a grasp of the authority of the community. From the experienced faith, individuals feel the need to belong; to be needed accepted and wanted within a particular group. This sense of belonging is intrinsic to the human experience as a social being. He describes a second characteristic of affiliative faith is participation in ways which enhance religious affections or the aspect of faith which speaks to the heart. Singing, dancing, art, and other types of interactions with others allow for greater assimilation into the culture or shared meaning of the group. Through such interactions with the divine and with others, individuals can experience awe, wonder and insight into mysteries of the faith tradition. This process of assimilation or enculturation into group dynamics and shared activities leads to the third characteristic which is seen as a natural bi product of such interactions. By "sense of authority" Westerhoff refers to a particular community's way of affirming the Christian story and "a way of life that judges and inspired its actions." The shared story and meaning created influences the individual and, he argues, because essential in the formation of personal identity.

Searching faith is a move beyond affiliative faith in which the individual is acquiring a personal sense of identity in relation to the community. During this process there is a period of doubt or critical judgment in which the individual naturally begins questioning the claims made within the community and will seek to experiment or may seek alternatives to these understandings. Ultimate this process leads to the acquisition

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[356] Westerhoff, 93.

over time a personal faith story develops which leads to deeper commitment to the faith tradition or particular causes. This area of searching faith is a crucial period in which the individual is no longer seeking parental or other authorities to define reality for them.

Owned faith is thought to be a period of enlightenment, considered the culmination of the conversion process in which the individual has decided based on the conclusions of searching for key questions of purpose and ultimacy have now resolved to make significant changes in their behavior and attitude. These individuals strive to be witnesses to their faith and willing to be involved in social action for causes they espouse. He calls owned faith the goal of Christian education and God's desire for every person. Reaching owned faith, or our full human potential he avers "is a long pilgrimage in which we need to be provided with an environment and experiences that encourage us to act in ways that assist our expansion of faith."[357]

While the aforementioned styles offered by Westerhoff are not to be considered fixed categories with which to identify particular groups, much of the literature and conclusions of this dissertation suggest that many parishes function at a level of experienced faith where young people participate with their families in practices of the Christian community even if only superficially. In order for churches to foster a move toward affiliative faith where young people develop a sense of belonging, it is imperative to assess the community's unwritten curriculum. In other words, it is essential that parishes carefully examine every aspect of the learning experience participants are exposed to; not just what is being taught in faith formation classes or youth group sessions. Key questions communities of faith should ask include: what is the mission of our community? How is this mission expressed? Are young people welcome? Do young

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[357] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith*, 98.

people have a voice? Will we listen to what they have to say? The ministry of hospitality is one of the often-underemphasized ministries of the parish but which has the most impact on individuals when it comes to affiliative faith.

Shift #2-From a Catechetical to a Kerygmatic Approach to Youth Ministry

One of the primary assertions throughout this dissertation is that the presentation of the kerygma should be the first step in creating a culture of encounter in youth ministry and faith formation. Because of the influence of the school-instructional model of education in the United States, the emphasis on catechesis has led to sharing of faith as information while undermining formation and transformation which leads to discipleship. Too many young people know information about their faith; who Jesus is, what the catechism teaches, and have not developed an experiential knowledge of Christ. This propositional and sacramental focus has led to a lack of interest and connection to a faith that is to be lived in the world. Sunday school classes have become the series of hoops that adolescents and teens must jump through to obtain the sacraments. There is no need to document the numerous negative experiences of young people and older adults who have left the church having been marked by the inflexibility, callousness, or disregard of catechists, priests, "the sisters" (as many cradle Catholics often remark) and or religion teachers over the years which has caused much pain and distrust in the credibility of the church to answer ultimate questions. The section that follows will identify key aspects of a kerygmatic shift that can be made in current youth ministry initiatives and confirmation programs.

