

Virtual Pilgrimage

A Pathway to Spiritual Renewal for Frontline Volunteers in Ottawa's Shepherds of Good Hope

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DEDICATION

To the Volunteers at Shepherds of Good Hope, who moved heaven and earth to ensure
that this project came to fruition:

To Paul Roach, whose belief in justice urged him to organize the petition that salvaged
this project...

To Irene Skoulaki, who worked tirelessly to circulate the petition, not once, but twice...

To Peter Napier, whose integrity and expertise carried me through the bureaucratic and
legal complexities of the reinstatement process...

To the twelve volunteers who participated in the research process, whose conscientious
commitment, discerning insights, and heartfelt sharing were a researcher's dream...

&

To all of the volunteers of the Shepherds of Good Hope Community, whose compassion
and dedication continue to makes the world a gentler place.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
HMP	Human Potential Movement
HR	Harm Reduction
MAP	Managed Alcohol Program
PP	Positive Psychology
PT	Practical Theology
QR	Qualitative Research
QA	Quality Assurance
SGH	Shepherds of Good Hope

ABSTRACT

Walking practices are experiencing a revival in the post-millennial world. Chief among these is the discipline of pilgrimage. The purpose of this research was to explore the pilgrimage trope as a pathway to spiritual renewal for Ottawa's Shepherds of Good Hope (SGH) volunteers. A form of substitute pilgrimage identified as 'virtual pilgrimage' (VP) was adapted to simulate the last 100 km. of the Camino de Santiago trail. A purposive random sample of twelve SGH volunteers (six men and six women) walked the distance virtually, over a period of six weeks. Each week, the participants were given a reflection question to focus their walks and their journal accounts.

The research methodology was configured around Richard Osmer's four-task cycle for practical theological research. The data was collected by way of a questionnaire, a focus group, and the participants' journal accounts. NVIVO software was used to analyze the data, and Stephen Bevans' "praxis model" was used to interpret the results.

Virtual pilgrimage encompasses many of the themes associated with the traditional distance pilgrimage, including suspension of regular routines, intentionality, experiences of blessedness and beauty, and encounters with sacred mystery that inspired social action. The results showed that like the traditional, distance pilgrimage, virtual pilgrimage contains a parallel facility for spiritual renewal, with potential wide-ranging applications in the health, human, and social services fields.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

0.1 Statement of the Problem

This thesis presents my research into virtual pilgrimage as a new transformative faith practice for Shepherds of Good Hope (SGH)¹ volunteers. The interest in this research arose from my work with the Shepherds of Good Hope community. Until September 2014, I was responsible for the training, supervision and spiritual care of volunteers. The vibrant spiritual life of the community had declined, and interest and participation in traditional forms of faith expression had dwindled. My goal was to explore an alternative expression of the sacred that would provide volunteers with an opportunity for awareness of and reflection on the sacred in the midst of the ordinary life of the community.

With this in mind, I explored the discipline of pilgrimage. Like many genres of sacred walking, pilgrimage is experiencing a revival across the developed world. I wondered if a localized, substitute form of the traditional, somatic, terrestrial pilgrimage could potentially offer a pathway to spiritual renewal for some volunteers. A number of volunteers were already dedicated walkers, and participated in a walking initiative sponsored by SGH. For the purpose of this project a type of substitute pilgrimage described as “virtual” pilgrimage was used. In virtual pilgrimage the same themes and messages associated with traditional pilgrimage were enacted in a local setting. The research problem consisted of the following question: “Can virtual pilgrimage be a pathway to spiritual renewal for SGH volunteers?”

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym SGH is used to refer to Shepherds of Good Hope.

0.2 Preliminary Definition of Virtual Pilgrimage

The concept of pilgrimage and variations on the pilgrimage motif (i.e. virtual pilgrimage) were broad enough to include the different faith groups that were now part of the community. I could see the possibilities in the pilgrimage trope.

0.2.1 What it is Not

Virtual pilgrimage immediately evokes ideas of the armchair, cyber trek. It is not that. Neither is it a labyrinth, or the Stations of the Cross, or such localized pilgrimages as the Sons of Norway or St. Brigid's Way. Neither is it the form I encountered in Kathryn Rudy's research where medieval nuns transformed their living quarters into "Jerusalem surrogates," and walked within the convent as if walking in Christ's footsteps. Arguably it could be any of the above, but for this research virtual pilgrimage is used differently.

0.2.2 What it Is

I did adapt Rudy's concept, but in a new way. Virtual Pilgrimage here is a form of substitute pilgrimage, but the themes and messages of traditional pilgrimage are enacted in local neighbourhoods. I set out to explore whether virtual pilgrimage could be adapted as a spiritual practice for the Shepherds community? Could it embrace and validate the diverse experiences of the sacred now present in the community?

0.3 Inspiration: The Motivation for this Research

My interest in pilgrimage was first sparked after reading a Canadian pilgrim's account of experiences on the Camino de Santiago on April 6th, 2007. I remember the date because it was Good Friday of that year, and the weekend of my mother's eightieth birthday. Until that moment in time, I had no interest in the idea of doing a pilgrimage, and was only vaguely aware of the concept as a spiritual practice. In a matter of days, that would change drastically. Suddenly and serendipitously, I began encountering people who either were interested in pilgrimage or were already seasoned pilgrims. Pilgrims love to share their stories, so there was no shortage of opportunities to read about and listen to personal accounts of pilgrimage. Most of the people I encountered had done the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in Northern Spain,² so my interest crystallized around the Camino. I started getting equipped, and embarked on a rigorous training regimen. On April 26th, 2010 I arrived in Europe, and on April 27th I walked out of an albergue in St. Jean Pied de Port, France to start my pilgrimage on the route popularly known as the Camino Frances³. Thirty-four days later, on May 28th, I arrived at the pilgrimage destination point, the St. James Cathedral in the ancient city of Santiago, and four days after that I reached Finistère -Lands End- on the Atlantic Ocean. Over the course of the thirty-eight day trek I was struck by the inordinately large number of people engaged in this activity, and by the fact that the overwhelming majority of them did not express an explicitly religious motive for doing the pilgrimage. They were fascinated by the allure of the Camino, and while they were at a loss to explain it, generally felt that something transformative was happening.

² The Confraternity of St. James, "Pilgrim Guides to Spain: Camino Frances" (London: UK, 2010).

³ The Confraternity of St. James (2010), P. 1.

Meanwhile, back at my work in Ottawa's Shepherds of Good Hope community, the traditional Catholic spirituality of the community had been declining for many years. The liturgies no longer seemed relevant to the majority of those who served - the staff and volunteers - or to those being served. My hope was to find a way to nourish the spiritual life of the community and its people. Having just come back from the Camino, I was on fire with the prospect and promise of pilgrimage as a way to do that. This research was inspired by my own transformative experience of pilgrimage, and the need to find alternative ways of providing spiritual support to a specific target group, SGH volunteers.

0.4 Purpose of the Study

This study has the three fold purpose of 1) responding to the loss of spiritual vitality within the SGH community with an inclusive, restorative faith practice that is accessible to all, 2) finding an inclusive framework for honouring the diverse spiritual currents in the Shepherds community, and 3) contributing to literature and scholarship in pilgrimage studies within the disciplines of Theology and Practical Theology

The specific purpose of this project is to contribute to a revitalization of the spiritual life of the SGH community through implementation of the practice of virtual pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a universal practice that is found in all major religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.⁴ In all of these traditions, the faithful are drawn into journeys to sacred centers that have become focal points for rejuvenating their faith. The action of intentional walking is fundamental to the discipline of pilgrimage, whether on the grand scale of the

⁴ Ian Reader, "Pilgrims and Pilgrimage: Place and Journey in Cultures and Faiths Worldwide" (The University of York, 2007). <https://www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/content/faiths.html> (accessed June 10, 2017).

international pilgrimage, or the local scale of the virtual pilgrimage. Virtual pilgrimage is a logical derivative of the broader pilgrimage motif. As a localized adaptation of pilgrimage, virtual pilgrimage carries the same potentiality for transformation and renewal. Additionally, it is accessible to all persons, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or socio-cultural background.

The broad purpose of this research is to bring forward virtual pilgrimage as an inclusive practice with potential to address the search for more depth and intensity in contemporary spirituality. Several scholars have recognized the changing conditions of belief in Western society. Theologian Ronald Rolheiser describes our socio-cultural landscape in terms of the loss of a sense of God within ordinary life. Dysfunctional behaviour and lifestyle patterns have resulted in the loss of an experience of God in our ordinary lives.⁵ In a related vein, Charles Taylor identifies the 1960's as the "hinge moment" when the cultural revolution of the 1960's destabilized earlier forms of religion.⁶ Taylor posits a subsequent development which he called the "Nova Effect."⁷ The Nova effect produced "a galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane" with a "steadily widening gamut of new positions."⁸ This pluralist world with many forms of belief and unbelief brought about a quest for meaning in contemporary life.⁹ With the post-modern profusion of worldviews and the erosion of conventional faith paradigms, individuals are seeking alternative ways of experiencing the transcendent. The discipline of pilgrimage

⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1994), pp.28-48.

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 526.

⁷ Taylor (2007), p. 300.

⁸ Taylor (2007), p. 423.

⁹ Taylor (2007), pp. 530-533.

has the potential to appropriate the spiritual dimension on the one hand, while also transcending cultural and faith boundaries on the other.

0.4.1 Expected Contributions

The most important contribution I anticipate is the introduction of virtual pilgrimage as a transformative faith practice for SGH volunteers. Other potential contributions include virtual pilgrimage as a pathway to human wellness and spiritual health in organizations dedicated to human service. Virtual pilgrimage can be adapted at all levels of organizations. In health care systems, for example, where budget constraints are imposing serious limits on treatment resources, virtual pilgrimage can compliment and enhance occupational and physiotherapies for patients in such areas as geriatrics, long-term care and stroke rehabilitation. It can also be used to promote personal and communal wholeness among the service providers in these organizations. Another anticipated contribution involves the furtherance of the notion of “virtual” pilgrimage as a construct for framing and imaging adaptations of the traditional spatial/ temporal pilgrimage.

Aside from the specific target group for this project, the volunteer sector of the SGH community, other target audiences are anticipated to be: 1) therapists and chaplains in human services organizations (i.e. hospitals, prisons, social agencies, etc.) seeking innovative care options for their clients and patients; 2) church leaders looking for creative ways of inspiring congregants; 3) academics interested in alternative expressions of the sacred; 4) individuals who are contemplating making a pilgrimage or searching for an alternative way to connect with the sacred.

0.5 Methodology

This project uses a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research (QR)¹⁰ uses a variety of approaches to explore the social world of individuals and communities. Within the broad scope of QR, the method for this project is structured around the fundamental tasks in the Practical Theology (PT)¹¹ research cycle as delineated by Richard Osmer's four questions: 1). What is going on? 2) Why is this going on? 3) What ought to be going on? and 4) How might I respond?¹²

0.5.1 The Interpretive Framework: Practical Theology

An interpretive framework in qualitative research refers to the interpretive lenses and the distinct body of literature that shapes the research problem and procedures. The interpretive framework for this project is Practical Theology. Practical Theology has become a burgeoning arena of inquiry in recent decades. Among the scholars who have made important contributions to the development of Practical Theology are McCarthy (2002), Tracy (2004), Graham, Walton and Ward (2005), Osmer (2008), Swinton and Mowat (2009), Wolfteich (2009), Bevans (2010), Sensing (2011), Walton (2013), Cartledge (2015), and Willard and Meyer (2016). The significance of these authors for this work is highlighted at relevant points throughout the thesis.

Practical Theology is defined as “a critical theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring

¹⁰ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym QR is used to refer to Qualitative Research.

¹¹ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym PT is used to refer to Practical Theology.

¹² Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 4.

faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God.”¹³ Theology is concerned with the relationship between the Divine and the human. The aim of Practical Theology is to combine theory and practice in the praxes of individuals and communities. PT surmises therefore that theological knowledge is contextual and emerges from experience. God’s interaction with the world is mediated through human experience. In their seminal work on Practical Theology and qualitative research, Swinton and Mowat use the analogy of a play to describe Practical Theology as “the faithful performance of the gospel”¹⁴ in contextually appropriate ways whilst remaining faithful to the structure and plot of Christianity.¹⁵

As an interpretive discipline Practical Theology seeks to understand specific challenges within a contemporary social context. The aim of this research is to mediate between the Christian tradition and the changing spiritual climate within the SGH community. In the SGH context, that entails understanding the changing conditions of belief and practice within the community, and developing new faith practices to honour the evolving spiritual ethos. PT views the world as a “stage” for the redeeming activity of God, and specific contexts as the “place of encounter with the infinite mystery of God.”¹⁶ The place of encounter in this project is the literal pathways trod by the participants in the practice of virtual pilgrimage.

