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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

AN EXPLORATION OF ADOLESCENT SPIRITUALITY IN A SINGLE-GENDER
URBAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Catholic Educational Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Elizabeth E. O'Donnell, O.P.
San Francisco
December 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

An Exploration of Adolescent Spirituality in a Single-Gender Urban Catholic High
School: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Catholic secondary teachers are called to educate students in body, mind, and spirit; however, there is little to guide them in how to educate students spiritually. Past research in Catholic schools has addressed academics, community capital, and religious practices of students, but has neglected to evaluate the school's performance in fostering students' spiritual growth.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, the social sciences have denounced human spirituality as an area worthy of scholarly research. While this is changing, particularly in the area of adult spirituality, there remains a limited amount of scholarly literature available on the topic of childhood or adolescent spirituality.

The problem addressed in this study was the insufficient clarity on "how" to teach or to address the spiritual growth of students: a pedagogical concern. This study explored the lived experiences of spirituality among junior and senior-level urban high school students to learn the nature, meaning and essence of spirituality in the lives of adolescent girls. In addition, this study critiqued the findings to ascertain larger implications related to Catholic secondary school teaching pedagogy.

A phenomenological qualitative method was employed to determine students' perceptions and experiences of spirituality. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with eight female participants in a single-gender urban Catholic high school. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to reveal the childhood context for students' spiritual

awareness and development, their current perceptions and experiences of spirituality, and students' responses on how their attendance in a Catholic high school had either nurtured or not nurtured their spiritual growth. Individual narratives portrayed the findings.

Results revealed students' definitions of spirituality that included characteristics such as healthy relationships with God and others, awareness of one's interior life, authentic living, moral guidance, and committed service to others.

Conclusions reflected that students found that courses in social justice and opportunities for community service nurtured their spiritual growth. Students articulated a need for secondary educators to grow in their ability to deal with racial issues and, in order to provide credible modeling for students, that teachers develop their own healthy spiritualities. Finally, students desired improved mutually open and compassionate relationships with teachers.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of Catholic education is the formation of the whole child: spirit, mind, and body (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977; Paul VI, 1965; Pius XI, 1929; United States Catholic Conference of Bishops [USCCB], 1995). In fact, a distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic secondary school is that teachers are called to bring the light of faith into every curricular area (CCE, 1988; Pius XI, 1929). In their statement on adolescent catechesis, *Renewing the Vision* (USCCB, 1997), the United States bishops indicated the spiritual development of youth into full maturity as a primary goal for teachers and catechists in parishes and Catholic high schools. While spiritual development is named as one of the most significant goals, little explanation is given as to how educators of adolescents are to foster or to assess this development.

Parents are the primary educators of children (Pius XI, 1929). The Catholic school supports parents in this role and seeks to foster the holistic growth of youth for the sake of society, with particular concern for their moral and spiritual formation, as well as their intellectual and physical development (USCCB, 1995). Within the Catholic school, it is the teachers who carry the weight of this significant responsibility and who have the most profound formative impact on students (Paul VI, 1965).

In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift in the demographic makeup of Catholic school teachers. This shift has seriously affected the qualifications of educators for teaching religion among students. Previously, women and men religious who made up the majority of Catholic school educators came to classrooms with the benefit of

theological and religious training received from the formation provided in their religious communities. Since Vatican II, significantly fewer women and men have entered religious congregations across the nation, thus impacting Catholic school staffing. In 1960, lay faculty consisted of 26% of all staffing and, in 2008, rose to 96% (McDonald & Schultz, 2009).

The majority of lay members lack the theological and religious training which provides both a professional competency and sense of self-efficacy to teach religious studies in the manner identified by Church documents (Cook & Hudson, 2006; Schaub, 2000). While the lack of theological and religious training does not imply an inability to foster spirituality in students within a Catholic school, Murphy (2005) pointed out that in past years, the spiritual charisms of religious congregations influenced both lay faculty and students by the presence of men and women religious within the schools by the particular charisms of the various religious congregations. Murphy explained,

For most of the last 150 years...the spirituality that has informed and inspired Catholic education and Catholic educators has flowed from the lived experience, the various charisms and spiritual roots of the religious communities that were the backbone and the inspiration for Catholic education...These religious communities gave us a priceless gift—a gift which only recently we have come to recognize and appreciate. The spirituality of Catholic education was a result and offshoot of the spiritualities of these various religious communities. Lay teachers were supposed to piggyback, to benefit from the spill-over of the spirituality that developed within and inspired the religious communities whose members taught in Catholic schools. (pp. 6-7)

Currently, lay educators are largely responsible for Catholic education in the classroom and for the administration and policy formation in local sites and diocesan levels. These educators are now called on to accomplish the spiritual formation of students in the same way as the religious men and women did, yet, without the benefit of the spiritual traditions which imbued and inspired members of various religious

congregations in the past (Murphy, 2005). According to Murphy, many lay “Catholic educators have been grappling as never before” (p. 8) with the question of how to bring a spirituality, appropriate to lay life, to their work in the classroom as educators.

In addition, 27% of the laity serving in Catholic secondary schools in western states has identified themselves as non-Catholic (MacDonald & Schultz, 2009). Of those self-identified as Catholic, those who are not practicing their faith may diminish the capacity for impact on the religious or spiritual formation of students in Catholic secondary schools.

Another demographic shift has been in process in Catholic schools in recent years reflecting a change in students’ religious backgrounds. Catholic schools were founded in the United States during the 19th century in an effort to resist the Protestant influence found in the public or “common” schools (McDonald & Schultz, 2009). The establishment of Catholic elementary and secondary schools provided a separate school system from the state-provided public schools for parents to choose for their children’s attendance. In addition, this system provided a structural system to support parents in their role of educating children in the Catholic faith. While never realized, the United States’ bishops in their Baltimore Council of 1884 mandated that all Catholic children were to attend a Catholic school or to receive formalized religious instruction in some way (McDonald & Schultz, 2009).

From these early beginnings, we can conclude that student enrollment in Catholic schools formerly consisted primarily of an all-Catholic population. In the 2008-2009 school year, national enrollment in Catholic schools reported a 14.9% non-Catholic population (McDonald & Schultz, 2009). Catholic schools located in the western states

reflected a 15.7% non-Catholic enrollment, with a 25% non-Catholic population in secondary schools (McDonald & Schultz).

While Catholic schools today consist of mixed religious backgrounds among teachers and students, the role and purpose of the Catholic school has not changed. The educational philosophy of the Catholic school remains rooted in the importance of educating the whole child—spirit, mind, and body—and cannot be separated from its essential identity. Despite its changing demographics, educators' assessment of the school's efficacy must continue to look to the school's purpose to create the necessary tools for measurement and evaluation.

Admittedly, assessment of some of these goals is more readily conceived of than others. In particular, making a distinction between the religious instruction and the spiritual development of students is a murky task, but a necessary one for today's educators, Catholic and non-Catholic, faced with a growing population of mixed religious backgrounds. For the sake of this current discussion, let us consider the concept "religious education" as the academic expression of the school's purpose. The spiritual development of students refers to a capacity for growth found in every human being and will be considered as a non-academic goal of the school's mission (CCE, 1988). We will return to a fuller discussion of the distinctive characteristics between the two later in this dissertation.

Research, therefore, provides a means for measuring the degree to which we, as Catholic educators, are reaching our goals. Although the research in Catholic education has measured the positive effects of academic instruction (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Cook & Hudson, 2006; Greeley, 2002), and of the community or social capital of the

school (Hudson, 2006), researchers have neglected assessment of the school's efforts to educate students spiritually. Past research has examined the religious consequences of a Catholic education, that is, whether a Catholic education makes "better" Catholics and whether Catholic education is a predictor of behavior in a graduate's adult life (Greeley, McCready, & McCourt, 1976; Greeley & Rossi, 1966). However, research in Catholic education has yet to explore in depth the effects of religious instruction in Catholic secondary school students, and more specifically, the degree of spiritual development effected in youth through the overall curricular program (Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2001; Kaster, 2005). Meegan, Carroll, and Ciriello (2002) found the lack of research on religious outcomes in Catholic schools in the past decade a major concern.

Existing research focused on religious instruction has quantitatively measured effects by external behaviors of students, that is, Mass attendance and religious practices (Hudson, 2006; Schneider, Rice, & Hoogstra, 2004), but external behaviors do not indicate integration of tenets of faith nor the degree to which the school has effected transformation in students' spiritual and personal maturity. There is little research that reveals how instruction affects the spiritual development of students (Frey, Pedrotti, Edwards, & McDermott, 2004).

While former quantitative studies reflect the academic efforts of schools, they provide an isolated picture and may be missing significant insight into students' experiences (Lawson, 2006). In a recent article assessing the lack of research literature available to religious educators, Lawson proposed a four-faceted need for research: theological, historical, philosophical, and empirical. Lawson noted, "Much more needs to be done for us to begin to understand how God works in the lives of children and how we

can encourage a healthy spiritual walk with God” (p. 161).

As distinguished from research in Catholic education, research in the social sciences has contributed greatly to the understanding of human growth and learning during the past century especially in the developmental psychological areas of cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development (Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1950). However, social science research has largely marginalized the area of spirituality and spiritual development during the past century for several reasons, but mostly due to the emphasis placed on the rational dimension of academics and the effects of secularization in society (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Ebaugh, 2006; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006).

The 1960s witnessed the reemergence of the scientific study of religion primarily in the field of psychology; however, this subfield of psychology still struggles with the concept of spirituality (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). Currently, research in the social sciences focusing on spiritual development and its benefits in adults (Bridges & Moore, 2002) and in higher education settings (Estanek, 2006; Tisdell, 2000, 2007) has grown; yet, studies exploring the spiritual development in children and adolescents remain sparse (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Bridges & Moore; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002).

A recent study of adolescents, the *National Study of Youth and Religion* [NSYR] (Smith & Denton, 2005) conducted from 2001 to 2005 by the Search Institute, sought to investigate the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of 3,290 random adolescents in the United States. Self-described as “largest, most comprehensive and detailed study of American teenage religion and spirituality conducted to date” (p. 7),

the study included both quantitative survey data and qualitative in-depth personal interviews of 267 teens in 45 states. The interviews sought to capture a broad range of difference among informants in religion, age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, rural-suburban-urban residence, region of the country, and preferred language spoken between English or Spanish.

Based on survey data and interviews, the study concluded that

...compared both to official Catholic norms of faithfulness and to other types of Christian teens in the United States, contemporary U.S. Catholic teens are faring rather badly. On most measures of religious faith, belief, experience, and practice, Catholic teens as a whole show up as fairly weak. (p. 216)

The study found a disconcerting gap between the self-professed beliefs of students connected to the Catholic community through school or parish programs and the rate of engagement in risk behaviors (McCorquodale, Shepp, & Sterten, 2004). Findings in the NSYR related to Catholic youth revealed the following: that those who attended Mass less frequently had been physically involved with more people and reported getting drunk more often (p. 61); that Catholic school students reported a higher frequency of regular alcohol use while showing a lower rate of engagement in sexual intercourse than Catholic youth who did not attend Catholic schools; that the rate of engagement in sexual activity was very alarming for both junior high and high school students among all Catholic youth; and, finally, that over one third of all Catholic youth (37%) “sometimes, usually, or always feel sad or depressed” (p. 61).

The NSYR recommended that the pastoral needs of Catholic young people struggling with important issues affecting their personal and spiritual well-being challenge the faith community to recognize, to acknowledge, and to respond for the benefit of the youth. This study supports the need for renewed measures and methods in

both parishes and Catholic high schools among Catholic educators and catechists in their work to foster the spiritual and religious development of the adolescent students being served.

Teachers in Catholic secondary schools are responsible for educating the whole student across the curriculum ([Sacred] Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982), yet they lack the data necessary to guide their methods in order to address the whole student. Most importantly, teachers lack empirical data which assesses the impact of their methods and instruction in the spiritual development of their students.

Purpose of Study

The problem addressed in this study was the insufficient clarity on “how” to teach or to address the spiritual growth of students. This has been a pedagogical concern. While there is often a co-mingling between the terms religion and spirituality, this study explored the lived experiences of spirituality among junior and senior-level urban high school students to learn the nature, meaning and essence of spirituality in the lives of these adolescent girls. In addition, this study critiqued the findings to ascertain larger implications related to Catholic secondary school teaching pedagogy. While an operational definition for spirituality will be provided later in this document, this study intended to reveal those understandings and definitions held by the adolescent girls who were participants.

Myriads of definitions of spirituality may be found from a variety of scholarly domains (Underwood, 2006), not least of which from Catholic theological discourse. (Underwood located over 200 definitions for the term while conducting her research.) This study was posed from the domain of the social sciences, which assumes spirituality

as a component of human development and which supports the philosophical framework upon which the study's purpose was pursued.

Background and Need

Adolescence is a time of multiple dimensions of change occurring in individuals between childhood and adulthood. These various strands of developmental change, physical and biological, cognitive, social and emotional, and moral, are acting separately within the adolescent, as if each was a dancer on a stage, going at one's own pace and rhythm. While a conceptualization of adolescence and its characteristic multi-dimensional development may lead one to believe that the timeline for onset and conclusion of these various strands of change would remain constant over generations, that is not the case.

Current research in neurobiology has reported significant new findings in the disparate timelines of developmental strands with particular ramifications for adolescent girls (Dahl, 2004). These new findings point to an even greater need for social systems, such as education, to strengthen support networks for the safety of an ever-increasing risk factor related to the lives of our youth. This section will present this data in order to display the heightened need for high school students to have stronger social support systems. The discussion will provide background and need for the growing importance of a program which addresses the spiritual development of youth in our Catholic secondary schools as an important component of the support we offer to youth.

Spirituality is a very broad topic with deep historical roots both within the Catholic tradition and in the secular world. In order to approach this study with realistic expectations for its completion, clear parameters must be drawn to establish the context

in which spiritual growth will be explored.

To make these distinctions, let us first consider that there is a plethora of literature available on this topic springing from a variety of sources. Within this body of literature, two significant fundamental approaches exist. The first perspective holds that spirituality is an outgrowth or component of the broader foundation of religion. Much literature on spirituality and various spiritual charisms found in the domain of Catholic theology may fall into this category (Sheldrake, 1995). Another perspective, found within the social sciences literature, focuses on spirituality as a foundation for the study of human development which may be expressed in a variety of external modes, one of which is organized religion (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). Both of these perspectives exist in society in various ways.

In order to present the background for this study, current cultural viewpoints on the topic of spirituality will be discussed. A recent surge in popularity of spirituality within secular culture will provide the basis for this discussion and will suggest four specific factors to support the need for this study.

First, a discussion of the current trend in our world of renewed hunger for spirituality is explored to illuminate the social milieu in which our students live. Secondly, the current state of empirical study on spirituality is presented which both provides tools for the study and points to the need for additional research on this topic. Thirdly, the significance of religiosity and spirituality in the lives of adolescents is discussed, as well as the prevailing gaps in the literature on spirituality and adolescents. Finally, the context of spiritual development within the mission of the Catholic school is defined as the foundation for the study of spiritual development in an all-girls urban

Catholic high school.

There are several challenges to a study of this nature which have already revealed themselves in the previous pages: first, that of distinguishing between semantically similar terms, such as religion, religiosity, religious, and religiousness. In the preparation of this document, many authors have been found to use these terms interchangeably. For the sake of clarity, use of these terms within this document should be understood synonymously. Additionally, while religiosity is a very complex concept (Holdcroft, 2006), employment of these various terms in this text will refer to the “engagement with an organized faith tradition” (King & Boyatzis, 2004).

A second challenge related to a study of the topic of spirituality is the lack of clear distinction between the terms religion and spirituality. Indeed, each is a multifaceted, complicated construct that involves various layers and levels of human behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and practices and levels of awareness (Hill et al., 2000; Holdcroft, 2006; King & Boyatzis, 2004). A further discussion of this reality will be addressed in Chapter II. However, for the sake of the present discussion, an operational definition is offered from the body of social science literature. *Spirituality* refers to

a universal human capacity or a quality of a person’s character, personality, or disposition with tendencies toward transcendence or connectedness beyond the self. It is often related to a manner of living that is carried out with a deep awareness of self, others and the divine. (John E. Fetzer Institute, 1999, p. 2)

A further challenge is that of the need for clarification between the terms spirituality and spiritual growth and development. Considered a relatively “new line of theory and research” in the social sciences, Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, and Wagner (2006) affirmed the significance of a developmental view of spiritual growth:

This work suggests that there is a core and universal dynamic in human

development that deserves to be moved to center stage in the developmental sciences, along-side and integrated with other well-known streams of development: cognitive, social, emotional, and moral. The name commonly given to this dimension is spiritual development. And it is hypothesized to be a developmental wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, connectedness to others and the sacred, purpose, and contributions, each and all of which can be addressed by religion or other systems of ideas and belief. (p. 5)

Spiritual development is thus defined from a perspective of “the person as actively constructing a view of the self-in-context” (p. 5) and more broadly:

Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental “engine” that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs and practices. (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003, pp. 205-206)

These challenges are compounded when the terms religion, religiosity, religious, and religiousness are aligned with the concepts of spirituality and spiritual growth in the context of a discussion about religion or religious education. When a clear distinction has not been provided by the author of a particular text, the overlapping nature of the two closely related constructs leads to further confusion. This was evidenced in the NYSR study (Smith & Denton, 2005) which defined its area of interest in the lives of adolescents to be “their religious and spiritual beliefs, commitments, practices, experiences, and desires” (p. 4). In this case, the terms were intermingled in such a way as to suggest a synonymous relationship between religion and spirituality. In other sources, the title of a study may contain both terms, religion and spirituality; however, the concept of spirituality was found to be subsumed into a discussion of religion and was rarely mentioned again beyond the title (for example, Bridges & Moore, 2002). With these comments in mind, the text that follows intends to bring greater focus for the reader on particular issues related to both adolescence and spirituality that provide the

background and need for this study.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence has been defined as “the developmental period...during which the body and brain emerge from an immature state to adulthood” (Kelley, Schochet, & Landry, 2004, p. 27). This simple statement is quite deceiving, as it involves a myriad of systems, processes, and events within a person journeying through this life period. However, the primary developmental task of adolescence is the development of identity (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968). A part of that identity may be one’s spiritual identity-seeking.

In his work on psycho-social human development, Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968) theorized that the primary task of the adolescent period is the cultivation of one’s identity. “The sense of ego identity...is the accrued confidence that one’s ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity...is matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (Erikson, 1959, p. 89). This task of searching for a clearer sense of identity is no small chore. Indeed, it involves every aspect of the adolescent’s social and emotional life and must be addressed among physical and hormonal changes already impacting one’s relationship with self and others as the body is transformed both internally and externally.

Erikson (1959) shed light into the breadth and depth of issues affected during this challenging time:

It is difficult to be tolerant if deep down you are not quite sure that you are a man (or woman), that you will ever grow together again and be attractive, that you will be able to master your drives, that you really know who you are, that you know what you want to be, that you know what you look like to others, and that you will know how to make the right decisions without once for all, committing yourself to the wrong friend, sexual partner, leader, career. (p. 93)

Successful achievement of the discovery of one's identity occurs through the passage of crises in which intense questioning and inner searching about oneself produces enormous benefits for the adolescent in the form of heightened self-esteem. Erikson explained, "Self-esteem, confirmed at the end of each major crisis, grows to be a conviction that one is learning effective steps toward a tangible future, that one is developing a defined personality within a social reality which one understands" (p. 89). Further, Erikson intended several connotations to the term "identity," denoting the broad span across which individuals must come to understand themselves both individually and within communal contexts:

...by approaching it from a variety of different angles—biographic, pathographic, and theoretical; and by letting the term identity speak to itself in a number of connotations. At one time, then it will appear to refer to a conscious sense of *individual identity*; at another to an unconscious striving for a *continuity of personal character*; at a third, as a criterion for the silent doings of *ego synthesis*; and finally, as a maintenance of an inner *solidarity* with a group's ideals and identity. (p. 100)

Erikson (1959, 1963, 1968) theorized that identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence during one's lifespan; yet, it is the primary task of this transitional period. Erikson clarified that adolescence, as the "stage of an overt identity crisis" (1959, p. 118), is "a normal phase of increased conflict characterized by a seeming fluctuation in ego strength, and yet also by a high growth potential" (1959, p. 116).

Marcia (1980) affirmed Erikson's work and asserted that "identity refers to an existential position, to an inner organization of needs, abilities, and self-perceptions as well as to a socio-political stance" (p. 159). Marcia suggested an alternate way of viewing the construction of identity as

A self-structure—an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives,

abilities, beliefs and individual history. The better developed this structure is, the more aware individuals appear to be of their own uniqueness and similarity to others and of their own strengths and weaknesses in making their way in the world. (p. 159)

Marcia (1980) developed statuses of identity resolution intended as methodological tools for the further empirical study of Erikson's theory, which later became associated with identity theory (Marcia). The modes of identity resolution address two factors: first, the degree to which one may be in a decision-making process or crisis regarding his or her identity, and secondly, the extent to which one has made a personal commitment in the areas of occupation and ideology (p. 161).

Marcia (1980) distinguished four modes within the process of identity clarification: (1) *Identity Achievement* refers to those who have experienced a decision-making period and are pursuing self-chosen occupational and ideological goals (p. 161); (2) *Identity Foreclosure* refers to those who are committed to occupational and ideological positions, but who are committed to roles that have been parentally chosen rather than self-chosen. These individuals show little or no evidence of a "crisis" (p. 161); (3) *Identity Diffusion* refers to those who have no clear sense of self identity either regarding occupation or ideological viewpoint whether or not they have previously experienced a decision-making period; and (4) *Identity Moratorium* refers to those who are in the midst of a vocational or ideological struggle; "they are *in* an identity crisis" (p. 161). Marcia proposed several advantages to these identity statuses stating that they provide for a greater variety of styles in individuals who are dealing with the struggles of identity crises. Further, these styles allow for both healthy and pathological aspects of the identity formation task, and by their relative objectivity, they allow for a reasonable degree of "interobserver reliability" (pp. 161-162).

As an individual emerges from childhood, he or she is awakening from the foreclosed identity state which has been directed by parents and other significant adults. This may be especially true of the child's experience of religion fostered by adult influences in his or her life. Adolescence provides the opportunity for identity achievement through reflection and self-searching including the search for meaning within religion. Adolescence stimulates a period of questioning about one's religious identity of the past. This reality is not only a healthy aspect of adolescent growth, but is also one that should be capitalized on by Catholic educators to encourage exploration and heightened learning about religion and spirituality.

Cognitive and Social Development

In an elaborate orchestration of developmental elements, what makes this intense identity formation process possible at this stage in the individual's life is the advancing cognitive powers which coincide with this period. Piaget found that with adolescence comes the ability to perceive reality with the benefit of abstract thinking (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). In addition, the adolescent's affect is transformed by this ability to go beyond the concrete. Piaget and Inhelder asserted that the affective, social and cognitive aspects of one's behavior are inseparable and, therefore, must be considered together.

With only these psycho-social tasks taking place within the adolescent, there is already reason for excitement about the awakening person within each adolescent. However, this work cannot take place without developing cognitive structures that enable this significant work of identity clarification. We turn now to the cognitive developmental process, a separate but imperative dance of growth and change.

Cognitive and affective development surge forth in a seemingly synchronous

manner within the context of the psycho-social identity clarification process, as the former provides the necessary components for this inner reflection. Piaget and Inhelder (1969) observed advanced cognitive capabilities in the maturing adolescent mind and identified this new level as formal operational thought. Envisioned as a distinctively newly created cognitive structure, formal operational thought releases a broad range of new potentiality for abstract thinking, including a greater facility for problem solving, for idealism, for synthesizing, and for affective processing (Piaget & Inhelder). This ability is critical for the adolescent's growth toward adulthood supporting the decision-making and learning necessary for identity clarification, social relationships, and discerning one's place in the world.

As critical as the cognitive development is for the adolescent's identity formation task, so is the development of one's affective ability (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). The affect is an essential component of self-knowledge for the construction of identity and relationships. Stressing the equal importance of the two, Piaget and Inhelder remarked "The change of perspective is as important for affective as for cognitive, for the world of values also can remain bound by concrete and perceptible reality, or it can encompass many interpersonal and social possibilities" (p. 149). They further stressed that the affective, social and cognitive aspects of an individual's behavior are inseparable and, therefore, must be considered together. Piaget and Inhelder underscored the importance of understanding an intertwined relationship between cognitive and affective aspects. "Affectivity constitutes the energetics of behavior patterns, whose structures correspond to cognitive functions, and even though the energetics may not explain the structuration or the structuration the energetics, neither one can function without the other" (p. 114).

The adolescent's transformed perspective ushers her or him into adulthood more than the bio-physical changes brought on by puberty. Piaget and Inhelder (1969) viewed this transformation as a liberation from the confining nature of the prior concrete cognitive functions of childhood and emphasized this dual transformation as far more important to the adolescent's progression into adulthood than the mere physical changes brought on by puberty.

Adolescence (15-18) is the age of the individual's introduction into adult society much more than it is the age of puberty. Preadolescence is characterized both by an acceleration of physiological and somatic growth and by the opening up of new possibilities for which the subject is preparing himself [*sic*] for he can anticipate them by means of the deductive capabilities he [*sic*] has acquired.

Each new mental structure, by integrating the preceding ones, succeeds both in partly liberating the individual from his [*sic*] past and in inaugurating new activities which at the formal operatory level are mainly oriented toward the future. (pp. 149-150)

The "new activities" referred to above by Piaget and Inhelder (1969) may provide a key to adolescent spiritual development as the enhanced horizon of affect and cognition may be the very stage upon which adolescent spirituality is built. Piaget and Inhelder referred to the "moral autonomy which emerges on the interpersonal level...acquires with formal thought, an added dimension in the application of ideal or supra-individual values" (p. 150). The adolescent may now embrace values and decisions regarding social concepts of justice, aesthetics or other ideals through a decision-making process independent of adult control. While this provides the means for future career-seeking opportunities, the adolescent's deepened receptiveness to new values creates the potential for greater integration of spiritual values. The inseparable and irreducible nature of the adolescent's cognition and affect work together in support of the adolescent's primary task of identity formation which will include in its process the embrace of new

understandings and values for self and for relationships with others around them. Piaget and Inhelder asserted this concept:

The formation of personality is dominated by the search for coherence and an organization of values that will prevent internal conflicts... Even if we disregard the function of the moral sentiments, with their normative equilibrium, it is impossible to interpret the development of affective life and of motivations without stressing the all-important role of self-regulations. (pp. 158-159)

It is helpful to realize the importance of Piaget and Inhelder's work as these newly enhanced cognitive and affective abilities provide the potential and support for the adolescent mind to grow in spirituality and spiritual values.

Social Cognition and Spiritual Characteristics

Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) defined spiritual development as “the person as actively constructing a view of the self-in-context” (p. 5). This definition appears to have much crossover into the realm of social cognition. For this reason, further examination of this concept may be helpful. Expanding on Piaget's concept of social cognition, Tagiuri (1969) articulated a view of the major classes of objects and events towards which social cognitions are directed:

The observations or inferences we make are principally about intentions, attitudes, emotions, ideas, abilities, purposes, traits, thoughts, perceptions memories— events that are *inside* the person and strictly psychological. Similarly, we attend to certain psychological qualities of relationships *between* persons, such as friendship, love, power, and influence. We attribute to a person properties of *consciousness* and *self-determination*, and the capacity for *representation of his* [*sic*]environment, which in turn mediates his [*sic*] actions. (p. 396)

Flavell (1977) asserted that the focus of social cognition is humans and human affairs (p. 119). Flavell further stated, “Numerous motives, ranging from self-preservation to idle curiosity, must continually impel people the world over to make sense out of themselves, other people, interpersonal relationships, social customs and

institutions, and other interesting objects of thought within the social world” (pp. 118-119). Flavell identified three preconditions for social cognition: (1) *Existence* refers to a person’s basic knowledge that a particular fact or phenomenon of the social world exists as one of life’s possibilities; (2) *Need* refers to the disposition or sensed need to attempt an act of social cognition, such as identifying a feeling, desire, or value; and (3) *Inference* concerns the skill or capacity to carry off a given form of social thinking successfully (pp. 120-121).

Several specific topics of interest have been proposed for social cognition (Flavell, 1977): perception, feelings, thoughts, intentions, personality and self (pp. 125-139). The realization of one’s self identity through means of social cognition has been further expanded to include one’s sense of humanity, of sexuality, of individuality, and of continuity (Guardo & Bohan, 1971). The factors and broadened conceptualization of the affective or social cognitive discussed here appear to share many attributes with spiritual development. New research on adolescent brain development may offer further insight into these factors.

Adolescent Brain Development

In 2004, the New York Academy of Sciences’ Symposium focused on Adolescent Brain Development. The goals of the symposium were: (1) to gain greater understanding of the development of the adolescent brain and (2) to bring together researchers from a wide range of backgrounds and scientific disciplines “in order to create a broader interdisciplinary dialogue” (p. 1).

In his keynote address at the Symposium, Dahl (2004) sketched a conceptual framework for adolescence that emphasized how the very nature of this developmental

transition requires an interdisciplinary approach. He further underscored how a set of neurobehavioral changes at puberty represent *part* [author's emphasis] of a much larger set of maturational changes in adolescence, and how these require an approach that focuses on brain/behavioral/social-context *interactions* [author's emphasis] during this important maturation period.

Dahl (2004) cautioned that the “problems affecting adolescents in our society are both enormous and complex” (p. 2). However, he was optimistic about the contributions and advances of both current and future research for the sake of our youth (p. 2). Dahl explicated,

These studies are beginning to provide new insights about adolescence as a unique developmental period. These include normal developmental studies of cognitive, emotional, and social maturation in adolescence; clinical research focusing on the development of a broad range of behavioral, emotional, and substance abuse problems in adolescence; and advances in using animal models to understand both neural and behavioral aspects of development during puberty and adolescence. (p. 2)

He further postulated that one of the key issues for the field of adolescent development is that

Stronger scientific bridges need to be built across disciplines that will allow previously separate bodies of knowledge to be linked and more effectively applied to the large-scale problems affecting youth. It is essential, we believe, not only to deepen our understanding of specific neurobiological changes during adolescent development, but also to broaden our knowledge of how behavioral, familial, and social influences *interact*, in multifaceted ways, with the development of the biological systems of interest. (Dahl, 2004, pp.1-2)

While the effects of spirituality and religiousness are difficult to measure empirically, research is beginning to reveal their benefits in the lives of youth (Bridges & Moore, 2002). The definition of spiritual development presented earlier in this section articulated a conceptual perspective of spirituality as an integral component to human

maturity, through the “process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence” (Benson et al., 2003). Understanding the spiritual nature of adolescents is a crucial component in a multi-dimensional approach to understanding adolescent development and, therefore, to providing support to the adolescent youth that we serve in our schools. A study that explores the spiritual lives of adolescent females may further provide valuable insights to scientists regarding the integration of such neurobiological changes within our youth.

The Health Paradox of Adolescence

Dahl (2004) posited that adolescence presents a striking paradox with respect to overall health statistics. While this developmental period manifests vigorous increases in physical and mental capabilities, Dahl reported that overall morbidity and mortality rates *increase* [author’s emphasis] 200% over the same interval of time. “By adolescence, individuals have matured beyond the frailties of childhood, but have not yet begun any of the declines of aging...In almost every measurable domain, this is a *developmental period of strength and resilience*” (p. 3).

Despite the robust changes in stature and physical strength, reaction time and reasoning abilities, enhanced immune functions and temperateness to external factors, rates for death and disability among adolescents are not the result of illness, but rather, are related to “*difficulties in the control of behavior and emotion*” (Dahl, 2004, p. 3). These high morbidity rates are due to risk-taking behaviors of adolescents, such as accidents, suicide, homicide, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, violence, reckless behaviors, eating disorders, and health problems related to risky sexual behaviors. Dahl noted that “adolescence has become strongly associated with an increase in risk-taking,

sensation-seeking, and reckless behavior” (p. 3).

Highlighting a second level of paradox occurring in adolescence, Dahl (2004) pointed out that, due to enhanced cognitive capabilities, adolescents have developed better reasoning capabilities and decision making skills than they possessed during childhood and that they are able to perform very close to adult levels in their cognitive functioning, including the ability to assess the consequences of risky behavior. However, despite these cognitive improvements, “adolescents appear to be more prone to erratic and...*emotionally influenced* behavior—which can lead to periodic disregard for the risks and consequences” (p. 3). For these reasons, Dahl underscored the importance of further research,

These striking paradoxes—high rates of morbidity and mortality despite robust physical health, and increasing rates of reckless behavior despite improved capacities for decision making—provide part of the framework regarding the importance of research into the neurobehavioral underpinnings of these developmental changes. Compelling scientific questions lurk within these mysteries and seeming contradictions. Achieving a deeper understanding of adolescent neurobehavioral development can, in the long run, contribute to the pragmatic goals of early intervention to address these large-scale problems. (pp. 3-4)

Mindful of the advanced cognitive abilities emerging during adolescence, one can imagine the potential pleasure a secondary educator might foresee from the experience of teaching students with increasing abilities to grasp content. However, considering the under-developed abilities for making wise choices and for dealing with emotions, it should be clear how crucially important it is for educators to realize that their job does not only entail instruction of their students’ intellect. A teacher will only be living the truest call of his or her vocation if he or she realizes the need of the students to teach them how to navigate the difficult and challenging pathway into adulthood by tending to

their emotions, learning to regulate them and to deal with them when they are overwhelmed. Spirituality may be a way to do this, therefore, new opportunities for how to educate the whole child may be revealed through a study of this nature.

Storm and Stress?

Historically, adolescence has been somewhat negatively labeled as a period of “storm and stress.” Arnett (1999) reported that over 100 years ago, G. Stanley Hall (1904) proposed that “adolescence is inherently a time of storm and stress” (p. 317). While many psychologists have come to reject this notion, it is one that remains prevalent in our society. Arnett challenged the depth of its merit and limitation arguing that a case could be made for “the validity of a modified storm-and-stress view” (p. 317).

Hall (1904), credited with initiating the scientific study of adolescence claimed that “adolescent storm and stress is characteristic of all adolescents and that the source of it is purely biological” (p. 317). Denouncing this claim as false, Arnett (1999) posited that, instead, evidence supports the existence of storm and stress among adolescents to some degree “at least for those in middle-class American majority culture with respect to conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risk behavior” (p. 317). Arnett further pointed out that not all adolescents experience storm and stress in these areas, but that these characteristics are more likely to occur during adolescence than in any other period during the human life span. Arnett contended that individual differences in both intensity and expression exist among adolescents, as well as cultural variations in the pervasiveness of storm and stress.

Dahl (2004) added that during the 1960s to 1970s, attempts were made to understand adolescents from the perspective of “raging hormones.” Dahl asserted that

while early investigators may have contributed some insight into the role of pubertal hormones, “these early models of hormonal effects were overly simplistic” (p. 6). Arnett (1999) cautioned readers not to over-generalize the sometimes dramatic problems of some adolescents.

A broader understanding of the spirituality of adolescent students may encourage educators to understand the inner lives of students and their need to learn how to cope with the challenges they are faced with dealing with pubertal hormones and neurobiological changes. Insights from students found in this study may help to critique educators’ pedagogy in order to better address students’ needs. Instruction in intellectual curricular areas, such as history, physics, and doctrine, alone will not help students to transition successfully into adulthood nor will these alone bring students to understand spirituality. A greater awareness and understanding of the spiritual lives of students, including their spiritual needs and desires for learning, may better equip teachers to foster spiritual development in their students.

Refocusing the Question: What is Adolescence?

Dahl (2004) identified that adolescence has been defined in different ways and, at times, that it has been difficult for investigators to come to consensus due to challenges inherent in bridging animal and human models of puberty and adolescence. He posited that the difficulty in reaching a clear consensus is “related to ambiguities regarding how to best *conceptualize* the notion of adolescence” (p. 9).

Providing a definition from his own research group (Adolescent Development Affect-Regulation and the Pubertal Transition Research Network, [ADAPT]), Dahl (2004) offered,

Let us then provisionally define adolescence in humans as *that awkward period between sexual maturation and the attainment of adult roles and responsibilities*. This definition...captures the concept that adolescence begins with the physical/biological changes related to puberty, but it ends in the domain of social roles. It encompasses the transition from the social status of a child...to that of an adult. (p. 9)

Furthermore, Dahl asserted that, since adolescence involves transitions in social roles, as well as “a multitude of pubertal changes in body and brain” (p. 10), a conceptualization of adolescence may best be understood in terms of “*interactions* between biological, behavioral, and social domains” (p. 10).

Since, in this conceptualization, adolescence begins in the domain of physical changes (puberty) but ends in the domain of social context (adult roles), efforts to understand the transition period *must* entail interdisciplinary approaches. The very nature of this transition involves interactions between the biological, behavioral, and social domains. (p. 10)

A cross-disciplinary approach is not complete without a deeper understanding of adolescent spirituality—a place where other domains come together within the individual, where processing and transcendence may well provide the necessary ingredient to assist the individual in his or her passage through this transitional period.

Addressing the Complexity of the Problems

Dahl (2004) acknowledged that “there are compelling reasons to believe that neuroscientific research can ultimately help to delineate underlying developmental processes in ways that can inform more effective early interventions and social policies to promote healthier adolescence” (p. 4). However, in contrast, he also acknowledged that “there are equally compelling reasons to believe that complex behavioral and social factors are so intertwined with biological development as to make simplistic or reductionistic goals untenable” (p. 4). He argued that examining neurobehavioral contributions “does *not* equate to a reductionistic approach; the goal is not to try to

reduce these complex problems to the level of brain mechanisms or biological interventions” (p. 4). Rather, Dahl emphasized the importance of “how a mechanistic understanding of biological processes can actually *enhance* the importance of behavioral or social policy interventions” (p. 4).

Moving beyond some of the stereotypes of adolescence held in the past, Dahl (2004) pointed out that with the current and future research available, important differences in how we approach our understanding of adolescence may be distinguished. “We can now move beyond age-old observations and negative characterizations of impulsive and ‘hot-headed’ youth, and start to ask specific scientific questions” (p. 5). Dahl posed several questions, placing the complex problems of adolescence into an empirical context. Some of these questions are pertinent to this study:

What is the empirical evidence that adolescents are “heated by Nature”? Are these changes rooted in biology? Are some of these changes simply a function of greater freedoms and social influences? Are there neurobehavioral underpinnings to some of these adolescent tendencies that are universal across cultures? Are some of these changes related directly to increases in specific hormones? Are they linked to maturational changes in specific neural systems in adolescence?

These questions presented by Dahl (2004) provide an adequate backdrop for further exploration into the lives of adolescent youth, particularly in light of the complex problems faced by adolescents. However, unless the spiritual is included as a natural component of the adolescent, a deeper understanding of this transitional life stage may be missed.

Additional important questions could penetrate further into the mystery: How do adolescents journey beyond the painful memories of their risk-taking behaviors, low self-esteem, and negative social consequences resulting from their poor choices or unknown neural/hormonal factors? How do they move to a place of social, emotional, and

psychological maturity from these stormy conditions, if that has, in fact, been the experience of their adolescence? How do we account for teens who pass through the storm on seemingly quieter waters or does every teen experience adolescence as a storm? How can educators assist in this process? Without a more holistic approach to our youth, scientists may still fall short in their multi-disciplinary effort to understand the lives of adolescents. For the sake of our adolescents, particularly in light of new findings in neurobiology, we cannot afford to ignore the spiritual lives of our youth.

Recent Discoveries in Neurobiology

Recent discoveries in the neurobiology of the adolescent brain hold great significance for educators and others who work with adolescents. Dahl (2004) postulated that part of the problems during this period of adolescence may be “linked to a set of biologically based changes in neural systems of emotion and motivation, which contribute to what appears to be a natural increase in tendencies toward risk taking, sensation seeking, and some emotional/motivational changes during pubertal maturation” (p. 7). Expanding further on this, Dahl stated,

There seems to be a natural biologic proclivity toward high-intensity feelings that emerges at puberty. Some emotional states—specific types of feelings—may be triggered more quickly and/or with greater intensity as a function of the biological changes attendant [*sic*] on pubertal maturation. For example, the tendency for increased parental conflict in early adolescence can be understood, at least in part, in relation to an increase in the *intensity* of emotion that is aroused during pubertal maturation. (p. 7)

Additionally, Dahl (2004) asserted a related observation about adolescent emotional development: “Pubertal maturation is associated with a greater inclination to *seek* experiences that create high-intensity feelings” (p. 7). Adolescence appears, therefore, to be “a developmental period when an appetite for adventure, a predilection

for risks, and a desire for novelty and thrills seem to reach naturally high levels” (pp. 7-8). Again, this notion does not apply equally across all populations of adolescents.

Individual differences must be taken into consideration. For some, this tendency may be subtle; for others, emotionally charged and reckless behaviors may result (Dahl).

Biological Changes of Puberty

Dahl (2004) explained that puberty alone consists of a multitude of operations going on at the same time. “Puberty is not just one process—it is a suite of changes that occur in relative synchronicity” (p. 11). Dahl posited that these pubertal changes are striking in and of themselves in several ways: (1) puberty brings dramatic changes in body size and composition; (2) puberty leads to the physical changes of sexual maturation; and (3) the physical changes of puberty lead directly to alterations in many aspects of social experience; and (4) the areas of cognitive, psychological, and emotional changes are linked to puberty (p. 10). Dahl clarified further,

Thus there are several interrelated processes that contribute to the physical, emotional, and social changes that are encompassed by physical maturation. Even within this relatively narrow focus on physical changes at puberty (within the much broader set of developmental changes that stretch across adolescence) it is clear that there are still several component processes that can be considered separately. At least three of these sets of pubertal changes can be linked to specific sets of hormonal changes. (p. 10)

Dahl (2004) illustrated further stating, “Clearly, puberty is *not* one process—it is a suite of changes that occur in relative synchrony” (p. 11). In addition, he pointed out that a “wide range of variations in the precise sequence and timing of these various components” not only occurs, but may be accompanied by the occurrence of complications or disorders as a result of one single component within the system (p. 11).

Dahl (2004) stressed the importance of considering these various components

separately as research has revealed historical changes in the time of development among adolescents. For example, Rutter (1993) found evidence pointing to historical changes in the *average* [author's emphasis] age of onset of some aspects of pubertal processes, particularly in females, over the past century in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, the UK and the United States. Rutter found that while puberty is occurring earlier in many industrialized societies than it had previously, marriage and other adult roles are now often delayed. In the United States, the average age of menarche is now at age 12, where previously it had been at age 14. As Dahl explained, it is important to note that menarche is a *late* [author's emphasis] event in female puberty, as it is one of the later stages in a process that begins with many earlier developments. Dahl articulated an important distinction when referring to adolescence,

When we talk about adolescence, we're not just talking about teenage years, but about this interval that often begins with a cascade of hormone changes by 9-12 years of age, with most of the physical changes of puberty often complete by the middle of the teen age years." (p. 2)

There are a variety of factors which may explain the findings that marriage and other roles are now often being delayed in our society, however, these will not be addressed in the present discussion. What is important for the sake of this text is the realization that with the period of adolescence beginning earlier and adult roles starting at a later period, a greater span of time between the onset and conclusion of adolescence has been created. This prolonged interval has both advantages and disadvantages. Dahl (2004) offered that the advantage provided by this change is that more time is now available for adolescents to learn complex skills and to develop a variety of capabilities needed for taking on the responsibilities inherent in adulthood. Yet, as Dahl stated, this benefit does not come without a price, specifically, "costs and vulnerabilities, including

the broad range of behavioral and emotional health risks” (p. 14) that may have serious implications on many of our youth. More importantly, the expansion of this period has implications for the cognitive development and emotional development of youth, areas which have recently been opened to vast new understandings as a result of neurological research on the adolescent brain.

Implications Regarding the Adolescent Brain

These historical changes taking place in the onset of puberty are extending the period of adolescence. Dahl (2004) contended that this expansion has important implications for understanding the various processes of adolescent brain development.

The earlier onset of puberty results in a relatively earlier activation of *some* neurobehavioral changes raising several provocative questions about the interrelationship with components of adolescent development that occur on a different timescale—particularly those aspects of adolescent brain development that continue to undergo important maturational changes long after puberty is over....In other words, most elements of cognitive development show a trajectory that follows age and experience rather than the timing of puberty. (p. 15)

One may view this as a unique stage of vulnerability for adolescents as the changes in timing of distinct neural and hormonal processes rally in separate paths.

This principle has direct implications regarding the recent historical changes in pubertal timing. While some neurobehavioral changes (such as drives and emotional changes at puberty) are occurring at earlier ages, many other aspects of neurocognition progress slowly, and continue to mature long after puberty is over. Thus, the recent expansion of the adolescent period has also stretched out the interval between the onset of emotional and motivational changes activated by puberty, and the completion of cognitive development—the maturation of self-regulatory capacities and skills that are continuing to develop long after puberty has occurred. (p. 15)

Puberty and Brain Development

Dahl (2004) summarized three existing processes that are known about puberty and brain development: (1) some brain changes *precede* pubertal increases in hormones,

(2) some brain changes are the *consequence* of pubertal processes, and (3) some aspects of adolescent brain maturation and cognitive development appear to be independent of pubertal processes and continue long after puberty is over (pp. 15-16). What is significant about these three is the “*potential for internal dys-synchrony among the components of adolescent brain maturation*” (p. 16).

Dahl (2004) reported further that researchers (Martin et al., 2002) have discovered behavioral changes that are specifically linked to puberty from several developmental domains (Table 1). Findings of Martin et al.’s study indicated “several domains that seem to link more strongly to puberty than age during adolescent development and most of these are *affective* measures—related to emotion, motivation, arousal, and appetitive or drive systems” (p. 17).

Table 1

Developmental Domains Evidencing Puberty-Specific Maturation Changes

- Romantic motivation
 - Sexual interest
 - Emotional intensity
 - Changes in sleep/arousal regulation
 - Appetite
 - Risk for affective disorders in females
 - Increase in risk taking, novelty seeking, sensationseeking [*sic*] (reward-seeking)
-

Note. From Dahl, R.E. (2004). Adolescent Brain Development: A Period of Vulnerabilities and Opportunities. *Annals of New York Academy of Science, 1021*, p. 17.

The growing disparity of these timelines demonstrates the heightened needs of our youth as the period of vulnerability broadens, particularly for adolescent girls. In addition, girls may be more susceptible to incurring social stigmas as a result of risky or sexual behaviors in which they have engaged. This research provides for educators in a single-gender urban Catholic high school a clearer agenda to assist them in responding to the needs of their students. This study may further support the efforts of Catholic

educators to respond to those needs.

Applying a Metaphor: The Unskilled Driver

Applying a metaphor to this state of vulnerability in adolescents may provide greater clarity. Dahl (2004) and his team (ADAPT Research Network) compared this to starting a racecar engine with an unskilled driver behind the wheel. This metaphor is engaged to capture “the relatively earlier timing of these ‘igniting passions’ at puberty” (p. 17). Dahl clarified that these passions refer not only to sexual and romantic drives, but to an intensification of other goal-directed interests that surface with adolescents during this period, such as sports, hobbies, music, art, and literature. In addition, he acknowledged the rise of “passionate commitments to idealistic causes” (p. 17).

Elaborating further, Dahl (2004) noted that these motivational and emotional changes represent an understudied aspect of adolescent development, yet, stressed the “enormously important dimension of understanding the neurobehavioral underpinnings of vulnerability in adolescence” (p. 18). Dahl asserted the crucial need for understanding as the early activation of these intense passions may be channeled into a wide range of healthy activities shaped by the particular experiences at this point of an adolescent’s life. Dahl stated,

Moreover, when these passions flare up to intense levels, these young people often have not yet developed the skills that can harness these strong feelings (nor have they achieved the neural maturation of underlying control systems)Adolescents need to learn to navigate complex social situations despite strong competing feelings. Skills in self-regulation of emotion and complex behavior aligned to long-term goals must be developed. These self-regulatory processes are complex and mastering behavioral skills involves neurobehavioral systems served by several parts of the brain. The ability to integrate these multiple components of behavior—cognitive *and* affective—in the service of long-term goals involves neurobehavioral systems that are among the last regions of the brain to fully mature. (p. 18)

Addressing the question of what happens to cognitive development when puberty occurs earlier, Dahl asserted that a strong body of research (Giedd, 2004) has suggested that “most measures of cognitive development correlate with age and experience—not sexual maturation” (p. 18). Returning to the metaphor of the racecar engine revving at top speed with an unskilled driver behind the wheel (Dahl, 2004), the precarious position of our adolescents becomes clear.

The pubescent youth has several years with a sexually mature body and brain systems that are activated for sexual and romantic interest and passions, but a relatively immature set of neurobehavioral systems for self-control and affect regulation. This “disconnect” predicts risk for a broad set of behavioral and emotional problems, and not just through recklessness, risk taking, and sensation seeking, but also in just navigating complex social situations and attempting to master strong emotions. (p. 18)

Structures of Support

The goal, of course, is for adolescents to learn the skill of *affect regulation* (Dahl, 2004). The mentoring from mature and responsible adults is a key component for adolescent youth to realize this goal. Unfortunately, this can often be a time in the lives of our youth when adults tend to back away from them for various reasons. Addressing this unfortunate gap, Dahl asserted,

There is a need for a social context that can provide the appropriate amount of support to adolescents. It is crucial for adolescents [to] have the appropriate social *scaffolding*—the right balance of monitoring and interest from parents, teachers, coaches, and other responsible adults—in which to develop the skills of self-control while still being afforded sufficient support and protection. (p. 20)

Dahl explicated that the lack of adult mentoring “plays a part in creating a great deal of vulnerability for youth in our society” (p. 200).

He further maintained that these passions of youth can be applied in healthy ways “in the service of higher goals” (p. 21). In his explication of this notion, Dahl implicated

characteristics previously named in this document that are components of a healthy spirituality:

So these igniting passions can be aligned in *healthy* ways—in the service of higher goals. Feelings of passion are rooted in the same deep brain systems as biologic drives and the primitive elements of emotion. Yet passion intertwines with the highest levels of human endeavor: passion for ideas and ideals, passion for beauty, passion to create music or art. And the passion to succeed in a sport, business, or politics, and passion toward a person, activity, object, or pursuit can also inspire transcendent feelings. (p. 21)

Fortunately, the single-gender urban Catholic secondary school has the structure and social context that can provide the needed support to adolescents. Human spirituality may be the precise place which enables one to integrate life experiences and come to greater self-knowledge, and holds great potential for responding to their growing needs of our youth. For this reason, attention to the development of this critical area in our students cannot be overlooked. While the social context is already present in the school, a study of this nature may provide insights to help educators re-vitalize their efforts to support students and to foster their spiritual growth through renewed efforts in all of the programs, instruction, and interaction already in place in the school.

The Renewal of Spirituality

There has been an upsurge of interest in spirituality both nationally and internationally in the last 20 years (Nolan, 2006; Nuzzi, 2001; Ó Murchú, 1997; Wuthnow, 1998). This renewed interest is expressed as a deep hunger for the spiritual, “a hunger that is often unrelated to organized religion” (Nuzzi, p. 68). While this rise in interest may be long overdue, some believe it signals the demise of formalized religion (Ó Murchú). Based on studies and surveys conducted in Europe and the United States in the past 20 years, Ó Murchú opined that formal religious practice is in a decline as many

people seek a spiritual freedom perceived as incompatible with formalized religion.

Attempting to make sense of developments and larger cultural issues about the public practice of religion and in private spirituality in the United States in the past 50 years, Wuthnow (1998) conducted a study which analyzed results from 200 in-depth interviews, existing scholarly research studies, and popular books and articles about spirituality. Wuthnow theorized that a profound change in Americans' spiritual practices has occurred in an unusual way. Wuthnow postulated that a subtle reordering has taken place in how Americans understand the sacred itself, that a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking. Wuthnow proposed 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" (p. 3).

Wuthnow (1998) proposed a distinction between a spirituality of *dwelling* versus a spirituality of *seeking*. A spirituality of dwelling emphasizes habitation, the belief that God occupies a definite place not only in the universe faraway, but creates a sacred space where humans can dwell nearer to themselves, and in which humans can find God in this sacred space and "stable territory". A spirituality of seeking emphasizes *negotiation*, a concept that includes a reinforcing of one's conviction that God exists in time and space that are both fleeting rather than stationary, and that calls individuals to search for new spiritual vistas where they may have to negotiate spirituality among complex and confusing meanings. Wuthnow postulated that while both dwelling and seeking are a part of what it means to be human, he concluded that the period since the 1950s, replete with social transition, uncertainty and change, has compelled many Americans to become

seekers of spirituality, dissatisfied with the stationary habitation of dwelling, found in more formalized religion.

In his book, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*, Nolan (2006), a Catholic Dominican priest, theologian and university professor, provided a deeper analysis of the social changes and their contributing factors of the past century, and asserted the prevalence of a worldwide hunger for spirituality that is unprecedented. Nolan contextualized this hunger as a response to several extremely complex and shifting factors that are signs of the times (Paul VI, 1965/1973). He postulated that this hunger for spirituality is fundamentally a response to the ideologies and certitudes of the modern era.

Beginning with the Enlightenment, this certitude was expressed in the scientific age shaped by Newton's mechanistic worldview and in industrial capitalism with its unlimited economic growth. Modernity's ideology held a deep optimism about the future, based on an absolute certainty that the progress of science, technology, and reason would overcome all human problems and would replace pre-modern religious superstitions. The result of this ideological wave of influence which swept across Western culture was that religion, morality, and art were relegated to private belief. The message of the modern era was that economic and political progress was all that mattered.

Nolan (2006) explicated that the early 20th century began to witness the demise of modernity, as its most industrially advanced countries began to act irrationally and inhumanly. The violence, cruelty and methods of torture simply did not equate with human progress. Nolan pointed out that by the end of the 20th century, these regimes having collapsed, the world was left with one superpower, which was determined to wipe out terrorism while ignoring the ecological destruction of the earth.

Resulting from this collapse, Nolan (2006) proposed that the postmodern era holds a generation of people who are skeptical of any ideology, including religion. Religious ideologies have suffered this same fate as a result of the scandals that have rocked the churches, undermining their authority. For many people, Nolan asserted, all religious authority appears exclusive, divisive, and oppressive.

The result of these collapsing ideologies, Nolan (2006) concluded, is that deep down, most people today feel totally insecure and live in a state of suppressed despair, trying to find ways to distract themselves from the hard realities of our times. Where previously people relied on the certainties and practices of their respective cultures, Nolan proposed that, today, all traditional cultures are slowly disintegrating. With little left for people to hang onto, postmodernism is filled with accounts of high rates of those who turn to drink, drugs or suicide; of others who seek imagined security in wealth and possessions; and still others who engage in sports, entertainment or sex to distract themselves from the worries of life.

Nolan (2006) proposed that one very strong response people may have to the present uncertainties is to attempt to return to the past. This return may be expressed in several ways. First, people seek out the religious fundamentals of the past, finding solace in the certainty, authority and absolutism of religious dogma. Resorting to the religious fundamentalism found in Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish arenas, Nolan explicated that the differences among each of the groups often puts them in open conflict with one another, while, at the same time, they share a common reliance upon an authority that provides absolute truths that cannot be questioned or doubted. This is the security that fundamentalism offers to a very insecure world.

Another response Nolan (2006) postulated to postmodernism is that of the search for an appropriate spirituality, a response that is gaining momentum everyday. While this, too, could be perceived as another form of escape, Nolan proposed that this deep hunger for spirituality is genuine and sincere; it is one of the signs of our times.

Nolan (2006) explicated further on the prevalent hunger for spirituality, stating that the need is expressed in acute awareness and felt in a variety of ways: first, in a longing for something that gives one sustained inner strength and peace to cope with the anxieties of life; secondly, in a longing for religious experiences of God as opposed to merely religious experiences of dogma; and, thirdly, in a desire for holistic healing of body, soul and society. Finally, Nolan clarified that the sign to be read in our times is not the number of people who have found a satisfactory form of spirituality to live by, but rather, the widespread *hunger* for spirituality, the felt need for spirituality. “One could argue that all human beings need, and have always needed, spirituality. What is happening today is that many more people are becoming acutely *aware* of their need for spirituality” (p. 8).

Responding to Ó Murchú’s (1997) prediction that formalized religion will gradually disappear as spirituality continues to flourish, Nolan (2006) acknowledged the separation of spirituality and religion as “one of the most significant developments of our time” (p. 12), yet reprobated the value of setting up a dichotomy between the two realities. Instead, Nolan affirmed, “What we are all beginning to recognize is that religious institutions tend to become fossilized, legalistic, dogmatic, and authoritarian” (p. 12).

In conclusion, Nolan (2006) pointed out that many, in their search for spirituality, have marginalized Jesus or have even rejected him as irrelevant; others who treat Jesus as

central to their spirituality tend to make him the object of their spirituality rather than a person with his own spirituality from which we can learn something. The students who attend our Catholic schools come as products of western culture, formed and shaped by the realities of the times. A holistic education is promised to students and their families, both Catholic and non-Catholic. If educators do not respond to the call to teach students how to grow in their own awareness and desire for spirituality, a significant part of their education will be denied. Accepting this call in light of the signs of the times requires a broader and deeper response to the needs of our students by giving greater attention to their spiritual development within the Catholic tradition. This study is needed to support teachers in this call.

Current Status of Religion and Spirituality in the Social Sciences

As a result of many years of marginalization within the scientific community, there remains much to be learned about spirituality (Henderson, 2005). There is currently a lack of consensus on the definition of spirituality and the distinction between religion and spirituality (Pargament, 1999; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006; Scarlett, 2006). Addressing the lack of definitional consensus in the social science research literature on the diverse conceptions of religiousness and spirituality, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) sought greater clarity about the use and understanding of the two terms through a survey conducted among various populations of Americans.

In the study (Zinnbauer et al., 1997), a variety of demographic, religio/spiritual, and psychosocial variables were explored. Noted as one of very few empirical studies comparing religiousness and spirituality, the results suggested that, while the terms described different concepts, they are not completely independent of one another. In

addition, both definitions incorporate concepts of the sacred, while only a small portion of the sample respondents (19%) considered themselves “spiritual, but not religious” (p. 561).

Highlighting the growing understanding in the social sciences that religion and spirituality are two distinct, yet interrelated concepts, the study by Zinnbauer et al. (1997) pointed to differences in self-rated religiousness and spirituality, and variations in the definitions of the terms. Zinnbauer et al. asserted that the study illustrated the need for researchers to recognize that many meanings are attributed to religiousness and spirituality by different religious and cultural groups, and concluded that “no single perspective on religion dominates postmodern culture, but rather multiple perspectives exist simultaneously” (p. 562).

Adding to this challenge, spirituality is a topic which has far-reaching involvement across multiple domains—psychology and sociology, health and anthropology, and education, and various social settings, such as youth and social work, and religious institutions (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006).

Roehlkepartain (2005) reflected that one of the major challenges in the study of spirituality is that “there is no cohesive, integrative center of activity” (p. 3), even though individual scholars share common interests in youth and their spiritual lives. There is a need for study that brings together insights from multiple domains in order to push learning forward in this both elusive and permeating topic. In addition, this study may provide a vehicle for gathering viewpoints of spirituality from adolescent girls with differing religious backgrounds enrolled in a Catholic secondary school.

Adolescence and Spirituality

This study was particularly concerned with the spiritual lives of adolescents. However, as the previous section revealed, religion and spirituality are often co-mingled in discussions. This section will examine further the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of adolescents, with particular concern for spirituality in the lives of adolescents.

Religious engagement among adolescents has been found to lessen risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, and to enhance positive outcomes, such as social and emotional functioning (Bridges & Moore, 2002). These new findings in positive effects have sparked further interest in the study of religion in the fields of public health, social work, education, developmental psychology, and in prevention (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). While every discipline acknowledges the need for more research in the area of adolescence, findings in the social sciences may help Catholic educators to understand better how to foster the spiritual development of their students and, therefore, may help educators better serve the specific needs of their students in urban Catholic secondary schools.

Adolescents and Religiosity

Considering the social context in which adolescents live, Smith and Denton (2005) postulated that teenagers can be the source of adults' highest hopes and most gripping fears. While teens represent a radiant energy for the future of families, communities, and society, they can also evoke deep anxieties about rebellion, conflict, and broken and compromised lives. Smith and Denton reflected that parents, teachers, and youth workers hold their teens with pride, hope, and enjoyment, but also with worry,

distress, and frustration. These feelings of ambivalence are often amplified by the media which presents images of teens that further influence society. Smith and Denton asserted that many adults attempt to respond to the needs of youth to help them to weather this life transition. Parents seek ways to increase communication and participation with their teens, and communities work to set up youth centers and programs. However, a significant gap in these efforts remains. “Very few efforts to better understand American adolescents take seriously their religious faith and spiritual practices” (p. 4).

Naming this as a “curious neglect,” Smith and Denton (2005) postulated that most teens report on surveys that their religious beliefs and practices are an important part of their lives and that faith provides them with guidance and resources for knowing how to live. It, therefore, seems important that Catholic educators have access to deeper insights for guiding and assessing spiritual development in the students they serve.

A recent study of international perspectives on religion, education and adolescence supports this apparent need for Catholic educators to delve further into students’ perspectives in order to gain insights into students’ spiritual growth. Francis (2005) summarized that “the task of the religious educator is enriched and enabled by the discipline of empirical enquiry which listens to young people themselves” (p. 11) and that “the churches need to listen to young people engaged in their own spiritual and religious quest” (p.11). While the terms *religion* and *spirituality* are found co-mingled in this reference, it supports the need for a deeper exploration into the spiritual development of our youth.

In order to explore the perceptions of youth in the United States and to gain a more scholarly understanding of the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents,

the findings of the *National Study of Youth and Religion* [NSYR] (Smith & Denton, 2005) were surprising and alarming, enlightening and filled with hope. Of the broad range of findings, those most salient to this present study included the following (adapted from pp. 260-262):

1. Religion holds a significant place in the lives of United States' teens today.
2. Contrary to popular assumptions and stereotypes, "the vast majority of United States' teens are not alienated or rebellious when it comes to religious involvement" (p. 260). Rather, teens are quite content to follow their parents' conventional traditions.
3. As an expression of this religious conventionality, contemporary 13- to 17-year-old teens do not consider themselves seekers rather than dwellers, nor "spiritual but not religious." Most teens are simply happy to accept the religion in which they were raised.
4. In a general comparison among major United States' religious traditions based on a variety of sociological measures of religious vitality and salience, Mormon teenagers are sociologically faring the best. After Mormon youth are conservative Protestant and black Protestant teenagers, followed by mainline Protestant teens next in religious strength, followed by Catholic, Jewish, and nonreligious teenagers.
5. The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.
6. The findings suggest a significant supply-side dynamic operative in the religious and spiritual lives of United States' teens, such that, the greater the supply of

religiously grounded relationships, activities, programs, opportunities, and challenges available to teenagers, the more likely teenagers will be religiously engaged and invested. Conversely, when religious communities do not invest in their youth, their youth are less likely to invest in their religious faith.

7. At the level of subjective consciousness, adolescent religious and spiritual understanding and concern seem to be generally very weak. Most United States' teens have a difficult to impossible time explaining what they believe, what their beliefs mean, and what the implications of their beliefs are for their lives.

While much of the literature that has been reviewed thus far in this section co-mingles religion and spirituality, it bears re-stating that the present study focused on the spiritual lives of participants. This study also acknowledges that student participants have come from a variety of different religious experiences and backgrounds, however, the study focused on each participant's understanding of spirituality within her own lived reality.

Adolescent Catechesis

The Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis (PAC) was created in 2003 as a collaborative effort comprised of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). Building on “a desire to develop a common vision for adolescent catechesis in order to address serious lapses in the Church's formation of adolescents” (PAC, 2009, p. 1), PAC asserted that the impetus for its development began in 2004 in order “to support themes and approaches intended to strengthen catechesis with adolescents found in the National Directory for Catechesis

(2005).

Concurrent with the development of PAC, the NSYR study (Smith & Denton, 2005) identified serious concerns regarding the ability of Catholic youth to articulate their faith and to live as disciples of Christ (NAIC website, 2009). Smith and Denton postulated that “very many religious congregations and communities of faith in the United States are failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating their youth” (p. 262). Responding to the serious challenges identified by the NSYR, the collaborative effort of PAC launched a “ground-breaking” (National Catholic Educational Association, 2006, p. 1) six-year National Initiative on Adolescent Catechesis (NAIC) uniting a collective goal to promote a “comprehensive and contemporary understanding of adolescent catechesis and to develop and support effective approaches to Catholic faith formation in parishes and schools” (p. 1).

The three national organizations, NCEA, NCCL, and NFCYM, are currently working together to assess the diverse catechetical efforts employed in adolescent catechesis. Representatives from diocesan-level and parish religious educators, Catholic school teachers/campus ministers, and youth ministers have come together to form the Collaborative Committee on Adolescent Catechesis. The goal of the Committee is to dialogue about principles, methods and strategies currently used for adolescent catechesis and to assess their effectiveness. It is the hope of these three organizations that a more unified plan for the future mission with adolescents in the Church will be identified.

Reporting on the results of the work to date of the Committee, Henderson (2005) defined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to adolescent catechesis. Naming the weaknesses, Henderson identified an “incredibly inarticulate” (p. 4) ability in

our youth to talk about their faith, religious beliefs and practices, and their meaning in their lives. In addition, the group identified the use of poor methodology that may unintentionally undermine the Church's teaching, including a lack of unified grade-level objectives to assess student progress in faith knowledge. Moreover, in some situations, adolescent catechesis is viewed as a program intended to provide knowledge of the faith rather than to prepare youth for a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church and to help young people become disciples. According to the Collaborative Committee, few resources exist that promote the integration of knowledge with the experience of faith.

Further challenges identified by the Committee address issues related to adult involvement in the catechesis of youth. Parish youth ministers need to "reclaim the charism of teaching within youth ministry", while catechetical leaders need to understand and appreciate the importance of a "relationship and intrinsic link among the tasks of comprehensive ministry with youth" (Henderson, 2005, p. 7). Similar challenges exist for high school religion teachers and campus ministers. High school teachers noted that "catechesis within the high school setting does not achieve its full potential when it is not connected to daily life and when it is approached solely as an academic subject" (p. 7). Further concerns exist within the school setting regarding weak religion curriculum that is "not seen as the central discipline of the entire school curriculum or foundational to the institutional identity or mission of the school" (p. 7).

Finally, a challenge named for Catholic high schools was the ability to balance the delicate interrelationship between religion class and campus ministry (Henderson, 2005, p. 7). A challenge common to both parishes and high schools is the lack of well-trained catechists with a strong sense of ministry. Henderson reported that many adult catechists

and ministers who work with youth “feel inadequate teaching Catholic tradition and scripture since they have never received the necessary formation themselves...creating credibility issues around what they teach” (p. 7).

Contributing to this initiative, Kaster (2005), director of Youth in Theology and Ministry at Saint John’s University, suggested implications and conclusions regarding the state of adolescent catechesis today. After completing a comprehensive review of current literature, Kaster found that adolescent catechesis is “knotted in competing visions and seriously entangled by a lack of research and assessment of effective practice” (p. 6) and that “the literature directly related to adolescent catechesis is sparse” (p. 6).

Kaster (2005) concluded that adolescent catechetical leaders need to “engage social science data and theory to inform their practice and, specifically, gain competence in effective evaluation of student and parent learning” (p. 6). Noting that “Catholic schools have done a better job of research and program assessment than parishes” (p. 6), Kaster pointed out that “even Catholic school research has focused primarily on academic achievement or benchmarking catechetical inputs” (pp. 6-7). He noted the significant lack of published research that evaluates the effectiveness of adolescent catechetical programs, both in Catholic schools and parish ministry.

Kaster (2005) further concluded that Catholic youth ministry needs to revise its vision to align itself with the vision of evangelization and catechesis outlined in both the *General Directory for Catechesis (GDC)* and the *National Directory for Catechesis (NDC)* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2005). He suggested that “this lack of definitional clarity” (p. 8) contributes greatly to confusion about the distinctive roles that religious education, youth ministry, and Catholic schools play in

adolescent catechesis. In addition, he acknowledged that confusion “exists in the definition of the terms catechesis and evangelization” (p. 8). Finally, Kaster suggested that adolescent catechesis would be enriched by the discipline of empirical study that listens to the voices of young people.

The fact that religion is the least studied curricular area within Catholic educational research (Hunt et al., 2001; Kaster, 2005; Meegan, Carroll, & Ciriello, 2002), the inadequate level of agreement among faculties and administrators about the seriousness and legitimacy of religion as a subject in an academic curriculum confirms a need for the renewal of the Catholic school, particularly in fulfilling its call to educate the spiritual dimension in order to better meet the needs of students in the third millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). There is a need for exploratory research which will inform practitioners on methods for instruction and assessment in the development of students’ spirituality. The need for greater effectiveness in the catechesis of youth is evident. This study will contribute to the research related to this need.

The Mission of Catholic Education

Any consideration of elements that may foster the spiritual growth of students in Catholic schools must work in cooperation with the foundational structure already in place, the theological background that exists in the Catholic school. The Catholic school participates in the evangelical mission of the Church which is extended through catechesis, by way of religious education. However, several distinctions must be made between catechesis and religious education. The following theological background will first review the Church’s defining mission of evangelization, and then will consider how the Catholic secondary school fits uniquely into that mission through catechesis and

religious education.

Significant to both of these theological concepts is that the purpose remains the same: life in Christ (Nuzzi, 2001). “All religious education...and Catholic schools share this in common; they seek to help the people of God to discern and interpret the ongoing revelation of God in their lives” (pp. 65-66). For the sake of this present study, it is this aim that must be understood as the “spiritual development” envisioned in the school.

Mission of the Catholic Church

Evangelization is the primary mission of the Catholic Church (Paul VI, 1975). Receiving this mission from Jesus, “so that all people can believe and be saved” (¶5), the Church takes her example from the life of Christ. Christ, first of all, proclaimed the Kingdom of God. Central to His message, Christ proclaimed salvation to be “the great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man [*sic*] but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One” (¶9). These two central themes of Christ’s message, the kingdom and salvation, are available to every human being as grace and mercy, and yet, must be acquired through suffering and toil, and through commitment to a life lived according to the Gospel (¶10). Paul VI stressed that, above all, salvation and God’s kingdom are obtained through continual, radical conversion, “a profound change of mind and heart” (¶10).

Christ achieved His mission through the preaching of words, actions and signs, words that “reveal the secret of God, His plan and His promise, and thereby change the heart of man [*sic*] and his destiny” (Paul VI, 1975, ¶11). The Church, charged with the mission to continue Christ’s message, considers this task “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest destiny” (¶14). The purpose of evangelization is the interior

change through the divine power of the message proclaimed, “both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs” (¶18).

The process of evangelization includes components required of each participant: the one evangelizing and the one to whom the message is being proclaimed. First, “the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness” (Paul VI, 1975, ¶21). Secondly, the name, teaching, life, promise, kingdom and mystery of Jesus, Son of God, must be proclaimed (¶22). Thirdly, the proclamation may only reach full development when it is listened to, accepted and assimilated, and when it has inspired genuine transformation in the hearer (¶23). The sign of this transformation is the person’s inner conviction demonstrated through membership in community and his or her own efforts to proclaim the message of the Gospel to others. This is the “touchstone of true evangelization” (¶24).

Evangelization is not complete if it does not take into account the “unceasing interplay of the Gospel” (Paul VI, 1975, ¶29), and the human reality of each person’s life, that is, the personal and social realities. It is in this manner that the Gospel has far-reaching implications for both personal development and liberation.

Evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, . . . about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development- a message especially energetic today about liberation. (¶29)

The effect of evangelization on the person, transformation, cannot be minimized. When the person becomes deeply aware of God’s saving love and mercy despite one’s own sinfulness, of God’s abundant grace at every moment in this life and beyond, one is transformed and changed. This demonstrates the profound link between evangelization

and human development and liberation. The Gospel is not an abstract message, but is directed to human beings within the very context of their lives. The message, therefore, has ramifications to both social and economic realities, yet is not limited to these realities, and may raise questions in the person about the reality in which he or she lives. The Gospel message is further linked to the theological order, in that it touches concrete situations of injustice that need to be rectified, and of places where justice must be restored. The Gospel message must be communicated in love; therefore, evangelization is deeply linked to charity. God's saving love is intended to promote the good of each person in justice, peace and truth. The message must take in the entire person, in all facets of being, including his or her openness to God (Paul VI, 1975).

There are several methods through which evangelization takes place. Of primary importance, how the message is communicated, one must consider the circumstances of time, place and culture, and, above all, continue to allow for creativity, for discovery and for adaptation so that the message can be heard in a fresh and meaningful way. The most important and effective means is "the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God" (Paul VI, 1975, ¶41) with a conviction, truth and love that nothing can alter, nor destroy. The message is communicated through preaching which takes many forms, but which must be done with passion and zeal. A third means of evangelization is teaching or catechetical instruction, especially to children and young people, through "systematic religious instruction" (¶44). Catholic educators participate in the mission of the Church through the teaching of religious education and through every other subject throughout the curriculum as the light of faith is brought to bear on knowledge and culture.

Catechesis

Catechesis is a direct expression or extension of this evangelizing mission. Once the message has been heard, catechesis deepens and extends understanding and knowledge of Jesus Christ in those who are being catechized. Pope John Paul II (1979) explained,

The primary and essential object of catechesis is...“the mystery of Christ.” Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this mystery in all its dimensions: “to make all men [*sic*] see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth...know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...(and be filled) with all the fullness of God.” It is therefore to reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ’s actions and words and of the signs worked by Him, for they simultaneously hide and reveal His mystery. Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity. (p. 6)

The purpose, then, of catechesis is that each person grow in a loving relationship with Christ, a relationship that transforms and liberates, and enables one to become the most authentic person he or she was created to be, walking in awareness of God’s love and forgiveness more and more each day throughout one’s lifetime.

Catechesis, considered a stage in evangelization, involves the education of children, youth and adults in the faith, in which doctrine is taught in an organic and systematic way (John Paul II, 1979). The distinction between evangelization and catechesis is that evangelization is the initial conversion, and catechesis has a “twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ” (¶19). Catechesis is not only concerned with nourishing and teaching the faith, but is also concerned with “opening the heart, with converting, and with

preparing total adherence to Jesus Christ on the part of those who are still on the threshold of faith” (§19).

The specific aim of catechesis is the teaching and maturation of faith “and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful” (John Paul II, 1979, §20). This fullness of life is directed to the spiritual growth of each person. “It is in fact a matter of giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism” (§20). This growth comes as one grapples with the mysteries of Christ, accepts in faith the person of Jesus Christ and gives oneself wholeheartedly to conversion in Christ, commits to growing to know Christ more personally, then opens up to being shaped and formed into Christ. This process is wholly transforming and enables one to know and to love Christ in a deeply personal and loving relationship.

John Paul II (1979) stressed the need for systematic instruction, so that all essentials of the faith are covered, and so that instruction is integrated into the Christian’s life. In so doing, catechesis must not focus solely on a person’s life experience, but rather, balance must be obtained between instruction and reflection on life. Thus, catechesis does not deny the human aspects of the person’s life, but rather, engages them in the context of the revelation that God has given to us in Jesus Christ, a revelation that is carried in the depths of Church tradition and in scripture, and

constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living, active tradition.... This revelation is not however isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel. (§22)

In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1988), the Catholic school’s role in the Church’s mission of

evangelization is affirmed; however, a clarification is made regarding the school's role in catechesis. Referencing Paul VI (1967), the Congregation asserted that there is a close connection, and at the same time, a clear distinction between religious instruction and catechesis (¶68). This distinction is in the school's role to educate, to integrate faith into culture, in which catechesis "presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school; a whole lifetime" (¶68).

The CCE (1988) explained that the aim of catechesis is maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic, which happens mostly in a local Church community. While the Catholic school's educational purpose is knowledge, the school uses the same elements of the Gospel message, tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. The Congregation acknowledged the similarities between religious education and catechesis: religious instruction helps to strengthen the faith of students, while catechesis increases the knowledge of the Christian message. The Congregation continued its clarification further stating,

The distinction between religious instruction and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education....The basic principle which must guide us in our commitment to this sensitive area of pastoral activity is that religious instruction and catechesis are at the same time distinct and complementary. A school has as its purpose the students' integral formation. (¶69)

Spiritual Development of Adolescents

Groome (1997) proposed that the ultimate concern for secondary school educators and campus ministers in the Catholic school is the spiritual development of students.

Groome asserted the need to reject the old model of viewing religious education and catechesis as a dichotomy, as separate and distinct; rather, they must be viewed as symbiotic and complementary. Imposing a distinction between the two, Groome clarified, is not realistic because we are interested in educating more than just students' minds; we are interested in affecting their hearts, souls and hands as well.

Conceptualizing this role for religious educators, Groome (2003) affirmed the "new" evangelization (Paul VI, 1975), and stressed that each person is called to live out faith as a relationship with Jesus Christ, always open to being informed, formed, and transformed (Groome, 2003). Christians shaped by this relationship become *cooperators* with their students in their journey of faith, partners, as opposed to the old hierarchical models as dispensers of knowledge. Thus, Groome (1997) proposed that the method for catechetical education, a method which retains respect for both academic rigor and spiritual development, should be based on the art of *conversation*, a conversation between the "sacred pages of scripture" and the "book of the world" (p. 27), that which is found in nature and life experiences.

Groome (2003) penetrated to the heart of the issue of adolescent spirituality; however, many practical matters remain in question. What level of conversation between the lives of teachers, students, and the "sacred pages of scripture" is necessary for authentic spiritual development to occur? What level of cooperation or conversation is possible in the secondary classroom given the challenges teachers daily face from academic guidelines and time constraints, disinterested youth and discipline issues, and external pressures from colleagues, administrators, and parents to provide a "legitimate" curriculum? Finally, how does a teacher access each student's individual experience of

spirituality and become aware of students' understanding of spirituality in order to facilitate growth in this human dimension while addressing curricular guidelines? There is a need for exploratory research which will inform practitioners of students' experiences of spirituality and of the meaning spirituality holds for students to provide greater insight to educators into the development of students' spirituality. This study will contribute to research related to this need.

Philosophical Framework

This study is grounded in a conceptual viewpoint that considers the human life span from a developmental psychology perspective. From this perspective, the adolescent is ripe with emerging awarenesses in the dimensions of personality, cognition, emotional and social areas, and spirituality. The study intends to inquire specifically into the spiritual development of adolescents. Although literature currently found in both popular and scholarly arenas often intermingles use of the terms *religion* and *spirituality*, this study will focus on the spiritual aspects of adolescent females' life experiences.

This viewpoint is further supported by a belief that adolescent girls who attend Catholic secondary schools may or may not have had religious experiences during childhood from their family of origin. Whether or not each girl has had earlier formative religious experiences, based on the assumption that every person holds a spiritual component within their humanity, spiritual development and awareness may be expected to grow with or without former religious experiences.

For those students who have had childhood religious experiences, a developmental psychological perspective will view these early experiences of each student as particular opportunities for the formation and expression of spirituality.

However, the developmental perspective further considers that adolescence provides the opportunity for identity clarification enabling each person the choice either to embrace or to reject previously foreclosed beliefs and practices, including those of their family's religion. The life stage of adolescence is significant for these students to clarify their own spiritual identity. Therefore, it is important to learn in what ways Catholic secondary educators either facilitate or impede this growth. In order to explore this developmental component of adolescent girls' spirituality through their experiences and perspectives, a phenomenological philosophical framework has been selected to further ground this study.

The American Heritage Dictionary (1979) defined *philosophy* with several meanings. Three of those meanings are pertinent to this study: (1) Love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means; (2) Inquiry into the nature of things based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods; and (3) The critique and analysis of fundamental beliefs as they come to be conceptualized and formulated (p. 985).

What is Phenomenology?

Moran (2000) explicated phenomenology as a body of philosophy characterized by a number of themes rather than by dogmas or as a particular system.

It claims, first and foremost, to be a *radical* way of doing philosophy, a *practice* rather than a system. Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasises [*sic*] the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experienter. (p. 4)

Submitting further, Moran stated that the first step of phenomenology is "to seek to avoid all misconstructions and impositions placed on experience in advance, whether these are drawn from religious or cultural traditions, from everyday common sense, or indeed,

from science itself.” He clarified that explanations must not be imposed on phenomena before it has first been understood from within.

Understanding phenomena must be done without any external structures that may serve to distract the perceiver from absorbing the truth of an experience. “Freedom from prejudice means overcoming the strait-jacket of encrusted traditions, and this also means rejecting the domination of enquiry by externally imposed methods” (Moran, 2000, p. 5).

While many others have left their mark in the school of phenomenological philosophy as writers, thinkers, or practitioners, Moran (2000) postulated phenomenology as “an enterprise begun and elaborated by Husserl and then radically transformed by Heidegger” (p. 4). According to Moran, the majority of the founding writers or significant practitioners emphasized a need for a renewal in philosophy “as radical enquiry not bound to any historical tradition” (p. 5). The importance of this philosophical perspective for researching life experiences is evident in the visions of these early thinkers. Moran explained, “Phenomenology was seen as reviving our living contact with reality....In particular, the programme of phenomenology sought to reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject” (p. 5).

Moustakas (1994) explicated that the phenomenological method has evolved from the phenomenological philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl (1931) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). The phenomenological perspective seeks understanding of the meaning of being human (Heidegger, 1927/1962) and of becoming more human (Van Manen, 1990). “We can become more human only through understanding self and others in individual life-worlds, situated contexts, and contingencies and caring about it all” (p. 174).

Application of Phenomenology to Education

Submitting a phenomenological perspective as a philosophical framework for this study requires some further explanation. It is one thing to view the world through the experiences of others, but further sense must be made of those experiences for the sake of an educational research project. For educators, once the life-world of a student has been listened to and analyzed, one cannot stop with merely the new insights gained. One must go further to the question of *so what?* Studying the phenomenological perspective of students impels further consideration of implications for improved practice and pedagogy.

Van Manen (1990) postulated that “when educators raise questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way” (p. 1). He further asserted that pedagogy requires an ability to make sense of the phenomena of the life-world of students in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and relationships with them. The knowledge gained in this research is meant to serve the aims of Catholic secondary school teachers’ pedagogy.

In this study of the lived experiences of junior and senior-level high school students, the exploration examined the thoughts, consciousnesses, values, feelings, emotions, actions, and purposes of these girls as they were expressed in language, beliefs and artifacts. Van Manen (1990) defined human science as the study of people or “persons” who have consciousness and who act purposefully in the world by creating objects of “meaning” that are “expressions” of how human beings exist in the world (pp. 3-4). Admittedly, Van Manen’s description of human science is defined more narrowly in

this context than in others for the purpose of connoting the term “phenomenology” and the phenomenological tradition of inquiry. Van Manen clarified that “human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena and at understanding the lived structures of meanings” in the lives of people (p. 4).

Summary

The underlying aim of all phenomenological inquiry is that of understanding the meaning of being human and of focusing on a particular experience of life. The purpose of phenomenological inquiry becomes a particular “overarching question” or “*the* question” (Munhall, 2007, p. 174) reflecting the phenomenological perspective of the underlying aim. Thus, the question of this phenomenological inquiry, “What is the meaning of being spiritual for adolescent girls in an all-girls urban Catholic high school?” is based on a philosophical perspective.

Research Questions

This study will investigate the following research questions through qualitative data collection and analysis:

1. What is the meaning of being spiritual for adolescent girls in an all-girls urban Catholic high school?
2. What implications do students’ understandings of being spiritual have for secondary educators?

Limitations

This study was limited by the fact that it cannot be generalized to a larger population of either Catholic high school youth, or to teens in the United States. In addition, the study looked only at a single gender population, so therefore, cannot be

applied to adolescent boys. Further, this study was conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area, which is characterized by a high percentage of multi-ethnic populations, by a middle to lower middle class economic population and by socially liberal viewpoints.

As the researcher, my presence added limitations to this project. As a single, white female conducting a project within a multi-ethnic adolescent population, the researcher was clearly limited by these realities. My identity as a vowed religious woman was an additional factor in the influence of the researcher on the project. For this reason, careful consideration of the manner in which I presented myself to students was necessary. First, I chose not to wear my religious garb (habit) which is customary for the sisters in my religious congregation in order to normalize my appearance as much as possible. Secondly, I introduced myself to each student using my religious title, "Sister." While this, too, may have created discomfort for the students, I believed a positive rapport with the students was better supported by honesty with them about myself as a researcher, particularly about my religious identity. I was hopeful that my experience as a high-school educator and campus minister would further lessen this limitation as I communicated myself in an authentic and open manner, capable of engaging in conversation about spiritual topics with the students.