Content of Kerygma

A strong proponent of discipleship-based communities, Bill Hull has written extensively on the dynamic presentation of the Gospel kerygma as essential to transforming churches into disciple-makers. In his recent book, *The Discipleship Gospel* Hull argues that because of the many distortions in preaching, Christian churches have created many differing levels of adherence from those who emphasize forgiveness to prosperity to consumerism and even those who associate the Gospel to political views, whether right, left, progressive, or moderate.[358] This leads Hull to make two important assumptions which are pertinent to this section: "the Gospel you preach determines the type of disciple you make" and "you cannot make a Christ-like disciple from preaching a non-discipleship gospel."[359] With regard to the first axiom, preaching here is not merely limited to the pulpit but more importantly to the ethos the community has established through its worship, service, hospitality and other aspects, what Westerhoff calls the church's "unwritten curriculum." Harkening back to chapter two, Hull raises this second claim as the reason many churches focus on being good Christians and less on being disciples of Jesus. He argues further that this separation of the term Christian from disciple is what has led to the propensity of "country-club" churches which focus on a non-discipleship gospel. He argues quite decisively that there is no biblical validation for a concept or practice of Christian living separated from the notion of discipleship.

According to Hull, churches need to return to a basic preaching of the kerygma which can be summarized in seven basic elements which represent the two essential aspects of discipleship; the content of the Gospel and our response to what is revealed. The seven points developed in the second part of the book are: 1) God's kingdom is here,

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[358] Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached—We must Follow*, (USA: HIM Publications, 2018), 29.
[359] Hull and Sobels, 30-32.

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2) Jesus is the Christ, 3) he died for our sins, 4) he was resurrected, 5) repent of sin, 6) believe in the Gospel, and 7) follow Jesus.[360] These seven points summarized with three key Scripture passages namely Mark 1:14-17; 8:27-31; and 1 Cor. 15:1-5. Representing the essential doctrinal content of the kerygma, the first five verses of chapter fifteen of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians succinctly captures the core of the Gospel content which Christian disciples must adhere to. The four messages can be summarized in the following narrative: God's kingdom is among us. There is a way to experience the life of the kingdom of God through relationship with Jesus Christ. The first step involves understanding Jesus' identity as the Christ, the son of God and who as provided the way of reconciliation through his passion, death, and resurrection. In order to receive this gift of salvation and reconciliation provided by Jesus, we must repent of our sin, make a profession of faith, and resolve to follow Him. A summary of key questions are provided in Appendix B.

The Essential Kerygma-Personal Witness

Personal witness has always been presented as the most effective presentation of the kerygma more than any eloquent exposition of faith. As part of this culture of encounter described earlier, ministers must prioritize sharing personal faith in the formation process of young people. Often pastoral agents are cautious in sharing these experiences for fear that these could be misconstrued as diverging from the faith tradition. Catechetical or youth minister trainings consistently warn against sharing personal opinions based on lifestyle choices or areas of personal preference which may deviate from church teaching with sentiments such as this: "Faith sharing with students is not an opportunity to share your personal opinion or what areas you agree or disagree

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[360] Hull and Sobels, 49-89.

with the church on. Just share what the church teaches." On the contrary, the level of

authenticity of a minister who strives to meet the ideals set forth by Christ can become a

healthy model of a maturing and self-appropriated faith. John Paul II states that the first

form of evangelization is personal witness: "People today put more trust in witnesses

than in teachers, in experience than in teachers, in experience that in teaching, and in life

and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable

form of mission."[361]

Sharing one's faith story is the most effective way to show young people that

everyone is on their journey toward becoming disciples of Jesus. As mentors and faith

partners, youth ministry leaders engage young people in a personal quest of naming their

faith reality specifically by not providing the answers, but by providing the appropriate

questions and religious frame of reference in order to understand their stories with faith

practices and Christ's teachings. Root states that youth ministers called to facilitate

spiritual introspection by "being honestly human before and with young people, calling

them into their own humanity, inviting them to contemplate and search for God in the

barren empty spaces of their own lives."[362] The ability to share life with a young person

is the heart of discipleship living. The Bishop's document on adult faith formation, *Our