This research draws on two fundamental principles in the interpretive enterprise:

1) Practical Theology as a task-oriented activity, and 2) Practical Theology as

¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 25.

¹⁴ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p. 4.

¹⁵ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p. 4-5.

¹⁶ Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p. 23.

quintessentially contextual. Two seminal works form the basis of the interpretive framework for this study: Richard Osmer's four-task approach to Practical Theology, and Stephen Bevans' study of models of contextual Theology.

0.5.2 Practical Theology as a Task-Oriented Activity

The starting point for practical theological inquiry is the specific contexts and situations that pose questions to the resources and tradition of the faith in order to advance new understandings and responses. Richard Osmer highlights the importance of situating the problem within a practical context (i.e. the ministry setting). Osmer's four-task conception of practical theological inquiry is the framework around which this research was designed.

The task-structured approach to Practical Theology proposed by Osmer provides an overall strategy for the research process. Osmer identifies four elemental questions that correspond to the four essential tasks in the research process: 1) 'What is going on?' is the 'descriptive-empirical task' that involves gathering information to discern patterns and dynamics in a deficiency or problem in a specific ministry context.¹⁷ 2) 'Why is this going on?' refers to the 'interpretive task' that draws on the social science disciplines to better understand the problem.¹⁸ 3) 'What ought to be going on?' points to the 'normative task' that uses theological interpretations to construct guidelines for good practice.¹⁹ 4). 'How might we respond?' corresponds to the 'pragmatic task' of developing a new revised faith practice.²⁰

¹⁷ Osmer, (2008), p. 4.

¹⁸ Osmer (2008), p. 4

¹⁹ Osmer (2008), p. 4.

²⁰ Osmer (2008), p. 4.

For the purpose of this research, the four PT tasks are as follows: 1) The first task involves pinpointing the declining interest and participation in traditional faith forms, and the need for new practices that express the evolving spiritual ethos of the SGH community. This task also involves contextualizing the issue by providing a detailed portrait of the historical evolution of the SGH organization. Osmer's image of a "living human web"²¹ helps explain the bonds of inter-connection that exist between communities and the broader social systems in which they subsist. 2) The second task draws on several social science disciplines, including anthropology, history, psychology and sociology, to understand the internal and external factors that impact SGH at the levels of individuals and their community. 3) The third task uses constructs from the Biblical and Christian tradition and the discipline of Theology to establish ethical and theological parameters for such key concepts as pilgrimage, spirituality and transformation. 4) The fourth task sets forth virtual pilgrimage as a new ritual practice that can be adopted by SGH volunteers, but also can also be offered to other audiences seeking a ritual that combines physical activity with an expression of the holy. Virtual pilgrimage is a transformative practice that combines physical and conceptual reality with the sacred mystery

0.5.3 Practical Theology as a Contextual Activity

Practical Theology is a contextual activity described by Stephen Bevans as the relationship between the cultural context and the inherited tradition. The context is the "individual and collective contemporary experience."²² For theology to be authentic, it

²¹ Osmer (2008), p.16.

²² Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 5.

must be appropriated through the filter of our individual and collective contexts. Bevans proposed six ways to model / assess the faithfulness of a community's culture, or context, in relation to the Gospel.

At one end of the continuum, the translation model views theology as a static core of ideas that simply requires conversion into new idioms of culture.²³ At the other end, the anthropological model uses culture as its reference point for discerning the presence of God, with little consideration of pre-existing concepts or doctrine.²⁴ The middle ground is home to the synthetic model, which sees context and pre-existing theological concepts as dialogical partners engaged in a mutually-informing exchange.²⁵ The transcendental model privileges subjectivity, with understandings of God and culture being formed in relation to authentic experiences of the self.²⁶ The counter-cultural model engages with culture, but upholds the Gospel as the lens for interpreting experiences of the present, and generating prophetic theology and practice.²⁷ Finally, the praxis model uses culture as the starting point for the theological reflection required to shape action.²⁸ Bevans does not promote one model over another, but emphasizes that different circumstances demand different approaches in the relationship between theology and culture.²⁹

In research using Practical Theological as a tool for evolving contextually-appropriate Christian action, the praxis model stands out as a solution-focused way of

²³ Bevans (2010), pp. 37-53.

²⁴ Bevans (2010), pp. 54-70.

²⁵ Bevans (2010), pp. 88-103.

²⁶ Bevans (2010), pp. 103-117.

²⁷ Bevans (2010), pp. 117-137.

²⁸ Bevans (2010), pp. 70-88.

²⁹ Bevans (2010), p. 140.

engaging with culture.³⁰ It is the model most appropriate for this study. The praxis model maintains that God's presence is manifested in the fabric of culture, at the level of reflective action, described as "reflected-upon action and acted-upon reflection" rolled into one.³¹ Throughout the data collection process the participants were called upon to reflect upon their walking practices: 1) in journal accounts structured around a reflection question for each of the six weeks of walking, 2) in the questionnaire which they completed at the end of the virtual pilgrimage, and finally, 3) in the focus group, designed to get insights into their collective experience and understanding of virtual pilgrimage. In the praxis interpretation, reflection leads to action, to "responsible doing."³² Unlike the more traditional process of "faith seeking understanding," the praxis model in theology is "faith seeking intelligent action."³³ It is a boots-on-the ground approach that involves actually doing the truth, an action that leads to new understanding and new practice.

The praxis model consists of three essential steps: committed action, reflection on that action (analysis of context and re-reading of Scripture and Tradition), and new praxis (new, committed, intelligent action).³⁴ In this project, the first step involves the concerted practice of virtual pilgrimage by the research participants. This happens against a backdrop of critical reflection on the contextual reality in which the deficit is identified. The deficit, for the purpose of this research, is the declining interest in traditional forms of faith expression, and the need for an alternative spiritual practice for SGH volunteers. The second step involves interpreting participant feedback in light of the social science

³⁰ Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (eds.), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005), p. 23.

³¹ Bevens (2019), p. 72.

³² Bevens (2019), p. 73.

³³ Bevens (2019), p. 73.

³⁴ Bevens (2019), p. 73.

disciplines and the Christian tradition. This provides a deeper, richer understanding of the human, social and cultural factors that impinge on virtual pilgrimage as part of the evolving organizational structure of the SGH community, within the broader context of macro-level socio-cultural shifts. The third step critically assesses (reflects on) the concrete act of virtual pilgrimage to consolidate its authenticity as a spiritual practice. “Authenticity” is assessed in light of the Christian understanding of the Sacred. An authentic spiritual practice is revelatory, hospitable, inclusive, and open, and provides the impetus for inspired practice or action in the world.³⁵ The spiral pattern of the praxis model complements Osmer’s four-task movement in the practical theological enterprise.

0.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant within the discipline of Practical Theology, and in the wider community of scholars and practitioners interested in finding innovative ways to celebrate the sacred in contemporary life. It adapts and broadens the concept of pilgrimage to create an inclusive practice that is accessible to ordinary individuals in their ordinary milieus. It also expands the concept of pilgrimage beyond the distance pilgrimage conception to include pilgrimage that is localized and secular. Finally, this links up the interplay of a very ordinary ritual practice with mystical reflection and contemplation. This traversing of the divide between mysticism and Practical Theology, where mystical texts or experiences are rarely included, represents a departure and

³⁵ Marie McCarthy, “Chapter 14: Spirituality in a Postmodern Era” in James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), pp. 192-206.

advancement within the field.³⁶ Michel de Certeau describes mysticism in terms of practice. What is essential, according to de Certeau, is “not a body of doctrines ...but the epistemic foundation of a domain within which specific procedures are followed: a new space and new mechanisms.”³⁷ Claire Wolfteich conjectures that de Certeau’s view of mysticism as social practice is not only applicable to Practical Theology, but is “a needed corrective to practical theological method and discourse.”³⁸ This project corresponds with de Certeau’s conception, and augments the trailblazing ventures of Wolfteich, Tracey and other leading edge researchers in the field of Practical Theology.

0.7 Research Design

This is a qualitative research project conducted within the framework of Practical Theology. QR emphasizes “participants’ perspectives, meanings, and views,”³⁹ The research design for this project combines two approaches: the “narrative” approach and the “phenomenological” approach. The characteristics of QR, the broad approaches used for information collection, and the specific research tools and strategies used to collect and analyze data are further developed in the Methodology Chapter.

³⁶ Claire Wolfteich, “Practices of ‘Unsayings’: Michael de Certeau, Spirituality Studies and Practical Theology,” in *Spiritus 12* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 161.

³⁷ Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech,” in Graham Ward ed., *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford: the Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 188-189.

³⁸ Wolfteich (2012), p. 162.

³⁹ John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), P. 38.

0.8 Assumptions and Limitations

0.8.1 Assumptions

Five philosophical assumptions form the basis of the interpretive paradigm in all QR. These assumptions include: the “ontological” assumption concerned with the nature of reality; the “epistemological” assumption concerned with how we know what we know; the “axiological” assumption concerned with the role of values; the “rhetorical” assumption concerned with the language of research; and finally, the “methodological” assumption concerned with the process of research.⁴⁰ These assumptions and their application to data collection and analysis in this study are elaborated in the Methodology Chapter.

0.8.2 Limitations /Delimitations

The study is limited by its focus on a very specific target group, SGH volunteers. Among the delimitations (things the study did not investigate) are other walking disciplines such as consciousness walking, cyber pilgrimage, and other versions of substitute pilgrimage such as labyrinth walking.

0.9 Research Focus on Volunteers

Volunteers are the target group for this project. There are several reasons for that decision: 1) Shepherds’ was founded by volunteers and continues to depend largely on the volunteers to fulfill its mandate, 2) when this project was initiated, volunteers were the most accessible group by reason of my role at the time as their manager, and 3) volunteers hold the greatest potential for spiritual engagement by virtue of their proclivity to

⁴⁰ Creswell (2007), pp. 16-19.

participate more in the liturgies and cite spiritual reasons for their involvement with the SGH community.

0.10 Outline of Thesis

The General Introduction announces the research problem, situating it within its ministry context and explaining the motivation for the focus on pilgrimage. Practical Theology is identified as the interpretive framework and elements of PT and the QR design are introduced. Volunteers are identified as the target group.

Chapter I answers the first question in the research cycle: 1) ‘What is going on?’ This question contextualizes the need that gave rise to the research problem as a function of the evolving Shepherds community. An historical overview of the SGH community is the backdrop against which the changing ethos calls for new forms of faith expression.

Chapter II responds to the second question in the research cycle: ‘Why is this going on?’ This chapter analyses the socio-cultural changes that lead to declining participation in conventional Christian faith practices. In addition to resources from theology and the Christian tradition, theories from the arts and sciences were used in this chapter to augment the breadth and depth of information related to the problem. This chapter addresses cultural and spiritual issues separately: Section I focuses on socio-cultural change as a result of several macro-level trends and movements, and Section II assesses the impacts of these movements on western spirituality as a whole.

Chapter III addresses the question: What ought to be going on in the spiritual life of the SGH community? This chapter sketches out the historical rise and fall of

pilgrimage and the many variations of the pilgrimage motif over the centuries. Aspects of twenty-first century pilgrimage are elaborated, and the concept of Virtual Pilgrimage is developed. The historical roots and constituent elements of virtual pilgrimage are described, and its adaptability as an SGH alternative practice is put forward.

Chapter IV introduces the fourth question in the research cycle, ‘How might I respond?’ The response to this question extends over the final three chapters of the thesis. Chapter IV, the Methodology chapter, consists of the approaches and procedures used to collect and analyse the research data. A rationale for the choice of a qualitative methodology is presented, and the characteristics of qualitative research are described. The philosophical assumptions are outlined, and the stages of the research process, from sampling, to data collection and data analysis are explained. Finally, issues related to quality assurance are identified and accounted for.

Chapter V is a continuation of the pragmatic task designed to answer the question “How might I respond?” Chapter V, the Results chapter, describes the data analysis process, and presents the findings of the study. The results are presented by way of the participants own accounts of the virtual pilgrimage experience. The three-movement praxis model is used as a framework for identifying and organizing the major themes in the study.

Chapter VI, the Discussion chapter, rounds out the pragmatic task of the practical theological research cycle. The ‘Discussion,’ examines the patterns and themes in the

findings, and the potential contributions of the research. The thematic structure of the analysis and interpretation in this research is developed around the praxis model. The significance of the results is interpreted in relation to previous research in pilgrimage studies and related disciplines, and in concert with Theology and the Christian Tradition. The Discussion chapter endorses virtual pilgrimage as a transformative faith practice.