Finally, a methodological limitation embedded in the study was that of the tape-recording method, which does not pick up the finer nuances communicated through facial expressions and body language. This was addressed through researcher journaling after each interview took place.

Significance

Catholic educators are called to educate the whole child: spirit, mind and body

(CCE, 1977). Cobb (2005) asserted that the years when children are in elementary, middle, and high school are “precisely the years when habits of spiritual understanding and practice, or their absence, take root...religious impulse and spiritual nature left unattended by schools risk substantively impairing a child’s intellectual, social, aesthetic, and ethical growth” (p. 1). The purpose of this research project was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of spirituality among adolescent junior and senior-level high school students. The outcome of this project may provide insights for Catholic secondary teachers as to how they can better educate students in their spiritual growth.

By asking students directly about their perceptions and experiences, we can learn about their spiritual lives and what facilitates growth and learning for them. For educators, it is important to understand the awarenesses and understandings of spirituality with which the students already come to them. It is the role of Catholic secondary teachers to then take students’ experience, and to further educate them by incorporating their experience into the life of Jesus, found in scripture, and into the faith tradition of our Church. Secondly, considering the popular view in society regarding the distinction between religion and spirituality, it is important for Catholic educators to understand this distinction. By so doing, they will be better equipped for the fostering of their own spiritual growth and that of their students.

Finally, through the work of Smith and Denton (2005), we learned that religion and spirituality are alive and well among our adolescent youth in the United States. However, we, in the Catholic Church have not succeeded in educating our own teens about their faith.

Munhall (2007) articulated the benefit of a phenomenological study to the

practices of those engaged in serving human beings, such as health, education, and other social agencies:

Phenomenological research is significant and we can demonstrate its significance not by numbering, but by stating the implications for change that emerges from the interpretation we glean from our participants on the meaning of various experiences. Results from a phenomenological study can be used for policy development, change in practice, increasing our capacity for care and compassion, and raising our consciousness to what was not known or otherwise erroneous. (p. 154)

This study may provide learning as to how we can better educate our students in the context of a global world enduring a paradigmatic shift regarding the constructs of religion and spirituality both culturally and within the Catholic Church. Perhaps we need to learn to approach teens through their experiences, as opposed to through dogmatic curriculum in the classroom. While this does not do justice to the many superb Catholic secondary teachers who have served faithfully in our schools for many years, there may still be something for all of us to learn as a result of this study.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms should be understood as defined below:

Catechesis	Distinct from evangelization (the initial conversion), catechesis has a twofold objective of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. (John Paul II, 1979, #19)
Consciousness	Sensory awareness and response to the environment as defined by Merleau-Ponty (1962). "Consciousness is life: it is not an interior or inner existence, it is existence in the world through the body. The unity of mind and body becomes a means of experiencing, thus eliminating the idea of a subjective and objective world. A person cannot step out of consciousness and be sure of anything. The world is knowable only through the subjectivity of being in the world. Objectivity as a quest for reliability and validity depends on the recognition of this relationship between mind and body, subject and object, and the

	knowledge that this or any knowing comes about through consciousness” (Munhall, 2007, pp. 160-161).
Decentering	Reflection on one’s “own beliefs, preconceptions, intuitions, motives, and biases so as to decenter” (Munhall, 2007, p. 170). A critical step in the process of a phenomenological study, necessary for the researcher to become the “research instrument” (Munhall, 2007, p. 170).
Embodiment	“Explains that through consciousness we are aware of being-in-the-world, and it is through the body that we gain access to this world. We feel, think, taste, touch, hear, and are conscious through the opportunities the body offers” (Munhall, 2007, p. 161).
Essence	“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it <i>is</i> —without which it could not be what it is...The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10).
Identity Achievement	Refers to those individuals who have experienced a decision-making period and are pursuing self-chosen occupational and ideological goals (Marcia, 1980, p. 161).
Identity Diffusion	Young people who have no set occupational or ideological direction, regardless of whether or not they may have experienced a decision-making period regarding either ideological or occupational goals (Marcia, 1980, p. 161).
Identity Foreclosure	Persons who are also committed to occupational and ideological positions, but who are committed to roles that have been parentally chosen rather than self-chosen. These individuals show little or no evidence of a “crisis” (Marcia, 1980, p. 161).
Identity Moratorium	Individuals who are currently struggling with occupational and/or ideological issues; they are <i>in</i> identity crisis (Marcia, 1980, p. 161).
Intentionality	“Refers to consciousness, to the internal experience of being conscious of something; thus the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28).
Intersubjectivity	“Intersubjectivity is the verbal and nonverbal interplay between

the organized subjective worlds of two people in which one person's subjectivity intersects with another's subjectivity. The subjective world of any person represents the organization of feelings, thoughts, ideas, principles, theories, illusions, distortions, and whatever else helps or hinders that person. The real point here is that people do not know about anyone else's subjective world unless they are told about it. And even then, they cannot be sure" (Munhall, 2007, p. 173).

Intuition	Intuition is a key concept of transcendental phenomenology. "Descartes (1977) held intuition to be primary, an inborn talent directed 'toward producing solid and true judgments concerning everything that presents itself' (p. 22)...for Descartes, intuition was regarded as a distinct capacity of a pure and attentive mind born from 'the light of reason alone'" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32).
Life-world	"Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).
Perception	"In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted. Intentions, united with sensations, make up the full concrete act of perception" (Husserl, 1970, pp. 608-609 in Moustakas, 1994, p. 52).
Phenomenon	Phenomenon is that which appears in one's consciousness. The concept originated from the Greek <i>phaenesthai</i> , meaning to flare up, to show itself, to appear. "Constructed from <i>phaino</i> , phenomenon means to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, the totality of what lies before us in the light of day" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). "In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge. Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (p. 26).
Phenomenology	"Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experienced" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10).
Religion	William James (1902) defined religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude" (p. 32).
Religiousness	"Religiousness refers to the extent to which an individual has a relationship with a particular institutionalized doctrine about a

	supernatural power, a relationship that occurs through affiliation with an organized faith and participation in its prescribed rituals” (Reich, Oser, & Scarlett, 1999).
Religious Development	“Religious development is the growing relationship between an individual and a particular institutionalized doctrine and tradition related to a divine being, supernatural other or absolute truth” (King & Benson, 2006, p. 385).
Spiritual Development	Spiritual development is “the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices” (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003, p. 207).
Spirituality	“Spirituality refers to a universal human capacity or a quality of a person’s character, personality, or disposition with tendencies toward transcendence or connectedness beyond the self. It is often related to a manner of living that is carried out with a deep awareness of self, others, and the divine” (John E. Fetzer Institute, 1999).
Structural Description	“From the first three steps in phenomenological data analysis, the researcher writes a description of ‘how’ the phenomenon was experienced by individuals in the study” (Creswell, 1994, p. 237).
Textural Description	“From the first three steps in phenomenological data analysis, the researcher writes about <i>what</i> was experienced, a description of the meaning individuals have experienced” (Creswell, 1994, p. 237).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Restatement of Problem

As educators, it is our role to equip our students with a foundation of skills, knowledge and wisdom that will enable them to strive for fullness of life relying on the ongoing development of their inborn human potential (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997). In the Catholic school, the boundaries of human potential extend to the spirit, mind, and body of each child (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 1977; Pius XI, 1929). Unfortunately, methods for tending to the growth and development of the student's spirit have been insufficiently articulated (Henderson, 2005; Kaster, 2005). For the Catholic educator, this gap cannot be ignored (Schuster, 1997). In order to gain deeper insight into the spiritual experiences of students within a Catholic high school, this study will explore the lived experiences of spirituality among junior and senior-level high school students to learn the nature, meaning, and essence of spirituality in the lives of these adolescent girls. In addition, this study will critique the findings to ascertain larger implications related to Catholic secondary school teaching pedagogy.

Overview

This review of literature has a twofold purpose. First, it is designed to provide the reader with relevant background about empirical studies and theories on adolescent spirituality, religiosity, and spiritual development addressing contextual factors that influence high school junior and senior-level girls who attend an urban all-girls Catholic high school. Secondly, the chapter will review material pertinent to a phenomenological study of spirituality. This review of literature will illustrate how the present study will

add to the research on adolescent spirituality.

In order to present an overview of the content of this chapter, several points of clarification are needed. First, research in the area of adolescent spirituality is currently in a fledgling state of growth; there is limited research available on this topic. The majority of existing studies found for this review originated within the subfields of religion in sociology and psychology. In several cases, authors identified that a particular study was to be understood as a reflection of both religious and spiritual characteristics of youth (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Smith & Denton, 2003). Therefore, to provide the reader with sufficient background information regarding the context for the spiritual lives of American adolescents, it is necessary to review empirical studies which examine the religious behaviors and attitudes of youth. The first section of the chapter will address empirical findings related to adolescent religiosity and spirituality.

Secondly, establishing an operational definition is traditionally an important part of a research study. However, there is currently no commonly accepted definition within the social science domains for spirituality, spiritual development, or for the difference between the latter and religious development (Hill et al., 2000; Reich, 2001; Stifoss-Hanssen, 1999; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). Because of the salience of content and variety of issues involved in attempts to define this concept, I have placed a discussion focusing on these issues in the second section of this chapter.

Thirdly, although research in the area of adolescent spirituality is rather recent within the social sciences, admittedly, there is an abundant amount of literature available on the topic of spirituality in general, especially in the areas of Christian spirituality and

theology. In addition, there is a multi-dimensional aspect to both religion and spirituality in areas of social science research, therefore, there exists an abundance of literature available which relates either or both topics to that of another construct within multiple domains. For these reasons, it is important to clarify that the review of literature found in this chapter will be limited to the discussion of topics related to spirituality that will best serve the researcher in the preparation of this research project. The topics that will be addressed in this review are (a) empirical studies of adolescent religious and spiritual engagement; (b) a conceptual analysis of the terms religion and spirituality; and (c) a phenomenological approach to the study of adolescent spirituality.

The Scientific Study of Adolescent Religiosity and Spirituality

This section will review current empirical research that has been conducted on adolescent religious and spiritual attitudes and behaviors. In order to address this topic, the marginalization that has taken place in the past century of religion and spirituality in the social sciences will first be reviewed. This discussion will provide the reader with a greater understanding of the impact this marginalization has had on available research, particularly in the area of adolescent spirituality. Next, the section will present findings from recent national sociological studies of the religious and spiritual behaviors and attitudes of American teens, with attention given to urban youth and gender trends. A particular focus in this discussion will be placed on the findings for Catholic youth of both religious and spiritual attitudes and behaviors.

Marginalization of the Study of Religion and Spirituality

Empirical science has not always marginalized religion and spirituality. Most psychologists of religion trace their discipline back to pioneers such as William James,

especially in his classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/2002), and G. Stanley Hall who considered religiousness and spirituality to be integral to the study of psychology (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Donelson, 1999; Gorsuch, 1988; Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000). In fact, two students of James and Hall, J. H. Leuba and E. D. Starbuck, were considered the “real pioneers in empirical studies” in the psychology of religion (Donelson, p.188). Starbuck became dedicated to the systematic study of religion and worked to reconcile science and religion (Donelson).

In a special issue of the *Journal of Adolescence* devoted to the psychology of religion and adolescents, Donelson (1999) reported that despite the energy committed to the psychology of religion by early psychologists, the topic became largely dormant from about 1930 to 1960. Publications carrying an annual review of psychology of religion failed, and undergraduate university courses in the psychology of religion declined sharply. Donelson posited that “Psychology’s early love relationship with religion gave way to the temptations of Freudianism and behaviorism” (p. 188). Freud’s ideas and methods were controversial, yet fit well with the scientific attitude of the time. Freud’s psychoanalysis came to be seen as anti-religious, atheistic, and hostile to religion, and Watson’s behaviorism brought a concern with his focus on describing behavior only in terms of observable environmental events (Donelson). “Because God is not considered observable, there seemed little in religion for a behavioral psychologist to study. This position ignored the fact that psychology of religion is about human behavior not about theology” (p. 189).

Some psychologists continued to find religion of interest and contributed the

results of their own studies crossing the divide between science and religion. Donelson (1999) affirmed that some contributed significant work to the field of psychology crossing the science-religion divide (Donelson, 1999) were: Carl Jung (1936/1969, 1964); Erich Fromm (1950, 1945), Abraham Maslow (1966, 1970); Viktor Frankel (1959); and Gordon Allport (1937, 1950, 1959). Still, a predominant lack of attention to issues of religion and spirituality in the social sciences has been documented by many scholars (Gorsuch, 1988), and even more specifically, in the study of adolescence (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Donelson, 1999; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003).

Gorsuch (1988) reviewed several theories attributed to this lack of attention in an attempt to understand the rejection of what had previously been a vibrant movement. Dominant themes found in these theories involved issues of psychologists who: (1) wished to be more scientific and objective, finding all things religious subjective; (2) who were less likely to be personally involved in a religion than other academics; and (3) who were involved in the “coming of age” of psychology during the period from World War I to World War II, and who turned away from the psychology of religion in order to establish a more disciplined scientific field. The latter of these was ultimately a rejection of philosophy. Gorsuch explained, “During that period the study of anything that resembled philosophy was strongly discouraged in order to help psychology establish a separate identity as a science; hence psychology shifted from the study of mind and spirit to the study of behavior” (p. 205). Zinnbauer et al. (1997) reasoned that the difficulty of adequately defining and measuring either religion or spirituality has had negative implications for furthering social scientific research.

The scientific study of religion has reemerged since the 1960s, yet gaps still exist. More recently, some progress in research has been found relating religious variables to adolescent development (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003), however, the same cannot be said for spirituality within adolescent research. In July of 2002, Benson et al. searched two broad social science databases, Social Science Abstracts and PsycINFO, to determine the extent to which spirituality was being addressed in published studies between 1990 and July 2002. In addition, a more refined search of six premier journals on child and adolescent development and spirituality or spiritual development was conducted. The search determined that less than 1% of the articles cataloged in the two databases addressed issues of spirituality or spiritual development among children and adolescents.

A broader search including more traditional terms related to religiosity increased only marginally the attention given to these topics. When the search was limited to six leading developmental journals, the attention to spiritual development dropped even further; only one article was identified that addressed spirituality in childhood or adolescence (Benson et al., 2003).

For comparison purposes, Benson et al. (2003) analyzed the number of articles which addressed other domains of human development (cognitive, psychosocial, moral, emotional, and behavioral) during the same time frame (1990 to 2002). Without limiting the search to articles with children or adolescence as a key word, this search confirmed that spiritual development is examined much less often than other forms of development. In addition, only one in five of the articles on spiritual development specifically addressed children or adolescents. No articles on spiritual development appeared in the

six leading journals across the 12 years.

In another recent survey of scholarly journals over a five-year period (1993-1997), two main journals were reviewed for relevance to religion or to adolescence (Donelson, 1999). The dominant content of articles found in the two main journals, *Review of Religious Research* and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, focused on research and reflected some themes of concern since the early years of the century, but also reflected more distinctive themes of contemporary concern (such as marriage, divorce, and family; religious mobility and experience; abortion and sexuality). Gender measured the most frequent of the topics tallied (N=21) in the two research journals in the last five years. Donelson reported that this interest was consistent with issues found in earlier centuries and holds marked prominence for contemporary researchers; however, adolescent journals have neglected this topic altogether in relation to religion.

Hill et al. (2000) concluded that “The state of the discipline [scientific study of religion] today can be characterized as sufficiently developed but still overlooked, if not bypassed, by the whole of psychology” (p. 51). This study will contribute to much-needed research in female adolescent spirituality. In addition, this study will consider the phenomenon of spirituality from the perspective of adolescent girls.

National Demographic Studies of Adolescent Religiosity

Currently, two main national studies exist which explore sociological factors describing the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of U.S. adolescents toward religion and spirituality. The first is a meta-analysis conducted by Smith, Denton, Faris, and Regnerus (2002), and the second, by Smith and Denton (2005), is a more comprehensive sociological study conducted from 2001 to 2005 at the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill. Each of these studies, which will be discussed in this section, made significant contributions to our understanding of the religious and spiritual lives of American youth.

Mapping American Adolescent Religious Participation: An Initial Study

Seeking to address the lack of knowledge about youth religion, Smith et al. (2002) analyzed and compiled available survey data to provide a big-picture view of adolescent religious participation. Although current data was inadequate in some cases, reputable existing survey data provided the means for learning about some of the religious aspects in the lives of American youth. The goal of Smith et al.'s study was to heighten a broader understanding of and to help lay down a baseline of essential information about American adolescent religion.

Smith et al. (2002) performed a meta-analysis using three recent, reputable national surveys of American youth to present descriptive statistics on three fundamental aspects of youth religious participation: religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and involvement in church youth groups. They examined the influences of age, race, gender, and region on religious outcomes, to the degree that the survey data allowed. Survey data sets employed were Monitoring the Future (1998), The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (1995), and the Survey of Parents and Youth (1998).

Monitoring the Future (MTF) is an ongoing longitudinal nationally representative survey of American high school students, administered to 12th graders since 1975, and to 8th and 10th graders since 1991. Subsamples of students in each grade from schools across the United States are administered different versions of the questionnaire. Each

questionnaire covers core areas of demographic information and drug use, as well as questions on a range of other topics, including social life in school, academic achievement, parental involvement, political preferences, and religion. A multistage area probability sample design was employed to engage students from various geographic areas and school sizes across the nation ranging from rural to metropolitan areas. Response rates from schools varied from year to year, ranging from 66% to 88%. Smith et al. (2002) focused on results from 1996 which had a student response rate of 83%. Total Ns for the MTF varied by year and grade. In 1996, N for 12th graders=14,823; for 10th graders, N=7,895; and for 8th graders, N=9,167. Class samples were weighted in proportion to their national representation. MTF data does not include school drop-outs or home-schooled youth.

The MTF survey includes two religion questions on its core questionnaire: (1) "How often do you attend religious services?" and (2) "What is your religious preference?" MFT data from 1996 was used for this study, as later surveys excluded core religion questions for western regional students. Demographic information included age, gender, race (only coded for whites and African Americans; all other races were simply coded as "other"), and geographic region.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, 1995, referred to as Add Health, was a nationally representative school-based study of adolescents focusing on the social context of healthy behavior. Eighty eligible high schools, both public and private, were drawn from a national sampling frame of high schools. School eligibility required a minimum total enrollment for 11th grade greater than 30. The sample design ensured representativeness according to geographic region, urbanicity, school type, and school

size. Feeder middle or junior high schools were also selected with probability proportionate to those students who would be sent on to the selected high schools in the following year.

With a total of 132 schools participating, the Add Health survey was administered in schools from the fall of 1994 to the spring of 1995, to all students grades 7 to 12 present on the survey date, and was completed by more than 90,000 students. An equal number of boys (49.5%) and girls (50.5%) completed the Add Health Survey. Of note, however, were students who responded “no religion” to the survey’s religious affiliation question. These respondents were not administered subsequent religion questions, which most likely resulted in an underestimate of the religiosity of American youth on this survey (Smith et al., 2002).

The third survey included in the data set was The Survey of Parents and Youth, 1998 (SPY), designed by Princeton University’s Center for Research on Child Wellbeing in conjunction with the National Evaluation Team for the Urban Health Initiative at the Center for Health and Public Service at the New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School (Smith, et al., 2002). SPY was designed to monitor trends in youth’s access to parental and community resources. The survey, which included interviews with parents and youth, generated information on parent-child relationships, involvement in supervised activities, and outcomes, such as health status, educational expectations, and school achievement. The study was administered as a random-digit-dial telephone survey to a nationally representative sample of youth aged 10-18 (N=743). Parents were screened and then interviewed, and then were asked for permission to interview the youth. Providing no incentives for participation, SPY achieved an adult response rate of

89% and a parent consent rate for child interviews of 74%. SPY was conducted in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

Employing these three available surveys for their meta-analysis, Smith et al. (2002) compiled and analyzed the data sets to provide a “big-picture view” of adolescent religious participation. The compilation focused on American youth in the standard teenage years, those between the ages of 13 and 18. All data was weighted to be nationally representative. Intending to provide the basic findings needed at this preliminary stage of a research program on American youth and religion, Smith et al. primarily employed descriptive frequencies and cross-tabs for analysis. Descriptive findings were calculated for three main dependent religious participation variables, then for effects of gender, race, age, and geographical region.

Religious participation and preferences of youth. Smith et al. (2002) observed that the majority of American youth are religious to the extent that a religious tradition or group was identified. Only about 13% in 1995 reported that they had no religion. Nearly one-quarter of the teens reported that they were Catholic and Baptist each; the remaining half was spread thinly across a variety of different religious traditions and denominations or was not religious. The study reflected that about half of American adolescents regularly participated in religious organizations in the form of religious service attendance and participation in religious youth groups. Further, the study found that those youth who participated in youth groups were frequent attendees of religious services, reflecting that those youth who were religiously involved tended to be so through multiple forms of religious participation. About half of the religious youth reported they were not religiously active, attended church services either rarely or never, nor had they

been involved in religious youth groups during their high school years.

Religious service attendance for 12th graders was tracked over time. Using MTF data from 1976 to 1996, results showed a largely stable pattern, with a slight but noticeable decline in religious service attendance over the 20 years. In particular, weekly religious service attendance suffered, losing 8% over the time period. The categories of students who responded attending never and rarely grew by 4% each during these 20 years.

Age, gender, race, and region. Religious participation of American adolescents was found by Smith et al. (2002) to decline with age. Attributed to a number of reasons, the older American youth grew, the more they were less likely to report having a religious affiliation and attending church services regularly, or to participate in a religious youth group. This decline may have been attributed to an increase in personal autonomy from the authority of religious parents, increased participation in paid jobs, and social and recreational activities which may have competed with religious activities for the youth's time.

Mirroring a similar pattern of religious variation among adult men and women in the United States (Smith et al., 2002), adolescent girls were somewhat more religiously active than boys. Girls were more likely than boys to report a religious affiliation, to attend church regularly, and to be involved in a religious youth group. For example, Add Health data revealed that 45% of all youth who reported no religion were girls, while 55% were boys. Monitoring the Future data showed gender differences in religious service attendance for surveyed 8th, 10th, and 12th graders combined. Six percent more American adolescent girls than boys attended church services weekly, while 5% more

boys than girls never attended church.

Smith et al. (2002) found some differentiation among American adolescents by race. Youth of all races were represented in almost every religious group. However, certain religious traditions were comprised of much higher proportions of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian youth, who tended to cluster in specific religious groups. Race was also attributed to somewhat influence church attendance and youth group involvement, with African-American youth being the most involved, followed by white youth and those of “other race” who exhibited relatively the least religious participation. Smith et al. postulated that these differences were not easily explained by socioeconomic differences, but probably were derived more from cultural expectations of religious participation within racial and ethnic communities and the religious traditions in which the teens tended to participate.

Religious participation of American adolescents varied somewhat by region of residence. Southern youth were the most religiously involved, followed by youth in the Midwest and West. Religious participation reported was the least for adolescents who resided in the Northeast (Smith et al., 2002).

National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

Seeking to respond to what they identified as a “curious neglect,” the National Study of Youth and Religion ([NSYR] Smith & Denton, 2005) intended to help develop a better scholarly and public understanding of the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents. Smith and Denton postulated, “To adequately comprehend the lives of American teenagers, it therefore seems important to understand their religious and spiritual beliefs, commitments, practices, experiences and desires” (p. 4).

Conducted from July 2002 to March 2003, the NSYR was a national random-digit-dial telephone survey (RDD) of U.S. households containing at least one teenager between the ages of 13-17. Total RDD participants (N=3,290, with a Jewish oversample of N=80) included both English- and Spanish-speaking teenagers and their parents. The survey employed a sample of randomly generated telephone numbers representing all household telephones in the 50 United States. By employing the RDD telephone survey sampling method, the survey was able to include school-attending youth and school dropouts, as well as home-schooled youth and students frequently absent from school. The RDD survey method also enabled researchers to ask numerous religion questions which may have been otherwise disallowed by principals and school boards if administered in schools. In addition, the verbal reading of survey questions by trained interviewers facilitated question-and-answer clarification, thus increasing the validity of answers. Smith and Denton (2005) asserted that the anonymity allowed by the RDD survey interviewer on the telephone, compared to an in-person interviewer in the home, may have also contributed to greater validity of teenagers' answers to sensitive questions and reduced the possibility of biasing effects of in-person interviewers' gender, race, and age.

Religious participation and preferences of youth. The NSYR survey asked teens what kind of religious people they considered themselves to be (e.g. very religious, somewhat religious, not religious) and with which religious denomination they most identified. Seventy-five percent of U.S. teens self-identified as Christians, 52% of which were Protestant and 23% were Catholic. Sixteen percent of teens considered themselves to be "not religious;" however, Smith and Denton (2005) reported that not all of the 16%

of nonreligious teens *acted* not religious, as responses from nonreligious teens in other parts of the survey reflected that many nonreligious teens believed in God, attended church, and prayed. Smith and Denton surmised that there must be something in the way these teens understood the concept, “religious,” that caused them to identify themselves as not religious on the surveys.

The next largest percentages of religious affiliation among teens identified minority U.S. religions of Mormonism with 2.5% and Judaism at 1.5%. Several other religions were named with youth affiliation at less than one percent: Jehovah’s Witness (0.6%), Muslim (0.5%); Eastern Orthodox, Buddhist, Pagan or Wicca each at 0.3%; and Hindu, Christian Science, Native American, Unitarian each at 0.1%. Smith and Denton (2005) asserted that U.S. American teens as a whole adhered to one religious faith as opposed to mixing faiths (e.g. mixed religious family), and were predominantly Christian.

Religious belief similarity of parents and teens. According to Smith and Denton (2005), a popularly held stereotype of American youth considers U.S. teens as dissidents who regard their parents’ religious beliefs and practices old and meaningless, and who want little to do with their parents’ religion. The NSYR survey asked teens to express how similar to or different from their parents they were in their religious beliefs. About three out of four teens considered their own religious beliefs to be somewhat or very similar to their parents: 78% of respondents considered their own beliefs somewhat or very similar to the beliefs of their mother, while 72% considered their beliefs very or somewhat similar to those of their father. Only 6% of respondents considered their own religious beliefs very different from those of their mother and 11% from those of their

father.

Not all youth who expressed “very” different from parental beliefs were not rebellious, antireligious teens of religiously devout parents. Smith and Denton (2005) found that 37% of teens who reported very different beliefs from their mother and 45% whose beliefs were very different from their father responded on another question that their own religious faith was very or extremely important to them in their daily lives. This suggests that these teens held firm to their own faith but seemingly did not agree with their parents on most religious matters.

Religious similarity to parents varied somewhat according to the religious traditions teens were affiliated. Mormon teens were the most likely among all U.S. teens to hold religious beliefs similar to their parents, followed by conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Black Protestant teens. Jewish teens reported they were the least likely to express that they shared the belief of their parents, although there was still an impressive majority of Jewish youth who did. Overall, the data reflected that U.S. teens leaned strongly toward similarity with their parents in religious beliefs.

The question of whether teens remained affiliated with the religious tradition of their parents or were drifting or converting to other religious traditions was addressed as a matter of retention of youth. Results found that conservative Protestant and Mormon parents did the best job retaining 86% of their teens each, followed by Catholics at 83%, black Protestants at 81%, and Jewish parents at 75%. Mainline Protestant parents’ teens retained their parents’ religion at 68%. Parents of other religions, Jehovah’s Witness, Hindu, pagan, Buddhist, and Unitarian, have been doing considerably worse than Mormon, Christian, and Jewish parents in retaining (at 57%) their youth in any of these

religions. Finally, nonreligious parents' responses indicated they were faring relatively poorly at retaining their youth as nonreligious at 63%.

Finally, there appeared to be relatively little "religious switching" of teens away from their parents' religion into other religious traditions. For Smith and Denton (2005), this finding was striking. At the same time, significant percentages of teens with religious parents considered themselves non-religious. About one-third of teens of "other religion" parents were not religious, 17% of teens of mainline and Black Protestant parents and 18% of teens of Jewish parents were not religious. Mormon and Catholic parents followed at 13% and 12%, respectively. Conservative Protestant parents showed the lowest levels of teens deserting their faiths for non-religious identities at 10%.

Religious service attendance. Researchers asked: How frequently do teenagers attend religious services and with whom do they attend? Forty percent of all surveyed U.S. teens reported attending religious services once a week or more; 19% reported attending one to three times per month; 22% reported attending religious services a few or many times per year; and, 18% reported never attending religious services.

Religious service attendance varied greatly by the religious tradition of the teen. Seventy-one percent of Mormon teens and 55% of conservative Protestant teens attended religious services weekly or more frequently, while 58% of Jewish youth and 31% of Catholic teens attended religious services only a few times a year or never. Almost all of the nonreligious teens never attended religious services. Mainline and Black Protestant teens fall in their frequency of church attendance between these two extremes. U.S. teens as a group professed to want to attend religious services not less, but actually more than they currently do. This sentiment was attributed to several factors: possibly wishful

thinking, uncooperative parents and transportation problems which prevented more frequent attendance. The findings provided no evidence to support the belief that significant numbers of teens preferred to stop attending religious services and were only doing so because of force imposed by their parents.

Slightly fewer than half of the teens surveyed attended religious services with both parents, 21% attended with only one parent, and 10% attended with neither parent. Teens in this last group attended with a friend, with another family relative or by themselves. More than half of Mormon, conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic teens attended religious services with both of their parents. Jewish teens attended with both parents. Black Protestant teens were much more likely than all other groups to attend with only one parent. Nearly all nonreligious teens did not attend or did not have parents with whom they might attend.

Features of faith. Based on teens' responses to the NSYR survey, Smith and Denton (2005) reported that slightly more than one-third of U.S. teens experienced an intimate relationship with God, another third felt something in the middle, neither intimate nor distant, and almost one-third either felt distant from or did not believe in God. This variance differed again by religious traditions. In this case, Black Protestants and conservative Protestants ranked highest on closeness to God, with nearly 50% of each reporting that they felt very or extremely close to God. Forty-four percent of Mormon, 40% of mainline Protestant and 31% of Catholic teens expressed that they felt very or extremely close to God. Only 10% of Jewish youth acknowledged the same, which was just 1% more than nonreligious youth reported. U.S. teens of all major traditions were spread across a spectrum of closeness to God, and for the most part, more

teens stated they felt closer to God than distant.

Researchers asked: How many doubts about their religious beliefs do U.S. adolescents have? According to the NSYR survey, teens have relatively few doubts about their religious beliefs. Nearly half of religious teens reported having no doubts at all in the year prior to taking the survey; another one-third had a few doubts. Only one in 20 religious teens reported dealing with many doubts about their faith in the previous year. Compared to other faith variables, the doubts responses varied less by religious traditions. Differences were not major. Religious teens were found in general not to struggle a great deal with doubt about their faith (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Religious and spiritual beliefs and experiences. U.S. teens hold a great deal of religious belief and a great deal of variance in their belief (Smith & Denton, 2005). More than 80% of teens responded that they believed in God, slightly more than 10% were unsure about their belief in God, and only 3% reported they definitely did not believe in God. Considering the question, *What is the God that teens believe in?*, about two-thirds of teens responded that they believed in God as a personal being involved in the lives of people today; 13% professed a deist's view of God as having created the world but not being involved in it now; and 14% subscribed to what Smith and Denton referred to as a "New Age approach" to God as an impersonal, cosmic life force. Five percent of respondents simply did not know whether they believed in God or refused to answer the question.

Belief-in-God measures showed notable variance across the religious traditions analyzed. Smith and Denton (2005) found that Black and conservative Protestant teens stood out for their relatively high rates of definite belief in God. Among religious youth,

Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, and mainline Protestant teens were relatively likely to not be sure whether they believed in God. At the same time, about half of nonreligious teens professed to believe in God and another third were open to the possibility; only 17% of nonreligious teens (nonreligious were 16% of all teens surveyed) stated they simply did not believe in God. Overall, the NSYR response data reflected much religious belief among teens and much variance among teens in their religious belief.

The NSYR surveyed teens about the occurrence of personal religious experiences in their lives. Four specific religious experiences were given as options in the survey: (1) Has the teen made a personal commitment to live life for God? (2) Has the teen ever had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful? (3) Has the teen ever experienced a definite answer to prayer or specific guidance from God? and (4) Has the teen ever witnessed or experienced what the teen believed was a miracle from God?

Roughly half the respondents reported having had each of a variety of religious experiences. Smith and Denton (2005) reported that further analysis revealed that only 20% of all U.S. teenagers reported not having had any of the four religious experiences. Twenty percent of teens reported having experienced all four, another 20% experienced three of the four, 18% experienced two, and 17% had one of the four religious experiences named in the survey (the remaining 5% did not know or refused to answer). Smith and Denton concluded that the vast majority of U.S. religious teens and minorities of nonreligious teens reported having had one or more significant religious experiences.

Once again, the likelihood of a teen having had one of these experiences varied significantly by religious tradition. As with the general pattern found in other results previously discussed, Smith and Denton (2005) found that conservative Protestant, Black

Protestant, and Mormon teens were the most likely to have had these religious experiences; nonreligious teens were the least likely; and Jewish, Catholic, and mainline Protestants fell somewhere between these two groups, depending on the specific question. It can thus be concluded that U.S. teens of almost any religious tradition were not lacking significant religious experiences.

Personal religious practices. Personal religious practices are another important dimension of religious life worthy of examination in the life of U.S. teens. Religious practices were defined by Smith and Denton (2005) as those “specific actions in which religious believers engage over time that embody spiritual meaning and foster personal formation toward excellence in religious faith and works” (p. 45). These habits are spiritually significant as they are engaged in intentionally for the purpose of being shaped by them over time, so that one is formed into the goodness that is known by one’s religious faith (p. 45). Some well-known religious practices are prayer, scripture reading, meditation and tithing, but there are many other possibilities as well. Smith and Denton asserted that although not all religious traditions encourage the same religious practices, the NSYR survey asked all teens about many practices in order to map out proportions among teens.

Significant minorities of U.S. teens reported having engaged in most of a long list of religious practices in the previous year of the study (Smith & Denton, 2005). Fewer than 20% reported they had meditated, served as acolytes, or participated in a religious group at school. Between 20% and 29% taught Sunday school, burned candles or incense for religious reasons, or engaged in the spiritual disciplines of fasting or self-denial, and participated in a scripture study or prayer or religious group. About one-third of teens

reported having read a religious book, spoken at a religious service, practiced a religious day of rest, and attended a religious music conference, and nearly half reported that they have worn clothing or jewelry with religious meaning, shared their faith with another person, and listened to religious music outside of a concert.

The differences for many of these practices across traditions were notable, yet not consistent across all traditions (Smith & Denton, 2005). For example, Mormon teens were found to be strong in sharing faith and teaching Sunday schools, but demonstrated little interest in other religious practices. Black Protestant teens showed strength in playing instruments or singing in religious music groups and choirs, but were low on spiritual meditation. Overall, findings revealed that significant minorities of U.S. teens of all religious traditions examined in the study responded to have participated in the previous year in nearly all of the different religious practices surveyed. In addition, although the survey did not ask all religious practice questions of nonreligious teens, Smith and Denton reported that not a trivial number of them expressed having engaged in the previous year in most of the religious practices surveyed.

Catholic Youth and the NSYR

Catholic teens, who represent nearly one-quarter of all U.S. teens, stood out among U.S. Christian teenagers consistently scoring lower on most measures of religiosity (Smith & Denton, 2005). NSYR results revealed U.S. Catholic youth scoring 5 to 25 percentage points lower than their conservative, mainline, and Black Protestant peers on a variety of categories: religious beliefs, practices, experiences, commitments, and evaluations. Researchers sought explanations for these differences posing questions, such as: (1) Why do U.S. Catholic teenagers as a whole seem so less religiously engaged

than their teenage counterparts in other U.S. Christian traditions? (2) What might help the apparent overall higher levels of religious laxity among Catholic teenagers compared both to other U.S. Christian teens and authoritative Catholic norms of faithfulness?

Demographic differences. In order to delve more deeply into these questions, researchers reviewed youth responses collected in the interviews with Catholic youth. While these interviews clearly cannot be generalized to the U.S. Catholic youth population, they gave some insight into what appeared as religious laxity, indifference, and permissiveness.

Smith and Denton (2005) pointed out that some U.S. Catholic teens interviewed were religiously and spiritually very serious, informed, and committed. In the course of the 267 NSYR personal interviews with teens living in 45 states, a number of White, Black and Hispanic Catholic teens were found who loved God and the Church, who understood and could articulate what Catholics believe, who were involved in the ongoing life of their parishes, and who were sincere in their commitment to live lives as faithful Catholic believers. Smith and Denton discovered these youth were a “definite minority” among the Catholic teens interviewed. Instead, Smith and Denton observed that the majority of Catholic teens interviewed tended to be rather religiously and spiritually indifferent, uninformed, and disengaged.

Seeking a sociological explanation for these differences, Smith and Denton (2005) postulated three possible explanations: (1) that the differences were due to the existence of simple demographic factors, a higher concentration of Catholic youth living in the northeastern United States, associated with lower religiosity; (2) that the difference was possibly due to the larger Hispanic population of Catholic teens, who were found

less likely to attend church than, for example, White and Black teens; and (3) that further minor demographic differences, parental marital status, age, and gender, may explain the differences between Catholic teens and their Protestant peers. Multivariate regression analyses were run to remove the effects of each of these differences from the negative association of Catholic teens with church attendance, importance of faith, and religious youth group participation. Using mainline Protestant teens as the reference group, the regression analyses examined whether the significant negative effect of teens being Catholic on these three religiosity outcomes was diminished or made statistically insignificant when controlling for the effects of possibly related demographic factors. The statistical results showed that none of the demographic factors explained away the Catholic factor.

Parental religiosity. Throughout this study, Smith and Denton (2005) observed the influence of both parents and other significant adults in the lives of teens to have profound effects. In fact, results of the NSYR survey showed that, compared to their Protestant peers, U.S. Catholic parents of teenagers were somewhat less likely than conservative and Black (but not mainline) Protestant parents of teens to attend church regularly and were more likely than the same to attend infrequently or never. U.S. Catholic parents of teenagers were also much less likely than all of their Protestant counterparts to participate in organized activities at church other than regular worship services in experiences such as Bible studies, potluck meals, music practices, and small groups. U.S. Catholic parents of teenagers were less involved in the community lives of their parishes outside of regular services than were U.S. Protestant parents of teens. In addition, Catholic parents of teenagers were somewhat less likely than their conservative

and black (but not mainline) Protestant counterparts to report that their religious faith is very or extremely important in their lives and to be married to a spouse who shares the same religious faith. Considering all of this data, Smith and Denton (2005) surmised that these relatively lower levels of religiosity and parental religious solidarity among Catholic parents of teenagers could help explain the relative lower levels of religiosity among U.S. Catholic teens.

Multivariate regression analyses were run to examine the possible effects of parental religiosity on the negative correlation of Catholic teens with Church attendance, importance of faith, and religious youth group participation. Using mainline Protestant teens as the reference group, statistical results displayed that parental religiosity was indeed a significant factor in U.S. Catholic teens' religiosity outcomes. Statistically significant differences between Catholic and mainline Protestant teens originally found in the study were reduced when controlled for parental church attendance, importance of faith, and shared parental religious faith in addition to demographics. This difference was made statistically insignificant when the effects of parental involvement in church beyond regular worship services were removed.

When all four parental religiosity variables were entered into the same regression model, three of the four parental religiosity variables (all except parental importance of faith) remained statistically significantly associated with frequency of teen church attendance, while the coefficient for the Catholic teen variable was reduced by nearly one-third and became statistically insignificant. In other words, the lower levels of church attendance by U.S. Catholic teens compared to their mainline Protestant peers could be significantly explained by the lower levels of religiosity of their *parents*. The differences

among teens disappeared when differences among parents were accounted for.

A similar but less clear-cut pattern emerged for a regression analysis of teen importance of faith. Controlling for the four parental religiosity variables reduced the coefficients for the negative Catholic teen association with importance of faith. That association was made statistically insignificant when one of the four parent variables tested individually (church activities beyond attendance) was controlled for. In other words, the lower levels of importance of faith reported by U.S. Catholic teens compared to mainline Protestant teens could be explained partly by the lower levels of religiosity of their parents. The religious (Catholic versus mainline Protestant) differences in importance of faith among teens were again reduced and, for one parent religiosity control, disappeared when religious differences among parents was accounted for.

Summarizing the Findings

The marginalization of religion in the social sciences originated in scholarly circles early in the 20th century and has affected the approach to both religion and spirituality in academic institutions of higher learning to the present day (Donelson, 1999). This reality has impacted the amount of research currently available for review on adolescent spirituality and may have prevented the accumulation of greater knowledge of the spiritual lives of adolescents.

This marginalization of religion and spirituality continues in the social science domains in college and university courses today (Donelson, 1999), taking place in institutions which have most likely prepared Catholic secondary school teachers. This exploration presents a possible explanation for teachers' attitudes towards religion in high school curricula, therefore, providing a broader contextual understanding for the present

study.

The review of empirical research conducted among adolescents in the United States has been the most revealing topic covered in this section. From this review, more accurate information about the religious and spiritual lives of teens has been made evident. First, the review displayed that a majority of U.S. teens are religious, value their religious beliefs, and feel a close connection to God. The research reflected that a majority of teens participated in religious organizations in the forms of regular service attendance and involvement in youth groups. Secondly, while teens have been subject to popularly held stereotypes which considered them religiously dissident, survey results refuted these opinions. Three-fourths of teens surveyed by Smith and Denton (2005) responded that they embraced the beliefs of their parents and that the majority attended religious services with their parents. One-third of all teens reported an experience of having an intimate relationship, more than 80% reported that they believed in God; and roughly half reported having had one of a variety of religious experiences. This information suggests that religion and spirituality hold a valued place in the lives of American teens.

The majority of our American youth have a hunger and a desire for God; to belong to and to practice their respective religious traditions. This is great news in itself in that it may provide encouragement and new vitality to parents, teachers, and religious leaders in their efforts to evangelize youth in their various faith traditions. However, a third major learning from these studies was that Catholic youth scored comparatively lower than their Protestant peers. This finding may be distressing for those engaged in the process of catechizing youth. More than that, the issue of parental lack of participation

presents a serious challenge. Yet, by focusing on the overall position religion holds in the lives of teens, we may suspect that teens desire to know God, to understand their religion better and how it relates to their lives. This information has the potential for instilling a new confidence in religious educators that it is possible to speak of religion and spirituality to teens as persons who value both constructs and who are willing to learn. However, further research may reveal more successful ways to engage and to educate teens while they are young enough to be significantly impacted.

Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality

The Catholic school shares in the mission of evangelization through its charge to teach the whole child: spirit, mind, and body (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977, 1982, 1988). Paul VI (1975) stressed the importance of the ongoing evaluation of how the message of evangelization is communicated. Paul VI stated that in so doing “one must consider the circumstances of time, place and culture, and above all, continue to allow for creativity, for discovery, and for adaptation so that the message can be heard in a fresh and meaningful way” (¶41). Viewing the circumstances of our time, we find complex and contrasting issues. Some of these are: (1) a lack of clarity in social science research between religion and spirituality (Hill et al., 2000); (2) a sustained period of marginalization in the scholarly study of religion and spirituality, yet, research which shows strong (91%) engagement in the practice of religiosity among Americans (Gallup International Association, 1999); and finally, (3) a significant presence in the lives of U.S. teens today is their religion (Smith & Denton, 2005), yet, at the level of subjective consciousness, adolescent religious and spiritual understanding and concern seem to be generally very weak, particularly among Catholic youth (Smith & Denton).

To approach this study with clarity, it is important to make some distinctions between the constructs of religion and spirituality. In light of the paradoxes mentioned above, a deeper search into social science research may produce a broader perspective, a fresh look, and may even give rise to new discoveries and understanding for the benefit of the mission of Catholic education for adolescents in our secondary schools (Kaster, 2006). This section will review evolving perspectives of religion and spirituality from the viewpoint of some historical and current concepts of the constructs; it will discuss cultural and contextual issues which may have impacted these evolving perspectives; it will review recent empirical studies related to the changing cultural perspectives on religion and spirituality; and, it will follow with a discussion of distinctions, overlaps, and potential pitfalls between the two. Finally, the section will present current theory on definitions and descriptions of spirituality useful in forming a conceptual framework for spirituality.

Evolving Perspectives of Religion and Spirituality

Hill et al. (2000) maintained that scholars have struggled to differentiate the *psyche* (the psychological soul) from the *pneuma* (the religious spirit) since the beginning of their discipline. Since William James (1902/2002), G. Stanley Hall (1917) and Edwin Starbuck (1899) at the beginning of the 20th century, the psychological study of religion has followed a meandering course “ranging from an impressive inauguration...to a neglect of the topic during the heyday of behaviorism, to a slumbering though detectable reemergence of the field where theories have been developed and at least some empirical studies conducted” (p. 51). Hill et al. (2000) summarized the current state of scholars’ attempts to define religion and spirituality:

The veritable flood of interest in spirituality witnessed in the popular culture during the past few decades has resulted in disagreements and perhaps even confusion about what is meant by such terms as religion and spirituality. Both spirituality and religion are complex phenomena, multidimensional in nature, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective or interest. (p. 52)

Several factors have contributed to this meandering journey and current status.

Historically, spirituality was not distinguished from religion until the rise of secularism in this century (Hill et al., 2000; Turner, Lukoff, Barnhouse, & Lu, 1995; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), and with this came a growing disillusionment with religious institutions in western society. Turner et al. (1995) asserted that in the last 25 years, a “split” had taken place between religion and spirituality leading to widespread development of spiritual practices not associated with recognized religious institutions. Turner et al. claimed that many became disillusioned with religion and religious institutions, often seeing them as obstacles rather than facilitators of personal experiences of the transcendent. The effects of these changes, which became evident in the 1960s and 1970s, was that spirituality began to take on more distinct meanings and more favorable connotations apart from religion (Turner et al., 1995, p.437).

The Evolving Concept of Religion

The word “religion” comes from the Latin root *religio* which connotes a bond between humanity and some greater-than-human power (Hill et al., 2000). Scholars from the social sciences have identified at least three historical designations of the term: (1) a supernatural power to which individuals are motivated or committed; (2) a feeling that is present in persons who vividly conceive of and observe such power; and (3) the ritual acts carried out in respect of that power (Hill et al.; Wulff, 1997). Drawing upon the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963), Wulff affirmed that in every instance *religio* referred

to “something that one does, or that one feels deeply about, or that impinges on one’s will, exacting obedience or threatening disaster or offering reward or binding one into one’s community” (Smith, 1963, pp. 20, 22).

A reified object. Wulff (1997) articulated that the meaning of the word “religion” has undergone an elaborate evolution over the centuries. From referring to one’s perceptions, feelings, or actions, the word came to be used with a variety of alternative meanings. These alternative meanings included alien ritual practices of others, a universal disposition of inner piety, an abstract system of ideas, a totality of all belief systems, and an unchanging essence that underlies the diversity of observable, dynamic forms. Wulff maintained that religion has become increasingly reified from an abstract process to a fixed objective entity expressed through a definable system (such as denominations, major faith traditions, world religions). Wulff concluded that this reification of religion, while helpful for classification purposes, creates a serious distortion and depreciation of religion because it overlooks the dynamic personal quality of much religious experience and leaves out the crucial factor of transcendence.

Traditional definitions. Social scientific research has traditionally adopted either a substantive or functional approach to religion (Wulff, 1993; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). The substantive approach, explained Zinnbauer et al., focuses on the beliefs, emotions, practices, and relationships of individuals in relation to a higher power or divine being. Central to this definition is the sacred, and it is the sacred which fundamentally characterizes religiousness (Zinnbauer et al.). Additionally, the functional approach emphasizes the function that religiousness serves in the lives of individuals. The functional refers to the beliefs, emotions, practices, and experiences of individuals that

are examined, while the focus is on how they are used in dealing with the fundamental problems of existence such as life, death, suffering, and injustice (Zinnbauer et al.).

Hill et al. (2000) maintained that philosophers and theologians (such as Heschel, 1958; Tillich, 1952) suggested that religion should be sensitive and responsive to ultimate life questions, while urging the individual to pursue a search for answers to those questions. Heschel (1958) defined religious thinking as “an intellectual endeavor out of the depths of reason. It is a source of cognitive insight into the ultimate issues of human existence” (p. 43).

These traditional definitions of religion have portrayed a generally positive, stabilizing influence on the lives of believers (Hill et al., 2000). Zinnbauer et al. (1997) reasoned that what is notable about these former approaches to religiousness is that they comprise fairly broad explanations and include a wide range of elements. Consequently, definitions and conceptualizations within these traditions have been broad enough to subsume “spirituality,” as well as both individual and institutional beliefs and activities (Zinnbauer et al.).

Social Sciences: The Secularization Model

According to Hill et al. (2000), a number of social scientists have held to the secularization model which considered society’s movement from the sacred to more secular conditions as a natural or “a normal modern phenomenon, the result of a triumphant rise of science and rational enlightenment over superstition and mysticism” (p. 58). Therefore, religion became less relevant or socially useful over time. Revisionists of this model (Stark & Bainbridge, 1996) have contended that secularization called for the transformation, not the elimination, of religion.

Smith (2003) observed that sociology has had a long history of reductionist thinking. With regard to religion, Smith elaborated that this reductionist thinking has often expressed itself in claims that what on the surface appeared to be religious phenomena was in fact revealed by serious analyses to *really* [author's emphasis] only be about other things quite unrelated to religion. In other words, "what appears to be divine or spiritual or transcendent or pious or sacred were considered to *really only* [author's emphasis] be about social class, race, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, solidarity, social control and so on" (p. 19). Smith argued that such reductionism and many other cases of analytical reductionism are "intellectually parochial and simplistic" (p. 19).

Evolving Concepts of Spirituality

The word "spirituality" derives from the Latin root *spiritus*, which means breath of life, and with the Latin *spiritulis*, designating simply a person "of the spirit" (Hill et al., 2000). The term spirituality has historically been referenced in the context of religion and is still both experienced and expressed by many through conventional religious understanding (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). As spirituality has become differentiated from religiousness, it has taken with it some of the elements formally included within religiousness. Therefore, recent definitions of religiousness have become narrower and less inclusive (Zinnbauer et al.).

Lukoff, Lu, and Turner (1992) emphasized that while confidence in religion and religious leadership has been decreasing, there has been a consistent or slightly increasing number of people who report that they believe in God or some spiritual force, who pray or engage in some spiritual practice, and who report a religious or mystical experience. This cultural differentiation has resulted in a present-day trend of viewing spirituality in a

positive light through its associations with personal experiences of the transcendent (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996) and to view religion with its associated demands of tradition in a more negative light and as a hindrance to spiritual experiences (Turner et al.). Stark and Bainbridge (1985) concluded that this trend “has not created an irreligious culture, only an unchurched one” (p. 441).

Definitional Issues

Still, the concept of spirituality remains somewhat obscure. For Spilka (1993), spirituality is a “fuzzy concept.” In his article discussing the problems inherent in operationalizing a definition for this concept, Spilka stated, “There is a word in the religious lexicon that embraces obscurity with passion. The word is spirituality” (p. 1). In his attempt to find definitional clarity, Spilka first went to dictionary sources, which (1) stressed spirit, soul, or “incorporeal” substance; and, (2) cited spiritual in an adjectival way, referring to ethereal or refined qualities as moral, ethical, or religious characteristics. Spilka found none of these to be helpful in his quest to operationalize the term. Further searches into the literature from the psychology of religion were equally dismaying. His final attempt was to interview a group of 10 people asking two questions, “What does spirituality mean to you?” and “What is a person you might consider spiritual like?”, or in other words, “What are the psychological characteristics of a spiritual person?” The group included a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a number of psychologically sophisticated clergy, two seminary students from a pastoral psychology program and two clergy who were former professors of religious studies. The result of this recorded interview process centered on the concepts of holism and relationship: spirituality implied a holistic perspective unifying the individual with others, the world, the universe,

and most frequently, the supernatural. Spilka assured that reference was made also to a nonsupernatural transcendental framework, a framework lacking the concept of a deity, (James 1902/2002), as well.

Spirituality: A Multidimensional Construct

Spilka (1993) further outlined a framework providing direction for the development of a multidimensional system for understanding spirituality. In this system, three major orientations were related to a number of spirituality forms and subforms: (1) spirituality associated with participation in certain rites, such as prayer, observing rituals, scriptural reading, and making pilgrimages; (2) spirituality identified with religious experience and its expressions, such as glossolalia, being born again, experiencing divine help, God, mysticism, and so forth; and (3) spirituality referring to a quality of life which is optimistic and stresses faith, hope, love, compassion, and a moral relationship to the universe. Given this systematic view of spirituality, Spilka postulated that a number of forms and subforms of spirituality may be explicated: (1) world-oriented; (2) God-oriented; and (3) people-oriented or humanistic spiritualities (Table 2).

While Spilka (1993) held to his task of finding an operational definition for the term spirituality, this systemic view generated several new questions. As a psychologist, Spilka wondered if in psychology's integral connection with people, perhaps spirituality was an implicit factor within traditionally accepted theories, such as self-actualization and self-realization. In addition, he questioned the same implicit component in "new theologies," such as feminist, liberation, and earth spiritualities. Spilka suggested that these questions merited further evaluation.

Finding a common denominator. A relatively new wave among scholars

Table 2

<i>Multidimensional Forms of Spirituality</i>	
Forms of Spirituality	Connotations, Subforms, and Possible Expressions:
<u>World-oriented spiritualities:</u>	<p>These stress the world view of peoples or individuals. This form can be further subdivided into three subforms;</p> <p>(a) <i>Prescientific supernaturalism</i>: Where withdrawal from the world is valued as an avenue to true devotion; (such as Augustine's <i>Confessions</i> and <i>Imitation of Christ</i> by A' Kempis);</p> <p>(b) <i>Poetic naturalism</i>: Identification with nature is expressed in poetry that is unrelated to religion; (such as poetry of Wordsworth);</p> <p>(c) <i>scientific naturalism</i>: based on views of the natural world; (such as Einstein's <i>Cosmic Religion</i>).</p>
<u>God-oriented spiritualities:</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opposed to world-orientations; these are the most frequently cited in the literature. 2. Thought and behavior are premised upon theologies, broad or focused: Pentecostal, holiness, evangelical, or those of specific religious bodies. Examples include: Various writings on: <i>Judaism</i> by Heschel and Buber; <i>Catholicism</i>: by Merton and De Chardin; <i>Protestantism</i>: by Luther and Calvin. 3. Tend to be doctrinal or institutional in nature, but can be creative in the ways they are focused.
<u>People-oriented or humanistic spiritualities</u> Consists of a glorification of human potential; often refers poetically to the human spirit.	<p>Characteristics between childhood and adulthood include: Curiosity, imaginativeness, open-mindedness, willingness to experiment, faithfulness, flexibility, humor, receptivity, eagerness to learn, energy, the need to love, and the ability to laugh.</p>

Note. From "Spirituality: Problems and Directions in Operationalizing," by B. Spilka, 1993, pp. 6-7. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association. Toronto, ON.

searching to operationalize a definition for spirituality has been predicated on finding a common denominator that will bind both religion and spirituality together, while at the same time acknowledge their differences (Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). Pargament (1997) proposed that the anchor point for this common denominator is the concept of the sacred. Pargament suggested that examples of the sacred include the

concepts of God, divinity, transcendence, and ultimate reality. According to Pargament's proposition, spirituality may then be defined as "a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discourse, hold on to and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives" (Hill & Pargament, 2003, p. 65). Hill et al. (2000) further clarified what is embraced by including the sacred as a distinguishing factor:

The Sacred is a person, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self. Though the Sacred may be found within the self, it has perceived value independent of the self. Perceptions of the Sacred invoke feelings of respect, reverence, devotion, and, may, ideally, serve an integrative function in human personality. Such respect or reverence, may, but may not, involve the personal commitment to live a life that is congruent with the principles or characteristics of that which is considered sacred. In the context of religion, this sacred content is often defined through institutional mechanisms such as ecclesiastical authority, sacred writings, and traditions. Such institutionalized sources of knowledge work together in religions to provide religious adherents with a picture of what reality is like...and recommend actions that people should strive to undertake or lifestyles that people should seek to embody to respond appropriately to this reality. (p. 5)

Spirituality and Spiritual Development

According to Roehlkepartain, Benson, King and Wagener (2006), there is evidence of increased attention to the domain of spirituality and spiritual development; however, there is no consensus about what the domain really is. The fundamental challenge in compiling scholarship on "spiritual development" is certainly a definitional issue, knowing that how the subject is defined serves to set boundaries on the areas of scholarship, as well as influences whether it is deemed legitimate in the academy.

Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) postulated that there are several ways to think about the terms *spirituality* and *spiritual development* and explicated that the vast majority of researchers in the field of adolescent spirituality agree that spirituality has multiple domains (Gorsuch & Walker, 2006; Lerner et al., 2006). MacDonald (2000) analyzed 20

measures of spirituality, identifying five “robust dimensions of spirituality” (p. 185): cognitive orientation; experiential/phenomenological dimension; existential well-being; paranormal beliefs; and religiousness. Roehlkepartain et al. suggested that these examples point to the many facets that surface in this field. Roehlkepartain et al. asserted that these measures reinforce the understanding of spirituality and spiritual development as complex, multidimensional phenomena and processes that require sophisticated theory, measurement, and analysis across diverse populations, cultures, and traditions (p. 9). However, much of the current research relies primarily on relatively superficial measures of spirituality.

A second definition of spiritual development asserted by Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) focused on the person as “actively constructing a view of the self-in-context” (p. 5). Roehlkepartain et al. embraced the following description:

Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental “engine” that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. (Benson et al., 2003, pp. 205-206)

A third theoretical perspective emerging from the research suggests that “there is a core and universal dynamic in human development that deserves to be moved to center stage in the developmental sciences, alongside and integrated with the other well-known streams of development: cognitive, social, emotional, and moral” (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p. 5). Roehlkepartain et al. identified the name commonly given to this dimension as “spiritual development” and maintained that “it is hypothesized to be a developmental wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, connectedness to others and the sacred, purpose, and contributions, each and all of which can be addressed by religion or

other systems of ideas and belief” (p. 5).

Empirical Studies Measuring the Changing Concepts

The religious and spiritual dimensions of culture are among the most important factors that structure human experiences, beliefs, values and behavior (Lukoff, Lu, & Turner, 1992). Neither the students who comprise our populations in Catholic secondary schools, nor the teachers, are immune to these factors. Two recent studies measured the effects of change in the constructs of religion and spirituality which have had significant impact in our American culture in the past 30 to 40 years.

A Generation of Seekers

Roof (1993) sought to study the religious and spiritual lives of “baby boomers,” the generation of Americans born during the period following World War II, and to determine how their experiences and struggles with religion and their search for meaningful spiritual styles had altered the religious landscape of America during the 1990s. Roof reasoned that the baby boomer generation was an important generation for this study as boomers have had a significant impact on our nation due to their disproportionately large numbers. The study surveyed 2,620 households in the four states of California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Ohio, states selected to maximize regional variation. Using random-digit dialing, potential respondents were screened by year of birth, so that only those born between 1928 and 1963 were initially interviewed. These birth years were addressed in order to sample two specific cohorts: pre-boomers and boomers. A stratified sampling process was employed to obtain approximately equal numbers in each of the four states.

The survey was conducted in four stages: (1) general survey, (2) follow-up

survey, (3) in-depth interviews, and (4) group interviews (Roof, 1993). Two of the stages involved telephone interviewing and the other two employed face-to-face interviewing. The initial interviews of the first phase took place during the fall of 1988 and the spring of 1989. The overall response rate was 60%.

During the first phase of the study, respondents were asked more than 80 questions on their social background, religious participation, moral values, and attitudinal items (Roof, 1993). The final analysis of the first phase reduced the group size to 61% of the total, or 1,599 cases, narrowing the study to older boomers, those born from 1946 through 1954 (802 cases), and younger boomers, those born from 1955 through 1962 (797 cases). Successive stages continued to narrow the group to focus only on older boomers, those born between 1946 and 1960. In the final phase, group interviews were conducted to discuss religious and spiritual topics of interest to older boomers. Fourteen group interviews were held with as few as four or five people per group and others with as many as 20 people.

Roof (1993) posited that in the past 35 years, interest in spirituality has greatly increased. Results of the study confirmed that significant religious and cultural upheavals had taken place in American society during the 1960s. The boomer generation displayed themselves as a “generation of seekers,” in search of a “new language of the spirit” (p. 241). This “seeking” is the quality of

Seeing, of feeling, of acting, in a unified manner that many boomers find missing in organized religion. Whatever *religio* might once have expressed, it does not always do it very well in a world that is very pluralistic, highly compartmentalized, and secular. Hence some of them do more than just drop out of the churches and synagogues; they turn to serious metaphysical quests on their own in hopes of finding a more fulfilling way of believing and living. (p. 79)

For boomers, Roof (1993) pointed out that based on survey responses, more than

just differing orientations toward religion and spirituality came to be during the 1960s and 1970s. Broader universes of meanings, or new ways of organizing and conceptualizing life, emerged that restructured the religious landscape. Experimentation was a hallmark of the boomers' generation. A religious pluralism increased between mysticism and theism; as meaning systems which encompassed very differing beliefs, symbols, and "pictures" about God, about human nature, and about the forces that shape life.

Boomers who were interviewed expressed a deep sense of yearning for religious experience that they could claim as "their own" (p. 67). Roof (1993) explicated that this yearning for some kind of immediacy was asserted in many ways in both traditional and non-traditional languages: centering one's life, focusing within, knowing God, getting in touch with yourself, the higher self, finding "it" (p. 67). A strong desire to experience life directly was communicated, to have an encounter with God or the divine, or simply with nature and other people, without the intervention of inherited beliefs, ideals and concepts. Pursuit of the inner experience emerged as a key desire, conceived as that which is the "wellspring of authentic spiritual and religious life" (p. 67). This inner realm of one's self, far from the experiences of the outer realm of roles and relationships, surfaced as what is "true and right" to that person's experience. Roof summarized this as

A realization of a vital truth: The spiritual and religious, to be meaningful, must relate to people's everyday experiences and give expression to their deepest feelings and concerns. A person must find his or her true self, and allow that self to assert itself, in order to be genuinely spiritual. (p. 68)

Roof (1993) postulated that this pursuit of self expressed by participants has led to a "rediscovery" that psychology and spirituality are not exclusive domains, but rather, are integrally related, and that psychology has become the vehicle for an emerging form of

religiousness (p. 68). Popular books have reflected this blending of the religious and the psychological, such as M. Scott Peck's (1978) *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth*. Roof explained that a factor in the rise of this form of religious expression has been particularly evident among boomers in the enormous growth of informal spiritual groups such, as Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon, and other Twelve-Step programs.

A common theme expressed in the emphasis on "turning inward" was that of exploring religious and spiritual traditions. This exploration was viewed as a spiritual exercise in an age when awareness of the great diversity of religions became available. Roof (1993) pointed to the influence of modern culture, such as the Beatles' visit to India, which opened up yoga and the mystical wisdom of gurus. Americans were also exposed to new possibilities in the exploration of Eastern movements, such as Zen Buddhism, Hare Krishna, and to indigenous traditions such as Native American religions. While these "new religions" are less visible today than in the 1960s, Roof asserted that they have impacted the spiritual and religious dimensions of American society. A sense of mixing and matching across traditions has become common for many Americans as this exploration has made possible a synthesis of ideas, beliefs, and practices, including the New Age possibility of "creating your own reality" as one of its slogans declares.

Almost all of those interviewed had an opinion about the difference between being "religious" and being "spiritual" (Roof, 1993). While respondents lacked agreement on what the difference was, the majority was sure that the two realms had become disjointed. Religion conveyed an institutional connotation: to attend worship services, to attend Mass, and to light Hanukkah candles. On the other hand, being

spiritual was more personal and empowering, and had to do with the deepest motivations of life. Spiritual growth was viewed as something individuals could cultivate themselves.

In this study, Roof (1993) observed that what boomers abhorred the most about attending church was “just showing up and going through the motions” (p. 78). He further emphasized that “This generation cannot be understood apart from the disjunction between inner feelings and the broader institutional expressions. It is a huge gap, and one that is keenly felt by many” (p. 78). For boomers, religious institutions which were lacking in vitality and which seem removed from the everyday lives of members were judged as empty and irrelevant. In addition, to a generation that insisted upon authenticity and credibility as prerequisites for commitment, just going through the motions of religious involvement smacked of hypocrisy.

Finally, Roof (1993) concluded that four patterns of change had taken place in the religious practices of Americans: (1) the reemergence of spirituality; (2) religious and cultural pluralism; (3) multilayered belief and practice; and (4) and transformed selves. The study made evident that the terms “religion” and “spirituality” had taken on new popular meanings. Where the terms had historically included both individual and institutional elements, religion had now been defined more narrowly, as formally structured, and identified with religious institutions and prescribed theology and rituals (Zinnbauer, et al., 1997). The label of spirituality had conceptually broken away from religiousness and had been adopted by identifiable groups of believers, such as those participating in “new religions” which emphasized directed spiritual experiences over institutional religion. Spirituality had come to be commonly regarded as an individual phenomenon and identified with such things as personal transcendence and

meaningfulness (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996).

Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) identified the broad diversity of opinion among scholars regarding religiousness and spirituality as somewhat problematic. Zinnbauer et al. argued that while the range of opinions may enrich the understanding of the constructs, the inconsistency in the definitions has had negative implications for social scientific research. Zinnbauer et al. offered three points to underscore this problem: (1) without a clearer conception of what the terms mean, it is difficult to know exactly what is attributed to the terms by both researcher and participants; (2) a lack of consistency in defining the terms impairs communication within the study of religion for social science and across other disciplines interested in the two concepts; and finally, (3) without common definitions within social science research, drawing general conclusions from various studies becomes difficult.

Acknowledging the changes that had taken place in popular definitions, in his article entitled, *Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy*, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) posited that researchers' conceptualizations of religiousness and spirituality had not kept up with this transformation in the two constructs. Zinnbauer et al. found that while much energy had been expended by theorists and researchers defining the terms and while some common themes had emerged, little attention had been paid to the ways the general public defined the terms, particularly in regard to how individual believers think about and distinguish them.

To address this problem, a study was conducted with two purposes: (1) to investigate several questions regarding the ways in which individuals characterize

themselves and their belief with regard to religiousness and spirituality, and (2) to explore the association between the answers to several questions and different demographic, religio/spiritual, and psychosocial variables. The questions included the following: How do individuals define the terms religiousness and spirituality? To what degree do individuals view the conceptual relationship between religiousness and spirituality? and, What positive or negative connotations do they attribute to the terms religiousness and spirituality? Specific hypotheses were made only for the relationship between self-rated religiousness and spirituality and the various demographic, religio/spiritual, and psychosocial variables.

Based on the work conducted by Roof (1993), Zinnbauer et al. (1997) hypothesized that self-rated spirituality would be related to mystical experiences, New Age beliefs and practices, a pantheistic or agnostic belief about God, religious quest, higher income and education, group experiences related to spiritual growth, and the experience of being hurt by clergy. In addition, it was hypothesized that self-rated religiousness would be related to right-wing authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness and parental religiousness. Self-righteousness, frequency of church attendance, and age were also expected to be related to self-rated religiousness.

Eleven different samples were collected for this study from Pennsylvania and Ohio (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Groups were specifically selected from a variety of churches, institutions and age groups that were likely to hold differing definitions and self-reported levels of religiousness and spirituality. The groups were comprised of members from a rural Presbyterian church, a conservative Catholic church, a nontraditional Episcopal church, a rural Lutheran church, an urban Unitarian church, and

several “New Age” groups. In addition, five other participant groups included community mental health workers, students at a State University, nursing home residents, and faculty at a college of nursing.

The total number of surveys distributed was 608, and 346 were returned complete (57%). The entire sample consisted of 112 males (32%) and 234 females (68%) whose ages ranged from 15 to 85. The sample was predominantly white (95%). The median household income level was \$50,000-\$64,000; 39% of the participants were married; and the median highest level of education completed was some college. Questionnaires were distributed to participants by several different methods: some were passed out to participants directly after worship services, some were distributed by clergy, others were distributed to workers either by placing them on their desks or in mailboxes (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Findings. The results suggested three main conclusions. First, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) observed the evidence displayed that the terms *religiousness* and *spirituality* described, in part, different concepts. Religiousness was found to be associated with higher levels of authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance. As predicted, spirituality was associated with a different set of variables: mystical experiences, New Age beliefs and practices, higher income, and the experience of being hurt by clergy.

According to participants’ own written definitions, spirituality was most often described in personal or experiential terms, such as belief in God or a higher power, or having a relationship with God or a higher power (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Definitions of religiousness included both personal beliefs, such as a belief in God or a higher power,

and organizational or institutional beliefs and practices such as church membership, church attendance, and commitment to the belief system of a church or organized religion. Zinnbauer et al. pointed out that these definitions coincided with more recent ones provided by scholars.

A second conclusion (Zinnbauer et al., 1997) was that although religiousness and spirituality appeared to describe different concepts, they were not fully independent of one another. Self-rated religiousness and spirituality were modestly but significantly correlated ($r = .21$), and most respondents indicated that they considered themselves both spiritual and religious (S+R, 74%). Definitions of religiousness and spirituality did not significantly differ in the nature of the sacred; instead, definitions for both commonly incorporated traditional concepts of the sacred.

While most of the participants appeared to integrate spirituality with traditional organizational beliefs and practices, there was a small proportion of the sample (19%) that identified themselves as solely spiritual (that is, the “spiritual not religious” group) and this group differed in several ways (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Similar to the “highly active seekers” in the baby boomer generation (Roof, 1993), this group further identified themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious”, appeared to reject traditional organized religion in favor of an individualized spirituality and, compared with their contemporaries, were also found to be more individualistic and more likely to come from homes in which their parents attended religious services less frequently.

Finally, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) concluded that despite the finding that 93% of respondents identified themselves as spiritual (that is, endorsed either the “I am religious and spiritual” or “I am spiritual but not religious”), and 78% identified themselves as

religious, there were group differences in self-rated religiousness and spirituality, and variation in the definitions. Thus, Zinnbauer et al. recognized that greater clarity was needed to distinguish the meanings attributed to the individual terms in order to interpret the differences more precisely.

The findings illustrated the need for researchers to recognize the array of meanings associated with both religiousness and spirituality by different religious and cultural groups and the different ways in which individuals considered themselves religious and/or spiritual (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Zinnbauer et al. recommended that further studies of religiousness and spirituality must go beyond the use of single-item self-report measures and scales that are not sensitive to different group ideologies. “Only by explicitly operationalizing religiousness and spirituality in terms that reflect the variety of perspectives of potential research participants can we make generalizations across groups and ideologies, and cumulate findings across studies” (p. 562).

Distinctions, Overlaps and Potential Pitfalls

While usage of each term, religiousness and spirituality, is often inconsistent in research literature, little consensus has been reached about what the terms actually mean (Zinnbauer, et al., 1997). Hill et al. (2000) explicated that spirituality has become differentiated from religion (and religiousness), and in so doing, it has taken with it some of the elements formerly included with religion. Where religion was historically considered a “broad-band construct” (Pargament, 1999), including both individual and institutional elements, it is now seen more as a “narrow-band construct” (Pargament; Zinnbauer et al., 1997) that has more to do with the institutional alone (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). Spirituality has become the favored term to describe individual experience and is

identified with the more desirable qualities, such as personal transcendence, supra-conscious sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996). In contrast, religion has been relegated to the role of the villain, being more often identified with rigid, or “formally structured,” religious institutions that often are perceived to restrict or inhibit human potential (Pargament, 1997).

In addition, as asserted by Hill et al. (2000), both terms now differ according to how they are evaluated. Previously, both religiousness and spirituality were more generally considered to have both positive and negative qualities. More recently, spirituality has become imbued with a more positive connotation. As the label of “spirituality” has become distinct from religiousness, it has been adopted by identifiable groups of believers who prefer to associate themselves with phrases such as “spiritual, but not religious,” “spiritual seeker,” “spiritual journey,” or “spiritual quest” (Hill et al.; Roof, 1993; Zinnbauer et al. 1997).

Attempts within clinical literature to address religious and spiritual concerns raised a number of definitional issues (Turner et al., 1995). Some descriptions of religion and spirituality described an overlap existing between the two, for example, this explanation offered by Turner et al., “Both religion and spirituality involve a sense of meaning and purpose in life, provide a source of love and relatedness, and intend to keep believers in right relationship to the unknown and unknowable” (p. 436). In other definitions, spirituality subsumed religion. Turner et al., in their review of literature found Miller (1990) stated that spirituality involves “transcendental processes that supersede ordinary material existence. This includes but is not limited to systems of religion” (p. 261). Others in the clinical literature considered the two to be mutually exclusive. Turner

et al. postulated that,

While there is no consensus as to the existence and/or nature of boundaries between religion and spirituality, a frequently drawn distinction in the literature...utilizes the term religion to refer to “adherences to the beliefs and practices of an organized church or religious institution” (Shafranske and Malone, 1990, p. 72). Spirituality is used to describe “the transcendent relationship between the person and a Higher Being, a quality that goes beyond a specific religious affiliation.” (Peterson and Nelson, 1987)

Potential Pitfalls

Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) asserted that this “bifurcation” of religion and spirituality has both proponents and detractors. Hill et al. (2000) cautioned researchers to be aware of several potentially troublesome issues when contrasting religion and spirituality. First, as Pargament (1997, 1999) pointed out, current approaches to the study of spirituality include a lack of grounding in both theory and research that were “serious dangers in themselves” (Hill et al., p. 63). Secondly, Pargament (1999) and Zinnbauer et al. (1999) warned against two additional subtle dangers. First of all, there is a danger of polarization when one can be expressed in two potential forms, either individual versus institutional or “good” versus “bad.” Pargament (1999) further asserted two important points regarding the potential for polarization between these concepts: (1) virtually all religions are interested in matters spiritual and (2) every form of religious and spiritual expression occurs in some social context. Secondly, both religion and spirituality have their own dark sides when applied in inappropriate manners (Wagener & Malony, 2006).

For some scholars, this “bifurcation” of religion and spirituality (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) are artificial lines of demarcation which blur the fact that belief and tradition are dynamically intertwined with the experiential (Wuthnow, 1998). “To argue that spirituality is good and religion is bad (or vice-versa) is to deny a substantial body of

research demonstrating that both religion and spirituality can be manifested in healthy as well as unhealthy ways” (Hill et al., 2000, p. 64). Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) asserted that these types of evaluations are likely to emerge in postmodern societies in which social institutions are viewed with suspicion and individual development is held as a primary value.

Secondly, and perhaps the more serious danger postulated by Hill et al. (2000) is that of losing the field’s distinctive sacred core. The term “spiritual” is used in modern discourse often as a substitute for words like “fulfilling,” “moving,” “important,” or “worthwhile” (p. 64). Hill et al. argued that unless these terms, ideologies, activities, and lifestyles involve consideration of the sacred, they are not spiritual. Hill et al. further theorized,

When some people invoke the concept of spirituality, they are indeed referring to an ideology or a lifestyle...that is an attempt to articulate and respond to the sacred. However, when the term “spirituality” is invoked to describe ideologies or lifestyles that do not invoke notions of the sacred in one way or another, they are not spiritualities at all, just strongly held ideologies or highly elaborated lifestyles. (p. 64)

Roehlkepartain et al. (2006) indicated that many may seek to know, relate to, and respond to the sacred without the perceived trappings and constrictions of traditional religious doctrine, ritual, and institutional engagement. Others argue that this debate is really a Western one, rather, a debate among North Americans, in that it ignores how these terms are experienced and used in non-Western and developing societies (Stifoss-Hanssen, 1999).

Contemporary Conceptions of Spirituality

A reference to “contemporary” spirituality highlights an important issue; that “spirituality” has changed shape, sometimes subtly and sometimes substantially,

throughout Christian history (Sheldrake, 1998). The word itself has evolved as individuals and historical or cultural environments have changed. “Because our thinking about God, Church and the human person necessarily develops under the influence of theology as well as human knowledge and historical events, every generation has to redefine what precisely spirituality is meant to encompass” (p. 40).

Pluralism and the Crisis of Postmodernity

Jesuit theologian Phillip Sheldrake (1998) asserted that even Christian communities can no longer take for granted old understandings of language that lie behind classical notions of spirituality. While a great deal of diversity always existed around the concept of spirituality in the past, a radical pluralism is now undeniably present within all of the major western religious denominations. He acknowledged that within the Catholic Church today, it is less easy to speak of a “Christian spirituality,” as was formerly the practice, than to speak the more accurate phrase, “the spiritualities of Christians” (p. 1). Sheldrake maintained that what were formerly exclusive systems of faith are now increasingly giving way to an “eclectic approach to spirituality that is prepared to ‘borrow’ not only across denominational boundaries, but also from other world faiths” (p. 1). Many of those who have looked in the past for enlightenment to Christian spiritualities are no longer committed to the central religious truths found within these traditions, and, in many instances, there exists a general suspicion of religious dogma (Sheldrake).

Postmodernity. Sheldrake (1998) offered an explanation for this dramatic change in systems of belief which has taken place among Christians in the last century. Outlining a Western cultural context as that of “Postmodernity,” Sheldrake negated the current

viability of the promises made by positivism. Sheldrake explained, “A belief in human self-sufficiency, the primacy of reason, the possibility of achieving totally objective knowledge, and assumptions about inevitable progress now appear simplistic and over-optimistic. Western culture overall has lost faith in simple explanations or universal certainties” (p. 2).

Sheldrake (1998) attributed this shift of attitude to a paradigmatic change in our cultural thinking, “because we have learned too much about nature and humanity. We can no longer afford to be naïve... Western culture overall has lost faith in simple explanations or universal certainties” (p. 2). Comparing this paradigmatic shift to other crucial points in the history of Western consciousness, such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, Sheldrake posited that we are at a crucial point in history, where traditional patterns of thought and behavior, as well as institutions, are under continual pressure from a surrounding reality that is impervious to the answers of the past, and which presents an overwhelming number of new questions.

A global context. Some scholars have pointed to global issues of the last century which impacted the changing and current status of religion and spirituality (Sheldrake, 1995; Wulff, 1997). Sheldrake posited six general factors that may have served to “undermine the world-view that we have inherited from the past, and that traditional spiritualities took for granted” (p. 2). Some of these factors, Sheldrake pointed out, originated in the 19th century, but have slowly come to the surface of collective consciousness.

These factors consist in the following: (1) Our understanding of the universe has

changed substantially as a result of developments in cosmology and quantum physics, among other things. As a result, we can no longer view ourselves, a human race, as the center of creation, or as giving “unique meaning to the whole of creation” (p. 2); (2) An evolutionary theory of some form is now predominantly accepted without question. Thus, humanity’s evolution is understood as one of life’s processes that can be neither separated from, nor understood as inherently superior to, others; (3) We now live in a world that generally accepts psychology as a respectable science, thus revealing a complex inner world that calls into question the straightforward objectivity of human perceptions and values; (4) Developments in economics, political theory, and the genesis of the social sciences challenge traditional conceptions of human society; (5) Major catastrophic events which have taken place during the past century, such as the Holocaust and Hiroshima, and present realities of widespread suffering from hunger or poverty, have irrevocably undermined society’s overconfidence in human progress. Equally distressing was the unexpectedly rapid collapse of the Soviet empire, which called into question the long-term stability of “even the most monolithic of human institutions” (p. 3); and (6) Finally, there has been a fragmentation of collective consciousness, inhibiting a sense of community and encouraging a concentration on interiority and purely personal development. Spirituality, thus, has become a private affair.

Attempts to Define Spirituality: Three Models

In light of the global, social and cultural factors that have occurred in the last 30 to 40 years, it is possible that very few believers and non-believers alike have remained untouched by the evolving concepts of religion and spirituality, including students and teachers who are members of the Catholic secondary schools. Since the focus of this

study will explore junior and senior-level students' perceptions and experiences of spirituality, it is important to keep this evolution of meanings in mind. Students' understandings could come from any of the perspectives previously articulated, and it is important for the researcher to be acquainted with these perspectives, while being open to additional meanings students may express.

In this review of literature, there was no one definition found to capture a broad enough range of concepts for the purpose of this study. Instead, this next and final section will review three different models for visualizing spirituality that may be more helpful to the research project. Each of the models offers a perspective appropriate for the study: first, a phenomenological humanistic model is discussed which contains a broad scope of qualities that may be found represented in the students' perspectives; secondly, a six-factor model represents a pastoral approach to viewing spirituality; and finally, a Catholic Christian perspective of spirituality from a Catholic educator.

Toward a Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality

Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) proposed a humanistic definition of spirituality, adhering to the beliefs of Abraham Maslow (1970), who stated his position as:

I want to demonstrate that spiritual values have naturalistic meaning, that they are not the exclusive possession of organized churches, that they do not need supernatural concepts to validate them, that they are well within the jurisdiction of a suitable enlarged science, and that, therefore, they are the general responsibility of all mankind [*sic*]. (p. 33)

Elkins et al. (1988) clarified that Maslow was not anti-religious nor did he believe a nontheistic stance was the only viable philosophical posture. Rather, Maslow was “strongly committed to the view that spirituality is a human phenomenon and that it is

more basic than, prior to, and different from traditional expressions of religiosity” (p. 6). Elkins et al. argued that churches and temples do not have a monopoly on spirituality or on the values that compose it, rather, that these belong to humanity and are not the exclusive possession of organized religion or of traditionally religious persons. An enlarged definition and understanding of spirituality would recognize its human and universal nature and would extricate it from the narrow definitions identified by traditional religions (Elkins et al.).

Elkins et al. (1988) proposed to delineate a humanistic definition, description, and assessment approach to spirituality that would promote clearer understanding of spirituality and that would be sensitive to the spirituality of those not affiliated with traditional religion (p. 7). The project aimed at enlarging a definition of spirituality that would not equate it with narrow religious beliefs, rituals, and practices. At the same time, Elkins et al. clarified that it was not their intent to invalidate religion, but rather, to assert that a humanistic approach to spirituality is at variance only with narrow religion that would claim a monopoly on spirituality and would refuse to recognize its human and universal nature. The project was conducted in two components: first, a review of theoretical research was engaged to define and describe nine major components of spirituality (Table 3); secondly, interviews were conducted with several people who were considered to be “highly spiritual” (p. 9) to establish informal validation of the nine components.

Four major assumptions formed the foundation of the project (Elkins et al., 1988):

- (1) There is a dimension of human experience, which includes certain values, attitudes, perspectives, beliefs and emotions, which can best be described as a “spiritual

dimension” or “spirituality” (p. 8). (2) Spirituality is a human phenomenon and exists, at least potentially, in all persons. (3) Spirituality is not the same as religiosity; therefore, it is possible for persons to be “spiritual” even though not affiliated with traditional religion; and (4) By means of theoretical and phenomenological approaches, it is possible to define and describe spirituality and to develop an approach to its assessment.

Because of the many ways spirituality may be expressed outwardly, Elkins et al. (1988) believed that the common core of spirituality would be found at the inner, phenomenological level. After reviewing the literature of major writers and classicists, Elkins et al. found that none of the writers provided a clear, comprehensive definition of spirituality. However, a variety of elements emerged displaying convergence and overlap among the writers in their implicit descriptions. Elkins et al. realized that spirituality could not be defined simply, due to its complex and multidimensional nature. Elkins et al. composed a list of components according to the literature reviewed (Table 3). Nine major components of spirituality were found (adapted from Elkins et al., pp. 10-12):

1. *Transcendent dimension.* The spiritual person has an experientially based belief that there is a transcendent dimension to life; “transcendent dimension” is a natural extension of the conscious self into the regions of the unconscious or Greater Self. Believing in “more” than what is “seen,” this “unseen world” extends harmonious contact with, and adjustment to, this unseen dimension that is beneficial (p. 10).
2. *Meaning and purpose in life.* The spiritual person has known the quest for meaning and purpose and has emerged from this quest with confidence that life is deeply meaningful and that one’s own existence has purpose. The actual ground

and content of this meaning vary from person to person, but the common factor is that each person has filled the “existential vacuum” with an authentic sense that life has meaning and purpose.