Hearts Were Burning Within Us* provides us with a framework for fostering this sense of

appropriation in working with youth as well:

> It is not enough for catechists to know their subjects. They also need the
>
> competence to animate a shared journey with other adults, the ability to relate
>
> authentic Catholic faith to real-life circumstances, the ability to guide them in

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[361] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Vatican.va, 42.
[362] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry,* 46.

prayer and through spiritual experiences, and the craft to integrate divergent

tendencies into the full faith and life of the Church. It is essential that catechists

witness in their own lives the truth of the faith they are communicating. This will

require a love for people, a passion for catechesis, effective interpersonal and

community-building skills, respect for different adult learning styles, the ability to

communicate and explore the Gospel with others using active and engaging

methods appropriate to the learners and to the content, and the flexibility to adapt

to ever-changing circumstances.[363]

Even in the Post-Apostolic period there are important expositions on the

importance of the kerygma. In response to his dear friend Deogratias, deacon of the city

of Carthage in Northern Africa, the great Augustine in his *First Catechetical Instruction*

addresses formation of the catechumens, those preparing to be initiated into the Christian

community, and in doing so writes a primer the essentials of discipleship. Chapters 1-4

set forth the proper environment catechists should create with candidates to bring about

conversion. For Augustine, the primary purpose of initiation of these early followers of

Christ is the presentation of the kerygma, the basic proclamation of the Gospel. These

learners must be presented the message of the Gospel that inspires them to understand

God's love for them, and their purpose in the God's plan for salvation of the world. In

these chapters he emphasizes two foundational virtues that catechists, teachers or lead

learners must possess in the instruction of beginners.

Preaching should be done first and foremost with great joy with which the teacher

has embraced the Gospel. Augustine states that learners "are listened to with much

greater satisfaction, indeed, when we ourselves also have pleasure in the same work; for

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[363] USCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within*, 151.

the thread of our address is affected by the very joy of which we ourselves are sensible, and it proceeds from us with greater ease and with more acceptance."[364] Implied in this statement is the power of personal testimony and the joy and zeal for the faith that must be exuded by those who present it. Tragically, popular culture, movies and personal stories often depict stories of woe at the hand of "the sisters growing up," "Father so and so," or "my Sunday school teacher". These stories have perpetuated a negative light and unfortunately the motives for many to disassociate themselves from church. It is time to be more selective of individuals in one's presentation of the Gospel.

Secondly, as recipients of God's grace and the joy that we exude, we share the Good news with love. According to Augustine, love for students must be the driving ethos from which salvation history is to be presented. To this end he exclaims: "[T]ake this love, therefore, as the end that is set before you, to which you are to refer all that you say, and, whatever you narrate, narrate it in such a manner that he to whom you are discoursing on hearing may believe, on believing may hope, on hoping may love."[365]

Conversion of heart becomes the foundation from which beginning followers of Christ can then be effectively catechized. The proceeding chapters (5-15) involve personal interviews with candidates in which they are asked their motivation for embracing Christianity. The dialectical format described by Augustine implies an adult learner, based on the specific instructions about answering certain objections in a formal apologetic style. What is also implied in these chapters is that genuine dialogue and intentional relationships should be important in the formation of these candidates. The

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[364] Augustine, *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed*, (Ch. 2:4), trans. S.D.F. Salmond, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, accessed November 26, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1303.htm,.
[365] Augustine, *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed*, 4:8.

concluding chapters (16-30) address necessary tenets of the faith which are then presented. The implications of these three movements from heart (kerygma), intentional relationship to presentation of faith content is important to note for our purposes of understanding the place of catechesis. When this foundation of assent of faith in the kerygma is established, the catechetical part can be more effectively delivered.