The General Conclusion provides an overview of the project with a summary statement on the research hypothesis, the origin and context of the research problem, and a synopsis of the conclusions, implications and recommendations of the research. The relevance of the findings for the Shepherds community is considered, and implications for the discipline of Practical Theology and the literature on Christian pilgrimage are reflected upon. The section ends with a take-home message designed to succinctly address the “so what” question in relation to the merit of virtual pilgrimage as a simple, accessible, inclusive Christian faith practice.⁴¹

⁴¹ Sensing (2011), pp. 212-234.

CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address the question, ‘What is going on?’ This question represents the first task of the four stages of Richard Osmer’s conception of the research process in practical theological inquiry. The first task involves information-gathering for the purpose of assessing the loss of vitality in the spiritual life of the SGH community. The background and context of the ministry setting is described to further clarify the trajectory of spiritual decline. The first step involves “attending” for the purpose of discerning and describing the deficit, and envisaging a potential remedial intervention.

1.1.1A Contextual Approach

The research problem in all Practical Theological inquiry is situated within a practical context (the ministry setting). According to Stephen Bevans, contextualization is part of the very nature of theology: “Theology that is contextual realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth are to be considered along with Scripture and tradition as valid sources for theological expression.”⁴² In this project, the subject and source of reflection on Christian values is the experience of the research participants, the SGH volunteers who participated in the virtual pilgrimage experiment. Osmer referenced the “web of life”⁴³ image adapted from Fritjof Capra’s work to focus

⁴² Bevans (2010), p. 4.

⁴³ Capra, Fritjof, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996). Quoted in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 16.

attention on the linkages between the ministry setting and the web of cultural and social systems beyond the ministry setting. Capra identified a host of socio-cultural factors that typically influence ministry settings: 1) the rise of public education, 2) the spread of democratic values, holding authorities accountable and encouraging people to think for themselves, 3) greater ethnic, religious, and lifestyle pluralism, affording more choice in affiliation options, and 4) secularization and the tendency to relegate religion to the sphere of the personal and private.⁴⁴

Applied to this research, Capra's observations point up trends that have impacted the organizational and spiritual marrow of the SGH community: the increasingly complex needs of clients, the heightened demands on resources, the accelerated pace of life within the community, the formation of a hierarchical structure and standardized procedures, and the inevitable requirement for an educated, skilled workforce.

Practical Theology also privileges context on an academic level, using a cross-disciplinary approach for optimal understanding. Through the interweaving of different practices and voices in the spaces between disciplines, points of intersection and divergence are explored. Muller described this 'fitting together', as a complex, multileveled transversal process.⁴⁵ The cross-disciplinary approach is further developed at the interpretive phase of the research cycle, where the disciplines of anthropology, history, psychology and sociology provide insights into the complex interplay of elements that shaped the SGH community and its spiritual life.

⁴⁴ Capra (2008), p. 16.

⁴⁵ J.C. Müller, "Transversal Rationality as a Practical Way of Doing Interdisciplinary Work with HIV and Aids as a Case Study," in *Practical Theology in South Africa* 24 (2) (2009), pp.199–228.

1.2 What Is Going On?

The task of gathering information addresses the question “What is going on? This task requires a quality of attentiveness, a spirituality of presence that Richard Osmer refers to as “priestly listening.” The priestly role of the ministry leader implies an ability to carry and ponder the questions, needs and concerns of the community.⁴⁶ Osmer created a continuum of “attending” for information gathering: the informal level of interpersonal communication, the semi-formal level of active listening, and the formal level of systematic, empirical methods. Closely aligned to attending is the notion of “guiding,” the ability to formulate a description of the deficit, and to fashion a remedial intervention informed by the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

My own listening/attending process involved the slow, gradual recognition that the faith-based thrust and enthusiasm of the foundational days had diminished. The early reliance on Godly intervention for everything from personal safety for frontline workers, to foodstuff to feed the needful hundreds, has given way to security protocols, formalized training, and government per diems and budgets. Using Osmer’s continuum, one of the telling indicators on the level of informal attending is declining participation in the daily liturgies, with the eventual disappearance of most forms of communal worship. On the level of semi-formal attending, responses to the question “Why do you want to volunteer for Shepherds of Good Hope?” suggests a noteworthy tendency.⁴⁸ This question is asked on the ‘Volunteer Application Form. Answers can generally be lumped into a few broad categories: 1) ‘to give back,’ 2) ‘to make a contribution,’ 3) ‘to gain experience’ for a career in policing, social work, nursing, etc., 4) ‘to perform community service’ required

⁴⁶ Osmer (2008), p. 36.

⁴⁷ Osmer (2008), pp. 39-40.

⁴⁸ SGH “Volunteer Application Form,” revised in 2006.

by school, by court, etc., and 5) ‘to live out faith values.’ The latter response or some variation on it has become the least likely reason to be cited.

Once my observations became a concerted academic inquiry, I adopted Osmer’s more formal disciplined approach of exploring scholarly research to achieve clarity about contemporary trends in pilgrimage and spirituality. Based on information obtained at this level of systematic attending, I was able to take the essential first steps towards selecting a strategy of inquiry and developing a research plan. The research plan is the four-stage process that involves determining the subject matter of the research, determining the data collection methods, determining who will conduct the research, and determining the sequence of events in the research plan: data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and transmission of findings.⁴⁹

1.2.1 In the Beginning: The Genesis of Shepherds of Good Hope

The Shepherds of Good Hope was founded in 1983 as a grass-roots response to the burgeoning homelessness problem in Ottawa’s “Lowertown.”⁵⁰ In the early 1980’s, homelessness was a new phenomenon on the socio-cultural scene. A number of factors contributed to its emergence as a social problem at that time: 1) The counter-culture movement that characterized the “hippie” movement of the 1960’s and 70’s had taken a toll on many of its adherents, resulting in their inability to participate in mainstream living;⁵¹ 2) A well-intentioned nation-wide shift towards de-institutionalization in the 1970’s and 80’s resulted in hundreds of former psychiatric patients being released into

⁴⁹ Osmer (2008), pp. 53-57.

⁵⁰ Chris Coveny, *Explore Ottawa’s Lowertown*, www.ottawamove.com/area/Lower-town (accessed June 24, 2017).

⁵¹ Judson Landis, ed., *Current Perspectives on Social Problems* (3rd ed.), Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., p. 2.

the community. Many of these individuals did not have the life skills or the networks of support to cope outside the confines of the institution;⁵² 3) Post-industrial era affluence enabled many landlords to upgrade and restore former ‘slum’ properties. This “gentrification” trend⁵³ pushed affordable housing beyond the means of individuals living on social assistance or disability incomes.

In the early 1980’s, shelters and soup kitchens were seen as interim measures until a more permanent solution to the issues around poverty could be found. No one imagined that homelessness would become an epidemic, and that networks of shelters, soup kitchens and drop-in centers would become part of the institutional landscape of the Western world.

1.2.2 The Formation of a Community

The genesis of Shepherds was faith-based, similar to most of the early stage collective efforts to alleviate the problem of homelessness. William Swatos described the transcendent resources which differentiate faith-based organizations like Shepherds from secular organizations: “God, the Holy Spirit, sacramental acts and rites, and prayer... provide them with superior motivations and loyalties.”⁵⁴ Shepherds was a predominantly Catholic initiative, loosely structured, with a largely voluntary work force. The action of reaching out in faith to ameliorate unmet needs, only later searching out the means to sustain the effort, was at that time a typical pattern of expansion for Shepherds. Liturgy and

⁵² Torry Fuller, *Out of the Shadows: Confronting America's Mental Illness Crisis* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), Chapters 1-3.

⁵³ Elizabeth Rapley, “Feeding the Hungry, Caring for the Poor in an Affluent Society: The Shepherds of Good Hopes of Ottawa,” *Logos* 6:2 (Spring 2003), pp. 135-136.

⁵⁴ Walter Swatos, Jr., ed., “Organization Theory and Religious Organization,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Hartford, CT: Altamira Press, 1998), p. 10.

prayer were an integral part of the daily routine. Volunteers assumed responsibility for the many tasks involved in feeding, clothing and sheltering those in need: cooking, cleaning, laundering, building, and repairing. They foraged and fundraised, organized bake sales, craft fairs, raffles and spaghetti dinners. They canvassed bakeries, churches, department stores, and grocery chains. Eighty-two year old Nancy Jandrew washed windows in her apartment building to raise funds for Shepherds. Agnes Devlin, another founding volunteer, crafted beautiful handmade Irish dolls which were sold or auctioned off. Mary Yelle and Madeleine LeVoguer, also founding volunteers, organized bake sales and bartered for foodstuff and toiletries from market vendors and retailers. Lives were transformed in this dynamic community. Workers shared the fun, the passion and a healing fellowship, while also experiencing the joy of service.

1.2.3 The Spiritual Impetus: The Heart of the Mission

The spiritual dynamism that founded the Shepherds community was the creative energy at the heart of its Christian mission. The work of serving people with complex, challenging needs was inspired by faith-based values. At the time of its inception in 1983, Shepherds was one of Ottawa's principal Catholic social action projects, with an almost exclusively Catholic ethos. The Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa provided the physical space, the former St. Brigid's School, to house the community. The volunteer work force came from English and Francophone parishes across the city, and most of the funds to cover operational costs were donated by religious orders and individual Catholic supporters. With the passage of time, the community attracted support from other Christian denominations, and eventually from an array of diverse other faith groups in the Ottawa

region. In its work of serving those in need, the SGH practice of extending concern, respect, and hospitality towards the followers of other religions echoed the spirit of the Vatican II decree on inter-religious collaboration and dialogue. The Secretariat for Non-Christians specifically endorsed “deeds and collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed toward the liberation and advancement of mankind.”⁵⁵

Shepherds is rooted in the social action tradition of the Catholic Church, which upholds the dignity of the human person through the principles of solidarity, participation, and the option for the poor.⁵⁶ Compassionate service has always been at the heart of the mission statement. It is also a core tenet of the other Christian and non-Christian faith groups that have contributed goods and volunteer time to SGH. In his research on the science of compassion, researcher Paul Gilbert maintained that compassion is “not something as simple as an emotion or motivation, but rather a complex combination of attributes and qualities.”⁵⁷ Gilbert proposed that “the human capacity for compassion appears to involve two different psychologies: on the one hand, awareness and engagement; on the other, skilled intervention in action.”⁵⁸

The focus on compassionate service has endured over thirty-five years and numerous adaptations of the SGH mission statement. In its current form, the statement affirms: “Creating community for all through acceptance, compassion and care.”⁵⁹ Other

⁵⁵ Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, AAS 75 (Vatican City and Bombay: St. Paul’s Publications, 1984), pp. 825-827.

⁵⁶ Social Action Office, *Catholic Social Teaching* (Brisbane: 2010) Section 3. https://www.sao.clriq.org.au/cst_intro.html (accessed June 22, 2017).

⁵⁷ Ayls Cole-King and Paul Gilbert, “Compassionate Care: The Theory and the Reality,” in *Journal of Holistic Healthcare*, Vol. 8 Issue 3(2011), p. 30.

⁵⁸ King and Gilbert (2011), p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Shepherds of Good Hope 2016 Annual Report*, (2016) Cover Page.

faith groups hold to similar ideals. The Hindu Temple of Ottawa states as one of its objectives “To carry out charitable work of every nature and kind on personal, national and international levels, and to solicit and accept donations, gifts, bequests and legacies for such purposes.”⁶⁰ Na’amat Canada, an association of Jewish women, pledges among other things to “Foster mutual respect in a diverse society,” and to “Respond to humanitarian concerns in an evolving social environment.”⁶¹ These groups epitomize the many faith groups that in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity collaborate with SGH to serve those in need. SGH provides the framework for participation, while visiting teams of multi-faith volunteers provide the workforce and often the ingredients for the day’s food production. The “golden rule” is a basic human principle that cuts across cultures and faith traditions, calling us to a collective standard of mutual care. Inter-religious collaboration is one of the most beneficial ways of fulfilling the Biblical invocation to “Feed the hungry, house the homeless, clothe the naked” (Is. 58: 7).

1.2.4 The Changing Spiritual Ethos

Over the years, the spiritual tenor of the community fluctuated to accommodate expansion and specialization within the community. While SGH struggled to meet increasing demands for the basics of life, especially food and shelter space, there was a growing awareness of the multifaceted nature of the issues that brought clients there in the first place. By the early 1990’s, it was evident that beyond the necessity of meeting basic material needs, there were complex psycho-social problems that needed to be addressed. One of the disturbing trends was the prevalence of substance abuse in the

⁶⁰ The Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton Inc., *Objects and By-Laws* (amended May, 2009).

⁶¹ Na’amat Canada. *Our Mission*. www.naamat.com (accessed June 26, 2017).

population, a condition that often co-existed with untreated mental illness in a form described variously as “dual diagnosis,” or “concurrent disorder.”⁶² Coinciding with substance abuse, especially the use of intravenous drugs, was the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C. Hoping to alleviate the crisis, SGH set up a special shelter facility for the psychiatric homeless, the most vulnerable street entrenched population in the city. At the time, no funds existed to support this initiative.