3. *Mission in life.* The spiritual person has a sense of “vocation,” which translates into a sense of responsibility to life, a calling to answer, a mission to accomplish, or even a destiny to fulfill.
4. *Sacredness.* The spiritual person believes that life is infused with sacredness and often experiences a sense of awe, reverence, and wonder even in “nonreligious” settings; life is not dichotomized into sacred and secular, holy and profane, but rather all of life is considered “holy” and the sacred is found even in the ordinary.
5. *Material values.* The spiritual person can appreciate material goods but does not seek ultimate satisfaction from them nor attempt to use them as a substitute for frustrated spiritual needs.
6. *Altruism.* The spiritual person believes we are our “brother’s keeper” and is touched by the pain and suffering of others, has a strong sense of social justice, and is committed to altruistic love and action.
7. *Idealism.* The spiritual person is a visionary committed to the betterment of the world and loves things for what they are yet also for what they can become. The spiritual person is committed to high ideals and to the actualization of positive potential in all aspects of life.
8. *Awareness of the tragic.* The spiritual person is solemnly conscious of the tragic realities of human existence, deeply aware of human pain, suffering, and death. This awareness gives depth to the person and provides him or her with an

existential seriousness toward life. Paradoxically, awareness of the tragic enhances the spiritual person's joy, appreciation, and valuing of life.

9. *Fruits of spirituality.* The spiritual person is one whose spirituality has borne fruit in his or her life and the effect is discernible upon one's relationship to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.

Elkins et al. (1988) synthesized these factors into a definition of spirituality:

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning "breath of life," is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate. (p. 10)

A Six-Factor Model

LaPierre (1994), a Methodist minister who has served as Director of Chaplains at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction, Vermont, recognized the multidimensionality of spirituality through his own review of the literature. Drawing mostly on contemporary authors in the fields of religion and spirituality from Judaeo-Christian and health-care perspectives, LaPierre postulated a model for describing spirituality. LaPierre identified six clear factors of fundamental aspects for describing the spirituality of individual people (Table 3). His conceptual model includes: journey, transcendence, community, religion, "the mystery of creation," and transformation and were explicated as the following (adapted from LaPierre, pp. 153-159):

1. *Journey-* Represents an individual's choice to respond to a discovery of deeper meaning and includes the search for that deeper meaning, purpose or goal, which may be a universal truth or God; also referred to as "a journey of

the spirit.”

2. *Encounter with transcendence* - Deals with the belief that there is a transcendent dimension to life; recognizes the existence of a level of reality beyond the limits of ordinary human experience.
3. *Community* - While the search for God can be very private, members of religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) often find that being in community with like-minded believers is important.
4. *Religion* - While sometimes ambiguous, religion is often experienced as a collection of rituals, rules, patterns of life, and other behaviors; an array of theologies, beliefs and apologetics to which one must adhere in order to be embraced into membership. Religion is often understood as what a person does in response to specific personal beliefs about a divine being or beings, yet may not incorporate the expected beliefs and behaviors.
5. *The mystery of creation* - An experienced and interpreted relationship among human beings and the mystery of creation. A relationship with God encountered in objects, creatures, views, and forces of the natural world; experiences which point to the natural world as a place where God is to be encountered.
6. *Transformation* - Personal transformation where each step is intended to lead to greater personal change.

LaPierre (1994) advised that, while the model may still need refinement, it may offer a starting-point for developing qualitative and, possibly, some quantitative ways to articulate a working spirituality and its apparent changes. LaPierre advised that the model

is flexible enough to allow an investigator to use only as many dimensions of the model that are applicable to the experience of a particular person or group. In addition, it is not

Table 3

Attributes of Contemporary Spirituality: A Comparative Perspective

Elkins et al. (1988) <i>Humanist perspective</i>	LaPierre (1994) <i>Pastoral perspective</i>	Groome (1997) <i>Catholic educator's perspective</i>
Transcendent dimension	Encounter with transcendence	Transcendent: "God-conscious"
Meaning and purpose in life: the person has an authentic sense that life has meaning and purpose	Journey: for deeper meaning, purpose, universal truth or God	Way of life: Requires prayer, equals "the way of Jesus"
Mission in life: sense of vocation		
Sacredness of life: awe, reverence, wonder, all life considered holy	Mystery of creation: relationship with God through objects, creatures, natural work, and other humans	Relationship with God: live justly, right relationship with God, self, others, creation
Material values: appreciative of, but does not seek satisfaction in material goods	Religion: rituals, rules, patterns of life, beliefs	
Altruism: touched by pain, needs of others, sense of social justice	Community	Communal, ecclesial: a special emphasis among Catholics, response to God's invitation to us through the ordinary and everyday
Idealism: committed to betterment of the world	Personal transformation	Ontological: engages our whole being
Awareness of the tragic, suffering, and death		
Fruits of spirituality: spirituality has borne fruit; effects are discernible in self, others, nature, life		Wholesome: vibrant, life-affirming, life-giving

necessary that the model be limited only to those who claim a Judaeo-Christian heritage. The model may be useful in describing the state of a person's spirituality qualitatively in settings such as parishes, hospitals, religious communities, and retreat houses.

Spirituality: A Catholic Christian Perspective

Groome (1997) proposed six characteristics of Christian spirituality and distinguished each of the six characteristics further with a Catholic perspective (Table 3). The first characteristic of Christian spirituality is that it has a *transcendent* dimension: it is a "God-consciousness" about life and about living one's life. A Catholic Christian spirituality is focused on God and on one's relationship with God. In our search for God through the person of Jesus Christ, Groome explained, it is God's unconditional and never ending desire for us that awakens our own spiritual desire for God and moves us into our own spirituality. Our desire for God is only the reflection of God's prior desire for us. Groome further explicated that our ability for transcendence is actually God drawing us to Godself and "the divine spark within us prompts us to respond" (p. 30).

Secondly, Christian spirituality is *ontological*. By this, Groome (1997) suggested that it engages the very depths of people, of our "being." Groome referred to this engagement of our whole person to Jesus' direction to his hearers about living the great commandment, "with all one's mind, heart, strength, and with all your soul" (Luke 10:27). Groome stressed that spirituality pertains to our souls, the deepest aspects of our "being", who we are and how we live our lives in the world. Thirdly, Groome maintained that Christian spirituality is *wholesome*. Distinguishing the word *wholesome* from stereotypical connotations of "holiness," Groome clarified that this characteristic is not meant to be understood as "some kind of a wimpy 'church mouse'" (p. 30), lacking in fun

or enjoyment. Rather, *wholesome* expresses traits of tremendously wholesome, vibrant and vital, life affirming and life celebrating, life-giving person for self and others. In Catholic spirituality, Groome clarified, the more fully alive we become the more holy we become because the glory of God is the human person fully alive.

Fourthly, Christian spirituality is essentially one's *relationship with God*, and, Groome (1997) affirmed that to be "holy" and "whole" in this relationship means to live with justice, or to live justly. Groome noted further that the biblical understanding of holiness of life is "right relationship" with God, self, others, and creation; and the biblical notion of justice is the same, right relationship. Therefore, he asserted, to be holy and to be just are one in the same, or "two sides of the same coin," living the covenant relationship.

Fifthly, and closely related to the previous, is that Christian spirituality is *communal*, and even ecclesial. Groome (1997) explained that this is a special emphasis in Catholic Christianity. In the same way that God reaches out to each one of us, initiates a relationship, and we respond, God also reaches out through every aspect of life; everything and anything, through the ordinary and everyday. Groome asserted that in the Catholic faith, the Church is the privileged locus of God's outreach and the community that empowers our response. As from the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures, Groome pointed out, so too does God come looking for us as a people and, though we must have a personal relationship with God, we cannot remain alone. Groome clarified that spirituality calls us into the Faith community and through the Faith community into the world.

Finally, Groome (1997) expressed that while his list is not nearly exhaustive, the

last characteristic of Christian spirituality is that of one's *way of life*, or how we actually live. Groome negated that spirituality is synonymous with our prayer life, but instead, declared that spirituality is synonymous with our life and with how we live. He elaborated that "Our prayer life is needed to sustain and nourish our spirituality, our 'God-consciousness,' our 'right relationship,' but it is, finally, how we live. The way for Christians to live, to be holy, is the 'way' of Jesus" (p. 31).

Shift in Catholic Perspective

Sheldrake (1998) asserted that in recent decades, a paradigmatic shift has taken place in the general approach to theology towards a greater reflection on human experience as an authentic source of divine revelation. This shift has brought about substantial changes in the way the Christian life is viewed, and has facilitated a movement from a more static concept of spirituality to one of a more fluid nature.

Sheldrake posited,

If the frontiers of theology increasingly seek articulation in a process and method that is experiential, spirituality has followed suit by becoming more of a dialectical tension. On the one hand, there is the historical concreteness of revelation in Jesus and subsequent Christian tradition, and, on the other, there is the personal assimilation of salvation in Christ by each person within changing historical, cultural, and social circumstances that demand new approaches to Christian conduct. As a result of these shifts of perspective, the realisation [*sic*] has emerged that specific spiritual traditions are initially embodied in people rather than doctrine and grow out of life rather than from abstract ideas. (p. 41)

While our students may not be ready to articulate definitions of spirituality as polished as Catholic scholars, attention to their own experiences is certainly a way of bringing them further along in their own spiritual development.

Section Summary

This section has discussed factors in western society during the past century that

have impacted the scholarly advancement of research and study on spirituality in the social sciences, and in university academic programs until the present. Secondly, the section has reviewed major cultural events that have taken place impacting popular thinking and understanding of the two constructs, religion and spirituality. Both of these have provided a broader understanding of the ongoing debate in the social sciences regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of spirituality.

This portion of the literature review has presented several academic conceptualizations of spirituality, together with a Catholic Christian definition. First, the humanist view (Elkins et al., 1988) summarized the breadth of human characteristics, capturing the most positive and most beautiful aspects of what it means to be human, into a package labeled as spirituality. The characteristics named, which were transcendence, altruism, idealism, awareness of suffering and of the sacredness of life, as well as possession of a sense of purpose and a desire for obtaining that purpose, may indeed be the very things that separate us from other forms of life on our planet. This perspective stops short of naming a Creator or naming any human need to have a relationship with a Creator.

Secondly, the pastoral perspective (LaPierre, 1994) of spirituality acknowledges many of the same beautiful dimensions of our humanity: ability for transcendence, sense of purpose and desire for growth on a journey, and awareness of the sacredness of all life and creation. This pastoral perspective highlights two additional components of our humanity. One that is recognized by many is that of religion, which provides support for learning and growth in becoming more fully human. In addition, this pastoral perspective recognizes our human need for relationships with individuals, with creation, and with

God. This offers a fuller understanding of each person, and is undoubtedly helpful in pastoral ministry concerned with healing individuals.

The third contemporary perspective of spirituality offered was that of the Catholic Christian (Groome, 1997). While Groome acknowledged the beauty of human characteristics as the basis of our spirituality, each of the factors was embedded within a relationship with God. As Groome expressed this embeddedness, it is not a static relationship, but an embrace with a God who deeply desires to walk in love with God's beloved, all humanity, who deeply desires that all of creation, human and nonhuman, live in harmony, in right relationship with one another, and who deeply desires that we live fully alive, with our whole being. Finally, the Catholic Christian perspective affirms both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, as the fullest expression of God's love, sent to reconcile, to heal, and to show us the way through the mysterious journey of life.

This review has pointed out many changes that have taken place in the social sciences during the past century with regard to the place of spirituality in human reality. The review has further described many global and cultural factors which have impacted significant change in people's thinking, practices, attitudes, and beliefs.

Christian spirituality is in the midst of a major shift. This review has uncovered an awareness within the Church that there is a need for change in how spirituality is perceived. As Sheldrake (1998) posited, in the past, religious and spiritual practices were dictated by dogma and tradition. There is now a recognition of the importance of human experience as a profound source, a preliminary source, for finding God in one's life. This shift invites Christians to acknowledge the sacredness of their lives, not only the people, objects, and an event, but to come to deeper faith that God is actively working through all

parts of their lives for their good. This may well be a call from the Holy Spirit for a paradigmatic change for some into a fuller understanding of their humanity as spiritual beings, and into a deeper relationship with God. The movement towards the importance of viewing one's personal experience, thus, signifies profound possibility for meeting God, and a growing awareness of one's experiences becomes an avenue of possibility and learning through the fostering of one's spiritual growth.

While this research study intended to take place within the context of a Catholic secondary school, its purpose was in accord with that stated by the CCE (1977) for the education of the whole child. For that reason, inclusion of the broader perspective of spirituality from the social sciences has served a distinct purpose. Considering Catholic teens' poor ability to articulate the concepts of their faith, as determined by Smith and Denton (2005), and considering that our youth are products of our culture and society, there was good reason to believe that the students who participated in the study might or might not be able to articulate their own personal understanding and experience of spirituality in unison with the definitions and expressions provided in this text by Catholic scholars. This portion of the literature review has served to prepare for the study, providing a wider base for understanding and familiarizing the researcher with terms and concepts which were used by the teens as they expressed their own understandings and experiences of spirituality.

A Phenomenological Perspective of Adolescent Spirituality

During the course of this literature review, several philosophers were found to have shaped and formed the body of phenomenological thought that currently exists (Husserl, 1907; Heidegger, 1927; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These and others are considered

the first-generation phenomenologists (Munhall, 2007). The review revealed a number of writers who proposed a “method” for phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Spiegelberg, 1965; Van Kaam, 1965; Van Manen, 1990). Munhall referred to these authors as “second-generation” phenomenologists. Further review uncovered a significant number of phenomenological studies in the health care field, however, few were found that explored topics in education.

Munhall (2007), author of *Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective*, noted that nursing students who have been immersed in phenomenological literature, have often found the methods from second generation writers to be limiting and incongruent with first generation philosophy. Munhall opined that this outcome can be explained by the emphasis placed on “the scientific method” by the academy which has impacted many of the methodologies previously published.

According to Munhall (2007), a more recent author has changed this situation dramatically by proposing a human science approach to phenomenology. Munhall cited Van Manen’s (1990) human science approach as one where his views were often consistent with first-generation phenomenologists. Munhall declared Van Manen (1990) an “outstanding phenomenologist for those in the human sciences to follow” because his view of phenomenology is one of a philosophy of being as well as a practice (pp. 159-160). From this perspective, a phenomenological inquiry can offer a valuable understanding of lived experience through reflective writing to practitioners so that meaning can be understood as “phenomenological wisdom” (p. 160). Van Manen’s approach provides the means for practitioners, nurses and teachers, who are researching lived experience to offer insights for policy development, change in practice, for

increasing our capacity for care and compassion, and for raising our consciousness to what was not previously known or understood (Munhall). For this reason, Van Manen's method for researching lived experience and Munhall's further application and refinement of this method will be engaged for this study.

Munhall (2007) further asserted that the first step for the researcher in a phenomenological inquiry method is to immerse oneself in the phenomenological literature, particularly among first-generation philosophers. This grounding is imperative to a quality inquiry. This section will discuss some important concepts within the phenomenological perspective. Secondly, the section will review Van Manen's perspective on and methodology for researching lived experience in human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.

The Phenomenological Perspective

The phenomenological perspective requires a re-focusing of traditional methods of scientific inquiry. Phenomenological research methods are derived from the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1930) and others who followed in the phenomenological movement (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Polkinghorne clarified a distinction between Western science and the phenomenological perspective. Western science of the past three centuries has been based on the notion that reality consists of natural objects and that knowledge is a description of those objects as they exist in themselves, the purpose of which is "to eliminate the distorting influence of personal perspective and the subjective properties of researchers" (p. 41). The phenomenological perspective looks precisely for features of human awareness and experience before moving on to assumptions about independent natural objects. In the

phenomenological perspective, descriptions of objects come from human experience; therefore, experience itself must be clearly understood before a firm foundation may be established for the sciences studying the natural world.

Phenomenological philosophy concentrates its investigations on descriptions of essential structures that are inherent in one's consciousness and that are necessary for human experience to have the general appearance it has. Polkinghorne (1989) explicated that, in this way, phenomenological philosophy is concerned with the universal elements and relationships that constitute experience in general.

Methodologically, this requires careful and thorough capturing and describing of how people experience a particular phenomenon. The methodological requirements explicated by Patton (2002) are:

How they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it to others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have *directly* experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have "lived experience" as opposed to secondhand experience. (p. 104)

A phenomenon of focus may be an emotion, a type of relationship, a particular job. For example, one study (Riemen, 1986) referred to by Munhall (2007) considered the phenomenon of caring in nurse-patient interactions.

Phenomenological Inquiry

The phenomenological approach concentrates on descriptions of experience. In this perspective, rather than asking questions about the existence and character of a particular object or phenomenon, the researcher must first suspend all preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and direct the inquiry toward what is present in a person's awareness (Polkinghorne, 1989). This process of suspension or reduction is called

bracketing or *epoche* (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne).

Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience

Van Manen (1990) postulated that the nature of lived experience is an important concept in phenomenological human science research because it begins in lived experience and eventually turns back to it. Quoting Dilthey (1985), Van Manen suggested that in its most basic form lived experience involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself.

A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have a reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective. (p. 223)

Van Manen (1990) explained that there are characteristics to lived experience. First of all, it has a temporal structure. “It can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence...something past that can never be grasped in its full richness and depth since lived experience implicates the totality of life” (p. 36). He further explicated that lived experience is both the starting point and end point of phenomenological inquiry.

The aim of phenomenology is deeply rooted in the lived experience: to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

Van Manen (1990) articulated the importance of the narrative portrayal of one’s perceived experience. Referring to the concepts of Merleau-Ponty (1962) who described phenomenology as “the study of essences” (p. vii), Van Manen clarified that the word “essence” is not to be understood as something mysterious, but rather, as a linguistic

construction, or a description of a particular phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is written so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed in a manner that readers are able to grasp the nature and significance of an experience that was previously unseen. Van Manen contended:

The phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive. (p. 39)

An appropriate topic for phenomenological inquiry, therefore, is derived from questioning the essential nature of a particular lived experience or “a certain way of being in the world” (p. 39).

Methodology

A broad field of phenomenological scholarship provides the researcher with the methodological grounding for human science research and inquiry practices (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen asserted that the broad field of scholarship can be considered as a set of guides and recommendations for inquiry that neither rejects nor ignores tradition, yet guides the researcher in defining appropriate research methods, techniques, and procedures for a particular research question. Van Manen (1990) named six methodological themes which support phenomenological human science research and noted they should be understood as possessing a “dynamic interplay” (p. 30) in their relationship to one another. The six themes are as follows:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

Van Manen (1990) asserted that the problem with most phenomenological study is not that we are lacking in understanding about a particular problem, but rather, that we are entirely too familiar. More accurately, our own pre-understandings, suppositions, and assumptions pre-dispose us to interpretations of the phenomenon before we even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question. For this reason, an important exercise the researcher must engage in is that of what Husserl (1931) called “bracketing” (pp. 144-145), where one takes hold of the phenomenon in awareness, and consciously places outside of this awareness one’s own knowledge of the phenomenon.

Rather than trying to forget what one knows or to ignore what is already known, Van Manen (1990) suggested that it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories as an essential part of the process. This can be done linguistically through story-telling, through use of metaphor, or by journaling. This is an important step in the inquiry for the researcher’s preparation as Van Manen expressed, “By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence” (p. 49). The use of language is essential as it makes present to us what is “inherently pre-linguistic and therefore essentially not transposable into a set of precisely delineated propositional statements” (p. 50).

Investigating experience as it is lived. While the notion of “data” is ambiguous within the human science perspective, there are several approaches that may be taken to “gather” or to “collect” lived-experience material of different forms (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). These include, but are not limited to, personal descriptions by the researcher of the lived experiences being explored, use of linguistic tools for further reflection on one’s

writing, obtaining experiential descriptions in written form or interview, locating experiential descriptions in literature, such as biographies and poetry, music and art.

Section Summary

This section has reviewed some of the central concepts in phenomenological inquiry in order to provide some rationale for the choice of this methodology for the present study. This method will potentially provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of students' spiritual lives, and in so doing, additional benefits may result. Through further immersion in the literature, personal descriptions, and students' lived experiences, the researcher may be transformed in her approach to students and realize insights regarding secondary teaching pedagogy that may be shared in the form of recommendations for other educators. The following chapter will discuss in greater detail the research design and methods for this phenomenological inquiry.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of spirituality among junior and senior-level high school students to learn the nature, meaning, and essence of spirituality and of their spiritual experiences. In addition, this study critiqued the findings to ascertain larger implications related to Catholic secondary school teaching pedagogy. Because there were few studies found explaining students' spiritual experiences in the literature, a phenomenological method devoted to understanding students' lived experiences of the fostering of their spirituality within the Catholic school best lent itself to examining this question.

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What is the meaning of being spiritual for adolescent girls in an all-girls urban Catholic high school?
2. What implications do students' understandings of being spiritual have for secondary educators?

Overview

Qualitative research, developed from an interpretive paradigm, seeks to study a particular phenomenon within a natural context from the perspective of those who regularly experience that phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). This section will present the research design for this project, including its intended population, access, rapport and ethical standards maintained with the student participants. Secondly, the section will explain the role of the researcher as the instrument in this study and will

provide the process employed for data collection and analysis. Specific concerns of the study regarding validity, generalizability and the background of the researcher are also addressed.

Research Design

A qualitative research method was selected for this study primarily because of the nature of this study's purpose. Phenomenological inquiry, while derived from phenomenological philosophy, focuses on the lived experiences of humans with special interest in a particular concept or phenomenon as a means of conducting active research (Van Manen, 1990). The inquiry sought to understand the essence and meaning of the phenomenon of spirituality from the lived experiences of the student participants. As a preferred method in human science, the inquiry involves the researcher in the description, interpretation, and self-reflection or critical analysis of the phenomenon.

While it is important to acknowledge phenomenology as a philosophical perspective, it should be understood further that this philosophical viewpoint must be molded into a process suitable for a research inquiry. Historically, early methodologists of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Kaam, 1969) contributed greatly to this effort, forming the phenomenological method into one that could be applied to the field of psychology. However, Van Manen (1990) fostered a distinct method appropriate for the field of education. Munhall (2007) affirmed Van Manen as “an outstanding phenomenologist for those in human sciences to follow [because he viewed] phenomenology as a philosophy of being as well as a practice” (pp. 159-160).

Munhall (2007) furthered this method of human science research in her application of phenomenological inquiry to the field of nursing integrating the means for

going beyond describing and interpreting experiences to applying what is learned from the human experience for the sake of improving practice and policy. Munhall explained,

A critique of the experience may offer infinite possibilities for needed change...provide direction to practice or theory...that would ultimately enlarge our purpose and assist individuals in attaining meaning and improve sensitivity, understanding, and change in conditions and approaches that were not enhancing the quality of their lives. (p. 169)

While Van Manen (1990) influenced the design for a phenomenological research method that would grasp the life-world of students' spirituality, Munhall (2007) provided a broader vision for how to accomplish a research project of human beings in a manner which would directly impact educational pedagogy through the reflective and interpretive outcomes. For this reason, it may be helpful to present an overview of Munhall's method to the reader as it was so influential in shaping the design of this study (Table 4). The phenomenological method was engaged for data collection and analysis as its philosophical tradition provided both structure and formation to the researcher during the data collection and analysis process in this exploration. Other methodologists guided the technical aspects for researching lived experience in this project (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006).

Data collection consisted of a series of three in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006) with each of eight high-school students (two juniors, and six seniors), self-reflections of the researcher on the experience of spirituality and of the student interviews, and the collection of artifacts. Interviewees were selected by means of a purposeful, criterion-based selection process. A phenomenological analytic approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of students' perceptions of and meanings derived from experiences of spirituality.

Table 4

Munhall's Method of Phenomenological Inquiry: A Broad Outline

I. Immersion	An essential and critical beginning of a phenomenological study where the researcher immerses herself into the language and comes to understand the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology.
II. Coming to the Phenomenological Aim of the Inquiry	<p>A. Articulate the aim of the study.</p> <p>B. Distinguish the experience that will be the focus of the study.</p> <p>C. Researcher works to “de-center” and come to “unknow” the phenomenon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflect on one’s own beliefs, preconceptions, intuition, motives, and biases. ▪ Adopt a perspective of “unknowing.” <p>D. Articulate the aim of the study in the form of a phenomenological question.</p>
III. Existential Inquiry*	<p>A process conducted simultaneously with Step IV; Requires “being-in-the-world” and takes place in the life-worlds of both researcher and participant. Constitutes the step in which existential material is gathered. Requires specific processes, such as attentiveness, intuitiveness, constant reflecting on decentering, active listening, interviews or conversations clarifying, synthesizing, writing, taking photographs.</p> <p>A. Listen to self and others; develop heightened attentiveness to self and others.</p> <p>B. Reflect on personal experiences and expressions.</p> <p>C. Provide experiential descriptive expressions.</p> <p>D. Record ongoing reflection in your personal journal.</p>
IV. Phenomenological Contextual Processing*	<p>Parallels the process of existential inquiry and processing. In this step, thoughts about the material gathered in step III are presented in writing for the reader, describing the situated contexts of all who take part in the study, where participants are located in the various life-worlds, and the contingencies of those in the study, including the researcher.</p> <p>A. Analyze emergent situated contexts.</p> <p>B. Analyze day-to-day contingencies.</p> <p>C. Assess life-worlds: spatial, corporeal, temporal, relational.</p>
V. Analysis of Interpretive Interaction	<p>A. Integrate existential investigation with phenomenological contextual processing.</p> <p>B. Describe expressions of meaning (thoughts, emotions, feelings, statements, motives, metaphors, examples, behaviors, appearances, and concealments, voiced and nonvoiced language).</p> <p>C. Interpret expressions of meaning as appearing from integration.</p>
VI. Writing the Phenomenological Narrative	<p>A. Choose a writing style to communicate an understanding of the meaning of this particular experience.</p> <p>B. Write inclusively of all meanings, not just the “general”, but the “particular.”</p> <p>C. Write inclusively of language and expressions of meaning with the interpretive interaction of the experience of the situated context.</p> <p>D. Interpret with participants the meaning of the interaction of the experience with contextual processing (steps III and IV).</p> <p>E. Narrate a story that at once gives voice to actual language and simultaneously interprets meaning from expressions used to describe the experience.</p>
VII. Writing a narrative on the meaning of the study	<p>A. Summarize the answer to your phenomenological question with breadth and depth.</p> <p>B. Indicate how this understanding, obtained from those who have lived the experience, calls for self-reflection and/or system reflection.</p> <p>C. Interpret meanings of these reflections to small and large systems with specific content.</p> <p>D. Critique this interpretation with implications and recommendations for political, social, cultural, family, and other social systems.</p>

*Concurrent processes.

Note: Reprinted with permission from Munhall, P.L. “*Nursing research: A Qualitative Perspective*, Fourth edition.” Jones and Bartlett Publishers, LLC., 2007. www.jbpub.com.

Research Setting

In a phenomenological study, the common experience of a phenomenon among participants is central to the study in which participants may or may not be located at a single site. However, since the purpose of this study was integrally associated to participants' attendance in a Catholic school, it was necessary that the study took place within the setting of a Catholic secondary school. The setting selected for this exploration was Trinity High School ([THS], a pseudonym). One of few single-gender urban Catholic high schools within the San Francisco Bay Area geographical region, THS draws from a socioeconomically and culturally diverse population. In the 2008-2009 school year, the racial profile of THS's female student body was 35% African-American, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 27% Euro-American/Caucasian, 20% Hispanic/Latina, 10% Multi-Racial, and 3% Other. The religious affiliation of THS's students was 52% Catholic and 48% non-Catholic. Forty-nine percent of THS's students were on tuition assistance.

A purposeful selection process was employed to select eight students for in-depth interviews. Criteria for this selection determined students according to specific characteristics. First and foremost, eligibility was based on students who had experienced and who possessed an awareness of their own spiritual life, and who displayed an ability to articulate their experiences of their own spirituality in thoughts and feelings. Secondly, students who represented a variety of diverse perspectives were sought from those identified by the first criteria. The school's vice-principal, campus minister and senior religion teacher (the same person), and the junior class religion teacher selected students for participation in this study based on the determined criteria.

Population

In-depth interviews with participants are the primary means of data collection in a phenomenological study. Extended in-depth interviews provide the opportunity for participants to reflect and to disclose their experiences in rich detail. Junior- and senior-level female students were targeted for this study. Based on my prior professional experience, junior-level students are the most academically focused of the four levels, as they are acclimated to high school and are not yet as distracted by the college search and application process as senior students. Senior students possess both an intellectual and psychological maturity which may allow them the best vantage point for their collective experiences within the Catholic school. It was thought that this would enable them the greatest ability for self-awareness and for articulation of spiritual experiences.

Eight students participated in the interview process: six seniors and two juniors. Of the eight, three were African-American, two were Latina, two students were Caucasian, and one student was Filipina. Junior and senior student-participants received a \$15 gift certificate as an expression of gratitude for their participation.

Access and Rapport

Access into the site was obtained through the cooperation of the school's administrators, the principal and vice-principal. An initial contact was made with the administrators to describe the purpose and background of the study, its intended duration, and anticipated benefits (Appendix A). Additionally, the scope and involvement of participants and the assurance of their voluntary participation was communicated at that time.

Ethical Standards

High ethical standards were maintained throughout this study through confidentiality of data from interviews. Participants' identities have been protected through the use of pseudonyms for the school site, as well as for the school personnel and students. In addition, pseudonyms have been used for all parishes and schools named, and for the city in which THS is located. Interviews were conducted in two private settings in the school.

Participants' rights were protected through (a) approval of all necessary forms from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects; (b) the Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix H); and (c) voluntary informed consent obtained from the school administrators, students, and parents. The informed consent forms explained to the school administrators, students, and parents, that their participation was voluntary and that they may have chosen to withdraw from the study at any time.

An Ethical Dilemma

Each of the participants was promised confidentiality at the time the study was initiated. However, the obligation to maintain confidentiality created an ethical dilemma at times in light of other roles held by the researcher in addition to that of the researcher in this study. As the interview process unfolded, participants revealed sensitive information that gave cause for concern about their physical and emotional health. In these instances, my role as a credentialed teacher and mandatory reporter concerned for the student's safety became more engaged than that of the researcher inquiring about the topic. In every case in which a student revealed information containing potentially harmful circumstances, further investigation either within or without the interviews

revealed that critical information had already been communicated to school personnel and verified that each student was receiving the support needed. Student confidences were never broken.

Researcher as Instrument

An integral component of qualitative research is that the researcher is the key instrument for analysis of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 1998; Munhall, 2007; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). However, this holds several implications that warrant further explication in the context of this chapter on methodology. Patton asserted elements of voice, perspective, and reflexivity with regard to the researcher as instrument. This section will explore those three components.

First, referring to the typical writing style predominantly found in scholarly journals and books, Patton (2002) claimed that these employ a passive voice where no human being is visible. Patton suggested, “The third person, passive voice communicates a message: This work is about procedures, not people” (p. 63). Patton further explicated that the traditional academic style is employed in order to project a sense of objectivity, control, and authority. Any sense of a real human being present in the research project is generally disguised or hidden away. Contrasting the traditional academic voice and the personal voice characteristic of qualitative analysis, Patton recalled the distinction made by philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (1923) between “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships.

An I-It relationship regards other human beings from a distance, from a superior vantage point of authority, as objects or subjects, things in the environment to be examined and placed in abstract cause-effect chains. An I-Thou perspective, in contrast, acknowledges the humanity of both self and others and implies relationship, mutuality, and genuine dialogue. (p. 64)

Recalling that the purpose of this study was to understand human experiences of spirituality, the first person voice has been employed, particularly for the presentation of findings and analysis of data.

Secondly, it is important to consider that since a human being serves as the instrument in a qualitative study, the perspective brought to the inquiry by the researcher is part of the context for the findings (Patton, 2002). Patton clarified that since it is a real live human being who makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions and interprets responses, self-awareness of the researcher may serve as an asset in both fieldwork and analysis. Patton suggested that inclusion of the researcher's training and preparation, as well as data collection and analytical processes, add value and credibility to the inquiry. Judgments about the significance of findings, therefore, are inevitably connected to the researcher's credibility, competence, thoroughness and integrity. Such judgments, Patton explained, invite response and dialogue, rather than just acceptance or rejection (pp. 64-65).

Finally, Patton (2002) asserted the reflexivity of the inquirer as an important dimension of the qualitative researcher's role as instrument. Reflexivity provides a means for emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, consciousness and ownership of one's perspective.

Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voice of those one interviews and those to whom one reports. (p. 65)

Reflexivity is integral to the phenomenological process. A reflexive presentation of findings will enable the reader to understand how the researcher has come to a particular conclusion, illuminating findings of the study.

Data Collection

The purpose of data gathering in phenomenological inquiry is to collect “naïve” descriptions of the experience under investigation (Polkinghorne, 1989). Data needed for this study were descriptive reports of spirituality exactly as the experiences appeared in each participant’s consciousness. In phenomenological inquiry, the research project draws on three sources for the generation of descriptions of experiences: (1) the researcher’s own self-reflection on experiences of the phenomenon; (2) descriptions of the phenomenon from other participants in the study, and (3) depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project in the form of literature, poetry, art, music, and by previous psychological and phenomenological investigators (Polkinghorne, 1989). All three of these types of datum were gathered in this study to explore the meaning of spirituality for adolescent girls.

Researcher’s Self-Reflection

The researcher’s personal self-reflections on experiences of the phenomenon were engaged as a preparatory step to gathering data from research participants (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). The purpose of these reflections was not to share personal intimacies with others, but rather, by coming in touch with one’s own experiences through personal descriptions, the researcher may recognize that those are the possible experiences of others. These descriptions of lived experience may serve as data, or material on which to work in the phenomenological process (Van Manen, 1990). The researcher noted personal reflections of her own lived experiences during the data analysis process helping to bracket out her own presuppositions and biases, and to gain insight into the lived experiences of the students. Searching for common experiential

meanings, the self-reflections served to open up the question of how these insights may help with pedagogy. Concise narratives of the researcher's self-reflections will be included in the research findings.

Researcher's Reflections During Interview Process

The researcher made notes into the digital recorder immediately following each interview. These notes consisted of immediate self-reflections including thoughts, feelings, concerns, and reactions to the interview content and experience. The notes contained methodological points of clarity to be addressed either in the interview process, transcribing, or analysis process. Finally, the notes contained observations of students' behaviors, attitudes, facial expressions, and body language; non-verbal information that assists the researcher in the interpretive and analytic process. Interviews served as a rich source of insight into participants' lives and perspectives of spirituality and its growth and development fostered within and beyond the classroom.

Student Interview Process

Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews with eight high-school girls: two juniors and six seniors. Seven of the students were interviewed three times and one of the students was interviewed one time (discussed later). Interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. Scheduling of student interviews was negotiated with the vice-principal, and with each of the student participants so that interviews did not significantly interrupt students' instruction time. In-depth interviews of 90 minutes were scheduled during the regular school day. The actual duration of each interview varied depending on each student's ability to self-reflect and to articulate her experiences of spirituality.

In Seidman's (2006) Three Interview Series for in-depth interviews, each

interview has a designated focus enabling the researcher to obtain a breadth of information from the participants pertinent to a phenomenological study. The first interview focused on childhood experiences of each participant which illuminated the context from which her understanding and experience of spirituality had emerged. Interview questions addressed those events, relationships, and practices that fostered her spiritual awareness as a child. The second interview focused on the student's present understanding of spirituality, that is, her own articulation of a definition, awareness, feelings and descriptions of spirituality as understood and experienced in the present. The third interview invited each student to describe the manner and degree to which she values spirituality. The third interview further invited students to offer suggestions for educators in Catholic secondary schools to better address the spiritual education of students in Catholic high schools.

Participant Selection Process

At the initial meeting with the school's administrators, the researcher's desired primary criteria was discussed. In the course of the meeting, it was agreed that the selecting school personnel (mentioned above) would give first priority to the researcher's criteria, and would then seek as secondary factors students who represented the school's ethnic and religious diversity. It was also agreed that 14 students would be identified initially, allowing for student denials, with a final goal of 10 students desired for the study.

In early January, 2009, each selecting member, the vice-principal, campus minister and junior religion teacher, compiled her list of possible students independent of the other selecting members. After each one's list had been created, the three compared

lists and found that 12 names out of each individual teacher's total of 14 names were common among all three lists. A final list of 14 students was determined from those lists by the vice-principal.

Initial Contact with Students

In late January, the school's vice-principal called those students initially identified as possible participants for a brief meeting. She informed the students that a researcher from the University of San Francisco would be conducting a study at THS in the upcoming weeks. The vice-principal introduced the researcher to the students as a trusted colleague with whom she had had a previous professional relationship. (The researcher was not present at these meetings.) Meeting with the students in two groups of seven, the vice-principal informed the students that the researcher would explain more about the study to them in the next two days, and assured them of her confidence in and support of the project.

Introductory meetings with researcher. Introductory meetings between the researcher and students followed as planned. The introductory meetings, limited to 15 minutes each, enabled the researcher to meet with each of the 14 students individually, to introduce herself, and to explain the research project. An Introductory Meeting Agenda and Review of Three Interviews were provided to each student at the beginning of the meeting (Appendixes B & C).

The agenda for these meetings consisted of the following: (1) The purpose and goals of the project were communicated. (2) The desired level of student participation was reviewed, including the three-interview process and final student verification of researcher's summaries. (3) An Informational Letter and Consent Form for Students

(Appendixes D & E) were distributed. (4) Students were given a Cover Letter to Parents Requesting Permission and a Consent Form for Parents (Appendixes F & G). (5) Students were informed of possible risks and participant's rights. Two copies of the Participant's Bill of Rights were provided (Appendix H), one for the student and one for her parents. (6) Finally, each student was invited to participate in the study with the understanding that the first 10 to return their forms would be admitted for participation.

After discussing possible participation in the project with her parents, each student was asked to sign and return the Student and Parent Consent Forms to the vice-principal. If they elected not to participate in the study, students were asked to sign and return a separate form, Decline to Participate (Appendix I).

Interview Scheduling

Students were informed at the introductory meeting that if they chose to participate in the project, interviews would be scheduled by the vice-principal. Students were encouraged to communicate any concerns with the vice-principal regarding the interview scheduling.

Initial and ongoing negotiation of the project with the vice-principal provided a supportive component for several reasons: first, the vice-principal's insights into the students' ability to articulate spirituality was valuable for the selection of student participants. Secondly, the vice-principal determined and coordinated interview times with students' class schedules, secured clearance with teachers, and assigned a private location in the school where interviews could be conducted.

Participant volunteerism. Eleven of the 14 students returned signed student and parent consent forms to the vice principal. Three students chose not to participate. Six of

the 11 students who returned paperwork were seniors, and five of them were juniors. While the original research proposal stated that five students would be selected from each class level, I instructed the vice-principal to keep the six seniors who accepted the invitation on a list of final participants in the event that one of the eleven decided to withdraw from the project at some point throughout the course of the interviews.

I asked the vice-principal to schedule all senior-level students first for interviews before juniors, as senior-level students' instruction time becomes more limited after the spring break with the anticipation of final exams and graduation exercises as the year draws to a close. I planned to make a final determination as to which four of the five juniors would be named final participants in the study in collaboration with the vice-principal toward the end of the first set of interviews.

Scheduling framework for interviews. Each student was to be interviewed a total of three times for the study. In order to build rapport with each participant and to maintain continuity in their reflections from interview to interview, the process was designed so that each student would be interviewed once per week for three consecutive weeks. However, only three students per week would be interviewed during a three-week segment to provide time for transcribing between interviews.

The first set of three participants were to be interviewed once per week for three weeks and would then be followed by the second set of three students for three weeks, and finally, a third set of four students would complete the process arriving at the initially desired 10 students. All 11 students were kept on a list of intended participants in the event of a withdrawal from the study. Final determination of the 10th student would be made during the course of the interview process.

Attrition of desired participants. Toward the end of the first three weeks of interviews, I met with the vice-principal to discuss scheduling for the second and final sets of students. There were still 11 students on the intended participants list. For the sake of balancing religious backgrounds among participants, I decided at this point to keep all 11 students in the study. This would require four sets of students for interviewing, with a fourth group consisting of only two students.

Due to difficulties with the transcription software, transcriptions were taking more time than originally anticipated. This was a major concern, as it did not provide the enrichment desired to prepare for upcoming interviews. I asked the vice-principal to schedule the set of two students for the second three-week session to allow time to catch up on transcriptions. The final two three-week sessions would then contain three students each, reaching the revised total of 11.

Toward the end of the second set of interviews, I met with the vice-principal for the scheduling of the third and fourth sets of students. She informed me that in preparing schedules for the next two sets, she had discovered that a fourth set of interviews would mean extending the interview process three weeks beyond the students' return from the Easter holiday break. This was unsatisfactory for the sake of students' instruction time in the final weeks of school. I needed to limit the total number of participants to those who could be completed prior to the spring break dismissal.

By this time, I was two-thirds of the way through the second set of students, and had gathered ample rich data. I was satisfied that a revised total of eight participants would be sufficient for the purpose of the study. In addition, I learned from the vice-principal at this time that three of the junior-level students who had volunteered to

participate in the study were no longer eligible due to their academic standing in the school. One final attempt was made to draw in another junior student for the sake of raising the total number of juniors. However, this student declined the invitation. No further attempts were made to involve juniors.

After all of the unexpected shifts, the final group of participants in the study from THS consisted of six senior- and two junior-level students. No student ever withdrew from the study after beginning the interview process.

Participant preparation for interviews. Students were asked initially to prepare for interviews by spending time reflecting on the topics for each of the three interviews. An overview of the three interviews was provided to students at the introductory meeting with the researcher for this purpose (Appendix C). For the second interview, students were asked to give intentional reflection for one week in preparation for the topic on how they were nurtured spiritually during the specific week between the first and second interviews (Appendix J). In addition, they were asked to select an object or “artifact” that represented or expressed their spirituality in a non-verbal way. The artifact could be an object, a dance, or song. Students were asked to provide the artifact at the second interview.

Interview Process

Interviews were audiotaped by means of a digital recorder. At the beginning of the first interview with each student, I conducted a practice session in order to familiarize the students with the tape-recording process. Asking two introductory interview questions and recording her responses, I then played back this initial interaction for the participant so she could hear her own voice on the recorder. This exercise enabled the student to

become acquainted with the technology and fostered the growth of a comfortable rapport between myself and the student. In addition, this initial exercise provided a test of whether or not the student's voice was clearly audible on the recording.

Secondly, I reviewed a series of points at the first interview with each participant intended to further establish a comfortable rapport and to foster an atmosphere of trust and openness. The following four topics were covered with each participant: First, I assured her that there was no "right" answer, that I was only interested in learning of her experiences and perceptions. Secondly, I pointed out that I would try to limit my own usual "teacher" facial and verbal expressions to her responses explaining that it was my desire to listen and not to coach specific responses from her. Thirdly, I alerted her to expect that I may take notes during the interview and explained my reasons for this, that is, only to ask further questions of clarification. Finally, I informed her that I would keep track of time to assure coverage of all questions, as well as to make sure she returned to class at the agreed time. At the end of the interview process, students remarked that these initial comments had helped them to feel more comfortable to speak freely during the interviews.

Interview Questions: First Interview

Initial familiarizing questions:

1. Please tell me about your family:
 - How many siblings do you have? How old are they?
 - Who do you live with now? Who have you lived with in the past?
 - Where have you lived during your childhood?

Background

2. Where did you attend elementary school?
3. What have been your religious practices as a child? Did you go to church?

Spiritual awareness during childhood (up to the present)

4. What was your understanding of spirituality as a child?
 - Were you aware of spirituality as a child? If so, how?
 - When did you first become aware of the spiritual?
 - Please tell me how this happened for you. (event and experiences)
5. Please describe one or two experiences that you consider especially “spiritual” in nature that occurred during your childhood.
 - Events and factors surrounding (age, location)
 - How did you feel?
 - What difference did the experience make for you in your life, if any?
 - Why do you consider that a very spiritual experience?
6. Do you think there is a difference between religion and spirituality?
7. What relationships in your life helped you to understand or to be aware of spirituality?
8. In what ways did your understanding or awareness of spirituality change throughout your childhood?

Interview Questions: Second Interview

1. From your perspective, what is spirituality?
2. Please describe an experience during this past week that has been spiritual.
3. How do you experience your spirituality at home? At school? With family?

4. What is it like to be spiritual at THS? In what ways is your spirituality nurtured at THS?
5. Can you think of an experience at THS that has occurred recently that affected you spiritually?
6. How can teachers nurture the spirituality of adolescent girls at THS better? What suggestions do you have for Catholic secondary educators?
7. What image, song, or artifact do you associate with being spiritual?

Interview Questions: Third Interview

1. What does it mean to you to be spiritual?
2. Given what you said in the first two interviews, how do you make sense of spirituality? Or of the spiritual part of your life?

Collection of Artifacts

Student participants were asked to select an artifact that best expressed the essence and meaning of the spiritual experiences they would describe in the interview and to present that to the researcher at the second interview. Artifacts might consist of a variety of objects or artistic expressions: a selection of literature such as poetry, narrative, or biography; a piece of music or art; a dance movement or a song; a photo or other remembrance of nature. Through the use of the artifact, additional meaning and essence was extrapolated from the students' understanding and perceptions of the object or expression.

Organization of Data

An in-depth interview process produces an extreme amount of data which must be carefully identified and organized to ensure a successful study. Digital recordings of

participant interviews had to be labeled, filed, transcribed, chunked into meaning segments, referenced and printed. This section will review for the reader how data were organized to facilitate the accessing and analysis of the material.

Interview Transcriptions

After an interview was recorded, the digital data was downloaded into the computer and saved into the software program entitled *Digital Voice Editor 3*. At this time, each interview was identified with a two-part label: an alphabetic letter identified the student participant and was followed by a number denoting the specific interview for that student (Example: A.1 connotes Student A, first interview).

I attempted to complete transcriptions from each student prior to the following interview; however, this was not always possible. As much as each transcription could be completed, the transcription process enabled further thought about the content from which I made lists of questions to be included in the next interview with a particular student. When completing a transcription was not possible, I reviewed my notes taken during the previous interview in order to prepare for the next interview.

Formatting.

Embarking on the project of transcribing, a number of further decisions were necessary to provide confidentiality and to ensure easy access back to original data. Early on in the transcription process, a consistent system was created, defined, and employed for the duration of this segment of the study. The system included methods for both formatting and transcribing (Table 5).

Transcribing.

Each interview was transcribed from the digital form into text for further study

Table 5

Guidelines Created for Formatting and Transcribing Interviews

<u>Initial document format:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Margins: 1.25 (left), all others at 1.00 ▪ Paragraph format: left margin at -3 with hanging indent of .5 ▪ Font: Times New Roman 12 pt. ▪ Pagination: lower right corner, included on first page ▪ Set header (top of page) to repeat on each page: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Left side-Interview identifying label b. Center: date of interview c. Total length of Interview ▪ Set footer (bottom of page) to repeat: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Left corner: Series of paragraph numbers included in the particular interview b. Center: Date document was last printed c. Right: page number
<u>Formatting interview transcriptions:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Interviewer quotes</i>: single-spaced type in bold print; <i>except</i> when it is a brief interjection in the midst of a longer quotation from the student. (e.g. SE: Uh-huh; SE: Uh-hum or Okay) In these cases, include these utterances within the midst of parentheses, <i>not</i> in bold faced type. ▪ <i>Participant quotes</i>: regular type Times New Roman, single-spaced. At the end of each paragraph, note in parentheses the time signature that corresponds to the <i>Digital Voice Recorder 3</i> notation. Double space after each completed paragraph. ▪ <i>Speech patterns</i>: both interviewer and interviewee display a particular style of speaking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Note a <i>pause</i> either by ... or if the pause is more than a few seconds, note by [pause]. If the pause is extensive (more than 5-10 seconds), note within brackets the length of the pause. □ <i>Other patterns</i>: such as “Uh-huh”, or Uh-hum, or hmmm... denoted as they sound. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student interviewees often recount a sort of talking out loud to themselves. Note these by the use of quotation marks. ▪ Students will often emphasize points or concepts in their statements. Note emphasized words in <i>italics</i>, mark the word in bold print when even greater emphasis is placed on a word or phrase. ▪ <i>Special effects</i>: Those sounds that occur within the course of the interview, and are beyond the control of the researcher. These effects often occur in the midst of either the participant or interviewer speaking, such as airplane flying overhead, student noise outside, student crying during interview, coughing, bell sounding, etc. Note special effects by labeling within brackets such as: [coughing], [airplane noise], [student becomes emotional], [student crying].

Sample transcription:**SE: Cute. How do you come up with...how is “fairy tales” decided?****Is it...**

E: Uhm, student council actually chooses the themes. We broke it...we gave a whole bunch of different themes, and then we voted...(SE: Oh!)...on which one we wanted. (1:07) Yeah.

SE: Great! Are you on student council?

E: Yes, I am.

using the *Digital Voice Editor 3* software, earphones, and a transcriber’s foot pedal. The digital recorder provided a very high quality recording, yet several factors impacted the time needed to transcribe each student interview, particularly characteristic patterns and variations in the pace of each participant’s speech. While this was a time-consuming task, it yielded a deeply integrated knowledge of my data.

Seidman (2006) asserted, “The participants’ thoughts become embodied in their words. To substitute the researcher’s paraphrasing or summaries of what the participants say for their actual words is to substitute the researcher’s consciousness for that of the participant” (p. 114). For this reason, carefully transcribed interviews are essential tools for interpreting and understanding the life-worlds and perceptions of the research participants. Interviews were transcribed word for word and included all pauses and non-word sounds made by both participants and the researcher, such as coughs, laughs, sighs, pauses, outside noises, telephone rings, school bells, and interruptions as recorded on the tape (Seidman). Every attempt was made to reproduce the lived in-person experience of the interview as accurately as possible. In addition to non-verbal sounds, the emotions, body language, and facial expressions communicated by the participants and researcher were recorded in the researcher’s reflective notes so that they might further support the interpretive process later during analysis.

Interpretive process begins. During the phase of transcribing, the interpretive process actually began as one must make ongoing interpretive decisions about the meaning of participants' words. The reflective nature of the interviews and of the topic of spirituality may both have added to the fact that most people are not in the habit of speaking in clear paragraph form, let alone in complete sentences. In the interview recordings, students frequently left sentences incomplete as they began to verbalize another thought that occurred to them mid-sentence. Interpretation suddenly merged with the task of transcribing as significant questions pushed to be addressed: *Where do I punctuate? Where do I end this paragraph?* Kvale (1996) confirmed that with punctuation the process of interpretation and analysis begins.

To illustrate this point, one student spoke continuously for 16 minutes during a particular interview. The transcribed text of this response continued for three single-spaced pages. The text then needed to be broken down into smaller chunks of meaning by creating paragraphs. Each interview transcription was dealt with in this manner. Every student response was broken down into these chunks of meaning. A time notation was included parenthetically at the end of each paragraph to facilitate access back to the original audio recording if needed. These paragraph chunks were subsequently numbered continuously from the first response of the first interview to the very last student response of the last interview. In this way, any one printed single paragraph, statement, or one-word response could later be identified directly to the student and paragraph number.

Proofreading transcriptions. Each interview transcription was reviewed in its entirety one last time by listening again to the complete interview with headphones and reading through the typed text. Corrections were made as necessary. When words or text

were unclear, they were verified with student participants.

Organization of transcription text. Completed interviews were paginated beginning with page one, printed, and filed in a notebook. The notebook contained dividers one through eight. Each set of interviews was filed according to the corresponding student.

Data Analysis

The “aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal the structures, logic and interrelationships...in the phenomenon under investigation” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 50). Polkinghorne further asserted that data analysis is the core phase of research in this tradition, its purpose being to derive a specific description of the essential features of the experience from the data collected. The finding of phenomenological research is a description of the essential structure of the experience being explored (Polkinghorne). The finding is referred to as a “general structural description” (p. 51). This conventional method advocated for a phenomenological study, which would further suggest that the gathered material be collapsed into themes, essences, meaning units, and structural definitions (Munhall, 2007). However, I found that this method would not serve the particular study well and would not do justice to either the researcher or to the student participants. Neither did I find that a complete collapsing of all material into specific themes would adequately represent the life experiences and perspectives of the students selected for this study.

Referring to her own profession of nursing, Munhall (2007) pointed out that while shortening the interview findings into lists of characteristics and descriptions may be attractive for its “shorthand” method, this abbreviating approach raises an issue with

regard to phenomenological inquiry. Specifically, “a major problem with this approach, especially in a phenomenological study, is that words and signs do not have the same meaning for everyone” (p. 178). Although Munhall was speaking to practitioners of nursing research, her words can be easily applied to educational study. Words are interpreted differently by both the researcher and the participant. “These words and signs further lose meaning if they are acontextual. The signs and symptoms manifested by a patient have meaning only when placed in a historical, social, cultural, and individual context” (p. 178).

Yet, the question remained how to best communicate findings from the series of in-depth interviews and researcher reflections when an extreme amount of data had been collected. Intuitively, from the beginning of this study, it was my desire to enable each participant’s voice to speak of her own perceptions and understandings and to allow those voices to come forth from the distinct contexts of each one’s own life. I decided to present findings of the interviews in the form of narratives to be contained in three separate chapters. Each of the chapters addresses a different aspect of the study’s research questions. (The approach to these narratives contained in the three chapters will be further articulated in the next section.) Munhall’s (2007) explanation of the process for gathering and processing data confirmed this decision.

There are no shortcuts here. Those who invest the time and make the commitment to authenticity will serve well themselves and their participants. Once again the researcher is called on to be the “instrument.” Each individual participant needs our reverence for his or her individuality and way of expressing meaning. (p. 179)

Researcher’s Self-Reflection

During the analysis process, the researcher’s self-reflection continued. As narratives of each student were written, insights surfaced and were journaled. In the final

stages of articulating my interpretations of each summary, all journal entries were reviewed and reflected upon to create the summary texts. The summaries which follow the student narratives ultimately created the text from which the final chapter was written.

Student Interviews

Seidman (2006) recommended the construction of profiles and themes as a means through which to communicate the experiences and understandings of participants. He pointed out that in-depth interviewing is capable of “capturing momentous, historical experiences” (p. 123) and advocated for allowing individual profiles to speak for themselves. By telling the stories of my participants, I invite readers to both bear witness and to begin to understand the factors influencing adolescent spirituality, the subject of my dissertation (Seidman). This section reviews the process involved in the presentation and analysis of findings.

Reduction of Text

Typed transcriptions amounted to over 500 pages of data, excluding the researcher’s reflections. This data needed to be reduced to what was most important in communicating students’ perspectives and experiences (Seidman, 2006). Seidman advocated that the material must be approached from an intuitive perspective, coming to the transcripts “with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (p. 117). Seidman further explicated that the interviewer must be prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself.

The first step, therefore, was to reduce the amount of material that had been collected. Several steps were involved in this process. First, the completed participant-response numbered transcript for each interview was photocopied, generating two

identical copies of the text. Next, one copy of the set was filed into a binder, and the companion copy of the same interview was cut into strips containing one unit of response material each. A quick reading of each response (one interview at a time) yielded separate piles of topic-related responses. Piles were then stapled together and labeled according to the topic contained in the pile. Finally, an in-depth reading of each response allowed the emergence of significant quotes or of those that seemed important and of interest (Seidman, 2006). With significant quotes highlighted, each pile then generated passages that could then determine material to be included in student profiles. In this way, initial decisions were made about what material would be included and resulted in a preliminary outline from which to create student narratives.

Reporting of Data: Student Narratives, Profiles and Themes

Three distinct chapters present the interview findings in this document contained in narrative form. Chapter IV introduces each student to the reader in the form of a profile. The brief profile is intended to allow the reader to become personally acquainted with the student and contains accurate information unique to the participant: age at the time of the interviews, year in school, religious preference, ethnicity, and a portrait of the student's family and lifetime living situation. Each of these elements is helpful in creating the context out of which the student has lived her life.

In Chapter IV, the introductory profiles are followed by narratives which present the structure of childhood experiences and relationships that have contributed to each student's understanding and awareness of spirituality during this historical period of her life. The narratives contained in Chapter V articulate for the reader each student's own definition and current understanding of spirituality and communicates examples of each

student's present experience of spirituality. Additionally, Chapter V outlines for the reader the meaning spirituality holds for each of the participants. Chapter VI contains narratives expressing students' observations regarding how spirituality has been or could have been better fostered in a Catholic secondary school. Common themes among students' perceptions were discussed where appropriate in the sixth chapter only. Further rationale for the structure of each chapter will be provided at the beginning of Chapters IV, V, and VI.

Inclusion of participant quotes in narratives. While Seidman (2006) advocated the importance of narrating participants' perspectives from their own words as essential, attempts were made in this study to further reduce the amount of data collected through the narration of profiles in the researcher's voice. Participants' words were inserted into the text when it was more important that the reader hear the student's voice directly than through my own voice.

Further explanation is needed here. While care was taken to transcribe student responses exactly as they occurred on the digital recording, some editing was done in the narrative writing process so as to facilitate the reader's understanding of each student's voice. At this point, editing was done in a limited manner so as to maintain the language style of the participant, while at the same time preserving the flow for the reader. Specifically, in order to remain true to the speaker's words, only pauses and repetitions have been omitted (such as inordinate repetitions of the word "like" or "you know").

Artifacts

Students were asked to articulate how each artifact represented their spiritual experience during the course of the interviews. Students' responses and explanations

were integrated into interview transcripts. Analysis of their expressions about the artifacts have been embedded within the analysis process described above as they were included into each successive student narrative. Photos of the artifacts have been taken by the researcher and included in the following text in order to further communicate the spiritual significance of these objects or expressions to the reader.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were established for the data collected from student in-depth interviews in several ways. First, at significant points throughout the interviews, I checked with students to verify for content understanding by inserting questions such as, “Is this what you are saying? Do I understand correctly?” Secondly, as interviews were transcribed, if there were any questions as to the spoken words of students on the recordings, I approached the students to seek clarification. Often, I was able to ask these questions at the beginning of a next interview. In one case, I arranged to meet with a student at school after dismissal for this purpose. In this instance, the student wore the headphones as I replayed sections of the interviews in question.

Finally, as the student narratives were completed, they were submitted to students via email for verification of the accuracy of my summarizations. Students responded via email or through a follow-up phone conversation to clarify any points that were inaccurate. Corrections were made to the text accordingly. In addition, researcher validity was established through the researcher’s own reflections before and after interviews, and through written descriptions of her own lived experiences.

Generalizability

Where traditional empirical research is most often interested in obtaining

knowledge that is generalizable, phenomenology is interested in what is unique about individuals in their lived experience and what learning can then be applied to practice and policy (Munhall, 2007). It is a “theory of the unique...interested in what is essentially not replaceable” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Generalizations made to populations or individuals outside of this study has been limited by the extent to which comparisons can be found between the participants and other populations and analyzed for similarity.

Background of the Researcher

My association with the Catholic school system has been a life-long experience. As a product of a Catholic elementary school, I experienced first-hand the benefits of community that permeated the entire school and parish life, embracing all members in a caring, faith-filled manner. I have been a member of a women’s religious community for 29 years, formed as a Catholic educator in a religious congregation with a 130-year-old corporate commitment to educating children, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Having completed a graduate degree in Private School Administration, I am deeply committed to the mission of Catholic education. I believe in its potential to transform lives in a holistic manner, based on the faith perspective instilled through its curriculum.

I have served 14 years in Catholic elementary schools in various capacities from teaching to administration. My most recent professional service was in a congregationally-sponsored all-girls urban Catholic high school where I served for five years as campus minister and senior class moderator and for four of the years as a religion teacher at the senior-class level. During this tenure, my experiences as a campus minister and moderator, teacher and colleague provided many vantage points from which to learn. I realized that my white skin and white religious habit and European American

cultural background unintentionally communicated messages of privilege, wealth, and power to the culturally and socioeconomically diverse student population. While my heart wanted to communicate understanding and support to students, and to teach a perspective of hope, that in faith, untold potential lay within them, I struggled with the obstacles of their pre-conceived notions and with the demands of the academic structure of the school. I found that the most authentic connections with students took place in the context of class retreats, where students had the opportunity to acknowledge their own life struggles and to find healing for their experiences in the faith context provided by the retreat. The retreats provided for me a broader perspective of the students and the burdens they carried daily to school.

During the course of these five years, class retreats were both my regular routine and deeply privileged experiences. Paradoxically, upon returns to school, my visits to the faculty room exposed me to my colleagues' frustrations and negative perceptions of students due to students' limited academic skills, poor attention in class, and low performance. Having more insight into the burdens that students carried on a daily basis, I felt frustration by colleagues' over-focusing on academics, to the exclusion of "the whole child" (CCE, 1978). I understood students' complaints about particular teachers and learned from students which teachers made profound impacts on students in positive ways.

I became concerned about the lack of understanding of the mission of the Catholic school that I perceived in colleagues and wondered how this could be instilled in teachers who lacked the rich formation from which I had benefited. Realizing that my own life vocation and professional roles limited my perspective to that of the faith dimension, I

became curious about the ways secondary teachers, who are both committed and experienced with the mission of the Catholic school, but who teach subjects other than religion or theology, manifest the primary purposes of educating the whole child in their teaching.

It is my hope that through this study I may have uncovered deeper insights into the spiritual experiences of adolescent girls, and by listening to the students' experiences in an urban Catholic single-gender high school, may learn what has been helpful or not helpful in fostering the spiritual lives of students within the school. It is further my hope that this study will provide positive feedback for practical methods for teachers as to how students' spiritual development may be fostered within the Catholic secondary school.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS: CHILDHOOD FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Chapter Rationale

Two research questions drove the design of this phenomenological study: (1) What is the meaning of being spiritual for adolescent girls in an all-girls urban Catholic high school? And, (2) what implications do students' understandings of being spiritual have for secondary educators? To explore these questions, a structured in-depth phenomenological interview process (Seidman, 2006) facilitated the uncovering of rich data revealing the meaning of being spiritual for eight adolescent girls through stories told about their childhood, about loved ones, about painful memories, and about triumphs achieved in personal growth. Most of all, the interview process facilitated a gradual building of insight and understanding for both the participants and for the researcher seeking to learn from these girls' perceptions.

Munhall (2007) asserted that a phenomenological inquiry by its very nature, requires attentiveness to the life-worlds of both the participants and the researcher. Munhall directed that when we, as researchers, engage in dialogue with our participants, that we must not only listen to the language or linguistic expressions used to describe and interpret their experience, but we must "hear the situated context of their 'being-in-the-world'" (p. 176). This *situated context*, referred to as the horizon or background of the participant's experience, involves several areas necessary for an existential investigation (Table 4). Munhall emphasized, "Expressions of meaning *cannot* be acontextual. The thoughts, feelings, emotions, and questions are deeply embedded in the context of the participant's life, or life-world" (p. 176). Therefore, while the existential inquiry is being

conducted, the researcher must process the context of the student's life-world.

The existential inquiry (Table 4) involves an array of "specific processes such as attentiveness, intuitiveness, constant reflection on decentering, active listening, interviews or conversations clarifying, synthesizing, writing, taking photographs, creating verse, and almost anything that will reflect your participant's and your consciousness and awareness of the experience" (Munhall, 2007, p. 177). Munhall further clarified that because phenomenological inquiry has "at once subjective, objective, and intersubjective qualities to it," all of the data that is collected through these means is referred to as *material* (p. 177). Through analysis of the array of material collected, which includes interview transcriptions, the researcher must search to find participants' expressions of meaning. "The expressions convey in words a manifestation of meaning...as participants express themselves with emotions, thoughts, desires, questions, wishes, hopes, and complaints" (p. 179). Munhall clarified, "It is to this that we need to turn our attention" (p. 179).

Perhaps the most significant component of the phenomenological inquiry is the step of phenomenological *contextual processing* (Munhall, 2007) which parallels the step of existential inquiry. In contextual processing (Table 4), several components of both the participants' and researcher's life-world must be taken into consideration. Munhall described the components of this process as: (1) an analysis of any contingencies that emerge in the situated context of the interview process; (2) an analysis of day-to-day contingencies within either the participant's or researcher's life, unifying the life-worlds during the situated context of the interview process; and (3) an assessment of the life-worlds of each participant (p. 193-194).

Munhall (2007) addressed four existential life-worlds which will provide greater dimensionality from which to process the phenomenological material of this study to give a greater perspective of meaning to the material that has previously been collected (p. 194). The specific life-worlds identified by Munhall are (Adapted from pp. 194-197): *Spatiality*—refers to the space in which one exists presently, the environment, for example, one's home environment. The material needs to be processed through "the lens of the environment," as Munhall stated. "An experience does not exist alone. It is always embedded and connected" (p. 194). Spatiality may refer to the country, city, school, and/or family in which one is located (Munhall).

Corporeality—"refers to the body that we inhabit and is also referred to as embodiment" (p. 194). As our minds and all of the understanding and awareness possessed in our minds are contained in a body, the connectedness of the mind with the body, our embodiment must be considered when processing the phenomenological material. "Body intelligence is what experiences phenomena. We negotiate experience through the unity of mind and body. Perceptions are what enter the body and therefore become the starting point of meaning" (p. 195).

Temporality—refers to the time in which both the researcher and the participant are living. All human beings are connected to this concept of time; "Our embodied bodies occupy a space and that space is located in time" (p. 195). Munhall explicated the importance of processing the participant's perception of time when listening to participants and interpreting the material related to the phenomenon. In addition, a further aspect related to time is that of *history*. Because life experience is contained within an historical period in which each person's life exists, it is important to consider the

historical aspect of each participant's life. Munhall expressed, "That period is extremely influential in regard to our behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and where we are located (spatiality)" (p. 195).

Relationality—"refers to the world in which we find ourselves in relation to others" (Munhall, 2007, p. 196). All relationships in which the participant participates or interacts as articulated within the material must be considered when analyzing and interpreting for meaning. Relationships contribute significant dimensionality to the participants perspective of the phenomenon under study, particularly the phenomenon of spirituality.

Based on their unique life experiences, each of these existential areas will be found to overlap in varying degrees within the participants' life-worlds and will impact their individual perspectives of the phenomenon. These existential areas will provide breadth and depth to the meaning of spirituality held by the participants in this study.

Structure of Findings

The findings from this phenomenological inquiry will be contained in narrative form in Chapters IV, V, and VI. The current Chapter IV contains material gathered primarily from the first interview, and the following two chapters correspond with material from the successive interviews. The content of each interview had a particular focus and provided a necessary component for the other two. In this fourth chapter, profiles provide the reader with a personal context for each student followed by a narrative containing significant findings from each student's childhood formative experiences, events, and relationships. The researcher's interpretive critique follows at the end of the chapter reviewing the findings from the perspective of the study's research

questions. Chapter V presents the participants' current perceptions, experiences, and understanding of spirituality. The chapter further contains students' expressions of the meaning they held for spirituality at the time of the interviews and concludes with the researcher's interpretive critique of the findings from each participant. Chapter VI contains reflections on how students' spirituality has been nurtured by their attendance in an urban Catholic secondary school. Additionally, this chapter contains participants' observations of ways teachers might improve the manner through which they foster students' spirituality, suggestions which may be helpful to Catholic educators. Chapter VI, the final section to present findings, will discuss students' responses thematically, and follows with a chapter summary. The focus of each interview will be reviewed in greater detail at the beginning of each chapter.

Observations on Findings

Before presenting the findings, a few notes are in order for reading clarity. During the first interview, some students neither expressed memories of childhood formative experiences of a religious nor of a spiritual nature. In some cases, students may have only recently come to an understanding of spirituality in their own lives. Throughout the interview process, I maintained a perspective that each of the participants had been identified by experienced educators as students capable of articulating their own spiritualities or spiritual experiences. Each student was found to articulate most areas of the questions at least reasonably well, but not every section was well-defined by every student. In the presentation of findings, the reader may find unequal reporting from students; one student may appear to be missing pieces, while a later section for the same student may be found well-developed. This was due to two factors: (1) the flow of the

interviews curtailed discussion of some topics; and (2) students demonstrated uneven abilities to respond to each question.

Secondly, for some students, the concepts *religion* and *spirituality* have been considered synonymously throughout most of their lives. For others, usages of these concepts were intermixed in the interviews, and therefore, may be found intermingled in the text that follows. Finally, interview questions were specifically designed to address the concept of spirituality. None of the initial interview questions contained language from the researcher that initiated or assumed a connection to or belief in God. During the course of the interviews, when God was named or a deity referred to, it was done so at the initiation of the participant. Any further questions posed by the researcher with regard to the belief in God or assumption of this relationship were done so as to further clarify the students' perceptions.

Childhood Formative Experiences

The purpose of the first interview in an in-depth phenomenological study is to provide a context for the participant's experience of a particular phenomenon in the participant's life up to the present time (Seidman, 2006). To provide the context for this study of eight adolescent females' experiences of spirituality, participants were asked questions about the events, practices, and relationships that may have shaped their understanding and awareness of religion or spirituality from their childhood to the present year of enrollment, either senior or junior year of high school. Because spirituality is closely associated with religion and religious practices, the questions in the first interview addressed the childhood religious practices instilled within the participant's family and sought further to uncover through this avenue when each participant came to discover an

awareness and understanding of spirituality. Participants provided stories and details about these formative experiences during their childhoods. In the text that follows, a short profile will introduce each student to the reader, will be followed by a narrative containing the participant's unique contextual experiences, and will conclude with the researcher's interpretive critique of each student's childhood formative experience.

Cassandra Ramirez: Tradition of Faith

Cassandra was 18 years old and a senior at Trinity High School (THS). She had attended THS since her freshman year. Baptized Roman Catholic as a baby, she practiced Catholicism all of her life. Cassandra was the second oldest of four girls, although the fourth girl was currently just a toddler. While her parents were both born in Mexico, Cassandra and her sisters were born in the United States. She remembered living as a little girl with her parents and two sisters crowded together in the small apartment of an aunt and uncle and nine cousins a few blocks from the house where she currently lived. When her parents had enough money, they moved into a house in a largely Latino region of her city, Californiaville. Cassandra's grandparents and other relatives visited often from Mexico. At these times, it was Cassandra's parents who were the primary hosts for the visitors who might stay anywhere from two weeks to three months at a time.

Cassandra's grandfather was staying with her family at the time of the interviews.

Close-knit family ties were the fabric of Cassandra's childhood. For Cassandra, these ties contained a past, a present, and a future of her immediate and extended family. The importance of family in Cassandra's life was evident in her description of the house in which she lived since she was a toddler:

I love my house. I've just gotten so fond of it. Like everything has happened there. I don't know. It's just somewhere I've grown up and somewhere I go back

to everyday and look forward to going when I leave. The memories... family¹ reunions, bringing home my little sisters, seeing my little sisters grow up. Yeah, like, [for]² all the family, has been a house that's been *in* the family a long time. Since a lot of my aunts and uncles have moved in a couple years ago and moved to Californiaville. So our house is like the main house where everything starts. (A20-21)³

Family Relationships and Religious Practices

Asked to describe her earliest experiences of spirituality, Cassandra expressed that she did not exactly consider her childhood experiences as spiritual, but that she was definitely religious (A22). All of Cassandra's family on both of her parents' sides were "pretty strict Catholic" (A22). In fact, many of her relatives served as catechists in their home village in Mexico. Her close family ties provided warmth and surrounded her and her siblings with a routine of family religious practices, catechesis, and faith. Cassandra stated that religion was "more of a tradition" for her family than anything (A22).

Practices included weekly mass attendance, regular prayer, including the rosary, and instruction from various family members in the scriptures and Catholic faith tradition.

What was most significant, however, was that these practices always occurred within a familial relational context.

Cassandra's strongest memories of religious instruction during childhood took place in her home with her mother and sisters. Cassandra recalled the nightly bedtime ritual in which the three girls would climb into their bunk beds together in the same room—one girl upper and two on the lower levels—and listen to their mom teach them

¹ Ellipses have been employed primarily to denote pauses in students' speech. While many have been edited for the sake of fluidity of text, those that remain within the context of student quotes are intended to further reveal the students' life-worlds through their speech patterns. In fewer cases, the ellipses will also denote the omission of text.

² Researcher's comments have been inserted for greater reading clarity or to communicate expressions of emotion from either the researcher or participant during the course of the interviews. Insertions will be denoted with the use of brackets [].

³ Interview quotations are referenced according to the participant's response. The reference system is explained in Chapter III: Methodology.

about prayer, scripture, and faith. Their mom, perched at the end of one of the lower beds, began teaching her daughters little prayers as she tucked them in. Cassandra said it was “a little ritual, a little tradition” or “like a little school” (A97) where mom would recite the prayers and then the girls were to repeat.

Often, the girls’ response was, “Oh! I can’t remember all that!” (A97), to which mom would read the prayers all over again. The girls, one peering down from above while the others crouched to the edges of their beds to listen intently to mom as she said, “Now, say this after me” and again, “Now, repeat it,” until they each learned their prayers. The girls often asked, “But what does that *mean*?” (A97). But as they grew older, Cassandra remarked that they eventually grew to understand the meanings of the prayers. I asked Cassandra how she liked this little ritual, to which she replied,

I liked it. Because I didn’t think about it as like a religious thing. She made it seem more like a kind of little fairy tale, a little story because she always told us, “God was the *Baby Jesus*, like, a *Baby God*.” So, we were like, “Oh! How cute! We liked it.” (A100)

Sometimes her mom, for the sake of correcting the girls’ behavior, engaged this endearing connection to the Baby Jesus. Cassandra recalled that when she and her sisters had done something bad, her mom would say, “Oh! Baby Jesus wouldn’t be happy. Poor baby!” (A101). Pointing to his picture, she would say, “Look! He’s crying! You made him cry” (A101). And the girls would respond, “Okay. We’re sorry.” Wondering if this had really made an impact on them, Cassandra asserted that, in fact, it had. They had seen more their mom’s care and concern for them, which moved them to stop whatever their behavior was. This was a regular way of solving things in the family.

At times, the nightly ritual with her mom involved reading from a book of scripture stories for children after which her mom would pray and then explain to the

girls what the stories meant. This practice seared these stories into the girls' memories symbolically representing the uniqueness of their mom and their love for her. Sometimes, their mom prayed first, and then read a story to them that had to do with the prayer selected from a special little book. The girls found the little book their mom used at times confusing and, at other times, a source of amusement. The girls listened intently to the stories, such as Jonah swallowed by the whale or about Jesus turning water into wine. Their mom had a way of bringing the stories to life and making them seem exciting to the girls. "Oh my God! The *whale* just *ate* him? Wait, can that *happen*? I don't think so!" (A107).

Marveling at how these things could happen, they were instructed further on the importance of maintaining good behavior in God's sight. They certainly did not want a whale to eat them, yet they remained amused by their mom's animated engrossment in the act of storytelling (A107). Their mom's ability to make everything more exciting, even eating, was a "special little talent," an endearing image that comes to their minds each time they hear those scripture stories today. Cassandra revealed, "That's how she told her stories. We were amused because she'd say it in a certain way and we were just *hooked!*" (A108).

Other times their mom would explain the prayer by telling them a story from her own life or of something going on in the family and relating that story to the prayer for the evening. Of all the different narratives their mom shared with them, the girls liked her personal life stories best. Those stories provided windows into their mom's childhood, and enabled them to learn about her. She often related her own life experiences back to her faith, "You know, when I was younger, we were poor, and then Jesus was also poor"

(A105). For Cassandra and her sisters, these nightly rituals were engaging and enchanting.

Community: Process for Religious Celebration

Sunday mornings were hectic in Cassandra's house. Her dad woke up his elder three daughters after the toddler had woken Cassandra's parents. With that, her dad called for the family to begin their weekly ritual of preparation before going to Sunday mass. He called for the older daughters to help their mother with the baby, to help make the breakfast, and for them to start their showers and pick up the house. Despite the list of ritual chores to be accomplished prior to departing for Mass, Cassandra reported that the family invariably woke up late and, then, had to rush to get to Mass.

Timely completion of the morning agenda determined which Mass the family attended. For most of Cassandra's life, her family has belonged to St. Agnes Parish where the Spanish Mass is at 1:00 p.m. If they did not make that mass, they could attend the 2:00 p.m. Spanish Mass at the Cathedral or another Spanish Mass in the area at 5:00 p.m. As a very last resort, a Mass was available in English at 7:00 p.m., but the family only had to resort to that Mass once during her lifetime. For Cassandra's family, the weekly tradition of Sunday Mass attendance was "always in Spanish and always the whole family" (A76).

Cassandra reported that she often saw aunts, uncles, and cousins at Mass, so the custom has been a familiar one for her. I asked Cassandra to describe what it was like for her as a teenager to "have to go to church every Sunday?" She replied that going to church every Sunday has been a tradition in her family since she was little; therefore, she never really thought about it. "Because as a family, it's just kind of automatic. We just go

together. We leave together. We spend the whole weekend together” (A77). She continued,

I know I feel really special because I know a lot of parents struggle to get their kids to get up and go to church. And I know, a lot [of] people, a lot of women I know, their husbands don't want to go to church. Their children don't want to go to church. So they just go by themselves, with like the youngest person in the family. When I see that, it's really sad to me. It's really a sacrifice... give up two hours—at the most—of your time. And it's not necessarily, like for me, the religious part to be like, “Okay, I'm going because I'm religious.” 'Cause, just what you learn and what you see can really impact you. (A78)

Cassandra explained that she was aware that many teens her age do not care to attend Sunday church on a regular basis, or that they do not care about religion right now. She expressed gratitude that her cousins, also in their teens and slightly older, held to the same practices that her own family did of always going to church.

I asked her to explain how her weekly attendance at Mass affected her. For Cassandra, weekly Mass attendance has meaning. She admitted that at times it becomes little more than a routine, but expressed that once she is in church, she realizes its meaning for herself. She explained, “I'm like, ‘Okay. This is a process. This is a *holy* tradition...to go to church” (A80). Surprised at her response, I asked Cassandra to explain what she meant by a *process*. I was enlightened by her response:

It's a *religious* process, but also, a *communal* process. Get to go with the family and then learn about Gospels, and what's going on in the church. And then just seeing people *after* mass or during Mass. You're like, “Oh, hi! how are you?” And you start talking and you kind of develop a little community. So, that's the process. (A81)

Cassandra explained the process of migration that her family has made over the years participating in three different parish communities. Over the years, they have met many people, but have felt closest to those from St. Agnes Parish. These are the ones whom they have known the longest and whom they have shared many ties with

Cassandra's family. Further, these have been the most faithful to weekly Mass attendance, so they have seen them the most frequently. Commenting about the experience of growing to know the people Cassandra said,

So you develop a little family, a little community that you know. People that you've gone to catechism with, or people your parents know from back home—back in Mexico. And so, it's just like a community there, and at St. Bart's, not much of community. We hardly knew people and not a lot of people went to church. And then going to the Cathedral, and you see people you *know*, from St. Agnes or St. Bart *go* there, so it's different, like a process of getting to know people at different places. And just getting closer to them cause you *all*...you all kind of transition to a new place. (A83)

Returning to Cassandra's earlier explanation that attendance at Mass consisted of *two* processes, I asked her to explain more how she viewed the religious process that takes place at Mass. She mentioned the process of listening to the Gospels. What did that mean for her? Not surprisingly, Cassandra's reply began from her family context, and then expanded to include how she relates to the Gospels within the context of her family relationships:

Sometimes, there's something going on in the family, like the extended family, like one of my aunts or something, that you're like, when you read the Gospels, you think about *them*. There's been lots of times when that has happened. And you're like, "Oh, I could relate a lot to this." And so, once that kind of strikes you, you just listen more and you're like, "Okay, this could work" or you could be like "Okay, I could learn *this* from *that* situation."

We do that a lot because when that happens, my sisters, we just look at each other and we're like, "Yeah. *That's* going on in our family." Either something good or something bad. It's like, "Okay, yeah, they should take this advice." You know, that's usually how I *incorporate* the gospel in my life. And then there's also the passages that really, like, "Okay, this is a *really* good message." But it's usually the passage that hits me the most, or affects me the most is the one I could relate to when something's going on with... Well, it's usually my family, cause we don't have a lot of *friend* drama, like, we're just very calm friends. So, ones that happen in the family, you relate to that. (A90-91)

Cassandra stated that the gospels do not exactly come to her mind when she is outside of

Mass, except for certain passages such as, “clothe those who have no clothes” and “feed the poor” (A92). She said that these passages *always* strike her, because she has heard them since the fourth grade. Whenever she sees a homeless person or someone in need, she thinks of these passages, but said that her thoughts do not proceed beyond that point.

Family Treasures of Faith

From the time Cassandra’s grandparents were very young, they have been very religious. Cassandra recalled how they frequently talk about their own need for God. Their pursuit of God has born fruit in them of a further desire to become catechists and to influence their own children with the same beliefs. Visits from her grandparents to her home in Californiaville added to the regular family religious routines.

Whether together with her grandparents in California or in Mexico, her grandfather’s presence has meant nightly praying of the rosary. No one had to say anything to call the family around 9 p.m.; everyone knew to gather around her grandfather for the rosary (A67). Praying the rosary together, another family tradition, was not a particularly pleasant one for Cassandra. Her grandfather tended to drone on with little prayers added at the end of the rosary to a countless number of saints to whom he was personally devoted. The family waited patiently on their knees sometimes up to 30 minutes trying to keep from falling asleep. Despite this unpleasantness, Cassandra expressed that she found that these practices provided her times for genuine prayer. Especially in times of need or gratitude, she was able to stay focused on her grandfather’s words. Mostly, she expressed that she was content to participate, to listen, and to pray, as she found her grandfather “the holiest man I know” (A70).

Her grandmother, Cassandra recounted, experienced much suffering of both

physical and emotional pain and numerous traumatic experiences during her lifetime.

Cassandra asserted admiration for her grandmother because “she always tells us to pray” (A27). Recently, when Cassandra’s uncle, her mom’s brother, was diagnosed with cancer, Cassandra recalled that her grandmother’s response was calm and confident. She told the family that she was praying for her son in church and that she told “The Priest” to pray for him. This was her grandmother’s way of dealing with serious issues.

The Priest, the man her grandmother prayed to in times of crisis or concern, Cassandra revealed, is an ancestor, a “family saint” (A27). It is this family saint who was the recipient of her grandmother’s strong devotion, as well as the devotion and admiration of the rest of the family. The Saint is Toribio Romo who is known as the “Immigrant Saint” due to many accounts that he has helped immigrants to cross the Mexican-American border (Gutierrez, 2009). Cassandra remarked, “It’s a very interesting story” (A28). I asked her to tell me about the Saint:

Well, this Saint, he was my great-grandmother's cousin. And so, he's like a great-uncle. He was born around 1900 and he died in the war—the Christian war—when the Mexican government was fighting, trying to fight off the Christian people. They didn't want Christianity or Catholicism to be practiced. So he died because he was still giving [*sic*] Mass. And, ever since then, there have been many stories about how this man has helped people cross the border and we're very, we're very...we really believe that. Because people...when they cross the border, they say, “Oh, this man, he looks a lot like...”

He's very fair-skinned, cause we're all kind of, more fair-skinned. And he has blue eyes and black hair. So they say, “this tall young man, with blue eyes, has helped us cross the border, and he's given us money.” And then they ask him, “Where...how do I thank you?” because they don't know that he's a saint, or deceased. And he says, “Just go back to my town, and look for a man called Toribio Romo, and that's gonna be me.”

And so there's been a lot of people who have gone back to where we're from, the town my mom is from. And, it's very small, it's probably like 300 people. So it's not hard to distinguish people. So, the man that the Saint helped to cross the border, he went back to our town, and he asked for that person, and they sent him

to our church. And in the church, there's a huge picture of him [the Saint]. And he [the man] broke down and started crying cause he said it was that man. (A29-31)

Sister Elizabeth: Wow...

Cassandra: Yeah, and there's [sic] been a lot of family experiences that we attribute to that...we attribute to him because they're miracles. There's [sic] just too many to count.

The pope canonized him, made him a saint, like, say, the early 1990's. So, since then, like our...Our town's really, really small, like 300 people. And then people started to realize that this is true. So they started flocking in, just like 20 buses on [sic] a day. It's crazy! (A41)

And so we have immense faith because we see that...a lot of good things happen to our family that are due to him. And we have that strong belief and it also unites us because he's part of our family. (A41)

As Cassandra recounted the details of the Saint's life, it became evident that this Saint is like a glue that holds the family together. Her uncle's recent cancer diagnosis caught the entire family with shock and dismay, particularly since he and Cassandra's aunt had just become parents. Worries about her uncle's ability to work and to care for his family throughout the chemotherapy treatments and beyond plagued the entire extended family. Approximately one year after her uncle's initial diagnosis, his clean bill of health was celebrated widely throughout the family with a party and extra prayers of gratitude to the Saint both in Californiaville and in Mexico. Reflecting on this powerful experience, Cassandra explained, "We put God before everything, but we definitely think that through our Priest, that God was able to help us. Because, it was just unbelievable to us" (A43).