In summation, a kerygmatic approach to youth ministry is first and foremost an invitation to an encounter with the Lord. Sharing the components of the kerygma as delineated above lead to the invitation to personal relationship with Christ allows for catechesis to have an effect. Otherwise it is just information. Countless testimonies of young people who say that after their experience of God through a retreat or other experience of encounter, the aspects of the faith they learned in Sunday school made sense. Secondly, the most effective sharing of kerygma is through personal testimony and witness of authentic faith that is experienced through daily living. In this way, an effective presentation of kerygma brings together the propositional and the experiential. We are reminded thirdly by the great Augustine that sharing kerygma must be done with great joy and love that exudes from a life of relationship with God. These are important virtues for the catechist or youth minister to express which will draw students to want to pursue for themselves.

The conclusion of this chapter will feature a proposed format for YCoP groups with training modules for facilitators and peer ministry leaders. While anyone in the parish who has a heart and vision for youth ministry described above can participate as a facilitator of YCoP groups, the ideal candidates should be individuals already engaged in

relational ministry and who are already engaged in the work of discipling others through informal gatherings.

YOUNG COP- Format & Design

1) Opening Prayer

As argued by Canales, developing varied practices of prayer with youth is essential for a discipleship based youth ministry.[366] Prayer experiences with youth should be varied from personal informal to formal and should provide plethora of different prayer experiences from *Lectio Divina* to guided meditation to Ignatian exercises. The Christian tradition enjoys a vast and deep well of prayer traditions and experiences that can be beneficial to youth. The approach to prayer should be varied in that it should provide invitations for young people to lead prayer.

2) Weekly "Check in"

This presents an opportunity for the facilitator or other members of the group to "check in" with each other. It is important for facilitators to be intentional when asking about members, experiences of the past week, family related issues, school, etc. Creating an environment of openness and disclosure of one's personal life is essential to engagement with members of the group and ministry opportunities and follow up during the week.

3) Topic Introduction

Ten to fifteen-minute introduction of the topic to be discussed for that week. It is important for the facilitator to try to incorporate icebreaker activities or questions based on current events, popular culture including movies, music or social media that might be

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[366] Arthur Canales, *Models and Methods for Youth and Young Adult Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 135.

"the buzz" of the week. It takes a great deal of creativity on the part of facilitators to seek to integrate these diverse and often antithetical to the Christian message into the conversation. The ability to integrate these types of topics into conversation accomplishes two very important goals. The first and most important goal is to convey a genuine report with the group you are working with which will serve to further the culture of trust and pastoral listening desired. The second goal is to inform the group of young people that you are versed in the culture and are therefore not trying to purely force the faith tradition. If anything, as Christians who are reading the "sign of the times," one must be seeking to understand how cultural expressions speak to deep seeded desires or symptoms of areas of need.

4) Facilitated Group Discussion

As the heart of the YCoP effective facilitated group discussion that engages in genuine conversation is one which raises questions or claims made from personal experience on the topic, from pervading culture on this topic, and those made by Jesus or the faith tradition related to this topic. Integral to this period of questions is to establish a dynamic of the group discussion is a dialectical or Socratic method of questioning. This method of providing open-ended questioning is not intended to lead to answers or definitive conclusions to these matters but to provide key insights that can be gleaned from the shared meaning and learning generated by the interactions of all members. It is always important to conclude the gathering by asking what one or two key insights participants are taking with them. The facilitator may conclude by suggesting some summary comments about what was discussed and an activity to try in preparation for the next week's topic.

5) Closing Prayer with Individual Intentions

These closing moments of the gathering can be valuable for intercessory prayer for member's needs and action of the part of the group.