In an effort to stem the tide of drug overdosing and the epidemic spread of the AIDS virus, SGH ushered in revolutionary intervention strategies that had already been implemented in Vancouver and Toronto. This initiative represented a change of direction from an abstinence and treatment ethos to a harm reduction ethos. Harm reduction (HR)⁶³ refers to “policies, programs and practices that seek to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal psychoactive substances and risky sexual activity. HR is a pragmatic response that focuses on keeping people safe and minimizing death, disease and injury associated with higher risk behaviour, while recognizing that the behaviour may continue despite the risks.”⁶⁴ In the case of SGH, it involved setting up a needle exchange system for intravenous drug users, and the provision of prescribed quantities of alcohol to chronic alcoholics. The provision of condoms for sex-trade workers was an already established practice.

In May 2000, funding was secured from the Ontario Ministry of Health for a Managed Alcohol HR pilot project. The Managed Alcohol Program (MAP)⁶⁵ targeted

⁶² Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, “Answers to Common Questions on Concurrent Disorders,” *Journal of Addiction and Mental Health*, (September-October 1998), p. 16.

⁶³ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym HR is used to refer to Harm Reduction.

⁶⁴ Centre for Disease Control, “Communicable Disease Control B C Harm Reduction Strategies and Services Policy” (May, 2011): p. 1.

⁶⁵ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym MAP is used to refer to Managed Alcohol Program.

individuals for whom abstinence and conventional treatment strategies did not work. HR represented a radical philosophical shift for Shepherds for two reasons: 1) HR was a revolutionary approach. It marked a drastic departure from conventional treatment approaches and challenged traditional moral standards; and 2) Access to government funding signalled a fundamental directional shift from dependence on donated goods and services to reliance on a secure, mainstream resource base. Another directional shift involved the “housing first” approach, also referred to as “streets to homes.”⁶⁶ In keeping with the thrust towards fiscal responsibility and good stewardship, policy makers ascertained that the cost of sheltering large numbers of homeless persons was not economically expedient: a week’s worth of shelter per diems could pay for a month’s worth of housing. Following Toronto’s lead, Ottawa and several other Canadian cities instituted the “housing first” approach. This initiative easily got the political backing required for affordable supportive housing, and in 2003, government monies in the form of an Ontario Ministry of Health grant were designated for the purchase and retro-fit of a supportive housing facility.⁶⁷ New approaches and innovations were accompanied by changes in the composition and ethos of the Shepherds community.

The population being served had grown increasingly more diverse, with a corresponding diversity among employees. Similarly among volunteers, while the long-term registered volunteers consistently belonged to an older Caucasian, Christian demographic, the newly registered volunteers represented the many different ethnic and faith movements that are now endemic to the Ottawa urban landscape. The former vibrant spirituality had dissipated, and all but disappeared. With increasing operational demands,

⁶⁶ S. Tsemberis & S. Asmussen, “From Streets to Homes: The Pathways to Housing Consumer Preference Supported Housing Model,” in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 17(1-2), 1999, pp. 113-131.

⁶⁷ Shepherds of Good Hope, *A Bridge to Somewhere: Prospectus* (2008).

fewer structured prayer times, and dwindling participation in the liturgies, the lively spiritual vibe of the community had vanished.

1.2.5 The Need for New Pathways of Faith Expression

The need for new faith pathways to inform and support a caring, compassionate community was unmistakable. The conventional faith practices of the foundational days were no longer relevant to the majority of workers. Charles Taylor provides insight into this trend away from conventional religion in his encyclopaedic treatise on secularity. Taylor proposed that one of the effects of secularity is cultural and religious pluralism, with its many forms of belief and unbelief. Pluralism offers a plethora of pathways: a “steadily widening gamut of new positions”⁶⁸ that also encourages “a spirituality of quest”⁶⁹ Taylor proposed several responses to this quest: 1) We can take inspiration from modern day examples of people and movements that had explored the transcendent through new itineraries of prayer and action - Jean Vanier, Mother Teresa, John Main, the Taizé Movement, etc. 2) We can reconnect with the converts and practices of earlier times. The conversion stories of Augustine and the lives of the Saints can serve to mediate meaning and hope to contemporary seekers. Christians today need to emulate those who “radiated some sense of direct contact” ...we need to “enlarge our range of examples of what this direct contact might involve.”⁷⁰ 3) We can look to the poets and prophets among us. Gerard Manley Hopkins offers a beautiful example of a new itinerary in his search to recover the aesthetic dimension in life. Hopkins sought a new poetic

⁶⁸ Taylor (2007), p. 423.

⁶⁹ Taylor (2007), pp. 530-533.

⁷⁰ Taylor,(2007), p. 729.

language that celebrates the beauty and wonder of creation and shows people a way back to God.⁷¹

Yet another itinerary for reconnecting with the transcendent is the practice of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is enjoying a global resurgence. The foundational element in pilgrimage is the action of intentional walking. For the purpose of this project, pilgrimage walking is adapted in a form identified as virtual pilgrimage. Virtual pilgrimage is a logical derivative of the broader pilgrimage motif. Virtual pilgrimage carries the same potentiality for transformation and renewal as traditional pilgrimage. As a localized adaptation, it is an ideal practice for SGH. The objective of this research is to explore virtual pilgrimage as a fruitful pathway to the sacred in the midst of the ordinary life of SGH volunteers.

1.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to address the first task of the practical theological research process with the question, ‘What is going on?’ The first step involved information gathering for the purpose of discerning and describing the deficit, and envisaging a potential remedial intervention. The background and context of the ministry setting were described to further clarify the trajectory of spiritual decline in the SGH community. An historical overview provided a sense of the evolving nature of the community, and contextualized the need for new faith pathways to inform and support a caring, compassionate culture. The next chapter explicates the impact of several major cultural and spiritual trends on the ethos of the SGH community, using theories from the social science disciplines to supplement resources from the Christian tradition.

⁷¹ Taylor (2007), p. 755.

CHAPTER II: THE CHANGING CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret spiritual decline in light of developments within SGH and in the wider community. Broad cultural and spiritual shifts have impacted the SGH community, creating the deficit that forms the basis for the research problem. Theories from the arts and sciences are combined with resources from theology and the Christian tradition to augment the breadth and depth of information related to spiritual decline. This chapter addresses cultural and spiritual issues separately: Section I focuses on socio-cultural change as a result of the influence of 1) secularization 2) the human potential movement, and 3) the pervasive loss of capacity for contemplation. Section II examines spirituality by assessing the different impacts of these movements on western spirituality as a whole, and the subsequent manifestations of contemporary spirituality that come about.

2.2 Why is This Going On?

In order to understand the changing dynamics of the SGH community and the impact of these changes on the spiritual life, it is necessary to move to the second task in Osmer's model. The second task asks the question, "why is this going on?" This task seeks to apply "sagely wisdom" to an interpretation of the issues being observed.⁷² Sagely wisdom requires the interplay of three key characteristics: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment.⁷³ The waning spirituality at SGH is examined in relation to discernable patterns in the social order. This examination is a

⁷² Osmer (2008), p. 82.

⁷³ Osmer (2008), pp. 82-86.

concerted method of wisdom-based reflection intended to yield depth understanding and potential strategies for renewal within the SGH community.

2.3 Section I: The Changing Socio-Cultural Landscape and SGH

The first section of Chapter II addresses the socio-cultural portion of the second task of the research cycle. The context within which the spiritual life of the SGH community subsists has been traced back to several major socio-cultural developments: 1) secularization of the western world, 2) the human potential movement, and 3) loss of Capacity for Contemplation. These macro level trends have impinged on the cultural élan of the community, with a trickle-down effect that alters the form and nature of its spiritual ethos.

2.3.1 Secularization and SGH

“Secularism” is defined in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as “indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations.”⁷⁴ Secularism refers to the principle of the separation of government institutions and persons mandated to represent the state, from religious institutions and religious dignitaries. One manifestation of secularism is “asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices on its people.”⁷⁵ Another manifestation of secularism is the view

⁷⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secularism> (accessed May 20, 2016).

⁷⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.quora.com/Is-secularism-related-to-atheism> (accessed May 20, 2016).

that “public activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be uninfluenced by religious beliefs or practices.”⁷⁶

Secularization is a double-edged phenomenon that has impacted the social order in ways that are both beneficial and detrimental. On a beneficial level, it has contributed to the revolution that encouraged the growth of pluralism and diversity in lifestyles, values, and faith practices. On a detrimental level, it was part of a movement that also coincided with and contributed to a mental health crisis and the homelessness epidemic in the western world.

Taylor uses “secularization theory” to explain trends in religion across North America. Among the characteristics of secularity are a) a retreat of religion in public life, b) a decline in belief and practice, and c) a change in the conditions of belief.⁷⁷ Taylor describes the displacement of enchanted forms of religion during the ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960’s and the advancement to a new ethic of authenticity.⁷⁸ The cultural revolution endorsed a plethora of freedoms, including freedom to explore one’s potential, freedom to create one’s Self, freedom of personal expression, freedom from scheduling, freedom from rigidly defined roles and hierarchical statuses...”⁷⁹ An unfettered freedom of choice resulted in the upsurge of belief and unbelief options that laid the groundwork for religious diversity.

New itineraries of belief and practice fill the void created by the disappearance of conventional faith forms. Catherine Bell notes that “the more that religion is unable to

⁷⁶ Definition of Secularism, <https://www.quora.com/Is-secularism-related-to-atheism> (accessed July 10, 2016).

⁷⁷ Taylor (2007), p. 423.

⁷⁸ Taylor (2007), p. 526.

⁷⁹ Jentri Anders, *Beyond Counterculture: The Community of Mateel* (Washington State University Press, 1990), <https://www.abebooks.com/.../beyond-counterculture-community-mateel/.../anders-je> (accessed Aug. 2, 2016).

control the sacred, the more the sacred may thrive in a wide range of ritualized forms and activities... ritualized forms of the sacred may flourish in a society that is secular, in the sense that the sacred is no longer dominated, defined, or integrated by any particular set of religious beliefs or practices”⁸⁰

In a 2006 address at a Tokyo conference, the Dalai Lama endorsed secularism as a route to respect for all religions through its doctrines of non-interference and non-promotion of any particular religion: “Secularism does not mean rejection of all religions. It means respect for all religions and human beings including non-believers. I am talking to you not as a Tibetan or a Buddhist, but as a human being having a friendly discussion and sharing my experience on the benefits of cultivating basic human values.”⁸¹ Secularisation is one way to guarantee religious freedom in a world where competing religions could potentially assert control over the cultural and educational systems.

By the turn of the century, SGH had become a multi-religious community. Many of the major faith groups are represented among the staff, volunteers, and service recipients at SGH. True to the spirit of hospitality that under girds the mission of the community, SGH extends concern, respect, and openness towards the followers of all religions. This posture of openness to the other coincides with the position of the ‘Secretariat for Non-Christians’ developed in response to increasing religious pluralism. The Secretariat sanctions shared experiences of “prayer, contemplation, faith, and duty”⁸² among persons from different traditions. The Secretariat describes this type of collaboration as “a mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and

⁸⁰ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), p. 201.

⁸¹ Dalai Lama, “A Good Heart-The key to Health and Happiness” (Tokyo: Conference Address, Nov. 2006).

⁸² Secretariat for Non-Christians (1984), pp. 825-827.

preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals.”⁸³ SGH welcomes the numerous cultures and faiths represented by the individuals who arrived at its portals, many in need and many others with offers to help those in need.

2.3.1.1 The Great Malaise

One of the negative consequences of secularization according to Charles Taylor was the “great malaise.”⁸⁴ Characterized by the lack of a higher goal to give sense to all the lower ones,⁸⁵ the malaise exposed “an overwhelming sense of fragility and futility in post-modern life.”⁸⁶ Customarily the malaise took three forms: “1) the sense of the fragility of meaning, and the search for over-arching significance, 2) the felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize the crucial moments of passage in our lives, and 3) the utter flatness, emptiness of the ordinary.”⁸⁷ In the mid 1960’s, the malaise seemed to run parallel to the tsunami of psychiatric diagnoses and hospitalizations that found mental health institutions bursting at the seams.

Secular ideals began to steer traditional, medical treatment models for disability and mental illness in the direction of more humanitarian, community-based alternatives. The culmination of this shift was the massive purge of psychiatric institutions across the developed world, in a trend that came to be known as de-institutionalization.⁸⁸ De-institutionalism was well-intentioned to the extent that it was motivated by a growing awareness of the isolation and control mental hospitals exerted over patient’s lives. The

⁸³ Secretariat for Non-Christians (1984), pp. 825-827.

⁸⁴ Taylor (2007), p. 299.