Cassandra recounted another experience of the Saint that touched her more personally. About three years prior to the interview, the family was making their annual summer trip to Mexico, to the village of her parents, when a near-fatal accident occurred

on the highway. A truck driving in front of her father's truck was carrying a load of refuse. All of a sudden, an iron bar broke loose from the truck in front of Cassandra and her family, and the bar instantly came crashing through the windshield narrowly passing by her dad's left ear. Instead of hitting and killing her father, the bar passed right by him hitting the back seat and landing on Cassandra's feet. Miraculously, her dad was able to remain calm and continued driving despite the shattered glass blown out of his truck's windshield in front of him. The family was frightened, but when her dad flipped down the visor which had been sliced by the passing iron bar, they found a picture of their Saint fastened behind the visor (A44-45).

Cassandra and her family immediately credited their safety to the intercession of the family Saint. "I felt someone was with us [because] we could have died. All the family was in the car. It couldn't have been anyone else because his picture just happened to be there" (A46). Cassandra's parents had a habit of putting relics or pictures of saints and the Virgin Mary in their car or in various rooms of the house. However, no one in the family remembered placing the Saint's picture behind the visor. The family was awe-struck that the Saint's picture happened to be attached to the visor that day. Still trembling, the family felt extremely grateful. Cassandra remarked, "We felt really blessed, but we knew that he had something to do with it" (A47).

After the trauma and shock dissipated and the family continued on to their village, her parents announced that all of the adult members of the family, including her grandparents, aunts and uncles, would make a pilgrimage on their knees to give thanks to God and to the Saint for helping them. When her parents and family members returned from the pilgrimage, Cassandra and her sisters were instructed, "We just walked all the

way to give thanks. You children, since you didn't go, you go another day walking here in the village or go to pray in the church and offer your thanks" (A58). The day concluded with a festive celebration to continue to give thanks for the protection and safety granted to them that day.

Family Symbols of Faith

The Saint has been a source of great pride for the family. Her father kept the iron bar from the accident as a symbol for his faith. It serves as a reminder of how close to death the family came that day and how grateful they were for the Saint's intercession to God for their safety. Cassandra reported that everyone in her family keeps a picture of the Saint framed somewhere in their house: their bedroom, kitchen, anywhere.

Cassandra herself described that she carries two pictures with her that speak to her of her family bonds. Cassandra explained that one, a photo of the Saint (Figure 1), reminds her of the family heritage of faith and the power of prayer and protection. It further reminds her of the story of the man who saw the Saint's picture and believed in him.



Figure 1 Family saint, Toribio Romo



Figure 2 Madre Mia de la Ascension

The other picture is of the Virgin Mary (Figure 2) and is a symbolic reminder for Cassandra of the family's tradition of religious devotions she has experienced in their village in Mexico throughout her life. She remembered regular processions of adoration to the Virgin with the villagers with special warmth and fondness. Cassandra explained,

It's like a procession. It depends on what the celebration is. Like, at my aunt's house, they have an adjoined little garage, [and they] empty it out. They put a bunch of flowers in there and...a little altar. The Virgin stays at the house...random neighbors, or people can come in and pray to her. The next morning, they take her to someone else's house. And then, finally to the church (A236)

It's a nice experience, because we don't do anything like that *here*. We have processions here, but it's a little different because in Mexico, it feels more like a *community*. Your cousins are there, your next door neighbors are there. And it's more—you could say—*normal*. It makes me feel excited, in a way, because you hear the singing and you're just carrying this beautiful image and then you enter the church, and it's *beautiful*, it's *gorgeous*. And you're just like, "Wow. I'm a part of all this." It's just amazing. (A242-243)

For Cassandra, carrying the two pictures reinforced a love she held for her family that was intertwined with faith and fostered by a community of believers:

It [picture] definitely reminds me of my family. My grandpa is very devout and my grandma is too, on my dad's side...so that part too. When I see it, it kind of reminds me of like, when I go to church in Mexico. Like, seeing her, like, on the altar. It's a very special feeling. (A247)

Witnessing a Family Faith to Others

When Cassandra was in the 8th grade, her teacher asked the class to report on a relative who had made a significant impact in the world. Cassandra reported on the family's Saint. She revealed her belief that it is a very special blessing for her family to be related to someone so great. She lamented not having known him personally in her lifetime, but she expressed gratitude that others in her family have had that opportunity. Her great-grandmother received her First Communion from the Saint, as he was the priest

who presided over the special Mass. Her mom grew up knowing the Saint's brother before he passed away in the 1980s. Her mother has told her that the Saint's brother was an amazing person himself and the greatest person she had ever met; her mom imagined that she would have been breathless meeting his brother [the Saint]. Cassandra spoke with nervous excitement at the prospect of meeting the Saint in the future: "When I do, I'm going to...I don't know what I'm going to do!" (A64).

Elementary School Influence on Spirituality

Cassandra transferred to St. Agnes Catholic Elementary school in the fourth grade. I asked her to reflect on examples that may have contributed to either her sense of being religious or spiritual within the Catholic school context. It was initially hard for Cassandra to pinpoint any particular factors, as she stated religiousness was already a part of her. She did feel a greater sense of belonging, however, when she transferred into St. Agnes than she had in the public school.

While Cassandra did not find other students to be particularly religious, she felt more comfortable talking about her family life with her peers at St. Agnes. She found support from her friends, for example, after the near-tragic incident with the steel bar in Mexico. She further explained that the religious celebrations that took place at school affected her. Events such as the May crowning and celebration for the Immaculate Conception of Mary helped Cassandra to realize how blessed she was and how God had helped her in her life. She mentioned other school activities, such as the Seder meal and Faith Families that fostered her growth as a religious person.

Awakening to Spirituality

Cassandra explained that she became more aware of the spiritual in her life

beginning in the seventh grade. While there was no specific turning point, she realized her own maturing process and a different presence around friends and others. She began to view things at a more spiritual level. She credited this changing perspective to her junior high teachers who dealt with religion in a whole new way than she had ever experienced. Cassandra described that these teachers addressed religion with a more serious tone and on a more personal level. They challenged their students to think and to consider what they believed about issues, rather than telling them what was prescribed for them to believe as Catholics. For Cassandra, this was the beginning of making her way through the literal images and rules she had been taught during her childhood to finding deeper truths and to forging her own beliefs.

She explicated that the course content went from learning about religion to “what do you believe?” Cassandra cited examples of her previous literal beliefs in such things as the Bible’s Adam and Eve story and Jonah and the whale. When her teachers revealed to the class that these stories were not actually factual, but rather, contained deeper truths, Cassandra remarked, “I started getting a sense of what *I* believed versus what all had been taught to me” (A140). She stated that she still held most of what her parents instilled in her, having embraced them as her own, but has found deeper truths within their teachings, rather than taking those lessons literally.

Cassandra affirmed this as the time that she was definitely beginning to be more spiritual. Cassandra associated her sense of growing spirituality with developing a clearer awareness of herself and of her own beliefs. She explained this as,

When I was an eighth grader, I started developing like more of my *own* beliefs. And I kind of didn’t—it wasn’t that I didn’t *care* what everyone else was doing or what everyone else believed. I’m like, “Okay, why should I believe what *you’re* saying or why should I do what you want me to do?” Okay, like, “I could do

things myself.”

And I view that spiritually because I—when I do things or when I thought about things...I sense meaning behind them. It’s hard to explain, but, like in fourth grade or in fifth grade, I still believed what everyone else told me, but I think at that stage, also, I kind of started to be like, “Okay, I could fend for myself a little bit, what I believe.”

And starting to grow more, starting to be more mature, at least like in seventh or eighth grade, when you start to get ready to go to high school and make little personal decisions, I started to view my life as more *my* choice instead of being—kind of—living as other people *wanted* me to live. Like, I didn’t want to rebel and do something else. No, but it’s just little things, that you’re like, “Okay, why should I listen to what this kid is saying when I know I don’t want to do that?” So, I think that’s how my spirituality started to grow. (A143-145)

She described this as a major turning point in her life. For example, while the majority of the class was in favor of abortion, Cassandra held firm to her position not in favor. When her classmates hissed at her with exasperation, Cassandra’s classmates expressed, “She could [*sic*] think whatever she wants. She’s all ‘pro-life,’ but she doesn’t think about *choice*” (A150). Cassandra thought to herself, “Okay, what’s so bad about going against the crowd in what *I* believe is *right*? And I know it’s something I believe is *right* and I’m not going to give that up” (A151). Cassandra revealed that this incident was a major stepping stone for her in the process of developing her own person. She added, “And that’s how I started developing my spirituality and seeing things as ‘This is right and this is wrong, and I’m going to believe what I want to believe’” (A151). Cassandra felt a sense of pride within herself that she had taken a stand for what she believed. She attributed this ability to the modeling received from her father and grandfather who have displayed an ability to speak their mind and to stand up for what they believed to be right or wrong.

Cassandra Ramirez: Interpretive Critique

The formative context for an awareness of spirituality provided by Cassandra's childhood can be viewed through multiple dimensions of space, history, corporeality, and most especially, of relationality. Through these various layers, we may see a unifying spectrum of influences, primarily those of relationships, which have formed Cassandra in religiousness and values, and in family traditions of faith and gratitude.

The environments of two specific family-centered locations have provided the setting for the nourishing of religious practice and growth in understanding religious or gospel-related values. For Cassandra, her family home, described as the "place where everything happens," was the central site for the unfolding and living out of family relationships within both her immediate and extended family. Her grandparents' home in a small village in Mexico was the secondary space where the dimension of family relationships and practices, religious beliefs and rituals took place. It was within her grandparents' home where the beliefs and practices of Catholicism were nurtured and practiced, and passed on from one generation to the next as her grandparents found meaning in serving as catechists to others in their village, and in the passing down of their faith to their own children.

In turn, Cassandra's mother and father, both, embraced the role of catechist in their own lives, further enfolding this element of their own identities into their roles as parents. For each of these four individuals, deep meaning was found in the practice and values of their faith, so much so that each chose to incorporate the role of catechist and of faithful observance of the religious tradition into their own lives and modeled these values for Cassandra and her siblings. This meaning has been a central aspect of

Cassandra's family life.

The corporeal practices experienced both in her family home and family village in Mexico have served to reinforce this central meaning. The ritual of kneeling to pray the rosary as a family gathered together in the presence of her grandfather has been a shared experience of family life. Processions to the Blessed Mother together with her extended family and townspeople have provided memories rich in color, music, texture and tradition. These memories cannot be separated from Cassandra's life with her family; in fact, they are an essential aspect of her life-world.

Of all of the dimensions through which we can view Cassandra's childhood, the most significant formative element has been that of her family relationships. Cassandra's deep love and respect for her parents and grandparents have been the key ingredient of the formative influence these individuals have had on her life. Because of her love and honor for her mother, Cassandra and her sisters listened deeply as her mother taught them stories from scripture and shared values of her own belief in Christ. Because of her love for her father, Cassandra has participated in his value of regular religious practice in local parish communities, opening herself to the experiential learning which may come from attending weekly Mass; she has also participated in the weekly gathering of the members of Californiaville's Catholic Spanish-speaking community worshipping together and building relationships over time.

Because of her love for her grandparents, Cassandra has embraced the ritual of praying the rosary, of regular prayer to the family saint, and of devotion to the Blessed Mother. While it remained to be seen whether or not Cassandra would eventually integrate these values as an adult, it was evident that her love for these family members

and acceptance of her own family rituals and practices have provided meaning for her as she has participated together in these activities with her extended family and siblings throughout her childhood.

The family tradition of faith in her distant relative, the Saint, fostered by her grandmother, has illuminated much of Cassandra's family life as he was very often the one to whom the family prayed in times of hardship, and to whom the family expressed gratitude in times of great relief or deliverance. The presence of this person within their family heritage was a source of blessing for them, one which was met with deep gratitude shared throughout the family both in Californiaville and in Mexico. The belief in and gratitude for the Saint permeated meaning throughout the family. In particular, for Cassandra, a relationship with the Saint provided deep meaning in her life-world.

Finally, these familial relationships, instilling practices, values, and beliefs and ongoing presence of modeling, instruction, and conversation, have taken place in Cassandra's life over time. None of them were one-time occurrences or unprecedented events. The historical, long-term element of these dimensions provided a safe environment, reinforced the values lived as well as taught, and by their predictability, served as a foundation from which Cassandra has been able to navigate the decision-making process through which she may discover her own identity. With the predictable stability provided by her family over time, teaching styles she encountered in her Catholic junior-high classrooms successfully sparked and supported the emergence of an identity-seeking journey for Cassandra, fostering a new inner awareness of the presence of spirituality within herself. Evidence that this awareness will continue to grow during Cassandra's high school years will be viewed in the following chapter.

Diana Martinez: Growth through Relationships

Diana Martinez was a senior at THS and was 17 at the time of the interview, looking forward to turning 18 in the next two months. Diana was Mexican-American and had lived in Californiaville since her birth. She had attended Catholic schools since Kindergarten. Diana had one brother eight years younger, and lived with both parents and her little brother. After renting an apartment with several other relatives at the beginning of Diana's life, her mother decided that she wanted her own house. When Diana's mother became pregnant with her second child, Diana's younger brother, Diana's parents bought the house they were living in at the time of the interviews.

Diana had four aunts and two uncles, all her mother's siblings, and various cousins who also lived in Californiaville. Her grandparents visited from Mexico from time to time, staying for short periods at various homes within the family, depending on who had more room at the time. Diana's grandmother was visiting at the time of the interview.

Family Religious Practices

When Diana was younger, she attended church with her mom; however, her dad did not like to go to church, so he never attended with the family. Diana remembered that her grandfather accompanied them to church on occasion and she had memories of being at Mass with her aunts and cousins. Her family lived in St. Agnes Parish and preferred attending there; however, when Diana was enrolled at St. Mark's School in the first grade, she said it became necessary for them to attend Sunday Mass at St. Mark's.

When Diana was 15, she began attending weekly Mass on her own at St. Michael's where she was still going at the time of the interviews. Diana's mom continued

to attend weekly liturgy, but went to church only on weekdays, not Sundays. Diana herself was a regular attendee of the 9 a.m. Mass at St. Michael's Parish where she was currently enrolled in the Confirmation Preparation Program. I asked Diana how it was for her to go to church by herself. She replied, "I like it. I like going by myself because, when I go with other people, I get distracted a lot and I don't focus on the liturgy. But when I go myself, I can focus" (C9).

Diana expressed that her grandmother was very religious and that she went to church every day. In Mexico, her grandmother participated in daily praying the rosary with a group of women. However, Diana considered her grandmother's religiousness a negative influence because her grandmother was strict, and even considered "mean" by some in the family. Diana explained this by relating an example: One time her grandmother had come into her room, "and I had some posters on the wall...a poster of an Indian, and then, of a wolf or something. And she [grandmother] told me that that was the *devil's* work. So, from her, I got a negative view" (C23).

Despite the mixture of family practices that Diana experienced as a child, she described a personal practice that originated for her during childhood. She kept a medallion of the Virgin Mary, La Virgen de Guadalupe, for most of her life. The medallion was a sacred possession because it reminded her of the Virgin Mary, a mother with whom she could talk. Diana added with a chuckle, that since the Virgen de Guadalupe was not her real mother, she could speak more freely with her as with a friend, and say things she could not tell her own mother. A large painting of the Virgen de Guadalupe hung in her bedroom. When she saw this or other depictions of the Virgen, the image prompted her to remember this special relationship and to pray.

Early Understanding of Spirituality

When I asked Diana to describe for me her understanding of spirituality as a child, her answer positioned spirituality with childhood religious practices. With regard to spirituality, Diana expressed, “I don’t think I had an understanding. To me, if anything had to do with spirituality, I would think ‘Holy Spirit.’ That’s what I would think, and *part* of God, but I never really thought of spirituality *inside* of me” (C14). She further described that she saw religiousness and spirituality as the same thing. She continued with a statement about her own personal expression of religiousness:

I wasn’t religious. My mom, she would *make* me go to church, but I never paid attention when I was younger. I would probably end up going to the bathroom a lot. Or, there was this little *room* in the church where people could go and pray and there was [*sic*] candles and I would just go in there. Or, if we went, like, my aunts would go, I would volunteer to take care of the babies and go outside. And so, if I had to stay inside, I would just look at the whole church, and then look at the stained glass and...at St. Agnes, the chandeliers. So I would count the candles on the chandelier, so I wouldn’t pay attention [laughs] to mass. So, I didn’t really have an understanding of what spirituality was. (C14b)

Diana explained that, as a child, she really did not have an understanding of spirituality. She believed that while it had begun to develop, it was not fully formed, but she now had a more clear understanding of it. Her spirituality began to develop when she was 15. She recounted a very painful experience that happened in her family, to which she accounted the beginning of this process. This painful experience was the cause of very difficult feelings, including anger toward God and the Church. She explained,

I think it started when I was 15. Because, when I was 12, I remember, it was the 12th of December, and my mom, she wanted...we went to church, because it was the celebration for Our Lady of Guadalupe. And, my mom, she...she was in...(what’s it called?) she had to deal with the immigration [voice softens, emotion surfacing]. And so, I remember [begins to cry]...I remember that we had to...she asked me to go...she asked me to go to the altar with her and ask God to help her. And then, in February, [crying sobs] she was deported. [pauses] So, I think that’s when I really, like, broke away from the church. Because [sobs] I had

gone and I had asked and the worst had happened. (C16)

The impact of this devastating experience had far-reaching consequences, including affecting a much-anticipated cultural coming-of-age ritual for Diana:

I remember in that year it was my *Quinceañera* and she [her mother] was deported three months before my party. And so, my dad told me, he was like, “You’re not gonna have a party” because she was gone. And I understood that, but I just remember, one day coming home and she wasn’t there. (C17)

Although her parents had taught her as a child to pray every night before going to sleep, she said that during the time her mother was gone, she was unable to pray. She felt abandoned. “And I felt like, how could that happen to my mom, when she’d never harmed anyone? [crying]” (C30).

After two months, Diana’s mother was able to return. In the interview, Diana continued to express the depth of her anger and how it had affected her relationship with God. It was her mother’s testimony to her own faith in God that brought Diana to a new position in her relationship with God. She recounted,

And so, when my mom got deported, that’s really when I just...really rebelled against the church because I blamed God. I blamed *Him* for what happened to her [sobs]. And so, I was just really angry. But...when she came back, she told me that she had made a promise to God that if she was able to come back that she would go to church every day. I mean, every—once a week. And so, she started to do that, and I wasn’t as scared anymore. And so I started growing closer to the church because I believed that it was *God* who had helped her come back. (C19)

At this point in the iteration of her experience, Diana related her growing spirituality to a growing relationship with God:

And so, [crying] that’s how I started getting closer to God and now, I just try to be strong. That’s where my strength lies. Because, my mom, she told me not to talk about it [the deportation]. And so, I couldn’t talk about it with *anyone*. And, [sobs]...we kind of tried to ignore it...that it happened. But, every day, I think about it and I’m just scared [sobs] that something will happen to her again...or, to anyone else in the family. (C20)

When her mother returned to Californiaville, Diana recognized that her own feelings had changed. “When she came back, that’s when everything was there. And then, I grew stronger in my faith” (C30). Asked to expand on how her faith began to grow stronger, Diana explained,

Well, I started to believe more in God...that he truly could help. Because my mom, she told me about her experiences [sobs] that she had when she was over there. And she told me that, if it hadn’t been for God, she wouldn’t be here again with us. And so, I really believed in that. And so, [sniffs] now, every time I do have a problem,...like I do get sad about it, but then I think about what has happened, and how everything is okay. (C31)

In addition, Diana experienced a growing presence in her life from participation in the Catholic Church. She explained a continuing process of healing that took place through a series of sacramental events that enabled her to feel a sense of safety, liberation, and cleansing:

I remember at my Quince⁴, I had to go to Mass. And I remember that the priest, he told us...Before I had my mass, he came and he talked to me, and it was just...[pause]...like, I had confession. And in confession, it was a place where it was safe to talk about it [mother’s deportation]. And so, that also helped me. And then, when I had my First Communion, I was eleven, and I remember the first time I had confession, I felt really liberated. And it felt really good, just to, like, feel *clean*, [laughs slightly] after, like, carrying things for so long. (C22)

She explained further that this growing spirituality had been expressed in a greater involvement in school through her participation in campus ministry and liturgical ministries, through greater engrossment in her studies, and in extra-curricular activities, such as soccer and Latinas Unidas. Diana expressed enthusiasm about her participation in confirmation classes at St. Michael’s Parish. Through the classes, she found a sense of peace, which helped her to grow in her spirituality. She believed that through her involvement in all of these activities, she had opened and grown.

⁴ Refers to Quinceañera.

Diana stated that her religion classes provided a place where she had been able to explore her thoughts and perspectives about religion. Class discussions have enabled her to discover what religion “really *means*” to her (C24). Through her religion classes, she searched to find how her own views aligned with those of Jesus in the gospels. At the time of the interview, Diana believed that her “*ultimate* view, is how Jesus was *tolerant*” (C24). For Diana, “being tolerant means being liberal” (C24). For this reason, Diana came to view the Church as tolerant, even though she disagreed with the Church’s position on many issues.

Diana Martinez: Interpretive Critique

The childhood life-world of Diana Martinez was not particularly strong in any one dimension of environmental, relational, corporeal, or temporal factors forming her towards an awareness of spirituality. Rather, it was one event that occurred during Diana’s sophomore year that served as a catalyst for the emergent awareness and for various dimensions subsequently impacting further development of Diana’s perspective toward spirituality.

The environment of Diana’s home was not religious, although one factor provided the presence of some religiousness. Diana had a framed picture of the Virgin Mary in her bedroom for as long as she can remember, and she wore a medallion which carried a picture of the Mother. These objects served as visual reminders of the relationship Diana has had with the Blessed Mother, a person to whom Diana could turn and confide without reserve. Diana’s experience of the spatial environment of her church were felt in more corporeal ways than any other; her memories consisted of images of the stained glass windows around the church, the candles, of trips to the restroom or outside of the church,

and of caring for younger cousins.

While parental relationships are almost always significant in the life of a child, it was Diana's mother who provided for her a model of faith. Diana particularly remembered her mother's trips to a quiet church where her mother would kneel at the altar in silent prayer. This memory was especially clear to Diana as the final actions of her mother immediately preceding the earth-shattering experience of her mother's deportation. The unexpected nature of the experience brought Diana face-to-face with her relationship towards God and the Catholic Church. Strong feelings of anger and confusion became focused within these relationships, as she blamed God for not answering her mother's prayers for help. She vented her anger and confusion at God and towards the Church in the months following her mother's deportation. Much to Diana's surprise, transformation awaited her.

When Diana's mother managed to return to the family home in Californiaville, Diana's expressions of anger towards God were firmly met by her mother's disapproval, as her mother attributed her safe return to the family entirely to God and to God's saving action. Shocked by this information, Diana's internal image of God was shaken and began to change. Her mother's words provided the impetus for Diana to re-evaluate her relationships with both God and the Church. This process enabled new understanding of God based on her mother's expressed beliefs and relationship with the divine. Positive nurturing elements from her mother's experience contributed to Diana's own relationship with God, and enabled her beliefs and expressions toward God to become transformed and more defined.

With a keen sense of the generative impact this event had on her life, Diana

articulated a personal, as well as, spiritual transformation. The event became the catalyst for the emergence of an inner spiritual awareness, and an outer energy flowing from her, enabling greater involvement in her schoolwork, extra-curricular activities, relationships with peers, and with her parish.

In addition, this transformation inspired a new level of interest and participation in the Catholic Church for Diana. Entering this arena on her own, she tread lightly. Diana had an intellectual curiosity which sought answers to her many questions regarding the Church's doctrine. The answers she found determined the direction Diana would take committing herself to the Church's teachings and the degree to which she would embrace the doctrines espoused. The transformation Diana experienced regarding religion inspired her decision to participate in a confirmation preparation course; a contingent event which proved to serve as a source of greater understanding of spirituality on a day-to-day basis for Diana. Participation in the course further nourished her intellectually and relationally, particularly through the modeling and instruction she received from her confirmation teacher.

For Diana, there was a strong temporal aspect to this transformation, as she was aware of the changes that took place within her. Diana expressed joy and pride in the recognition of these changes that occurred over time in her life. She related these changes as manifestations of a growing spirituality.

A number of sacramental encounters provided memorable corporeal experiences contributing to the shaping of Diana's spiritual awareness through association of these physical or emotional feelings. She remembered receiving both her First Communion and her first confession, or Sacrament of Reconciliation (as it is called in the Catholic

Church). In addition, Diana sought out her parish priest to receive the sacrament of reconciliation as part of the custom to prepare for her Quinceañera. Diana expressed feelings of safety and liberation, of healing and peace, as a result of these experiences, which were corporeal realities that contributed to her understanding of spirituality.

Maria Washington: Witness to the Word of God

Maria Washington was a 17-year old African-American senior at THS. Maria had five half-sisters and one half-brother from her father, and one half-sister who was her mother's daughter. Maria was the only child common to both of her parents and was born when her mother's elder daughter was a senior in high school. Three of Maria's half-siblings and all of her father's relations lived in the Midwest. She rarely saw this part of her family. Her other half-siblings and many nieces and nephews lived in the Bay Area. Maria explained that when birthdays came around, they all gathered together to celebrate. She stated further that it was a different kind of experience because not all of the siblings had the same mom and dad, "Because that was before my dad made a commitment to God and really got saved and really slowed himself [*sic*] down and things like that" (B1). She reassured me that despite the diversity of parental ties among them, "We're all cool, though" (B1). None of Maria's siblings had ever lived with her. Her maternal grandparents were both deceased early in her mom's life and her father's parents lived in the Midwest. Maria and her parents have lived in Californiaville all of Maria's life.

Childhood Religious Experiences

Maria explained that as a young child, she did not have a sense of spirituality, but was well versed in the rote and external religious practices of her church. She reported that she did not understand "the things of the Spirit" (B18), but she knew who God was:

“I knew that he died for my sins, because I was always taught that” (B18). Maria dutifully absorbed the rote practices of reading her Bible and praying nightly as she was taught to do by her parents. She recalled learning how to pray the Lord’s Prayer as a very small child:

My mom would come in and she would get on her knees with me, and we would pray before I would go to bed. It was just basic, *The Lord’s Prayer* and then, *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*, and things like that. Then my mom would read the Bible with me sometimes. (B18)

With her parents, Maria has attended the same Pentecostal church in Californiaville all of her life. As a child, Maria was active in all of the activities her church had to offer for young children. She sang in the children’s choir, she praise-danced and she attended the church’s own elementary school from pre-school through third grade. She remembered well the refrain sung frequently at her school and sang out, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!” (B7). At school, she recounted the daily recitation of pledges to the Christian flag, the Bible flag, and the American flag followed by praise and worship in the classroom. In addition, Maria attended Vacation Bible School each year.

She recalled that her parents never had to force her to go to church. Rather, it was something she loved to do. She loved participating in church and delighted in the friends she found there. Since she lived as an only child at home, she explained that she adopted her group of friends and other church members as surrogate family calling them “play-cousins and play-sisters, play-aunties and uncles” (B9). These relationships evidenced warm and supportive ties between church members grown over time providing a strong network of close relationships throughout the community. Capturing the significance of the church setting and its community in her life, Maria exclaimed, “That was really my

home. It still is even though I'm growing up; it still is my foundation" (B9).

Praising God Through Song and Dance

Maria's love for her church was enthusiastically expressed through song and dance. Maria's mom was the director of the children's choir, so Maria's participation there was to be expected. She loved singing in the choir, especially since her friends were members. She remembered jubilantly volunteering to join: "Yeah! I want to sing in the choir! I want to sing for Jesus!" (B11). She explained that, even at a young age, she knew God had blessed her with her mom and dad; therefore, it was a pleasure for her to go to rehearsals to give praise to God. After singing in the children's choir, Maria transitioned to the teen choir and sang with this choir until last year, her junior year in high school.

In addition to participating in the choir, Maria began praise dancing at the age of nine with other girls in her church. This was a particularly colorful and forming experience in her life. Maria explained,

We always used to dance. There was this group I was in called Mother Onion, and she was a Gospel comedienne. We would do different shows at the Cow Palace, at the Calvin E. Simmons Theatre, at Harry J. Kaiser. We were called, "Onionettes," and so we would dress up and stuff tissue and stuff, and we would act like little old ladies and dance around and sing like all these little old-school gospel songs. One time, we opened up for Kirk Franklin. I don't know if you've ever heard of him, but he's a gospel singer. That was pretty big for us because we loved to do it. We loved to minister and make people laugh...

So, everything that I did *in* the church I loved to do, because, at the time, I didn't really...I *realized* I was doing it unto God...But, it was fun and now I see that it was also ministry at the same time, because you are helping others to—you know—*see* God through you. I was told to always let my light shine, so I loved doing it. It was fun. (B12-13)

For a while, Maria reported, it seemed to her that she was at church every day either rehearsing or performing, attending Bible study, or helping out with Vacation Bible School. During her childhood, Maria firmly established herself in her church community

by her spirited and generous participation in church events.

Religious Influences of Elementary School

From preschool to third grade, attending private school at her church impacted the shaping of Maria's spirituality. She explained that by attending school within her own faith community, she grew to be comfortable with who she was and grew to know that God was real. Emphasizing this latter awareness, Maria confirmed that the frequent witnessing to God's action in the lives of other community members further strengthened her own faith in God. She explained,

I always heard "God did this for me," "This is my testimony," from the adults, you know, their conversations. [For me] it was like, "Okay, *yeah*. God *is* real." And just that upbringing, to grow up with people around me who had the same faith as me, who was [*sic*] taught the same thing as me. Really, you know, the church strengthened my conviction, I believe. And I feel that's how it had the impact on me. So when I did go out, you know, to the world, I had that strong background. (B31)

Leaving her church's elementary school to enter fourth grade in a public school was a major transition for Maria. Having been sheltered by the faith-filled environment of her church community during her initial years of school, she was accustomed to friends, teachers, and parents of friends sharing the same belief in God. When her mom placed her in the public school, she realized that not everyone believed in God. Maria remarked, "It was really different for me and I had to *adjust* because I had to realize, 'Okay, everybody doesn't believe in God! Everybody doesn't go to church!' So it was kind of...really opened me up a little bit" (B19).

Despite the new and surprising experiences that Maria encountered in this environment, she stood firm in her faith in God. She recalled,

I remember I had a friend [who] was Jehovah's Witness, and I was like, "When's your birthday?" She was like, "We don't celebrate birthdays and things like that."

She was telling all the stuff they didn't celebrate. It was really weird, I mean *strange* to me. I was like, "I've never met anybody like this before." She was like, "Well, do *you*?" I was like, "Yeah. I'm a Christian." I started telling her about me, and she was like, "Oh, that's cool!"

Even as a child I would tell people about Jesus. It was just natural for me, because that's what I knew, you know? I was just like, "Oh, well yeah. And he, he was born as a baby. You know, he loves you, just like he loves me." And things like that. So, it always stuck with me because that's what I knew and every time I would come across someone who believed differently, I wasn't the type of child to be like, "No, you don't know what you're *talking* about!" But, *I* knew what *I* knew *too*, so I wasn't going to let anybody change my mind about what I believed. (B20-22)

Core Doctrinal Beliefs and Role of Scripture

Maria's childhood religious experiences instilled in her a firm foundation of her belief in Christ and an ability to articulate her church's doctrine effortlessly throughout our conversations. Just six minutes into the first interview, responding to my question to explain her childhood religious practices, Maria posited,

I was always taught that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, that the Holy Spirit is important, that we must be filled with the Holy Ghost, and I always knew that no matter what, Jesus lives in my heart and I must confess him as my Lord and Savior to be saved. (B8)

She further supported her proclamation with a spontaneous recitation of scripture, stating, "For, Romans 10:9; If you confess in your heart the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised you from the dead, you shall be saved" (B8). Stunned at first, I did not realize what she had just said. Within a few minutes, Maria again quoted scripture as she explained the delight found in praise dancing; she confirmed praise dance as a means of ministering to others, "Cause laughter doeth good like medicine" (B13).

Maria declared that the Bible had played a pervasive role in her life helping to form her thinking and behavior as a child. She stated,

I knew the Ten Commandments, and I knew not to steal, not to, you know—of

course—not to murder, not to take what is not mine, not to lie, not to cheat. And basically, I think I based my thinking off of knowing the Ten Commandments and knowing that those type of things are not conducive to living how God would want me to live as a child. And I kind of live by that, I guess you could say. (B28)

She continued to recite Bible verses spontaneously throughout the interview process demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the text and a deep integration of scripture in her being.

Childhood Understanding of Spirituality

Maria expressed her childhood understanding of spirituality in the context of a relationship with God. She first explained that as a small child her relationship with God was situated within a context of obedience and disobedience, reward and punishment:

As a child, I knew that in order to get things, I had to be good. I was always told, “You need to do this. You need to do that. Don’t act up when you go to school. Don’t be disrespectful cause God don’t like ugly!” (B23)

These messages, along with the influence of teachings she learned from listening to the Bible read to her, provided the initial formative influence in the shaping of Maria’s person. Recalling her inner voice speaking, Maria repeated,

“Okay, you know what the Bible says, you know what your mom and dad says [*sic*] too. So just do it so you won’t get in trouble.” So as a child, I guess, I seen [*sic*] God more as like, [pauses] I seen him as loving, but, at the same time, I seen him as if I messed up or did something wrong, I’m gonna get in trouble. (B24)

She offered an example of the degree to which her relationship with God, fostered by her parents and the messages she had learned in the Bible, impacted decisions she made about her behavior at this point in her life:

When I was in the fourth grade or fifth grade, I had a friend...and she was one of my close friends. For her birthday, we went camping. Her sister was drinking wine, or whatever, and her sister let her have some. And we were only like nine. My friend was like, “Do you want some?” And I was like, “No?!” Cause it was like, “I KNOW better! I’m not—I don’t want *that*!” [laughs] you know! And it was just kind of like, “Oh my gosh!” I just couldn’t *believe* it! You know, cause I

was always taught not to drink alcohol and not to smoke and things like that. I knew God was watching me, so of course I wasn't going to do anything like that.

So, I guess I say that story just to say how I seen [*sic*] God, cause I knew he was always watching me. I know that I can suffer [laughs] if I do something wrong. So, it was just like, "Okay, do what I need to do so I won't get in trouble." But then, I always knew Jesus really does love me... (B25)

Maria added to this example an insight into her own spiritual development, while affirming the significance of the Bible as her moral compass. "I guess spiritually, I wasn't mature spiritually, but at the same time, I knew what the Bible said. And I was like, 'Okay, I'm gonna do it!'" (B25).

Religion Versus Spirituality

During her later years of childhood, Maria came to understand a distinction between religion and spirituality. Maria became aware that she was called to something more than merely external obedience and conformity. She viewed the ministers and adults of her church community with great esteem, but began to open to a new level of understanding about those qualities she most admired in them during her junior high years. She explained,

As a child, I knew that going to church was good. I knew that all those things were good—to be sincere about God. There was like a thin line, I guess, with understanding religion and spirituality, but I never really knew why people shouted in church. Or, I never really knew why people spoke in tongues, you know. And the Church of God in Christ was always taught to be filled with the Holy Ghost and to have evidence of speaking in tongues. But I didn't know how people did that. I seen [*sic*] my mom fall out in church and people going to the altar, but I didn't know *why*. I didn't understand *why* they were doing that.

So, it was always vague for me. It was always foggy. But, I knew, "Okay, well, this is probably what you *should* be doing." You know. And I kinda could tell between people who just *believed* in God, and people who...really, *lived* for God. Who really spent time *with* him. Like, there was a model of people, like my bishop, I seen [*sic*] him as someone who is spiritual. Like, I'll be like, "Oh, he's *dope!* [slang for 'cool'] I wanna be like *him*." You know, my bishop, I wanna be like the evangelist that teaches Sunday school and stuff like that.

I saw those people as spiritual, but, I didn't realize that their being spiritual had to do with them actually going home and spending time with God. I didn't realize that. I just figured, you know, they [*sic*] *always* been like this. They were *always* teaching Sunday school and preaching in the pulpit. And, no, it didn't occur to me that they had to be delivered from some things. They had to get on their knees at night and pray to God and ask him to help them. Or read their Bible every day, you know, every morning just to know what his Word says to *grow* spiritually.

I didn't *know* all that. I just *seen* [*sic*] them at church and so I *knew* that aspect of, "Okay, there *are* spiritual people." I didn't know *how* they became spiritual. And then, at that time, I know for a fact, that I probably didn't draw the line between religious and spiritual either. (B38-41)

Keenly aware of the testimonies she had heard from adults at her church throughout her childhood and admiring the spiritual qualities displayed by the ministers of her community, Maria became tantalized by the question, what made them tick? What were the inner workings that enabled these behaviors in them? She wanted to be like them. She was attracted by their love for and faith in God.

In her desire to be like those she admired, Maria came to reflect on herself and her own behaviors about church. Valuable insights opened to her enabling a new understanding of what it meant to be religious and what it meant to be spiritual. She realized that it was to be *spiritual* that she most desired. Moreover, in her desire to be spiritual, Maria came to understand the concept and realized that what she most desired was a relationship with God. She explained,

During my middle school years, it was kind of a transition, because I started to be influenced by those around me. And, I started to...I guess, focus. It was like, I always knew that there were people that went to church but didn't really live...live for God. Like, I knew that, but...I didn't really apply that to myself. I just always thought, "Well, okay, I can just be in the middle." You know. "That's fine."

Until now or until maybe my sophomore year, I didn't realize that...you know, as a child, I was...I *could* be spiritual, and I didn't realize *either* that I was just being religious. When I *think* of being religious—[pounds on table with emphasis] I

mean, people might have different opinions, I mean—when I think of being religious, it's just kind of like, just going with the ropes, you know, doing, you know... going to church, knowing the church songs, and things like that, but, there's really no relationship.

Religion [pounds on table] to me is when you *know* of God, but you really have no relationship with him. That's religion to me. And with...the *spiritual*, you *have* a relationship with God. You know God. And so, in my 10th grade year, that's when those things began to get clear to me; that, in order to be spiritual, you *have* to have a relationship with God. And religion is just people that know *of* God, but don't really have a relationship with him. (B42-44)

Life Experience Brings Deeper Insight

Struck by this young woman's ability to articulate a complicated spiritual understanding with such clarity, I asked Maria to explain the life experiences that took place during her junior high school years and leading up to her sophomore year to bring her to such a vision. With more explanation, Maria provided the backdrop of where she was during the somewhat rebellious stage of her junior high years situating her onto a path away from the religious tradition in which she had been reared.

So, basically, all through my life, I grew up in church [pounds on table], I knew the church. I knew who was who [pounds]. I knew who the evangelists were, the preachers, the deacons. All that stuff. But *all that* is not gonna get me into heaven. And, all that is, I mean, just because you *know* the church songs, just because you *know* protocol, just because you *know* when we do Communion, *why* we do Communion, but if in your heart, you're not really *living* it, it makes no difference to God. Romans 12:1, "Present your bodies unto God, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." and then, Romans 12 and 2, "My brother, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

And *that*, those two scriptures stick out to me, because it's not about *what* you do in church. It's not about you singing in the choir. It's not about you, you know, doing all those things. But living *holy* is what God wants to see. And living *righteous*, and *trying* to do what his Word says is what God wants to see. And *that* is what I didn't get between maybe 7th grade and 10th grade. (B46-47)

Maria continued providing background needed to lay a foundation for her movement from naïveté into greater awareness:

Because there's a period of innocence where you just don't know. Like, you *just don't know*. It's not that you intentionally *do* things, you know, it's not that you do things trying to be sneaky either, during that period of time. It's just like, you just don't know until somebody tells you or until you find out for yourself. So, there was a period of that and, I'm guessing, that was maybe preschool to 6th grade for me. But then, at my church, they are very Bible-based [pounds]. So everything we do, offering [pounds], communion [pounds], comes out of the Word of God [pounds]. They'll show [pounds] you, "That's what the *Word* says! Okay!" So, you know, you *do* it! That's how it is. So once you start knowing things, *God* will hold you accountable. You know what I'm sayin'?" (B48)

When Maria was in the 7th grade, she began attending the teen church provided by her church community where the content addressed age-appropriate issues of concern for youth. Responsibility behavior among the youth was encouraged regarding topics such as sex, alcohol, and smoking. Maria recounted that during these sessions, she vehemently affirmed the proper behavior, "Yes! That's right" (B50). However, her tune changed in the days following Sunday services when she went to school. At middle school, Maria remembered, she allowed friends to influence her. Maria nervously explained precisely what that meant: she never smoked, drank, or had sex, stating, "I am still a virgin" (B50). Yet, she remained uncomfortable with reciting the degree to which she became susceptible to the pressure of her peers during this time. She stated, "Sin is sin. So, you know, if I cuss somebody out, it's the same as me lying to my mom. You know, it's all the same" (B50).

She described that when at school under the influence of her friends' behavior, "I would allow, you know, peer pressure sometimes, to make me [cuss] *knowing* that I knew better than not to cuss. But I would cuss just because, you know, my friends were cussing" (B51). She rationalized, "Oh, well, I guess it's *okay* then, cause they're doing it." Maria asserted that she never allowed her grades to slip because she always had a sense of pride in herself and because she did not want her mom to be paying money for

her education for nothing. However, she conceded, at the same time, “I was kind of...tryin’ to...go with the crowd” (B51).

Backtracking to reinforce her upbringing, Maria revealed a deeper motivation operating within herself working to assert her own identity:

To go back to my upbringing, I’ve always had a strong conviction and people always knew that, “Oh, Maria, she goes to church.” You know, everyone always knew, “Oh yeah. Little church-girl Maria!” And things like that. So I guess *my* thing was, to try to be like, “Okay, guys. You know. That’s just not all I do.” (B52)

With hindsight, Maria acknowledged that, during this time, she was neither committing herself to her beliefs, nor embracing the behaviors of her peers. Rather, she was attempting to walk in both worlds. It would be some time before she realized greater clarity and was able to make a firmer commitment to God. She explained,

And when I *think* about it now, you know, I thought I was doing *okay*. I wasn’t smoking or drinking like the other girls. But, at the same time, I wasn’t doing what *God* said to do either, cause I was still tryin’ to, you know, *kinda* fit in. But I wasn’t really in the *church either*, so I was kind of walking on this middle path. But the Bible says, “You cannot serve God and man.” So, I wasn’t doing either one. I was kind of in the middle. I have to choose, you know. But I didn’t *realize* that yet. (B53)

The Party Girl Faces Her Spiritual Weakness

By her sophomore year, Maria’s weekly participation at church had waned. Having assumed the role of a party person, Maria spent more time hanging out with friends, attending parties, and dancing with boys. Maria reported that she and her friends enjoyed being the center of attention at these parties and amused themselves dancing evocatively with the boys. All the while, Maria continued attending her church each week and would frequently inquire of other partygoers, “Do you believe in God?” Maria stated, “That was always my thing. No matter what, you have to believe in God” (B57).

At one party, Maria met a boy. Giggling, she admitted she found him cute. She agreed to talk with him and, naturally, inquired whether he believed in God. With some agitation in her voice, Maria exclaimed, “He told me that he believed in God, but he didn’t tell me that he was Muslim. Of course, that’s a big clash right there, because Christians and Muslims believe *two totally different things!* But I didn’t know that” (B57). Maria explained that, up until this point, she had never kissed a boy other than little “cheek-kisses” from boys in third grade. As a sophomore in high school, she was resolved not to let any boy kiss her unless she liked him a lot. She remained in contact and continued talking to this boy over the next four months.

Around this same time, Maria met another boy at her church who impressed her very much, but in a different way. She exclaimed, “He was really *saved!* I’ve never seen a boy act like this before” (B59). Maria continued explaining the differences she found in this second young man that impressed her,

He would come to church, and he would be focused on God. He would go to church, listen to the Word of God, participate in praise and worship, and really, just be into the service. I was...attracted to him because of his *looks*. And then, I was attracted to him at the same time because, I was like, “Wow.” Like, “He looks like he’s not *playing* about God. Looks like he’s really *livin’* the life *for* him.” Like, you know. (B59)

Maria remained in contact with the Muslim boy staying up late at night talking with him on the phone. This was something she had never done, as she was not to be on the phone that late. Further, the content of their conversations crossed a line into things she had never discussed. She was uncomfortable and explained, “I found myself in some crazy situations. I knew better, because I know I was taught better, but for some strange reason, I was just allowing people to influence me and think, ‘Oh, it’s okay’” (B61).

In addition, Maria recounted that during this time she attended a friend’s slumber

party, which was held at a hotel. This was to be a combined boy and girl slumber party. She knew if she had told her mom that boys were going to be at the party, she would not have been allowed to go. She stated, “I didn’t *lie* to my mom...but I just told her I was going to my friend’s *slumber party*” (B62). She described a situation that occurred while at the party where a boy tried to push her to have sex with him. She asserted, “I was like, ‘No. I don’t get down like that.’ You know, I always had confidence in myself or I always had a sense of pride. You know, ‘I’m precious merchandise [pounds hand on the table], don’t touch me’” (B63).

Maria recognized that during this time in her life she was spiritually weak. She acknowledged, “Because I was weak spiritually, that affected *everything* in my life” (B64). She continued to assure herself that she was okay. From the vantage point of our interview setting, Maria recalled that while nothing more happened in the hotel room that night,

Just being in that situation was kinda like...I coulda prevented that, first off, if I wouldn’t have even went in the first place. That was my lack of wisdom, lack of spirituality, you know. All these things that would’ve been stopped if I would’ve just listened, you know, to the Holy Spirit telling me, “Okay, you don’t need to be there.”(B64)

She explained that other things were going on around her in the hotel during this time. People were drinking and smoking marijuana. She had never been in a situation like that before. This made Maria wake up and begin to ask herself some questions about the choices she was making. She stated,

That kind of made me wake up. The hypocrisy in it is that, the morning after, my mom picked me up and took me to church. And I was in church, clapping my hands, like nothing had happened the night before. And, I felt so...dirty. I felt, so...like, “What the heck am I doing?” But, I didn’t know how to stop it. (B65)

A Conversion Story

Maria still did not know how to stop her negative behaviors. She remained in contact with the Muslim boy, talking with him late at night on the phone. At this time, a friendship kindled between Maria and the boy at her church who was saved. Maria learned that this boy knew her God-dad and after obtaining his email address, they began corresponding and became friends. She described that, to her surprise, this young man was not into girls in a promiscuous or romantic way because he was focusing all of his relational energy on God. Maria explained, “He was really trying to *grow in God*” (B67). For Maria, this was a great relief. “When he *told* me that, I was like, ‘Wow! He’s really serious!’ He’s not a fake or phony, he’s really living according to the Word of God” (B67). Critiquing the value of this friendship, particularly in comparison to her relationship with the Muslim boy, Maria stated,

And so, I started being *his* friend. And at the same time, he was *my* friend. He started encouraging me and pouring life into *me*. But at the same time, the boy, who was Muslim, he was pouring—just to make it more vivid—he was kind of pouring death into me, you know? (B68)

A few weeks passed and Maria went to the movies with the Muslim boy. Still naïve, yet going along with the tide, Maria described what took place next that caused her to wake up to what she was doing:

We were sitting down, and he’s like, “let’s get up and walk around.” [voice is incredulous]. I was like, “*Why?*” And he was like, “Because. We can just get up.” And I was like, “Okay. Whatever.” I was really hesitant. “I don’t want to.” But, I was like, [to herself] “Okay. He keeps bothering me. So maybe we should just get up and start walking.” And he started kissing on me, and stuff like that. And you know, I didn’t really know what to do! I had never kissed a boy before! [laughs] And so, I was like, “Oh my gosh.” And then, of course, like,...I don’t know [sounding emotional]...I don’t know what I was thinking...but I just let him kiss on me, and stuff like that [voice changes]. We...that lasted for a long time. [voice lowers].

It never escalated to anything more than that, but like, he was just heka kissing on me and stuff like that. I felt so...like...disrespected, like...and...but, and when I was with him, I started crying. Then he asked me why I was crying. But I lied and I was just like, “Oh, well, cause...” I just made up some other reason, like, “Oh, because I like you so much,” or some crap. But, I didn’t.

And, I just...I felt, I *knew* I felt bad about myself. I was just like, “I can’t *believe* I’m in this situation.” Like, I *figured* that my first kiss would be with somebody that I really liked, who I really loved, but it wasn’t. It was with someone...who...I talked to for three months. And, because he started kissing on me, I just *allowed* him, you know what I’m sayin’? And I just felt so *violated*! And I was just like, “I can’t believe I just let this happen.” (B69-71)

Maria was shocked and disappointed with herself. Her unhappiness became amplified after the movie when she met up with her friends and was picked up outside the theatre by her friend’s mother. Her friends, with whom she had actually gone to the movies, questioned her, “Where were *you* at?” She told them that she had kissed the boy. They responded, “Are you *serious*?” To Maria’s dismay, as the shock set in among her friends, they pressed further,

“Oh, y’all must’a been kissing for a long time!” And all this stuff, you know, kind of joking about it. But really, on the inside, I felt, really...like....disgusted. I was like, “Wow. I can’t believe I just sat there and did that the whole time.” (B73)

When she returned home from the movie that night, a cascade of regret and sorrow over her behavior for the previous two years came tumbling out. She described her experience,

When I got home and after they left, I just got on my knees and I started crying. I was like, “Lord, I am *so* sorry.” And I *remember* that day *clear* as day [says with emphasis]. I was really just on my knees crying out, like, “I’m sorry.” And because—I *knew* I was wrong, because, first off, I *knew* better. And second-off, I was *in* church, praise dancing, singing in the choir, doing all this stuff, but my life wasn’t right, you know. It was fake. I was being a hypocrite for [pounds hands down on table] two straight-up years, you know.

When I really came to the realization [that] I would be at church *all* the time, and then I would go home, and, you know....[pauses] talk like, gossip, like *heavy* gossip. I mean, of course, everyone gossips, but like, “oh yeah, that girl, diiddiddidi...” you know, just doing a whole bunch of stuff that was just so...*opposite* from what I have been taught, *opposite* from what...I’m *supposed* to

be doing. At least, if I'm goin' to *live* like that, don't be up in church, like up in the pastor's face *wavin'*, you know, acting like I'm all holy and stuff. Because, that wasn't the case at all. So, after that, that's when I was on my knees just cryin' out, like, "I'm sorry, Lord. I apologize and I really repent. And, I promise you I'm gonna do better." (B74-76)

Maria sought refuge in her young male Christian friend. She poured out her grief and sadness and found in him the encouragement and support she needed to get her life back on track. Her friend assured and challenged her at the same time with these words,

It's okay. You know. God will forgive you. But you really need to make the decision whether you're gonna live for him, or whether you're gonna be in the world. Because, you can't do both. Because, you know, that's being hypocritical. And of course, you're gonna make mistakes, but, you know, you have to make that commitment to really try to do better. (B76)

Trusting that her friend was right, his words provided just the impetus Maria needed to re-commit herself to living spiritually and to live her life for God. She stated,

And I was like, "Yeah. You're right." So he encouraged me to really be a better person, spiritually, you know, in God, because on the natural side I always did good in school. I always was [a] friendly person, kind, loving. But all that type of stuff, it don't matter when it comes to, you know, living for God and being truly spiritual. (B77)

Maria knew she could no longer continue living as she had in the past two years. That same night, she made a firm commitment to change her life, to read her Bible and to develop her relationship with God. While she did not recall the exact date this occurred, Maria remembered vividly the night in March of her sophomore year when this turning point took place. She credited her Christian friend for the help he gave to her to turn toward God. She explained, "I was really convicted in my spirit. And I know, that was when God was really calling me, to be like, 'Okay. You need to get it together. Because you doin' all this is not gonna work'" (B81).

A Fresh Start: A Process of Gradual Change

With vigor, enthusiasm, and determination, Maria took on her new charge. Repeating the resolve she felt at that time, Maria exclaimed, “I’m gonna really start *reading* my Bible [pounds on table with emphasis]. I’m gonna really start—you know—developin’ my relationship with God” (B78). It was hard for her at first to develop these new habits and behaviors. She called her friend, the young Christian man, Denzel, who consistently offered her the encouragement she needed, “It’s okay, sis. You know, it’s gonna be alright. Just shake it off” (B78).

Her friendship with Denzel blossomed into one rich with the spiritual encouragement she most needed. Maria expressed that since Denzel was saved, he was able to help her grow in God. Denzel checked in often with Maria to ensure she was reading her Bible regularly and living according to the values that had been instilled in her previously in her life. Maria remarked,

I knew all this stuff to read my Bible and to pray, but I never *did* it, you know [pounding on table for emphasis]. It was just like, “Okay, whatever.” So then, all this stuff that I was taught, it started coming back to me. And I started actually *living* it and *doing* it, and not just *hearing* it, you know. For the Word says, “Be a hearer *and* a doer of the Word.” (B79)

She began to hear and to do what God desired for her. Maria expressed that, for her, this effort was more than just attending church regularly. “It was like I was *seeking* God for something. I *wanted* to be better. I wanted to be *spiritual*, *really* spiritual. Not just that fake stuff, you know” (B80).

Change came slowly and deliberately. She began confronting herself about her behaviors and motivations. For example, Maria had always loved to dance, but now she questioned for whom she was dancing. She recalled this process,

Am I dancing for Satan, shakin' my butt on some boy? Or, am I, you know, am I at church praise dancing? I can't do both. It don't even match up. If somebody [had] seen me at a party dancing, then [had] seen me on stage, they'd be like, "Is that the same *girl*?" You know, it just doesn't make sense. (B82)

The change was gradual and was a struggle for her leaving old behaviors behind, such as going to parties, using profanity, and so forth. Maria missed these things at first, but knew she needed to make deliberate changes in her life. Her old friends started noticing the changes and asked her why she was acting so differently. Maria explained,

It wasn't that I was tryin' to *judge* them, or do *anything* like that, but I was separating myself so I could *grow*, you know. And *then*, when I felt that I was strong enough spiritually, *then* I could go back and help my friends, so they could grow, too. But, until then, I had to separate myself. The Bible says, "Come out from amongst them." And so, you have to separate yourself at a point in time, so you can allow God to use you and be stronger in Him. (B80)

She found inspiration and guidance for these changes in the Bible. Little by little, she began to notice small changes, which provided more encouragement to her.

It really was a struggle for me at first to decide that I didn't want to go to a party, or not *talk* to certain boys. But, at the same time, as I started to *grow* in God, it was easier for me. The more I read my Bible, the more I prayed, God started to give me wisdom on how to avoid situations, on how to say no, on how to...not even *long* to do those things anymore. Like, now, I could care less about going to a party, or, you know. It's not hard for me not to cuss. But, yeah, at first, I had to stay prayed up [laughs]. I had to stay reading the Bible *every* day, because, really, reading the Bible *does* help you grow *spiritually*. (B83)

She reported that during this time, the Muslim boy tried to keep in touch with her. She explained to him that she was working on changing her life and that she was willing to remain friends, but that was all. Eventually he quit trying to contact her and Maria continued on her path toward deepening spirituality.

Maria described that she began to feel much better about herself. She felt better that when she went to church, she no longer had the burden of memories of partying the night before. "I felt so much better when I came to church, I could really praise God and

not feel guilty about the things I had no business doing and I could really worship God and allow God to use me for his glory” (B85).

Progression of Spiritual Awakening

I asked Maria if she perceived a progression of change in her awareness of becoming spiritually stronger. She responded definitively “Yes” and proceeded to explain distinct phases she had passed through since that March night of her sophomore year. She first identified the act of committing herself to live a saved life. With the support of her friend, Denzel, she consistently poured herself into her Bible and prayer. Maria characterized Denzel as one who “knew a lot about spirituality and about the Word of God cause he *read* it...He just couldn’t stop...And he would pray for hours and hours. And God spoke to him and told him he was called into ministry” (B100). From Denzel, Maria learned that it was possible for her to have a relationship with God. Describing her response to learning of Denzel’s call, Maria exclaimed, “Wow! Somebody *my age* been called into ministry,” and again, to perceiving that Denzel enjoyed an authentic relationship with God, “Somebody *my age* has a real relationship with God and is *really spiritual!*”

This had a powerful affect on Maria for two reasons. First, she was gratified to know that she was not the only one her age with a desire to know God, and secondly, she felt relieved and explained that one does not have to be “50 years old to have a relationship with God. You can be *my age*, and really be on fire for God and willing to do a work for him” (B101). With Denzel’s support, she applied herself fervently to living a saved life by pouring herself into reading the Bible. She described the effects of this effort: “When you *read* the Word of God, you become more *like* God. So, those

characteristics just kind of started jumping off of me. In that, you know, I just started growing” (B102).

During the summer between her sophomore and junior year, Maria visited an aunt in Georgia. Staying with the aunt for several weeks, Maria had the opportunity to attend church with the aunt whom Maria described as a “mighty woman of God.” It was while in Georgia that Maria began to see evidence of change in herself. At church with her aunt, she found herself standing up freely to join in praise and worship. It was no longer forced or artificial. Previously, when Maria had seen others praising the Lord, she could not understand why they did what they did and sometimes considered them over-exaggerating. She observed that as she began to grow spiritually, she recognized a difference within. Identifying this as the second phase of her growth, Maria explained,

It really is authentic to praise the Word of God and worship him, to really know that you’re changed, to really know that God is doing something in your life. And just to know, that he was doing something in my life, I couldn’t help but to lift up my hands and cry out to him. (B90b)

She observed further growth when she returned home from Georgia. Now taking a serious approach to what was going on at church, Maria no longer played with her friends during the services sitting in the back talking, chewing gum, laughing, and texting. She came seriously seeking God. At the end of each service, she found herself on the altar crying out to God for deliverance and for God’s help to change who she was to make her a better person.

Maria’s joy and newfound desire for God overflowed into her friendships. She wanted them to know the same happiness she had discovered. Maria was disheartened to realize that most of her friends could not understand her feelings for God, nor did they understand why Maria no longer cussed, went to parties, or listened to rap music.

Confused by this, Maria tried to help her friends see what she had come to know: “God is really *good*, y’all. You guys really need to take out the time and, you know, *pray* and *read* your Bible, because that’s the *only way* you can grow spiritually” (B92). Maria recounted that when she began to beseech her friends to believe, she noticed greater growth in herself. She recalled, “Wow, I’m really [pounds on table with emphasis] different” (B92).

Finally, Maria identified a newfound ability to love others indiscriminately. She realized a deeper meaning and call in her commitment to God, one that inspired genuine concern for the wellbeing of others:

I have to love *everybody*. It’s not just my family. It’s not just my friends. But there are *people* out in the world, who don’t know *who* God is. Who don’t even *believe* in God. So, it is *my* job to tell them, and then, now, you know, either they can receive it or deny it. But, you know, it’s my *job*. And I have to really *care* about other people. And so, it’s not hard for me to say, “I love you” to somebody I just met. It’s not hard for me to say, “You know what, you can call me if you need to.” (B98)

Where before she acknowledged having a perfunctory attitude toward others, she began to realize that she was called to go beyond this toward a greater posture of hospitality. Illustrating the difference in her manner, Maria offered, “To really care about somebody enough to say, ‘You want to come to church with me?’ or ‘Do you have a Bible?’” (B99). Graciousness and concern for others became more and more evident, displaying themselves more frequently. She explained,

To really *care* about somebody enough to be like, “You want to come to church with me?” You know what I’m sayin’? “Do you have a Bible?” Or just little stuff like that I realized started becoming a part of my attitude. “Okay, she *needs* to know about God.” “She doesn’t.” So those things became evident to me. (B99)

A Spiritual Experience

At the end of the first interview with Maria, just to ensure I had covered all of my

interview questions, I asked Maria if she could describe an experience in her life that she considered very spiritual. As if what she had already described had not been enough to satisfy completely my curiosity about this young woman's spiritual experiences, Maria had one more surprising experience to tell.

She explained that, at the age of seven, she was given the gift from the Holy Spirit of speaking in tongues. While Maria did not remember much about this event, it remained a special one for her, according to her mother. The gift had not re-occurred since that time. However, on New Year's Eve after the transition she made following her sophomore year when Maria began walking boldly for God, she was once again filled with the Holy Spirit. Maria's words best portray the joy and delight that filled her in this experience:

On New Year's Eve service at my church, December 31, 2007, I was sixteen, and that was a couple of months after the end of sophomore year, when I made the transition into walking boldly for God. My friend [Denzel] and I, we were always talking on the phone about the Holy Spirit, and just church in general. I mean, God and the Bible, and things like that. And so, he asked me if I was filled with the Holy Ghost. And I said, "Yeah." But I don't actually remember. So, I would like to speak in tongues again.

It's important, the Holy Spirit is important, because, you know, he's always with you, he's your comforter. And then, at the same time, with the Holy Spirit, you're given power, you know, to heal. And all those things, and cast out devils, and all that different stuff. So, it's a very important spiritual gift to me.

And so, at that service, I was just prayin' to God. And the pastor was like, "If you want to speak in tongues, just start cryin' out to God right now and start worshipping Him and clapping your hands, and he will fill you." That's what his Word says, "If you seek him, he will fill you with the Holy Spirit." And then, I just started praisin' God. And then, all of a sudden, it just flowed like, out of my belly [says with joy, and a smile] "flow living waters!" you know.

It just started coming. And I felt so happy. And I was just worshipping God. It was just like, I *felt* his Spirit *on me*, you know, *in* the atmosphere, and *in* the church, like, his presence was just made known. And I just, I just couldn't *stop*! And that's how I know it was just flowin' and it was real. And I heard myself

speaking in my heavenly language. And I know that when you *do* speak in tongues, you're giving praise and honor to God, so it was just *awesome* to me that he blessed me—even though my mom said I had it before—but just to hear...for myself, just to know he was living inside of me was just *awesome*.

*SE*⁵: You said, “It was like the waters flow...” What did you actually *feel* inside of you?

Maria: When the Spirit is heavy in the service, it's always warm, and it's like...uncontrollable. Like, when I try to close my mouth it just keeps on flowing and flowing. It's just like, I'm givin' honor, you know, just *praisin'* him and just couldn't stop. And, the Holy Spirit, he does what he wants to do when he wants to do it. So, he just started fillin' *everybody*, and everybody around me, I heard, you know, speakin' in tongues. And then, everybody was just worshipping and praisin' God. And we had gone into the New Year by that time, but we were just all praisin' and worshipping God.

I just felt so...empowered with the Holy Spirit. You know, he helps you to live holy and gives that *conviction* to make sure that you stay on the right path. (B113-117)

Maria Washington: Interpretive Critique

The development of Maria's awareness of spirituality throughout her childhood has been a result of various life-world dimensions overlapping and influencing one another through a regular pattern of religious practice. These dimensions united through one significant contingent event, the stinging regret of her own promiscuous behavior with a boy in a movie theatre, transformed Maria's life-world perspective.

Maria has held to a lifetime practice of religious devotion and worship. Her regular church attendance throughout her life has been the place where temporal, corporeal, spatial and relational dimensions of Maria's life have intersected, overlapped, and, through these combined influences, have ingrained elements of religiosity into Maria's life-world with knowledge, committed regular practice and corporeal expression, and sustaining relationships.

⁵ *SE* refers to the voice of the researcher: “Sister Elizabeth.” This was the term students used to address the researcher, and so it has been employed for this text.

The environment of Maria's church community, rich in the witness of faith, prayer and praise, has served as a wellspring for immersion in scripture, and has provided abundant support from the web of relationships shared among members. Membership within the community has provided a formative influence for Maria through the sharing of personal testimonies of life experiences endured through prayer and faith, and through the expression of loving support and encouragement particularly towards the children and youth of the community. The community has further fostered growth in religiosity for Maria through various levels of relationships: with pastors and deacons, and with teachers and surrogate family members. All contributed to an atmosphere of home-away-from home, of loving care, and of bonding in their belief in Christ Jesus as Savior.

Maria's corporeal experience of religion began as a young child who sang and danced in praise to God in the presence of her church community and extended beyond her own community as she performed for larger groups of Christian believers in other cities. It was through this corporeal dimension of Maria's young adolescence that she came face-to-face with the limitations of her humanity, where she learned that behavior freely chosen, but left unchecked, can wreak havoc on one's inner peace and sense of rightness with the world.

Through the acceptance and compassion of a friend and peer, Maria faced truths within herself by admitting to her deep regret and sense of shame, a courageous step which strengthened her inner self and opened her to a new level of understanding and of perceiving life. Maria's spirituality had awakened. Suddenly, new meaning flooded into Maria's awareness, transforming all of the actions, rituals, testimonies, and messages she had received throughout her life to this point within the nourishing environment of her

church community. The day-to-day nurturance of faith, practice, and participation in worship and praise, providing a sense of religious practice nurtured by relationships and examples, had now become transformed, bursting through with a new life-world vision for Maria. She now came to see all of her life experiences through the lens of spirituality with the added filter provided by daily reading of scripture. This new perspective became the predominant life-world out of which Maria began to perceive her life.

Alice Ross: Singer of the Praises of God

Alice Ross, a senior African American young woman at THS, was 17, soon to turn 18 at the time of our interviews. Alice had two brothers, one older at 20 and one younger at 16, and had lived with her parents and brothers all of her life. Her family lived in two other cities in the Bay Area prior to moving to Californiaville, where they had lived for the past five years. She had numerous relatives who lived in the Bay Area and whom she saw often. Alice and her family had been members of the same Pentecostal church community in Bay City all of her life.

Childhood Religious Practices

As a child, Alice loved her experience of regular church attendance with her family. She enjoyed being at church together with her friends with whom she shared trips to the snow, camping, and other places. Alice participated wholeheartedly in her church community as a member of the choir. She was privileged to lead the community frequently in many of the songs because her mom was the choir director. Alice reminisced, “Yeah, a lot of great memories” (D31).

She elaborated that when together with her friends at church, she felt a closer bond as they learned about God attending Sunday school together. “It made it better to be

with them and to learn about God” (D38). However, for Alice, the most spiritual part of the church service was singing, because it was something she loved to do. “I felt like I was making a connection with God in doing that” (D34). She began to sing in church by age seven and loved to sing either inside or outside of church whenever she got the chance. When she was singing, “It felt like a warm embrace, I just felt all warm inside” (D35).

Church consumed most of her life during these childhood years. Classmates in her elementary school knew this about her. “*Everybody* knew I was a Christian, cause I was *always* at church. Every time somebody asked me [chuckles] what I was doing that weekend, ‘Oh, I’m going to church’” (D42).

The pleasant rhythm of this routine was shattered for Alice during her eighth grade year when her grandmother passed away. For Alice, this loss was devastating. “Because I felt like [strong voice] *God* was taking her away from me. And that *connection*, it just...wasn’t there anymore. I felt *alone*, like, you know, even singing couldn’t bring me out of what I was going through [speaking softly]” (D40).

Alice had been very close to her grandmother. She explained, “Most of my childhood memories involve her” (D11). Alice recounted regular visits to her grandmother’s and that her grandmother had spent many Christmases with her family. At some point, Alice’s grandmother came to live with Alice and her family. One special memory Alice held was of a family trip they took to Disneyland with her grandmother along. “That was a *really* great memory” (D14). Alice’s grandmother was confined to a wheelchair because she was blind and could not walk. Having her grandmother with her and wheeling her around Disneyland made the trip even more fun for Alice.

Alice recalled that there was not just one special time with her grandmother, rather, the specialness of her memories with her grandmother were a culmination of all of their visits. “They were *all* really special actually” (D16). She spoke of her grandmother as a mentor with whom she talked “about everything” (D17). Alice reflected, “We were really close” (D17). Alice explained that she believed her grandmother had more of a spiritual impact on her by her death than during the time she spent with her alive. Alice confirmed that her grandmother was indeed a spiritual person, but that they did not spend time talking about religious things. Alice said that she came to realize “a few things” (D19) through her grandmother’s death.

Entrance Into Temptation

Alice’s grandmother suffered from multiple sclerosis for 20 years. As her illness progressed, the family moved her to a convalescent home outside of Bay City. The family continued their regular visits, as she lived near their church in Bay City. A few months before she died, her grandmother had a stroke and stayed in the hospital for the remainder of her life. For Alice, the visits were not the same and so she went less and less. When her grandmother passed away in January of her eighth grade year, Alice was actually surprised as she had not been to see her for a while. Her grandmother’s death was very hard for Alice, for her mother, and for all of the family. I asked Alice how she felt about not seeing her grandmother as often as she had in the past before her grandmother died. Speaking almost in a whisper, Alice stated,

I felt really bad about it. Yeah. I think that had a lot to do with what I did *after* she died because I blamed *myself* for her death. Because I didn’t go visit her, I thought she just wished herself to be *dead* because people who [*sic*] she loved had stopped coming to see her. (D50)

Her grandmother’s progressing illness and eventual death seriously affected

Alice's experience of church. She started to hate going. "I felt like *God* was taking her away from me. And that *connection*, it just...wasn't there anymore. I felt *alone*, like, you know, even singing couldn't bring me out of what I was going through" (D40).

For Alice, life felt chaotic and she began to engage in self-destructive behaviors. She was angry at God and blamed God for all of the bad things that were happening to her. Shortly after her grandmother's death, she "went on a rampage" (D19) that lasted for the next few years. She attempted suicide and became sexually active on a regular basis. She explained,

I was just really upset at God for taking her away from me because I was so close to her. You know? And—yeah. I felt like, really *alone*, like, I didn't have anybody that really *loved* me. Like, nobody understood...*who* I really was or understood me for me. Yeah, I was just looking for love in all the wrong places, I guess. (D20)

She revealed that she did not have a close relationship with her parents. She was unable to talk with either parent about the pain she felt losing her grandmother. When the time came for her to enter high school, major arguments ensued with her parents over which high school she would attend. She had been accepted to a co-ed Catholic secondary school, but they insisted that she attend THS; its tuition was more affordable for them and they believed it to be a better school for their daughter. Alice was horrified as all of her friends at the time were boys. She could not imagine transitioning into an all-female school and finding friends.

Starting high school at THS added to the chaos in her life. She knew no one prior to entering the school and was initially unsuccessful making genuine friendships. She felt very much alone. She commented that she began to feel numb at the beginning of her ninth grade year when she learned that THS was her parents' final decision. "I blamed

my parents every *day* that they were ruining my *life*, because I was already upset, and then I had to come *here* everyday” (D54). She described her freshman year,

I didn't really do any work or anything. My grades were horrible. I just felt really *alone* and like...especially cause I didn't really have any *friends*. I had people that I *talked* to, but like, they were just acquaintances, I guess you could say. Yeah, it was just [a] really...dark...time. (D61)

In April of her freshman year, Alice met a young man with whom she began dating. He became her “boyfriend” (D62). She explained, “That’s when things really started to change—at the end of my freshman year” (D62). She saw a lot of him during the summer months between freshman and sophomore year. She described how her behavior became more and more destructive:

I saw him a lot in the summer. He was a drug dealer, like, the complete opposite of a “nice guy,” like, typical boyfriend. And then, beginning of sophomore year, we started having sex. I was 15, so he was 17 or 18. And we had sex like every day sophomore year. It was kind of out of control. It was *really* out of control.

SE: In what way was it out of control?

Alice: Just the fact that we were having sex every day and it was unprotected. At first, we started off protected, but then, it was unprotected. I just didn't care about anything. I was like, “If I get pregnant,” you know, “I'll just get an abortion.” (D64-65)

Alice's parents knew that she was dating the young man, but were unaware of their sexual activity. Alice shared that three times her parents insisted that she stop seeing him because he was two years older than she, but she did not stop. The two would put up the pretence that they had stopped, only to get back together again. This relationship and behavior continued throughout her sophomore year. Alice recognized the unhealthiness of the relationship.

Sophomore year...nothing really changed. I still felt alone, cause I knew he didn't *really* love me and I knew I didn't really love *him* either. So, it was an outlet for me, but not to the point where I really felt I had recovered from the loss. (D68)

I asked whether she had continued attending church with her family during this time. While her attendance continued, it was less frequent and she “hated it.” She continued singing with the choir, but felt disconnected and did not care that she felt that way. She knew what she was doing was wrong, but she was still angry at God.

During the summer, between her sophomore and junior year, Alice began cutting herself. She believed that no one ever noticed the marks on her skin, not even her boyfriend. It was during this time that Alice came to the lowest part of her life:

I think I felt even *more* alone. Like, nobody could *see* what I was really going through or the *pain* that I was feeling. I mean, I covered it up with, you know, being comedian, being funny, and things like that, but nobody still saw...how much I was hurting inside. And so, I felt like I was in a *pit*, yeah. And nobody could rescue me, I guess. (D75)

Delivered From Temptation

Her junior year commenced. Alice continued with the same destructive behaviors, but she started attending church “a little bit *more*” (D77). She began to feel guilty about what she was doing, “and *wanting* to be...*freed*...I guess, from this pit that I was in” (D77). She opened up and confided with a friend about her sexual behaviors. Her friend implored her to stop what she was doing, to live a saved life, and to stop being a hypocrite. Alice took this advice into consideration. She realized,

This isn’t the way to be. I *called* myself a Christian, yet, I was living this double life of...*nonsense*. I discovered that this wasn’t the way to live. So, I made the decision to give my life completely to God and live for him. (D10)

In January of her junior year, Alice made a firm commitment “to live *for God*” (D78). She referred to this event later as the point at which she was “saved,” explaining this as the moment she accepted the Lord Jesus in her heart and believed that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, and committed herself to live a holy life from that

moment on. However, in April of her junior year, during spring break, she had sex again with her boyfriend. Alice confided to her best friend, Maria, about her sexual behavior.

Alice knew Maria was a committed Christian. Alice remarked, “That’s when she stepped in” (D83). Her friend exclaimed to her,

“What are you *doing*? You said you were gonna live for God and be a Christian, like a true Christian, and you *know* that this is wrong.” And stuff like that. She was like, “You really need to...start seeking God for *deliverance* from this, because, it’s really taken over your life.” And I...did that. (D79)

Alice commented that her friend Maria had come to her many times since her sexual behavior began saying, “You need to *stop*,” but Alice felt Maria was judging her, so she shunned her friend when speaking about this topic. However, this time, Maria’s message got through to Alice. Alice explained,

This one time she talked to me, she was just like, you know, “You grew up in the church. You *know* what’s right and what’s not right. And you need to *stop*,” basically. Like, “You know what you’re doing is wrong.” And “you’re on your way to hell.” And “you really need to...let that boy go and move on to bigger and better things in *God*, and seek out what he really has for you and seek deliverance from...*that*.” [pauses] Yeah. It was a really emotional conversation. (D85)

Alice knew that her friend was right. She reported feeling very badly about the things she had been doing. Because she knew Maria was right, she decided to “make that decision; to live for God” (D87). Finally, at the end of her junior year, Alice began actively to seek deliverance from God from the destructive behaviors she had engaged in since her sophomore year. She started going to church every Sunday, again. She joined the Praise and Worship Team at her church, which meant that she was responsible to lead the praise and worship each Sunday. She read her Bible regularly and began to pray more often. Alice shared,

[I] really started to *seek* God for what *he* wanted me to do with my life. Like, ‘Why am I here?’ You know? And I really felt connected with God. I felt like I

finally had somebody who...loved me...for me...and for everything that I had *done*. You know, he *still* loved me throughout all that. So...Yeah. I really felt a connection with God during that time [speaks almost in a whisper]. (D81)

Her new desire was to try to be a better Christian and to overcome the temptation to have sex and engage in the destructive behaviors that she had been doing for the previous two years. She applied herself to living this out each day through prayer. Alice's concept of spirituality had changed by the end of her junior year in high school, but would continue to be transformed as she made her way through her senior year.

Spiritual Awareness of Childhood Transformed in Early Adolescence

Alice's understanding of spirituality as a child came out of the events and experiences she witnessed in her church community. She believed that spirituality was "people getting the Holy Ghost, jumping around, stuff like that [laughs]...and reading the Bible, praying, singing, and participating in the church service" (D127). In contrast to this early impression, Alice remarked, "That has changed, because, once you actually *experience* it [spirituality], you see that it's a lot more than that. It's a daily struggle, or...something that you just...you know...*have* to do...dealing with temptations and stuff like that" (D128). After a second thought, Alice clarified, "I mean, you don't *have* to, it's a *choice* that you make (D129).

Alice's concept of spirituality had changed significantly by the end of her junior year in high school. Asked how she perceived that her spirituality had grown and developed through this experience, Alice observed,

I feel a *lot* more [*sic*] closer to God than I did before. One night when I received the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, I *really* felt closer to God. I felt like a huge burden being lifted off of me. I felt like I was finally *delivered* from everything that...I had experienced before...all the sex, and cutting, and suicide and stuff like that. I felt like it had finally been lifted off of me and that I could finally walk in what *God* had for me to do. (D-90-91)

Alice's transformation and developing understanding of spirituality would continue as she made her way through her senior year.

Alice Ross: Interpretive Critique

The childhood life-worlds of Alice maintained a regular rhythm of weekly church attendance with her family, regular visits with her beloved grandmother, and a social circle incorporated within the limits of her church's community of members. As a young child, Alice learned to worship through a corporeal expression of song. Combining her love for singing with an exceptionally talented voice, this manner of expression provided meaning for Alice in her childhood religious formation of praise and worship.

As a young adolescent, Alice was devastated by the loss of her beloved grandmother, an event which was further devastating as she felt partly responsible for her grandmother's death due to the tapering of her visits. Losing the one person from whom she felt truly loved and accepted, and to whom she could always confide her deepest self, Alice was cast into a deep darkness from which she perceived no solution for escape. While in this period of darkness, all sense of meaning drained from her participation in religion, even through song.

Alice's journey into darkness paradoxically deepened as she made attempts to feel some sense of life by engaging in a sexual relationship with a boy. She further sought to either end her life or to control the feelings she experienced by cutting or through other destructive means. Neither the cutting nor frequent sex relieved Alice of the pain she felt within.

Fortunately, through the gift of friendship, Alice began to disclose some of the darkness she was living. The friend, Maria, was someone with whom she shared a

culture, a tradition of religious practice, and who offered an attractive option of friendship in a school environment that Alice initially despised. The presence of this friend provided an oasis in the desert, of not only the school environment Alice was opposed to, but one that offered relief from the dark and dry journey of her own life. The result of Alice's disclosure of her behaviors to her friend was surprisingly beneficial to Alice and instrumental in her transformation.

Alice finally submitted to Maria's admonishments and began attending church and opened her heart to God in prayer. She began to feel relief from the darkness and depth of pain she was experiencing. Slowly, new insights and perceptions emerged for Alice, resulting in a deeper sense of inner spirituality.

Jane Cabral: Response to Love through Service

Jane Cabral, a senior at THS, was a Filipina-American young woman born in the United States to immigrant parents. As an only child, Jane lived with her parents until the age of seven, at which time her grandparents moved in with Jane and her family. Jane expressed that she enjoyed living with her grandparents because when her parents were busy, she always had someone with whom to talk and because she liked having them around. Jane attended THS since her freshman year and was 17 at the time of the interviews.

Childhood Religious Practices

Jane's family actively practiced their Catholic religion throughout Jane's life. This regular religious practice reflected many Catholic devotional traditions embedded within the family's Filipino culture. Jane recounted childhood memories of weekly Mass attendance with her parents, and attendance with her larger extended family on special

occasions, such as Christmas and Easter. In addition, she remembered celebrating major family events, such as baptisms, together with her grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and cousins. She does not have any particular memory of what those experiences were like for her, but Jane's parents have told her that, unlike other children who ran around the church, Jane remained seated paying careful attention to what was going on during the Mass. She remembered noticing which priests presided over the Mass recounting the delight she felt as a child when she recognized them, "Oh! Father Richard!" (E13). She acknowledged not paying much attention to the homilies, but that she sat quietly throughout the entire service.

Jane recalled being particularly aware that Jesus was present with her on Sundays. At first, being too young to receive Communion, she was aware of this presence because her parents told her regularly, "Jesus is with you. He'll really be watching you when you're at church" (E14). This weekly instruction inspired Jane to feel that presence and to look forward to Sundays with excitement, "Oh! Jesus is *here* with me today! It's Sunday!" (E14). She explained that a feeling of confidence in God's protective presence permeated her childhood filling her with both joy and anticipation as she looked forward to Sundays knowing that God would be especially with her on those days. She recalled her inner thoughts as a child, "Someone's watching me. I should be really good in church just to show him that I *care*" (E14).

Another lesson that Jane's parents provided to her childhood religious formation was to inspire within her a belief that, no matter what happened, God would always be with her and that she only needed to "keep believing in him." Jane remarked, "So that's what I did" (E15). She reported that this learning provided her with peace and calm many

times over when feeling anxious about various situations in her life, but mostly it has calmed her anxiety when facing an upcoming test.

As members of a Filipino family, Jane, her parents and grandparents participated in an annual tradition hosting a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the family home. Carrying forth a revered custom from the Philippines, Jane explained that Filipino families circulate a statue of Mary from house to house, keeping the statue for one week in each home before passing the Virgin to the next home. As the statue visits each home, the host family nightly will spend time together in prayer and devotion to the Blessed Mother praying the rosary or other devotional prayers. Jane offered that, in addition to these traditional annual visits, her family hosted the statue for special occasions, such as for birthdays of family members.

She recalled these events with fondness and warmth. She treasured the special time her family spent together on these occasions, as they enabled opportunities for both of her parents, as well as her grandparents, to be present. During these nightly recitations of the rosary, Jane would ask her parents, “Why do we do this every year?” (E15), to which her parents would reply, “She’s here to protect our *home*, to protect our family, and with the help of God, this will happen and we’ll be safe no matter what” (E15). As a result, Jane did feel safe and she felt happy being able to pray together with her family.

Describing further, Jane explained that these were times when she learned to pray. On the first day that the statue arrived at her home, a large group of people from her extended family and the Filipino community gathered in her house for the opening of the week’s ritual. These evenings involved a much longer process because as they prayed the

rosary, each mystery⁶ was read, followed by a decade of Hail Marys, and then, the group would sing a hymn in Tagalog before moving on to the next mystery of the rosary.

Completion of the rosary was followed by a long list of intercessory prayers for those who were sick, for the dying, and for those who could not be present with the group for this event. Jane enjoyed these times as she found they provided an opportunity to “let everything out” (E23) and because those gathered prayed together sharing their concerns and hopes with the community.

I asked Jane to elaborate what she meant by “letting everything out” during the prayer experience. Her comments revealed an understanding of prayer. She stated that these were times when they were able to really express themselves and their faith in God. She explained that prayer together was a choice that one makes; he or she could either decide to join in or go to another room of the house. However, she expressed joy that everyone did choose to recite the rosary and to pray together with one another.

Childhood Devotions and Prayer

Since childhood, Jane grew in a regular habit of private prayer. Using cultural practices of devotional objects, Jane developed relationships with Jesus, God, and Mary through regular prayer at night in the privacy of her bedroom. She fashioned an environment that supported her prayer. She described a little altar that stood on one side of the room across from her bed. Sitting atop the altar was a small statue of the Child Jesus, to which Jane referred to as the “Santo Niño.” A night light of the Virgin Mary and several rosaries were placed on top of the altar. These visual objects provided Jane with a

⁶ The rosary, a traditional Catholic prayer, consists of the act of meditating on 15 “mysteries,” or passages from the Gospel. These mysteries contain various accounts from the life of Jesus, where, by meditating on the passage, one comes to understand more clearly how to deal with one’s own life situations with grace and wisdom.

visual focal point to calm herself at the beginning of her prayer and, again, they provided a focal point at the end of her prayer. Most of the time, however, Jane explained that her eyes were closed throughout her prayer.

Jane described that she created this visual setting in her bedroom as a small child and, even when her family moved when she was seven, she remembered that the altar and religious objects were the first things she set back in place in her new bedroom. She described further the Filipino custom to have a Santo Niño in one's bedroom, as well as in other places of the house. Jane recalled the family altar which stood in the hallway next to her parents' bedroom. The altar held the Santo Niño, the Virgin Mary, more rosaries and some prayer books, as well. She did not remember a time in her life when the altar was not displayed either in her house or in her bedroom.

She recalled her early association with the Santo Niño relating as a small girl to the Baby Jesus, "Oh! Baby Jesus! Just like me! Baby Jane!" (E91). At this time, Jane knew only that she and Jesus were both babies. She recounted that, as a small child, she did not make a religious connection with the Child, but realized that Jesus had grown up from a baby to a boy as she herself was growing. She learned that as Jesus made that transition from a baby to a young boy, through teenage years into adulthood, he was someone that everyone could relate to "until the end of *our* time" (E93). In this way, Jane considered Jesus like a playmate or a peer, therefore, she viewed him as her friend. She understood Jesus to be near to her, always watching and by her side, whereas she perceived God as more distant, guarding her safety from afar.

Growing Awareness of Spirituality Through Service

Jane's parents enrolled her in her parish's elementary school starting in

Kindergarten. She attended weekly Mass on Sundays, where she felt safe in God's care. She described herself as "the little girl sitting in church saying to herself, 'Jesus is watching me and he's here with me. I can really feel him'" (E26).