Conclusion

The familiar phrase "youth are the future of the church" discloses the well-intended yearning of most pastoral leaders and adult congregants that young people can contribute in significant ways to the church when they reach adulthood. The collective aspiration that youth become the leaders of tomorrow may not become a reality if pastoral agents do not seriously consider how they can contribute to the church of today. Contrary to the popular adage that "children are to be seen and not heard", young people want to be heard and if their voices persist in being among the marginalized, they will surely not be seen in church. That said, there are many reasons to be hopeful about the future of Catholic youth ministry in the United States.

Chapter One sought out to provide some key areas of disaffiliation with the goal of creating a forum for these grievances to be shared in an environment of deep care and listening. The areas of contention where youth feel a disconnection to the church serve as marvelous opportunities for pastoral care and a thoughtful apologetic approach with discipleship as a formidable response to these challenges. A second major conclusion of the first chapter is that the current methods of dissemination of faith formation and youth ministry are not producing the necessary results of making disciples due to the emphasis on the school-instructional model and large youth group formats respectively. What is needed is a shift toward intentional relationships and small group format which allows for a greater sense of belonging and genuine intimacy among peers and other adults.

Chapter Two sought to provide an understanding of discipleship from the perspective of the Scripture, which present the style of disciple making exemplified by Jesus and the early Christian movement as characterized by the Acts of the Apostles. The experience of those who came to be followers of the way experienced three primary movements of kerygma or hearing the proclamation of the basic message of the Gospel, kairos or initial encounter with the Lord, and koinonia which is the desire to live and shared community with other disciples of Jesus and seek to live a life of Christian virtue patterned after the practices of the church. These are therefore necessary components of any effective youth ministry initiative. Thus, a major conclusion of chapter two is the need for a kerygmatic rather than a purely catechetical, school instructional model of faith formation and youth ministry. A second major conclusion which follows from this is that discipleship is an apprenticeship of the life of Christ where the young novice is mentored in the practices of Christian discipleship from other more seasoned youth and other adults.

Chapter Three sought to capture the "mystery of community" by seeking definitions from the social sciences, retrieve a sense of koinonia from the early Jesus movement and delineate characteristics that will lead to a greater experience of belonging by young people. The goal of effective youth ministry is become the traveling companion of youth by creating an atmosphere of welcome, where they can voice concerns and frustrations in a non-judgmental and where they can come to engage the Christian story in a way that intersects their own experience in light of the culture. Using Christ as the model, pastoral agents are to be the unnamed companions along the way as young people seek to articulate God's activity in their lives.

Chapter Four presented the various elements of the CoP model of small Christian community being proposed by Regan as a way to effectively engage, to the extent possible, every and all members of the community in the work of evangelization. The elements of domain, community and practice provide a clear vision and purpose for groups. The Young CoP model that is being designed has been heavily influenced by the evangelizing cells system with emphasis on kerygma, Scripture, and the commitment to share what has been learned with other youth.

Pastoral agents must become exegetes of culture as they seek to read the sign of the times. The message of the Gospel must be translated for the youth of today based on the many influences of culture not in order to compromise its message but in order to fulfill the call to the new evangelization. Youth ministry approaches must capture the elements of the new evangelization: new in its ardor, methods and new in its expression. It is quite fitting to conclude by citing Pope Francis who has been instrumental throughout this work. In a key address as well as the closing mass in celebration of the conclusion of the Synod on Youth the Pope expressed the need to become a synodal church. He declared: "journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his Church in the third millennium." A synodal church is one of reciprocal listening in which each person has something to learn.[367] In the closing Mass of the Synod the pope he concluded asking for forgiveness:

> I would like to say to the young people, in the name of all of us adults: forgive us
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> if often we have not listened to you, if, instead of opening our hearts, we have
>
> filled your ears. As Christ's Church, we want to listen to you with love, certain of

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[367] Edward Pentin, "Draft of Final Document Thrusts Synodality to the Fore," National Catholic Register, October 25, 2018, http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/final-draft-of-document-thrusts-the-issue-of-synodality-to-the-fore.

two things: that your lives are precious in God's eyes, because God is young and loves young people, and that your lives are precious in our eyes too, and indeed necessary for moving forward.[368]