⁸⁵ Taylor (2007), pp. 300-308.

⁸⁶ Taylor (2007), pp. 300-308.

⁸⁷ Taylor (2007), p. 309.

⁸⁸ Torrey (1997), Ch. 1-3.

former focus on changing individual patients was supplanted by a social model that emphasized changing environmental, physical, and societal barriers.⁸⁹ A more pragmatic motivation for de-institutionalization was the increasing cost of maintaining mental hospitals. A former medical superintendent of the Queen Street Health Center in Toronto described the fiscal pressures he experienced: “Pretty explicit messages were associated with budget cuts...close units, lock the door, and don’t use them.”⁹⁰

2.3.1.2 De-institutionalization

In his expose of the American experience in the realm of mental health, Fuller Torrey describes de-institutionalization as “one of the largest social experiments in American history,” and a major contributing factor to the mental health crisis of the late twentieth century.⁹¹ De-institutionalization began with the introduction of the first effective antipsychotic medication, commonly known as Thorazine.⁹² De-institutionalization was a two-part movement that involved moving the severely mentally ill out of institutions, and closing part or all of these institutions.⁹³ Torrey offers an apt portrayal of the American experience in his parody on Jimmy Carter’s Commission on mental health, describing the “psychiatric titanic” brought on by de-institutionalization: “Their lives are virtually devoid of ‘dignity’ or ‘integrity of body, mind and spirit.’ ‘Self-determination’ often means merely that the person has a choice of soup kitchens. The

⁸⁹ Chavron Niles, “Examining the Deinstitutionalization Movement in North America,” in *Health Tomorrow, Vol. I* (University of Toronto, 2013), p. 66.

⁹⁰ H. G. Simmons, *Unbalanced: Mental Health Policy in Ontario, 1930-1989* (Toronto: Wall and Thompson, 1990), p. 160.

⁹¹ Torrey (1997), p. 8.

⁹² Torrey (1997), p. 8.

⁹³ Torrey (1997), p. 8.

‘least restrictive setting’ frequently turns out to be a cardboard box, a jail cell, or a terror-filled existence plagued by both real and imaginary enemies.”⁹⁴

In a retrospective on de-institutionalization in Canada, one psychiatrist recalled: “So we took tens of thousands of patients and threw them out of the hospital without any support system...the bureaucrats were delighted to get them out of the hospitals...and only...later did we say, ‘Hey, this is crazy, what about housing, what about recreation?’”⁹⁵ In analyses of the causes and consequences of de-institutionalization, researchers found that most ex-patients did not receive greater access or improved quality of service after de-institutionalization, leaving them without essential services. Once released from mental hospitals, many patients ceased taking their medications.⁹⁶ Families were unwilling or unable to step into the breach. A survey of familial attitudes towards caring for a discharged family member found the emotional burden and social costs were often overwhelming. Families reported feeling burdened, trapped, and isolated.⁹⁷

In the absence of dedicated community services and support networks to aid the integration process, many patients were unable to achieve even a minimal standard of living.⁹⁸ Dear and Wolch describe the typical search for a home by ex-patients: “the zone of transition...an area of property speculation, housing conversion and cheap accommodation and services, had become more than ever the home for society’s marginal people.”⁹⁹ Their plight was further exacerbated by the gentrification trend.

⁹⁴ Torrey (1997), p. 11.

⁹⁵ Simmons (1990), p. 160.

⁹⁶ D. Mechanic and D. Rochefort, “De-institutionalization: An Appraisal of Reform,” in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16 (1990), pp. 301-327.

⁹⁷ D. William, “Family Coping With the Mentally Ill: An Unanticipated Problem of Deinstitutionalization,” in *Hospital Community Psychiatry*, 27 (1976), pp. 183-185.

⁹⁸ Niles (2013), pp. 70-75.

⁹⁹ M. Dear & J. Wolch, *Landscapes of Despair: From Re-institutionalization to Homelessness*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.13.

Gentrification is the process by which central urban neighbourhoods that have undergone disinvestment and economic decline experience a reversal, reinvestment, and the immigration of a relatively well-off, middle and upper-middle class population.¹⁰⁰ The word “gentrification” was originally coined by sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the residential rehabilitation of housing in London’s Islington.¹⁰¹ On the other side of the Atlantic, Elizabeth Rapley found that in the city of Ottawa gentrification pushed affordable housing beyond the means of those living on social assistance or disability pensions.¹⁰² The shift from custodial care to community-based care in mental health treatment seemed a humane and timely option, but release strategies were convoluted by economic motives,¹⁰³ and the abysmal lack of formal networks of integration and support for patients left many with no alternative but to live on the street.¹⁰⁴ In Ottawa, that translated into the streets and alleyways of Lowertown.

2.3.1.3 A Grassroots Response

It is a well established part of SGH lore that in the early 1980’s, many of the homeless and hungry in Lowertown found their way to St. Brigid’s Church, where the aging rector, Fr Jack Heffrenan, made up sandwiches on demand. Word got around, and the number of needful people grew. Fr. Jack realized the problem was beyond his meagre means, and he contacted Agnes Devlin, an activist and advocate for those in need, and a

¹⁰⁰ Willem Van Vliet, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Housing* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 198.

¹⁰¹ Ruth Glass, “Introduction,” *Aspects of Change* (London: Center for Urban Studies & MacGibbon & Key, 1964), p.p. xiii-xlii.

¹⁰² Rapley (2003), pp. 135-136.

¹⁰³ Simmons (1990), p. 160.

¹⁰⁴ Niles (2013), pp. 73-76.

well connected member of the Catholic Women's League in Ottawa.¹⁰⁵ Agnes enlisted the support of the League, and Fr Jack gave them access to his church to prepare and serve a luncheon meal. An historical sketch in the 2003 *Shepherds of Good Hope Annual Report* describes the making of that first meal: "On February 7, 1983, St. Brigid's Church opened its doors to a small group of women assigned to prepare and serve a pot of soup to hungry guests."¹⁰⁶ That event was the inaugural moment in a collective response that would eventually become the *Shepherds of Good Hope* community. SGH was born out of a compassionate response by ordinary folks to people in need.

There were some fairly obvious linkages between secularization and the need for communities like SGH. Secular trends that contributed to the collapse of familiar narratives had contributed to the initial crisis of meaning that overwhelmed the treatment facilities of the time. Secular ideals had subsequently instigated the purge of these facilities, leaving many former patients homeless. The homelessness crisis sparked the compassionate impulse that birthed SGH and dozens of similar, grass-roots, faith-based outreaches across the land. Another offshoot of secularization, globalization, would also indirectly impact SGH, as waves of exiles sought sanctuary in Canada. Globalization and the collapse of nation states resulted in the large scale dislocation of local ethnic and linguistic groups.¹⁰⁷ Thousands of displaced people fled political dictatorships or the horror of war, starting with Latin America in the late 1980's, followed by Africa and the Middle East in the ensuing decades. A Statistics Canada census snapshot of the country in the first decade of the twenty-first century shows a 7% increase in population growth

¹⁰⁵ Catholic Women's League of Canada, *World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations*, www.cwl.ca (accessed May 21, 2017).

¹⁰⁶ *Shepherds of Good Hope Annual Report* (2003), p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Eigen, "The Role of Civil Society in Global Governance," *What Leading Thinkers Say About Development: Kapuściński Development Lectures* (University of Sofia, Bulgaria, 2015), p. 46

in Canada's six large urban areas, one of which is Ottawa-Gatineau.¹⁰⁸ Refugees instinctively seek out communities like SGH to supply them with the basic necessities of life and give them a sense of home.

The trends and offshoots associated with secularization - the malaise, de-institutionalization, and globalization - brought about a nationwide mental health and homelessness crisis in the late twentieth century. The reach of the crisis has extended into the millennial age with the third world refugee crisis. In the early 1980's, shelters and soup kitchens were seen as interim solutions to a temporary homelessness problem. Thirty-five years later, the thrust has shifted with "housing first"¹⁰⁹ and "streets to homes"¹¹⁰ initiatives, but the networks of shelters and support services have become standard features in the institutional landscape of the Western world.

2.3.2 The Human Potential Movement and SGH

There is a lack of research to conclusively formulate a direct correlation between the "Human Potential Movement" (HPM)¹¹¹ and homelessness. Yet for those who work with homeless persons, the link is compelling, even if indirect and inferred. For that reason, HPM is included in the discussion of factors that contributed to the changing cultural landscape, and by extension impinge on the SGH community.

¹⁰⁸ Statistics Canada, *Census Snapshot of Canada – Urbanization* (Nov. 21, 2008), www.statcan.gc.ca (accessed May 21, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ S. Tsemberis, L. Gulcur and M. Nakae, "Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals with a Dual Diagnosis," in *Journal Information*, 94(4), 2004.

¹¹⁰ Tsemberis and Asmussen (1999), pp. 113-131.

¹¹¹ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym HPM is used to refer to Human Potential Movement.

The Human Potential Movement is defined as “a psychological philosophy and framework, including a set of values.”¹¹² Another child of the cultural revolution, HPM was initially used to refer to humanistic psychotherapies that became popular in the 1960s and early 1970s in the United States.¹¹³ Humanism as defined in the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* is “a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual’s dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason”¹¹⁴ The scope of the HPM includes a wide range of self-improvement groups and programs shaped by New Age philosophies¹¹⁵ and alternative spiritualities.¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Puttick credits the HPM with paving the way for “the interest of mainstream society in personal development, the quality of relationships, emotional literacy, human values in the workplace, and the replacement of hard political causes with softer issues such as environmentalism.”¹¹⁷ Fundamental to the HPM is the belief that through the development of human potential, humans can experience an exceptional quality of life filled with happiness, creativity, and fulfillment.¹¹⁸ The mass appeal of HP has been evidenced in the proliferation of self help books and the explosion of training centers for personal and spiritual development. HP techniques have been adapted for personnel and

¹¹² Elizabeth Puttick, “The Human Potential Movement,” in *New Religions: A Guide*, Christopher Partridge, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 399.

¹¹³ The phrase “Human Potential Movement” is said to have originated with George Leonard, president of the Esalen Institute.

¹¹⁴ Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanism> (accessed May 21, 2017).

¹¹⁵ New Age Movement, <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/NewAgeMovement/2008>, (accessed Oct. 12, 2016).

¹¹⁶ Theology Today, <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/oct1976/v33-3-article4.htm> (accessed May 22, 2016).

¹¹⁷ Puttick (2004), p. 399.

¹¹⁸ Human Potential Movement http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Potential_Movement (accessed June 5, 2016)

management training programs, with offerings of group dynamics, interpersonal skills development, role playing, and sensitivity training.¹¹⁹

2.3.2.1 The Human Potential Movement and the Seeking Mind-Set

The human potential movement impinges on the ethos of communities like SGH, influencing the lives of the clients and workers who inhabit these communities. HP cashes in on the seeking mind-set identified by Charles Taylor as a spirituality of quest. Taylor posits new alternative spiritualities situated in a “middle ground,” between conventional and non-conventional genres.¹²⁰ These new spiritualities have mass appeal among Taylor’s generation of seekers, hoping to find direction and meaning in life. The SGH community, by virtue of its cannon of openness, welcomes seekers and incumbents of all persuasions. The employees increasingly represent a younger, ethnically diverse, university trained demographic. The majority of these young people have drifted away from the faith practices of their upbringing. Others among them espouse non-Christian, non-conventional, or non-faith beliefs and practices. In a related vein, new volunteers increasingly identify as having no faith or belonging to non-Christian affiliations. For the most part, the traditional liturgies at Shepherds no longer resonate with SGH staff and volunteers. They seem rather to be following their own lights, including the HP injunction to accept only “what rings true for your own inner self.”¹²¹ The HPM is one answer to the quest for “more direct experience of the sacred, for greater immediacy, spontaneity and spiritual depth.”¹²²

¹¹⁹HP Techniques, <http://www.metroactive.com/landmark/landmark1-9827.html> (accessed June 5, 2016).

¹²⁰ Taylor (2007), p. 512.

¹²¹ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement* (Oxford:Blackwell, 1996), p. 21.

¹²² Clark Roof (1999), p. 86.

HP promises that its methods will “radically empower individuals through unleashing untapped powers of the mind.”¹²³ It further claims that individuals “can experience their true (even divine) potential and influence all areas of their lives for the better.”¹²⁴ Such promises have enormous appeal for those struggling with a crisis of meaning. For Shepherds, that includes both the service providers and those being served. Both groups, for the most part are “heirs of the expressive revolution ...seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self.”¹²⁵ According to Heelas et. al., this kind of spiritual path consists of an autonomous exploration that involves “seeking out, experiencing and expressing a source of significance which lies within the process of life itself.”¹²⁶ The self-absorbed focus inevitably leads to what Taylor calls the “Peggy Lee response: Is that all there is.”¹²⁷

2.3.2.2 The Human Potential Movement and Disenchantment

Wade Clark Roof alleges that the human potential movement, “with its inflated images of being special, unique, and only potentially realized,” largely failed to deliver on its promises. According to Clark Roof, “maintaining the self became a burden, a psychological crisis brought on by one’s own self-delusions.”¹²⁸ In Theodore Roszark’s trenchant portrayal of HP as the malady of narcissism, he cites the techniques and theories frequently used: Gestalt, Encounter, Transactional, Psychodrama, and

¹²³ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), pp. 259-60.