When Jane entered the fifth grade, she felt a shift happen inside of her. She became aware of a desire within her to help others in her community. She explained that this desire was not for the general community, but for *God's* community. As a fifth grader, she wanted to do this "because I know he does a lot for me and my family" (E4).

For Jane, fifth grade was a transitional year. In Jane's Kinder through eighth grade school, fifth graders were not yet considered among the older students, nor were they any longer part of the younger students. To support the fifth graders' transition into the older grades, each of the fifth graders was expected to complete 20 hours of community service. Jane considered altar serving as one way she could fulfill this requirement. However, while discussing this idea with her parents, Jane was challenged to a deeper level of understanding this commitment. Jane's father instructed her, "Don't just do it to be an altar server or just to get your service hours. You should become an altar server because you *want* to do it"(E41).

Jane recalled that after further thought, she decided to make a firm commitment to her parish, stating, "I decided to serve God, because he always served *me*" (E42). She attended the training for altar servers provided by her parish and followed through with her commitment. She explained that when she first began to serve at Masses, she was nervous and afraid to make mistakes. After relaxing into the role and realizing that everyone makes mistakes, she grew firm in her resolve that serving was what she wanted to do. Jane served faithfully in this way for three years.

Jane perceived her year in fifth grade as a transitional time in her spirituality. She believed that the decision-making process to become a server revealed an emerging awareness of spirituality within her which permeated from this awakened desire to serve. She stated that her sense of attending church went from one little girl's musing that "God will be watching me" to realizing that "I'm here for a *reason*. There's a *reason* for me to do this. I'm actually serving *God* and serving *others* in this community" (E124). She explained that this was when she became most keenly aware of the spirituality that existed within her:

I think that's when I really *realized* it, like, *fully* and *completely*, was when I became an altar server. Because, I wasn't being *selfish* and doing it for *myself* and just to get my hours done. I was doing it for *others*, as well. And that's...that's a big *step* to take from just like, "Oh." You know, "I'm just going to church every Sunday," to "I'm going to church every Sunday *because* I'm a server...because I'm serving the St. John's community and because I'm serving God." (E125)

She was able to see a difference in her own response at church and she found new purpose in everything she did for others, especially for her church community. She felt more committed to everything she did at home, at school, and in her community and this commitment reflected in wholehearted service to others. Jane articulated further her unique perspective of spirituality expressed through service:

And it just feels really good to be able to help people. Because, not only am I just serving God, but I'm serving *myself* and I'm serving *others* and, you know, without help, we would just kind of be on our own, 'every man for himself.' But, with the help of others, and the help of God, we're able to do things together, we're able to pull through and get everything done and accomplished. (E46)

From this new sense of purpose, Jane felt a deeper bond with God, "Because, in return, I'm serving him, and I'm helping that community of St. Augustine" (E45). She explained understanding spirituality as a connection, and one that grew stronger for her and more evident as she fulfilled her weekly obligations of service in her parish.

Speaking of her bond with God, Jane stated,

It got a lot stronger. It became more evident. And, becoming an altar server is what led up to that. Because, that's what I, you know, kind of realized, that...that I was more aware of my spirituality and so it all kind of connected with each other. I was more aware of my spirituality, and because of that, I felt like I was closer to God, and that bond was just a lot stronger than before. (E128)

Service Through Song

By the eighth grade, Jane was an experienced altar server and was regularly called on to train younger students. She frequently received the praise of presiders and parishioners alike on the quality of her service and on the careful attention she paid to every detail of the Mass. She was pleased that she had decided to become more involved in the weekly services rather than just sitting and observing everything happen during the Mass.

Two weeks before her eighth grade graduation, Jane decided to join the parish's youth choir. Feeling too old for altar serving by her freshman year, Jane resigned from that service in order to invest herself wholeheartedly in the demands and commitment required to serve the parish through song. Not knowing anyone else in the choir, at first, she stretched herself and made new friends. By the beginning of her senior year and much to her amazement, Jane had already been made the conductor for the youth choir. She reported that frequently parishioners observed to her, "You're really young and you're the conductor!" (E58).

The youth choir regularly maintained a weekly membership of 20 to 30, in addition to several youth musicians who came together before the youth Mass for practice, prayer and reflection. Jane explained that the members of the choir held in common a desire to share their musical talents with the parish. The members developed

warm and close relationships working together from week to week. Yet, the rhythm of membership included departures of graduating high school students who moved on to college followed by the experience of welcoming them home for visits throughout the year. The choir provided a small community within the larger parish where close relationships developed for Jane. Despite the movement of membership in and out each year, the choir was a source of friendship for Jane, through which spiritual concerns and support could be shared back and forth between members. Jane expressed that she felt greater freedom being herself with the friends made in the choir than with most of the friends she made at THS.

Spiritual Growth Inspired through Song

Jane asserted that her participation in the choir had a positive influence on her spirituality throughout her high school years. One male parishioner, whom the choir members referred to as “Uncle,” was the director overseeing all of the parish choirs. She explained that Uncle structured the youth choir in such a way that before the choir sang each Sunday, they first prayed together. Uncle called them to read the scriptures assigned for the day so that they could be more attentive to the readings and more connected to the music that had been selected. Uncle prompted the youth to reflect on the readings, asking them to put the content into their own words and to think of a time in their own lives when such an experience had happened to them. Jane’s recounting of one such reflection period demonstrated the pertinence of these sessions in the lives of the youth:

I remember one of the situations that he came up with was, “Was there ever a time that you didn’t believe in God?” And everyone decided to raise their hands, because there was one point in time when one of us just didn’t believe in him. And we had to go around *in* the circle and state *why* we didn’t believe in him anymore. And, what was the whole situation, and do you still believe in him?

And he really gets us thinking. And he lets us deal, feel comfortable...to open up. So, what we're feeling, how we feel, and like *you* said [refers to introductory comments of interviewer], he says, "There's never a wrong answer" or anything like that. And he even shares his own experiences with us. Which makes us even *more* comfortable, because we think, "Oh, since he's a lot *older* than we are, maybe he has this whole mentality of being perfect." But nobody's perfect, and he just really makes that known and lets us know that it's okay to make mistakes and to doubt *God* every once in awhile, because everyone does it.

SE: How does he let you know that it's okay to make mistakes? Does he *say* that? Or can you tell by his actions?

Jane: It's actually a mixture of both. He *tells* us straight up, you know, "Everyone makes mistakes and it's okay because we all learn from them." And then, he also tells us about mistakes that he's made before and *how* he learned from it. And he'll just continue to apply what he learned later on in life if he ever comes into the same situation. And he'll also tell us, you know, "It's okay to make mistakes. Don't feel like you need to be a perfectionist." (E67-70)

Jane recalled one of the examples Uncle had shared with the choir which tied into the topic of doubting God. She recalled Uncle sharing with the choir about a time he doubted God one dark and stormy night when he happened to be driving on the freeway. He was upset, and because of his present state of doubt, his emotions were escalating. Jane explained, "It almost seemed like he was *cursing* God" (E71). When Uncle began to curse God, the engine of his car shut off while still on the freeway. Jane exclaimed through laughter, "Of course, that made him even more upset than he was already!" Next, she remembered,

Then, he just kinda calmed down. Filipinos have this tendency to hang a rosary on their rear-view mirror. And he looked at it and he was like, "Okay. Maybe if I just pray, everything will be okay." So he decided to start praying. And he was apologizing to God for cursing him, for doubting him. And, I think, he did one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and a Glory Be. Then he decided to start his car *again*, and it worked...started working. And he was able to drive off a lot *more calm* [slight chuckle] than he was initially. (E72)

Spirituality of Prayer

This incident impressed on Jane the importance of prayer. I asked her to recall a

time in her life when she was drawn to pray. Her voice filling with emotion, she recalled an experience that took place between her freshman and sophomore year. She had just returned home from an extended visit to the Philippines and learned that a favorite teacher from her junior high had been killed in a cycling accident. At first, Jane denied the truth of the report that she heard from her grandfather, until he presented her with the saved newspaper clipping.

Jane felt the loss deeply. She was inconsolable and unable to sleep for the first few days. One night, her mom came to her in her room and tried comforting Jane, saying, “He’s in a better place. No matter what, God will take care of him. He’s not going to let anything bad happen to him” (E31). Jane was then able to cling to this message and to offer up the concerns of her heart through prayer. She explained,

And so, [emotion returns] that’s what I just kept praying, like, “I just *hope* that he’s gonna be okay. And I just *hope* that his family and his girlfriend, and actually, all the students that he *helped*, will be okay, too.” Because he was one of the best teachers that I actually *had*. And I knew that a lot of people *admired* him, because he suffered from dyslexia and the reason he wanted to teach just...because he wanted [emotional] to help kids who had *problems* [voice breaks] and he did a really good job doing that. And it was just...it was just really sad to know that he wasn’t gonna be there anymore. And when he had a really big impact on a *lot* of our lives. (E32)

Initially, upon hearing the news of her teacher’s death, Jane was devastated. She had never felt this way before. As a result of her prayer, Jane felt great relief. She explained that as she continued to pray, she was not only asking God to take care of her teacher, but to bring peace and comfort to herself. She recalled that one day, she decided, “God *will* take care of him. He’s gonna be okay” (E36). She realized that her teacher would not want to see her in such an emotional state. “I’m pretty sure he would want me to continue and just live life the way that I would want to live it, whether he was there or

not” (E36). She explained that praying had brought her much comfort because she believed that her prayer had brought her to the realization of what she needed to do.

When asked how she perceived that this event had affected her spiritually, Jane asserted feeling that her bond with God had been strengthened. She admitted that previously she doubted God’s existence in times of need. However, this time was different. She explained,

After that, after feeling comforted, after the whole *incident*, I just felt like there was a stronger bond and I believe in him no matter what, now. Whether something bad happens, or something that happens, I’m just *always* gonna *believe* in him. It’s not like my freshman year and before, where something bad happened, I was just like, “Oh, God doesn’t exist. He’s not answering my prayers. He’s not helping me.” Now, it’s just like, “Okay, I know that he can’t answer *everything* for me. I can’t be selfish. I just have to live...live the way that I’m supposed to live, and if he answers my prayers, then *great*. If not, then I’ll learn eventually. (E38)

Elementary School Fosters Growth in Spirituality

Attending Catholic school since Kindergarten, Jane affirmed that it was her eighth grade teacher who had had the greatest influence spiritually on Jane and her classmates. Jane remarked, “She was the one who *really* got us to bring out our spiritual selves” (E101). She explained that, every week, her eighth grade teacher would direct the students to sit together in a circle and the class would have serendipity. During these sessions, they talked about God and prayed together. The prayer and conversations provided an opportunity for students to name issues they were having with one another within a safe, respectful, and confidential atmosphere. Jane reflected that many internal problems within the class were repaired and students were able to forgive one another, to express gratitude for one another, or to do whatever they needed to do among themselves.

Originally, serendipity had been introduced to the class while on their week-long

science camp adventure. Their eighth grade teacher capitalized on this experience, extending it further into the regular classroom routine. She explained to the students that serendipity was a time for surprises, because they may learn new things about each other and may even be able to help one another. She also invited them to consider serendipity as a time for expressing gratitude or forgiveness.

Jane recalled the first time the class experienced serendipity in the classroom. Her teacher closed the lights, lit a candle, and prompted the students to pass the candle around the circle in which they were seated. As each student received the candle, he or she was to apologize, express gratitude, or ask forgiveness of another classmate. While this was a challenging exercise for the students, the teacher took the opportunity to name major issues she had observed going on in the class. Jane commented, “She would take it upon herself to put it out on the table” (E110). In so doing, the teacher intended that not only those involved could fix the situation, but that everyone in the class could come together and offer suggestions for how the issue could be dealt with. Firm boundaries of respect and confidentiality were established which provided much support to the class. The teacher instructed the class further explaining to them that issues were not only a class problem, but were personal problems that perhaps other members of the class could help to solve.

Jane offered an example of how one such problem was solved during serendipity. She explained that, for some reason, two groups of girls in her class were having a problem with each other. Jane remarked, “I’m sure it was just normal girl drama” (E104) in which each group had a grudge against the other and had displayed their animosity toward one another publicly or had gossiped to other students in the school.

The situation had not gone unnoticed by their teacher nor by other classmates. At a serendipity session, their teacher brought the issue to the attention of the class stating that she observed the class and noticed that the two groups of girls were not getting along with each other. She noted that one of the groups was having a problem with the other group and asked the former to share their reasons with the class. Jane recounted the scene and its result:

They told their reasons and they *realized* that everything was just *stupid!* It was like stupid reasons to be mad at each other! And then, that's when they said "sorry" to each other. And they said, "Oh, you know, I shouldn't have acted this way. I should have talked to you about it first." And everything got better with time. Of course, it was still kind of awkward to be able to talk with them, just like *that*, but they started to warm up to each other a lot more. And everything got fixed, so, everyone was just like happy by the time we graduated. (E105)

Reflecting on the impact serendipity had on her spiritually, Jane acknowledged that the environmental factors, dimmed lights and a lit candle, calmed her mind and body. She was then able to listen deeply to the conversation. She explained,

Hearing other people's problems made me think about my own life. Like, "Oh. Have I ever made that mistake before? And if I did, how can other people help me? How can I help myself? Or how can God help me? What should I do?"

And you know, hearing about other people's problems, or just listening to my own and what people can say about it really helps, because spirituality doesn't just come to you like that. Sometimes you have to get help or sometimes you have to get like a *boost* from someone else...and just be motivated from something else.

I just thought that serendipity was a really good time for me to get in touch with that, and just to kind of *really* think about the decisions that I make and the decisions that other people make. (E115-117)

During the interview, Jane continued to feel gratitude to her eighth grade teacher for providing this experience. She believed that serendipity had fostered a sort of spiritual awakening for herself and for the members of the class. She observed that if her present

senior class could have this experience, it could help them to deal with some continuing issues that existed among them.

Jane Cabral: Interpretive Critique

Due to Jane's strong cultural heritage, the life-world dimensions were strongly intertwined between home and church, and between her personal life and religious life. Out of the religious cultural foundation of her Filipino family, emerged a sense of spirituality through a newfound desire to serve God.

For Jane, spatial and relational life-worlds were strongly intertwined during her childhood. In her home environment, she was surrounded by objects and practices that fostered her formation into the Filipino cultural religious traditions, such as small altars located in her home and bedroom, whose symbolism called forth prayer and faith. The relationships Jane shared with her parents and grandparents fostered and supported Jane's religious formation into the culture, as they informed and instructed her on the rituals and artifacts common to their household.

Spatial and temporal life-worlds were intertwined for Jane. Through a lifetime of regular weekly attendance at Mass, the church environment and weekly liturgical ritual became a customary practice of religious tradition. These dimensions contributed to Jane's self-identity in relationship to God: "God sees me; I am a good girl who is being obedient in church." These spatial and temporal elements provided further support to her parents' instruction, fostering not only a sense of her cultural religious tradition, but a foundation for an awareness of a relationship with Jesus. This relationship developed within the environment of her home, where, as a little girl, Jane perceived Jesus as a playmate, and later as a friend.

There has been a corporeal component to Jane's religious development as well. She remembers being quiet in church, being aware that God was watching her, awarenesses that filled her with a feeling of safety and security and contributed to the building of Jane's self-identity as one cared for by God. For Jane, the corporeal, spatial, and temporal elements of her childhood life-worlds have provided a firm foundation for an ongoing relationship with both God and Jesus.

A contingent experience that occurred when Jane was in the fifth grade provided an opportunity for further growth in her religiousness, and subsequently, in the emergence of her spiritual awareness during childhood. Receiving an invitation to give service to her parish community and with further guidance from her father, Jane accepted this call to serve, allowing it to become deeply embedded within herself. Thus, her service took on a greater sense of meaning. For Jane, this call became an opportunity to serve not only her community, but God, and to acknowledge the love and generosity that God had bestowed on herself and her family throughout her life. The invitation to serve provided the opportunity for Jane to transcend herself through giving physical service to her church community, and in so doing, to give thanks to God through the manifestation of her actions.

As a result of this commitment, an entirely new sense of purpose and meaning was revealed to Jane. Her weekly Mass attendance held new purpose, as did her own self-identity. She found meaning in the contribution she was making to her parish community, which gave her a sense of fulfillment. In addition, by providing service to the community, she found that she experienced the weekly liturgy at a different level of meaning. Rather than remaining merely as a spectator, she intuitively felt that her level of participation

had changed and, therefore, she became more open to the events and focus of the liturgy. She was flooded with feelings beyond anything she had ever experienced: feelings of peace, of gratitude and blessing, and of joy from giving for the benefit of others. These feelings reinforced the fact that she had come to realize what it meant to have an active interior spirituality through which she now perceived her life-world differently.

Jennifer Winfrey: Persistent Desire for God

Jennifer Winfrey was 17 and a senior at the time of the interviews. She had attended THS since the beginning of her junior year. Jennifer is Caucasian and lived with her younger sister and both of her parents. She lived in the same house in Californiaville all of her life. Jennifer's dad was brought up in the Methodist Church. Her mother was raised in the Catholic Church and was very active in the Church when she was younger. Jennifer's parents were married in the Catholic Church, yet neither of them continued the practice of either of their faith traditions during Jennifer's life. During the period of the interviews, Jennifer explained that her mom had become very involved in Buddhism, seeking the inner-god, inner-spirit and healing.

Jennifer's maternal grandfather, with whom she was very close, lived only a few blocks away. He was an active participant in his Catholic parish for many years until diminished health prevented his continued attendance. Jennifer had numerous extended family members who lived throughout the Bay Area.

Childhood Religious Practices

Jennifer reported few memories of childhood religious practices. In fact, she exclaimed, "Honestly, I don't even know *how* I'm Catholic today when I look back on my childhood!" (F12). However, she acknowledged that she could remember some

experiences. So, from there, we traced a line of religious and spiritual development.

Jennifer explained that she has always had an awareness of God and has never doubted God's existence. She recalled that this was perhaps fostered by her father's occasional references to the Bible, such as "God has everything planned out for us" (F13). In addition, she vaguely remembered her mom describing God by encouraging Jennifer to realize her own inner spirit. She described God as a candle within herself or as an inner light. However, Jennifer reported that, for the most part, there was rarely either conversation or active practice of religion in her home.

She remembered attending Mass as a family occasionally on Christmas. She recalled one Saturday evening when her mom decided, "Let's go to church" (F14). This particular evening left a distinct impression on Jennifer. When it came time for the congregation to go to Communion, Jennifer's mom told her that she could not go up, as she had not yet received the necessary instruction. Jennifer became so angry at the thought that the Church "wouldn't accept me," that when the family went out for ice cream later, she would not partake of the treat (F15). Her anger over this incident remained a vivid memory for some time.

A Sense of Prayer

Since Jennifer's parents both worked full-time, they engaged the help of their next-door neighbor to care for Jennifer and her younger sister. The caregiver, an elderly woman named Anna, was very kind. Jennifer came to love Anna very much. However, when Jennifer was eight years old and in the third grade, Anna became ill and passed away. According to Jennifer, this loss was so great, that it triggered deep fear in her that she might lose her parents. Around January of her fourth grade year, Jennifer began to

suffer from extreme anxiety attacks brought on by this fear. Jennifer remembered imagining all sorts of horrible things that might bring her parents to their death, but mostly, she remembered crying continuously and feeling so anxious that it was difficult for her to sleep.

During the four-month period that these attacks lasted, Jennifer's mom tried a number of things to console her daughter. She suggested various relaxation tools and Jennifer recalled that she may have encouraged Jennifer to pray. Jennifer remembered her dad talking about prayer with her suggesting, "God *listens* to you. God can *talk* to you" (F20). Wherever this notion of prayer came from, Jennifer reflected that she did begin to pray to God calling out to be relieved from her anxiety.

She explained that at that time, she would pray more out of her anxiety than out of gratitude, and very often she would beseech God, "Please help me with this" (F16). The anxiety attacks tapered off by the end of the school year as did her movement towards prayer. By the end of Jennifer's eighth grade year, she was in great need of God's help once again and found herself moved to prayer. This time, she was seeking God's help to become a better person. In fact, her desire to better herself became so strong at the end of Jennifer's eighth grade, she took it upon herself to attend church, even though she attended alone.

An Unstable Early Adolescence

Jennifer acknowledged that much of her childhood experiences remained unclear to her due to a number of significant emotional issues she had experienced throughout her childhood. At her core, Jennifer expressed that she holds a belief in the existence of a greater being that has helped her to stay alive. She possessed a faith in this greater

existence due to the number of times she had been spared from death. She referred to this faith as her “main thing.” Thinking back on the events of her life, she expressed, “Yes, I know this [being] has to be” (F45).

Jennifer described herself as “mentally unstable” during her early adolescence. She explained being very unhappy, depressed and given to distorting her own reality to fit her depression. “So, whereas, something cannot be that bad, but I’d *make* it bad. You know, ‘My parents abuse me.’ They *don’t* abuse me, but in my *head*, I could convince myself, ‘No, really, they *do*. They *do*. They *do*’” (F46). She commented, “So, I was living a lie a lot so, I wasn’t really perceiving reality *correctly*” (F48). In addition, Jennifer was found to have an eating disorder.

During her eighth grade year, Jennifer became seriously involved in a relationship with a boy who was depressed. She described that the manner by which the two of them communicated with each other was by physically acting out on themselves. Instead of stating to the other, “I had a really bad night last night,” she explained that her message would be, “I *hurt* myself. I cut myself twenty times last night. Had a really bad night!” (F49). She remarked that in this way, they worked to gain each other’s attention.

Towards the latter part of her eighth grade year, Jennifer was hospitalized where she stayed for just over two months in order to stabilize her health. Upon returning home, Jennifer’s desire to harm herself remained. She wanted to die and continued trying to hurt herself. Two more serious incidents occurred before this desire changed inside Jennifer.

In addition to other prescribed drugs, Jennifer now had her own supply of sleeping pills to help with her anxiety. One night, Jennifer took an unknown number of sleeping pills, once again trying to hurt herself, and then went to bed. She recalled

sleeping, but somehow became vaguely aware that she was throwing up in bed. She was unable to wake herself up long enough to do something about this, so remained face down in her vomit. She made several attempts to sit up, only to throw up again and end up back in the same position face down falling back to sleep. At some point, something within provided the impetus for her to get out of bed and to attempt climbing the two flights of stairs up to her parents' bedroom. She recalled struggling with each step, her body giving in to sleep and retching, with her cat forging ahead of her seemingly urging her on to each next step. Somehow, she finally made it to the top of the second flight of stairs, outside her parents' bedroom.

The next morning, Jennifer found herself in the hospital where, medically, her body had recovered from the overdose of drugs. However, medical personnel impressed upon her that she could have died by drowning in her own excretion. Jennifer concluded that, for her, her survival was proof of the existence of some powerful being. She had been so disabled by the drugs, she felt as if she was in a coma. She expressed her amazement as proof of this other being,

So it's just *that*. It's like...there's no *way* I could've done that, like, on my own, like, walk up or *anything*. Cause even when I got to the room, it's like, couldn't stand...It was basically, like, "get to the room, *somehow*." I don't... *that* really...just kind of made me see like, "Something, someone, *whatever*, like, is helping you." (F65-66)

This insight was not sufficient to change her behavior. Sometime in the latter part of Jennifer's sophomore year, she ended up in the hospital again, this time for having consumed a lethal amount of alcohol. The doctors informed her parents that she could die, predicting a 50-50 chance of survival. However, Jennifer pulled through. The doctors were astounded that she had survived after coming so close to death. When she awoke in

the ICU, she learned of her near-death experience. Again, sensing that something was holding on to keep her alive struck Jennifer's awareness; yet, she was still unfazed.

Tougher Challenges Inspire New Insights

Throughout her ninth and tenth grade years, Jennifer attended a large public high school in Californiaville, where she had many friends and easy access to drugs and alcohol. Her relationship with her boyfriend remained close, as her parents were unaware of the mutually negative affect they had on each other.

After Jennifer's episode binging on alcohol, her parents began to see through what Jennifer referred to as her "fabrications." They concluded that she needed a different, more positive environment. Towards the end of her sophomore year, Jennifer's parents decided she would transfer to THS. Two of Jennifer's aunts had attended the school and had loved it. Her parents believed that the smaller school community and Catholic environment would further support their daughter's return to health. In addition, her parents came to realize that the relationship Jennifer shared with her boyfriend was not supporting her return to health. They acted in this regard, as well, calling a final end to the relationship.

Jennifer started at THS in the beginning of her junior year. At first, she was furious that she had to transfer schools. She no longer had access to the familiarity of her old school, to her friends, and to alcohol and drugs. She explained that her first days at THS were horrible; of course, her angry attitude did not help. She expressed that she hated everyone, especially her parents. She continued going to parties on weekends to reconnect with her friends, but, in a short time, Jennifer found that she could not keep up with her old life *and* maintain the school obligations that were now hers. She exclaimed,

“Too much homework to [still] do my old life!” (F98).

While she tried to hang on, she realized that she could not keep up with her former ways. In addition, she chose doing her homework on the weekends instead of going out. She remained angry and continued some of her destructive behaviors, but she recognized that THS was a place where education really mattered. Triumphant, Jennifer came to realize, “Wow! I really *love* school! And I love *education*! I can *do* this!” (F99). She remembered how she had enjoyed learning in the past and her focus finally shifted.

Despite this new outlook, life remained tough for Jennifer at THS. Making friends was hard for her and was still the case at the time of our interviews. She acknowledged that when she started at THS, she did not want to make friends. When her perspective finally changed, she tried to be friendly toward others, but speculated that they only saw her as a quiet, invisible, “good-girl type” (F101).

Searching for the Light

As Jennifer recounted her former behaviors, she explained that the heavy medications she had been prescribed seemed to significantly alter her mental state and her personality. She expressed disgust at herself for the behaviors she had exhibited during the past. As she spoke, she noted that from her present perspective, she could not identify with the person she had been during those prior events. She revealed a deep desire permeating inside of her throughout this difficult passage of her early adolescence.

At the end of her eighth grade year, when Jennifer returned home from the hospital, she began once again to pray. She remembered feeling filled with a desire to be better; she wanted to be a better *person*. She asked herself, “How can I be a better person?” (F36). The idea occurred to her that she could go to church; perhaps if she tried

this, it might help her to improve herself. Jennifer underscored that her experience going away to the hospital for two months had been very difficult. In addition, returning home, she found herself feeling very confused and still felt mentally unstable. She decided, “I’m going to go to church. I want to be better” (F38).

She began attending the Catholic parish a few blocks away from her home. In this way, she could walk to church, though at first, she only attended sporadically. She recalled wanting to be a full part of the community, but since she still had no formal instruction in Catholicism, she still lacked the freedom and benefits of full membership in the community. She had only been initiated into membership as far as baptism. So when Jennifer learned that she was eligible to sign up for confirmation classes, she became interested, but did not follow through with this for yet another year.

At the end of her ninth grade year, Jennifer enrolled herself in the confirmation class, which was a two-year program. She began attending church more consistently, especially since her grandfather now needed her help to get himself to church. Her grandfather’s desire to attend Mass supported a more consistent attendance for Jennifer, and gave her someone with whom to go. Having observed the congregation a sufficient number of times, she felt a new desire. She expressed, “I *want* to receive Communion. I want to *do* this” (F39), thus prompting her registration for the upcoming confirmation class.

Unfortunately, her grandfather’s health did not allow him to continue accompanying Jennifer to Mass for much longer. However, by this time, Jennifer reported that she had already built consistent weekly attendance into her life for her grandfather’s sake. Now that he could no longer attend, she explained that she *chose* to

continue going regularly on her own. For Jennifer, this was a significant turning point:

That's kind of when it all started to fall into place. It was more like, "I'm *choosing* to go...even *more* so on my own." Not just out of my obligation to take my grandfather....This is something I *want* to do. I *want* to hear the readings. And I *want* to hear interpretation on them. And I wanna, you know...do that. (F122)

Firming up her commitment and regular attendance at both weekly Mass and confirmation class, Jennifer began to learn more about the Catholic faith. Now that she had a clear reason for attending, she became more engaged in the classes and she asked questions. She found herself more and more agreeing with what she learned and discovered that what she was hearing confirmed her own beliefs. While she did not grasp everything that was discussed during her classes or during the Mass, she took in as much as she could and grew to feel very grateful that she had decided to attend.

Now in her junior year and dealing with the transition into THS, the combination of Jennifer's decision to embrace religion and other factors in her life served as a catalyst for further self-reflection. She remarked that as she began her year at THS, "I took a step back from *everything*, and I became *sober*, and I stopped trying to *hurt* myself and I *ended* it with my boyfriend" (F77). Jennifer reflected on the pervading power this decision made on her inner self transforming her outlook on life:

[This] was really when I started to *step* back and say, "What *kind* of a person do I want to be? *Who* do I want to be? Like, What *is* my belief? What—where do I stand with God? Like, what do I *believe* in God? And really just kind of thinking, "What kind of *person* do I want to be? And, how do I want to *spend* my life? And *what* do I think is my *purpose* in life, *today*, or right *now*?"

That's what I meant by what is my *purpose*...I think that I'm supposed to *help* people. And, I think science and medicine is [*sic*] kind of like *my* way to help people. And like, so...I kind of came to that conclusion that I *want* to be a very supportive, nice person, grounded, not anxious. I don't want to keep running *away* from myself. I don't want to keep hurting myself. I want to *respect* myself.

I don't really *like* myself all the time, but I want to *respect* myself. And I realize I

am a child of God whether I'm a *good*... I'm *behaving* well or not. You know, I *want* to...I really...I've [*sic*] really have wanted to be *close* to God. And I realize... doing...*hurting* myself...*is*...taking me farther away. And I realize being *mean* to people, or acting stuck up, or you know, I mean, that's *all* going against *everything* that I believe in. That I think, you know, on Sundays, "Oh yeah! I believe with that! I believe with that!" But I wasn't really bringing it to the *week*, type thing? [voice elevates]

And so, you know, I really thought like, "NO. I need to change. And *this* is how I need to change." And, you know, "This is what I want to be." And I just kind of have that motto for myself...*now*. (F83-86)

Reflecting back on her classes and church attendance, Jennifer observed that during that time she had been going through the external motions of religious participation, yet there remained much more for her to learn. She described that the class had not been very structured. She was disappointed that there had been no homework, no retreat, or more formal type of instruction, particularly about scripture. I asked if the class had touched her spiritually. She responded that, during that time, she was taking in much information about the rubrics and rituals of the religion itself and about its doctrine, but she knew there was much more to be learned. She remarked that the class had been sufficient for her; otherwise, she would not have agreed to be confirmed. Jennifer realized that, by this time, she had found sufficient resonance with the faith and, despite what was lacking in the class, she knew this was what she wanted.

I kept going just because I *wanted*...cause I think confirmation for me at the time was like a...a "*labeled*" way to be closer to God. You know, labeled like...for me, it was really like a, "*Yes. I want to be Catholic.*" And, "*Yes. I want to...learn and I want to keep learning and I want to be part of this religion.*" (F173)

Jennifer revealed a deeper desire underlying that to be Catholic, "Yeah. I mean, there's *always* been this desire, I think, from my childhood. Even *now*, like, I think it's this *desire*, this *wanting* to attain like a closeness...to God. So, the *desire*, yeah" (F174).

Childhood Understanding of Spirituality

Jennifer expressed that as a child her spirituality could be characterized by a notion that there is a God and that a desire to be close to God persisted within her; however, she was not sure how to achieve that closeness. “Just the *notion*, and the core *desire* of wanting to be close to God, but not really sure *how* and not really *able* to be” (F125). I asked where she thought this notion had come. Jennifer asserted, “It’s just been there” (F126).

As a child, Jennifer further believed that she was guided more by spirit than by religion. She affirmed that by having a sense of the presence of a “being,” that she had been aware, but not particularly in-tuned with that being (F129). She recalled having a notion that she believed in God and supported what Jesus did; however, she expressed awareness that she did not have much knowledge of the Bible and elements of the religion. Feeling convicted about this belief in God provided Jennifer with a core foundation of security and confidence strengthening her quest for learning about the Catholic religion and opening her to increasing participation in the Church.

At the time of the first interview, Jennifer was still struggling with how to articulate a concept of spirituality for herself, as well as for the sake of her participation in the study. What she was able to identify clearly was that something had indeed shifted inside herself since she began at THS:

It was the realization...of kind of...what kind of person I wanted to be and the relationship that I want to have to [*sic*] God. Because, before, during my childhood, it was kind of like, “Yeah, there’s a God. And yeah, He can help me. Whereas last year, it shifted to, “Yeah. There’s a God and I want to be close to God. And yeah, there’s a God. And I *want* to...you know, *follow* the role that *Jesus* took on earth.” And I *want* to observe Jesus’ tendency... (F141)

Still feeling inadequate about this new facet of her life, she continued to express a

longing to grow, to learn and to develop greater fluidity in the relational aspect of this spirit-related area of her life, revealing a desire for the sacred at her very core. She recalled,

I don't know how to refer to the Bible and Jesus very well. Um...but...[mumbles] you know, I *want* to live...lovingly, and I *want* to help people, and I *wanna...be* like Jesus. And I *want* to be like that. And *that's* what I want to be like. And I *want* to be close to God. There's more of a realization if I can be *close* to this...*thing*, that I've had a *notion* to...growing up. (F142)

This longing has been manifested in her periodic attempts at prayer throughout her childhood.

There's *always* been this desire, I think, from my childhood. Even *now*, like, I think it's this *desire*, this *wanting* to attain like a *closeness...to* God. So, the *desire*, yeah.

SE: So that desire has been with you all the way through your childhood?

Jennifer: Well, the *desire...yeah*, by *praying*, I think, I was trying to be close. But I don't think I *realized* I was trying to be close. (F174-175)

Jennifer expressed that the growing knowledge and understanding of the religion, combined with her persistent desire for closeness with God provided for her a backbone, a sense of confidence out of which she was then able to delve further into making the religion her own.

Jennifer further explored the means by which she had been seeking the sacred, explaining that it has been through her journey into self-knowledge and revelation that she has come to recognize that which is of God and that which is not. Asked to explain the people who may have encouraged growth in this area of her life, Jennifer responded,

I think, really, my relationship with myself has been the main thing that...makes it grow. Because, I mean, people around me aren't really Catholic or religious in my life. So...I mean, while they can *say*, "Yeah. We support *you* being Catholic." It's really been *my* inner reflection and my relationship with myself.

But I think it's directly reflected kind of relating back to other things about self-destruction and about hurting myself. It's like my relationship with myself was *bad* and I was *far* from God. So, the more I kind of grew with myself and examined my relationship with myself, the more I can kind of be more part of like my *inner* God [voice elevates], the spirit, and then, I can let the faith... *outer* God, I think. And the God to other people. (F145-146)

Jennifer's journey into self-knowledge involved transferring to THS, becoming sober, and going off all medications. She explained that once off all the medications and alcohol, her mind was able to function clearly.

I was able to really step back—and not have friends even to, you know, to even to *forget* about it. There's [*sic*] no escapes. *Here* you are now. *No* other options, you know [slaps one hand into the other with clarity and determination]. You're *here*. And you have *school* work. So, it's kind of, "Okay. Do the school work."

And I think that really got my mind just...*working* again. And it's just kind of me being *alone*...being, "Okay. Look. This is where you *are*." And, "Wow! This is what you've done!" kind of thing. [slight laugh]. And it just *hit* me, I mean, *all* the memories hit me. And *from* that, I was able to say, "Wait a sec. I don't want to be who I was. And I want to be close to God." And, "*How* can I do this?" And so, it was really about *changing* my relationship with myself. (F147-148)

Listening to herself speak, Jennifer was then able to sum up the spiritual experience that was now hers, "I guess that's a good way to put it. You know, it was about changing my relationship with myself in order to be close to God" (F149).

Jennifer Winfrey: Interpretive Critique

The negative experiences of Jennifer's childhood fashion a merging of life-worlds into a blanket of darkness. However, after a significant change of environment for Jennifer at the beginning of her junior year, she began to journey through the darkness of her temporal, corporeal, and relational worlds, searching through her own inner darkness towards light.

Jennifer's childhood memories of her family environment and relationships are clouded by the events of her anxiety attacks, eating disorder, cuttings, and later abuse of

drugs and alcohol. Because of the overwhelming memories of these illnesses, Jennifer continued to perceive her relationship with her parents laced with the sting of their former and, perhaps, ongoing frustration and disappointment in her.

The corporeal experiences of Jennifer's self-destructive behaviors embedded a dark and lifeless pall into her own cellular memories of her childhood. While it cannot be known from the first interview the complete degree to which these negative behaviors actually consumed every moment of Jennifer's childhood reality, particularly as she reported them, these incidences colored the memories of Jennifer's childhood that she was able to recount of this historical period in her life. Therefore, according to this interview, Jennifer's self-described "mental instability" remained as her temporal life-world image further negatively impacting her identity of self.

After two near-death experiences and a third hospitalization, Jennifer's parents decided to make a drastic change in Jennifer's school environment. Much to Jennifer's consternation and displeasure, she was enrolled at THS at the beginning of her junior year where spatial and corporeal, temporal and relational changes could begin to take place. Perhaps the most profoundly beneficial change for Jennifer was that of the new environment which challenged her gifted intellect. Paradoxically, by her own choice to embrace this new challenge and rise to meet the academic demands with which she was now faced, Jennifer released her grasp on those contacts that kept her connected to the past. Making this choice, she allowed new life to trickle into her life-worlds and faced the most predominant remaining relationship in her life: that of the relationship with herself.

While an unpleasant task, the truth that revealed itself to Jennifer brought her peace. Through the intellect that she began exercising with joy in her academic arena,

Jennifer came to trust this interior learning as it revealed itself. This truth brought to Jennifer the light of understanding: that the further she moved into the agony of self-inflicted darkness, the further away she drew from the peace and goodness of God. Jennifer was not able to offer a clear description of spirituality; however, she did articulate clearly her desire for God and her persistent desire to embody the sacred in every part of her being.

Katie MacDougall: A Snapshot in Time

Katie MacDougall was born in Freedom, a town bordering Californiaville. Katie, a junior at THS, was 16 at the time of the interview. She had one sister who was away attending college when we met. Katie lived with her parents in Freedom for all but one year of her life, when the family lived out of the country. A number of Katie's relatives on her mother's side resided in the Bay Area; her father's family lived on the east coast. Katie stated that it was her family's custom to gather with members of her mother's family for major holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving and that her paternal cousins usually came to visit at Christmas, as well. Katie was Caucasian and Protestant. Katie's maternal grandfather was Catholic.

Childhood Religious Practices

Asked to describe what it was like for her as a child going to church every Sunday, Katie's response referred to superficialities; she remembered that she always wore skirts and that she felt jealous towards the other little girls "in their *cute* little *party* dresses" (G18). She recounted that Sunday school was filled with battle stories and "the moral-of-the-story kind of thing" (G18). She recalled an atmosphere that felt competitive among the smaller children with whom she attended Sunday school:

I think it was also just like... a lot of it was kind of like a contest cause we were so little. Like, "Oh. Well *my* dad does this! And *this* is what I get to wear to church! And he makes *this* much!" Like just like the old church that I used to go to like it was very like it was... [exhales] kind of pretentious a little bit. (G19)

For most of Katie's childhood years, she attended Sunday school while her parents went to the church services. She revealed that only recently had she begun attending the church services with her parents and omitted Sunday school. The church she was currently attending had a weekly service geared towards youth which her parents liked to attend with Katie. These services were targeted towards the college students who attended the nearby university and they focused on offering support to students who were searching for their faith or who were attempting to re-connect with God. Sermons were preached according to quarterly themes in a casual setting. The services included community time when attendees could visit or pray with one another. A band played contemporary music during the service. Katie opined that this service was intended to be relaxed for the sake of the youth. I asked how these services touched her spiritually. She responded,

I really like the music, just because I'm in vocal ensemble. Just so I—I think I have more of a connection with it. And like, I'm just really able to *relax* and like, let *go* and I'm able to just let myself sing and like, just be really worshipful. But then, like... I also like the service a lot just because... I don't feel that like... I have to... make any extra effort—kind of thing. Like, it's just that I'm able to come and like, come as I am. And like, I don't have to... [loses her train of thought] But anyway, so... but also, it's just really hard for me—I think—to... pay attention during the sermon. And so... depending on who's speaking that day. (G33)

Spiritual Experiences During Childhood

When I asked Katie to describe her memories of being spiritual during her childhood, Katie recounted that her family had a habit of praying before meals, or on occasions when her grandfather visited, he led the blessing before the meal. Katie added

that she had attended church since she was born. She stated,

Just because it's been a really big deal to my parents to have a really strong faith and like a good spiritual life...I think that they think—they feel really strongly that it leads to like a healthy life, just in general to like have a strong faith in God. And then, like, everything else will follow, kind of thing? (G9)

While she was growing up, Katie and her family attended a few different churches.

Beginning at Covenant Church in Californiaville, they moved on to the Presbyterian

Church in Freedom, where Katie was confirmed. She considered herself a Presbyterian.

In a sing-songy voice, Katie exclaimed, “So that was pretty cool! [chuckled]” (G10).

Trying to think of spiritual experiences in her childhood, Katie recalled the fellowship group her parents belonged to when she was younger. She remembered that as a child she liked to hang out with the adults during these sessions as she enjoyed listening to them sing. “I used to do that with them, but they don't have one anymore. So...[claps hands together]” (G11).

She explained that her mother was Catholic before she married Katie's dad. Katie does not know why her mother became Protestant. She speculated that perhaps her mother had some sort of “falling out of her faith” (G14) when she was in college. While Katie's parents used to talk about this issue, it only persisted as some sort of vagueness between them.

Elementary School Experience in a Private Protestant School

Katie attended a Protestant religious school during her elementary years where, she reported, religiosity was incorporated into the curriculum. She recalled that spirituality was not really touched upon until middle school when, depending on her teacher, the focus was more on one's personal spirituality. She opined that for the other students who attended the school, spirituality was not a very big deal. Katie attributed this

to a belief that the other students did not come from families who were religious, rather, from families who were looking for a private education for their children.

As a result, Katie acknowledged that, spiritually, she felt very insecure during her middle school years. She believed that she did not grow very much spiritually during this time and that she felt a disconnection between school and her practicing community at church. She explained,

Just because, I was surrounded by a lot of girls that were very...um...very *critical*. And I *liked*—I *really* wanted to fit in. And like, I just wanted to—like—have my *place*. I kind of like did what was *necessary*, to like, cut stuff out, I think. And like, I definitely like, *went* to church, and like, I hung out with like my church friends and stuff like that.

But, like, I think that it was very, very separated when I was in middle school. Like, church and school. And so, even though I *went* to a religious school, like, *church* and like religious stuff didn't really belong at *school*. (G87-88)

Katie MacDougall: Interpretive Critique

I was perplexed by Katie's manner during the interview. While appearing cheerful, her responses were frivolous. In addition, she exhibited a range of behaviors that were both exaggerated and, at times, inappropriate. These behaviors included clapping, frequently flipping her hair and speaking in an exaggerated sing-songy voice. A few times, Katie appeared to be trying to sound emotional or to cry, followed by an immediate switch to casualness or forced laughter. Several times, she made loud bursts of laughter or various other sounds such as squeaking or burping. Her sharing lacked a sense of authenticity and her behaviors seemed to communicate a resistance to participating in the interview.

More often than not, Katie's responses to the interview questions lacked depth or breadth. When asked to describe religious practices, she responded with descriptions of

superficial aspects of attending Sunday school; attention was given to the clothing worn by other little girls. In her discussion about attending church, only the external practices of religiosity were mentioned. No internal dimension of these practices was offered. Katie did express a sense of freedom to be herself at the youth services; however, her disclosure did not go any further. When Katie was asked about the spiritual experiences of her childhood, she repeated a description of her family's external religious practices. Her responses lacked any evidence that pointed to an awareness of interior spirituality during her childhood.

One section in Katie's disclosure of her earlier life was somewhat transparent; the mention of an experience of strong feelings of insecurity during her middle school years. Through an explanation which focused on blame and criticism of classmates, Katie revealed that she felt she had not grown spiritually as a result of harsh criticism she had perceived from others. More will be disclosed about my findings regarding Katie in the upcoming chapters.

Kathleen Norris: Child of God

Kathleen, a junior at the time of the interviews, is African-American and was the oldest of four girls in her family. Kathleen was 16 when we met; her younger sisters were ages 14, eight, and five. Kathleen had lived in two cities in the Bay Area during her lifetime, but had attended eight schools. The family moved frequently because her mother enjoyed moving and experimenting with different places to live.

This was Kathleen's first year at THS. Some of her older cousins graduated from THS in the past and loved the school. Kathleen's mom liked the descriptions of THS she heard from these cousins, and from other sources. Her mother learned that "the education

provided at THS was *phenomenal*, with teachers who were really *on* their students,” and that THS maintained a teacher-to-student ratio that was neither too high nor too small, but instead, “it was *perfect*” (H3). Concerned about the less-than-desirable education Kathleen was receiving at the large public high school she was attending, Kathleen’s mom decided that THS would be a much better place for her eldest daughter.

Childhood Religious Formation

Born and raised in the church as a Christian, Kathleen explained, “I *literally* grew up in the church. The house we lived in at the time was rented *by* the church. So, it was like, *in* the parking lot of our church. So, I grew up in the church.” (H9). Both of Kathleen’s parents were raised as Christians. They continued the tradition of regular church attendance with their own children. Kathleen reported that the church her family attended for most of her life was a non-denominational church mixed with a little Pentecostal tradition, except for a short time when her father was hired as the music minister in a Baptist church. At that time, he brought his family with him, but eventually, the family made its way back to the place of their roots, the church that Kathleen considers “home.”

Religious practice was a significant part of Kathleen’s childhood instilled into the family by her parents. Her own regular practices consisted of learning Bible verses by memory with weekly recitation of them, participating in the church choir, and engaging as a member in the praise dance team. Beginning at the age of four, Kathleen remained a member of the praise dance team until the time of our interviews. A scripture verse came to Kathleen’s mind as she reflected on her childhood religious formation. She stated,

There’s a verse that says, “Train a child in the way to go. When he’s [*sic*] old, he [*sic*] will never depart from it” [Prov. 22:6]. And, *really*, I have, like, just—every,

my life revolves *around* the church. Everything I do, I have to think about it and think, “Oh, is this what God will want me to do?” Because I was raised that way. I was raised thinking about...*constantly* about, “What would Jesus do?” and “Is this what I *should* be doing right now?” (H11)

Earliest Memory of Connecting with God

As a youngster in Kathleen’s church, the children’s choir was invited to sing for the congregation every fifth Sunday. Since the fifth Sunday of the month did not come around too often, this was a special event. One particular Sunday, Kathleen recalled that after the children’s choir had finished singing, there was the usual altar call. The pastor asked the community if there was anyone in the congregation who wanted to personally accept Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior.

Kathleen remembered that the little girl sitting next to her raised her hand and went down to the altar, but she remained standing alone. Gradually, Kathleen and every member of the children’s choir followed the girl down to the altar. Kathleen recounted that since all of the members were between the ages of five to 10, they did not really know what was going on. “But in our hearts, I think we could *sense* that there was something happening” (H29). Kathleen, herself, was six or seven at the time. Yet, she recalled that this was the earliest experience she remembered actually connecting with God. She stated, “From that point on, it’s been like ‘*Okay* God. What do you want for my life?’ and ‘I know, I gave my heart to you. So, I’m *yours*. What do you want me to do?’” (H30). She remembers feeling a peace, or a sense of calm coming over her after making that commitment. “Everything was just *smooth*, and everything just felt ...*right*” (H31).

The girl who had been sitting next to Kathleen was about the same age of six or seven. While Kathleen admitted that she, herself, had probably gone down to the altar initially because of the other little girl, once she got there, “It was just about *me*...and

God [slight chuckle] at that point” (H34). She acknowledged an awareness that she had made a decision of a lifetime and that she could feel the significance of her act.

Kathleen did not remember how her parents responded at the time, but based on the way she has seen them interact with her little sisters in church, she imagined that her parents were overjoyed and excited, that they probably felt something like, “Yes! She *gets* it! She *finally* gets it!” (H37).

I was amazed that this could take place in a child so young. I commented, “That’s pretty *amazing*, isn’t it? And you carried that in your heart ever since as a real moment of *significance*?” Kathleen replied simply, “Yeah. Every time I go astray or think about something that I shouldn’t be doing, I *always* go back and say, ‘Wait. I’m a Child of God.’ I can’t do that. It’s not right” (H39). I asked again, “Because you *know* you’ve already *given* your life to God?” Kathleen replied calmly, “Right. Right” (H40).

Childhood Religious Experiences

Kathleen was involved in religious formative opportunities provided by her church as a child. From Kindergarten through fifth grade, she attended Bible study classes on Wednesday evenings. She also participated regularly in Vacation Bible School [VBS]. When Kathleen mentioned VBS, she became animated and asked if I wanted to hear about her experiences with VBS.

She recounted rich teaching methods that had been implemented to instill knowledge of Bible stories in the students. Centered on a particular scripture story, such as the Israelites flight from Egypt, the activities included dramatizations, arts and crafts, music and singing with movements for the children. The teachers taught catchy sayings that the children called out in response to a prompt from the adults. Finally, teachers

would provide a snack depicting a particular scene to help students further integrate their learning of the story. On one occasion, Kathleen recalled that a cake, divided into two pieces, was provided with blue icing to replicate the Red Sea. Raisins were placed between the two pieces of the cake representing the dry land made evident after the water's parting and students were invited to place sprinkles onto the cake to represent fish in the sea.

For Kathleen, these weeklong summer experiences were wonderful. She stated, "It was just a really, really *great* time to just really learn about God's Word, but get to *really* experience it through hands-on activities. It was—it was *amazing*" (H75). As the highlight of her summers, she looked forward to these with great anticipation. However, the activities were not the only thing that she loved about VBS. At the end of the week there was an altar call, particularly placed for the sake of those children who did not ordinarily attend church. She described the powerful impact these altar calls had on her because of the witness of other children coming to love God as well, and recalled,

On the last day, they would have an altar call just for the children. Cause a lot of the kids in the community, they didn't grow up in the church as we had done. So, after the week was over, and they learned about God, and what he is, and *who* he is, and how he...lives *in* our lives, they would have an altar call, and the kids, we would all just go down there. And kids would be just like crying their eyes out, just like, "Oh my gosh! I love God *so* much! He's *so* amazing!"

So, I think just to see *that*, like as a *kid*, was like, "Wow! People like kids; they really, really get it! They understand the things that *we've* been learning in church." And even at a young age, I could see that, like, kids' lives were being changed just by this one week of VBS. It was ...oh!...it was just amazing. (H77-78)

Kathleen believed that VBS had a further effect on herself than it had on the other children. For Kathleen, who was already familiar with the Bible stories, and who had been "raised in the church" (H79), this was a time to experience other children her age

come to know and to love God. “It was like a time to...not really witness, but to like experience *other* kids *meet* my God and *see* like, what *he* can do in their lives” (H79).

Watching this happen to other children summer after summer became the predominant image of VBS for Kathleen. In recalling this memory, she stated,

Just to know that...like, it was—every VBS, the altar call, to see all the kids go down there, it was always reassuring me like, “God, you *really do love* us, like, *so much*.” It doesn’t matter what age you are. You could be like two years old or two *hundred* years old. God loves *everyone* of us. And just to see *that*, was, it was like assuring, “God!” like, “my Gosh! You *love* us!” just, “You love us *so much!*” (H80)

Kathleen found that this joy overflowed into her family life. With two younger sisters at home at this point, the love that filled her heart poured forth helping her to love them even more. She stated, “It helped me to show Christ’s love through it [making a pounding sound with her hand] you know—show them Christ’s love through me” (H81).

Another learning VBS provided to the children was in the form of a challenge. Each student would receive a specific task to perform and, with the offer of a reward at the end, was expected to complete the task. The daily challenge was printed on a little wristband and contained messages such as, “Go to a restaurant and pray for your food,” or “Help your dad mow the lawn.” Kathleen explained that by performing the tasks, it helped students to learn; at least, she revealed, the tasks “helped *me* learn service work in that I’m *here* for other people. I’m not *here* to benefit myself. I’m here to benefit the life of another person” (H82).

Nurtured in Leadership by Faith Community

Kathleen and her best friend, Danielle, grew up together in the church. Danielle was the daughter of Kathleen’s pastor and his wife. From an early age, Kathleen and Danielle were inseparable. In addition, they were viewed by their congregation as

leaders, even from among their own peers. Kathleen recalled that at the age of eight or nine, elder members looked to them saying among themselves, “What are they gonna do?” and to Kathleen and her friend, “You know you have to be an example for your younger sisters and for all the younger people that’s [*sic*] following you” (H42). Kathleen speculated that for the community, instilling leadership in the two girls at a young age was important, and was something that penetrated the girls’ awareness. Kathleen believed that they learned very early that they were called to leadership in the community and stated, “It’s really coming out now” (H42).

The adults in her community recognized leadership qualities in the girls and encouraged them. In the past, they served as junior leaders for VBS. Currently, the two girls were working on developing a curriculum for their youth nights which took place every second and fourth Friday. The two had been coming up with new ideas, feeling that the youth nights needed to center around the concept of *ministry*. She explained that this included a kitchen ministry, a basketball ministry, and everything else they did on those nights would be cast in the light of performing a ministry so that it could be for God. “Because *everything* you do is supposed to be an act of worship...to God” (H45).

Presenting their new ideas to the youth pastor was met with great enthusiasm.

Kathleen reported, “He *fell in love* with these ideas” (H46). She explained further,

After we talked to him, we went and did whatever we were gonna do. Then my mom came and talked to the youth pastor. And *she* said that his eyes were all watery and teary. He [said], “I *knew* it. I *knew* it from the time that they were little that these two were just *different* from all the other kids. They really *understand* God’s plan and what they need to be doing in the church even at their young age.” So, I think being a leader has always been part of who I am. (H46-47)

A specific focus of the youth program in Kathleen’s church was to raise up leaders. For this reason, the group was called, “The Generation of Christ.” Kathleen recounted the

manner in which they had been instructed,

“You *are* the generation of Christ. You *are* the next leaders of this *nation*. And you need to have something...like a foundation to stand on.” So, they really instill in us that we need to always have God as our back, and as our *rock* to really just stand on. (H56)

Realizing Christianity as a Relationship

As a child, her dad read stories from the Bible to Kathleen and her sister nightly before bed. She identified this as the way her dad connected with his girls. Smiling and speaking tenderly, Kathleen reminisced about this ritual, “I really enjoyed those times because it...I mean, I *love* my dad. I mean, I really like the relationship between a daughter and a father should be [*sic*]...like, the *strongest* relationship on earth” (H85). She further described that after her dad finished reading a story, he prayed with the girls. Down on their knees, they thanked God for the events of their day and for keeping them safe. Perhaps by design on her father’s part, this ritual had a lasting effect. Reflecting on the impact of this nightly event Kathleen stated,

I guess, really that helped us...in our life, cause now, I pray before I go to bed. I read a Bible story or a Bible chapter every day before I go to bed or in the morning when I wake up. And, I guess I kind of started doing that when I was about...maybe like 10 years old or 11...somewhere around that age, like, between fifth and seventh grade was when I really, *really* started reading my Word and realizing that God has a plan for me. And in order for me to fulfill that plan, I need to like, read about what His plans are and talk to Him, so I can know what His plans for me are. (H87)

Curious about how Kathleen came to pray regularly on her own, I asked her to explain further. She recalled that, at first, it was the messages proclaimed at church where she learned “Christianity is a *relationship*. And the only way that the relationship can grow *stronger* is through *talking* and...*reading*, and finding out about the person...who our relationship is *with*” (H88). This insight deepened for her as she began a daily

practice of reading the Bible, reflection and prayer. “The relationship was between *me* and *God*. So, the only way that I could make that relationship stronger was by praying, and reading his Word, and finding out who God really *was*” (H88).

After practicing this routine daily on her own for some time, Kathleen remarked that she was amazed by the results. She recalled the effect one story had on her. Reading from Job about all of the hardships he endured in his lifetime, what impressed Kathleen most was the trust Job demonstrated toward God. “Job was really a man of God. He would never turn his back on God” (H89). Through Job’s example, Kathleen’s trust in God grew. She explained,

Kathleen: Seeing how much Job really trusted God and how he *knew* that God would never leave him or forsake him, it really helped me to realize, like, through everything—even at a young age—knowing that God was *always* there and he was...he was just *awesome* like that. He—he *loves* us so much. And he puts us through a lot of those tests and trials and stuff to see if we’re gonna really trust him in the end. So, I think spending time with God in the mornings, it really brought us closer...

SE: You and God?

Kathleen: Me and God. Yeah. [small laugh]. Knowing that he is always *there* for me. And it always put me...my *heart* at peace, knowing that anything I go through, God’s always right there. He has my back. And, whatever I go through, it’s gonna be *for my good* in the end. (H90-91)

I asked Kathleen to express how this knowledge translated into her day, for example, as a junior-high student, with the awareness that God “has her back.” She replied,

So, if something were to come up in school, like, hypothetically speak[ing]—somebody were to hit me across the face or something, knowing that God is always with me and knowing that as a child of God, I have to be Christ-like, it would help me to *not* fight back. Just brush it off my shoulder, walk away, and not cause anymore problems.

That’s basically what staying connected with God has done for me. It teaches me to not...like, come to a situation or a challenge, like, down, and thinking that, “Oh. I’m gonna fail.” Or “Oh. It’s not gonna come out right in the end.” It’s like,

everything I do, I know it's going to be—no matter what the situation, no matter how it ends up in the end—it's how it was *supposed* to be. And, it's how...it's really how I *react* to a situation.

Yes. I guess, like, “Help me to react to different situations better.” Like, instead of *fighting* back, I'll turn the other cheek and just walk away. I won't *fight* back, because it's not of God, you know? (H93-95)

Getting Straight with God

At age six, Kathleen gave her life to God. As a girl, she listened intently each night as her dad read stories from the Bible and prayed with his daughters. At the age of 11, Kathleen thought to herself, “I can do this on my own” (H101). She asserted, “Well, not really *on my own*, cause I've always had people supporting me. But I could really get *my relationship with God straight*” (H101). For Kathleen, this meant showing God that she was devoted to him by performing random acts of kindness, by praying and talking to God each day, by reading her Bible, and by learning to listen to God speaking to her as she read her Bible. She spoke of “praying without ceasing,” and explained her efforts to speak constantly to God and with God about every little thing that came up in her day, for example, “Oh God, how am I gonna handle this situation?” or “Oh Jesus! Thank you so much! Cause that could've gone so much worse!” (H103).

Kathleen described that when reading Bible stories, often something in a particular passage would strike her. She exclaimed, “Oh my gosh! This is exactly what I'm going through right *now* in my life!” (H105). Arousing her curiosity, Kathleen would read further to discover how the biblical character had dealt with a particular situation. Kathleen would then apply the manner that had been revealed in the story to her own situation and explained that in doing so, “everything would be alright” (H105). In this way, Kathleen realized God speaking to her through his Word.

Another way Kathleen became accustomed to God speaking to her was through other people. Chuckling, she stated, “I *know* that it’s *God* speaking *through* them *to* me because they tell me about myself a lot” (H106). She spoke of corrections and cautions received from others which she has heeded, such as the time she had a boyfriend of whom her parents did not approve. Her parents cautioned her saying, “Kathleen, this is *rebellious*” (H106). Kathleen asserted this as the way God spoke to her through others.

Dreams were a medium through which God spoke to Kathleen. She recalled the reflection that frequently follows her dreams. Through these reflections, insights came to her that suggested a particular direction or resolution to something in her life. Kathleen explained, “Okay God, I *understand* what you want” (H107). She provided an example of one such experience stating,

There was *one* dream, it was *judgment* day, and me and all my church family, and my family, my mom and dad, aunties and uncles, we were all in a line to go to heaven. And then for some reason I got pulled out and got put in the *other* line to go...the other place [facial expression motions “hell”] [slight chuckle].

And while I was *down* there, [hell] I...I noticed like, everybody turned around [and] looked at me when I got into the line. And it was like, *all* my friends, like at school, and track team, just like all *those* type of friends who *really* weren’t living their life for *Christ*. Like, they *knew* the truth, but they weren’t *living* for it [voice elevates]. So, it was kind of the way to show like, “If *you* don’t *talk* to *these* people, this is what’s gonna happen.” So, He speaks to me through dreams in *that* way. (H107-108)

Greatest Challenge

The most difficult challenge Kathleen encountered during her childhood years was that of maintaining her relationships with her younger sisters. Dealing with little annoyances, anger, or temptations to fight with them have provided opportunities for Kathleen to go to God for help. Through prayer, she was able to find the strength and the patience for these disturbances to become opportunities to grow in love for her sisters.

While not an easy task, she reported maintaining a steady focus through the day-to-day challenges by keeping in mind that “God was always watching” (H97) and by trusting that God would help her to do the right thing. She explained that God would help her to pull back, to be at peace, and that he would place her into an internally quiet place so that she could deal with her sisters and the situation with patience, calmness, and greater clarity. She recounted that she would then speak to her sister(s) as, “Okay, “Ok-ay. [soft exhale] What you did was wrong. And I’m not gonna do anything to you, just *please* don’t do it again” (H99).

Friendship in God

Friendship provided another vehicle for Kathleen through which she heard God speaking to her. Kathleen had known her best friend, Danielle, since they were both infants. For Kathleen, the most important aspect of this friendship was that the two of them had grown together, stronger and stronger in Christ. Being with her and being friends with her taught Kathleen the importance of having a companion on her journey towards Christ. “You always *need* somebody. You can’t do it alone” (H172). The girls discussed their spiritual lives with one another, encouraged each other, and called each other to growth. Kathleen shared her conversation with Danielle when she revealed to Danielle her feelings about participating in the interview process,

“I get to go to the interview!” [with a “lucky me” tone of voice] [laughs] “Oh, for what?” “Oh, to discuss *spirituality* and *God* and stuff! It’s pretty *awesome!*” And she was like, “*Awesome!*” Cause me and her [*sic*], we like talking to people. We like this sort of thing. (H456)

In addition, Kathleen reported that often, as her friend prayed, read her Bible and received insights, she shared them with Kathleen. Kathleen acknowledged this as a great support in her journey and explained this as,

She's one of those people that's *always* checking up on me. Like, we're *accountable for* [sic] each other. So, we're always saying, "Did you read your Word today?" "Did you talk to God today?" or like, "What is He saying to you?" or just like stuff like that. And just having her always there, she's one of those people that I know she's gonna always be there for me.

She has helped me with struggles in my walk with Christ and I've always been there for her. And she's just always—she *really* builds me up and she encourages me like, "No Kathleen, you gotta keep *praying*. You *gotta* stay in your *Word*. You *have* to! It's a *necessity*! That's how you're going to *live*. You *have* to do it." So, just her *checking* on me all the time is *definitely* a way that I've come closer to God. (H180-181)

The members of their church community affirmed the friendship the two girls have shared repeatedly. However, they were affirmed not only for the sake of friendship, but for giving praise to God. Kathleen recalled a time when one of her pastors called her to the altar. After he said what he needed to say to her, she and her pastor went to the prayer room of the church. Danielle went with Kathleen to the prayer room. Kathleen explained that some of the women and deaconesses of the church were in the room at the time. When the two younger girls entered the room, the women stopped their own prayer, looked at Kathleen, then at Danielle. Suddenly, the women exclaimed, "You two! God is going to do sooo many things—miraculous things through you!" (H174). The women confirmed the bond between the two girls predicting that the friendship would remain and that God would work through them for the sake of others. For the girls, these words provided assurance that they would continue to grow together going deeper into God's Word and understanding God's will for them.

Emergent Understanding of Spirituality

Child of God

The concept of spirituality was not familiar terminology for Kathleen in her perceptions of life. Instead, from the time she was 10 or 11, she had an awareness of

relationship, an awareness of a relationship between herself and God, and between herself and God's people. Since she began to pray and to seek God's face through reading her Bible, this awareness grew. Seeking some unknown clarity, I asked further,

SE: And so, you *knew* that there was something significant in your life that you were responding to?

Kathleen: Uh-hum. Right.

SE: But in *addition* to the time at six years old when you went up to the altar, right? So, they were connected?

Kathleen: Right. Yeah. It was like, because I grew *up* in the church, I *always* knew that God was there and He's always present. When I turned six, that's when I *fully* accepted it and I gave my life over to Him. Then as I grew older, I just...kind of kept going deeper and deeper and deeper in my understanding of what that meant...to be a child of God and to know that God is always part of my life. (H122-124)

Finally, the most central place of meaning for Kathleen became clear; I had struck gold:

SE: So, *that* phrase, to be a "Child of God," holds a lot of meaning, doesn't it?

Kathleen: Yeah. Definitely. Yeah, definitely. [chuckles] Like, to be a Christian, means to be *Christ-like*. And when you're Christ-like, it's...like, you live like Christ *did*. So, when you live like Christ did, it's like being a Child of God. It's like, you're always...[tone of voice changes here; becomes very animated] It's like pleasing a *parent*! It's like, I'm a child of...my *mom*. I'm a child of *God*. I always have to be aware that He's always watching my actions and I don't *want* to disappoint Him. So, that's why I *pray*, and *talk* to Him consistently, and try to *obey* His commandments. (H125)

Child of God: Developing Identity

Throughout her childhood, Kathleen's church community provided support for her growth by encouraging her to read her Bible and to pray. However, Kathleen's parents were her greatest source of encouragement to *live* a Christ-life. Kathleen explained, "Both my parents *really* encourage me—as well as all my sisters—to *live* a Christ-life. It's their *job* as parents to make sure that *we* are Children of God" (H142).

Her parents fostered growth in Kathleen and her sisters through practices instilled at home, such as gathering in a circle as a family to pray together and offering their morning devotions together. Kathleen concluded, “I guess you could say they helped us grow or they helped us learn to *lean* on other people to *grow up* in the church, or as a Child of God and to become more mature” (H143). Kathleen’s parents instilled in her the understanding that she cannot do this alone, that she needs a support system to help her to make the right choices in her life.

Her parents supported Kathleen’s growth as a Child of God by the strong examples they set for their children. Kathleen described her mother as a *servant* in this way,

My mommy, she’s a real...she’s a...a *servant*. So she...I could see her *servicing* other people and serving is...a big part of being a Christian [slight chuckle]. Not only serving, just like, “Oh! Well let me take your plate for you.” Or, “Oh, I’ll make your bed for you.” But serving like...really serving the people of God. Like, spiritually, like, praying for them is a way of serving. And pouring *knowledge* into people is a way of serving.

So, my mom, [has] always been a servant in that sense. I’ve always noticed her serving other people. And really *nurturing* them and bringing them up. (H146-147)

Kathleen’s father modeled the intellectual side of being a Christian. A man whom Kathleen reported possesses numerous Bibles with various translations, and multiple dictionaries, Kathleen stated, “He is *constantly, constantly* in his Word, studying and going deeper into the meanings of a verse, or just like [what] a simple *word* means” (H151). Kathleen’s father was also a musician who used his music to worship God and to bring others to worship as he lifted them up through his music. She recounted the impact of his gift on others stating, “When he plays the saxophone, people [exclaim] ‘Oh, my gosh! This man is *so anointed* by God’ through his...through a simple thing, like playing

a saxophone” (H152). Kathleen expressed a belief that she had received qualities of intellectualism and worship for God from her dad.

Kathleen described the unique characteristic she had witnessed in her mother, “I see service as a spiritual *gift*” (H150). Her mother’s example inspired Kathleen to want to serve others. She explained that recently, while attending a youth camp, the teens were given a test consisting of a series of questions to determine the spiritual gifts each possessed. Kathleen’s score reflected a high rating for the gift of service. When her pastor called for each of the teens to stand as he named the list of gifts, coming to Kathleen’s name, he remarked, “Oh yes! You are *totally* a *servant!*” (H153). Kathleen described that she learned from her mom to put the needs of others first before her own. “It’s *not* about *me* all the time, it’s about *others*, and making sure that *they* make it to heaven, you know?” (H155). She recalled being about eight or nine when she realized that her mother consistently put her daughters before herself. It was also about this time that she began to notice the impact her father’s music had on others; that his “*anointed* music” was actually a ministry to others (H158).

Child of God: Developing Interior Understanding

While Kathleen’s understanding of what it meant to be a Child of God did not necessarily change throughout her childhood, she asserted that it did broaden and deepen. As she grew older, she came to understand more clearly what she needed to do. Kathleen stated, “in order to really live my life as a Child of God” (H161). She learned what she could and could not do. She committed herself more consistently to practices that would support her growth.

Her participation in church activities was transformed. For example, although she

was not inclined to dance, her mother put her into praise dancing at the age of four. Over time, Kathleen came to enjoy the dancing. Even more, she came to realize that her dance was an act of worship. She exclaimed, “You can really do anything and it’s for God” (H164). Having grown to like this activity, she came to realize that through her praise dancing, she was able to lead others into worship and that she was doing this for God and for his glory. For Kathleen, praise dancing was an expression of leadership and ministry for her community.

Kathleen Norris: Interpretive Critique

Kathleen’s childhood formative years were spent in the church, in more ways than one. Kathleen reported that by living in a house on the church property, she “literally grew up in the church.” In addition, born to deeply committed Christian parents who sought to raise their children in the same religious tradition, Kathleen’s childhood years were based on regular attendance at church. Her spatial environment at home and at church provided Kathleen with the external formation of a Christian religious practice. In addition, this spatial environment was present throughout her lifetime since birth.

Kathleen’s relational life-world supported her growth in the religious dimension. As a child, Kathleen was taught a rhythm of religious practices to support her growth in knowledge and understanding. Daily, she was instructed in Bible verses and prayer by her father, and she participated in the various activities offered by her church, such as praise dance, children’s choir, and Vacation Bible School. All of these dimensions strengthened her practice and knowledge of this religious life-world. The value that these formative experiences held for Kathleen was evident in the scripture verse she quoted, “Train a child in the way to go. When he’s [*sic*] old, he [*sic*] will never depart from it”

(Prov. 22:6).

At the age of six, Kathleen made a life-changing decision. While at a church service, she responded to her Pastor's call to commit her life to God. Although still at a young age, Kathleen intuitively sensed the meaning of her action after she ran to the altar to accept the invitation to become a Child of God. The meaning of this identity broadened and deepened throughout her remaining childhood years as she grew in her knowledge and religious practices.

Kathleen did not identify with the concept "spirituality" as clearly as she identified with and articulated her sense of self as a Child of God. She expressed that it is this identity that gives her life meaning and purpose. She further expressed a perception that the development of this identity took place through her religious commitment as a Christian. She grew in her interior identity as a Child of God by actively participating in church events, and through a daily commitment to Bible study and prayer.

Since the day she gave her life over to God by responding to the altar call at age six, Kathleen had been in a process of learning to give her life over to God each day, in whatever way and to what degree that means. Through persistent mindfulness practiced over time at her church, Kathleen realized that her identity as a Child of God was a call to a personal relationship with God. This awareness gave Kathleen deeper meaning and fulfillment as she faithfully persevered in her prayer life daily to respond in love to God in this relationship.

As her relationship with God grew, Kathleen's religious life-world perspective changed. She realized that her commitment was not only to God, but to serving God by bringing others to know of God's love for them. During her early adolescent years,

Kathleen's decision to offer herself in service to her community through leadership provided the means by which her sense of self became transformed; transcending her thoughts and preoccupations for herself alone, she began to look beyond herself to the needs of others. Kathleen defined herself as a Child of God. This life-world perspective provided deep meaning and purpose for her, and colored all other life-world perspectives in her existence.

CHAPTER V
RESEARCH FINDINGS: CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND
UNDERSTANDINGS

Chapter Rationale

Munhall (2007) explicated that several methods of phenomenological inquiry call for collapsing or condensing the material into themes, essences, meaning units, and structural definitions. Munhall explained further,

In many phenomenological studies, we see the prevalence of these approaches in the discussion of themes, essential elements, labeling, clusters, categories—all attempts to provide a description of an experience in a clear, logical listing of some type. Sometimes whichever method the researcher used to organize the material is then placed into a narrative. If there were 10 participants, the researcher searched for similar themes among the 10 with perhaps a note or two about differences, but then wrote the narrative in a way that reflected the mergence of 10 participants. (pp. 177-178)

Munhall pointed out the inadequacy of engaging methods that either collapse or reduce participants' responses into synthesized summations when one's profession is particularly interested in providing service for the good of others.

A major problem with this approach, especially in a phenomenological study, is that words and signs do not have the same meaning for everyone. Both the health care provider and the patient interpret words differently. These words and signs further lose meaning if they are acontextual. The signs and symptoms manifested by a patient have meaning only when placed in a historical, social, cultural, and individual context....[Yet] Within these texts are expressions of meaning. The expressions convey in words a manifestation of meaning....People do not talk in themes; we impose themes on their "language." It seems more authentic to stay close to the participant's language and search through the material for the expressions of meaning. (pp. 178-179)

Education shares a common thread with that of nursing: both are committed to the well-being and development of human beings. The philosophy of education manifested in the Catholic school reveals an environment that is student-centered (Paul VI, 1965) and

that seeks the growth of the whole person (CCE, 1977). Health care practitioners aim to achieve an atmosphere that is patient-centered, and which seeks the health of the whole person (USF, School of Nursing, 2009). For this reason, Munhall's words may be applied to this research study which sought to learn the spiritual experiences of adolescents enrolled in a single-gender urban Catholic secondary school and which was concerned about the pedagogical practices employed by secondary educators to foster spiritual development in their students. Rather than collapsing all of the material collected in this study into generalized themes or extensive listings, the findings from students' responses will be offered in separate narratives, thus providing the uniqueness of each student's life experiences and perceptions to be made visible. It is the belief of the researcher, that by coming to know each student's contextual reality and perception, insight will be gained into how to better serve the needs of students in their spiritual development in a Catholic secondary school.

Structure of Chapter

The second interview explored students' current understanding of spirituality and asked each student to concentrate on the concrete details of her present lived experiences of spirituality (Seidman, 2006). This interview invited students to define the concept of spirituality according to their own perceptions. With the use of a reflection sheet (Appendix K), each student was encouraged to prepare for this interview by considering her daily routines and experiences for one week between the first and second interview, including school attendance, home, church, and work, which may have been spiritual in nature or that may have affected her spiritually. Participants were then asked to explain what they had observed in their present day-to-day lives, paying attention to those

experiences, events, or relationships that presently nurtured them spiritually.

Additionally, students were asked to identify and to bring a personal “artifact” that symbolically expressed spiritual significance for them. The purpose of the artifact was to provide participants with a non-verbal means of communicating a concrete practice or hidden value of spirituality presently held in their lives. Students were encouraged not to manufacture this object or expression if one did not exist, but to present something that was already a part of their lives. Not every student possessed an artifact of personal spiritual significance or presented one at her interview. Five of the eight participants’ artifacts will be presented in this chapter.

Given what they had shared in the first two interviews, students were asked in the third to reflect on the meaning and value that their spirituality had for them at that point in the interview process. Seidman (2006) stated, “The question of ‘meaning’ is not one of satisfaction or reward...Rather, it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (p. 18). In this case, students were invited to make connections between their life experiences and their concept of spirituality. Findings from this question are presented in this chapter.

This chapter presents the students’ perceptions and experiences of spirituality as they existed at the time of the interviews. Each student’s experience and perception is contained in one complete narrative, followed by the next student, and so on. The format for the chapter flows with a repeating pattern: (1) the student’s definition of spirituality; (2) contemporary experiences of spirituality as perceived and described by the student; (3) catalysts for growth, taken from the student’s descriptions of her contemporary experiences of spirituality; and (4) the student’s articulation of the meaning of spirituality

in her life. Finally, the researcher's critique follows each narrative.

Cassandra Ramirez: Tradition of Faith and Morals

Definition of Spirituality

Cassandra expressed a belief that she is a very spiritual person. While finding it difficult to define spirituality, she thought a definition was unique to each person. She believed that there are different factors that contribute to spirituality; however, one factor was predominant. She defined spirituality as having a set of beliefs and validating the authenticity of those beliefs by one's actions. Cassandra provided several examples of such beliefs during the course of the interviews, explaining her beliefs about abortion, immigration, and capital punishment. She had come to hold specific viewpoints regarding such life issues and realized that while others may disagree with her, she felt a sense of freedom within herself about her beliefs. She learned something distinct about herself in this process of clarifying her own values. She stated,

I know a lot of people in my class, they believe something because the *rest* of the people do. I'm *not* that kind of person. Like, if someone has *this* kind of belief, I'm not just going to go along with it, just because everyone *else* has it. (A160)

Cassandra explained that her parents helped her to develop a "really structured conscience, a really moral conscience" (A201). She recounted conversations with her mother regarding capital punishment. While Cassandra was not always in agreement with her parents, she listened to their reasoning and believed she understood their perspectives. She acknowledged an internal process took place when evaluating her behaviors and decisions; she asked herself, "Was this really wrong or not?", thoughtfully comparing her views with those of her parents.

She added that, for her, spirituality was being in good relationships "with people,

with God, with your family, [and] with your friends” (A179). Cassandra believed that one does not need to be religious in order to be spiritual. “I think it’s about, your actions, good actions you take, or initiative you take to help something. And also with the religious part, I don’t think you need to be religious at all to be spiritual” (A227).

Contemporary Experience of Spirituality

For Cassandra, spirituality meant being in good relationships with God and with others. She affirmed that her relationships with her parents and sisters were examples of being in “good” relationships. Not surprisingly, of all the environmental areas she considered to prepare for the second interview, her family was the only milieu Cassandra found rich in spiritual stimulation.

She articulated a rich source of spiritual formation when discussing relationships with her family. She explained that she frequently thinks about the relationships she shares with her parents and sisters. She expressed a sense of awe and an awareness of the uniqueness of these relationships contrasted with the family relationships of her peers.

About her relationships with her parents, Cassandra asserted, “I *value* it a *lot*” (A204). She revealed that the intimate bonds shared in her family were built on a foundation of love between her parents, and strengthened daily by attention and care-filled interactions, humor shared and time spent together.

When I was growing up, my mom was always like, “Your *dad* is very special. There’s [*sic*] a lot of people who don’t have a dad like *you* have.” I even see that in my family. I know a lot of my uncles, their children grow up without their *dad* being so *affectionate* with them. My dad was always very affectionate, very playful, funny, joking all the time.

With my mom, I’m very—with *both* my parents—I’m very close. I spend most of my time at home and my parents are almost always home. And so, it’s a very *close* relationship. And I value it, too, because, they’re also friends to me. They’re just kind of like, the people...like, we *travel*—we all, as a family, we do

everything together. We travel, we go to the store...something, you know, that seems insignificant, but we do it together. (A204-205)

Asked to recall some incident that had occurred over the previous weekend that illustrated an experience of spirituality, Cassandra reported there had been no special occurrence out of the ordinary. She laughed slightly and described the weekend as “gloomy and rainy,” that the family members were not in the best of moods. She said they had talked, and it still felt close, but it was a little different than usual. Her parents had not slept well because her baby sister was sick and kept them up during the night. In addition, her parents were preoccupied with paperwork for their grandfather’s return trip to Mexico.

She could not think of a really good interaction, while at the same time said there had been no negative interactions. She had nothing to report. I asked her to consider what it was about the weekend that made her feel safe in the context of her family, despite the bad moods. She recalled a scene naively illustrating the presence of a powerful love which bonded the family together:

It was...just seeing overall, over the weekend, almost everyday, that interaction, like my mom and dad are always together with my little sister. And she’s four. So, it kind of shows you like the little bond, that little closeness, bonding, between my dad and my mom and my little sister. We all bond, but you know, it’s kind of *them* three all the time. Because it’s my mom and dad, and then, my little sister, because she’s always tagging along.

I guess in the morning, yesterday morning, they had some sleep [little laugh], and they were all on top of the bed watching TV. And my little sister was coloring her books. I don’t know. I thought it was *cute*. I was like, “Oh, how cute.” And my dad was teaching her how to color. And my mom was bringing them coffee and cookies. It was just cute. You know, it warms you a little, just seeing [them]. (A211-212)

Cassandra referred to the relationships shared with her sisters as ongoing sources of spiritual resonance. I asked her to provide some examples to illumine the presence of

these relationships in her life. She recounted a daily routine of completing homework and studying together with her sisters, followed by a regular ritual of talking together about the day's events, and about the family or whatever came up.

Once we're *almost* done [with our homework], it's like, 11 or almost 12. But we're tired of doing homework. And we start talking to each other about the family, or a little gossip, or you know, something *new*; someone's having a baby, someone's getting married, and just random stuff. We always have our little random bonding moments.

I'm very close to my sisters. They're all very close to my age. We're like two, three years apart. So, we're really close. We have very similar tastes. And our experiences are the same, because we all came to THS, even though my sister's [*sic*] in college. We all come home. We all have the experience of family life at *our* house. So, it's a good little time to talk to each other.

SE: Did you have this experience last night before you went to sleep?

Cassandra: Yeah [laughs]. And the night before, and the night before. (A213-215)

She seemed only slightly aware of the uniqueness of these relationships.

It's not like we're little allies. But, sometimes when we're grumpy or upset with my mom and dad, we all think the same. We're like, "Oh man! This sucks!" Or something like that. It's definitely a time where we team together and talk about something. Or something we *don't* like, and we all agree with, or something we *all* like, and we all *rave* about. I really like being able to talk to them like that. (A216)

Cassandra assured me that there were times when she and her sisters got on each other's nerves and argued. Yet, she summarized in an understated way with a chuckle, "In general, I wouldn't trade them... Yeah, I'm fine with them" (A217).

I felt deeply touched by the beauty and simplicity with which she described these sisterly relationships. Asked if she ever considered what she loves about her sisters, Cassandra offered no grandiose comments, but simply stated that "It's the little things, little quirks and stuff that you just [feel], 'Oh, it's cool'" (A218). What she valued most

about them was how they all think alike and how they share so much in common, living together in their family, doing almost everything together, attending all of the same schools, and the fact that they are so close in age.

I asked Cassandra to explain how these relationships affected her spirituality. What she most realized was that they shared similar views and could talk about things, which was particularly evident in their nightly talks about family and extended family. These conversations provided deeper insight, “Oh, my aunt or my uncle said *this*, and that’s not *cool!*” To which another responded, “*Yeah*. I noticed. And that’s not cool.” She revealed that by sharing so much in common and by having the opportunity to talk about things, it made them grow closer together daily. She described the feeling this produced as, “Not happy, but *warm*, just to know that you have this back-up system” (A224).

Curious as to why she associated this with spirituality, I asked her to enlighten me. Cassandra identified that common values shared with her sisters were the source of a powerful bond for her, that within this context she was able to explore and to express her own thoughts and feelings and was able to realize her own identity in a safe context.

As a family, and my sisters growing up, obviously, the same way *I* did, we were taught the same *values*. Even if we received our education individually, we still come back to that full circle. We think immigration’s the same, abortion’s the same. It’s kind of creepy sometimes, we think so *identically*. But, I think that’s how it’s important for *my* spirituality, because, I can express how I feel with *them*, and just those little sharing times. And it feels very spiritual. (C225)

She concluded that it was this sharing of common values that contributed so significantly to the growth and formation of her spirituality.

Catalysts for Growth: Spiritual Identity Formation

Cassandra expressed a belief that the spiritual embodies more than religion. “It’s like a way of life. Beliefs, religious, but also beliefs you just learn from society, from

experience” (A23). Remembering her first interview, I was interested to hear how Cassandra would articulate her list of beliefs. She provided examples of significant social issues and explained personal life experiences that had led her to the convictions she then held:

Definitely, school has helped me think about things, different issues that have been in the media or big issues in politics that link with spirituality, I think, such as abortion. I’m very *passionate* about that. I have my set of beliefs and I *say* when I don’t agree with somebody on that issue, I speak my mind. And issues with capital punishment, [and] immigration, I try to say what I believe, because I *know* that what I believe is the actions [*sic*] I *take* every day. Like a lot of my family is undocumented. So I believe that it’s right for these people to be here, to get their papers and documents to stay here and work...

I see that my parents were undocumented immigrants and I could tell that they struggled a lot. What they talk about, what they show us their life was when they first came into this country—when they first came here. And just seeing my family right now, there’s a lot of sadness to go back, yet—to Mexico—yet they *can’t*, because if they do, they’ll lose their job. They’ll lose their home and it’s really hard. And, I think a lot of people don’t think about that, they kinda [*sic*] just think, “Oh. They’re here and they’re just gonna take our jobs away.” At least that’s what I hear from a lot of people here.