And thanks:

To all of you who have taken part in this "journey together," I say "thank you" for your witness. We have worked in communion, with frankness and the desire to serve God's people. May the Lord bless our steps, so that we can listen to young people, be their neighbours, and bear witness before them to Jesus, the joy of our lives.[369]

On the heels of the synod on youth and the encyclical *Christus Vivit*, the hope is that this dissertation has provided practical tools for implementing a youth ministry approach which will foster a listening, synodal sense of community and welcome which is so desperately needed in many parishes throughout the United States. Like many of the documents produced by the church, if they are not implemented through grassroots, efforts of the people, these will go unnoticed. Parish communities and pastoral agents must also enter into this practice of becoming synodal or listening churches by expressing deep sorrow for the many years young people have gone unnoticed, their incredible gifts and enthusiasm falling by the waste side; and bear witness to the life of discipleship.

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[368] Pope Francis, "Homily during the Mass for the closing of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops," October 28, 2018, http://www.synod2018.va/content/synod2018/en/news/pope-francis-homily-during-the-mass-for-the-closing-of-the-xv-or.html.

[369] Pope Francis, "Homily during the Mass for the closing of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops."

YCoP Training Module for Adult and Peer Leaders

The following are suggested topics to be addressed with foci or questions for discussion. They will be further developed in future resources which will accompany this work. Many of the explanations throughout this dissertation can serve a fodder for many of the topics discussed. The format of these gatherings should be a CoP gathering of 10-12 participants with outside resources facilitating these discussions. If number of parish staff is larger than suggested small group parameters, or if ministry leaders are included, it would be advisable to create two groups and conduct a larger session to share conclusions. These series can be provided over a two year cyclical schedule. Each series should have a follow-up or application of learnings for next steps. It would be important to provide in the opening session to discuss the topics being covered and a summary of each. In keeping with model of theological reflection, conversations and discussions should feature the three voices of personal experience, culture and faith tradition.

TOPICS with Foci & Essential Questions

I. **<u>Pastoral Leadership</u>**

    1. Deep Listening and Pastoral Care

    2. Creating a Holding Environment

    3. Community of mentors

    4. Evaluating our current practices

        a. "Foot washing" as Discipleship Hospitality

        b. Worship

        c. Preaching/ proclamation

d. Faith formation: Kerygma or Catechesis

e. Action- evangelization & social outreach

5. Evaluating our unwritten curriculum

a. Volunteerism or Ministry

b. Committees or Ministries

c. Characteristics of a Youth friendly church

d. Are we making good Christians or Disciples?

e. Teaching religion or faith?

II. **Cultural Exegesis**

1. Conversation between experience, culture and faith tradition

2. Reading the sign of the times (Matt. 16:3). Becoming a student of popular culture. Finding the redeemable in popular culture

3. Understanding the Trends- Profile of Millennial & "Y" Generations

4. The power of personal witness

5. The power of peer ministry

6. Both/and vs. Either/or

III. **Spirituality of Accompaniment**

1. Using the Emmaus Model

2. Four Earmarks of Discipleship

a. Intimacy- creating intentional relationships

i. The ministry of presence

ii. Customizing your relationship with each disciple

b. Invitation to Encounter-

<div style="margin-left:2em;">

    i.   Sharing Kerygma through personal witness

    ii.   Inviting disciples to profession of faith, prayer of commitment

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  c. Mutual accountability- Care for personal and spiritual wellbeing

  d. Creating Koinonia- community through sharing life together

  e. Plugging into the Church community

IV.   <u>**Communities of Practice**</u>

1. Domain- What is the purpose of our gathering?

2. Community- Who are we and what do we care about? Are all voices counted and heard? Fostering mutual accountability.

3. Practice- What is our story, individually and collectively? How have we experienced the Christian story intersecting with ours? What do we do that identifies who we are?