¹²⁴ Ankerberg and Weldon (1996), pp. 259-60.

¹²⁵ Taylor (2007), p. 507.

¹²⁶ Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead, Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 31.

¹²⁷ Taylor (2007), p. 507.

¹²⁸ Clark Roof, (1999), p. 9.

Transpersonal. All essentially assert the health and innocence of human nature.¹²⁹ Carl Raschke describes the HPM as “psycho-religiosity,” not a religion, but with undertones of spirituality that “makes use of psychological principles and techniques as surrogates for traditional beliefs and practices. It aims to fulfill and gratify inner personal longings for identity and meaning.”¹³⁰ In a related reflection on western modernity, Alexander Rosenthal-Pubúl observes that a culture based on humanism alone, by virtue of excluding the divine, devalues the human. Rosenthal-Pubúl believes that humanity aspires beyond material goods, comforts, and pleasures, searching rather for meaning, value, purpose, and transcendence.¹³¹

The idea of a special human dignity so central to Western culture cannot be defended on the basis of humanism. But in the late twentieth century, HMP was one of the most available and plausible meaning systems on offer. Its resonances had far reaching repercussions for those living on the slippery slope of meaninglessness. It was especially appealing to those on the fringes, the vulnerable and dispossessed, and those beleaguered by addictions or mental illness. With its assurances of empowerment and fulfilment, countless numbers were attracted to the movement in the hope of finding meaning, purpose and healing in their lives.

The consequence of HP for some SGH clients resembles the effects of Taylor’s malaise: the sad recognition that the daily round still feels futile, flat and fruitless.¹³² For others suffering from serious psychotic symptoms, and in need of intense and specialized

¹²⁹ Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Eco-psychology* (NY: Touchstone, 1993), p. 275.

¹³⁰ Carl Raschke, “New Age Spirituality,” in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter Van Ness (New York: Crossroad, 1996), pp 203-226.

¹³¹ Alexander Rosenthal-Pubúl, “What Went Wrong In Europe? A Reflection on Western Modernity” in *Modern Age: A Conservative Review* (Winter-Fall Vol. 54, Nos. 1-4, 2012), pp.25-26.

¹³² Taylor (2007), p. 309.

treatments, HP offers unattainable outcomes it is completely ill-equipped to deliver. On the broader organizational level, the philosophical self-aggrandizement thrust of HP counters the foundational tenant of the SGH mission, the other-directed Christian invocation to love one's neighbour. HP is a misrepresentation of the concept of the divine, and declares religious teachings and dogmas to be obstacles to a person's realization of a new way of being. Proponents of HP advocate a break with conventional morality, steering followers away from the call to serve the other in favour of a concerted focus on personal flourishing. This emphasis impacts communities like SGH, where the spiritual vivacity is inextricably tied to the mission and mandate. It is in the countless acts of reaching beyond the self to ameliorate suffering that the life and spirit of the community is nourished and enriched.

2.3.3 The Loss of Capacity for Contemplation

Ronald Rolheiser believes that our desire to be our own masters and subsequent disdain for any external force that would censor or restrict our psychic energies results in a continuous flux between depression (being out of touch with the deep source of our personal energies) and inflation (being unable to channel and contain those energies).¹³³ Rolheiser wrote extensively on the constellation of elements that extinguishes the capacity for contemplation in post-modern civilization. These elements are as prevalent in the SGH community as in society at large. As SGH became more specialized and access to resources became more formalized and secure, the daily round became more structured. Protocol and sure provision displaced the sense of adventure and mystery, and

¹³³ Ron Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 25.

the everyday need for providential intervention. Contemporary communities like SGH need ways to reclaim a sense of wonder and joie de vivre in daily life.

2.3.3.1 The Western Persona

Rolheiser describes a diminished capacity for contemplation in contemporary life, and with it, the loss of a sense of God. In a cogent assessment of the present day mindset, Rolheiser identifies three factors which militate against contemplation: 1) Narcissism, the excessive privacy and self-preoccupation which impedes one's ability to recognize the reality of others or to act out of a purpose beyond idiosyncratic preference, 2) Pragmatism, the primacy of achievement, and a sense of worth derived from what we do, not from what we are, and 3) Unbridled restlessness, the compulsiveness that manifests itself in impatience, greed for experience, and the loss of interiority¹³⁴ This constellation of elements has produced a new Western persona which Rolheiser designates the non-contemplative personality.¹³⁵ Aspects of Rolheiser's persona have manifested at SGH in the form of a stripping away of the overt need for the sacred, and the movement away from explicit confessions of faith, especially by staff and volunteers. Thomas Merton observes that, "he who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without the deepening of his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love will not have anything to give to others."¹³⁶ He further elaborates: "We have more power at our disposal today than we ever had, and yet we are more alienated and estranged from

¹³⁴ Rolheiser (1994), pp.28-48.

¹³⁵ Rolheiser (1994), pp.55-63.

¹³⁶ Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings* (New York: Paulist Press (1992), p.375.

the inner ground of meaning and of love than we have ever been.”¹³⁷ Merton avows that “far from being irrelevant, prayer, meditation and contemplation are of the utmost importance”¹³⁸ in contemporary life.

2.3.3.2. The Impassiveness of Institutions

Another contributor to the perceived lack of a spiritual élan is the failure of established institutions to apprehend it. David Tracey discovered that those who are educated and young may not be overtly religious, but they are unequivocally spiritual. In his work with university students, Tracy found that while they appeared secular and irreligious on the outside, they have a profound internal hunger for the sacred. The educational establishment has adopted the view that religion is a private affair, however, so has consequently failed to notice this impulse. Similarly, the religious establishment has adopted the view that young people are disbelieving, so once again, are missing the signal cues.¹³⁹ Tracy describes the paradox between unwillingness to accept beliefs and handed-down traditions, on the one hand, and a hunger for first-hand experience of the sacred, on the other.¹⁴⁰ The faith traditions are out of touch with the times. In a bid to bridge the chasm between spirit and form (spirituality and religion), Tracy recommends a return to the mystical traditions: “We are mystics in waiting, unsatisfied with hearsay and creeds, and eager to confirm with our own experience the existence of forces beyond the mundane.”¹⁴¹ Tracy’s vision buttresses the premise of this study, the conviction that the

¹³⁷ Merton (1992), p.375.

¹³⁸ Merton (1992), p.375.

¹³⁹ David Tracy, “Spirituality and Religion in a Secular Age,” *Carmelite Library Lecture*, March 4th (2004), pp.1-2.

¹⁴⁰ Tracy (2004), p.6.

¹⁴¹ Tracy (2004), p.7.

ancient practices can be a portal to the mystical encounter. Mysticism, according to Tracy, is able to teach us how to receive the sacred. In modern spirituality, there is more searching than finding or receiving...Searching without finding is an extension of the consumption orientation in which we live, and to some extent, modern spirituality replicates the conditions of consumer society.¹⁴² Mysticism shows us that the sacred is already close at hand. “It shows us how and why God is already searching for us.”¹⁴³ This research has found that through the practice of virtual pilgrimage, SGH volunteers gain a heightened awareness of mystery, and the sense of awe and gratitude that accompanies it. They experience delight and wonder in the mystical encounter, and are uplifted and renewed.

2.3.3.3 The Incursion of Technology

One of the most insidious and all-pervasive contributors to the loss of a contemplative sensibility is the incursion of technology. In a cogent analysis of the twenty-first century narrative, Nicolas Carr describes “the ecosystem of interruption technologies”¹⁴⁴ that is reshaping our lives, our relationships, our politics, and our civilization. We are at once incessantly connected and totally distracted. Margaret Wheatley observes that while we might still value curiosity, contemplation, privacy, conversation, and teamwork, these values are not visible in our lives because technology has taken over.¹⁴⁵ We are distracted beyond recall. In a community like

¹⁴² Tracy (2004), p.9.

¹⁴³ Tracy (2004), p.9.

¹⁴⁴ Nicolas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brain* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2010), p. 91.

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Wheatley, *So Far From Home: Lost and Found in Our Brave New World* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2012), pp. 87-101.

SGH, technology is indispensable to work, but it can also command an unhealthy attention, detracting from the capacity to be available to each other and to those being cared for. The essence of service is availability and attention to the other. In a brilliant analysis of the effects of technology on individual and communal identities, Wheatly mourns the demise of a collective identity and the loss of shared meaning that transcends the individual to bring coherence to a community.¹⁴⁶ She advocates a posture of openness to the world as a remedy for distraction and the alienation it produces: “By opening to the world as it is, we may find that gentleness, decency and bravery are available – not only to us but to all human beings.”¹⁴⁷

2.3.4 Summary Statement

The purpose of the first section of Chapter II was to address the socio-cultural portion of the second task of the research cycle. Section I assessed the impact of three broad trends on the SGH community: secularization, the human potential movement, and loss of a contemplative sensibility. Theories from the social science disciplines complemented resources from theology and the Christian tradition to provide a rich, thick understanding of the conditions behind the trajectory of spiritual decline. Section II examines major trends in modern day spirituality and apprises new and old forms of faith expression that provide potential pathways to transformation for contemporary humanity.

¹⁴⁶Wheatley (2012), pp.103-129.

¹⁴⁷ Wheatley (2012), p. 130.

2.4 Section II: The Changing Spiritual Landscape and SGH

The second section of Chapter II rounds out the interpretive (second) task of the research cycle with an exploration of the changing spiritual conditions inside and outside the SGH community. Spirituality has changed in the 21st century. The changing conditions of belief and practice have inspired new understandings of the universal nature of spirituality. An ethos of quest and a penchant for experimentation has revived and blended old forms of religious expression, and brought about new forms. In this section, several of the features of these new forms are investigated to apprehend the nuanced undercurrents of spirituality that exist within the SGH community and in society at large.

2.4.1 Spirituality as a Universal Human Phenomenon

Spirituality is a universal human phenomenon. The stages of human development identified by the human sciences are essentially the stages of spiritual development. According to Daniel Helminiak, the theist conception does not alter the human science account. Rather, it places the process of human development in the broader context of divine creation and purpose. Fundamentally, spirituality entails concern for the unfolding of a self-transcending dimension of the human mind, the hallmark of which is the meanings and values, the visions and virtues, by which people live. The impulse towards self-transcendence is a universal human feature.¹⁴⁸ In the SGH community, with its different cultural and faith groups, spirituality conceived this way is a potentially powerful force for unification and flourishing.

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Helminiak, *Religion and the Human Sciences: An Approach Via Spirituality* (New York: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1998), p. 166.

Daniel Helminiak draws on Bernard Lonergan's conception of the human spirit to describe the characteristic awareness that is unique to the human mind. Lonergan believes that the human spirit is a universal dynamism built into the human psyche. He envisages the spirit as self-transcending and spontaneous: it is through self-transcendence that we achieve authenticity.¹⁴⁹ Helminiak enlarges on Lonergan's concept to point up the characteristics of the human spirit: a) it is spontaneous in that it is primordially characterized by wonder, marvel and awe that is given expression in questioning, pondering and desire; b) it is self-transcendent in its continuous movement beyond the former self into new realms of experience; c) it is dynamic in its relentless movement towards fullness of knowledge and love; and d) it is structured in that it has a fourfold requirement for its fulfillment and unfolding – these four foci, referred to as the transcendental precepts, are formulated as follows: a) be attentive, b) be intelligent, c) be reasonable, and d) be responsible.¹⁵⁰ The transcendental precepts set the conditions for the unfolding of human potential. They insist that one engages in a process of honest discovery, and they require a commitment to be the best that one can be.¹⁵¹ The precepts have a universal application across ethnic and faith boundaries. For communities such as SGH, where conventional spiritual forms are no longer meaningful to the majority of workers and clients, the precepts offer a normative pattern of operations: by identifying in simple terms what is good and what is of value, they provide a compass for inspiring principled decisions and actions.

¹⁴⁹ Lonergan, Bernard, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 104.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Helminiak, "Treating Spiritual Issues in Secular Psychotherapy," in *Counseling and Values*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2001), p. 168.

¹⁵¹ Helminiak, (2001), p. 169.