But, if you realize that these people come here—*most* of them come here for their families to get a job. And I could say that with all my family members who don’t have the legal documentation that they come here for their families. They’re here to work. They’re here to better themselves. Because things are better off *here* than they would be in Mexico. It’s a lot harder to find a job. It’s a lot harder to get good health care. It’s just overall harder to raise family when you don’t have resources. (A180-183)

Cassandra’s explanation expressed her valuing of family. I asked her to explain the sadness to which she had referred. She stated,

There’s a lot of sadness, I think, because they’re *here* and they can’t go *back*. And if they do, it’s harder to get in. And because we have the privilege of going back to Mexico, and being able to visit our family. You never know what’s gonna happen. Like, if my grandma suddenly dies, or if another sister, or another brother of my mom’s family passes away. It’s a big issue, but my aunts and uncles have to think twice about everything. They can’t react and act on the spot; according to that situation, they have to think about the consequences.

That's what I think is very sad, as well as my family. Because, it should be something that's automatic if you want to go back, see how your family's doing. Just being back home, but you can't do that. And that's very upsetting, because my uncles always reminisce on [*sic*] their good times in Mexico, being with their friends and they can't go back.

I hear them talk about it, and it makes me feel a little guilty 'cause I have that privilege of going back. We try to go every summer. That's like our reward, you could say. And they can't get that reward. They're working every...almost every day of the year. It's not stable. They don't have a stable job, because they don't have papers. Their families are at risk because just driving by, the police could stop and ask them for an ID, and they don't *have* one. And that's what—it's very dangerous, and it's very *upsetting* because, they want to be here, yet, they yearn to go back. (A184-186)

Cassandra carried feelings of guilt about her family's situation. Not in a way that she punished herself, but that she thought "I have something that other's *don't have* and these people are in my family" (A188). She expressed feeling an inner conflict when her uncles asked if she and her family were going to Mexico in the upcoming summer. She would reply hesitantly, "Yes" (A188), but struggled to contain her excitement because she did not want to seem like she was "showing off" or "rubbing it in their faces" (A188).

I asked her to explain her feelings looking forward to her visits to Mexico. She stated that she was always excited, that this was the highlight of her year. She referred to Mexico as going "back home." She articulated a deep family bond that included the people of the village:

You just feel that you belong there; the rest of your family's there. It's just a lot more carefree, you could say, being around people you know, and everyone speaks the same language. Everyone knows what you're talking about. They eat the same thing. You have parties, and it's just a good experience. (A191)

Sometimes her mother advised not telling her uncles, that they would find out once the family had gone. Cassandra said that if her uncles knew the family was returning to Mexico, they would become upset. They did not speak of their feelings, but Cassandra

could see the pain on their faces, “Because they want to go and they can’t. And we can” (A189). Cassandra was not comfortable with her mother’s suggestion. At times, she felt her uncles should be told before her family left, but she felt the information should be kept quiet. “I know it’s family, but sometimes you try to do things not to hurt them... So, that’s the main reason why I *feel* guilty and I don’t like not telling them that we’re going” (A190).

I could hear how deeply she had grown to care about her family and to cherish them. It appeared that this deep caring and empathy for her family were evidence of a lifelong formation of her spirituality. I asked her to express how she perceived that these experiences had shaped her spirituality. She explained that this was all she had known since her birth; she had grown up knowing that some family members had not been able to experience the privileges she and her immediate family do. At the same time, she had not experienced the pain the others carried with them.

I sensed the connection between these experiences and her personal definition of spirituality and probed for more explanation. Cassandra articulated that class discussions had made her more aware of how she felt about immigration and other social issues. She illuminated her perception of spirituality: to have a set of beliefs and to display those beliefs authentically through one’s actions. She went on to state,

It’s still kind of hard to me, because I hear more people [classmates] talk about how they disagree with *my stance* on immigration. I mean, [many] agree, but I think I pay more attention to those that *don’t* agree with me. Just because, I want to tell them, “You don’t *know* what it’s like.” Because a lot of people [students] that *tell* me how the people that come here without documents, they’re not right and they just want to take our jobs. I...I...get upset. I pay more attention [to them] because I say, “You don’t even know what it’s like.” I’m not even in that *circumstance*, but I have family and I see it. So, I think that’s how it affects me spiritually.

[I feel] very strong, sometimes defensive, when I see people don't understand that most of these people come for good reasons. I don't try to push people to believe how I *do*, I just try to push people to see things how *I* see them. Like, I tell them, "What if your parent was *this*?" Or "what if your parent was *that*?" (A193-194)

The Value of Spirituality

Cassandra expressed that she values her spirituality. What she valued most about her spirituality was how life experiences had impacted her enabling her to grow. She was comforted by the knowledge that her firm beliefs and subsequent actions were a result of her life experiences, as opposed to resulting from what others had told her to do or to believe. With the exception of her weekly church attendance, which Cassandra self-consciously commented was due more to adhering to a family tradition, Cassandra wholeheartedly expressed, "My spirituality is my own set of beliefs" (A334) and she could clearly see the progression of their development since childhood.

She acknowledged that her spirituality impacted her in many different ways. One such impact affected the way she viewed and evaluated issues in her social justice class at THS, particularly since the class content dealt with issues concerning human beings, their well-being, and each student's beliefs about these issues. Cassandra expressed that her spirituality affected how she responded to material in other classes, as well, citing, "You evaluate it, not necessarily as good or bad, just getting your own *idea*, your own opinions" (A336).

Cassandra affirmed that her spirituality held an important part in shaping who she was and how she viewed the world. For these reasons, she valued her spirituality. She expressed confidence that it would continue to grow as she moved on to college. With enthusiasm, she envisioned the new experiences that college would bring to her, with the opportunity to make personal decisions with greater independence. She anticipated rich

class discussions, and that she would be free to enroll in a broader selection of courses more suited to her interests. Finally, Cassandra speculated that college would provide an opportunity for her to learn about a variety of new topics; topics that would provide opportunities for forming new opinions and ideas, and that would contribute to the ongoing growth of her spirituality.

Cassandra Ramirez: Interpretive Critique

Cassandra defined spirituality as “having a set of beliefs and validating the authenticity of those beliefs by one’s action”. She perceived herself as a very spiritual person. Cassandra’s responses expressed a perception that her spiritual life-world was the most predominant life-world through which she viewed her existential reality. All of her other life-worlds were subordinated to this aspect of her life, and have served to support and to form her spiritual life-world perspective. As Cassandra’s self-identity was formed throughout her adolescent years, influenced by both family and school environments, she has integrated the experiences and contexts of her life with a sense of moral values. This intertwining of values with her experiences and life-world contexts has enabled the formation of a personality and existential perspective that are at one with her moral values. For Cassandra, her personal identity cannot be separated from the values and beliefs that she held, and it was this perspective that she viewed as her spirituality.

The physical, spatial, and temporal life-worlds of Cassandra’s being-in-the-world, within the context of her immediate family and broader extended family, have influenced Cassandra’s spiritual life-world perspective. Cassandra has learned the harsh reality of those who immigrate to another country in search of a better life without proper documentation. She has learned firsthand of the fears and sacrifices this status brings. She

has witnessed the suffering experienced by her family members on a daily basis. The fear of being identified and deported significantly impacts the security of her relatives' physical life-worlds and is further magnified by sorrow because they cannot return to their homeland for fear of losing the jobs and homes they have secured in this country. They suffer the loss of being with their family of origin in order to secure a life for their own well-being and children. Witnessing these environmental factors has shaped Cassandra's convictions about social issues; therefore, these experiences have shaped her spirituality. Her temporal life-world has held love and empathy for her family and has listened to strong values expressed by her adult family members throughout her life, factors which have influenced the shaping of her spirituality. Cassandra reported that she had witnessed the development of her values and beliefs over time, and that these were what made her strong spiritually.

Cassandra's Catholic school teachers influenced the formation of her identity and of her morals and values. She described how she began to think differently about religion and about her own beliefs as a result of the teaching methods engaged by her junior high religion teachers who challenged Cassandra and her classmates to think about their beliefs. This was a turning point for Cassandra, as it was the first time that she experienced religion taught from this perspective, rather than solely the pouring of information into the students. This format caused Cassandra to begin to think about her own beliefs of religion.

In addition, she expressed that the religion classes taken at THS provided opportunities for students to study and to discuss social justice issues. This context revealed further spiritual growth for Cassandra. The classroom scenario caused

Cassandra to reflect on the personal life experiences of her family members, juxtaposed with the social policies held by the United States' government regarding immigration, abortion, and other topics. Studying these issues, Cassandra identified her own views and beliefs about the topics. Subsequently faced with the opposing views of her classmates on the issues, Cassandra's views became more deeply confirmed and integrated through a conscious choice to embrace her own beliefs rather than go with the popular opinion.

Finally, Cassandra expressed that she could not separate herself from the spiritual part of herself. It was through her beliefs and values that Cassandra defined her identity. She perceived this part of herself as her spirituality and, even more, as her very self. Therefore, spirituality held great meaning for Cassandra; for her to deny her spirituality would be to deny herself.

Diana Martinez: Essence of Change

Definition of Spirituality

Diana explained that for most of her life she had never heard the word "spirituality" as it was not used in any of her classes throughout Catholic elementary school or in any other dimension. Yet, she pointed out that this was not the case for the term "religion": "*Religion, it's everywhere. It's in the school, at home, in my classes*" (C68). It was only during her senior year that she became aware of the concept of spirituality. She expressed a sense of awe from the experience of growing in this awareness. "In the last six months is when I actually *discovered* that there's a word for what I was feeling or what was there" (C40). She recounted how she came to this awareness,

In the confirmation classes, we did start talking about spirituality. I asked the teacher, well, I told her I thought it was your *religion*. And she said that that was

just *part* of it. That it wasn't *all* of it. That there were many other components to it. I asked her "What?" and she didn't tell me. She said, by when I get confirmed, "*You* should be the one who answers that question." And so, my *new* understanding of it is that it has to do with your *soul*, and with the essence of who you *are* and who you *want* to be and the goals you have for yourself. And it also has to do with your faith in God. And all of those have to grow *together*. (C69)

Her understanding of spirituality became further nuanced during her senior religion course at THS, entitled *Women's Spirituality*, in which she came to view spirituality in terms of personal characteristics that, when lived, improve one's quality of life.

I used to think of spirituality as interchangeable with religion. That's what it meant to me. But since we had women's spirituality last semester. And it just described the different qualities that people have inside of them that helps them be better people. We had this book called *Women's Spirituality* [Chittister, 2006]. And it talked about the different women in the Bible. And, each woman had a special trait about her. There was like, Esther, she was like leadership and Deborah was...patience...So that just helped me *define* what it was and it helped me see how it plays a role in my life. (C41)

She spoke then from a more integrated perspective of her understanding of spirituality. "To me spirituality has to do with your *soul*. It has to do with the person you *are* and how at peace you are with yourself" (C42). She viewed spirituality as being connected to religion as the means through which one was able to have faith in God.

It has to do with religion, in that it's your connection with God. Through your spirituality, you are able to believe in him. Because it's really hard to *relate* to him and to *picture* him in your mind. But, through your spirituality, you *know* you're able to do all those things. (C42)

And also, spirituality, it's not *just* for people who have religion, I think it's like, it's part of your soul. It's like...it IS your soul. It's who *you* are in essence. Not just how your circumstances have shaped you, or your environment. It's *who* you are. (C43)

Spirituality: Catalyst for Personal Growth

Asked to describe her spirituality as a senior in high school, Diana expressed an

awareness of her own personal growth:

Right now, I feel that it's grown stronger. I feel like my spirituality, it's kind of like my reflection, sort of like when you...see yourself in the mirror. It's not what other people see. Or, sometimes it can be, but it's basically what *I* see I am. And also what I *want* to be. It is...partly being a woman of faith who has faith. But it's also being...a person who...realizes all this because it is *important*...in your life. And God is—like the most important thing in your life. (C140)

Illustrating the effects of her current spirituality, Diana articulated several ways that she had grown personally. First, she discussed that she believed she had become more open with others, especially with her parents. Previously, she dated without her parents' knowledge and at times lied to them about her whereabouts, but she recognized a new openness in herself that enabled her to communicate regularly with her parents about the places and the people that she was about. She identified this as growing in openness. "I would ask them permission if I could go out...And so, that was also part of growing up and *being*...more mature about things, since I didn't let them know what I was doing [before]" (C153).

She recounted an occasion when, at 16 years old, she first brought a young man home to meet her parents. Anxiously awaiting their reaction, their lukewarm response provided an opportunity for Diana to learn and to grow in self-knowledge as she talked later with her mother about the boy. As a result, Diana's trust and confidence in her mother grew, strengthening their relationship.

Diana observed another change that fostered growth in self-confidence about her behaviors. After practicing to ask permissions of her parents, she came to realize that by *overly* asking, she was inadvertently looking for the approval of others. She tapered off her permission-seeking, as she recognized that she needed to do more for herself.

"Now...if I do something, I do it for myself. I don't need that approval that I used to need

before” (C148). She acknowledged that this made her feel unsure at times, because she could no longer rely on others as she had in the past. Chuckling, Diana remarked, “So, now, since I’m not reliant on those people, all the effects of what I do, or the consequences of what I do, all comes down on *me*” (C149).

The changes she sensed within were noticed by others. She dated the first young man she brought home to meet her parents for about two months. After breaking off the relationship, the young man continued to talk with Diana’s mother through phone calls and visits. This made Diana angry. However, it meant that she had to continue seeing him in her home. Diana recalled that during the time they were dating, she was unhappy with him and she felt uncomfortable. She had not felt free to be herself. After several months of his continued contact with her mother, Diana began to speak her thoughts freely in his presence. Pleased with herself, Diana reported the young man’s observation,

But after we broke up, I *would be* myself. And so, he *saw* that. And so, one day, he’s like, “You know what, Diana? This is so...*weird*.... when we *were* dating, we would never talk. And now that we’re *not* dating,” he was like, “we talk all the *time*. And then when we *were* dating,” he was like, “That never *happened!* And now you *talk!* Now you’re *different*. You...you *talk*...you have things to *say*.” (C164-165)

Diana viewed this as one of her most significant changes; that she was no longer looking for approval from the young man in order to be herself. She had come to feel free enough to “just let who I really *am out*” (C166).

Relationships: Source of Spiritual Growth

Diana believed that many things had shaped her into being the person who she was presently, but she spoke specifically about various relationships that had contributed to her spiritual growth. She began dating her first boyfriend at the age of 14; he was 18. She explained that this friend occupied much of her time, and, as a result, her grades

dropped as he kept her on the phone all night with issues of his own that he looked to her to help him fix. After a while, Diana realized that she was being harmed by this relationship. Yet, rather than breaking up with this boyfriend, she continued the friendship as she felt much compassion for him in the painful family situation that was his. The friendship ended when the boyfriend joined the Navy and was deployed to Iraq. Diana grieved that she never heard from him again as she had truly cared for him. She stated that this had been a major relationship in her life.

Diana described other relationships in which she felt people, mostly boyfriends, had treated her badly (C47). She explained that it was not that boys had physically harmed her, but that they thought of her “as an object” (C47). Diana tearfully recounted that, during this time, she went from one bad relationship with a boy to another. Diana perceived that these relationships were “bad” because she considered some of the boys’ behaviors unpleasant. She provided a few examples of what she considered unpleasant behavior: Some boys called her only when they were bored; some, when they were with her, played video games instead of paying attention to her; or they tried to engage sexually with her. Diana found the sexual behavior with its accompanying pressures most uncomfortable and made her want to get away from these boyfriends. She explained,

I would be so uncomfortable, I would [want to] get away from them. If the conversation started leaning that way, I’d switch the subject, but they would always go back to that. And so, when they got too far, because they were always like, want to pressure me to have sex with them. And I never would. That’s when I would break up with them and just go with another guy. But then, he always ended up going that way. And so, that’s when I would just switch from guys to guys [*sic*]. (C48)

I asked Diana how these things affected her spiritually. She explained that, while these boyfriends made her feel badly, she did have one good friend who was protective of

her. She found in him someone who held a positive perception of her and someone whom she could trust. She decided to confide in him about the experiences she had had with previous boyfriends and, because she felt so badly about the past, she decided to “tell him everything” (C49). Her friend responded, telling her that she had the power within to change things in her life (C49).

Her friend’s words significantly impacted Diana. Feeling dissatisfied with the present condition of her life, she described, “It was just horrible” (C50). She was having problems with her mom because of her many boyfriends, because of the amount of time she was spending on the phone, because of her argumentativeness, and because of a decline in her grades, which had never happened to her before (C50). Diana realized that her life was out of order. She expressed this,

I realized how bad things were and how bad they *could* be because they weren’t that bad since I hadn’t, like, *done* anything with any of the guys, but, I knew if I stayed in a relationship like that, I might end up...I just never wanted to go that far. (C51)

Her friend’s words stimulated both insight and motivation that she had the power within herself to change. As a result, Diana proceeded to make serious changes in her life:

I decided to change just who I was and who I talked to and stuff. And so, that’s when I asked my mom if I could change my phone number and if I could get another phone [crying]. She said “yes.” So I got another one and I just started changing my life from then on. (C52)

She began to pour herself into her schoolwork knowing that her studies were a priority for her mom. She changed her cell phone number, quit participating in chat rooms, and, therefore, spent less time on the computer and more time on her studies. When good grade reports reappeared at home, typical of her elementary years, her mom was happy and Diana was relieved, as she had never wanted to disappoint her mom. She began to

feel better about herself (C53). In addition, she became more involved in extra-curricular activities at school, such as soccer, Latinas Unidas, and campus ministry.

Diana further disclosed the impact that this particular male friend had had on her. Suffering from serious health issues himself, Diana observed, “He was *happy* even though he had all these issues!” (C56). When the young man told her that she had the strength within herself to make changes in her life, she believed him. She knew, deep inside, that she possessed the strength, as she remembered receiving affirmations from her Catholic elementary school teachers about the leadership skills she displayed. This memory was the final impetus Diana needed to change. “I knew I had to change, that I wasn’t right” (C56).

Diana’s enrollment at THS further provided the needed support to make the changes. Although, initially, she was opposed to the single-gender status of THS, she came to realize that this factor had helped her to focus. In addition, she began to make friends at THS. At the time of the interviews, she spoke of one friend in particular with whom she had been able to confide the painful events of her past, and from whom she had found acceptance and caring. This friendship was a source of healing for Diana (C58).

I asked Diana to summarize how she viewed all of these events spiritually. She explained that involvement in her studies, in school activities and extra-curricular organizations had helped her to be more *aware* of spirituality. She conveyed the impact with this response:

It has really helped me grow, because I have been in a lot of different situations. And they have shaped who I am on the outside, and on the inside, sometimes, they help me grow in my spirituality, and other times they *don’t*. But they also teach me what *not* to do [smiles] and they show me that there are different paths

that I can take. It has taught me that there is [*sic*] always gonna [*sic*] be people in your life...that they always come and go. But that I have the strength to *let* them go, and to allow them to come *into* my life. So, I have become stronger and more independent and I rely more on myself. (C60)

She found herself opening up more to people who came into her life. She expressed feeling freer of the guilt and shame from her past. While the memories had not been erased, she stated, “I realize that there are more important things to worry about than just to be thinking about that” (C61). In fact, she articulated feelings of gratitude for what she had experienced because she could now feel compassion for other girls younger than she who were taking the same steps that she had, and she was able to offer them advice. She provided this example:

There’s a particular girl on the soccer team, and she’s doing the *same* thing I did. But, I think she’s advancing more rapidly. And so, I tell her every time I can, like, I let her talk to me about, “Oh, you know, this happened with this guy” or “I did this.” And I listen to her, and then afterwards, I just tell her, “And how did that make you feel?” Like, “Are you *okay* with it?” And like, “Do you think that later on you’re going to regret it?” So, now, I’m able to talk to her. (C63)

Diana’s perception of the degree to which she had changed was manifested in the mentoring relationships she now had with younger girls on the soccer team and on Latinas Unidas. Awareness of the role she played in their lives and of the opportunity she had to help others with what she, herself, had learned filled her with joy.

And like, *through* Latinas Unidas, that’s like, one of my bigger issues, because most of the girls *in* the club, they’re, they’re all freshmen I think, except for like maybe five...they’re like juniors, or something else. But most of them *are* freshmen. And, for *me*, everything that I *did* experience, it was in my freshman year. So, now, when I see them, I’m able to talk to them and just help them...in any way I can, so they don’t...have to go through *everything* I did. (C64)

Confirmation Class: Inspiration for Spiritual Growth

For Diana, participation in the St. Michael’s confirmation class was a catalyst for spiritual growth during the 2008-2009 school year. Diana first described the impact her

teacher's life story had had on her. The confirmation teacher shared her own troubled youth with the class: participation in gangs, drugs and alcohol, and of a contentious relationship with her father, the only parent she lived with. She further shared with her students her own self-destructive behaviors, such as burning herself with cigarettes. Finally, her teacher explained that through the Church, she had found the comfort and strength she needed to "reform" (C32) her life and that since that time, she found great joy teaching confirmation and First Communion, and by leading the Children's Choir.

Diana was deeply affected by the witness of her teacher's transformation. She spoke of her teacher with awe that "she's just really at peace with herself" (C32). Additionally, her confirmation teacher engaged Diana with care and concern in the classroom and at Sunday liturgies, helping Diana to open up more with people. Diana viewed this growth as impacting all of her relationships.

The confirmation class also affected Diana. Throughout each of the interviews, she referred to the "Fruits of the Holy Spirit"⁷ (Bible, Galatians 5:22-23) in a manner that displayed her continuing efforts to integrate these qualities into her life, especially the qualities of patience and peace, self-control, and joy. She explained that in the classes "We do exercises so we are able to *have* those qualities in ourselves" (C32). She recounted some of the exercises she had been working on outside of class to grow more conscious of the fruits of the Spirit, such as journal writing, meditation, and making intentional choices about her behaviors with others (C38, C66-67).

Diana expressed that the confirmation class had helped her to grow spiritually, as she had seen the impact of that growth manifested in her personal maturity (C38). She

⁷ Gifts of the Holy Spirit: believed to be bestowed on one at the time of receiving the sacrament of confirmation in the Catholic Church. The gifts can be found listed in the Bible in 1 Cor 12:7-1.

explained that this manifestation was evident in developing relational abilities and behaviors with self and others, and through a greater sense of personal freedom (C39).

Developing Spirituality Through Confirmation Class

I asked Diana to describe some of the changes she had noticed in her spirituality because of her participation in the St. Michael's Confirmation classes. She categorized her observations into two areas: first, she spoke of specific behaviors that had to do with her religious practices; and secondly, she spoke of her behaviors in the area of her relationships with others. She realized that many changes had more to do with an attempt to be more conscious of her actions and words.

Not necessarily bad words, but how my words affect other people. Like, sometimes I'll have bad thoughts. I'll criticize people in my head and, then, I remember my confirmation class and I'll be like, "Oh, that's wrong. I shouldn't be thinking that. That's not right." So, I'll say a quick "sorry." [laughs] And then I'll just try to think about something else. (C181)

She addressed her commitment to weekly religious practices, such as, Mass on Sundays. While she often felt tempted to sleep in and to skip Mass, she stated that, in the end, she reminded herself of the responsibility she had to attend Mass as a part of her commitment to the class.

I *chose* to go on my own. It wasn't like my mother chose for me. So, since *I* made that commitment, I have to fulfill it. I have to...abide by the rules that have been set there. And one of the rules is to go to church. (C183)

Diana explained that she was finding strength and comfort by reading the Bible when she felt depressed or anxious; a new resource inspired by her confirmation teacher. She summarized, "I've grown in my spirituality where I have more discipline of what I *say* and what I *do*." (C185).

However, Diana noted that the area of greatest concern for her had been

evaluating her behaviors while on dates and in her relationships with boys, as it was those that had affected her most in her life. She outlined the mental criteria that she had developed to help her to assess her behaviors while out on dates. Applying these criteria, she first asked herself whether or not her mother knew and had given her permission for her whereabouts. If the answer to this was yes, then Diana felt confident that she was all right. Her next step was to check herself about her behavior while on the date:

So, if my mother knows, she said I could, it's okay. And then, when I'm on the date, like if he [the boy] starts kissing me, I'll just be like, "Is this right? Should I be doing this?" Like, I'll actually think about it. And sometimes, I'll get this feeling where I think it's not right. So, I'll stop. (C186)

Diana reflected that when her confirmation classes began, she thought about her behavior when on a date, but then would go ahead and "do whatever" (C187). However, she realized that a change had taken place within her: "lately, more and more, I realize it's *wrong*" (C187). In fact, she recalled with delight a particular experience that had taken place just prior to the interview:

And so, *one* time, it was especially wrong. Like, I went to another city. And I can't specifically remember if my mother knew or not that I was there, but I went to another city and I was alone with that one guy. And then, he just started kissing me. And I was like, "This is wrong." Before I would just be like, "Okay. It's wrong. I know it's wrong" but I would go along with whatever I was doing. But that one time, I stopped—I really did. It was like, "You know what? NO. Stop." And then, at first he thought I was playing. Finally he *did* stop. And he was like, "Fine. I'll take you home." I was a little sad because he was angry.

But then I started to think about more things that we talked about in class and what God wanted us to do and stuff. And so then, I was like, "You know what? I'm not gonna get angry or sad. If he can't understand what I'm feeling, then it's okay. He doesn't have to, as long as *I* realize *why* I'm doing what I'm doing."

And so he didn't. He was *very* angry. And I was thinking about all of these things that I had learned in class and I started laughing. Because, I was like, "You know what? I'm right."...and I was *amused* that he was so angry. He couldn't see why *he* was wrong, but *I* could see why I was *right*. So, I started laughing and I laughed out loud. So, that made him *angri-er*. [both Interviewer and participant

laughing] He was like, “Don’t laugh at me!” I was like, “I’m not laughing at *you!*” (C187-190)

Diana rejoiced at the realization of her own growth in this experience. She thought to herself at the time, “I’m growing *up!*” (C191). She recalled further,

And so, *that*—that *day* when I got home, I was just like, “Okay. Today.” It was like a stepping stone for me. Because I was like, “No. What I did was right.” And I *felt* good about it and I felt like that day I had respected myself. And I had respected *God* by...stopping something that I didn’t—that I wasn’t comfortable and that I felt was wrong. So, that was one of the times that I’ve really...just...felt elevated by that feeling. (C192)

Later, when Diana returned home, she shared the event with her mother. Telling her mother that she had laughed, Diana said that her mother thought it was hilarious and they both laughed together. She confided the event later to her friend at THS who affirmed her for the growth that had taken place. Diana was especially grateful for this acknowledgement “because she *knows* all about my *past* relationships. And when she saw this, she was like, ‘See! You *are* changing!’ It made me feel very good and like, I was *right!*” (C194).

The Value of Spirituality

Diana found it hard to describe what spirituality meant to her in her life. However, she explained that she had come to believe that spirituality and one’s soul were closely related. She expressed her belief as:

I think everyone has *spirituality*, just like everyone has a *soul*. And it’s sort of like the *essence* of who you are. It’s something that like...sometimes you don’t notice, and you don’t really think about it until someone *asks* you or until you’ve really faced some instances in your life that really have made you question things in your life. (C259)

Diana perceived an element of fluidity about spirituality explaining that, not only did it have to do with who a person was in the present, but with who he or she was in the past,

and who he or she desired to be in the future. In this way, Diana articulated that spirituality possessed the essential core of a human being while, at the same time, it embraces *change* or the possibility of change for the future within the individual.

So, I think spirituality has to do with that. With...with your soul and with...who you *are* and...who you will become and who you *want* to be. I think it also has to do with how you have *changed*, like who you *were*. Because, that has—the things in your past are the things—or the environment and the things that you have faced in your life, those are what *shape* your spirituality. Those are what tell you...they make you be the way you *are*. And so, spirituality...it has to do with *that*. Like, with your core—with your core. (C260)

Diana sensed several influences that shape one's spirituality. For example, she explained, environmental factors, such as one's school, have an impact, and one's religion has an impact, although she qualified her understanding of the impact of religion making a distinction between religion and spirituality. Diana asserted that when spirituality was approached through religion, that it implied more of a connection with God and that this was the primary message that religion offered. However, she believed that spirituality was more than that. She affirmed that spirituality was a person's *core*, and if viewed in this way, it was one's connection to God, and it was one's connection to others. She provided an example, offering the manner of one of her teachers to illustrate her point:

I think it's *more* than that. It's *who* you are. It's your *core*. It is your connection to God, in a way, but it's also your connection to everyone else. Because, sometimes...just the way you are, like Mr. Peterson, his spirituality—I think—it has to do with his connection with other people, like the way he comes off to you. You don't even have to talk to someone sometimes to be able to see their spirituality or to be able to see there's *something* there. Like, it's not easily recognizable, but it's sort of like a feeling you get or something that comes across when you see someone or when you meet somebody. (C262)

Asked to describe her own spirituality, Diana exclaimed, "I think my spirituality hit puberty or something" (C263), to which we both laughed. Diana continued explaining

that previously her spirituality had been like a child in the sense that she was neither aware of it, nor did she believe that she had it. However, in the few months prior to our interviews, “It hit puberty because it’s starting to come out and it’s finally maturing and growing and I can recognize it” (C263). The awareness that her spirituality had been changing made her happy and she was confident that it would continue to grow and to help her to become a better person.

Finally, Diana explained that her spirituality had provided her with a sense of fulfillment or inner satisfaction. The emptiness she felt in the past had prompted her participation in many relationships as a means of filling a gap. “But then, when my spirituality started to grow, I didn’t have that gap anymore. Or if I *do*, sometimes, when I feel it, it’s sort of like, it’s okay because it [shows] the room *for* my spirituality to grow” (C264). She clarified, “It’s not a gap, it’ll get filled in eventually” (C264).

Returning to the question of what meaning spirituality held in her life, Diana expressed that her spirituality was important; it had provided the impetus for decisions she had made recently. For this reason, she recognized that her spirituality was of greater value to her at the present time because of its strong influence on her, in contrast with the past, when she made decisions without thought or restraint. She perceived that the awakened presence of spirituality within her influenced her decision-making directing her or guiding her choices regarding her impulses and desires. Offering an example, Diana shared that her decision to be confirmed had been like this, that she had decided to enroll in the confirmation class so that she could understand Catholicism better. She believed that this decision had been prompted by her spirituality. She further cited the decisions she had been making about her behaviors. She explained that as a result of her developing

spirituality, she had grown stronger and was able to stand up for her own feelings with others and to have less concern for what others thought about her.

Diana expressed that her spirituality meant many things to her, such that she considered spirituality as an all-encompassing entity that embraced and influenced many other aspects of her life: “It encompasses my conscience, it encompasses my feelings, my thoughts, the actions. Like, this is my spirituality and then there’s [*sic*] all these other things that I do and they’re *guided by* my spirituality” (C276). To illustrate her understanding of this holistic and integrative impact spirituality had had on her, Diana compared spirituality to an umbrella with “all these other things under it” (C277). She stated,

Before, I felt like the umbrella was really small and that like, it *didn’t* have an impact on all the other little things underneath, but now, the umbrella is growing bigger and it *does* impact all these things. So, like, right now, it’s not as big as it could be, because I still don’t see it. Like, sometimes in school or just in my classes, I don’t see it. But I *do* see it in other things where I have to make hard decisions. So, it’s still growing. (C277)

Projecting how she foresaw the role that her spirituality would play in her life in the future as she prepared to go on to college, she anticipated that her spirituality would grow in importance for her because she recognized that its presence in her life encouraged her to make good choices. While she was still not willing to abide by the guidance that her spiritual self offered to her at the present time, she anticipated that she needed to grow more before she was fully willing to make the choices that she sensed were better for her. She explained,

Right now, it’s like another stage in life. It’s kind of like I just hit puberty, so it’s *there*, but I still have to mature and *get* to adulthood. And I think as I get to adulthood, it will also start growing because I will be able to prioritize things differently and set values on other things. Right now, my spirituality *is* important, but there is [*sic*] also other things that impede it from being *as* important as it

could be. (C278-279)

She described a primary impediment that was currently keeping her from considering her spirituality to be of greater importance. In this context, she referred to her spirituality as a presence within that spoke with a voice of authority, and she felt if she listened completely to this voice, that she would miss out on fun things in life and that it would make her life boring. “Sometimes I feel if I just listen to my spirituality, I’ll always be safe. But, sometimes...I feel like in order to learn in life, I have to make mistakes so I can learn from them” (C280).

I asked Diana for clarification saying, “Do I understand you correctly: Your spirituality is important to you, but not *that* important, because there are times you don’t want to listen to it?” Diana replied, “Yeah. I *want* it to be more important, I *do*, but right now, it’s not *as* important. It’s getting more important. Like, I know it’s a great deal more important than it *had* been, but it’s still not *as*...” (C282). She cited examples from the past when she did not listen to what the voice of her spirituality advised her to do adding that she had no feelings of regret. She explained that this was now different for her; if she did not listen to that advice she sensed within, she would be preoccupied with the feeling that what she was doing was not right, to the point that she could not enjoy herself. She acknowledged that by acting against that inner message, she had found that there was no pleasure in carrying out the task or event. Whereas, when she listened, she felt different:

When I do listen, it feels like one of Ms. Green’s [English teacher] compliments. [laughs] It feels like I did something *right*. And so, I get this feeling of being light-weight and what I did do *was* right. It just helps me as a person. It helps me feel better with myself. And it helps me see the good things inside of me when I *do* do that.

SE: That’s a nice thing, isn’t it?

Diana: Yeah. [exhales with relief] (C288-289)

Diana Martinez: Interpretive Critique

Diana's perception of spirituality was that spirituality is one's essence, one's greatest truth. She stated several times, "Spirituality has to do with your *soul* and with the essence of who you *are* and who you *want* to be." She described that one's spirituality includes goals for one's future, one's faith in God, and personal characteristics that, when lived, improve one's life. Diana perceived that spirituality influenced her other life-worlds, relational, spatial, temporal, or, that spirituality was influenced by these other life-worlds.

Viewing spirituality as the essence of her being, Diana qualified this as that which is the deepest truth that she knew herself to be, not what others might attempt to define her as being. She expressed this as, "What I see *I am*" and "What I *want* to be." Within this understanding of her truest self, Diana articulated an awareness of her own autonomy as a human being. She included within her self-description that she was a woman of faith and identified God as the most important thing in her life; however, she perceived that the essence of herself, that which comprised her spirituality, would still exist whether or not she embraced faith in God.

For Diana, the seeking of a more authentic mode of being held great value. Through the perspectives of her life-worlds, spatial, temporal, and relational, Diana expressed an awareness of and great value for the change that had taken place within herself in the recent past. She perceived this awareness of change within the context of an ongoing experience of her spirituality. She described personal growth that had occurred in her behaviors impacting her relationships for the better. For example, the changes in her personal growth allowed her to be more truthful and transparent, thus improving her

relationships with her parents, particularly with her mom. She viewed these changes as evidence of her spiritual growth.

One specific relationship provided impetus for personal transformation in Diana. She recounted a period of time in her early adolescence that had been laden with unpleasant dating experiences and interactions with teenage boys. These weighed heavily on her sense of self and belief in her ability to form healthy relationships with boys. In addition, she perceived that her life had been “out of order.” Through the respectful friendship of a young man, she disclosed the painful memories and expressed her displeasure with her present state of being. Truth was revealed to Diana through her friend’s words and example. With new insight and motivation, she realized that she had the power within herself to change her life situation as well as to change herself. She decided to seek a more authentic state of being and expression of herself. She applied new effort to various aspects of her life, such as her academics, family relationships, behavior around boys, and opened herself to the possibility of transformation. Diana credited the ensuing transformation and movement into greater authenticity to growth in her spirituality.

In one of her explanations of spirituality, Diana stated, “Spirituality is your *soul*, it is *who* you are, your *essence*, not only how your circumstances have shaped you or your environment” (C260). By this, Diana expressed awareness that both life experiences and spatial environments had an impact on one’s spirituality. She noted the positive effect THS had on her life and growing spirituality through various factors present within the school: (1) the strong academic structure provided support for Diana to improve her grades; (2) the single-gender character of the school helped her to focus on her class

work; (3) the variety of extra-curricular opportunities in which she became involved fostered self-confidence and the awareness of her spirituality; and (4) new friendships formed with classmates helped Diana to heal as a result of their acceptance and care for her, and helped her to grow in trust and transparency. Diana noted that THS had impacted more than just “the outside,” but informed her “inside” by teaching Diana what not to do and by showing her the choices available to her through a variety of different paths.

Diana further explicated the effect that the environment of her confirmation class had had on her spiritual growth. She described that her confirmation teacher had been particularly influential in Diana’s awakening by hearing the teacher’s life story and by the attention the teacher paid to Diana, trying to draw her into healthy relational exchanges. The course content provided an array of material for Diana to consider as new modes of being through the study of spiritual virtues, referred to as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Diana summarized that the content, including the activities and experiences, of her confirmation class had provided her the opportunity to reflect on her own personal growth manifested in developing relational abilities and behaviors. Her self-reflection led to a deepened realization of the growth that had taken place within herself, a realization that provided Diana with a greater sense of self-knowledge and esteem, and, thus, greater personal freedom. Finally, she noted that by her involvement in the confirmation class, she had come to embrace a greater value for the practice of her religion, which provided spiritual support.

Diana described small changes within her relationships that had taken shape in her interactions with boys and in dating situations. A turning point occurred for Diana with regard to her behaviors with boys on a date one evening. Through the new values that

Diana had integrated as a result of the confirmation class and combined influences at THS, Diana was able to recognize the incongruence of engaging in sexual behavior with her new-found sense of right and wrong, and with a greater awareness of God's will for her. With a sudden burst of conviction, Diana's "NO" spoken that night, defined a clear boundary for her that resonated within, as it seemed to coincide with what she believed God wanted for her. This event opened Diana to new insight, awareness, and understanding, and she felt exhilarated.

Feeling triumphant, Diana realized that she had come to greater clarity of who she really was, unadulterated by clouds of negative feelings about herself. This insight provided for Diana greater awareness of what it meant to be human. She realized that who one was in the past did not define who one is in the present, nor in the future. Thus, Diana's understanding of spirituality encompassed the whole temporal human life perspective of past, present, and future. She expressed that spirituality possessed the essential core of a human being, while at the same time, it embraced the possibility of change within the individual in the future.

Diana valued her spirituality. She found it important in her life because of the impetus it provided for making good decisions about her behaviors and her relationships. She recognized that her spirituality was currently of greater value to her in the present than it had been in the past. She felt greater inner freedom, was more able to stand up for herself, and less concerned by what she perceived others thought of her. She attributed an all-encompassing quality to her spirituality that embraced her feelings, thoughts, and actions, which were guided by her spirituality. Diana's stronger sense of self and perceived growth resulted in a deeper conviction of the importance of spirituality.

However, as one anticipating moving away to college in the near future, she refrained from a complete and total embrace of her spirituality, saying that she did not want to be guided so much by it that she would be denied the fun life still held for her in the future.

Maria Washington: A Life Commitment to Relationship with God

Defining Spirituality

Maria expressed her perception clearly and definitively that spirituality is a relationship with God. She asserted further her understanding that spirituality is *not* religion, rather, “Spirituality is *relationship*, it’s a really *intense* relationship with God” (B239). Maria expressed a belief that God desires people to be in relationships with him. She explained, “He *wants* you to grow higher in him spiritually” (B323). She continued,

To really be spiritual, you have to spend time with God. It’s a *relationship*. You have to pray to him. You have to read your Word, because, that is the only way that we can *be* spiritual; we *read* something and we do things that are *spiritual*. You know, we have to *talk* to God, who is the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit, who is all in One. He’s God. And in order to be like him, you have to talk to him, and you have to spend time with him. But if you don’t *do* that, there’s no possible way that you can be spiritual. To know and have wisdom of God, you have to spend time with him and his word. And *that’s* how people become spiritual. (B35)

Clarifying the distinction between spirituality and religion, Maria explained religion as

When you *know* the protocol, you know what you’re *supposed* to do, you *know* what the Bible says. [placing hand on desk with emphasis at each point] But, spirituality is when you actually *do* it, to me. It’s like, *anybody* can be religious, anybody can say that they’re Christian. Anybody can, you know, believe in God. I mean, well, not anybody, but, most people say, “Oh yeah. I believe in God.” (B34)

Religion, is just going to church, you know, having *respect* for God, and doing what you do in the church, but as far as having a spiritual connection with our Lord and Savior, that doesn’t come by just going to church every once in awhile or, [big sigh]... just being in some type of position. That doesn’t make you spiritual. You know what I’m saying? It has to come from within. It has to come from your heart, and really...focus on *living* for God. It’s a life-thing, it’s a lifestyle. *Spirituality is a life-style. Religion is just something that you do.* (B36)

Frequently throughout the interviews, Maria referred to spirituality, this relationship with God, manifesting her conviction in the thoughts, feelings, and experiences she described. In one particular experience, she recounted a growth-filled episode that had been unfolding in the context of a precious relationship in the months prior to the interview. She believed that the relationship had fallen off course. Maria's vision of the new course needed was wholly contained within the context of her relationship with God. While she had felt a deep spiritual connection with this friend over the past two years, she believed that the outcome of any human relationship in her own life would be according to God's will, not to either her own or to the will of her friend. She articulated a deep trust that everything in her life would happen according to God's will and that it was better to let go of her own desires to allow those things that God had in store for her to happen. She explained, "God knows *when* things are supposed to happen, and *how* they're supposed to happen. But the only way that they're gonna happen, and the way *he* wants them to happen is if you *let* him" (B255).

Maria revealed facets of her own relationship with God. Comparing this relationship to the experience of coming to know another in a human relationship, she expressed several dimensions of God.

I've experienced him as a *Deliverer*. He delivered me from the things that I *used* to do, like, partying, cussing, and all that stuff. And then, as a *Healer*. I was really sick when I was a child. So, I *know* that it was God that helped me. Because, even though I know that they have doctors, but God gives [*sic*] the doctor wisdom to work on me. So I know God is all these different things. Now I really want to know Him *deeper* and just really feel that I have a connection with Him. (B150)

Maria worked daily to fill herself with the Word of God and to experience God more than she already had. On days when she could not find time to sit down and read the Bible, she listened to it read on a recording saved to her iPhone.

She stated that it would never occur to her to question the existence of God, to question that he died on the cross for her, or to question that the Holy Spirit was there as her comforter. She knew that God was real; she had heard what God had done for others and she knew what God had done for her. However, she believed that these convictions could only go so far. To stave off doubts, Maria worked to stay confirmed in the Word. She affirmed that one must continue to develop herself spiritually in order to keep the mind set on God.

To illustrate her point, Maria shared a learning she had received from a friend. The friend, a pastor, believed the devil tries to tell him that God is not real. “He *knows* that for a fact that that’s not true. But as a child of God, the devil’s always gonna try to come and try to tempt you, and try to make you think things that aren’t true” (B155). From this, Maria expressed further conviction to “stay in my Word and stay prayed up” (B156). She identified this conflict as a spiritual battle and quoted scripture,

“We fight against, not flesh and blood, but against principalities, sayeth the Lord.” So, if I’m in the *flesh*, I can’t fight a spiritual warfare. And so, I *need* to be in the spirit, so I can see the different spirits that *other* people are operating in so I can know, “okay,” if I need to back up or if I can be a witness to them. (B156)

Levels of Spirituality

Maria spoke frequently of God as the source of all love. She described passing through stages in her own life from absorption in self-concern into a love for others, a love that originated from reading her Word and which filled her heart with joy and delight in God. She found herself filled up with love through her personal prayer and through her participation in communal praise and worship.

The love she felt for God poured out of her in a love for her friends, for strangers, and for her family. She described her deep love and gratitude for her parents and she held

a conviction that her relationship with God allowed her to perceive the goodness and beneficence they possessed, while she acknowledged their limitations. She stated that she thanked God daily for blessing her life with the parents God had given to her.

Frequently throughout the interviews, Maria communicated her love for friends and peers by expressing a deep desire for them to come to know and to believe in God. In this way, Maria revealed the differences she saw in her own spirituality and in others. She referred to these differences she perceived between herself and her friends as “levels of spirituality.”

Illustrating further, she provided an example referring to a song entitled *Another Level*, by the Gospel singer-songwriter, Izzy Oft. Maria explained that the song spoke of growing in a deeper relationship with God. Maria posited that the deeper one grows in relationship with God, the further he or she grows in self-knowledge and realizes a greater personal need for God. She explained,

The *deeper* you grow in your relationship with God, the more you’ll have to deal with, and the more things that you’ll have to be delivered from. Because you can’t hold on to baggage, you can’t hold on to bitterness if you’re trying to *grow* spiritually. (B323)

She divulged an awareness that her peers and many of her friends did not have the same sense of honor, love, or appreciation for God. This awareness saddened Maria. She stated, “If you don’t love God, you can’t love yourself. And if you don’t love yourself, you can’t love somebody else” (B251).

Maria’s understanding of spirituality included a larger embrace of positive relational living. She explained that when a person had been called by God into a relationship or into ministry, that person’s life would not be perfect, but she expected that the person at least try to develop good relationships with all those with whom one is

surrounded. “Family is important and even the Word of God emphasizes family and a family structure” (B324).

Maria posited that if one desired a relationship with God, that it should go hand-in-hand with a desire to have a positive relationship with family. She further expressed a belief that family was something to be grateful for, especially because many people do not have that gift. Maria stressed her own feelings of gratitude for her parents. She spoke of the importance of having a good relationship with one’s family or parents within the context of the levels of spiritual growth. She perceived familial relationships as a necessary step in one’s progression toward God and further, that this quality was one viewed by God as important. Maria explained, “Spiritually, I guess—it’s like, if you don’t have a good relationship with your parents, it’s always something that’s always gonna be a problem for you spiritually and to grow further. Because God’s not gonna take you higher unless you conquer one level of your life” (B319).

She had grown to a level within her own spirituality where she recognized that God calls those who believe to service, yet no two are ever called in the same way. For this reason, Maria longed to know the plan God had in store for her life; to know in what way she may be called to please God by letting others see God through her. She expressed great concern that she would always be a vibrant witness, “I’m not saying that I want them to *think* of me, you know, all high. That’s not it. I just want them to see that there *is* a God and there is God living inside of me” (B151).

Contemporary Experiences of Spirituality: Purpose and Mission

Maria shared that she found herself in a spiritual place of less vigor and enthusiasm than she had felt previously. No longer experiencing the high excitement of

new learning and insight which followed her initial conversion, she continued her commitment to daily prayer and reading the Bible, but that other practices, such as fasting, had slowed down. In addition, she expressed that her involvement in church had become limited to a once-weekly attendance, as the demands of upper-division school coursework increased. Chastising herself somewhat, she feared she had become complacent in her walk with Christ because of the greater demands school placed on her time. She articulated feeling a distinct difference when she was “walking by the Spirit” and when she was merely “walking in my flesh.” She expressed a strong desire to return to her former fervent practices.

Spiritually, Maria continued to desire to grow in God and to develop a closer relationship with him. She acknowledged that when she first made her deep commitment to God to grow in an authentic relationship, it was exciting because she knew she was making a drastic change in her life and enjoyed the frequent signs of change. After two years, however, she desired more closeness with God and communicated an ongoing attempt to maintain that closeness.

Called for a Purpose

After Maria began reading her Word and spending time in prayer, she explained that she became more bold in her walk with Christ and therefore was more comfortable telling other people about Christ. She came to realize that her life was meant to be a witness to others of God’s love and the joy one experiences when living a saved life. She had been formed in one of the central tenants of her church, which was that the life of a saved person was meant to be “based on witnessing and winning souls for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In every part of her day, Maria was conscious of this call. She described that during religion class discussions, she sought to bring God into every conversation, in social justice class during her senior year and even when studying Buddhism in World Religions the previous year. She revealed the depth to which she was conscious of her call stating, “In every conversation I would bring up God no matter what we were talking about! I found a way to bring it back to God...and by the things that I don’t do, or the things that I might say just to uplift somebody’s spirit” (B166).

On several occasions, Maria received feedback from peers who noticed a special quality in her stating, “Maria, there’s somethin’ *different* about you. You’re *nicer* than other people.” Responding to these comments, Maria perceived these as occasions to invite people to grow closer to God. “[When] it becomes apparent to people that there’s something different, then that opens up conversation to be like, ‘Well, do you go to church?’ you know, ‘You want to come with me sometime?’” (B110).

In December of her senior year, a classmate whom Maria had known since early elementary school, but with whom Maria had never been close, noticed the change in Maria and took the opportunity to affirm this growth with a small gift. Maria was both stunned and delighted. She was gratified to realize that someone had noticed her attempts to bring others closer to God. Maria stated,

That was so *sweet* to me. And it made me realize that somebody *does* realize that I *am* helping somebody *else* to grow stronger in *their* faith. And it was like, “Wow! Thank you so much!” And that really touched me, because it’s not like we *talk* all the time, it’s not like we’re, you know, close *friends*. But for her to really just *do* something like that because she realized that I love God and she *saw* that in me, that she felt she wanted to do something nice for me. That really meant a lot to me. Thank you, God. (B168)

Maria further articulated her spiritual conviction by placing the credit for her growth and

good work with God.

Because it's *all* Him, it's *not* me at *all*. Because without God, I would really just be...a mess! [laughs] It's just ridiculous! Like, some things, you know, just common sense, you know, just *don't do*. But, just *wisdom*, just everything, it's just like, without Him, I...I just wouldn't be who I am today. (B169)

Even more delightful to Maria was the fact that this feedback had come from someone who was not a member of her church. For the fact that in church, others knew that she had committed herself to living a saved life, her peer provided greater confirmation as an outside observer that Maria had done what God had called her to do. She explained,

That's one thing for people to see you at church. But for them to notice you *outside* of church, that's what means more to me. Because, it's not about going to church and having these titles, but you're not *saving* nobody. God didn't save you just to sit around at home. He saved you so you can go out and save somebody else. And so, like I said, if I'm not doin' that, then I'm not doin' my job. (B170)

Searching for a Deeper Mission

As Maria continued to grow in her relationship with God, she sensed being called by God for a special purpose. "When you have a calling, you know it's placed in you when you were born, and you then begin to grow in it as you get older" (B246). While God's special purpose for her remained yet somewhat ambiguous, Maria's search for greater clarity continued to be a mainstay of her daily prayer. She stated more than once, "I don't know specifically what I'm called to do yet, but I know that God didn't save you [*sic*] for nothing." (B253)

Maria's interior sense of this calling was an integral part of her spirituality and was manifested frequently in her desire to call her friends to a deeper faith and knowledge of God. Maria's love for friends and her sense of being called to bring others to know God posed a bittersweet challenge for Maria in her spiritual journey at the time of our interviews. She explained that while she loved her friends and appreciated them,

paradoxically, she recognized that her friends were neither as spiritual as she nor did they value the same things as Maria did. Therefore, Maria found it hard to spend time with them on a daily basis. Often, she tried to discourage their offensive behaviors, feeling that the behaviors both offended God and kept her friends from growing closer to God. At the time of the interviews, this situation was a source of pain and sorrow for Maria.

When Maria and her friends spent time together, she expended energy trying to keep the activities they engaged in together in a positive realm. She acknowledged that as high-school seniors, she and her friends were maturing in the sense of being more focused. However, she countered this, pointing out the difference that existed between personal maturity and spiritual maturity. She affirmed that spiritual maturity came from reading the Word and praying, and spending time with God. She stated her concern, “I don’t know what everyone does on their personal time, but it displays in your *character* when you go out and do things like that” (B138).

Maria asserted that her own passage was a responsibility that she freely embraced. She further summarized the place she presently found herself on that journey was seeking to know God’s purpose for her more deeply than she had known before.

Right now, personally for me...I want to *grow more*. And I feel like I’m not *there* yet. And of course, no one will ever be there, but, just so I can really *see* where God wants me to be. Because, I *don’t* know what he has in store for me. I know my *purpose* is to be a *witness* for Him. So I’m going to *do* that, but what my *calling* is specifically, he hasn’t *told* me [and] I really want to *know*. So I’m kind of just searching for an answer and seeking after him. And *through* seeking him, I know that I will *grow* stronger in my conviction and also, all together, he will begin to open up my understanding and give me wisdom. (B139)

Offering Praise to God Through Dance

Maria possessed a passion for dance since early childhood. When she began dancing as a child, she danced in her church and joined children’s dance groups

performing in public arenas. As a young teenager, Maria danced at parties with her friends, sometimes in inappropriate ways. After her conversion, Maria reported she needed to realize for whom she was dancing. She found that her social dancing and Sunday morning praise dancing did not mix. This area of her life would also undergo transformation.

As Maria grew older, she began to realize that dancing was a ministry. Recognizing this factor and integrating its meaning remained two different aspects of her growth. It took time before she was able to completely internalize this message. As her relationship with God developed, dancing came to mean much more to Maria; it became a means to worshipping God. She came to recognize that through her dance, she could actually minister to others.

Since that realization, when Maria dances for members of her church or for others, she prays as she prepares to dance and asks God that she be able to touch someone through her dance. Maria choreographs each dance and asks God to give her the movement needed to create the dance using a song in which the lyrics match the message she wishes to proclaim. Maria pointed out that in the last few years she had been developing her dance skills with the help of instruction in ballet and jazz. With joy and enthusiasm, she spoke of the growth this instruction provided for her dance skills. She exclaimed, “I’m *perfecting* my *gift*! And I want to continue to perfect my gift” (B262). She was currently dancing with a new Christian-based company to different kinds of music, including hip-hop, but maintained that the praise dance style remained her favorite.

When I asked Maria whether there was an artifact she wanted to share, she

offered that she had been invited to dance for a special event before the church community of her aunt and that she would be praise dancing the following Sunday. Maria invited me to attend. Elated to receive her invitation to the performance, I witnessed her praise dancing the following weekend (Figure 3). As she danced, all eyes in the church were upon her, especially those of the younger adolescent girls, and a deep quiet came over the congregation as the lyrics of the song resonated in the hearts and minds of those gathered. Maria explained that she choreographed her dance to the song entitled, *Still I Rise*, by Yolanda Adams. Maria's artifact of praise dancing that afternoon is captured in this photo:



Figure 3. Maria Washington, praise dancing.

Still I Rise
by Yolanda Adams

Shattered, but I'm not broken
Wounded, but time will heal
Heavy the load, the cross I bear
Lonely the road I trod, I dare
Shaken, but here I stand
Weary, Still I press on

Long are the nights, the tears I cry
 Dark are the days, no sun in the sky, yes

Chorus:

Yet still I rise
 Never to give up
 Never to give in against all odds
 Yet still I rise
 High above the clouds
 At times I feel low
 Yet still I rise

Sometimes I'm troubled, but not in despair
 Struggling, I make my way through
 Trials, they come to make me strong
 I must endure, I must hold on

Above all my problems
 Above all my eyes can see
 Knowing God is able to strengthen me
 To strengthen me

For Maria, dance was not only enjoyable, but it provided an avenue for her to minister to others bringing the truth of God's love. She summarized the effect it had on her own spirituality as all encompassing, "It boosts my confidence level, it allows me to worship God, and it's exercise as well" (B270).

Catalysts for Spiritual Growth

Maria noticed authentic spirituality in others. She expressed regret that, at times, she compared herself to others' spiritual depth. "When I see someone preaching or teaching, I think to myself, 'Wow. They must spend a lot of time with God for God to really anoint them, to *gift* them like that to *help* somebody else'" (B142). At times like this, she felt encouraged to be more steadfast in her walk with God "so that he can touch me and anoint me so that I can help somebody else" (B143). It was to this, helping to bring others to God, that Maria expressed as her heart's desire. "*That's* where I wanna

[sic] be; where I can feel that God has called me and he has anointed me with a gift so I can touch somebody else's life" (B141). This desire impelled Maria to speak of God to others whenever she could. She perceived this call similar to Jesus' call to the apostles and explained,

He called his disciples to be fishers of men, not to just follow him around. I mean, that's *good* to be a follower of God, but at the same time, you have to go back out and get those who are lost. You have to go back out and get those who have no *idea* who God is. (B171)

At times, she did not feel that she was doing enough to grow closer to God and therefore, she was not doing her job to bring others closer to him. Maria felt the power of this call upon her as she arrived at school each day. She explained, "If I don't say something about God, just whatever, 'God is good' or something, I feel like I'm not doing my job. I feel like I'm not letting my light shine like I could" (B144). Maria described that she could feel the difference within herself when she was operating in the Spirit, she was "*really, just on fire,*" and full of the praises of God. At those times, she believed she was building God's kingdom. However, when she did not feel "on fire," when tired or preoccupied, she felt regret that she was lacking in this area (B145). She offered an analogy, learned from her pastor, that helped her to communicate the tension she felt between her struggle to remain faithful to God in her walk and to deal with life's many demands on her time. Maria stated,

When you *feed* your flesh everyday by watching TV, eating, and all this stuff, but the only way you can really feed your spirit is by praying and reading your Word. And I feel like I'm feeding my flesh more, you know, with all the things that I *have* to do in life and I'm allowing my spirit-med to be lack. And so I feel *weak* in the spirit, and not necessarily that I lose my conviction, but just *spiritually*, I don't *feel* like I'm aware God is calling me to *be*. (B146)

Within this struggle lay the crux of Maria's greatest challenge. She desired to

spend more time growing closer to God and to be better equipped to witness to others of God's love, but the demands of her life presented obstacles for her. She yearned to understand exactly how it was that God wished to use her as his witness. Maria expanded this notion in this way,

I know that there's something else that I need to be doing. I know that he *wants* to use me, but the only way he can *do* that, is if I "draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to me." [quotes from scripture] So, I have to *make* time, so that we can, you know, spend time with each other, so that he can really *show* me, "Okay. This is what I want for you, Maria. This is what I have for you." But until, I [laughs], give my time *enough* to really just sit there and pray, and stuff like that, it's not gonna happen. Cause he's not gonna just bombard. He's waitin' for me to do what I need to do as well.

At the same time, if I go to bed without readin' my Bible that day, I...I'll just feel like, "Wow." I just feel very *weak* spiritually. I know I could be doing so much better. (B147-148)

Valuing Spirituality

Maria expressed the importance of spirituality in her life through her strong desire to continue growing and developing a deeper relationship with God and to enable others to see God through her. She shared several of the thoughts she keeps to maintain her focus:

'Cause God will reveal stuff to you. The more you spend time with him, the more he will reveal to you. And that's where *I* want to be. I want to be able to really look at somebody and see what type of personality I have. [type of personality she is dealing with in them] Just that type of real deep, *keen* discernment. And that is *only* given from God.

Because you can know so much from experience, and things like that, but that *heavenly* wisdom is *so* different. And I *know* people who have that. And it's just like, "Wow." You know, that's really just... God operating in your life. And so, I really just want *God* to operate *fully* in my life. And knowing that he's leading me and that I'm *following*, not *me* leading, and you know, I'm dragging God along with me. You know what I'm saying? (B155-158)

Maria Washington: Interpretive Critique

Spirituality provided both meaning and purpose to the life of Maria Washington. Maria defined spirituality as a relationship with God, as a “really *intense* relationship with God.” For Maria, this concept expressed her understanding of herself, as one who was in relationship with God. Her perception of herself as one who was saved and therefore, who was in relationship with God provided deep meaning for Maria. This relationship was the focus of her desire and of her effort to participate wholeheartedly in the relationship in a way that opened her to ongoing growth and knowledge of God.

Daily, Maria devoted time to prayer and to the reading of her Bible. She recognized the commitment of time the relationship required and freely resolved herself to its pursuit, seeking to become more deeply involved in that relationship. In this way, Maria’s relational life-world contributed significantly to her sense of being, and to her understanding of herself. Maria explained that spirituality was a “*life-style*,” for the fact that spirituality required the attunement of one’s values and beliefs, purpose and sense of being toward the spiritual source. For Maria, this source was found in God.

Her sense of spirituality, perceived within her relational life-world, was manifested in the thoughts, feelings, and experiences she described. Her belief in God provided further meaning to the events of her life. In the account of one relationship, Maria explained how a friendship with someone with whom she had been very close had fallen “off-track.” She perceived that this relationship would only return to a healthy state if it was God’s will for both herself and for her friend. Through prayer and reflection, Maria perceived that a new course was needed if the friendship was to remain. She decided to let go of the relationship as it had existed in the past, in order to allow for the

possibility of change. She was prepared to accept the outcome. If it was God's will that the relationship be re-born and thrive in the future, she would gratefully accept that. If the relationship could not sustain the diverging paths of either one of them in the immediate future, Maria could accept that by the power she held through her faith in God.

Maria described several facets of her relationship with God. Based on her former experiences, Maria perceived God as a deliverer and a healer. She believed that God was real and she did not question this reality. Maria perceived God as the "Source of all love," love that poured out generously into the lives of believers. In her understanding of God, she perceived that there were different levels through which people experienced and expressed God; thus denoting levels of spirituality. Maria explained these levels as different stages through which one moved from self-absorption into concern for others. The more mature levels of concern for others were those through which one realized the overflowing love of God poured out, impelling the recipient to share the message and awareness of this love with others. She recognized within herself a movement from self-absorption into a realization of God's love, and further, into a place of deep desire to share that love with others.

Maria explicated this perspective by speaking of her love for her parents and of her deep concern for her friends and peers, that they would come to know God. She explained her understanding that spirituality included a larger embrace of positive relational living. She reinforced this point several times posturing that for one to be called by God in relationship meant that one was also called to living in good relationships with others, of particular import was that of maintaining a positive relationship with family.

Maria's understanding of relationship, specifically, of having a deep relationship

with God, also provided a purpose for Maria in her life. In her explication that God had called her to a deeper level of spirituality than those she had witnessed among her friends, Maria understood that God had also called her to serve. She explained that she recognized God calls those who believe into service, although the call may be manifested in various ways. For Maria, one of the ways she expressed her response to this call was through her offering of dance. She perceived that her life-time experience of praise dance had become a means through which she allowed others to know and to experience the love of God. Through this perception, Maria's corporeal life-world was influenced by a perception of spirituality.

At the time that I met with Maria, she realized that her life was meant for a purpose, one determined by God to witness to others the love and joy found from living a saved life. Maria's understanding of her purpose was fostered by her spatial environments: through her church community, through her school environment as she desired to share the Word of God with her peers, and in her family. Not only did this call provide meaning for Maria, but it provided her with an understanding of her own existence. She defined herself as one called to bring about the conversion of others, an awareness that entered into every conversation we shared about school, every space or positionality at school that she discussed. Maria felt called by God for a purpose, and she expressed having an awareness of this call through every part of her day.

Maria's temporal life-world contained her desire for continued growth in deepening her relationship with God. She was aware of the growth that had come to her since the self-absorption of her past, she desired further growth and insight into God's purpose for her in the future, and yet, she struggled to make time for God in the present.

Her desire for growth in her relationship with God was caught in the demands on her time within her present reality; a temporal conflict.

Alice Ross: Being a Good Christian

Alice equated spirituality with Christianity stating, “[It’s] just doing what God told you to do; being a good Christian” (D133). She became aware of the concept of spirituality when she was saved in January of her junior year, the point at which she decided to give her life to God. This experience opened Alice to a deeper relationship with God and a growing understanding of God’s will in her life. It was this deepened relationship to which Alice equated spirituality. She explained further that when she was first saved, she began seeking God for the presence of the Holy Spirit within her. This seeking later transformed into a seeking God for God’s plan for her.

Her perception of spirituality included a sense of being called by God for a purpose. I asked her to explain why she chose Christianity, with incredulity in her voice, she expressed, “Because it’s what’s *right* [chuckles]. That’s what *God* has called me to do. That’s why I’m here, is to live for him and to tell others about him through my story and the things that I’ve been through” (D134). I asked Alice to articulate how she felt about responding to this call. She explained, “[I feel] excited because I know that I’m helping others get into heaven, or have a closer relationship to God that I *do* have” (D135).

Contemporary Experience of Spirituality: Falling Out for God

In December of Alice’s senior year, a few months prior to our interviews, a divine event provided further support to Alice in her desire to turn her life around. She was attending a Pentecostal church south of Californiaville with some of her friends where a

recording artist was speaking and performing. She found the artist's presentation so powerful that she accepted the invitation to go forward to the altar to pray at the time in the service known as the "altar call." Alice recounted a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit,

[The presenter] finished and he was giving the altar call, I guess, for people to come up and give prayer or you know, stay up there until they *got* deliverance from whatever they were going through [speaking softly]. (D115)

I actually went to the *altar* for *prayer*, and I was just up there, you know, crying out to God, like, "I *need* you right now. I *need* deliverance." You know, and I just...felt it all be...[pauses] it was like...you know, I couldn't stop *thanking* him enough, or *worshipping* him enough for everything that he had done. Because I don't have to be here today. He *didn't* have to bring me through everything I had been through, you know. So, I was just filled with a joy also, you know, worship, and praising, and adoration for God at that point. (D95)

Like I was finally surrendering *completely* to God, and giving what I had done over to him...putting it in his hands, I guess. [pause] (D101)

I guess the Holy Spirit—well, I don't guess, it *was* the Holy Spirit—coming over me. And then it was just like I was, you know, worshipping and stuff like that. And then, I think it was a minister, or an elder, or somebody, came over and laid hands on me. And, the Spirit was so *high* that I fell out...which...normally happens [chuckle]. (D108)

At this point, I learned that to "fall out" means the Holy Spirit has come over a person with strength and power, the person falls backwards and is slowly lowered to a resting place on the floor by others gathered around. I asked Alice to describe what this experience felt like to her:

Just like God's hand was all over me and just kind of like the warm feeling that I kind of experienced as a young child coming back over me and *engulfing* me.

SE: Did you *feel* a pressure as that warmth pushed you back?

Alice: Yes.

SE: Do you come down hard on the floor?

Alice: No. They come and help you down. [laughs]

SE: How long does it last? The whole experience?

Alice: It was about...well, the *whole*...thing was about 40 minutes. From *me* going up there to *me* falling back and doing that. (D110-114)

Alice's mother was there at the time this occurred. Alice indicated that "When somebody laid hands on me and I fell out, she came up and prayed for me, also" (D107). Her mother told her afterwards that it had sounded as if Alice was speaking in tongues at some point during the experience.

Friendship: A Call to Live Spiritually

Alice's friend, Maria, was present for the preaching and altar call. Alice said that Maria, too, had gone to the front for the altar call, but prior to Alice, so Maria did not see what happened to Alice. Maria ended up on the ground as well. When Maria asked her friend if she had gone to the altar, Alice reported her experience to Maria. With a big smile at that point of the interview, Alice stated that Maria had been "really *proud* of me" (D120). Maria was very excited for her friend. This brought delight to Alice, "I was excited also [chuckles] to tell her, because she was the one who really put me 'in check' I guess. [laughter]" (D122). While Maria shared in Alice's excitement, Alice pointed out that it had not been *that* big of a surprise being that Alice had already begun her transformation some months prior.

The excitement and joy from this experience lingered a while for Alice. She reported that church services became "a *lot* better for me just because I felt really closer to *God* and had that *connection*" (D126). She articulated that she was then able to experience God on a *new* level than she had previously. Alice referred to this event during the interviews as the day she received deliverance.

Daily Spiritual Routine of Seeking God

At the beginning of the second interview with Alice, she recounted having spent a weekend full of participation at church-related events. On Saturday, she attended an all-day presentation on tattoos and body piercing put on by the First Saturday Women's group at a Pentecostal church near her home, followed by a Christian Youth Fellowship event at her own church from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. She finished her Saturday attending a prayer meeting for another hour and a half at her church. The following morning, she returned to church with her family for Sunday services at her own church. I was amazed by the amount of time she had given to church-related activities over the weekend, especially for a high-school senior in her last semester of school. She assured me that when she had a lot of homework, she did not go to church. However, I remained impressed.

Alice expressed that, presently, she felt there was more she could do to be more spiritual and to be closer to God. "I guess that's where I am now, just trying to grow even closer to God in my walk with Him" (D137). She did this by daily spending time in prayer and reading her Bible. She continued her effort to "seek God for what he would have me to do in doing more" (D138). She explained that she prayed and read her Bible in the morning for about 20 to 30 minutes before preparing for school, she prayed throughout the day, and she prayed again before going to bed. In addition, she expressed that she prayed when in need of strength or when faced with temptation. In those times, she explained praying, "To thank him [God] for allowing me to be alive and have that relationship with him" (D149).

Alice acknowledged that she saw her old boyfriend from time to time because he

lived in the neighborhood where her church was located. She admitted ongoing struggles with temptation because of the impression left in her mind from the duration and intensity of their behavior. I asked her to describe the effect this had had on her spiritually. She believed that it had made her both stronger and weaker, “Stronger, because I am overcoming the temptations. But, weaker, because I *do* still think things in my mind about...you know, things that *could* happen or things that...I *want* to happen” (D155). In order to find the strength she needed to deal with the temptations, Alice either prayed or talked to a friend for advice. Her friends usually advised her to continue praying and seeking God for this issue. Alice affirmed definitively that she had grown spiritually during this time. She thought there had always been a spirituality residing within her as a child, but that it had become something “even better” (D159) now in her adolescence.

Creative Expression of Spirituality

Alice offered a creative expression of her spirituality in the form of a song as a way to present her artifact. The lyrics poignantly captured Alice’s feelings about the relationship she perceived she was experiencing with God at the time of the interviews, and that she had tried to describe in words. The lyrics communicated the gratitude Alice felt for the deliverance she had received in recent months. The song entitled, *Running Back to You* (Commissioned, 2004), was one she was familiar with from her church.

*How can you forgive me when I've often gone astray
How can you think of me
When I do things my way?
Turning my back from You, the One who loved me first
Having my own desires, renewing worldly thirst*

*You told me You loved me, and I should make up my mind
You tell me, come back now, But I keep wasting time
Feeling so very weak, you say I can be strong
I feel I've gone too far,*

*You tell me to come home, You love me still.
 And I know this is real, and I am running back to you
 I see you're standing there for me. Your arms are open wide.
 And I don't have to cry no more, your standing there for me and I am running
 back to You ...
 Why do I go away?
 When I know I am no good when I'm on my own.*

Catalysts for Spiritual Growth

Describing how she felt about her spirituality, Alice expressed a desire to become more spiritual and to grow closer to God in her walk with him. In her desire to seek God and to know what God would have her do, she accepted an invitation from the campus minister at THS to serve as a team leader on the school's KAIROS retreat. For Alice, participating in this interview process and serving as a retreat leader for her class provided opportunities to respond to God's call. She felt that it was important for her to share her story with others for several reasons: first, so that she could be further liberated from the burden of keeping her past a secret from those around her. By sharing her own story at the KAIROS retreat⁸, she was provided with this opportunity. Secondly, Alice expressed a desire to tell her story so that others could learn from her. She stated that she wanted others to know

You are loved by God, if not anybody else. And that you probably do have friends and family who really do care about you and that you're not really alone. Just to open up with who you really are and don't be ashamed of doing so, because we all go through, you know, the same things, basically. (D161)

Valuing Spirituality

For Alice, expressing herself, expressing the gifts that God had given to her, and trying to live a holy life were the components that made up her spirituality. She identified spirituality as "probably the most important thing in my life, because I try to put God

⁸ Note: the senior class retreat event coincided with the interview process, taking place during the week that transpired between Alice's second and third interviews.

first, and God is entailed in my spirituality. So, in everything I do in my life, spirituality comes first” (D481).

Alice Ross: Interpretive Critique

The contingent event of her grandmother’s death and her subsequent choices and behaviors continued to be a part of Alice’s life journey into her junior and senior years in high school. Yet, they were in the process of becoming transformed. While Alice was no longer engaging in self-mutilating behaviors or sexual activity, the memories of these remained in her body and in her mind. Alice was no longer involved with her former boyfriend, although she did encounter him from time to time as he lived in the same neighborhood as the one where her church was located.

The memory of her sexual activity, still in the recent past, remained alive within her body. Alice disclosed that she struggled with the sexual urges and vivid memories of her experiences. Her body longed to return to the pleasure of these former activities, yet, her will desired and sought to live a different kind of life, one that offered her greater fulfillment and joy in her sense of who she was. While her corporeal life-world battled on, Alice opened herself to a new mode of being. She listened to the persistent urging of a friend and she allowed herself to seek a new existential reality, that of engaging in a relationship with God. Alice perceived spirituality as “doing what God told you to do” and “being a good Christian.” Pursuing a relationship with God as a committed Christian provided a more favorable self-image.

In January of Alice’s junior year, she responded to an altar call at church and intentionally gave her life over to God. Her sense of being was then shrouded in a new layer of self-identity as one who had been “saved.” Alice’s inner resolution to seek God

in relationship was strengthened while she still struggled with sexual urges. In the months that passed after her deepened commitment to God, Alice engaged in sex with her boyfriend again. Further admonitions from her friend resulted in more frequent attendance at church and inspired Alice to plead with God for deliverance from the urges and memories which continued to have power over her.

In December of her senior year, a few months prior to our interviews, a contingent event provided Alice with the healing she had been seeking from God, and subsequently, with inner peace and relief. Having responded once again to an altar call in church, she received the power of the Holy Spirit in an event referred to as “falling out.” It was Alice’s perception that she had been delivered from her painful memories by the power of God’s grace. After this event, Alice was more resolved to the daily living of her spiritual practices of prayer and reading the Bible. The event enabled Alice to move beyond a level of self-concern to greater awareness and concern for others. She sought to grow closer to God and, by her regular practices, she grew feeling more strongly connected to God. She expressed the significant nature of this event by referring to it as “the day she received deliverance,” creating a meaningful marker in her temporal life-world.

Alice’s temporal life-world contained positive memories of her grandmother and of her spirituality in the distant past, followed by the painful loss of her grandmother and ensuing self-destructive behaviors. These previous behaviors strongly united Alice’s temporal life-world with her corporeal life-world. However, at the time of the interviews, new meaning in the present had begun to illuminate the darkness of Alice’s temporal life of the past. She had given her life to God and had received a gift of deliverance, a

powerful experience that flooded her with a warm feeling throughout her body. Alice's corporeal and temporal life-worlds were both being transformed. Since none of Alice's surrounding environments had changed throughout the passage of time, the change in her self-identity was able to shed new light into the old familiar regions of her spatial life-world.

Most importantly for Alice, her relational life-world was transformed. Suffering the loss of her beloved grandmother darkened this world of Alice's such that she lost her way for the next few years. By the insistence of a treasured friend, Alice found her way back to a path that would offer greater light and meaning. Following this path, Alice grew closer in a relationship with God, a relationship that provided meaning and purpose to Alice's life, as well as ongoing transformation of her other life-worlds. Transcending beyond herself, Alice found meaning in sharing her story with others and in sharing her talented voice for the purpose of bringing others to God.

Jane Cabral: A Spirituality of Service

Definition of Spirituality

Jane expressed that she understood spirituality as having a connection with a higher being or Higher Power. For Jane, that being was God. She believed that all humans have something that is higher and more powerful than themselves; connecting with that something else, having a belief in it and being able to either pray or to call out to this other presence for Jane, was what constitutes a spirituality. She stated, "I always thought of it as having that connection with something else that you can't physically *feel* or see."

Jane explained that when she was in touch with her spiritual self, she felt very

calm. She was able to block out distractions around her, leaving her aware only of herself sitting wherever she was. From this peaceful state emerged a sense that something or someone was watching over her. This, in turn, made her feel safe and calm. She stated, “It’s like, you *know* something’s there, but you can’t see it, you can just feel it. And so I feel really *safe* and everything’s gonna be alright when I have that connection” (E9). Jane remarked that she perceived spirituality as something that was contained within herself. She had never considered it as a relationship, but rather as a component of the human person.

Contemporary Experiences of Spirituality

Jane expressed that she considered herself different from some of her peers. She acknowledged an awareness that some of her friends at school were not as spiritually and religiously involved as she was herself. About her participation in her church, she noted, “It’s a *choice* that I *make*.” However, with her friends at church, Jane described strong bonds that had developed during the years she participated in the choir. She felt that these friends were like a second family to her. She explained,

We really *do* act like a family. And usually they say, “All Filipinos claim to be each other’s relatives.” And my whole choir is all Filipino and so we always call each other cousin, or brother or sister, uncle or auntie, and it’s kind of like something that we have in *common* and that’s what *really* makes us bond. It’s because we’re all there at church together, we’re singing together. And that just makes us our own *family*. (E218)

This family connection extended for Jane beyond the time that she was participating at church. She expressed that because she knew herself to be more of a spiritual and religious person than other girls in her class, when she went to church, she felt like she was going home. When she went from her home to church, she felt as if she was going from one house to another. “It’s a nice feeling to have because it really means

I am comfortable there and I'm comfortable doing what I do." At this point, I realized that Jane was expressing a significant piece of her self-identity. I asked her, "So if I asked you to define who you are, it sounds to me like you would say you're a spiritual person and you're a religious person?" Jane asserted, "Yes."

The rapport Jane shared with her friends was one that was both prayerful and supportive, and one I found quite remarkable. When discussing the impact of the stories she heard from Uncle, her choir director, Jane revealed that prayer throughout her day was very important, especially while in the throws of college applications and other aspects of senior life. She explained that among her friends with whom she was comfortable being her own spiritual and religious self, she shared an acronym of support and care, P.U.S.H. Jane's own words described this best,

A lot of my friends and I actually have a little thing called "PUSH." So, "P-U-S-H." Whenever something bad happens, we always tell each other to "PUSH," which is: Pray Until Something Happens. And so, usually, that kind of calms us down, because we'll be really upset about something. But, my friends and I will tell each other, "Hey, Push!" "Just Push!" (E76)

Actually, just this morning, one of my friends from Boston texted me. And he's just going through a rough time right now. And I told him, "Hey, just PUSH; Pray Until Something Happens and God will take care of you." And he said, "You know what? Thank you. That really helps. And it's good to know that someone's there helping me out. Even though you live all the way in California. And I'm here in Boston. It's *nice* to know that someone takes the *time* to really give me that advice." (E78)

Jane shared this acronym mostly with her friends from the choir. While she tried to introduce it to her friends at school, the acronym did not take hold. She explained that there was a mixture of religions among the students who attended THS, but mostly, she found that not all of them prayed. She acknowledged that there were some people who were affected by PUSH, and others who were not. When a friend spoke PUSH to Jane, it

reminded her to slow down and stop what she was doing. She stated that she tried to be easy on herself and then she prayed. She asked herself questions such as, “Is it really worth the trouble to get upset about this situation? Is it worth it to yell or scream, or to blame others when it’s not really their fault?” Then she spoke words to calm herself and continued to pray. Jane remarked that by praying, “something is *bound* to happen. And it may not happen *right away*, but the answer will come eventually.”

Jane continued her own habit of prayer that began for her as a child. She described that usually before going to sleep at night, she would take time for her personal prayer. She found this the best time of the day because it was then that her mind was the most free of other concerns. Jane looked forward to this as her own very special time, “This is *my* time to pray, my personal time.” She stated that when she quiets herself to pray, she asks for help, for guidance, and speaks of many other things that come to her mind.

An Artifact for Dreams or Worries

Jane presented an artifact that she called her “angel-star worry stone” (Figure 4). Jane explained that she had received the stone as a birthday gift. The stone, a clear resin semi-spherical object with a white angel figure embedded inside, came with a note card which read, “give your worries to the angels,” and on the back side of the card it read, “Share your dreams or burdens that you hold tight in your heart. Today’s the perfect day to create a brand-new start” (author unknown). Jane revealed that when she felt stressed or worried, she held the stone and spoke quietly to no one in particular, “I hope that everything will be okay...that things will go smoothly and go well and without any problems” (E252).



Figure 4. Angel-star worry stone.

Finding this as a form of prayer in her life, she explained that, often, after saying these words, she felt like a great burden had been lifted off of her chest. Jane reported that she has been in the habit of performing this ritual in the mornings before beginning her day. She believed that the ritual brought positive results to the concerns in her life.

Current Awareness of Spirituality Through Choir

Reflecting during the week on what had touched her spiritually, Jane identified a particular moment that had occurred the previous Sunday. She explained that while her choir was singing a meditation song during the mass, the words in the refrain struck her with special meaning, “I surrender all...I surrender all to you, O Jesus.” With these words, an awareness emerged within her. She recalled the things she and her church community had done for God both in Church and outside of church. She remembered the many hours she had spent over the years, fulfilling her commitment to the choir, a demand of at least three hours each Sunday. She considered the things that she and her friends *could* be doing instead of going to church and she summarized stating,

I could be doing a *lot* of things within those three hours. I could be getting my

homework done, could be hanging out with people, I could just be relaxing at home, taking a nap. But instead, I decide to go to church. And so, I really thought that the song was *really* true; that we really do surrender a lot of things. Not because we feel like we *have* to, but we *choose* to do it. (E150)

Jane was aware of the uniqueness of her choice. Yet, she was content with the practices she had chosen. The spirituality of service manifested during Jane's elementary school years remained evident as she described the insight she received at this moment that Sunday.

I think it's one of the most *beautiful* things that you could actually ever do is give up your own time, not just for *yourself*, but for *others*. Because, like I said, it's a *choice*. You don't necessarily have to make it. But, it's a matter of *you* deciding how you want to live your life...how you want to spend your time. And, you can see every week that there are teenagers my age, younger, my age and younger, maybe even a few years older...who *do* decide to surrender...about three hours each Sunday to come sing in church. (E151)

She expressed a sense of great spiritual fulfillment from her ongoing commitment to serve her parish community. Within her spirituality of service, Jane had been nourished through her participation in the choir, through the friendships she made at church, and by listening to scripture speak to her life as she attended weekly Mass.

Catalysts for Spiritual Growth

During the week between the first and second interviews as Jane was paying attention to current experiences of spiritual significance, she happened to engage in a conversation with her boyfriend on the topic of religion. Jane reported that while her friend was a baptized Catholic, he stated that he neither believed in religion nor that he practiced any form of faith. In fact, he did not consider himself to be Catholic.

As their conversation continued, Jane's boyfriend informed her that he believed religion was a lie and that people only turn to religion when they are lacking faith in themselves. Jane maintained the truth of religion, stating that "people *have* something to

believe in when they *are* religious.” Her friend countered, “Why can’t they just believe in *themselves* instead? Is it because they’re insecure?” Negating this assumption, Jane asserted that “they have a Higher Power to turn to instead of turning to themselves.” The two, unable to agree on the topic, amicably ended the conversation recognizing that they each had very different beliefs.

For Jane, this experience tapped into her spiritual self. She explained that this had been the first conversation she had entertained with her boyfriend on the subject of religion. While she was aware he did not attend church, having both expressed their beliefs on the topic provided Jane with greater understanding of her friend. She expressed gratitude for this. In addition, she reported that this experience had helped her to better understand her own spirituality as well. It was a revelation for her to learn just how strongly she felt about religion stating, “I never thought that I could feel so strongly about religion at all, until I actually had to explain it to someone who’s *opposite* from me, who *doesn’t* really believe in religion that much.” Jane elaborated that all through her years of education in a Catholic school, she had become accustomed to speaking freely among others who shared the Catholic faith or who did not speak so strongly in contrast to her own views. This was the first time Jane had engaged in such an in-depth conversation. She affirmed that this had been a learning for her, one that had opened her more to herself and to knowing her boyfriend.

Valuing Spirituality

For Jane, being spiritual meant to be in touch with herself. She stated, “Not necessarily with God or anybody else, but you have to be in-touch and in-tuned with yourself” (E302). She explained further,

I think it has to do with understanding yourself. Because, if you don't understand yourself, then, how can you understand others? I always thought that it was *really* important to understand yourself, because, if you do, then it kind of opens up that barrier between you and other people.

And not just that, but it opens up that barrier within yourself. It makes you more confident as a person. It makes you stronger. And I think it's just that kind of sense of feeling connected to others and—more importantly—to yourself. And you just have to know how you really feel. *How* you think. *Why* you think the things that you think. And yeah...I just think that it really has to do with yourself—not in a *selfish* way, but, just in the sense that you have to be understanding.

SE: Understanding of...?

Jane: Understanding of your feelings and your emotions, as well as other's feelings and emotions. (E302-304)

Jane's concept of spirituality included the aspect of change over time. She reflected that as she grew older, she expected that she would learn new things about herself. She described that in seventh grade, she began to realize who she really "was," and by coming to THS, she believed that she had come to see her "full capability." Jane stated that while enrolled in her Catholic elementary school, a co-ed school, she often felt that as a girl, she was of less value than the boys. Coming to THS, she had learned many things about herself. Jane attributed this learning to her spirituality.

I learned that I *can* be a leader. I learned that I can be strong and that I can actually speak out without having to worry about the guys laughing because there are no guys here to laugh at me. And even better, the girls didn't [*sic*] laugh at me either, if I said something that was extreme, or I said something that would have been considered stupid if I were in seventh grade.