4. Engagement- What is our shared meaning?

5. Imagination- Who am I now? What has God called me to be? How can this community assist me in reaching my full potential as a child of God and disciple of Jesus?

6. Alignment- In what ways am I connected to this group? How is my identity formed by this community?

7. Emmaus Model- Using the Whitehead Method

    a. Attending- Developing deep listening; hearing the concerns of youth while suspending judgment.

    b. Asserting- Embracing the message of the Christian tradition as reading the sign of the times.

C. Pastoral Response- What now? Developing conclusions based on areas of pastoral concern and the need for action.

YCoP Modules for Teens/ Emerging Adults

I. <u>Sharing Kerygma</u>

1) God's kingdom is here. What does the experience of the Kingdom of God look like to young people?

2) Jesus is the Christ. Discussion of popular perceptions of Jesus in society (Matt.16:13) and the importance of personal profession of faith (Matt. 16:15). Personal witness of youth or young adult here is essential.

3) He died for our sins. What are the implications of Christ death in the lives of Christians? What does Jesus death mean to me? How might the celebration of the Lenten season serve to make relevant the suffering of youth today?

4) He was resurrected. With an apologetic emphasis, the arguments for understanding the resurrection can be presented featuring the purpose of the Easter season. How can a more robust understanding of Easter provide hope to young people who struggle with depression and suicidal ideations?

5) Repent of sin. A catechetical and apologetic presentation on sin is important without a tone of condemnation or judgment.

6) Believe in the Gospel. The important distinction between belief and faith as set one's life upon, not just believing a series of propositions. Moving from a propositional faith to a proclamational faith—from an emphasis on the content to character based on personal relationship.

7) Follow Jesus. What does it mean to be a discipleship of Jesus in today's society? The key phrases: *deny yourself*, *take up your cross*, and *follow me* are known as

gospel imperatives of discipleship found in Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23. How would these imperative look to a modern youth mindset in light of the often self-absorbed culture they are immersed in today?

II. **Discipleship**

1. Deny- (Mark 8:34; Matt.10:38; Luke 14:27) How do young people learn to deny themselves in a culture of self-gratification and pleasure on demand?

2. Take up your cross- The counter-cultural value of sacrifice for the good of others. The value of authentic friendship/companionship as a reflection of agapic love. From empathy to compassion.

3. Follow- The challenge of following Jesus in today's society. Personal witness

4. Counting the Cost- (Luke 14:25-33)

5. Instructions for New Disciples- Part 1- (Matt. 10:5-14)

    a. Who are the lost sheep of today? (v.5-6)

    b. Kerygma- The Kingdom of God is among you (v.7)

    c. Youth practices of healing, raising the dead, cleansing, and exorcising (v.8)

    d. Discipleship living- understanding grace (v.8), keeping it simple (v.9), inviting not pushing (v.11-14),

6. Instructions for New Disciples- Part 2- (Matt. 10:16-42) - Persecutions and Rewards of those who follow. (See chapter two for key topics)

7. Go- (Matt. 28:19) What does it mean to make disciples today?

    a. The practices of discipleship: 1) exorcising and healing, 2) table fellowship, 3) forgiveness of sins, and 4) teaching.

    b. "Baptizing"- The importance of sacramental life.

8. Discipleship hospitality

III. <u>Virtue Formation</u>

1. Prudence- The challenge of making good decisions in a relativistic society?

2. Temperance- The challenge of developing virtues of self -control and acts of self-denial in a culture which promotes self-indulgence?

3. Justice- Giving to God & Neighbor what is due. The challenge of being fair even when treated unfairly.

4. Fortitude- Peer pressure: The challenge of doing what is right even if no one else is doing it.

5. Faith- Not just wishful thinking and acting based on what we believe.

6. Hope- The challenge of being hopeful in light of rampant violence, Stoneman Douglas, depression and suicide.

7. Love- The challenge of agapic love.

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