A 2002 study by Piedmont and Leach describes spirituality as a universal human experience: “Our desire to find meaning within the reality of our own mortality is rooted in the very anatomic structures of our brain.”¹⁵² The researchers use an empirically based motivational approach that is reliable across Christian, Hindu and Muslim faith groups.¹⁵³ They identify spirituality as the raw psychological material from which religious behaviours arise. The characteristics of spirituality are as recognizable in the US as in India, or anywhere else in the world.¹⁵⁴ Another study combines biological and psychological interpretations to describe spirituality. David Hay and Pawel Socha characterize spirituality as a natural phenomenon within humanity. Hay’s biological approach interprets spirituality as a predisposition that has been selected by the human species for its survival value.¹⁵⁵ Socha’s psychological approach interprets spirituality as a socio-cultural attempt to cope with the existential human situation.¹⁵⁶ Both authors recognize that spirituality has a firm basis in the physical nature of the human species.¹⁵⁷ Both authors regard spirituality as typically having “a positive adaptive function, enabling individuals and perhaps societies to survive and cope with existential issues.”¹⁵⁸ Finally, both authors see spiritual awareness as natural and universal in the human species, and therefore not a function of religion, though the characteristic expression of spiritual awareness is through the language and practice of institutional religion.¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Tisdell emphasizes that while spirituality and religion are interrelated, they are

¹⁵² Ralph Piedmont and Mark Leach, “Cross-Cultural Generalizability of the Spiritual Transcendence Scale in India,” in *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 12 (2002), p. 1889.

¹⁵³ Piedmont and Leach (2002), p. 1898.

¹⁵⁴ Piedmont and Leach (2002), p. 1898.

¹⁵⁵ David Hay and Pawel Socha, “Spirituality as a Natural Phenomenon: Bringing Biological and Psychological Perspectives Together,” in *Zygon*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2005), p. 589.

¹⁵⁶ Hay and Socha (2005), p. 589.

¹⁵⁷ Hay and Socha (2005), p. 607.

¹⁵⁸ Hay and Socha (2005), p. 607.

¹⁵⁹ Hay and Socha (2005), p. 607.

different. In any human or cultural setting, spirituality is essentially about meaning-making. It involves an awareness of mystery and the interconnectedness of all things: it contributes both to personal authenticity and cultural development. Spirituality is given cultural expression through art, symbol, and ritual.¹⁶⁰

Martin Walton takes a pragmatic approach to his conception of spirituality. Walton argues that while the attributes of spirituality are at the core of human experience, the formulation of a consensus definition is well nigh impossible. He defines spirituality in terms of two basic constructs: lived experience and receptivity.¹⁶¹ ‘Lived experience’ is the context within which even the smallest detail of life may support and express the spirituality of a person.¹⁶² Spirituality is shaped by the experience of the spiritual in ordinary and existential forms, in nature, human service, beauty, art, friendship, and everything that is done with attentiveness.¹⁶³

‘Receptivity’ refers to the fundamental orientation in spirituality towards the other.¹⁶⁴ The experience of otherness involves “an encounter with a previously unknown dimension.”¹⁶⁵ It is fundamental to the human experience. Spiritual receptivity is the capacity to “encounter otherness, to appreciate difference, to acknowledge other possible interpretations and perceptions.”¹⁶⁶ For SGH volunteers, receptivity manifests itself in the dialectical give and take of an ordinary work day within the community. Their work is

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). p. xi

¹⁶¹ Martin Walton, “Discerning Lived Sprituality: the Reception of Otherness” in *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (UK: Sage Journals, June, 2013), pp. 1-3.

¹⁶² Walton (2013), p.2.

¹⁶³ Walton (2013), p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Walton (2013), p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Walton (2013), p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ C. Puchalski, “Improving the Quality of Spiritual Care as a Dimension of Palliative Care: The Report of the Consensus Conference,” in *Palliative Medicine*, 12/10, pp. 885-904.

the doorway to emotional investment and a heightened understanding of life. It links them to a community and mission that go beyond local boundaries. Their receptiveness to the other connects them to experiences and meanings that point beyond the ordinary to a transcendent reality. More than a mode of being, Walton stresses that receptivity is “a way of becoming.”¹⁶⁷ Accepting otherness entails growth. It is transformative. Openness to the other in a context that gives life meaning-in an ultimate sense-is a quintessentially spiritual experience.

The similitude of faith practices across religious boundaries lends further credence to the conception of spirituality as a universal phenomenon. Characteristically, spirituality is given expression through religious and theist belief. The conduits for spiritual expression are the disciplines and practices of the world’s religions. Some disciplines are widespread, existing within all of the major traditions. Pilgrimage is one such discipline. While approaches to pilgrimage are variable, the ritual and performance of pilgrimage as a religious voyage has persisted throughout time.¹⁶⁸ Ian Reader described the perennial nature of pilgrimage thusly:

The practice of people travelling to and returning home from places deemed to be sacred, and engaging in acts of worship and faith associated with those places, and the routes to them can be found widely, if not universally, across cultures and religious traditions. Indeed, they appear applicable also...in contexts that are not specifically or directly religious.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Walton (2013), p. 5

¹⁶⁸ Klaus Hebers and Hans Christian Lehner, eds., *On the Road in the Name of Religion: Pilgrimage as a Means of Coping with Contingency and Fixing the Future in the World's Major Religions* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), p.177.

¹⁶⁹ Ian Reader, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage: Place and Journey in Cultures and Faiths Worldwide*, <https://www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/content/faiths.html> (accessed Feb. 15, 2015).

While the ways, the destinations and motivations for pilgrimage are variable, the practice has endured through epochs and across religious/political boundaries as one of the oldest, yet most current forms of mobility. The recent proliferation of pilgrimage offers it up as a potential pathway to transformation. This project adapts the traditional pilgrimage motif to a form of localized pilgrimage so that it is easily accessible to everyone in the SGH setting. The new forms of pilgrimage are influenced by the milieu in which they are created. One of the most pervasive influences in the contemporary milieu is the psycho-spiritual approach to transformation and growth which is examined in the following section.

2.4.2 A New Psycho-Spiritual Era in Christianity

A new psycho-spiritual era is being heralded in Christianity. According to Paul Vitz, secular models promoting careerism, consumption, and the pursuit of pleasure are inadequate as a route to higher meaning.¹⁷⁰ HPM-based psychologies focus on pathology and trauma, resulting in a widespread victim mentality and with it, a predilection for shirking responsibility.¹⁷¹ The “negative,” secular psychologies born of HPM are being replaced by models and theories that call attention to the positive aspects of the human person. This shift is referred to as “positive psychology”¹⁷² (PP).¹⁷³ The positive psychology movement was launched by Martin Seligman in 1998,¹⁷⁴ a rejoinder to the

¹⁷⁰Vitz (1977), p. 130.

¹⁷¹ Vitz (2005), p.5.

¹⁷² Paul Vitz, “Psychology in Recovery,” in *First Things* (Institute on Religion and Public Life, March, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁷³ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym PP is used to refer to Positive Psychology.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1998).

“learned helplessness”¹⁷⁵ thrust of the mainstream approaches of that time. Frustrated with psychology’s narrow focus on disorder and distress, Seligman turned his attention to treatments and strategies dedicated to resilience and flourishing. Not surprisingly, this new first wave PP suggested a positive-negative dichotomy that tended to characterize natural negative emotions as undesirable. Since its inception, the first wave positive psychology has evolved to become a more balanced approach that recognizes and includes the dark side of the human condition. This more holistic perspective is identified as “second wave” PP.¹⁷⁶ Second wave PP recognizes the role of the spiritual dimension as a predictor of health and well-being. In a 2007 review of spiritual resources that could be “manualized”¹⁷⁷ for the purpose of psychological issues, Kenneth Pargament found that spiritually integrated psychotherapy encompasses a broad spectrum of clinical methods that can be applied through almost any system of therapy.

A recent publication by Compton and Hoffman honours the humanistic heritage that laid the groundwork for second wave PP, then goes on to describe emergent trends in the field.¹⁷⁸ In contrast to the exclusive first wave focus on strength-enhancing clinical interventions, second wave positive psychology utilizes an integrative approach that transforms suffering and adversity into strength-of-character and wellbeing. Second wave positive psychology uses a dialectical framework to build on people’s best angels and inner resources, while also addressing their inner demons and dysfunctions.

¹⁷⁵ Martin Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death: A Series of Books in Psychology* (New York, NY: WH Freeman / Times / Henry Holt & Co.1975).

¹⁷⁶ Paul Wong, “Positive Psychology 2.0: Towards a Balanced Interactive Model of the Good Life,” in *Canadian Psychology*, 52 (2), (2011), pp. 69-81.

¹⁷⁷ Kenneth Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), p. 320.

¹⁷⁸ William Compton and Edward Hoffman, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing*, 3rd ed, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019).

Overall, the positive psychology movement has ushered in a change of direction, with greater emphasis on the traits that promote happiness and well-being, and such other characteristics as optimism, kindness, resilience, persistence, and gratitude.¹⁷⁹ These positive characteristics are generally recognized by the major religions as “virtues.”¹⁸⁰ These same virtues are influential in the motivation to work in communities that are value-based and vocational. The mission statement that underpins the work at SGH has maintained the commitment to compassionate service over its thirty-five year life span. This commitment endures in the current version of the statement: “Creating community for all through acceptance, compassion and care.”¹⁸¹ The official mission statement is frequently inconsistent with the lived experience of the community and its inhabitants, however. The dynamics of the SGH community of necessity changed, from the fervour of the heady foundational days, to the uniformity of present day service delivery programs and protocols. Consistent with the evolution of both the SGH and the broader social order is the need for new avenues of meaning and expression to nourish the soul of the community. The psycho-spiritual thrust of the new positive psychologies augurs well for a community culture of serving and teaching, where relationships are collegial and the dignity and value of each person is upheld. This project explores the pilgrimage motif as one way of developing these positive attributes.

2.4.2.1 The Case for a Psychology- Spirituality Partnership

David Perrin argues for a partnership between psychology and spirituality. Perrin contends that beyond a strictly empirical or secular conception, psychology must appeal

¹⁷⁹ Vitz (2005), p.6.

¹⁸⁰ Vitz (2005), p.6.

¹⁸¹ *Shepherds of Good Hope 2016 Annual Report* (2016), Cover Page.

to a larger framework to adequately respond to the human quest for meaning.¹⁸² Some psychologists have begun “giving serious attention to the spiritual dimension of life and its psychic manifestations. Thus, much work is being done today that deals with the intersection of the concerns of psychology and spirituality.”¹⁸³ Paul Vitz’s research finds genuine religious elements in the work of several contemporary ‘self-theorists.’ Despite being a harsh critic of the person-centered psychologies, Vitz references several examples of spirituality in their work: Fromm’s notion of the integrated personality and the truly human self; Rogers’ highest stage of experiencing, characterized by immediacy and unity of flow; Maslow’s self-actualized person and his concept of the peak experience, which he describes as ‘oceanic or mystic experiences;’ and Rollo May’s existential conception of self-development, whereby individual potential is fulfilled through the transcendent activity of choosing.¹⁸⁴ Daniel Helminiak points out that the central feature of the new Humanistic Psychology is that “the defining, wondrously distinctive core of humanity is self-transcendence. It results not only in personal growth (as humanistic psychology has emphasized), but also and concomitantly in the knowledge and love of all things, including other persons—because human growth is unavoidably linked with physical, biological, and interpersonal reality.”¹⁸⁵

The endorsement of mysticism and the genuine valuing of love by the self-theorists set the stage for a new Christian era in psychology. An important aspect of the discipline’s transformation over the last generation is its view of religion. Religion is no

¹⁸² David Perrin, “Questions of human-spiritual development.” in *Studying Christian Spirituality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 228.

¹⁸³ Perrin (2007), p. 230.

¹⁸⁴ Vitz (1977) pp.18-27.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel Helminiak, “Common Humanity and Global Community: Lonerganian Specification of Maslowian Promise” (Toronto, ON: The 117 Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, 2009).

longer scorned as a negative, immature or pathological phenomenon.¹⁸⁶ The decline of the secular ideal and a growing uncertainty about the validity of the “self” as a robust theoretical construct has contributed to this transformation.¹⁸⁷ So too has research demonstrating that religious people tend to be happier, healthier, and longer-lived.¹⁸⁸ Polls show that religion and spirituality are important in most people’s lives, and in the realm of psychotherapy, most clients want religion and spirituality acknowledged in their therapy sessions. In his recommendation for a new psycho-spiritual paradigm in psychotherapy, American psychotherapist Victor Schermer conceives spirituality in the context of an embodied, distinctly human psyche. He insists that spirituality is not an add-on, but an integral aspect of our psycho-spiritual self that seeks realization in life’s journey: “It is our lives as lived that constitute our spirituality.”¹⁸⁹ Another proponent, John Shea, similarly argues for collaboration between psychology and spirituality, remarking that both fields deal with the inner dimension of human reality, and spirituality is a fundamental dimension of the person.¹⁹⁰ David Perrin proposes a partnership between psychology and spirituality, advocating for psychological approaches that acknowledge and include elements in the spiritual dimension of life. Perrin recognizes the need to go beyond the limited focus on measuring attitudes, practices, and values in psychology. “Given the startling ability for Christian spirituality to affect and change people’s lives...it is surprising that mainline psychology is not more proactive in integrating research in Christian spiritualities (as well as other faith-based psychologies) into its

¹⁸⁶ Vitz (2005), p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ Vitz (2005), p. p.