I think that, for me to have that confidence, was a way of *me* growing. And that's how my spirituality and my understanding started changing, because I understood myself more. And that just kind of changed overall. And I'm pretty sure that if I really took the time to think about it, then I could notice more changes within myself. And I'm pretty sure that I'll understand myself a lot *more* as I get older. (E306-307)

Jane also perceived that her spirituality helped her in her relationships by helping her to

keep in touch with others who were also spiritual. For example, Jane found that she could talk about spiritual things with the members of her choir community and that this affected her spirituality because they were able to give her different insights into concerns that she shared with them.

When I asked Jane how she made sense of her spirituality, she explained that although this was a difficult question, the way she made sense of her spirituality was to say, “It’s a *part* of me, it’s kind of a non-tangible item that I *know* lies within me. And it’s up to *me* to decide whether or not it’s actually there and if it’s something for me to express” (E314). Jane explained further her perception of the non-tangible character of spirituality:

I kind of think of it [as] a line from a movie *A Walk to Remember*, where they said that, “Love is like the *wind*; I can’t *see* it, but I can *feel* it.” So, I think of spirituality in that sense, too. I can’t actually *see* spirituality itself, but I can feel it and I can share it with others and just *hope* that they can *sense* it, for me as well. And, I guess, that’s the only way that I can actually make sense of it. (E315)

In order to learn how Jane valued her spirituality, I asked if she could imagine her life without it. She replied,

I don’t think I would be *able* to see myself without it—at *all*. Because, it *all* connects with each other. Because without spirituality I don’t think I would be able to *fully* and completely understand myself. And that means I wouldn’t be able to fully and completely understand *other* people around me. And...for *all* I know, that could just make me...like someone *outside* of the whole social group.

And that’s not the kind of person that I am. I’m a really social person, just naturally.I know that some people also try to talk to me about their problems, and in order for me actually give them advice, I would *have* to understand them. And I would *have* to make that connection with them, or else I would feel awkward. And so I *don’t* think I can live without spirituality at all. I have to have it in my life in order for me to actually *grow* as a person and be able to understand myself and everyone around me. (E320-321)

Jane Cabral: Interpretive Critique

For Jane, spirituality was the key to living an authentic life. In addition, spirituality influenced every life-world context within her existence. Initially, Jane asserted an understanding of spirituality as having a connection with a higher being, or for her, this meant having a connection with God. Jane described that in the past, she had experienced her spirituality through a physical sensation. She described that when she was in touch with her spiritual self, she felt calm. She was able to block out all distractions and to focus on her truest self within. She became aware of her own state of being and was then able to sense a presence watching over her and she felt safe and calm. By this perception, spirituality permeated her corporeal life-world and provided insight into her human existence.

Jane's perception of spirituality was integrated into her relational life-world. She was aware that her peers were not as religiously or spiritually committed as she. She realized that her own commitment to both religion and spirituality had been due to personal choice. While she noticed a difference between herself and her peers at THS, she experienced strong bonds of commonality with the youth in her parish choir with whom she shared many friendships. With these friends, she felt a greater spiritual connection and that she could speak openly with them about spiritual topics or personal concerns in a spiritual or religious way.

For Jane, being spiritual meant being in touch with herself. She perceived that her spirituality allowed her to know herself in truth, and therefore, her spirituality enabled her to be connected to herself. She believed that by being deeply connected with herself, she gained understanding into what it meant to be human. Without this insight, she feared she

would lack the ability to connect with others and to offer understanding and compassion to those who sought her out for support. Since Jane was a social person, she stated that she could not live without her spirituality; it was necessary for her to continue to grow as a person and be able to understand herself and others around her.

Jane perceived herself as a very spiritual person who had a deep commitment to serving God. By her understanding of her spiritual self and her openness to perceiving God in a meaningful relationship, Jane transcended self-absorption and committed herself to the service of others. Through her altar serving in the past, and directing the choir during her present years in high school, Jane found deep meaning. By providing service to her parish, she served God. Jane felt deep joy as a result of her active participation in the life of her parish as a way of giving thanks and praise to God and serving the needs of God's people. The service she provided allowed her to feel a sense of purpose, that God had given her much and she had reason to give God thanks.

Jennifer Winfrey: Persistent Longing

Defining Spirituality

Initially, Jennifer found it difficult to make a clear distinction between spirituality and religion. She stated, "They're different, but they overlap a lot for me." The part of religion that flowed over into spirituality for Jennifer was "a lot of inner energy...and inner spirit." Since Jennifer had few religious practices during her childhood, she reasoned that her experience of prayer was more of a spiritual practice that had been guided not from religion, but more from spirit, from something she felt from within. Jennifer explained that while she had trouble distinguishing between religion and spirituality, she was coming to understand a difference. She expressed the awareness she

held at that time as:

I just think, in general right now, like, when you asked me [about spirituality], I think *spirit*; [and] *religiousness* pertains more to like...an *overall* set of beliefs that *go* with a certain religion. And then, how one kind of...goes along with *that* and their kind of relationship to those...*formed* beliefs by an institution or a religion. (F131)

Having had a week between the first and second interviews to reflect on how she would define spirituality, Jennifer felt more able to articulate a description as she stated,

I feel it's just kind of like an *energy*...an energy with something that can't be seen...just more of like *feelings* and...I mean it's like being *connected* to my caretaker [*sic*]...who is a spirit and, well, I think she's a spirit, at least. So being more connected with the spirit. And I think everything has a spirit, you know? So, just being kind of connected with that...and really connected with yourself, like, deeply...That's how I would define it right now. (F270)

By the third interview, Jennifer was able to articulate her definition of spirituality more clearly. She added,

To be spiritual means to really be in-tuned with connections. So for me, spirituality is all about feeling connected to people. And the connections that I feel kind of remind me of God's love and presence. It's like, a physical reminder, God is with you, God is here, God is everywhere. And so, by connections, I kind of thought of people when I look in[to] their eyes. (F407-408)

It was evident that between her second and third interview, Jennifer had spent time reflecting on the question, *What is spirituality?* By the third interview, she asserted a clearer distinction and connection between religion and spirituality. She made sense of spirituality through the connection with God felt throughout her life even though she had not had the experience of a formal religion through which she could express that connection with God. She explained,

So, when I was younger, I always felt a connection to God and a higher power even though I couldn't really explain the religion behind it, or any sort of like, Catholicism. And growing up, it's just this connection that I've always held onto.

And then when I started high school, I wanted to nurture and further this

connection. I think my way to do this was *through* Catholicism. And that's the tie between religion and spirituality for me, is that religion is a way to help me *be* more spiritual, and celebrate my spirituality...identify it more, be more in-tuned with it, and even going to church, it's a way to celebrate, you know. Like, I believe in God and I'm with a body of people that also believe[s] in God and they believe in Jesus and we're all trying to be better people here. (F438-439)

Sensory Experiences Enrich God-Connection

Expanding on this, Jennifer disclosed her ongoing desire to be connected with others. She stated, "I have to really *feel* the connection" (F441). She shared that she "loves" receiving the Eucharist at Mass, especially because of the physical connection the sacrament provides, "I just love that feeling of like *physically* [having] Jesus inside of me" (F440). She expressed intentionally seeking to fully feel the connection, in the hope that this would fill the hunger for love she carried inside:

So it's really for me, been about trying to be connected. And I guess, right now, I have to really *feel* the connection. I'm trying to *fully* feel the connection and have that be *enough*. Cause my big thing I struggle with as a whole; *love*, and not feeling like I'm loved enough. But, it's like, I *am* loved enough. And I have all these connections throughout my life that remind me that I am loved. (F441)

Over the previous weekend, Jennifer had taken a walk to reflect on a number of people with whom she had experienced meaningful connections in the months prior to our interviews. As she reflected, one woman, a nurse, came to mind that she met while volunteering at a local hospital. Having completed her service at the site, she would no longer see this woman to whom she had drawn close. Jennifer's thoughts turned to the reality that, often, meaningful connections had come and gone throughout her life. An insight occurred to her, "Acknowledge the connection, but then let it go." By articulating what she had learned, Jennifer's understanding of spirituality shone through, that passing connections with people were a reflection of a larger loving presence of God. She reflected,

[When] I have this connection, I have to just kind of ... feel this connection and realize that ... more will come and I have an underlying lasting one. And these are just little reminders of it... that I need to appreciate, but really, like, I have the connection there all the time. (F443)

She concluded re-asserting the importance of deepening her faith in God and her Catholicism. She expressed this desire as,

Yes, I believe in God, Yes, I believe in Jesus. And Yes, I want to be like Jesus and live the way [he did], you know, look up to him as a model. And that's what I want, and that's what I'm gonna keep striving for, and aiming for, and trying to do in furthering that.... It's just more of a commitment to wanting to keep learning. And wanting to keep believing and acknowledging this firm belief I have in God and do this. So that's spirituality. (F444-445)

Sense of Beauty and Awe

I asked Jennifer to explain what it meant to her to be close to God and the desire she felt inside for God. Her response reflected a thoughtful image of these spiritual concepts. Jennifer's description displayed a depth of insight:

Being *very* aware of everything from the birds outside, to every little thing—people's emotions... just *noticing* everything that's around me, trying to absorb everything I can through my senses, and trying, really to be in-tuned to all the goodness *in* all these things, especially.

That's *really* what it's about for me; seeing [that] I'm talking to you, and your eyes sparkle or something. You know, it's like me seeing, "Wow. Inner goodness or..." really realizing the *good* in other people and *seeing that* and seeing, "Wow. That's a beautiful piano" [points to piano in the room].

And "*so beautiful.*" Just *loving* the world around me. That's what's really about being close to God. And just seeing it all and kind of soaking it all [in]... and then, "*Yes. I love this.*"

SE: And that connects you with God?

Jennifer: Yeah, just like, "Wow. Yes! *I love this!*" This is, you know, *life!* And God! And seeing all his *goodness!* And all his *amazing-ness!* (F150-153)

Since Jennifer had also identified her emerging spirituality with growth in self-knowledge, I asked that she further articulate her understanding of this further. She

described,

I think it means deciding *not* to hurt myself anymore. Deciding *not* to do stuff to harm *me*...whether I *like* myself or not. Whether it's a good or bad day. It's...to take care of myself—*bottom line*...And *that* will help me be closer to God. That's shifting my focus from “How can I *hurt* myself?” to “How can I *help* myself?” and “How can I be close to God?” And I can be *close* to God *from* helping myself. That is my *big* change in relationship with myself. (F154-155)

Contemporary Experiences of Spirituality

After Jennifer's grandfather was no longer able to attend weekly Mass, her own participation in the Catholic religion began to fall firmly into place. She stated,

I'm *choosing* to go, even more so on my own. Not just out of my obligation to take my grandfather. This is something I *want* to do. I *want* to hear the readings. And I *want* to hear interpretation on them. (F122)

She explained that it had been only in the recent past that she had begun to experience a sense of spirituality. She described that her early participation in religion had been a “wish-washy-like-religious experience” (F123) of superficial practice after she first began to attend Mass and confirmation classes.

For Jennifer, this initial period had been “trying to get on the track, trying to find a reason to go to church” until she decided to attend on her own (F123). After making this commitment, she began absorbing as much as she could to learn about Catholicism from homilies preached at Masses, from the content shared in her confirmation classes, and in her religion classes at THS. Jennifer reported that the content covered in her social justice class had been particularly helpful in making her decision to become Catholic. Having been exposed to the social teachings of the Catholic Church, she had studied them with intellectual acuity and curiosity and found that the documents resonated with her own views and concerns. She reasoned that the Catholic Church was the right place for her. Jennifer expressed that she continued learning about Catholicism and scripture, as

much as her time allowed. She stated,

I'm *trying* to educate myself on the *Bible* and stuff just cause, this is my *belief*. I need...I want to *know* as much as [I can], I *love* learning about it and I want to *know* as much as I can about it, even though I *do* question some of the things and [I'm] not like...just *absorbing* it all. You know, [to] say, "Yeah. Okay! I *really* agree with *that*" or, "That's *really* great. That's a really great message" and, "Yeah. This is awesome." Or, in some parts, I don't take it like I *have* to, but, I end up really agreeing with a lot of the things [church teachings] [chuckles]. (F43)

Jennifer reported that she was serving regularly as a Eucharistic minister at school liturgies, that she attended weekly Mass, and had become an active member in her church. She described that she was known by parishioners as the only teenager who went to church on her own. Speaking with a sense of pride and accomplishment, Jennifer expressed that her participation in her church was "very healthy."

Persistent Questions for God

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Jennifer's transition into THS had been that of making friends. Initially, when Jennifer transferred into THS, she was not open to friendships with her classmates, and so, presented herself as cool, distant, and "nice." However, as her focus changed and she became more open to the school, she tried to make friends, but her attempts were less than successful. Making friends became an obstacle to further settling in and feeling that she belonged. She explained,

Once it [her focus at THS] *re-shifted*, you know, it was *hard* for me to make friends, just cause...like, *still* to this day, there's *not* a lot of people in this school that I feel like I can *relate* to...in general. You know that there's [*sic*] people that you just kind of connect with and stuff? I haven't really *found* that person ...I don't feel like I *belong* here. (F100)

Jennifer believed that others, both teachers and students, perceived her as a "good-girl type," who never got upset. As a result of this perceived misperception, Jennifer felt invisible to others around her, both students and teachers, because of their lack of

accurate knowledge of her. At times, she felt isolated at THS, “I wasn’t invited to things and I didn’t really want to go to things I wasn’t invited to anyways, I told myself” (F103).

During the second semester of her junior year, Jennifer made two friends. She explained that she had been close to each of the girls during that semester, and she was happy to have found “great relationships” (F104). Her friends had been attentive to her emotional upsets that occurred during that semester as a result of the final break-up with her boyfriend. Jennifer expressed, “They were really supportive of me and it’s the first time I really experienced a *good* relationship” (F104). However, as she moved into her senior year, these friendships began to wane, leaving Jennifer feeling alone and isolated once again. She continued to struggle with God about this reality, about her perceived sense of isolation, and she tried to determine whether her present and past circumstances had been a part of God’s plan for her.

Catalysts for Spiritual Growth

When I met with Jennifer for the second interview, she had just returned from her senior retreat. The retreat, called Kairos (Brown, 1965), reviews with student retreatants a variety of aspects of the human life experience viewed through a Christian perspective. The four-day retreat is presented through a series of talks given by student leaders and faculty members according to themes developed by the original author of the retreat. These themes include topics, such as Know Yourself, Being Christian, God’s Friendship, Results of God’s Friendship, Obstacles to God’s Friendship, and Love in Action. Each talk is further developed by one appointed speaker per topic using the basic outline that is provided, and by then including a significant amount of honest self-disclosure of one’s own life experiences as they relate to the designated theme. The retreat structure consists

of eleven talks, most of which are followed by segments of time for individual reflection and then followed by group discussion among the retreatants on the topic.

Kairos Brings Up Deeper Awareness of Ongoing Struggles

Jennifer came to the second interview reeling from the effects of the retreat. She felt depressed and discouraged. The clarity and optimism with which she had spoken the previous week were temporarily missing from her responses. She articulated that the retreat had caused the re-surfacing of painful feelings and memories related to the issues she had dealt with in the past, but which had subsided more recently. She stated that she preferred not to think about these issues, but all of a sudden, they had re-emerged as a result of the material shared in the retreat talks. She expressed regret that she had been unable to reflect on the preparation questions provided for the second interview. Rather than launching into the intended interview questions, it seemed more appropriate to invite Jennifer to discuss her retreat experience, as this might also illustrate the current experience of her spirituality.

Her overall impression of the retreat was that it had been an “interesting experience.” She had been surprised by what she called the “extreme stories” of her classmates. She was consoled to learn that she was not alone in her struggle of facing difficult life situations as other students were also struggling with personal issues. There was one student speaker Jennifer felt she had “related to completely” (F219). However, her attempts to talk further with this student were unsuccessful, leaving Jennifer feeling discouraged about her effort to connect with a classmate. By sharing this incident, Jennifer revealed what had been one of the most disheartening parts of the retreat for her: failing to connect and to share herself in a meaningful way with her classmates and to

feel that she belonged. This disappointment was exacerbated by the fact that her attempt to connect with classmates had been an ongoing struggle, a goal which represented the achievement of a sense of belonging and a position of greater emotional health in her life.

Jennifer acknowledged that she continued to find it hard to open up with others. At the retreat, she had found it difficult to share with her classmates, particularly as she stated she was still getting to know or even to meet some of them and when asked to disclose aspects of her life on a deeper level, she did not feel comfortable doing so. She was aware that many of her classmates were able to share deeply from the beginning of the retreat, and this bothered her. She described that by the time she felt ready to talk about a particular subject, the conversation had moved forward. Feeling dejected, Jennifer explained, “So I felt bad about that. Then I started thinking about stuff that I hadn’t really thought about since eighth grade. It was kind of like I’m back at square one. Like I feel like I’m back in eighth grade again” (F220).

Having acknowledged her frustration and inability to shake the lingering emotional effects of the retreat, optimism resurfaced as she suggested that the retreat may have been responsible for the occurrence of the significant spiritual experience while away at Kairos. She proceeded to describe how the pain had allowed for a major insight to shine through her gloom, bringing a movement in spiritual growth.

God Becomes More Real

Before attending the Kairos retreat, Jennifer’s perception of God had been that of a distant presence. While on Kairos, an epiphany illuminated this perception, “I learned to have a more personable, like, relationship with God. Before, I would see God just [as] something way out there and I would pray to him. Now it’s more like [he’s] in my life”

(F224). She realized that her prayer did not have to be structured or formalized and that it could take place at any time during her day.

When I pray, even when it's in the middle of the day, it's like, that's okay. 'Cause I don't feel like I need a formalized time, but at the same time, it's like, I still go through my inner *calm* before I pray. (F225)

To clarify, I asked Jennifer if she meant that God now felt closer to her. She affirmed this and added a further qualification revealing greater depth into her new insight. She stated, "Closer in a weird way, cause, the thing is, I'm *frustrated* with God today" (G228).

Admitting this, Jennifer disclosed a new level of freedom that had been released within her. "I learned that it's okay to be mad at God" (F229). She explained,

The whole thing was about how God has a plan for everything. And, well, that made me mad 'cause I don't like the plan. But then I realized that I'm angry out of...ignorance of the overall thing that's gonna happen [in the future]. I'm just mad that...things *are* the way they *are*. (F229)

Despite the anger Jennifer felt about the state of her life at that moment, she was beginning to recognize that by venting her anger at God about her situation, she had drawn closer and had begun to find God more approachable and easier to relate.

Just like situations in my life in general. Just like...*why* am I even at Trinity High School? That kind of thing. I'm just *frustrated* that things had to turn out...like the way that they did for me. Even though, I think, I just feel a little bit closed off to like, the *good* things, even though I *see* them. (F230)

Perhaps without realizing, Jennifer expressed that she had broken through a self-created barrier of superficial pretense with God, and as a result, she felt freer to be herself, a more authentic self with God.

Before, when I pray [*sic*] to God, I'd see all these good things and just...you know, they'd have to be direct good things, just like beauty and stuff as God-ness. And I was still feeling *distant*, but close at the same time. But now, it's more like, okay, now I can be *mad* at him and stuff like that. And it's just...Yeah, it's more...I don't want to say he's like *at my level*, cause—I mean—I still like want [him] to be like—you know—*God*. Like, he's still above me! (F230-232)

SE: And so he's feeling closer to you now and you can tell him?

Jennifer: Yeah. It's like I can say, "I'm *mad!*" And he'll *get* it. And I can just be frustrated. Like, I don't have to *suck* up to him all the time and be like, "Oh! I'm so grateful for everything." [uses exaggerated tone] I can be like, "Well, I'm mad at this." [honest tone] You know. I can say the bad things, too, and I don't have to just say like, "I did this wrong. I deserve this." It's like, well I might deserve this, but I'm still *mad* type of thing. (F233)

Not knowing previously that she could be angry at God, Jennifer was yet unclear whether she was angry at the way things had turned out in her life or whether she was angry at God for determining the events of her past through some sort of master plan. If the latter was the case, then Jennifer wondered further why it seemed that she had been stranded by God in her present situation.

She continued to disclose the struggle of her ongoing attempt to make sense of the events of her life. She identified her current reality of having few friends as a result of transferring to THS. She then shared an even deeper source of pain felt as a result of her perceived reality: that of an absence of feeling loved by her parents. With this disclosure, she revealed an inner search for meaning in her relationship with God and, integral to this, she shared a desire to find consolation in God from the pain of her perceived loss of love and subsequent unhealthy behaviors.

I'm trying to learn that even...like, I don't have a lot of friends...and my parents don't show love for me or anything, I can still ...like, I still have God. It's like *that*...should be enough. And so it's kind of like a balance. Like, should I be really mad? Or should I just kind of like, be okay with that being enough love to last me. So, I'm trying to tell myself that that should be enough love. You know, so that's...what I'm trying for. (F235)

The Value of Spirituality

I asked Jennifer whether she could imagine herself separated from or no longer practicing her spirituality. She expressed that for her, spirituality provided a connection

upon which she depended, particularly when she was having a bad day. It was her spirituality that pulled her through. In addition, she explained that if she were to deny her spirituality, she would be denying her whole reason for living.

‘Cause my whole reason for living is helping others, and being connected when I help them... ’cause I want to be a geriatric physician. So I’m thinking of “doctor,” like, helping and just... really being connected with people and helping them. And *that’s* spirituality. I mean, I can’t even *imagine* neglecting this goodness or anything that makes me always want to be a better person and makes me always want to help others and always want to see the good and the God in other *people*. (F467)

Reflecting further on the question, she added,

Like, no! I really can’t even if I’m in a fight with God, it’s [spiritual connection] like, still *there*. And this spirituality—how can I be in a fight with God? And... I—I don’t... okay, I refer to like my spirit, I think if it as like my ‘inner god.’ I’m having trouble with this—my own thinking. Because if I’m mad at God, [how] I can be not mad at my own ‘inner-god,’... I’m not sure how that works. (F468)

I asked Jennifer for clarification of how she viewed the presence of God within her.

SE: Is it *you* or is it God? Do you see it as the *depth* of the goodness in *you*? Or, do you see it as God... Christ’s life actually living within you.

Jennifer: Yeah! It’s Christ’s life living within me which is the *depth* of my goodness. It kind of blends into the two. (F470)

Returning to the question of what it meant for her to be spiritual, Jennifer’s response seemed to reflect that greater clarity was coming to her even as we spoke. New understanding was breaking through which encompassed all of her life struggles up to this point in her life, yet, at the same time, embraced the hope that ongoing growth would come bringing greater and greater freedom in the future. She exclaimed,

It’s... *me!* It’s just being *me*. It’s realizing—you know—that... it’s me! It’s just... can’t even... I can’t separate *me*, like, *myself*—Jennifer Winfrey—from the Jesus that lives within me. It’s one and the same—like, linked, always forever. I mean, until I die and rise... out of me [speaks more softly here]. I mean, as long as I’m living, they’re one in the same. Like, there’s no separation. There’s ignoring it, there’s neglectation [*sic*] of it. There’s *separation* from it—*totally*, a lot of times, I

separate myself from it in just various ways as I've talked about before. Um, but, it's there. I think it's *always* there. And I think it's what *keeps* me...*alive* during the times I neglect it.

SE: And the times that you've separated yourself from it, the consequences were...?

Jennifer: I'm just not *in-tuned* with it at all—I'm just harming myself. And I think that *that's* what keeps me alive when I'm harming myself so...horribly. You know, I think that *reminds* me, like, "Yeah. It's [inner spirit] still there." So, I can trash my body like there's no tomorrow, and it [inner spirit]...keeps me living, and it keeps me going and it protects me. God protects me, and my inner-*self* protects me, and it reminds me, "Yeah. It's still there. Even if I choose to see it or not." Like, I just cannot...they're together—me. (F480-481)

Jennifer Winfrey: Interpretive Critique

Corporeal Life-World

While the situated context and life contingencies of a person's existential life-worlds significantly impact the perceptions and meanings held in any individual's life, this was particularly true for Jennifer. Both the situated context of Jennifer's life and life contingencies have had a profound influence on her perception of spirituality and on the meaning it holds in her life. The corporeal contingent experiences of Jennifer's childhood and early adolescent years made a profound mark on her existential reality. Beginning in the fourth grade, she experienced severe anxiety attacks. By her eighth grade year, Jennifer reported feeling seriously depressed. She became involved in a relationship with a boy of the same age who was also depressed. At this point in her life, with her own depression being reflected back to her through her depressed boyfriend, Jennifer reported that she began to engage in cutting, a self-mutilating behavior, and one that she shared with her boyfriend. In the middle of her eighth grade year, Jennifer was found to be suffering from an eating disorder, and was hospitalized to address this disorder and restore her health. Her hospitalization lasted for a period just over two months. In the

years that followed, as Jennifer entered high school, her self-inflicted injuries and illnesses persisted, although her methods changed. She began to abuse the medications prescribed for her anxiety, and added to this the abuse of alcohol. On two occasions, Jennifer's chemical abuse brought her near to death.

At the time I met with Jennifer for the interviews, she had ceased engaging in the physically harmful behaviors and substance abuse for a period of approximately two years. However, the memories of these traumatic experiences remained fresh and sensitive, as open wounds with barely a fine layer of tissue formed over a gaping hole. In addition, Jennifer had been informed by her attending medical personnel that, physically, her body would not be fully recovered from the residual chemical toxins ingested for another five to six months; a period that would not conclude until after her high school graduation.

The memories of Jennifer's past behaviors continued to be sources of shame for her. At times, these memories throbbed with disgust and regret. One could even imagine a visceral memory of these experiences lingering inside Jennifer's body, thus creating a corporeal life-world clouded with the darkness of shame and an oppressive sense—imagined or real—of the poisonous substances, self-ingested, moving at will throughout her various body systems. The reality of Jennifer's corporeal life-world contained ample reasons for being discouraged, yet also held for Jennifer the freshness of a two-year period of good health. At times, though, fresh growth can be tentative and quiet, only whispering its developing presence. Jennifer continued to express a longing for the return to good physical health. This deep desire to be “healthy” was articulated throughout every life-world of Jennifer's existence.

Spatial Life-World

By the time I met Jennifer, her daily spatial environment had changed from her former school environment, to that of a new school, THS, for a period of one and a half years. However, this new environment provided a mixture of both positive and challenging factors to Jennifer in her journey toward full health. In addition, Jennifer's home environment had been the scene of previous self-destructive events and perceived empty support from her parents. Her home environment remained shadowed by the memories of her past behaviors, with only few markers of a new trail blazed going forward.

THS provided a means of escape from her former school environment which had been filled with opportunities for negative and self-destructive behavior: easy access for obtaining drugs and alcohol, acquaintances who were substance abuse users, and an apparently relaxed, non-challenging academic atmosphere. At THS, Jennifer soon grasped onto the stronghold of a structured and serious academic curriculum. However, the loss of familiar friendships created a significant hole for Jennifer socially in an otherwise positive spatial environment at THS. She felt the pain of this loss almost daily, and at times, her loneliness threatened to overshadow the positive aspects of THS. Because of the ache of her loneliness, questions frequently surfaced within her, "Why did I have to be here?" "Why did these things have to happen to me in my life?"

Temporal Life-World

Jennifer's temporal life-world was affected by the earlier physical events of her life. Transferring into THS provided a marker in time separating her from the past with a new beginning; however, while this created a new band on the timeline of Jennifer's life,

the new demarcation was only the first step this new band was only the first step beyond the of events, substance abuse, and loosely structured environment of her former school. One might anticipate that greater temporal resolution of these issues may come in the future as Jennifer moved forward into college and beyond. However, while in the second semester of her senior year, she remained temporally close to the painful events and, even more so, to the ensuing emotional chaos. Moreover, although she had moved into a new environment, she remained in the same socially and culturally demarcated period of an adolescent's life: she was still in high school and, therefore, not yet completely separated in time from the contingent events of her past. She was still within the same socially segmented period, and had not yet escaped her past. Temporally, she was still attached. In her desire to be healthy, Jennifer longed for the time to come that would bring this resolution to her life, a resolution that she perceived would come with the return to good health, physically and emotionally.

Relational Life-World

The fact that Jennifer had joined a high-school class at the beginning of the class' third year together did not bode well for Jennifer's assimilation into a class culture that had already formed and journeyed together for two years. In my experience with high-school students, I have observed that for adolescents, intra-class friendships create bonding within a class, which grows over time as the class is promoted from grade to grade. Each class develops its own culture, spirit and inner harmony, or lack of harmony. The culture is developed as a result of the mixture of personalities, and through the collective and individual contingent events shared among the membership over time. For a student to join a class halfway through its high-school lifetime, assimilation into the

class culture is challenging and faces great odds for the incoming student. The incoming student will have missed a significant amount of time and experiences which have had a formative influence on the class's culture, identity, and collective individual relationships. It has been my experience that unless the incoming student has a powerful or attractive personality to the majority of the class, full assimilation will not readily occur.

While there was evidence of a mentoring system in place at THS to initiate incoming freshmen class students, there was no sign of a similar program in place for students entering THS later than their freshman year. The absence of successful bonding and networking among acquaintances was particularly evident for Jennifer as she expressed difficulties with friendships, feeling alone and isolated, and still unacquainted with members of her class while attending her Kairos senior retreat. Initially, she was slow to open up to make friends at THS, yet once she began to reach out, her own emotional baggage may have placed extreme burdens on budding friendships. She described that during her senior year, these friends made in the latter part of her junior year seemed to avoid her, rather than to remain present to her. Despite her desire for friendship, Jennifer's own extreme emotional needs may have acted as a deterrent for their formation.

As Jennifer described her experiences in her Kairos retreat small group, she expressed not knowing the girls in her group and that there were even some whom she had never met. It is possible that some of the girls may have been from the junior class attending the retreat in order to train to be leaders for their own class in the following year. However, in the second half of Jennifer's senior year, she still lacked a sense of

familiarity with her own classmates. For an adolescent, peer relationships are important for the ongoing growth and development of one's identity and movement into adulthood. For Jennifer, the lack of these significant relationships created a relational life-world tainted with emptiness and pain.

In addition, Jennifer's relational life-world appeared to lack a firm foundation of confidence that she was loved by her parents. Jennifer described her relationship with her parents as conflicted. She expressed a lack of feeling comfortable with them at home. She shared a few examples of tense, short responses on her part to their efforts to spend time with her or to be involved in her life. One occasion that occurred during the interview period reflected some reluctance on Jennifer's part to admit her parents into her life. However, it was Jennifer's deep conviction that she did not feel loved by her parents. This, too, was a source of deep pain in Jennifer's relational life-world.

She did describe positive connections with some adults in her life; with her grandfather, her piano teacher, and with a nurse in the hospital where she offered volunteer service. However, she did not mention any significant connections with any of her teachers and described a misdirected encounter with her school counselor.

Spiritual Life-World

Jennifer articulated a perception of three different aspects of spirituality. First, she referred to spirituality as the presence of a spirit within her. Secondly, she noted spirituality as an energy that passes between two people, or as a feeling of connection with another person or with herself. Finally, Jennifer described spirituality as being attuned to these connections, and as feeling connected with people. She asserted that by being connected with others, she was reminded of God's love and presence, and, in

addition, by having connections with others, God's pervasive presence and love were physically manifested to her. Jennifer's perception of spirituality was integrally related to her belief in God.

Each of Jennifer's life-worlds, spatial, temporal, physical, and relational, viewed through a filter of spirituality, were in the process of becoming transformed. Despite her physical illnesses and trauma of the past, she experienced a deep desire for God pulsing through her body since her early childhood. Jennifer's spatial life-world, enhanced by her naturally strong sensory awareness, provided Jennifer a medium through which she was able to visually describe the presence of God: with a visual beauty and a sense of awe. Jennifer expressed that she had sought to understand her life and to make meaning of the contingent events of her past, yet, she continued to search for deeper meaning within a perspective that assumed the presence of God. She longed to know whether the events had been a part of a divine plan. Finally, the life-world that was most transformed and which acted as the most transformative agent for Jennifer was that of her relational life-world. In addition, it was this life-world which had the greatest overlap with her spiritual life-world.

Jennifer referred often to her desire to connect with others and to form friendships. She felt embraced by her parish community and felt a sense of belonging in the Catholic Church. She identified a particular joy experienced from receiving the Eucharist, a time when she could physically receive Jesus and be touched by him. She expressed a persistent and deep hunger for love and described feeling a deep connection with God throughout her life. She further described a personal relationship with God that was transformed ever so slightly while on her Kairos retreat, evidencing a relationship

that was vital, alive, and real.

For every relationship which left a vacancy within Jennifer's relational life-world, she turned to God to fill that space. While critics of religion or of those who believe in the divine may find this to be proof that God or religion only serve as a crutch for the weak, Jennifer's life experiences offer further evidence to suggest the contrary. Jennifer defined spirituality as the authentic relationship with herself, and the presence of the spirit within her as a manifestation of God's presence in the world. She found her own inner spirit so sacred that she credited her rescue from death to the presence of the divine within her or to her inner spirit preserving her life. She further expressed knowing that by doing herself harm, she was doing violence to the divine within herself, and by caring for herself, she not only grew in relationship with herself, but also drew closer to God. Finally, it was through Jennifer's spiritual life-world and belief in God that she found hope for the future; that she would return to physical health, that healthy relationships would be hers, and that she would find love.

Spirituality held great meaning for Jennifer as it was her spirituality that contained her whole reason for living: to help others. Jennifer expressed that she could not imagine neglecting this inner goodness that made her want to be a better person, that inspired her to want to help others, and that made her want to see the good and the God in others. She concluded that her spirituality was the essence of who she was, and therefore, could not be separated from her self.

Katie MacDougall: A Snapshot in Time

Perceiving a difference between religion and spirituality, Katie stated that religion contains the rules of what one believes, whereas spirituality is when those beliefs are

made to fit one's own perspective, "Sculpted by...your life experiences, and...the way that you were *raised* and brought up, and also, the values that your parents feel are necessary to instill in you" (G89).

She described the spiritual part of her life as how she viewed God, as that which determined how she was to act in certain situations based on her faith, her morals and values. Asked to define the term spirituality, she added only that it would include how she interacted with people, and how she viewed God working in her life and in the lives of others. Katie offered an example of this, recalling a trip taken with her family when she was in junior high to help build an orphanage in India. She noticed a strength of faith in people who had very little materially. She commented on the delight they exhibited in helping others and their joy over being able to go to church. Observing people who had so little, yet who lived with such full hearts and a willingness to help others she stated, "I *definitely* saw God" (G54).

A second trip to the orphanage the following summer impressed Katie as she witnessed the people living in extreme poverty, yet so *happy* to be alive. She commented that "They definitely don't take anything for granted" (G55). She acknowledged that through this experience, she had felt God acting in her life,

Yeah! Just being able to like *see* that, and then, like, take...that back home, like, just because *I* take so many things for granted. And like...I'm *so* unwilling just to do like...the most *simple* things...just like, out of my own *laziness*. Like...it definitely like...gave me a new perspective. (SE: Uh-hum) (G56)

She explained more what she meant by this new perspective, "Like, [big exhale] It definitely made me look a lot differently on situations. Like [where before], 'Oh! This really sucks!' But it could be *so* much worse for me. Like, I really can't give like a specific example" (G57).

Perception of Self as a Spiritual Person

Katie perceived herself as a spiritual person by the fact that her parents had raised her in a spiritual manner. She explained that she demonstrated this spiritual manner in the way she presented herself to others, and by the morals and values that her parents have instilled in her. She described,

My parents, like, they really wanted me to be able to see that like all the *good* in the world and like all the beautiful *things*, like...they're all God. And like, everything that I've been *given* and like all of my *talents* and like...all of my abilities like, they're *gift*. And like, they weren't something that I, myself...um...I, myself had any like...effect over. It's like, "These are *yours*. This—like—this is part of God's plan for you." And so, like...uh...[exhales—looses train of thought].

So I think that when I do certain things, like, I'm definitely *very* thankful. And like, I always get really *nervous* [sing-songy], so like, I'll *pray* before something. I'll be just like... "just...make sure that like this *goes* well!" Or, "Just like, hope that I *do* well!" and then like...I was like, "Give thanks." ...But like, I know that like God can't *change* anything, but like, He can help me do my best! So...I think that...that helps me...Like, be a spiritual person. [whispering] (G70-71)

Values Katie's parents sought to instill in their daughters were honesty and respect, the manner through which Katie sought to present herself to others. She explained,

Like,[exhales] when I say the way I present myself, [sniffs] like, [big exhale] I think the way I present myself, it doesn't really like have anything to do with like my spirituality. But, like, I think that it's like a reflection of who I am inside. Like, the way I *conduct* myself with people. Like, I'm not gonna be rude. Like I'm gonna try and be as like nice as possible. Like, I'm gonna treat them how I would like to be treated. Like that kind of thing...So, [sing-songy and big exhale] it's not that like...spiritual the way I walk or anything. But I think it's just ...like I said, it's a reflection of like the way I am inside. (G72-73)

Explaining further the environment her parents sought to provide, Katie recounted a recent experience when a digital photo of Katie smoking hookah with her friends was emailed to the school principal. Katie's response to her parents' reaction displayed a struggle to hold them to the authenticity of their words and the values they espoused.

Valuing Spirituality

Katie expressed that at the present time, spirituality, her faith, and regular attendance at church held little importance for her. Clarifying, she stated, “At like the bottom of the totem pole, or whatever?” (G40). She added that she did not mean they were objectively unimportant, however, among her own personal priorities, they came at the end of the list because of the other activities in which she was presently involved.

I come to school [big exhale]...every day during the week, and I get up really early; and I work really *hard* and like, I get [claps hands together] all my work done. And then, I’m in the *musical*, so I’m here after *school*, and then on the weekends, like, I’ll go out and play tennis. And then, on Sunday, like, going to church and getting up in the morning is like, one of the *last* things I want to do. (G41)

Katie revealed feeling disconnected with her friends from the church and that she currently found little worth in attending either Sunday school or services. She stated,

Obviously, there’s a really easy *solution* to it. Like, “Just go!” But like, I’ve just never felt...[exhales]...very inclined to Sunday school. Just because, ...[exhales] it’s just...so ridiculous. Cause it’s like dealing with high school. Like, there’s *separate* clicks, [sing-songy voice] and...no one really listens to what exhales] the...whoever the speaker is has to say. And like, no one really *takes* anything from it. And like, no one really wants to like *deepen* their faith. It’s just kind of like a place to go. And so...it’s just...never really anything that’s ever interested me. Just because like...if I’m not gonna *gain* anything from it, and like, I really don’t *like* the people that I have to like hang out with for a whole hour. Like, it’s just...it just doesn’t make any sense. (G43)

Katie began to speak of her sister’s involvement in Campus Crusade at her college.

Describing how her sister actively evangelized people on the street, Katie revealed,

“That’s so intimidating to me” (G45). Speaking almost in a whisper, she stated, “I just couldn’t even *imagine* like approaching someone and talking to them about like, my faith and my walk with *Christ*” (G45).

After disclosing her own contrasting view towards her sister’s strong commitment

to faith, Katie moved to a slightly deeper level, revealing greater truth about her position at that moment with regard to spirituality. She stated,

Just because I feel like, I just don't have a lot to say. Because like, I haven't come from like a broken home or like, I haven't come from like a place where like I've had to like build myself up and like...like...God was the one that was like *saving* me from something, you know? And so, like, I feel like...I just don't have a lot to *say*.

And so like, when I was getting confirmed, I had to write my testimony [inflects voice], uh...I was just so *bewildered*. Like, I just...didn't know what to write. And so, I just kind of ended up not writing one. And...[forced laugh] I just...I don't know. [voice sounds forced] So...[more chuckles] (G47)

At the time of the interview, Katie was not inclined to pursue the growth of her spirituality. She expressed that she wanted to be able to control her own life; therefore, she did not believe it was realistic to put her concerns into a perspective of faith. She wanted to know when and where, how and why things were going to happen in her life. She preferred to make things happen for herself than to depend on someone or something else to make them happen. While Katie would have liked to be able to let God take care of her concerns and to let God provide for her, she stated, "It just doesn't *happen* that way. And so, I'd rather make it happen for *myself*, and like, *know* how it's gonna happen than just let some surprise kind of catch me off guard" (G91).

Katie wanted certainty in her life. She referred to feeling disconnected to her church community and implied that this feeling did not encourage a greater affinity towards spirituality. She added that by feeling disconnected from her church community, she believed that this further contributed to her desire to put off "the whole thing" (G92). She expressed that she would rather put other things first in her life so as to avoid dealing with the displeasure of the community experience. "I think being a part of the community is *such* a huge deal at my church that like, if you're not a part of the community, it's like,

really hard to participate in other things” (G93).

Katie did not feel disconnected from God. However, she questioned whether God would approve of her lifestyle. She added, “But I don’t really want to change my lifestyle to accommodate *him*” (G94). She acknowledged that this may have had something to do with her feelings of disconnect. She explained,

Yeah. I think it...does have to do with it. Just because like, I’m in high school and like, I want to have fun. And like, I want to be able to do what everyone *else* does. And I don’t want to like, let my religious beliefs like, *stop* me. But at the same time, like, obviously, like, I have *boundaries* and stuff, so I’m not just gonna like go do something like, super crazy and wild. But like, um...I think...it’s definitely one of those things where I just like—want to be able to like—forget everything I’ve been taught. And just kind of like...go with like...the *flow*. (G95)

While Katie had set her religious beliefs aside for the time being, she explained the challenging position her sister had taken with her regarding Katie’s stance:

My sister is very religious, like, she *often* likes to bring this up with me, and just like, “Well, *Katie!* Mom and dad told me that you don’t like going to *church!*” Like, “What’s *wrong?*” Like, ‘How come you don’t want to *go?*’ Like, “It’s really *important*. You *know* that.” And like, she always brings up like such *sore* points that I never want to talk about. But then, I think it’s also really good that she *does*, just so like, I know *why*. Because, normally, like, I would just like, put it off and like, I really wouldn’t give a reason. I ‘d be like, “Oh. Just because.” But like, she really makes me think about it. (G99)

Katie admired and appreciated her sister, and looked forward to her sister’s upcoming visit, yet she also anticipated a further discussion about Katie’s views towards religion.

She explained,

And then like, ...she...she’s definitely like, my moral compass. I would have to say. Like, “Well, *Katie...*, you *know* that’s not good for you. Like, it’s not healthy. You need to be talking to mom and *dad*. Like, they *know*, even though you don’t want to *do* what they say. Like, they know what’s *best* and like, they’ve done this before, kind of thing.” So, like, I definitely...like, I talk about like my faith and stuff with *her*. And so, she’s home this week for spring break. And so, I’m sure we’ll have some sort of *talk* about this because she’s on retreat right now, but she’s coming back today, so! [chuckles] (G100)

For the present, Katie wished to continue exploring and experimenting with life as a high-school student.

Katie MacDougall: Interpretive Critique

Objectively, Katie recognized that spirituality held value; however, spirituality did not hold much value for her at that time in her life. Reviewing the life-worlds of Katie's existence provides insight into her perspective of spirituality. In Katie's temporal life-world, neither religion nor spirituality held significance for her in the past. While she attended Sunday school and church services throughout her childhood, she found little meaning in either practice. In addition, she found the students who attended Sunday school superficial and lacking in faith or any real desire to learn about God. She had grown to dislike her peers, and since she found little meaning in the classes offered, she disliked participating further in the Sunday school program provided by her church. In addition, Katie perceived that community was highly valued at her church, but since she felt disconnected with the community, this was further reason why she did not appreciate the practice of attending church. She did not find meaning in the content offered at the Sunday services. Because of the empty religious experiences of the past and absence of meaningful relationships or experiences for her presently, Katie found no meaning or value in attending church.

She expressed that while she considered herself a spiritual person, she was not inclined to pursue the growth of her spirituality in the future as there were other things in her life that she found more important, such as after-school drama productions, sports, and spending time with her friends. In addition, she wanted to be in control of her own life and did not see a value in turning her life over to God. She wanted certainty and

preferred to make things happen for herself rather than depend on God for outcomes. Nor did she believe that it was realistic to place one's concerns in God's hands. Katie shared that she did not feel disconnected from God, yet she doubted whether God would approve of her lifestyle, a factor that suggested more distance in her relationship with God than closeness.

Katie's lack of regard for religion appeared to be a source of tension between herself and her parents. She reported that it was important for her parents to establish a strong religious environment for their children, a factor that suggested Katie's spatial environment was charged with conflict. This was further evidenced in the conversations she shared with her sister. In sharp contrast to Katie, these sisterly conversations revealed that Katie's older sister greatly valued her religion. While Katie admired her sister, the relationship they shared contained ongoing admonitions from her sister that Katie wholeheartedly embrace their parents' chosen religion and practice. Yet Katie neither held religion with the same value, nor did she feel personally inclined to share her religious values as publicly as her sister who was a committed Campus Crusader for Christ. This may have created more tension for Katie in her familial relationships. Within Katie's relational life-world, the active pursuit of religion was modeled, however, this goal did not resonate with Katie, nor did it appear to offer to her a means through which she could live authentically.

Perceiving Katie's overall existential state of being, it appeared that she was living more out of a mode of inauthenticity than authenticity at that point in her life. Both her behaviors and style of communicating expressed that she was currently not comfortable with herself and was attempting to engage in a number of false behaviors.

She perceived herself to be spiritual, yet, was unable to provide authentic examples of this manifested in her life. The manner by which she communicated herself in the interview seemed to express resistance that perhaps she did not want to participate. However, since students' participation had been optional, I questioned the degree to which she was living out of a sense of inner freedom.

She did speak with clarity when revealing that she felt she had nothing to say about spirituality. She asserted that since she had not had a troubled life, she did not have the experience of needing God to be saved. This suggested that she perceived having a troubled life was a prerequisite for one to have something of value to share about spirituality. The interview raised many questions for me: To what degree had Katie resolved her own feelings about religion within herself? Had she disclosed her truest self with regard to her feelings about religion to anyone? What was needed for Katie to move towards greater authenticity? What qualities had Katie's teachers observed in her that they found her to meet the criteria for participation in this study? Further questions emerged for me, from the perspective of a Catholic secondary educator, regarding how one would interact with a student like Katie in the classroom, such as: How does a teacher reveal spiritual insights to his or her students if they do not appear to value either religion or spirituality? What does this suggest for teachers, administrators, and diocesan personnel if, in fact, it is a teacher or teachers who do not appear to value either religion or spirituality? These questions suggested topics for possible future research.

Katie Concludes the Process

Eighteen minutes into the interview with Katie, she disclosed that she felt she had nothing to say about spirituality. This statement provided insight into her behavior and

apparent lack of cooperation. In addition, the revelation reinforced an already growing sense that, despite her teachers' recommendation, Katie was not in a space where I could consider her eligible to participate in the study according to the originally stated criteria. Still in the first interview, I decided to ask questions from the second and third interview agendas to determine whether different approaches would succeed in surfacing any previous experiences or spiritual positionality that might contribute to the study. Any responses of substance Katie provided are presented in Chapters IV and V.

Fifty-five minutes into the interview, the audio recorder inadvertently shut off, having reached its maximum digital memory capacity. Since I believed I had exhausted the depth of Katie's ability to articulate her present perception and experience of spirituality, I ended the interview. I shared with her that we could not continue that day due to the lack of recording capacity, but that I believed we had covered all of the questions for the three interviews sufficiently. I believed that she had answered the questions to the best of her ability. I asked whether she felt she had anything further to add, which she did not. At this point, I concluded the interview, thanking her for her participation, and told her that we would not need to meet again.

Kathleen Norris: Understanding Spirituality

During our first interview, Kathleen expressed that spirituality was not a concept that held particular meaning, however, the concept of being a Child of God carried great personal meaning and was held within the context of religion. If Kathleen were asked to explain spirituality, she acknowledged that by merely stating, "It's relationship" would not suffice. For her, spirituality was synonymous with being a "Child of God" (H131) and to living this out to its fullest standards (H137). She stated,

Being a Child of God means that you have to have a relationship *with* God. So, like, we can't—like *I* can't—*nobody* can spiritually *grow* unless you *have* that relationship. And when you *are* a Child of God, that's when you know that you have a relationship. (H432)

She explained that this relationship extended to others, but was centered in the relationship with God. Kathleen clarified that being a Child of God carried with it many responsibilities, including the responsibility of recognizing and assuming those obligations. Additionally, it carried the responsibility to engage in regular and ongoing conversation to allow the relationship with God to grow.

Kathleen perceived spirituality and religion as the same. “It’s what you live by, it’s what you *know*, and it’s how you live your life” (H16). She expressed that she understood Christianity not as a religion, but as a relationship with God and with God’s people, or with other Christians. She imagined spirituality was about making connections with whatever or whomever one considered as God. For example, Kathleen connected with God through her daily devotions of prayer and reading the Bible. In this way, she sought what God had in store for her life and what God wished for her to do.

She was encouraged to connect with God by the love she had experienced in her immediate family and within her church family. She benefitted from the personal encouragement from her youth leaders who called her weekly to inquire whether she had talked with God and read her Bible. Kathleen found that these regular check-ups kept her going and helped her not to backslide in her journey, especially because she knew they would be checking up on her. She further expressed a desire not to disappoint God, as that would never be a good thing. However, she stated that it had been the members of her church community who kept her going in her relationship with God and who continued to support her in this connection.

Current Spiritual Identity

During the second interview, Kathleen began using the term *spirituality* synonymously with her lifetime experience and self-identity as a Child of God. For Kathleen, it was her spirituality that provided meaning, and it was from this that she based all of her thoughts and actions. She described her spirituality as that which provided the backbone for everything that she did in life, particularly for making choices according to what she believed God wanted her to do. It was this backbone, this spirituality which served as the foundation for Kathleen's self-identity. Reflecting on some of the challenges and trials of her teenage years, Kathleen asserted that when dealing with temptations like boys and images that appeared on television, she turned to her spiritual base "to remember *who I am* and *where I come from*" (H213). Kathleen stated, "I am a Child of God. So, therefore, there's just a lot of things that I can't do cause...[voice softens, almost inaudible] it won't please him" (H214). She explained that this was not hard for her because she was disciplined and because she was raised with strong morals and a healthy conscience that were able to determine right from wrong.

For spirituality to serve as her backbone, Kathleen expressed, "That means for me it's something that I can always *lean* on because I know it's something that is concrete and it will always be true" (H222). She trusted that this backbone, or moral guidance, would always be there to guide her. She realized that she, herself, would change, but trusted that her spirituality, providing its moral guidance, would remain a concrete foundation available to her whenever she had need. For Kathleen, this spirituality came to her through her identity as a Child of God and was confirmed because of her certain belief in the presence of God. This knowledge gave her confidence that she would

emerge triumphantly from any difficult situation that came her way.

Leadership was a dimension of spirituality for Kathleen, particularly as it was encompassed within her broader identity as a Child of God. She explained that while not all are called to be leaders within the community, “God places something in everybody who believes in him, *some form* of leadership, like, teaching, or service...just anything” (H441). Kathleen articulated further her perception of the responsibilities entailed for a Child of God stating, “A *gift* is a quality that comes from spirituality. So was leadership. As Christians, we’re supposed to *lead* other people to Christ, right? So, it all kind of ties in” (H442). Kathleen explained that as a Child of God, as one’s own relationship with God grows stronger, more responsibility should be assumed for giving leadership to bringing others to follow Christ. Kathleen’s current expression of her spirituality, or commitment to Christ, was manifested within her strong commitment to serving as a leader within her church community and within her family.

Contemporary Experiences of Spirituality

Spirituality Exercised at School

Kathleen freely engaged her spirituality while at school. To illustrate this, she recounted an example that happened not long before our interviews. She explained that a practice of her church community was to fast and to pray together two days each week during the month of January. On Friday evenings, the week’s fasting culminated by the community coming together to pray until midnight. During her first January fast experience while at THS, the girls whom Kathleen joined for lunch noticed that she was not eating and became alarmed. “What’s wrong with you? Are you sick?” Kathleen explained to them that nothing was wrong; she was merely fasting. Raising further

concern, she told them, “No, I’m doing this because for me, it is a way to get close to God” (H233). With her peers still curious, Kathleen freely shared her deeper desire,

After I told them that, they asked a bunch of questions like, “Oh. *Why* would you want to do that?” and “Don’t you feel like you’re already close to him just by reading in the morning and just by living right?” And I would say, “Yes, I do feel close to him. But this time of fasting and prayer, it’s *me* giving *up* something. And by giving up something, I open up *time* to spend with God, which enables me to get closer and closer and closer each day that I fast.” (H234)

As a result, one of the girls began to fast with Kathleen for the following Fridays. To this unexpected response, Kathleen commented, “That was really cool” (H235). While none of the other girls joined in the fasting, they never displayed anything but respect towards Kathleen, neither at THS nor at her former school, something for which she was grateful.

Kathleen shared that she enjoyed fasting, especially since she was not alone, but felt connected with members of her church community who were fasting at the same time. She explained that fasting brought her closer to God. Very often while fasting, she did not enter the cafeteria, but went to the auditorium or to some other quiet place on campus where she could spend her lunch hour reading her Bible and praying. She stated,

I mean, what else was I gonna do? That’s what fasting is for—a chance to get closer to *God*. So, the only way, or the *best* way to do that, is by reading what he says and by *talking* to Him. So, that’s what fasting is for me. (H242)

Commenting further on the strength and power she received from the community gathered to pray after a day of fasting, Kathleen expressed,

It’s always interesting to go to prayer, or fasting and just see... and just *come expecting* something, but not knowing *what* you’re expecting. Just come expecting with an open heart and when you do that—or when all the *youth* do that, especially—God really just like *moved*. And we ended up staying like an extra *two* hours, cause we’ll just be *singing* or *praying* for each other or just praying by ourselves or something like that. (H249)

Spirituality Practiced at Home

Kathleen's mindfulness about her spirituality allowed her to perceive a variety of opportunities that provided spiritual growth within her family home. Some of these were by her own design and effort; others were opportunities resulting from the characteristics of her family. Kathleen took charge of fostering of her spiritual growth through daily rituals of prayer and devotion, reading the Bible and listening to Christian or Gospel music. Each morning, she meditated on a song or scripture passage and talked with God. She continued to hold herself mentally aware of God and of her needs for the day while in the car on the way to school. She further described "praying without ceasing" throughout her day (H283). She reflected that these were the ways that she kept herself "spiritually up" (H282).

Conversations with her dad provided growth as Kathleen mindfully sought to strengthen her spirituality as a Child of God. She found engaging with him in conversations about church, about his ideas for the church, and about her own spirituality both stimulated and strengthened her daily walk. She described that her evenings consisted of these treasured conversations, of homework, and then of time spent reading and reflecting on the Bible followed by more conversation with God. Kathleen stated that most often, she inadvertently prayed herself to sleep at night.

Artifact of Grace

Kathleen wore a necklace with a cross (Figure 5). When I asked Kathleen if she had an artifact of any particular significance, she exclaimed, "My necklace!" (H291). Opening her collar, she displayed a silver necklace with a cross surrounded by a ring. Etched into the ring were the words, "Christ's strength," which was an abbreviated

phrase for a longer verse taken from Philippians, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (4:13). Kathleen shared, “So those are my artifacts. I wear them everyday. I don’t take them off. It [the necklace] stays on my neck *everyday*” (H291).



Figure 5. Kathleen's artifact: Necklace with cross and ring.

Kathleen received the necklace and cross from her uncle as a Christmas gift some years previously. Crossing her hands over her chest on top of the necklace, she explained,

For me, the cross stays *right* here. So it’s just like Jesus, he’s always close to my heart. He’s with me at *all* times and he’s *never* gonna leave me. That’s why I leave it on cause I know he’s never gonna leave me. So I just leave my cross on all the time. (H292)

Kathleen explained that the ring hanging on the necklace had been a gift from her friend, Danielle, as a special reminder that God would always be with her, that she would always have Christ’s strength throughout any situation that came up in her life. Wearing the ring on her necklace reminded Kathleen that with Christ’s strength, she would always triumph no matter what challenges life might bring.

Challenges to Spiritual Growth

Challenges at Home

Because both of her parents were committed Christians, Kathleen’s home life was

favorable to her spiritual growth. However, she also described her present home life as “a testing time and a time of growth” (H262). With three younger sisters, Kathleen’s patience was often tried. She explained, “It’s like I could react to a lot of the things they do in so *many* ways, but I always have to *try* really hard to choose the *right* way to react to what they’re doing” (H262). Kathleen expressed that her spirituality helped her with this. She often called to mind the phrase, “What would Jesus do?” to help her to deal positively with her sisters due to the many annoyances they caused her. Kathleen’s mindfulness of a higher goal helped her decision-making process when dealing with her sisters. She explained,

Because they are younger and they’re annoying [laughs slightly] to me –no-o better term to use than that. They’re just annoying. But, like a lot of the things they do, I just really have to think about it. Like, Okay, what I say to them next, it could either really *hurt* them, and bring them down even *more*, or I can *use* what they did to *teach* them that “No, you can’t *do* this, you have to do *this instead*” or something like that.

So, my spirituality has helped me *definitely* in that area because so many times they’ve done something, I could just like bring them down just like put ‘em in the dirt, but I decide to bring them up out of that. (H263-264)

Kathleen referred to the quality of her home life within this period as “an educational time” (H265). Home was a place that provided growth inspired her parents’ examples. Emphasizing the deep spiritual qualities of her father, she observed,

My dad, he’s *really, really* spiritual....he’s always in his Bible. He’s always talking to God, or looking for new ways to reach other people. So, I learn by doing and by observing other people. So, at home, I’ll see my dad reading his Bible every morning, getting up like an extra hour to read his Bible. I’ll see *him* doing that, and that makes *me* do it. It makes *me* get up earlier to read my Bible and go deeper into the Word. (H265)

Her father’s attitude towards sharing his music with others in praise of God provided a powerful model of service for Kathleen. She expressed that by seeing him use his gifts to

serve others, she had realized her own potential for serving others:

He's a saxophonist, so he goes out to a lot of different churches around California and around the *country*, really. And I see *him* using *his* gifts to go out to serve other people. I look at *him*, and I say, "Well, okay. I can use *my* gifts" cause I'm an athlete. I love theatre. And I just love...really, I just *love* serving other people. So I look at *him* and say, "Okay, well I can use *my* gifts to serve other people and bring them *up*." So, it's a growth in that area. (H266)

Kathleen explained that she also experienced the growth of her spirituality through tests. Once again, she engaged the example of her younger sisters,

I can grow more and more in God just by doing the right thing with *them*. That brings me closer. Or if my mom tells me to do something that I *don't* want to do, I'll do it anyway cause I know it'll help me *grow*. (H267)

Accepting the role of teacher to her two youngest sisters had been an opportunity for growth. At the beginning of the current school year, Kathleen began teaching them the books of the Bible and, more recently, she taught them the Lord's Prayer. Kathleen expressed awareness that not only did this provide time for her to get to know her sisters better, she was also helping them to strengthen their relationship with God. To this, she exclaimed with tenderness in her voice, "Oh! I enjoy that a lot!" (H269).

Much learning was the result of Kathleen's attempts to reach out to her next younger sister, yet this had been learning of a different nature. This sister was in eighth grade at the time of the interviews, and by Kathleen's description, she was prone to moods and long spells of withdrawal from the family. Kathleen expressed her concern that this sister only talked to the family when she was angry, and on those occasions, she yelled. For Kathleen, this required a constant effort to love her sister. She stated, "With the sister that's *right* under me, I have to really work on loving her. I just have to continue to love her, even though she may not show that *she* loves *me* all the time" (H272). This was not an easy task, but Kathleen's keen perception of her sister

demonstrated that she had taken time to think about this and had achieved a level of understanding that helped her to maintain a loving interaction with her. She revealed,

Oh my gosh! She's a really hard one [laughs]. And she doesn't *talk* to us....So, for me, I just work on loving her. Every time she does something that's like, "Why did you do that?" I have to work on just *loving* her and trying to bring her *out* of that state of *whatever* she's in. We don't know *what* is wrong with her right now. But...[laughs]

Love is a big thing for me and the sister that's right under me. Cause a lot of the times, [*sic*] it seems like she feels she's *not* being loved, especially when my mom and I—well, cause she still goes to school out in *Pleasant Valley*. So it's always *me* and my *two* younger sisters and my *mom*. So *she's* always with my *dad*. So, I guess, for her, she feels kind of left *out* and *unloved* in a sense.

So, that's why I work on loving her. Because I *did* notice that. And I know if I was in *her* shoes I would feel...kinda *bad* that everybody else is having their life in Californiaville, and at school, and getting to spend time with *mommy* all the time...So, for me, just trying to bring her up and just *love* on her continuously, even though she doesn't *show* her love [slight chuckle] for *me* all the time is a *definite* way I show my spirituality at home with her. (H273-275)

Church Sponsored Youth Challenge

Kathleen expressed that she looked forward each winter to attending youth camp up in the mountains with 40 to 60 other teens. She described this three-day event as

It's a time for the youth to just *be* together and experience *God* by *themselves* without like, adults *looking* at them and worrying about, "Oh. Well somebody's *looking* at me." Because we're *all* youth and we really—we don't care about—[chuckles] we don't care about each other, like, when it comes to worshipping. (H300)

Because of the rustic atmosphere and scant furnishings at the camp, Kathleen perceived this part of the experience as a time for the youth to be humble. The program provided full days of activity, centered on praise and worship. Each day began with praise and worship scheduled for 20 minutes which inevitably stretched into two to three hours, followed by some free time and later, a session with a guest speaker. In the evening, the schedule was repeated. Kathleen was animated as she described the experience shared

with the other teens. She described,

All the youth, we realize that... “Okay, nobody cares about me if I lift my hands and worship.” So, we’re *all* doing that. We *all* have that mindset. “Okay, it’s just *me* and *God* right now.” And he really just *moves* like, in such a *powerful* way that we can’t stop worshipping. We end up worshipping for *two hours*! Just straight worship, and all the speeches get behind schedule, but it’s okay. Cause we really don’t *care*. [laughs] (H304)

It’s just *really, really amazing* to watch God move throughout the *whole* camp. Because, a lot of people that come up there with...*drama*...with family situations, with situations in their own life, with confusion, just with a whole bunch of stuff that’s really *burdening* them from strengthening their relationship with God. So, when they go *up* there, it’s like, they lay *all their stuff* down and it’s just *them* and *God*, and all that stuff is just like *wiped away* at the camp. It’s just *amazing* to watch people’s lives *really, really change* while we’re up at that camp. (H306)

A workshop was provided to the youth towards the end of the retreat which addressed the theme, “What do you do *after* you get *off* the mountain? What do you do with your mountaintop experience?” (H308). At the workshop, each teen was assigned a new accountability partner for the next year to ensure the committed living of the mountaintop experience. In addition, each one was called to sign a contract upon which one’s intended practices for the upcoming year had been articulated. Kathleen offered an example of this, “I will spend 30 minutes every morning in my devotion time” (H309). The youth added to the contract things they desired to change about themselves and spelled out how they planned to do so. Kathleen concluded, “Then we get *off* the mountain. That’s when we have to really incorporate it into our lives and see what’s gonna happen. But that camp, it’s just *amazing*. I really like going to it” (H310-311). She acknowledged that while on the bus ride to the camp, many of the teens grumble about going, but soon after the experience begins, they feel otherwise. Kathleen expressed, “It’s *so powerful*, nobody wants to stop, cause it’s just *awesome* to be in the presence of *God*. It’s like, why would I want to *leave*?” (H326).

The Value of Spirituality

Kathleen affirmed that for her, spirituality was probably one of her highest values; it was something “that I *highly* and *greatly* value, because it’s what has shaped me as a person” (H414). She realized that many of the choices she made in her life were due to the promise she made with herself and with God, or with her spirituality. She had come to value her spirituality deeply because of the examples others had been to her in her life; others whose lives had witnessed a depth of authenticity, meaning, and fullness. Kathleen expressed this as

I guess I try to live up to my spirituality all the time because I know that...just seeing like, other people who...view their spirituality in the same way that *I* do, then just seeing how it’s *benefited* them. And seeing where they *are* in life and how they really enjoy—like—other people. It’s...it’s rubbed off on me. And that’s how *I* view *my* spirituality. Okay, I want to...be a real *people* person so that I can win people *to* God and um...yeah. [slight laugh] Definitely. I value my spirituality probably more than *anything*. (H415)

For Kathleen, spirituality held meaning and illuminated her life with purpose. Everything she did and which occupied her attention was held within this context.

I was taught that *everything* that I *do*, like, *every* gift that I have, whether it be—for *me* acting or...track, or math, or just *anything*—is a *gift* given by God and we’re supposed to *use* those gifts *for* His glory. And so, spirituality, it’s like...Okay, I have all these things inside of me, so, I need to use them to benefit other people, and not just myself. Which...is going to help me become...a more mature Child of God. (H416)

Kathleen Norris: Interpretive Critique

Child of God

Being a Child of God gave meaning to Kathleen’s life as she lived within the context of a relationship with God. For Kathleen, to define spirituality or to describe this as merely a “relationship” was not sufficient to explain her life experience; “Child of God” alone would satisfy to accurately describe her reality. Being a Child of God carried

with it a sense of purpose for her life; that of bringing God to others and of sharing God's love with others.

For Kathleen, there was no difference between spirituality and religion. She perceived them as the same. "It's what you live by, it's what you know, and it's how you live your life" (H16). The two provided both meaning and purpose and enabled the expression of meaning and purpose in the life of the believer. In addition, Kathleen perceived Christianity not as a religion, but as a way of life.

Being a Child of God carried responsibility: one who was a Child of God had a responsibility to be in a relationship with God. This implied a daily intentional participation in the ongoing growth of that relationship with God as one could not grow spiritually without this relationship. Kathleen explained the state of being that this holds, "When you *are* a Child of God, then you *know* you have a relationship" (H432). By this statement, she qualified the state of being a Child of God: if one has not fully arrived at that state of being, then one does not fully understand the responsibility to be in relationship with God, and if one does not yet understand this implication, then one has not yet arrived at this state of being. Therefore, this state of being holds within itself deep meaning and purpose.

This state of being possesses other responsibilities and perceptions as well. The divine relationship must naturally extend to others, but all other relationships remain centered in the relationship with God. The relationship with God carries further responsibilities: to serve others in their need and to act in love towards others, in order to make visible the love of God. Service to others extended Kathleen's sense of meaning and purpose. By her awareness of the needs of others and her commitment to serve as an

expression of her being a Child of God, Kathleen could transcend herself, and reached out in relationship to God through her service to others.

Current Spiritual Identity

Kathleen's identity as a Child of God was her existential reality. During the second interview, she began to use the term "spirituality" synonymously with her life-long self-identity as a Child of God. She expressed that it was out of this identity that she based all of her thoughts and actions, and formed of her decisions. This identity provided support in times of temptation, and was the place to which she turned "to remember *who I am* and *where I come from*. I am a Child of God" (H213). For Kathleen, to live as a Child of God guaranteed the most authentic living of her being.

This existential reality directed her choices, behaviors, and activities. Being a Child of God meant she always had something to lean on that was concrete, and that "will always be true." She trusted this as her backbone and moral guide. Kathleen knew that she would change in the future, but her spirituality, or identity as a Child of God, would never change. This knowledge gave her confidence for the future; God was her safety and her strength. Her identity as a Child of God was confirmed because of her certain belief in the presence of God. Further aspects of her identity developed out of this central core, such as leadership within her community for the sake of Christ.

Relational Life-World

Relationships in Kathleen's life were perceived through the import of her essence, as a Child of God in this world. Kathleen's parents were models to her of servanthood and ministry through music. Her younger sisters were unique and priceless gifts to be loved, and the means by which God stretched Kathleen to grow in her ability to love. Her

best friend, Danielle, was someone with whom Kathleen shared meaning and purpose, a commonality in existential realities mingled in a lifelong friendship. With Danielle, Kathleen shared the experiences of ongoing growth in the development of her response as a Child of God; serving as leaders, attending youth camps, growing in the discipline of a daily practice of prayer and scripture reading.

Kathleen's relational life-world further supported her sense of being through the members of her church community in their regular participation of religious practices. The members of her church community were models of faith and spirituality, as well as conduits of God's word spoken directly to Kathleen. When Kathleen fasted, she was strengthened by the knowledge that she was not alone; she knew that the members of her community were fasting and were finding meaning in this act. Kathleen's own religious acts were given deeper meaning because they were performed in union with the community and she was brought closer to God through her own wholehearted participation.

Temporal Life-World

Kathleen's past was one that initiated and carried out a life-long process of formation and growth as a Child of God. Her past held Kathleen's own personal commitment to give her life over to God, an event which continued to provide deep and ever-unfolding meaning in Kathleen's life. Her past held within it a steady practice of learning what it meant to be a Child of God, and a practice of living that reality out through prayer, reading the Bible, and by performing acts of service. Kathleen's life reflected perseverance in the daily practices of prayer and reflection on the scriptures, and a mindful attunement to God's call to stretch beyond herself, and to find more

meaningful ways to respond to God in love, particularly in service to others.

Kathleen's future held anticipated deepening as a Child of God, a sense of being to attain in the future, to live a life rich in meaning and purpose, and of living her most authentic self. "I want to be a real people person so I can win people to God."

Spatial and Corporeal Life-Worlds

Kathleen's life revolved around the practices that supported her life's meaning, that of being a Child of God. She attended church regularly, several times a week, and maintained a daily practice of prayer and scripture reading. When it was time in her church community to fast and to pray together, Kathleen wholly participated in the experience. She participated in her school environment as a Child of God. She sought out teachers whom she found to be spiritual, and kept friendships with peers who also valued and sought to follow Christ. Kathleen wore a necklace each day that reminded her that Christ was her strength and was with her always. The necklace contained words from the Bible, "Christ is your strength," and she often grasped this object for the corporeal reminder of her life's meaning and purpose.

Kathleen expressed that her spirituality was something she valued highly, and it was what had shaped her as a person. It formed the choices that she made in her life. Her identity as a Child of God provided Kathleen with a sense of being, and with an image of being to attain. Being a Child of God gave her a sense of purpose and mode of being in the present: she possessed an attitude of gratitude to God for all that she had received, that she continued to receive, and that she would receive in the future.

CHAPTER VI

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

HOW A CATHOLIC SCHOOL NURTURED SPIRITUALITY

Chapter Rationale

While the analysis and interpretation generated from a phenomenological inquiry provides insight into the meaning of a particular human phenomenon, Munhall (2007) asserted that if a critique of the experience is not included in the study, then the “critical importance of our studies will go unfulfilled” (p. 169). Finding that a “critique of the experience may offer infinite possibilities for needed change” (p. 169), Munhall reflected,

the addition of critique would...have the benefit of increasing the significance of phenomenological work and, in a pragmatic way, provide direction to practice or theory...[and] ultimately enlarge our purpose and assist individuals in attaining meaning and improve sensitivity, understanding, and change in conditions and approaches. (p. 169)

The third interview focused on two additional aspects of the research questions. Students were informed or reminded that the purpose of the Catholic school is to educate the whole student: spirit, mind, and body. They were asked to reflect on ways they perceived their attendance in a Catholic secondary school had nurtured or not nurtured their spirituality. All facets of the Catholic school were eligible for their consideration: curricular and extra-curricular programs, teaching methods and styles of teachers, and rules and policies of the school. Students were invited to suggest how Catholic secondary educators could better address the spiritual growth and development of adolescent students from their own perceptions and experiences. Not every student had a response for each of the questions. The presentation of findings that follows will review the topics discussed in general by individual participants, and will follow with a thematic

presentation of topics that generated more specific concern from those students who offered insights.

How A Catholic High School Nurtured Spirituality

Cassandra Ramirez: Desire for Greater Insight

Cassandra indicated that school was not a place that she thought of when asked about spirituality. While she acknowledged that the Catholic school had undoubtedly shaped her spirituality, it did not stand out for her as having had a significant impact. For Cassandra, the influence of her family and their own practices of faith overshadowed the spiritual influences of the Catholic schools she had attended.

Cassandra did offer some feedback. She affirmed that the social justice class at THS had raised students' awareness of how people in other parts of the world lived in contrast to those living lives of privilege in the United States. She believed that more than any other, this class had inspired greater awareness, helped students to develop their beliefs, and therefore, contributed to their spirituality. Yet, she found the religion curriculum structured and knowledge-based, but failed to provide students with the tools needed to apply that learning to their lives in order to find personal meaning in the content. She specifically named instruction in scripture, "It doesn't enable people to really see things beyond the context of the Bible" (A262). She affirmed the value of courses which helped students to focus on social justice issues and messages in the media. She explained that students were better able to relate to these than to instruction on sections in the Bible.

Other classes, she opined, were more literal and did not provide the context for spirituality. Cassandra added that of all of the retreats she had experienced at THS, her

sophomore retreat contributed the most to her spirituality by raising her awareness of the needs of others. During this retreat, Cassandra and her classmates visited a local community agency that reached out to help the poor and needy. The impression from the experience was still clear in Cassandra's mind. She recalled,

I thought that everyone kind of *lived* like me or the people *around* me. But, just in my own back yard, there was [*sic*] people who couldn't pay for a piece of furniture, they couldn't pay for the food. And just seeing those people; I helped sort out clothes and distribute them. So, there was a family that came in, a woman with her three children. And I was like, "Wow." She's a mother and she can't really pay for her children's books, like they were getting books and toys and... That kind of affected me in that it kind of opened my mind to what happens; how people live and what we can do to help.

SE: And how did you feel?

Cassandra: When I first saw the woman, I was a bit sad, because, her children, you could tell they hadn't had a proper... I don't know... they kind of looked like they hadn't been *bathed* in awhile. Their clothes weren't very modern, you could say. And seeing kids on a daily basis, you want the best for the *kids*, in general, cause they're *innocent*. They don't have anything to *do* with how much their parent makes or what the consequences of their parents' actions had [*sic*] on them. And so, it just kind of made me... open my eyes to see like, "It's important to help these people." Like, they have nothing *against* society, but they're suffering because of it.

SE: It made you want to reach out to them?

Cassandra: I saw how they were picking up books from the shelter to take home. And I didn't feel *guilty*, I just kind of, later on, I thought like, "Wow. We have so much [*sic*] books and so much toys at home from our childhood that our mom kind of finds, and we just kind of throw them in the garage or something. And these kids are like, they *want* a toy. Like, something very small, they just *want* it because they haven't had anything like *that* in awhile. (A274-277)

Diana Martinez: Single-Gender Strength; Sports Program Deficit

Diana expressed that there were positive factors that have helped her to grow, but that she believed there were factors that hindered the spiritual growth of students. She credited the single-gender component as having provided many opportunities for its

students, particularly opportunities for them to speak their voice, a factor which had enabled students to develop the *confidence* they needed (C240). She stated that religion classes offered at THS were a source of spiritual growth for students. She asserted that the senior semester course entitled *Women's Spirituality* was particularly helpful for their growth, a course she referred to often during the interview process. However, she recalled that the concept of spirituality was never defined in the course and she did not find this helpful.

While pointing out the school's strength as "their core values in academics" (C241), Diana found this at times to be a hindrance for students' spiritual growth. She explained that in contrast to the strong emphasis on academics, the school's sports program received little attention. Diana believed that the weak sports department discouraged fuller participation among students and that she believed some students even left the school for this reason. She perceived this as a hindrance, believing that in order to nurture a person's spirituality, there needed to be a well-rounded effort for the girls to gather as many experiences as possible.

Diana opined that THS provided limited experiences for students to grow socially. As an all-girls school, the students had few opportunities to interact with boys, and therefore, girls lost self-confidence at times when in the company of boys. She stated that some girls felt they were missing out on their high school social experience, citing poorly attended school dances. She admitted to feeling that she had missed out on social aspects of high school because the THS dances were not well attended. For these reasons, Diana believed that THS had hindered students' spiritual growth.

She acknowledged that, initially, she herself, had wanted to transfer, but stayed

after making friends, something that helped her to adjust. She explained further that THS had recently implemented a program called “Link” which matched new freshmen with upper class women to facilitate the transition of the younger girls into the school. Diana believed this was a great help to incoming freshmen students and wished the program had been in place when she enrolled. Diana affirmed THS for addressing this important issue.

Overall, Diana believed that THS did try to help students to grow in their spirituality to a degree, citing the class on *Women’s Spirituality*. Further, she admitted that many girls did not pay attention to spirituality, stating, “It’s not something very big in their lives right now for a lot of girls that I know. They don’t really think about it a lot” (C255-256).

Maria Washington: Attitude of Gratitude

Maria had a positive experience of a Catholic school during her years at THS. She expressed a belief that God had placed her there for a reason. She appreciated the attention received from teachers and noticed a difference in the quality of caring at THS from that received from teachers at public school stating that “It’s not the same.” She articulated the difference as “a focus on each and every student, each and every individual to be the very best they can be, and that’s what I feel a lot of kids in public school don’t get” (B210). She found that the attention received at THS helped students to develop into a whole person.

Maria supported this by citing the school’s ESLR’s [Expected Schoolwide Learning Results] and acknowledged the intellectual growth that had taken place within herself. She explained,

I have challenging classes. I have teachers that really *care* about my well-being to make sure that my grades are good and to make sure that I get my homework

done on time. These teachers go through a *lot* with us and they go over hills just to make sure that we get our make-up work, and to make sure that we get to make up our test, or if we need extra help, they won't go to lunch just because we came in and asked for help. (B212)

Maria cited the approachability of teachers and staff at THS as major supports to students. "I can just go to Ms. O'Grady [vice-principal] and *talk* to her. It's just little things that make a real big impression on me" (B213).

She further expressed gratitude for the support that she and her family had received from the school's administration. Maria explained that at the beginning of her junior year, she had to enroll at a local public high school because her mother could not afford the tuition. When the principal heard of the family's situation, she contacted Maria's mom and made arrangements for financial assistance so that Maria could return to THS. Maria and her mother were deeply grateful for the care and support that were shown to them. Maria exclaimed, "When they said I could come back, that just *really*...I mean, it gave me a joy and I was like, 'Thank you, Lord'" (B215). She further explained that this event had validated her perception that it was God's will for her to attend THS stating:

That's the other reason why I know he [God] wanted me here for a reason, because, he wanted me to *learn* something from being here. I *know* I'm a better person *from* going here, as a whole person. Because with the religion classes and things like that, even though I may not agree with everything, I'm *still* learning. I'm still learning a different type of...like, education—I don't know how to explain it, but it's *more* than just like a 'school.' It's like...a *growing* place. I have participated in so much here. They develop my confidence just to know that I am capable. (B215)

Maria indicated a strength of THS had been the community service aspect of their program. She believed students had flourished as a result of their service experiences. Noticing the changes in others the service program had affected, Maria observed,

It makes me want to be a better person just all around *together*. Just the people that are *in* this school and how they...I'm not saying that every girl in this school is like motivated and stuff, but for the most part, each and every person here, I'm sure, is doing something that is benefiting the community, or something. Because, first off, we're required, but because they instill that into us, then we're gonna *wanna go out* and help the world. We're gonna wanna continue on that community service path. (B216)

She asserted that the requirement to complete community service had helped to instill in the students the importance of giving oneself in service for the sake of others and for one's own sake. She explained,

Community service *is* fulfilling, because you're helping somebody else and at the same time, they're helping you to be more compassionate and to realize not everybody *has* it like that. You really *do* have to go out and help other people. (B217)

Maria declared that she loved the school. She stated that she was happy and she appreciated having unique experiences like participating in the interview process. She felt safe, intellectually prepared, and that her confidence had grown, especially by the freedom and encouragement provided for the girls to speak out. She affirmed that all of these things had impacted her spiritually. Through her experiences at THS, she had grown thankful and stated, "Spiritually, that's a good thing [laughs] 'cause you learn to be grateful for the things you have, and the people that you get to meet, and the opportunities that were only offered *here*" (B219).

In addition to growing more grateful, she believed that she had grown more compassionate. Realizing the benefits that she had received by being at THS, she often admonished her peers not to complain about things, stating, "Be grateful because God is really good. And even though we might not have this and that, we are in a great environment. We have teachers that really care about us" (B220). Maria asserted that the school had helped her to see things in life more clearly and more positively. She

concluded that by combining all of these attributes, her spirituality had been impacted.

“Both things add to your spirituality; being positive and being compassionate and grateful [*sic*], because you can’t be a grumpy, hateful spiritually-growing person! [laughing] You won’t ever get anywhere” (B221).

When asked whether the school could do anything to improve how they fostered spirituality in its students, Maria first named those things she believed the school did well. For example, by offering a campus ministry and retreat program, students had an opportunity to participate spiritually in the school. However, she acknowledged that THS is a school, not a church; therefore, she pointed out that a line must be drawn. She did not think that the faculty and administration could be doing anything more than they were to prepare students spiritually “because you can’t really force Christianity or a belief in God on anybody” (B235). She asserted that within the religion program, the school communicated to students that they could either receive or deny a belief in God, but Maria believed that the school was doing much in the religion classes to inform students about religion or Christianity. She explained further,

Spirituality is *not* religion. Spirituality is *relationship*. It’s really *intense* connection with God...And I feel that, in each and every class, they make sure that we do something that even though it might seem like a lot of work at first, in the end, it’s only for our benefit so that *we* can learn, and so that *we* can be more intellectual, and to *think* more critically.

And also to seek things on the spiritual side as well. Because, even though a lot of these girls, they might not believe in God, or they don’t go to church at all, they’re getting some type of...*teaching* of the Word of God, *regardless* of whether they want to receive it or not. And I think that’s *awesome* that how you have schools, and giving children the opportunity. Because they can’t ever say that they never heard about God. Or they can’t ever say that, you know, “Well, I never *read* the Bible before.” You know. You were given the *opportunity* when you went to school. (B239-240)

Affirming that although not every student in the school was Catholic, Maria found

the school's program still provided time for reflection on Bible passages through prayer services and Masses. Maria commented, "Even though the girls might act like they're not interested, they *are* listening. Their ears *are* open. And they can't ever say that they never heard anything about God" (B350).

Jane Cabral: Reflections on Fostering Spirituality

Jane expressed that she believed the degree to which the school fostered the spiritual growth of the students depended on the teachers, on how they taught and on how they treated their students. She stated,

I really think that it depends on *who* the teacher is, because, some teachers seem *more* affiliated with religion and their spirituality than others. Like I know for a fact that my religion teacher is *very* religious. And she's a spiritual woman. Whereas, say, my *calculus* teacher doesn't exactly implement the spiritual...like, *really* implement the spiritual messages to us. She'll tell us to be quiet when they're doing prayer over the PA system, but, you know, it's *not* like we actually pray in her class, or anything.

But, in *religion* class, we're constantly referring to religion, like the Catholic Social Teachings. We *pray* in there even though we've prayed over the intercom. She'll *ask* us, like, "What do we want to pray for today?" And she'll make a personal kind of prayer for us.

So, I think that it really does depend on who the teacher is, because, I've noticed that usually it's the religion teachers who really try to get us to pray and think about our religion and our spirituality. And other teachers, like, the math teachers, or...not necessarily English teachers, but like, our math teacher, economics teacher, they don't really talk about anything that has to do with religion or spirituality. But our *English* teacher does because of things that we read. Like the poems. And that's why I really think that it just depends on *who* the teacher is and *what* are the circumstances in the classroom. (E230-232)

I asked Jane how she felt about the different positions various teachers held toward religion within the school. She explained that it seemed fine to her because faith cannot be forced on people. Providing an example of an attitude she believed was a good one for teachers to possess, Jane explained that her homeroom teacher instructed students

about the general school prayer read over the PA stating, “If *you* don’t want to pray, it’s okay. But just be sure that you respect those who *are* praying” (E233). Jane believed that all teachers should give this message, because not all students listened when the topic of religion or spirituality was raised. She stated further,

I think that teachers should convey the message that it’s okay if you don’t think that you’re very religious or it’s okay if you feel like you don’t want to pray. But, be sure to be respectful for those who *do* want to pray and express their spirituality. (E234)

Jane added that the degree to which she believed spirituality was fostered in the school depended on the curriculum, or rather, on what teachers chose to teach and the materials they selected for their classes, such as books and poetry. Jane asserted that the school and the teachers were the key factors for “raising students up” in a spiritual community and the degree to which this happened depended on *how* “they” wished to do so and *when* they chose to do so.

Jane identified another factor at THS as one that fostered the spiritual growth of students was the community service required as a part of the senior social justice class. In the community outreach dining room where Jane was completing her service requirement, she felt the experience had had a spiritual impact on her. As the group of volunteers began their day together with prayer, Jane felt united with the community in a common desire to help others.

Jennifer Winfrey: Through New Eyes

Jennifer observed a positive factor about attending THS; she felt greater freedom expressing her spirituality at THS than she had at her former public high school where none of her friends were religious. She appreciated that, at THS, prayer was offered daily over the PA. She found it easier to pray more frequently and to express her Catholicism

more openly. She was grateful for the religious practices kept at THS and expressed a belief that being at THS had helped her relationship with God to grow in general because she was able to be more open about her Catholicism. She was no longer embarrassed to tell a friend or peer that she would pray for them or to talk with them about going to church on Sunday.

Jennifer expressed an appreciation for the modeling she had received at THS from her teachers that helped her to continue to learn about Catholicism. “I see it [modeled] with my chemistry teacher. She has good prayers, [when she prays] I think, “Oh. That’s a nice way to say it” (F398). Comparing this experience to that of her former school, Jennifer explained, “Here, people *get* it” (F381). Jennifer added that for her, the process of transferring into THS helped her to become more in touch with herself. She further stated,

The whole experience of transferring let me have, like... “Me” time and [a] reflection period, where I really choose to live more like... what would be a good word? You know, just kind of more *in-tuned* with what I want—*who* I want to be, and *what* I want to be. And it just let me reflect more. (F382)

Kathleen Norris: Another Pair of New Eyes

Because this was Kathleen’s first experience in a Catholic school, she brought a unique perspective to the interviews. When asked to discuss the ways in which the school fostered the spirituality of its students, Kathleen pointed out the importance of finding the right group of friends to hang out with. “You have to hang out with the *right* people. The people that you know are going to build you up and not bring you down when it comes to talking about your spirituality” (H329). Since enrolling at THS, Kathleen tried to surround herself with girls who shared the same beliefs and with whom she could discuss her spiritual views, especially if she was going through a personal problem. She

expressed that she trusted she could go to friends for advice if they shared her spiritual views, that the advice would be coming from God. The most important quality for Kathleen, especially as a new student, was finding the right friends, friends who shared her values.

This group was not limited to students, but included some teachers. For example, she appreciated talking with her junior religion teacher and with the campus minister. Kathleen acknowledged, “It’s always nice to get advice from an adult” (H331). She stated further,

I know it’s kind of weird coming from a teenager [chuckles], 'cause we don’t really like listening to adults. But, getting good advice from an adult, especially when we know that the adult is coming from a *Godly* perspective, it’s always reassuring. (H331)

Kathleen explained that she did not necessarily go to her religion teacher to talk about her problems, but rather, she went to her “just to *talk*” (H332), and found that the topics inevitably turned to spirituality. “Like the other day, I went up to her room just to talk 'cause I had some time before school started and we just talked about how our Sunday was and what our Palm Sunday was like” (H332). She further expressed the spiritual support she had received from these conversations, the spiritual qualities apparent in her teacher, and an awareness of the growing trust that had come to her as a result of this relationship fostering growth in her ability to open up to others. She explained,

When I talk to her, I end up leaving with a different like, viewpoint, I guess, than when I first—than when I first started talking to her.

If I go in there and—well, because she *is* a religion teacher, so she has a lot of different backgrounds on how to say something. So, if I go in there with a problem like, “Oh. Ms. Perea, how am I gonna deal with my *mom*? She’s really stressing *out* right now.” She will say something like, “Just go in your corner,

'cause I know you do it anyways, go in a corner, and just sit and talk to God and meditate and meditate and just think about how you could approach your situation and help your *mom* in a better way.”

And, whenever she talks to me, I *always* feel *really* encouraged, because she’s just an *awesome*, awesome woman of God. Like, she—she’ll talk to really *anybody* and she’ll never turn you away. She’ll just *talk* to you, just about *anything*. You know, I always go to her during break, or lunch or something just...start talking to her.

That’s kind of helped me in my spirituality because it’s helped me to be open with people, especially because I *am* a new student so, I’ve only known Ms. Perea for like, seven months. So, just being able to...trust people, it helps me, definitely a *lot*, talking to her. And um, it’s helped me to know that people...out there...like, they really do care about you. (H333-336)

Being at THS, Kathleen noticed a positive atmosphere about the school. She found that a majority of the students were positive, as well as the school, as a whole, communicated optimism. She had observed a difference at THS from her former schools in the teachers and staff: first, that they did not spend their time in their offices wedded to their computers, and secondly, that they actually knew the students by name. Speaking animatedly, she explained, “They’re not just like, ‘*You!* Come over here!’ but rather, ‘*You! Kathleen!* Come over here!’” (H343). She expressed that this made a big difference, “Knowing that we’re *important* to somebody enough that they *know* what our *name* is and we’re not just our ID number” (H344). She stated further, “I *applaud* the administration, staff and faculty for that 'cause it really makes people feel important” (H344).

Wisdom for Educators

Students were asked to offer their thoughts to educators to enhance understanding about adolescent girls’ spirituality. Further, they were asked to offer their thoughts about teachers beyond those who taught in the Religious Studies Department and who

addressed spirituality in some form in their respective curricular areas.

Respect For Different Religious Beliefs

Jane offered a perception that teachers could improve carrying out their purpose as Catholic educators by communicating to students that it was okay to be different in their religious beliefs if a student happened to embrace different religious affiliations other than Catholicism. Referring to this in a general sense, she was not suggesting that teachers lacked respect, but suggested that some students might be ridiculed for embracing a different religious affiliation by other students and, therefore, she believed it would be helpful for teachers to communicate both by their attitudes and by their words that it was acceptable to be different. Jane expressed that students needed to hear that message in order to feel safe and secure in the classroom. She added that she had always felt safe at THS. She believed that the teachers at THS made it clear to the students that whether or not a student was Catholic, or if students did not wish to participate in Masses, all were expected to attend liturgies and prayer services and were expected to be respectful of the desires of those who did wish to participate. Those who did not wish to participate were permitted to remain seated quietly.

Teacher Bias

Jane raised a concern about some teachers' behaviors and attitudes that she referred to as "teacher bias." She described that there were some topics that, when discussed in class, seemed to provoke teachers and, it appeared to students, that those teachers were racially biased. Jane expressed that this was upsetting to the students. She provided an example, explaining that, on one occasion, her class had been discussing racism. At some point during the discussion, the white female teacher made a statement

to the class which, in Jane's opinion, had backfired. She went on to state,

We were talking about racism one time. And our teacher said straight out, "I know I'm a white female who's in power in this situation because I'm the *teacher*, but I don't want you guys to feel like that's affecting you or anything." But at the same time, for her to say that, like, "I'm a white female and... who's in *power*," it kind of *backfired* in a sense because everyone else who was *not* white, was just kind of like, "What is she trying to say about *that*?" (E360)

Jane recounted that some students took the teacher's comment personally. She, herself, expressed a desire that teachers communicate themselves in a way that all students would feel comfortable in the classroom, no matter what the topic.

Jane further described that some of her classmates had found teachers at THS in the past to be racist. For example, Jane explained if African-American students were talking in a class and the teacher was Caucasian, there had been occasions when the white teacher singled out the African-American students. Jane described, however, that when a group of Caucasian girls were talking in the same class, the teacher had not done anything to correct these students other than simply to say, "Please quiet down." Jane perceived that some Caucasian teachers felt threatened by African-American students who may be talking in class. Providing a non-specific example, Jane offered, "The teacher may say something like, 'If you don't quiet down *now*, then I'm going to send you to the Dean's or Principal's office'" (E372), further escalating the situation.

Jane suggested that this type of response from teachers builds animosity among the students in the classroom. She cautioned that, if allowed to fester, this could spread animosity between students and teachers, and among students and their peers. In addition, this could seriously undermine the positive school climate. She asserted further that she believed teacher bias defeated the purpose of teaching as teachers should not see students differently, but rather, as equals [human beings]. She questioned, "If teachers aren't

going to do that, then how are we supposed to learn from them? It kind of contradicts” (E373).

She recalled one particular incident during her sophomore year when a group of African-American students was talking in a class and the teacher corrected the group of African-American students, failing to correct the Caucasian girls who were also talking. Jane remarked, “I’ve noticed that in the way the teacher acts, sometimes it gets ridiculous” (E374). She described further,

You can see that they get really upset when African Americans try to *reason* with them. Like, “Why?” And they ask questions like, “Well *why* do you get mad at *us*, but when someone *else* is talking during class, you don’t tell *them* to be quiet or anything. You just let it go.” And the teacher didn’t have a response to that. He just stood there. And you can [*sic*] tell clearly that he was upset. But at the same time you can [*sic*] see that he was embarrassed. ‘Cause he didn’t *have* an *answer* at *all*. It just *happened*. (E375)

Voicing her own struggle to deal with this situation, Jane expressed a sense of powerlessness as she suspected that neither faculty nor staff would listen to a concern expressed by a student, who did not share the same level of authority as the adults, “because you’re not an authority in the school” (E376).

Levels of Power

Jane identified another issue of concern, that of which she referred to as “levels of power.” She described this as,

Another thing; there are like these levels of *power*. You know, there are the students, and then there’s student *council*, who’s kind of like the “middle-man” among the students and the teachers. And [then] you have the *teachers*, faculty and staff, who are at the top. Sometimes they [faculty and staff] may have that feeling, like, you know, “I’m higher up on...on the scale than *you* are. So you should listen to me.” Whereas, in reality, I think that you have to be able to *reason* with each other. Just see each other as equals. (E377)

Jane advocated for the need to have respect demonstrated in both directions, adults

toward students, and students toward adults. However, she questioned the use of power solely for the sake of one's position.

Of course, give each other the respect that they deserve, but at the same time, you can't use the whole *power* cards and say, "You know. I'm the *teacher*, you're the *student*. You *have* to listen to me." You have to be able to *reason* with them and think rationally. 'Cause if you *don't*, then, you know, it's not *good*. (E378)

Alice Ross: Importance of Speaking Up

Alice expressed that the teaching and curriculum at THS have affected her spirituality by providing an opportunity for her to take a stand on social issues and to articulate her beliefs in a safe atmosphere among her peers. She stated that teachers contributed to this growth by teaching their curriculum. However, she believed that teachers were remiss by not sharing their own viewpoints on certain issues. Alice posited that if teachers *did* share their own beliefs,

Then some people [students] wouldn't believe the things that they believe now, simply because the teachers are teaching what they believe, and they can also—you know—teach the curriculum, but, if they would share *their* standpoint in certain areas, that would impact the students a lot more. (D331)

Offering an example, Alice explained that while her religion class was studying different religions, some teachers stated that *all* religions were right and that this was just people's different ways of life. Alice opined, that if they would state their own religion and why they believed that that particular religion "is the right way or the only way, then, I think a lot of people [students] wouldn't believe in a lot of other religions that they teach about" (D332). While she understood and affirmed the need for teachers to teach about different religions to help students understand the various perspectives of each, she opined that teachers should share their own perspectives of what they believed as well. She elaborated that by so doing, it would strengthen teachers' efforts to educate students

spiritually because they would be communicating a more authentic perspective. Alice had not observed spirituality addressed in any other curricular area than religion, speculating that some teachers were neither Catholic nor Christian, “or *anything*, really, so they wouldn’t speak about spirituality and what they believe” (D339).

Alice affirmed that she found some of the teachers at THS cared about their students, but opined that the teachers could do a better job overall addressing the spiritual growth of students. She articulated her perspective in this way,

Just addressing it *period*. Even in religion class, we don’t go in depth about what each student *believes*. I mean, I guess you can talk about what you believe. But, in math or science or any other class, it’s not addressed at *all*. English, it *is* a little bit, if there’s a religious reference in one of the pieces of literature or something, but other than that, just *address* it and ask what the students believe, and how what we’re learning could affect their spirituality or what they believe. (D348)

Alice suggested that if teachers shared their beliefs more readily with students, it would allow students to feel closer to their teachers and “make their [students’] beliefs more *firm*, or *change*, if they saw teachers were sharing what they believe” (D351). She observed that teachers at THS tended to be more professional than to be about faith. Alice was struck by this observation when she first entered as a freshman. Since she was no longer attending a public school, she had expected teachers to talk about their beliefs and religion saying, “I expected that and I didn’t get it” (D354).

She confirmed that during her years of greatest personal suffering, she did not seek out any support from teachers or staff at THS. I asked her to suppose what it would have been like if she had been able to connect with an adult at the school for support. Alice speculated that she would have received guidance, but she did not sound as if she would have been comfortable with that. She immediately pointed out, “We’re kind of in two different spectrums of Christianity” (D.341). She explained further, “Catholic and

Pentecostal—what I am. So I probably wouldn't have went [*sic*] to any of the teachers to seek guidance...just because we believe in two different...doctrines” (D342). Pressing further, I asked if she thought it would be out of the realm for a Catholic teacher to give advice to a student who is in pain? Alice negated this, but suspected that with regard to the spiritual tone or content of the message, it might be different advice coming from a Christian denominational or Pentecostal teacher. She supposed that this difference probably did affect her own openness to the teachers at THS.

At the end of her fourth year, Alice's attitude toward THS had changed from when she first enrolled. She stated that she realized THS had prepared her for college and that she had come to know what she wanted to do in life. She had come to value THS and what she had received. She described THS as “a community-based school which provides a good education” adding, “I guess in *some* things they do *challenge* your spirituality” (D360). She identified these things as the instruction provided about different religions and the offering of Masses and prayer services. She asserted that while the Masses did not provide her with the same feeling as her own church, she acknowledged that the elements of the liturgies, scripture and song, provided nourishment and an opportunity for her to be an example to others of how she lived her life.

Call for Supportive Attitudes From Teachers

Maria perceived that many teachers at THS were not Christian and may not even believe in God, but urged that they remain positive, regardless of their own beliefs, and that they maintain a stance that was encouraging towards the students. Maria stated,

I don't know how to explain it. I want to say [to teachers] don't allow their unbeliefs to hinder somebody else's *belief*. But, it's like, you can't—like I said before—you can't make somebody believe in God. And as adults, it's harder to break that...that spirit of unbelief. (B351)

She emphasized the importance that all teachers support and encourage the teachings provided at THS and that they promote spirituality across the board. She acknowledged that students and teachers had their own opinions, but asserted that the teachers' role was to bring students to greater understanding of life issues. For example,

Continue to encourage the teachings that are *here*. And just promote spirituality all across the board, morally. I mean, even in our discussions in class, [of] course everybody's gonna have their own opinion, but I feel that for the most part, they're [teachers] trying to get us to understand things. Um, like, we—in Social Justice right now—we're reading about racism, things like that. So, um,...they always try to formulate our thoughts to...think open-mindedly about things and to really value *people* and value—like—our spirituality and our education. (B352)

Maria offered further, that teachers be enthusiastic, sincere, and consistent in living out their own religious commitment, especially if they *are* Christian. She stated,

Because the last thing that teenagers need are *insincere* teachers and teachers that don't really care...

But, um, you know, just make sure that they're cool across the board. And especially if they *are* Christian, to really live *out* what they *say*. And to be an example because a lot of teenagers are lacking the *example*. So, be an example in what they *say* and what they *do* every day. And I know that teachers have their days as well. But, you know, try to put on a good face for the kids, because they're looking and watching and they're *seeing* what you're gonna say, and what you're gonna do, and if you are *consistent*. And I think um, if they remain consistent, and always be *available* to *help* and to *hear* and to *listen*, that'll be *very* good. (B354-355)

She described an awareness that some students in class seemed to need extra attention from others, perhaps because they were lacking sufficient attention at home.

Maria observed that, often, these students took up more attention from teachers than was helpful to others by preventing more group discussion time. Maria desired that there be more time provided in class for reflection and for all to share their views, so that they, both students and teachers, could learn from one another. "A lot of times people don't

really get to say how they feel, and if there was more time for that, then that would be helpful in promoting spirituality” (B363). Maria perceived that if there was more time for teachers and students to share more deeply, then it could become clearer that both teachers and students cared: “If there were more things that would show that, because a lot of times people do the things they do because they don’t feel like they’re getting attention or that they feel like they’re not cared about” (B363).

Call for Compassion

Diana believed that it would be helpful for teachers to know that, at times, adolescent girls were confused by the personal issues in their lives and that finding their way spiritually was hard for them. She expressed that it would be helpful if teachers could be more understanding of this. She questioned whether many people took their own spirituality seriously, including teachers. She surmised that if teachers understood their own spirituality, they would be better able to help others. She thought that if teachers could talk about their own spirituality with students, it would be more helpful for students to understand spirituality, “because no one does talk about it” (C297). She commented that even after taking the class on women’s spirituality, she still did not feel that she understood what it was. She found it frustrating that the class had been presented in the context of religion, and hung back from providing students more of an opportunity to discuss their own spirituality.

Chuckling at the thought of teachers outside the religion department trying to integrate spirituality into their curriculum, Diana explained that she found this hard to imagine. She remarked, “I don’t know. ‘Cause I feel like some teachers...they’re just focused. And I can understand them, but...” (C299). Asking her to expand on this, Diana

revealed several insights and offered suggestions as to how teachers could be more caring, and in so doing, support the spiritual growth of students. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates Diana's perspective:

Diana: That they're just focused on their subject and teaching someone, like, math or something, that they're just focused on *that*, but when someone [student] comes in and she's having a bad day, but teachers don't...*recognize* that. They just keep going on with their lesson, like, it doesn't matter. And so, I think—I'm not saying like for the *math* teacher to be talking about spirituality, but like, to just recognize that...there are other things *outside* of the class that affects the way someone is *inside* of the classroom.

SE: I've thought about that before, too. So, let's do a hypothetical situation. [student laughs] Let's say a student comes in and she's having a really bad day...for, as we both know, could be lots of reasons. Help me to think, what could a math teacher do? Cause a math teacher could say, "I'm a math teacher. I'm not the counselor."

Diana: I mean, first...they could even just like, *send* them to the counselor...or something; so that could be one. But also, acknowledge that there's something wrong. Like, *ask* her if she's okay. And also, like, if they don't want to take class time out to do that, like, just...right *after* class, say something. Like, to just...sort of...let them know that they are *aware* that there's something wrong, and that they *do* care and that if they want, they can talk to them. Because, I know, there is sometimes more...like, to certain teachers, they're more willing to talk to them, than to others. But, that they just acknowledge and they just *ask* you and that they let you know that they *can* talk to you, if you *want* to.

SE: Do you think girls need more to hear teachers say that than a girl is able to assume that from a teacher?

Diana: Yes. [responds quickly; before question has even been articulated]

SE: So if a teacher says it, it creates more of an openness?

Diana: Yes.

SE: And then, in a class, just that a teacher would notice it? Do you think that will affect the student's spirituality? Just for a teacher to notice it?

Diana: Yeah. I think it will, because it'll help her see that there *are* people who *do* care and who *do* notice things. So, it'll help her first feel better, and then it'll also help her do the same for other people.

SE: I wonder also, if by a teacher just noticing and then, in a confidential manner, not out in front of the whole class—although, for a teacher to acknowledge a student, that they’re having a bad day, if the other students know, I think—the other students know somebody’s having a bad day. Right?

Diana: Yes.

SE: And so, it would seem that the message would get communicated to the whole class that this is a caring teacher. Right? But still, somehow, privately, just to acknowledge, “Looks like a rough day for you.” Right?

Diana: (no response)

SE: But then the teacher goes on with business for the whole rest of the class. I wonder, does that model for students the teacher’s spirituality? That they can hold on one hand that life can be hard, but at the same time, we have to do the business at hand?

Diana: I think it does. Because, I think if she *just* focused on that one student, the other students would think it would be, “That’s unfair.” And second, that that person really probably doesn’t care about her job. Because, if she *does* do both things, that shows that she *does* care, but that she also...*is* responsible and does...she recognizes things but she also has her priorities set right.

SE: Being...?

Diana: Like, that she *does* recognize that the student is having a bad day. And does *want* to help, and that she *will* help if the student wants. But that, right now, right then, like, during class time, it’s not the *right* time. And that she can tell her that if she wants, they can talk after class or something. But that she also—because she can’t just *stop* class. She has to keep going *with* her class. Because they’re *both* important, but it’s just that...maybe, first, the student doesn’t *want* that help from the teacher. So, she *does* have to do to her work. And if the student doesn’t want the help, then the teacher is *there*, but that there is [*sic*] like 20 other girls in the class as well. And their needs, in the classroom, like learning the subject are also important.

SE: And you said earlier, but that the teacher has her priorities, right? So that the class agenda is important, but I’m wondering, do you mean that a priority could also be acknowledging the student in her—her grief or her pain, at that time?

Diana: Yeah. I think...yeah. Because it *is*...it *should* be a priority for teachers for *all* their students to be doing well...not just *most* of them.

SE: Are there some students that wouldn’t like it to be acknowledged? They’re very private, and they wouldn’t want the teacher to say, “Hey. Looks like a bad

day”?

Diana: I’m sure there are some girls like that. But if the teacher just acknowledges and just asks, “Are you okay?” Or just smiles at her and like, just some way lets her know but doesn’t try to pry, like, “Oh. What’s wrong?” Or just leaves the door open for her. That’s better than trying to get it out of her right then and there.

Because, yeah, like especially with teachers, you don’t really talk to them. So, they’re basically strangers to you. So, it...it’s like having just a stranger on the street and want to know your whole life story and that...is weird [chuckles]. So, I think just acknowledging it, and if the student doesn’t want help, then like, I don’t think there is any more the teacher can do. But, just that the teacher takes the first step, I think, is important.

SE: More important that the teacher risks just to acknowledge the student than to do nothing at all?

Diana: Yeah. Yeah. (C300-313)

Sensitivity and Compassion

Desiring to learn the perceptions of other students on this topic, I asked Jane how a teacher could know if a student had a traumatic, painful or emotional experience going on when the student came to class. I asked, “If a teacher was ready for class with his or her agenda when students entered the room, how can a teacher know that a particular student is having a problem?” Jane suggested that teachers should somehow be able to sense a difference in the way the student was acting. She viewed the teacher’s role as one that included observing his or her students. For example, the teacher should know which students participated regularly in class and which did not.

She recounted one day during her sophomore year when her religion teacher noticed that Jane was not talking during class, as she was normally inclined to do. That particular day, the religion teacher approached Jane after class and asked, “Are you feeling okay? ‘Cause I noticed that you weren’t really talking during class” (E389). Jane

noted that nothing traumatic had happened, she was merely having an “off” day and was not feeling well. However, Jane was impressed that her teacher had taken the time to inquire personally about her. Jane offered, “I think if more teachers do that, they would be a little more understanding. It was nice to know that *she* noticed that I wasn’t acting like myself” (E390). Pressing further, I asked, “So, whether a student opens up or not, it meant something [to you] that the teacher asked and noticed?” Jane affirmed, “Yes” and explained further,

Because *she* took the initiative to come and talk to me after class. And she made sure that nobody else was around just in case if there was something confidential. I just think that there has to be *more* communication between the student and the teacher. (E392)

She recalled another occasion when she learned just after class that a cousin had been diagnosed with leukemia. Jane recounted that upon hearing the news from her aunt, she was stunned and confused. She had received a text message from her aunt after school giving her the news. Soon after, she became emotional and broke down crying in the presence of her friends. The next day in class, she found her thoughts drifting and her school work affected. Jane explained that her teachers understood somewhat and expressed their sympathy to her. However, it appeared to Jane that their expressions were matter-of-fact, and that they seemed concerned more about getting on with their class agendas. Jane further expressed that the impact of her cousin’s diagnosis was that she began searching for reasons why this had happened. She explained, “I was thinking, ‘*How did it happen? Why did it happen?*’ I felt like my questions weren’t gonna be answered or anything. And you know, until now, the question of *why* and *how* it happened was [*sic*] never really answered” (E386).

During the summer between Jane’s freshman and sophomore year, she learned of

the tragic death of a beloved junior high teacher from her elementary school. Jane was devastated by this loss; however, as the accident had occurred during the summer, she was sufficiently recovered to begin school in the fall. Having experienced this loss, she could empathize with students who might have had to endure a similar loss during the school year. Jane imagined that if it were her, she would want the support of her teachers that communicated a compassionate understanding that a student may need more time to complete her school work. Jane expressed that she hoped a teacher would not respond to a student dealing with a traumatic experience as “Just because this happened, doesn’t mean that you can’t do the work” (E381).

Jane acknowledged the fact that counselors were always available for students at THS if there was a need. However, she pointed out, sometimes students carried a confidence that could not be discussed with counselors. In addition, she expressed that if counselors had knowledge that a student was experiencing a personal difficulty, it might be helpful to both students and teachers if the counselor informed the teachers. Jane stated further,

If a student does decide to go talk to a counselor, maybe the counselor could give [teachers] a head’s up. Like, “This student, so-and-so, is going through some hard times,” or something. But not necessarily *say* what’s going on, but just kind of give that general overview that something’s not right in her life right now.

Attempting to learn Jane’s perspective of ways teachers could address students’ need for compassion, yet be respectful of their privacy, I asked her to brainstorm with me. The following reflects Jane’s thinking on this topic,

SE: What if a teacher were to open class at the beginning of the year saying to his or her students, “I recognize that there are times that you’re not going to be your best. But the difficulty for a *teacher* is that it’s *my* job to get class underway [despite how each student is feeling].”

Jane: Yeah.

SE: But yet, there's the challenge: how can the teacher always know? I mean, the teacher may try and watch, but, say for example, someone close to you died. Class could be underway, and if the student's really *suffering*, they may...that's a part that's not really clear. Should the *student* come up and say, or...should the *teacher* be the one who is supposed to *notice* it throughout class? You see what I'm saying?

Jane: Oh. Yeah.

SE: And so, what if the teacher were to say, "During the year, because of the situation, because of our [limited] time, when you come in and we start [class]. I have this *obligation*—I mean, that's my *role*—if there is something personal happening, if you slip me a little note so that *I* can know and be aware because I would want to be—I *want* to be sensitive to you." How does that sound to you?

Jane: I actually think that's a really good idea. 'Cause I'm pretty sure that students wouldn't be comfortable at *first* just because they're not—it's *not* something that they're used to, but as time goes on, I think... that... Say for example, something traumatic really *did* happen, I think that...there would definitely be...somewhat of...like, *more* of an understanding between the student and the teacher. And that if... the teachers do [*sic*] decide to start class that way, then it would be a good way to start it. Then everyone would actually *know*...that, "Okay. I *can* open up to my teacher." And the teachers will know that the student actually feels comfortable with them.

You know, it kind of reminds me of *serendipity*, which is what I told you about. Like, if it had to do with the whole class, let's say, then I think that there should be a time that everyone *should* be able to open up to each other if it's *really* affecting the whole class. (E394-398)

SE: Right. I'm wondering also about something you said, that spirituality is about a connection with people and if...the *power*...structure doesn't allow for a connecting...then, it's also not going to impact the *spiritual* lives of students.

Jane: Yeah. I...I think that's true. Because, of course, if you don't feel that connection, then... there's nothing *there* between you *guys* or something like *that*. But in order to actually...feel that spirituality and that connection, you *have* to feel comfortable with the other person. You *have* to kind of...not necessarily be on the same *level*, but...you know, just that level of understanding has to be there, but if people decide to be biased against one another, or they just decide to shut each other out, then, you obviously *can't* have the connection (E402)

Call for Relationship Versus Power

Alice reflected that her participation in the interview process had been a positive experience as she had had an opportunity to share her story with the hope of helping other students deal with difficult experiences in their lives. She was hopeful that by sharing her life in the interviews, teachers might come to greater understanding of what students experience, and may learn, too, from the experience. Struggling to articulate, without overstepping an artificial boundary of expectations placed on students by others, Alice observed,

Just for them [teachers] to understand that school isn't like...I mean it's a big factor in our lives, but...it's not—well, it *should* be a priority—[chuckles]—but I mean...students go through a lot outside of school, and maybe inside of school also. And so just to take that into consideration when they are teaching or when they are dealing with a student in the classroom or on a personal basis. (D424)

Alice affirmed the potential value of the study to impact teachers' behavior toward students, "Just to understand what they [students] go through and maybe in that understanding, they [teachers] can help them [students] out spiritually also, to get *on* the right track" (D426). Alice suggested further that if a teacher became aware of a student's behavior and attitudes in the classroom as unfocused, that the teacher be more pro-active and understanding.

I think that maybe if they see how a certain student behaves in a classroom setting or just their attitude towards what the teacher is teaching, then they could pull that student aside and see what's really going on with the student. Maybe that would help them to teach the student better. Or maybe if they see them having bad grades, just to understand that they are probably going through some stuff at home or at school or in their personal lives that's contributing to them having bad grades or to them having that certain behavior or attitude in the classroom. (D428)

I asked Alice to brainstorm further with me on this topic. Acknowledging the gap that existed between students and teachers, and that a teacher might not want to pry into a

student's private life, I asked Alice for suggestions of what a teacher might do in this case. Alice encouraged teachers to be persistent in asking a student, but not to pry, as a student will not offer any information at all. However, she raised a concern about the way teachers interacted with students inside and outside of the classroom. Unsure of what that behavior would entail, Alice remarked, "A different kind of behavior in the classroom, and outside the classroom if they really want to get results from the student" (D430).

Seeking clarity, I suggested, "Do you mean that it's important for a teacher to be genuine or non-judgmental? She responded affirmatively adding that while teachers do have more power in the classroom than students that it would be helpful in teacher-student interactions if teachers did not hold their power in such a manner that was condescending to students. Power, therefore, was identified as a significant issue. Alice acknowledged that not all teachers held their power in this way in the classroom, but indicated that some used their power in "not-so-good ways" (D433). She offered further, "Like, they are condescending to the students, but I feel like...if they were genuine and use [*sic*] their power to help the student, then the students would probably be more open to the teachers with their personal lives" (D433).

Stereotyping Students

Addressing further elements that would be helpful in teacher-student relationships, Alice expressed a perception that she believed teachers held a stereotype of students; a stereotype that students lived the same type of lives as teachers did when at the same age. Alice asserted there was a need for teachers to "let go of that stereotype of the lives they [teachers] had when *they* were teenagers because this was a totally *new* generation" (D442). She explained that teens today do not do the same things as teachers

did when they were growing up. She posed that if teachers understood this, then perhaps teachers would have better insight into students and why one was not performing up to standards, or why they acted the way they did in class.

She added that it would be helpful if teachers expressed greater authenticity toward students when interacting. “If you don’t *really* care about their personal problems, then don’t make it seem like you do” (D443). She further suggested a desire that teachers communicate a genuine sense of caring toward students, especially towards those who may be failing. To demonstrate her point, she stated,

Not so much that you don’t *care* about their personal lives, but just not about their academics, like, if you see that a student is failing, and you don’t go over to that student, and *inquire* about what is making them have bad grades, then you know...just act like you care about the students, basically. (D445)

Chapter Summary

Most students expressed ways they believed their spirituality had been fostered, while some did not readily perceive having experienced this. When asked how the school could better foster the spirituality of its students, all students were respectful, all students were positive and affirmed a variety of ways the school fostered spirituality in its students. One student appeared uncomfortable answering that particular question. For others, significant topics were raised and were discussed in an open, respectful, and honest manner.

Responses from students who were new to the school focused primarily on the school’s environment and the feeling of community within the school. Responses included the experience of feeling greater freedom to express one’s spirituality, to pray, and to affirm one’s Catholicism within the environment provided. In addition, students affirmed the positive attitudes found among teachers, staff, and students, authentic

spirituality modeled among some of the teachers, and in some teachers, approachability or persons to whom students could easily relate.

Senior students who had spent more time in the school provided insightful responses which reflected deeper thought and integration of their concerns, and presented their concerns from a balanced perspective. Significant concerns perceived and conveyed by students included racial bias and a need for more equal treatment of students, levels of power and a call for improved relationships between teachers and students, insensitivity and a call for compassion and greater understanding among teachers of the burdens students are carrying. Students also expressed a desire for teachers to be more authentic in their own spirituality and to be open with students about their spiritual perspectives. All of the concerns addressed were expressed out of a desire for better relationships between students and teachers and for improved mutual respect.

CHAPTER VII:
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of Catholic education is the formation of the whole child: spirit, mind, and body (CCE, 1977; Paul VI, 1965; Pius XI, 1929; USCCB, 1995). In their statement on adolescent catechesis, *Renewing the Vision* (USCCB, 1997), the United States bishops indicated the spiritual development of youth into full maturity as a primary goal for teachers and catechists in parishes and Catholic high schools. While spiritual development is named as one of the most significant goals, little explanation is given as to how educators of adolescents are to define, to foster, or to assess this development.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift in the demographic makeup of Catholic school teachers. Previously, women and men religious made up the majority of Catholic school educators and came to classrooms with the benefit of theological and religious training received from the formation provided in their religious communities. In the past, the charisms and spiritual roots of the various religious congregations inspired the spirituality of not only the women and men religious who served as educators, but further provided the backbone and inspiration for the Catholic schools in which they served (Murphy, 2005). Lay educators must now provide the capital in schools to inspire and nurture the spiritual growth of students, but from a spirituality that is unique to lay Catholic educators (Murphy, p. 7).

While there is often a co-mingling between the terms religion and spirituality, this study explored the lived experiences of spirituality among junior and senior-level urban high school students to learn the nature, meaning, and essence of spirituality in the lives

of adolescent girls. In addition, this study critiqued the findings to ascertain larger implications related to Catholic secondary school teaching pedagogy. In a previous study, over two-hundred definitions of spirituality were found to exist in the literature. An operational definition for spirituality was provided for this study for the sake of the discussion surrounding the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and background and need for the study.

Spirituality refers to a universal human capacity or a quality of a person's character, personality, or disposition with tendencies toward transcendence or connectedness beyond the self. It is often related to a manner of living that is carried out with a deep awareness of self, others, and the divine. (John E. Fetzer Institute, 1999, p. 2)

This study was approached from the domain of the social sciences, which assumes spirituality as a component of human development and which supports the philosophical framework upon which the study's purpose was pursued.

A qualitative methodology was engaged to conduct a phenomenological inquiry of the meaning and experiences of spirituality for adolescent girls. Based on the philosophy of phenomenology, which studies aspects of what it means to be human, spirituality was viewed as a human phenomenon. In-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006) were conducted to explore students' perceptions and experiences. A first interview explored students' childhood experiences which provided a context for their understanding of spirituality as adolescents. A second interview explored students' current understanding of and experience of spirituality, and invited students to provide artifacts which held spiritual meaning for students in a non-verbal way. A third and final interview invited students to express how they perceived their spirituality had been nurtured or not nurtured by their attendance in a single-gender Catholic secondary school.

Students were further invited to offer “wisdom” for teachers of how Catholic secondary educators could better foster the spiritual growth of their students in a single-gender urban school.

The criteria for participation in this study was that students must have experienced the phenomenon of spirituality and be capable of articulating their experiences. Students were identified as candidates for participation in the study by school personnel: the vice-principal, the campus minister and senior-class religion teacher (the same person), and the junior class religion teacher. After students were initially identified, the researcher met with each student individually in an introductory meeting to explain the research project and to invite each student to participate in the study. Participants were given forms to complete if they wished to participate in the study, including a form for obtaining parental permission. Students were later selected if they communicated a willingness to participate by completing and submitting all of the necessary paperwork. In addition, the school required that they remain in good academic standing prior to the time that they would be scheduled for interviews and throughout the process. Six seniors and two junior class students volunteered to participate in the study.

Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The interpretation process began with the transcription process, as decisions were made to apply punctuation and paragraph divisions to the text of participants’ responses. Each interview transcription was labeled to identify the participant, and was further broken down into chunks of meaning and numbered for easy reference during the narrative-writing process. Interview responses were numbered continuously from the first interview through the end of the third interview for each participant. During the transcribing process, participants’

unclear speech was verified with the participant. Transcription texts from each interview were carefully proofread.

The analytic process was guided by three methodologists: Van Manen (1990), Seidman (2006), and Munhall (2007). The steps in the analytic process followed consecutively as: (1) printed transcriptions were cut into single-paragraph strips; (2) Strips were reviewed and placed into small packets according to the topic discussed. Packets were labeled and numbered. (3) A continuous narrative was constructed for each participant, which was described from the packets and included the participant's childhood context, current perception and experience of spirituality, and finally, the participant's experience of spirituality within a single-gender, urban Catholic secondary school.

Each narrative, written consecutively, was later divided and placed into the proper order for presentation in Chapters IV, V, and VI. As each narrative was completed, the narrative was emailed to the student for verification. Students were asked to review the entire text to verify that the researcher's interpretations had accurately captured the student's feelings and experiences. Students were asked to respond within a two-week period. A final review of the student's life experiences and perceptions generated the researcher's interpretive analysis of the students' life-worlds: spatial, corporeal, temporal, and relational.

Conclusions and Implications

Research Question #1

The first research question of this study asked: *What is the meaning of being spiritual for adolescent girls in an all-girls urban Catholic high school?* For this

phenomenological study, this question was intentionally interpreted in two ways: (1) How do adolescent girls define spirituality? And (2) What meaning does spirituality have for these students, in other words, how do they value spirituality in their lives? This conclusion addresses both aspects of the question considering first the manner in which participants defined spirituality, and secondly, how students valued spirituality in their lives.

Defining Characteristics of Commonality and Difference

Reviewing the participants' perceptions of spirituality (Table 6) articulated as each one's life experiences had revealed to them, some characteristics were found common to more than one student, and in some cases, students articulated characteristics unique to their perspectives. While some general commonality was found among a few characteristics expressed, it is important to note that this did not imply similar meanings intended by the students within those common characteristics. Characteristics can be interpreted only within the context of each participant's life experience and, therefore, are unique in interpretation. For this reason, the following discussion of common qualities should be understood in a very broad and general manner, whereas the uniqueness of each student's definitions may be noted in Table 6.

Relationship with God. Seven of the participants defined spirituality within the context of a relationship with God. For Maria, Alice, and Kathleen, maintaining a sustained, committed relationship with God held priority and embodied the essence of spirituality. All other characteristics they named were secondary to this central defining reality in their lives. Maria viewed spirituality as an *intense* relationship with God, Alice expressed a more distant sense of God; yet she was committed to living within this

relationship. Kathleen's perception of spirituality, contained wholly within her identity as a Child of God as lived through the context of Christianity, was understood as the living of one's life completely in the context of relationship with God.

Cassandra, Jane, and Jennifer expressed a different perception of this relationship. For these participants, the state of being in a good relationship with God was listed as a characteristic of spirituality rather than as its essence, connoting almost equal import with other characteristics. Jane described spirituality as having a connection with God, yet, for Jane, this connection brought an awareness of a benevolent and caring presence, one whom she wished to express gratitude through service. Katie referred to God as an object who acts in one's life, who may or may not be noticed. She expressed that spirituality consisted of how one viewed God working in one's life and that she felt connected with God, but that she did not think that God approved of her present life choices.

In a review of literature on spiritual experiences, Underwood (1999) found that

Western spirituality emphasizes a more personal connection with God and other people, while Eastern spirituality places more emphasis on connection with all of life, and connection in unity. Many people have frequent interaction with the transcendent on a daily basis, looking to God for strength, asking for help, and feeling guidance in specific circumstances. Emotional support from the transcendent is manifested in feelings of being loved and comforted. A concept that emerges frequently in the spiritual literature of both Eastern and Western traditions is the concept of spiritual integration, with a resulting sense of inner harmony or wholeness. (p. 12)

According to Underwood's findings, all of the adolescent girls who participated in this study expressed a Western perspective in their experiences of spirituality. With changing demographics in our American society, it is possible that students from Eastern cultures, with Eastern spiritualities, may enroll in our Catholic secondary schools. For those students, the present study would not suffice for advancing our understanding of the

Table 6

Participants' Definitions of Spirituality

Participant:	Spirituality is defined as:
Cassandra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a set of beliefs and validating those beliefs by one's actions. ▪ Being in good relationships with people, with God, with family. ▪ Contains more than religion: it is a way of life.
Diana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having to do with one's soul; with the person one is, and with how at peace one is with herself. ▪ An essential component of one's humanity; one's essence. ▪ Growing in personal characteristics, such that the characteristics improve one's quality of life. ▪ Provides guidance in decision-making.
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A relationship with God; to <i>be</i> spiritual, one must spend time with God praying and listening to allow the relationship to develop. ▪ Having a "real" relationship with God; this enables "knowing the right things to do" in life. ▪ Spirituality is a life-style; ▪ Perceived levels of spirituality through which one grows from self-absorption into greater love for others; includes maintaining positive relationships with others, especially with family.
Alice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committing oneself to living a deep relationship with God; living one's life according to God's will; being a good Christian.
Jane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a connection with a higher being, Higher Power, or with God. Enabled ▪ Possessing a belief in a Higher Power and being able to pray or call out to this presence. ▪ A component of her humanity which enabled ever-deepening self-knowledge and understanding of being human; elements which provided skills for building relationships with others.
Jennifer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To feel connected to people and to be in-tuned with those connections; these connections are evidence of God's love and presence. ▪ The authentic relationship with herself, and the presence of the spirit within her as a manifestation of God's presence in the world. ▪ Spirituality: the essence of her very self.
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When one's beliefs, morals, and values fit one's perspective and guide one's actions. ▪ How one views God working in one's life and how one interacts with others.
Kathleen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Being a Child of God: a relationship which holds responsibilities for one to recognize and embrace. ▪ That which provided a foundation for decision-making according to God's will; an inner concrete foundation for making moral decisions. ▪ That which provides meaning to life and the basis for all choices and actions.

Note: Data taken from participant interviews.

spiritual perceptions and experiences of adolescent students. Further study would broaden an understanding of the spiritual experiences of adolescent girls for the pedagogical concern of how to foster students' spirituality.

Mindful awareness of one's interior life. Awareness of one's interior life may be understood as living in self-knowledge, acknowledging one's strengths and limitations, desires and dislikes, attitudes and temperament. Maintaining one's interior life includes accepting responsibility for mistakes made and being willing to learn from those mistakes. Living an active interior life requires a commitment to pay attention to the dynamics which occur within one's self as a result of every day life experiences.

Student participants who expressed a vital awareness of their spirituality evidenced an awareness of their interior life. For the most part, these students demonstrated a maturing self-knowledge. Cassandra described coming to know more keenly her beliefs about topics connected to the Catholic religion about issues regarding justice and human rights for others, beginning in the seventh and eighth grade and continuing through some of her high school classes. This occurred as her teachers challenged their students to think critically and to formulate their own beliefs and opinions rather than teaching students what they were to believe. Diana expressed a perception of spiritual growth achieved as a result of changing internal attitudes, postures toward others, and greater awareness of her motives behind external behaviors.

For Diana as well as for Maria, Alice, and Jennifer, knowledge of their interior life included recognizing personal transformation that had taken place as a result of a particular life event. Each of these girls articulated an awareness of their growth into greater maturity as a result of the prior life event or series of events, a maturity prompted

by honest self-reflection and an admission of her faults. For Maria and Alice, the transformation was particularly evident in their deepened commitment to a relationship with God and to giving service to others for the sake of sharing the message of God's love. Kathleen described an ongoing awareness of her interior life, from childhood to the present, that was well-integrated with her understanding of herself as a Child of God.

Life lived authentically. Living life authentically may be understood as living one's life according to who one believes he or she is intended to be, to live genuinely according to one's inner truth (American Heritage Dictionary, 1969). For Cassandra, Jane, Jennifer, Kathleen, and Diana, identifying and living out their spiritual selves was the manner through which they lived their most authentic selves. Diana and Jennifer both came to know themselves more clearly through the maturing that had taken place within them and which they perceived to be spiritual growth. Jennifer expressed that she had learned to be in a healthy relationship with herself, and her ability to live more authentically was proof of the spiritual growth that had taken place within her.

Cassandra, Maria, Alice, Kathleen and Jennifer expressed that if they were to deny the spiritual part of themselves, it would mean denying their very self. For these girls, to embrace and live out the spiritual aspect of themselves was to live fully and authentically who they are. This perspective was clearly articulated in Diana's definition of spirituality as one's soul, or as the essence of one's being.

Moral guide. Six of the participants revealed a moral component to spirituality or described a characteristic of guidance in decision-making. Cassandra found that spirituality meant having a set of beliefs, or a strong moral conviction toward the good and just treatment of others, yet qualified that orientation stating that it must be lived out

in one's actions. For Maria, Alice, and Kathleen, their perception of spirituality was integrally associated with their relationship with God and with doing God's will. Maria's perception of spirituality was embodied in a deep loving relationship with God, and contained a hunger to know and to do God's will in her life. God's will encompassed the guidance and direction for Maria's behavior, as well as, the inspiration for how she should live in order to give greater honor and glory to God. Alice perceived spirituality as doing the right thing according to God's desire for her. For Kathleen, being wholly united to God as a Child of God carried the responsibility of living attentively to God's will and carrying out in loving trust whatever God desired of her.

Katie defined spirituality as the "fit" between one's beliefs, morals, and values (as taught by her parents) with one's perspective, and when these beliefs guide one's actions. However, Katie expressed that she was presently not inclined to actively pursue the values she had been taught.

Relationality. For most of the participants, an important aspect of spirituality was that of being in good relationships with others, as well as with God. Cassandra found spirituality expressed through the peaceful, loving relationships with her family, with friends, and with God. Diana was aware of a growing relationship with herself which was manifested in a growing self-awareness, self-respect, and self-esteem. Maria and Kathleen each defined spirituality as being in a relationship with God; yet, each of these girls perceived her relationship with God as the source and inspiration of all other relationships in her life.

Jane found spirituality evident in having a strong relationship with herself, and her spirituality was strengthened by the friendships she shared with others in which she

could talk about spiritual things. Jennifer viewed spirituality as feeling connected with herself and with others and being in-tuned with those connections. For Jennifer, vital connections with others reflected the loving energy of God. Katie's perception of spirituality included how one interacted with others.

Transcendence beyond self. Several of the participants articulated an awareness of growing beyond self-absorption into greater care and concern for others. For some, this meant making a firm and public commitment of service to others. Cassandra described an awareness and empathy for others beyond herself, particularly when others were challenged by their pursuit of basic human needs as a matter of one's survival, dignity, and personal safety. Cassandra was aware of the concerns of her extended family members and empathized with them in the daily hardships they endured. Diana was currently finding joy in her newfound ability to reach out to other girls at THS who were younger than she to whom she offered support and guidance. For Jane, service given to her parish community over a span of seven years contributed significantly to her self-identity. In addition, Jane articulated this ongoing commitment to service in her parish as a vital component of her experience of spirituality.

Maria perceived her movement beyond self-absorption into greater love for others as an incremental growth she referred to as "levels of spirituality." Maria expressed an awareness that as she had grown deeply in her relationship with God, she felt an obligation to serve God through serving others and bringing the good news of God's love to others. Maria perceived this service as an essential part of her response to God in love. Alice articulated awareness that her current expression of spirituality included a desire to help others who may have lost their way to realize God's love for

them, as she had come to realize in her own life.

Both Jane and Kathleen realized a desire to serve God by giving service to their own church community at an early age. Each of these girls maintained committed and active service to her community for roughly half of her life. For all of the girls who identified giving service or growing in love and concern for others, this growth from self-absorption towards greater care for others was a manifestation of their spirituality.

Summary. These findings, relationship with God, mindful awareness of one's interior life, living life authentically, being in good relationships with others, having an inner sense of a moral guide, and transcending oneself for the sake of others, resonate with the operational definition of spirituality provided for this study (John E. Fetzer Institute, 1999, p. 2). Restating these qualities, the operational definition offered by the Fetzer Institute acknowledged that "spirituality is a universal human capacity," with "tendencies toward transcendence or connectedness beyond the self." Both qualities of transcendence and connectedness have been illuminated in this study as the participants described movement beyond themselves, and even more importantly, that spirituality was manifested through relational connections with self, with others, and with God. In addition, participants described their perceptions of spirituality as growth in knowledge of themselves and as living life authentically. These elements resonate with the objective definition of spirituality provided.

The Meaning of Spirituality as a Value in Students' Lives

All of the participants found value in spirituality (Table 7). For six of the participants, spirituality could not be separated from their own self-identity. Cassandra, Diana, Maria, Jane and Kathleen revealed that spirituality was integral to their

Table 7

The Meaning of Spirituality as a Value in Students' Lives

Participant:	How did the participant value spirituality?
Cassandra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cassandra valued her spirituality. What she valued most was how life experiences with her family had impacted her enabling her to grow in the convictions she held. • Spirituality held an important part in shaping who she was and how she viewed the world.
Diana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Diana, spirituality was the essence of herself; it was her soul. • She explained that spirituality had provided her with a sense of fulfillment or inner satisfaction. • Spirituality gave direction to her in decision-making. • Spirituality meant many things to her, such that she considered spirituality as an all-encompassing entity that embraced and influenced many other aspects of her life.
Maria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maria expressed the importance of spirituality in her life through the expression of her love and commitment to being in relationship with God, in her desire to serve God, and to follow God's will for her in her life. She possessed a strong desire to continue growing and developing a deeper relationship with God and to enable others to see God through her.
Alice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alice identified spirituality as "probably the most important thing in my life, because I try to put God first, and God is entailed in my spirituality. So, in everything I do in my life, spirituality comes first" (D481).
Jane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane could not imagine herself without her spirituality. She stated, "Because without spirituality I don't think I would be able to <i>fully</i> and completely understand myself. And that means I wouldn't be able to fully and completely understand <i>other</i> people around me" (E320).
Jennifer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality provided for Jennifer a connection with herself and with others upon which she depended. • Jennifer explained that if she were to deny her spirituality, she would be denying her whole reason for living.
Katie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katie found objective value in spirituality, but expressed that at the present time, spirituality, her faith, and regular attendance at church held little importance for her.
Kathleen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kathleen affirmed that for her, spirituality was one of her highest values; it was something "that I <i>highly</i> and <i>greatly</i> value, because it's what has shaped me as a person" (H414).

Note: Data taken from participant interviews.

understanding of themselves and that through their interior spiritual awareness, they found deep personal meaning in being spiritual. In general, these participants expressed an internal commitment to pursuing the ongoing growth of their spirituality in the future. They further demonstrated mindfulness towards their spirituality that may allow for its continuing development in the future.

General Conclusions to Research Question #1

Identity clarification. From a psychological perspective, many connections may be drawn between the participants' experiences and perceptions of spirituality and Erikson's (1959, 1963, 1968) stages of personality development as students articulated awarenesses of their self identities. However, the awareness of each girl's self-identity was integrally related to a sense of spirituality; therefore, this aspect of their self-awareness goes beyond Erikson's view. For the participants, a natural or innate sense of the spiritual was integrally related to each one's sense of her own identity. In most cases, this innate sense of spirituality included a belief in God and in the presence of the sacred within her life.

In addition, the results suggested common elements with Marcia's (1980) modes of identity clarification. For those students who were more emphatic about the importance of spirituality in their lives, identity achievement may have been accomplished with the valuing of spirituality as an essential component to their lives. Jennifer conveyed being in the midst of the struggle to determine who she was and possessing the knowledge that she desired to be connected to God and to be loved, she was finding further clarification of her identity and a sense of belonging through her pursuit of Catholicism. This struggle was intertwined with a spiritual self-understanding.

The students' perceptions of their own identities, while may be found to correlate with Marcia's modes of identity clarification, are again intertwined with a spiritual perspective, with the presence of God, with a perception of meaning and purpose for their lives which goes beyond a vocation. These connections may be helpful for secondary educators in their efforts to identify ways to foster and support the spiritual growth of their students.

Change over time. Several of the participants described that as their spirituality grew and became more deeply integrated, their behaviors and attitudes were transformed. An awareness of this change was most strongly expressed by Diana who credited her spirituality with effecting the changes in her behavior with boys on dates, and the changes in her that allowed growth in significant relationships such as with her mother, with her confirmation teacher, and with new friends made at THS. These changes were further evident for Diana in her new ability to provide mentoring to younger girls in the after-school activities she became involved in at THS. Diana's growing awareness of each of these areas of change effected transformation in her self-identity and deepened her self-confidence and self-esteem. This was a profound finding that merits further discussion.

Research Question #2

The second research question sought to apply learning acquired from the phenomenological inquiry to the practice of education in a single-gender urban Catholic secondary school. The second question addressed: *What implications do students' understandings of being spiritual have for secondary educators?* In each case, students offered a balanced response to these questions in which they praised the school for

concrete ways they had benefited spiritually, they raised genuine concerns, and they offered thoughtful, honest suggestions for educators to consider. Overall, students expressed awareness that the single-gender status of the school and its strong academic focus had contributed positively to their personal growth in self-confidence and, therefore, had contributed to the growth of their spirituality.

Affirmation of Social and Community Awareness

Three participants specifically mentioned that they found the community service required by THS as a strength in fostering their spirituality. They found that by fulfilling these service obligations, they were stretched beyond self-absorption to understanding the needs of others. Several participants expressed appreciation for the courses that allowed them to reflect critically on social justice issues and to voice their own thoughts and beliefs about these issues. The discussions provided them greater opportunity to grow in self-knowledge and in self-confidence. Cassandra disclosed that the times she has experienced the greatest amount of growth in her spiritual and religious formation in Catholic schools was when teachers challenged their students to identify their own beliefs about religious and social issues rather than teachers merely pouring doctrinal instruction into students.

Participants mentioned the course in Women's Spirituality that had been offered at THS. A few students suggested that they would have benefited more from this course had there been more opportunity for students and the teacher to share personally about their own spirituality. The participants stated that this would have provided a means for students to learn from one other and their teacher, and to gather more information upon which to base their own decisions regarding their spiritual lives. Finally, participants

appreciated opportunities the school provided to pray and to reflect, to listen to the Word of God, and to share faith during Eucharistic celebrations and prayer services.

Desire to Live Authentically and to Grow Spiritually

By defining their perceptions of spirituality, seven of the participants expressed a desire to live authentically and to wholeheartedly live out a commitment to the ongoing growth of their spirituality. While this was a common theme, several participants observed that some teachers did not appear to support the spiritual nature or religious dimension of the school, nor did they appear to value the ongoing development of their own spirituality. Several examples were provided.

Participants noticed that some teachers did not support the school daily prayer offered school-wide over the PA in the mornings. Students suggested that by the teachers' non-verbal behavior at prayer time, they communicated to students that neither prayer nor the spiritual aspect of the school was important. Students found this behavior unsupportive of their own desires to grow spiritually and to be nourished in a spiritual environment.

Participants described a desire that teachers be more transparent with students regarding teachers' own religious beliefs and spiritual lives. While the participants were not seeking great depths of personal disclosure from teachers, they suggested that if teachers shared more honestly about their own personal choices regarding religion and about the lived experiences of their spirituality, they would be providing more meaningful instruction through the witness of their own lives, of their decision-making process, and of the values teachers found particularly meaningful. Students suggested that if teachers disclosed more of their own personal life experiences with regard to religion

and spirituality, their teaching would become more powerful in the lives of the students.

Desire for Improved Relationships With Teachers

Participants acknowledged the life-giving relationships they enjoyed with certain members of the THS faculty. Gratitude was expressed for the degree of caring students felt from the faculty and administration, especially for the fact that students are known individually by name. These aspects were acknowledged as strengths in the school's efforts to foster the spirituality of its students. However, several participants expressed concern about the status of relationships between some teachers and students at THS and perceived this as detracting from fostering students' spirituality. These participants described a perception that some teachers maintained an officious posture that seemed to hold the teacher's curricular agenda with greater importance than the students who were being taught. In addition, several participants described experiencing a lack of understanding from some teachers while in the midst of enduring significant personal issues which impacted their ability to participate fully in the classroom. Participants found this lack of compassion to be an expression of teachers' greater concern for their classroom agenda than for students' well-being.

Participants explained that this stance created distance and division between teachers and students rather than bringing teachers and students together in mutually esteemed relationships. Furthermore, this stance communicated to students a lack of support from teachers which negated the mission of the school, that of educating students in spirit and faith. Participants expressed a desire that teachers open themselves to greater understanding of the lived realities of students, not to excuse them from academic responsibilities, but so that teachers could behave with greater compassion towards

students for the sake of the personal issues with which they may be dealing.

Several participants named a characteristic of the student-teacher relationships that they described as rigid, that, by remaining hidden behind their role, teachers stood divided from the less powerful position of students. Some students referred to these relational structures as “levels of power.” Gilligan (1983) identified this as a hierarchical structure which is a less comfortable relational posture for women or girls who feel a greater affinity toward mutual relationships within a web of connections. This type of alternate connection does not diminish the purpose or role of different individuals; however, it allows for greater ease and exchange among parties. Gilligan explained her understanding of the difference for women in approaching relationships which may illumine the predominant view of the need for a hierarchical structure within a school system in order to maintain discipline.

A shift in the imagery of relationships gives rise to a problem of interpretation. The images of hierarchy and web, drawn from the texts of men’s and women’s fantasies and thoughts, convey different ways of structuring relationships and are associated with different views of morality and self...The reinterpretation of women’s experience in terms of their own imagery of relationships thus clarifies that experience and also provides a nonhierarchical vision of human connection. Since relationships, when cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic, their transposition into the image of web changes an order of inequality into a structure of interconnection. (p. 62)

Students suggested that, for teachers who stand behind a rigid structure such as this, it was difficult to relate to them as human beings, and therefore, was difficult to approach them to speak openly. Even more so, participants offered that if there was greater openness on the part of teachers, and more opportunities provided in class for open and honest discussions in which both teachers and students might disclose their own beliefs and perceptions about issues discussed in the course, then greater mutual

understanding and compassion could result. Participants suggested that this would help students to understand teachers better and hopefully would help teachers to realize the good will inherent in students. For an all-girls school, it is worth considering the impact that a strongly hierarchical structure, be that in the administrative structure, or in the individual teachers' perceptions of their role as teacher, may have on students.

In addition, participants desired that teachers have greater awareness of the lived personal and social realities of their students. Participants pointed out a perceived generational difference between themselves and their teachers, asked for greater understanding and compassion of these differences, rather than judgment. Participants expressed feeling great pressure from expectations to perform and "to be" a certain way solely because they were enrolled in a Catholic school, and yet, their own personal and societal problems had not disappeared as a result of their enrollment at THS. Palmer (1998) addressed the concept of teacher-student relationships within a spiritual context calling teachers to the importance of making connections with students and building relationships as a means of fulfilling a true spirit of educating:

Behind their fearful silence, our students want to find their voices, speak their voices, have their voices heard. A good teacher is one who can listen to those voices even before they are spoken—so that someday they can speak with truth and confidence.

What does it mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken? It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honoring the other. It means not rushing to fill our students' silences with fearful speech or our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering empathetically into the student's world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth. (p. 46)

Freire (1970) described a pedagogy that does not acknowledge the humanity of the students, that which takes place when teachers merely try to pour learning into the

minds of the students without regard for the humanity of each individual student. Freire referred to this as “banking” education, rather than educating by drawing on the personal, social, and cultural realities of each individual. Educating for one’s growth, or greater personal freedom, places greater responsibility on educators to engage in relationship with his or her students, and to realize the needs of the students in order to bring about their greatest good. This calls for greater openness and mutual respect. It calls for engaging in the lives of one’s students, learning who each one is and what are their lived experiences, without passing judgment. Teachers are working with human beings. Teachers need to engage students in relationships; this is a primary way one communicates self to self, spirit to spirit.

Concern for Unresolved Racial Issues in the Classroom

Three of the participants expressed concern for some teachers’ inadequacy when dealing with racial topics in the classroom and with racially charged relations with students. Participants perceived that some teachers appeared uncomfortable discussing racial issues in the classroom, and as a result, those particular class discussions became thwarted and emotionally charged rather than providing fruitful learning. Aware of the teachers’ inability to lead a productive discussion on a particular racial topic created tension among the students and undermined the teachers’ credibility in the eyes of the students.

In addition, participants stated that they had experienced teachers treating African-American students differently in the past on a few occasions when the teachers were correcting the behaviors of African-American girls and of Caucasian girls. During these occasions, the teachers appeared threatened by the African-American students and

responded more harshly to them than to the Caucasian girls. These observations were noted by a Filipina participant and by one African-American participant. This unequal treatment of students was a source of disappointment for the participants that the teachers involved had not been better equipped to deal more fairly with the classroom management issue. The participants named these examples of ways teachers had neglected the spiritual education of students by their failure to provide equal respect towards every student in the classroom.

Race is an integral part of one's identity as a human being. To deny one's own race and that of another, to ignore racial differences or life-experiences inherent because of one's race, or to suggest that there is no meaning in dealing with racial issues, is to deny the authentically lived experiences of another, particularly of our students. Every person, regardless of color, has a racial identity, as clearly as one has a sexual identity, that must be clarified. For a white person, it has been much easier to ignore this fact; therefore, it becomes a greater challenge to acknowledge and uncover one's own racial life experiences and attitudes. However, for the sake of our own maturity as human beings who live in social settings with others, it is imperative that the discovery and growth of our racial identities be addressed. This is particularly important for educators who deal with mixed races within their classrooms.

Whiteness, as a race, is particularly elusive to deal with, and for this reason, left unattended, can be an unconscious liability. Ignorance of one's racial identity, latent attitudes and behaviors can have grave consequences in a multi-racial classroom. Identifying the complex nature of whiteness, Frankenberg (1993) confirmed the importance of addressing this reality.

Whiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence. Rather...it is a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present. Thus, the range of possible ways of living whiteness, for an individual...in a particular time and place, is delimited by the relations of racism *at that moment and in that place*. And if whiteness varies spatially and temporally, it is also a relational category, one that is coconstructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender. (p. 236)

Participants' responses revealed the need for educators at THS to address their own racial identities and naïve behaviors. Teaching social justice issues in the classroom to students is not nearly as poignant as the lessons taught by the behaviors exhibited in the school environment by ignorant educators. This is imperative to fulfilling one's role as an educator with integrity.

It is not comfortable for whites to engage in dialogue about racism. McIntyre (1997) acknowledged this difficulty, yet asserted the importance of committing oneself to this goal.

Spirituality Flourishes When One Belongs to a Community

Participants almost unanimously expressed the quality of being in good relationships or feeling connected with others as evidence of a flourishing spirituality; yet, one participant expressed painful feelings of isolation as a result of transferring to THS. While THS had implemented a program to "link" incoming freshmen with upper class students to help freshman girls to build connections of friendship and "big-sister" mentors, it was unfortunate that there was not such a provision for students who had transferred into THS later than their freshman year. Gilligan (1982) asserted the importance of relationships in the lives of women and of girls. Tending to this need among transferring students would be a conscious gesture towards the social and emotional, as well as the spiritual well-being of incoming students.

Summary for Research Question #2

This study focused on the participants' perceptions of how their spirituality had or had not been nurtured by their attendance within the Catholic secondary school. The study omitted teachers' perspectives regarding their efforts to foster the spiritual lives of students. More information is needed to gain a greater understanding to determine recommendations for pedagogical changes for teachers to foster the spiritual lives of students. Further study which gathers the perceptions and understandings of teachers would broaden an assessment of how educators could improve pedagogy for educating students spiritually.

Pedagogy for fostering spiritual development. Students did not identify an awareness of significant sources of spiritual development within their academic program. Yet, greater spiritual learning took place when students were challenged to assert their own beliefs and to express reasons for these beliefs. Additionally, students expressed a desire for discussions in class that provide opportunities to listen to the beliefs and reasoning of other students. This suggestion is worth teachers' consideration for classroom practices for nurturing students' spiritual growth.

Racial identities of teachers need cultivation. Research data implied that there is a lack of understanding among teachers of racial issues and of the consequences of their naïveté regarding such issues when relating with students in the classroom. In today's society of multi-ethnic populations, it is essential that educators avail themselves of resources to foster their own growth in racial issues. This is particularly true for Caucasian educators, who could risk sounding racist merely by adhering to a stance which denies that racial issues exist in a classroom.

Nurturing adolescent spirituality by example. Student participants expressed a desire to live authentic lives and they found great joy in the spiritual nature of their lives. In some cases, participants were disappointed with the lack of spiritual role-modeling provided by teachers. Students desired to hear the beliefs and spiritual experiences of teachers as they look to their teachers to be credible witnesses of a life lived maturely and spiritually. This calls for educators in Catholic schools to consider seriously the qualities that are involved or expected by their role as Catholic educators. While not all teachers in a Catholic secondary school may embrace the Catholic or another Christian religion, there is a spiritual component within each person's humanity. To neglect the development of this component deprives students of a an adult who is qualified to teach in a similar fashion as one who was unprepared with his or her curricular topic. If teachers were to tend to their own spiritual development, the educational results for students within Catholic schools may be far-reaching.

Quality of teacher-student relationships. Considering that a strong aspect of the participants' spirituality was that of change and transformation, this suggests a point for further consideration: What are the attitudes that teachers and administrators engage when dealing with students? Do teachers and administrators allow for students to change, to grow, and to be transformed? These questions suggest further thoughts for reflection that center around the quality of relationships that exist between teachers and students for the sake of students' learning. However, in the classroom, since the teacher maintains the role of authority, more responsibility for the quality of relationships may be placed on the teacher. Further research may be helpful to uncover attitudes and presuppositions regarding how a teacher believes they are to maintain control and discipline in the

classroom, particularly in light of how those relationships may contribute to the fostering of students' spirituality.

Participants expressed a desire for improved relationships and greater understanding from teachers for a variety of reasons that would ultimately foster students' spiritual growth and development. Further implications which flowed from students' responses included:

- That greater transparency from teachers about their own religious beliefs and about their own spiritual experiences would enhance student learning about how to actively live their own spirituality.
- That greater awareness and understanding from teachers about the lived realities of students' lives, without passing judgments, would strengthen student-teacher relationships and nurture students' spirituality.
- That teachers' inability to deal with racial issues and to exhibit equal respect toward every student negates teachers' credibility as models of Christian values in the eyes of students. And finally,
- That incoming students need to feel socially connected and a sense of belonging in their new school, regardless of their age of entrance, in order to feel spiritually satisfied.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future practice address implications revealed through the course of this research. Recommendations address further research into adolescent spirituality and into Catholic secondary educators' perceptions of spirituality and their role in fostering students' spirituality. Further research is needed:

- To reveal the perceptions and experiences of spirituality among teachers in a single-gender urban Catholic secondary school. A crucial question would be to consider the implications of teachers' perceptions of spirituality on the educational practices that take place within the school. Research questions may include:
 - What meaning does spirituality hold for teachers in a single-gender urban Catholic secondary school? How do teachers perceive their own spirituality? How do teachers perceive their role in fostering the spirituality of students? How do teachers perceive they are/are not fostering the spirituality of students?
 - What meaning does spirituality hold for Catholic school administrators? How do school administrators perceive their role in fostering the spirituality of teachers and students?
 - What meaning does spirituality hold for diocesan personnel? How do diocesan administrators perceive their role in fostering the spiritual lives of students, teachers, and school administrators?
- To examine how adolescent girls outside of the Christian tradition perceive spirituality. A study of this nature would provide a broader perspective of the spiritual perceptions and experiences of adolescent girls who attend a single-gender urban Catholic secondary school.
- To consider the long-term spiritual effects of community service experiences on students. A study of this nature would investigate the impact community service has had on adolescents' spiritual growth.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Recommendations for future practice address the topics discussed in the conclusion section of this dissertation. Topics addressed in these recommendations include: (1) further employment of successful teaching methods for critical thinking skills on social justice issues; (2) the need for educators to intentionally model a healthy spirituality as a mode of instruction; (3) that need for teachers in Catholic secondary schools to commit to ongoing growth and development of their own racial identity, and to understanding racial issues through the lives of their students; (4) the need for educators to improve relationships with students as a means of fostering spiritual education in students; and (5) the need for schools to support students in community and relationship-building, particularly in single-gender schools, for the well-being and spiritual growth of students.

Recommendations for colleges, universities and teacher preparation programs are:

- That courses for educators be offered to develop their own racial identities. That a course on racism be required as part of a credentialing program.
- That courses be offered to teach educators methods for fostering critical thinking skills in students, particularly as applied social justice issues. Courses should encourage educators to integrate service learning into every school and classroom curriculum, coupled with a reflection process for students to encourage attitudes of responsibility and care for others in students.
- That teacher preparation course studies include careful assessment of classroom management styles to compare and critique systems for establishing discipline. Educators should be encouraged to realize the possible negative consequences of

hierarchical versus humanistic, or authoritarian versus authoritative management styles on student-teacher relationships.

- That courses be offered to support educators in learning or developing healthy growth of their own spirituality and to help them to realize this as an essential component of their teaching skills and credibility with students.

Recommendations for Diocesan personnel:

- That a requirement for or encouraging the ongoing development of teachers' racial identities and growth in racial-sensitive behaviors within their classrooms be instituted.
- That diocesan personnel work with colleges, universities, and teacher preparation programs to ensure resources are available for teachers to become educated on racial issues.
- That in-services be provided to address the need for greater understanding among teachers of the lived realities of students.
- That in-services be provided on the topic of pedagogy for educating students spiritually.

Recommendations for Catholic secondary school administrators:

- That schools maintain a spiritual perspective. Provide a support system for students by tending to their spiritual lives of students and to their spiritual awareness, growth, and development.
- That administrators provide in-services and faculty retreats to encourage, foster, and facilitate spiritual growth and development in faculty, staff, and administrators to actively tend to their own spiritual lives.

- That administrators realize the importance of owning their racial identity for the sake of modeling for teachers and students and for credibility as an educator. Commit to life-long efforts to developing that identity in honesty, gentleness, and truth.

Recommendations for Catholic secondary school educators:

- That educators work to form supportive relationships with students. Students want to live lives of greater authenticity. Capitalize on this.
- That teachers commit to ongoing learning and growth in racial issues and that they seek out resources for personal and professional growth in this area.
- That educators expect ongoing change in students. It is important that educators understand that students are *changing* and, hopefully, change is ongoing for them. Teachers would help students by communicating a conviction to students that they are not defined by the worst behaviors exhibited in the past, nor by who they are in the present. Whatever was a student's darkest reality does not define who they are. Educators can teach students much about life and about spiritual health by expressing in word and deed, "I will support you by believing in you. I will teach you that you are not the sum of your worst moments."

Observations of the Researcher as Instrument

Overall, the adolescent girls who participated in this study modeled faithful and faith-filled lives, authentically seeking their own truth and God. At every step of this process, interviews, transcripts, and narrative-writing, I was touched by the lives of these girls and nudged toward greater fidelity in my own faith and greater authenticity in my spiritual life. What wonderful things could happen if teachers could open up their class

discussions to let the beliefs and inner riches of our students pour out! The inner lives of our students would brighten the world. Teachers and students would benefit from greater mutual relationships within a single-gender urban Catholic high school. I believe that students would not only enrich one another in their search for the sacred, but they would further enrich their teachers.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: Informational Summary to School Administrators

Informational Summary to School Administrators

Research Project: Fostering Spiritual Development

In a Single-Gender Urban Catholic High School

Background and Need

- Since the 1960s, a surge of interest has taken place in the area of spirituality. Books on spiritual topics are bestsellers. Yet many in our culture say they are “spiritual, but not religious.”
- The primary purpose of Catholic education is holistic: educating the child in spirit, mind and body, however, our Church documents on Catholic education do not specify how that is done.
- A recent *National Study of Youth and Religion* reported findings for Catholic youth were 5 to 25 percentage points lower than their peers throughout the nation in measures of practice and ability to articulate concepts of faith.
- With the rise of interest in spirituality in society, how are we responding to this phenomenon with our students in Catholic high schools? How are we serving them in their spiritual growth?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how students define spirituality and how they have experienced the fostering of their spiritual development during their high school years. This study seeks to investigate the experiences of students from their viewpoint.

Procedures of Project

The project will consist of *in-depth interviews* with 10 students from the junior and senior classes. Letters of information to the students and parents will be provided, as well as Letters of Consent insuring students of confidentiality, their right to refuse participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Duration of interviews: 30 to 90 minutes; preferably to be completed in one sitting. (Length of interviews will depend on students' ability to self-reflect and to articulate). Two to three interviews may be conducted per week, until 10 interviews have been completed. All interviews will be tape-recorded. *Time of interviews* may be negotiated: before school, during school-time, lunch-time, after school.

Needed from Administrators:

- A private space in which to conduct interviews securing confidentiality and, ideally, a space which will foster an atmosphere supportive of discussing spirituality,
- recommendations for student participants, and
- assistance coordinating distribution of Letters of Information and Consent, scheduling the meeting place.

Participant Requirements: five junior and five senior students, who have experienced their own spirituality and who can articulate their experiences in feelings, judgments, and descriptions. Selection of participants who will represent a range of variation in responses, rather than similarity, is desired for this study.

Risks, Costs, and Benefits to Participants

Students may experience psychological discomfort from the disclosure of personal information to a stranger; and psychological change resulting from the experience of reflecting and articulating on their experiences of spirituality. Cost to students may include the loss of personal, class and/or study time due to their participation in this study. Students will receive a \$10 gift certificate to a site of their choice (Starbucks, Borders, Barnes and Nobles).

Confidentiality

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Students may discontinue participation at any time. Confidentiality of both the school's and students' identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all conversations, written dissertation, and future publications.

APPENDIX B: Introductory Meeting: Invitation to Participate in Research

Introductory Meeting: Invitation to Participate in Research

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Introduction of researcher:

Purpose of Project:

Risks and Rights of participant:

Confidentiality:

Benefits:

What I am asking:

Process:

1. Introduction
2. Three interviews: one interview per week for three weeks
3. Verification of each interview transcript to be completed prior to the next interview.
4. Final verification of each participant's summary.

Conclusion to Invitation Process:

- Please return one signed copy of the Participant Consent form and one signed copy of the Parental Consent form no later than _____ to your vice-principal.
- Your VP will schedule the interviews according to your classes and input from you.

APPENDIX C: Overview of Three Student Interviews

Overview of Three Student Interviews

Focus of the Three Interviews

Interview One (Life history):

- How have you become spiritual in your life up to this point?
- Please explain/describe the events, relationships, and experiences in your life history that have contributed to your becoming spiritual or that have affected your spiritual life.

Interview Two (contemporary experience):

- What is your life like now for you to be spiritual? To feel spiritual?
- How do you experience your spirituality at home? At school? At work? With family?

Third Interview (reflection on meaning):

- What does it mean to you to be spiritual?
- Given what you said in the first two interviews, how do you make sense of spirituality? Or of the spiritual part of your life?

APPENDIX D: Informational Letter to Students

Informational Letter to Students

Dear

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of adolescent spirituality. I value the unique contribution that you can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things we have already discussed in the pre-interview and to obtain your signature on the participant-release form that you will find attached.

Through your participation, I hope to understand the essence of spirituality as it appears to you in your experience. My method for this research project will be to gather your insights and experiences through three in-depth interview where you will be asked to recall specific events, situations, or instances that were spiritual in nature. First, from your life experience, and secondly, from your time at . I will be seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experiences.

The in-depth interviews may take 90 minutes each, depending on the detail of your responses. The greater the detail, the more you will help me to understand the meaning of spirituality for adolescent females. The attached Summary Guide will assist you in preparing for the interview.

The interview will be digitally recorded, so that I am free to listen to you completely during the interview, and so that I can refer to your responses later. After our interview, I will transcribe your responses into typed form for further study. After completing all of the student-interviews at your school, I will work to compile a cohesive description of adolescent spirituality, based on your descriptions. When this compilation has been completed, I will ask you to review my summation of your experiences in a final meeting to determine how accurately I have captured your insights.

It is possible that some of the questions in the interview may make you feel uncomfortable, but remember that you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time.

Participation in the research may mean a loss of confidentiality as you divulge your experiences to me, however, all interview transcripts and tapes will be kept confidential. No student (or school) identities will be revealed in my final dissertation or in any reports or publications that may result from the study. I will use a pseudonym to protect your identity in any written document about the study or in any conversation about the study with professors or colleagues. The typed transcripts will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the files. Individual results will not be shared with any person from your school.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of spirituality among adolescent females for high school teachers and administrators, and for other researchers who seek greater understanding into the dimension of spirituality in the human life cycle.

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study. As an expression of my gratitude for your time, you will receive a small gift of appreciation including a certificate of \$15 from a location of your choice (Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, Borders, or Sports Authority).

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at _____ . If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your principal and vice-principal are aware of this study but do not require that you participate in this research. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at _____ .

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached consent form and return it to your vice-principal in the enclosed pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope no later than _____.

Gratefully,

Sister Elizabeth O'Donnell
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX E: Consent Form for Students

Consent Form for Students

Participant Consent Agreement

I agree to participate in a research study of “*What is the meaning of spirituality for adolescent females who attend an all-girl Catholic high school?*” I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily.

I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a doctoral degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that a brief synopsis of each participant, including myself, will be used and will include the following information: first name (a pseudonym), age, religious practice of choice, years of attendance in a Catholic school, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant.

I grant permission for the above personal information to be used. I agree to meet at the following location _____ on the following dates: _____ at _____ and on _____ at _____ for three in-depth interviews of 90 minutes.

I grant permission for the tape-recording on the interview(s).

If necessary, I will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place to review the content summary of the interview transcripts.

Research Participant/Date

Researcher/Date

APPENDIX F: Cover Letter to Parents Requesting Permission

Cover Letter to Parents Requesting Permission

Date _____

Dear Parent or Guardian of _____,

My name is Sister Elizabeth O'Donnell, and I am currently a graduate student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. For the past 20 years, I have served as a junior-high teacher, an elementary school principal, a high-school religion teacher, and a high-school campus minister at an all-girls Catholic high school. In my work with high-school students, I became profoundly impressed with the level of spiritual awareness and spirituality among high-school students; I came to believe that there is true treasure within our youth that may go unnoticed in some high school classrooms. For this reason, I want to return to the beauty of adolescent female spirituality to complete my required doctoral research.

The purpose of my project will be to learn more about the spiritual awarenesses and experiences of older adolescent females and to create a compiled description from my learning. I hope to gain deeper understanding into the question: *What is the meaning of spirituality for adolescent females who attend an all-girl Catholic high school?* Your daughter's principal, _____, and vice-principal, _____, have given permission for me to conduct this research in your daughter's school.

I am asking your daughter and nine other students from the junior and senior-level classes to participate in this research study. They have been recommended to me by _____ and _____ as students who may be helpful to my research by articulating the spirituality of adolescent girls. If your daughter agrees to be in this study, she will be interviewed about her experiences of spirituality.

I value the unique contribution that your daughter can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of her participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to introduce my project to you and to ask for your support in allowing your daughter to join me as a co-researcher seeking greater understanding about spirituality.

If she chooses to participate and with your support, her participation will involve three in-depth interviews and one final meeting where I will ask her to review my summation for accuracy. All participants' responses will be kept strictly confidential. No other person than myself, the researcher, will have knowledge of their responses.

The in-depth interviews may take 90 minutes each, depending on the detail of each student's responses. The interviews will be digitally recorded, and later transcribed for further study. After completing all of the student-interviews, students will be asked to review the transcripts for accuracy of their responses.

It is possible that some of the questions in the interview may make cause emotional discomfort. Students are free to decline to answer any questions they do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time.

Students' identities will be protected. All interview transcripts and recordings will be kept confidential. No student (or school) identities will be revealed in my final dissertation or in any reports or publications that may result from the study. I will use pseudonyms to protect each student's identity in any written document about the study or in any conversation with professors or colleagues. The typed transcripts will be coded and, with the recordings, will be kept in a locked file at all times. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the file.

While there will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of spirituality among adolescent females for high school teachers and administrators, and for other researchers who seek greater understanding into the dimension of spirituality in the human life cycle.

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, nor will you be reimbursed for your participation in this study. As an expression of my gratitude for your time, you will receive a gift certificate of \$15 from a location of your choice (Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, Borders, Sports Authority).

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at _____ . If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your principal and vice-principal are aware of this study but do not require that you participate in this research. Your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence on your present or future status as a student at _____ .

Thank you for your attention. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope or to your daughter's vice-principal no later than _____.

Gratefully,

Sister Elizabeth O'Donnell
Graduate Student
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX G: Consent Form for Parents

Consent Form for Parents

Parental Consent for Research Participation

Purpose and Background

Sister Elizabeth O'Donnell, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is conducting a study on the spiritual awarenesses and experiences of older adolescent female students in an all-girls Catholic high school. Because of the gap in research in the areas of both spiritual life development of students in Catholic secondary schools, Sister Elizabeth hopes to gain insight into the meaning and essence of spirituality for adolescent girls.

Procedures

If I agree to allow my daughter to be in this study, the following will happen:

1. My daughter will participate in three in-depth interviews of 90 minutes in a location at school that is determined by the school administration and that will support my daughter's confidentiality;
2. The interviews will take place on a school day at a time that is mutually convenient for the student, the researcher, and the availability of an appropriate location at the school.
3. My daughter will be asked to spend some time in reflection prior to the interviews to recall experiences that are spiritual in nature;
4. The interviews will be digitally recorded and later transcribed.
5. My daughter will be asked to review the typed transcription at a later date to assure accuracy and to provide an opportunity for her to add any information she may have forgotten.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. My daughter may experience discomfort revealing personal experiences during the in-depth interview; if this happens, the researcher will attempt to offer support and will reassure her that all information will be kept in strict confidence.
2. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used to protect my daughter's identity in the final dissertation and in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Transcripts will be coded for protection of confidentiality. Both the digital recordings and typed transcripts will be kept in a secure or locked file at all times. Only the researcher will have access to the files.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me or to my daughter from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is better understanding of the awareness and perceptions, meaning and essence of spirituality to adolescent females for the sake of teaching methods in Catholic high schools.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no costs to me or to my daughter as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

Neither my daughter nor I will be reimbursed for participation in this study. My daughter will receive a token of gratitude from the researcher in the form of a \$15 gift certificate from a location of her choice (Starbucks, Borders, Barnes and Noble, Sports Authority).

Questions

If I have any questions about the study, I may call Sister Elizabeth O'Donnell at

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher, Sister Elizabeth. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 422-5528, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the:

IRBPHS, Department of Counseling Psychology
Education Building, University of San
Francisco, 2130 Fulton
Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights," and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. I understand that PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to have my daughter participate in this study, or to withdraw my daughter from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to have my daughter participate in this study will have no influence on my daughter's present or future status as a student at

My signature below indicates that I agree to allow my daughter to participate in this study.

Signature of Subject's Parent/Guardian

Date of Signature

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature

APPENDIX H: Participants' Bill of Rights

Participants' Bill of Rights

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is trying to find out;
2. To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;
3. To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;
4. To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;
5. To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;
7. To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;
8. To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
10. To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to

USF IRBPHS

Department of Counseling Psychology, Education Building
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

APPENDIX I: Student Decline of Invitation

Student Decline of Invitation

_____ I decline the invitation to participate in the research study.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX J: Research Participant Information

Research Participant Information

Junior/Senior _____ Pseudonym _____

Research Participant Information

Name _____ Age _____ Grade _____

email address: _____

Home Address: _____ Phone: (c) _____
 City, Zip _____ (c) _____
 (h) _____

Best time to contact me: _____

Preferred Pseudonym (fake name) _____

Gift Card preference: _____
 (Barnes and Noble, Borders, Sports Authority, Starbucks)

Elementary school(s) attended: _____ Grade(s)

Junior High attended: _____

High school (s) attended: _____

Religious preference: _____

Interview schedule:

APPENDIX K: Participant Interview Two – Preparation and Reflection

Participant Interview Two – Preparation and Reflection

Interview Two –Preparation/Reflection:

The purpose of the second interview is for you to consider spirituality in your life at the present time. This will include your experiences with family, friends, in school, at home, at church, or at work (if that applies to you).

Part I: Present Experience

The authors Freeman and Dyson (2004) say that we are involved in about 30,000 events per day. To prepare for this interview, please be conscious during the next few days of the events that occur during your day: from the time you wake up in the morning, until you go to bed at night, including everything in between, and even during the night. Consider your interactions with family members, friends, or members of the larger community before you come to school. Consider all of the different events that occur during your school day, including, interactions with teachers and classmates, material that is covered during your classes, affects of assignments and classroom instruction on you, interactions with other students in the halls and on breaks.

Do any of these occurrences strike you in a spiritual way? Consider the following questions and be prepared to describe two to three of the events when you come to the interview.

- Avoid giving reasons for why the experience happened. Focus instead on describing from the inside, what the experience was like for you: How did the experience make you feel? What was your mood? What happened inside of you because of the experience?
- How did your body feel at the time? Do you remember any sounds, smells, or colors that were associated with the experience?
- Don't worry about trying to make the event sound "pretty" or fancy. Spend time thinking through the event thoroughly and about its spiritual impact on you.
- Be prepared to describe two to three experiences that have seemed to you particularly spiritual as you have live(d) through them. (You may wish to journal or to write some notes prior to coming for the interview.)

Part II: Artifact

Consider an artifact that best expresses the essence and meaning of the spiritual experiences you are describing in the interviews. Is there an object, such as a piece of literature, a poem, a story, a biography; a piece of music or art; a dance movement or a song; a photo or other remembrance of nature that will help you *to express your experience of spirituality*? If so, please bring that object to the second interview.



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