¹⁸⁸ Vitz (2005), p. 7.

¹⁸⁹ Victor Schermer, *Spirit and Psyche: A New Paradigm for Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and Psychotherapy* (New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), p. 122.

¹⁹⁰ John Shea, “Spirituality, Psychology and Psychotherapy,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Phillip Sheldrake (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2005), p. 52.

central preoccupations.”¹⁹¹ One of the challenges in communities like SGH is the ability to properly apprehend the subtle undercurrents of the spirit at work. While conventional faith forms are no longer adequate to a full expression of the community’s spiritual life, a framework that incorporates both the psychological and spiritual realms resonates with most clients and workers. Both Helminiak and Perrin provide insights into identifying and framing the community’s already present psycho-spiritual elements. Helminiak notes that: “In as much as psychologists propose ‘frames of orientation and devotion,’ ‘meanings and values,’ ‘beliefs or norms,’ ‘visions or virtues,’ or ‘credos or commitments,’ they covertly embody spirituality or religion.”¹⁹² Perrin buttresses Helminiak’s position: “In short, any proposal from a psychologist that involves ideals of living is unwittingly religious and spiritual in nature if it entails belief systems and norms for living.”¹⁹³ The discipline of psychology has an important contribution to make to human spirituality: 1) it helps people to reflect on their identities and to formulate their personal narratives, 2) it can help people to re-frame their perspectives as they transition through stages of development, 3) it can assist with the movement from a egocentric existence to an other-centered existence, 4) it can help distinguish between authentic forms and deviant forms of spirituality, and 5) it can assist with reclaiming mysticism: asceticism is experiencing a revival as people search for authenticity in life.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Perrin (2007), p. 228.

¹⁹² Helminiak (1998), p. 166.

¹⁹³ Perrin (2007), p. 231.

¹⁹⁴ Perrin (2007), pp. 235-245.

2.4.2.1 The Psycho-Spiritual Nature of Giving

Another aspect of the psycho-spiritual thrust in Christianity is recognition of the importance of the act of giving for spiritual growth. A 2010 study described contributory activity in the form of volunteer work to be an avenue for maintaining life satisfaction and psychological well-being.¹⁹⁵ A later study in 2013 found high levels of altruism in older adults who are involved in formal and informal volunteering.¹⁹⁶ The study further established the influence of altruistic attitudes and pro-social behaviors on respondents' psychological well-being.¹⁹⁷ In the SGH community, the volunteer program facilitates copious forms of eclectic giving that span the spectrum from food preparation to foot care. The central feature amid the array of donated services is the act of giving.

A psycho-spiritual approach recognizes the inherently spiritual nature of the motives for acts of giving. A qualitative study of crisis center¹⁹⁸ volunteers by Praetorius and Machtmes finds that incentives for volunteering are fundamentally spiritual. There are striking parallels between those who “worked the lines” in the crisis center, and SGH volunteers who work the frontlines as service providers. For the purpose of the crisis center research, spirituality is defined to include both sacred and secular motivations for volunteering, and consists of “those aspects of individual feelings, aspirations, and needs which are concerned with efforts to find a purpose and meaning in life experiences, and which may occur without the individual’s being related to a church body or making

¹⁹⁵ N. Morrow-Howell, “Volunteering in Later Life: Research Frontiers,” in *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* (2010), pp. 461-469.

¹⁹⁶ Eva Kahana, Tirth Bhatta, Loren D. Lovegreen, Boaz Kahana, and Elizabeth Midlarsky, “Altruism, Helping, and Volunteering: Pathways to Well-Being in Late Life,” in *Journal of Aging Health*, 25 (1), (Feb. 2013), pp. 159-187.

¹⁹⁷ Kahana et al. (2013), pp.172-175.

¹⁹⁸ A crisis center is an institution formed for emergency remediation or reference, frequently staffed by volunteers. *Psychology Dictionary. org*, April 7, 2013, <https://psychologydictionary.org/crisis-center> (accessed June 13, 2018).

systematic use of a body of beliefs and practices.”¹⁹⁹ The researchers identify four main expressions of spiritual motivation: 1) altruism, which refers to behaviour intended to benefit another, even if it entails some risk or sacrifice, 2) realizing personal blessings, 3) a deeper understanding of the human condition that results in a newfound sensitivity to others, and 4) realization of the interconnectedness of all of us: this leads to a heightened sense of social justice, and / or a desire to give back to the community.²⁰⁰

Given the faith-based foundation of the SGH community, the current project presumes the existence of a spiritual ethos. The psycho-spiritual benefits of virtual pilgrimage are among the indicators of spiritual transformation. The scope and appeal of the pilgrimage motif positions it well to embrace the various manifestations of spirituality that exist within the community. Virtual Pilgrimage is discussed at length in Chapter III.

2.4.3 Diversity and Pluralism in Spirituality

Another feature of our contemporary habitus is the acknowledgement of differences along the dimensions of ethnicity, faith, gender and socio-economic status, together with the willingness to actively engage these differences. This aspect of post-modern life is commonly referred to as diversity and pluralism. In a 2016 speech titled “Diversity is Canada’s Strength,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recounts the story of a Canadian Member of Parliament at an international symposium, who, when asked to describe what Canada looks like, pointed to his entourage:

¹⁹⁹ R.T . Praetorius and K. Machtmes, “Volunteer Crisis Hotline Counsellors: An Expression of Spirituality,” in *Social Work and Christianity*, Vol. 32(2), (2005) p.118.

²⁰⁰ Praetorius and Machtmes (2005), pp. 121-129.

He was accompanied by four other colleagues, none of whom except him were born in Canada. Among them were three women and two men... Two Catholics, an Ismaili Muslim, a Jew whose parents had survived the Holocaust, and a gay protestant minister... One was born in France, one in Portugal. Another was born in Argentina... Another in Tanzania...²⁰¹

In Toronto, Canada's largest city, more than half are born outside Canada.²⁰² We no longer live in the homogenous enchanted world of earlier times, when faith was part of the social fabric.

2.4.3.1 New Manifestations of the Sacred

Charles Taylor points to Canada's pluralism as the source of the many forms of belief and unbelief. Taylor envisions a new manifestation of the Christian vocation in the 21st century. He views that the absence of religion from the public domain as more indicative of a level of development within a civilization than the abandonment of a conception of God. Once a state or a collective within a state has reached the point at which its members enjoy the freedom of a personal identity, "...it is the end of society as structured by God or the beyond. However, it is not the end of personal religion...It is not even the end of religion in public life..."²⁰³ Taylor proposes a new space for God in the world. The sacred is no longer reserved for designated times, places, or persons, but occupies a place in profane time and is incorporated into the personal identities of its citizens. This shift to non-conventional genres is referred to variously as religion-less

²⁰¹ Trudeau, Justin. Prime Minister of Canada, "Diversity is Canada's Strength," London, UK: Canada House, November 26, 2015.

<https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength> (accessed June 4, 2017).

²⁰² Trudeau (2015) <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength> (accessed June 4, 2017).

²⁰³ Charles Taylor, "The Meaning of Secularity," as chapter 13 in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 187.

religion and the spirituality of quest.²⁰⁴ Taylor posits that the new spirituality is situated in a “middle ground,” wherein is found multiple alternative spiritual genres.²⁰⁵

2.4.3.2 Bibby’s Market Model Conception

Reginald Bibby cites other influences in the restructuring of the religious and spiritual landscape. Religion in Canada has become polarized, with some groups winning at the precise time that others are losing.²⁰⁶ Bibby sees two distinct trends: a) a change of market shares, and b) a reshuffling of prominent players.²⁰⁷ Using the market model as his framework, Bibby finds remarkable outlook changes in the Boomer era with shifts from obligation to gratification, and from deference to discernment.²⁰⁸ Church going is no longer viewed as an obligation, but as something that has to be gratifying to be pursued. Furthermore, Boomers are better informed than their predecessors and have almost unbridled freedom of expression. They insist on exercising discernment in all realms of life, including in religion and spirituality.²⁰⁹ What post-modern religion needs according to Bibby, is “new outlook, new alliances, and new effort.”²¹⁰ Bibby points very explicitly to the vital lessons learned from multiculturalism in Canada: in Canada, multiculturalism has flourished not through mere co-existence and toleration of differences, but as a result of concerted efforts at genuine communication and cooperation. He emphasizes the need

²⁰⁴ Taylor (2007), p. 512.

²⁰⁵ Taylor (2007), pp. 530-533.

²⁰⁶ Bibby (2012), p.3.

²⁰⁷ Bibby (2012), p.3.

²⁰⁸ Bibby (2012), p. 20.

²⁰⁹ Bibby (2012), pp.20-21.

²¹⁰ Bibby (2012), p.59.

to adopt this practice of drawing on and utilizing our collective resources in our religious and spiritual lives.²¹¹

2.4.3.3 Distortions of Pluralism

Several researchers are critical of the scholarship related to diversity and pluralism, arguing that the assumptions that underlie the concepts are based on a “sameness/difference paradigm” that uses mainline religions as the normative standard.²¹² Lori Beaman argues that pluralism is a myth. The range of religious choices in North America is obscured by mainstream Christian religious hegemonies which in the US is Protestantism, and in Canada is a combination of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.²¹³ Beaman is intentional in her use of the term “hegemony,”²¹⁴ a sociological construct from the conflict tradition that implies the domination of one group by another. In Beaman’s research, the hegemony works to erect “boarders or boundaries around normal religion.”²¹⁵ In the US, Protestantism, and in Canada, Protestantism and Catholicism, are the norms against which the “Other” is established.²¹⁶ In a related vein, Tricia Seifert argues that in order for spiritual pluralism to be adequately managed, there has to be acknowledgement and dialogue around the notion of “Christian Privilege.”²¹⁷ In her research on college and university campus in America, Seifert made the point that “bucolic chapels, Sundays off, and breaks at Christmas are regular reminders that higher

²¹¹ Bibby (2012), p.39.

²¹² Lori Beaman, “Myth of Pluralism, Diversity and Vigor: The Constitutional Privilege of Protestantism in the United States and Canada,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42:3 (2003), p. 321.

²¹³ Beaman (2003), p. 321.

²¹⁴ Beaman (2003), p. 314.

²¹⁵ Beaman (2003), p. 314.

²¹⁶ Beaman (2003), p. 313.

²¹⁷ Tricia Seifert, “Understanding Christian Privilege: Managing the Tensions of Spiritual Plurality,” in *About Campus* / May-June (2007), p. 11.

education was founded by Christians who transferred their faith's traditions from the church to the campus. As colleges and universities become increasingly diverse, inclusiveness means making room for all."²¹⁸ Similarly, Jorge Ferrer alleges that the time honoured approaches to understanding diversity and pluralism in religion are characterized by a "spiritual narcissism" that privileges established traditions and undermines true religious diversity.²¹⁹ Ferrer makes a case for a participatory critical theory of religious pluralism as an alternative to historical approaches.²²⁰

2.4.4 Remedies for Distorted Pluralism

These perspectives bring a deeper dimension to considerations of diversity and pluralism among workers (both paid and unpaid) and clients at SGH. The increasingly complex composition of these two groups requires more integrated and specialized approaches at all levels, including at the level of pastoral and spiritual care. SGH has become a diversified, multi-religious community. While much has been accomplished, truly honouring the different ethnic and faith groups that inhabit the SGH community is a work in progress. Researchers like Lori Beaman contend that much remains to be done. Religious groups in the margins typically encounter difficulties when they challenge or attempt to penetrate the boundaries of the "normal." This confirms, according to Beaman, "the fragility of the claim that a substantive pluralism exists."²²¹ John Renesch concurs. In a barbed sketch of initiatives to honour domestic and global differences, his proposal

²¹⁸ Seifert (2007), p. 10.

²¹⁹ Jorge Ferrer, "The Plurality of Religions and the Spirit of Pluralism: A Participatory Vision of the Future of Religion," in *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (San Francisco, CA: California Institute of Integral Studies, 2009), p. 139.

²²⁰ Ferrer (2009), p. 139.

²²¹ Beaman (2003), p. 314.

for dialogue includes: stop disrespecting ‘less civilized’ cultures because we supposedly think we know better, or think we have the technology to ‘improve’ things from our perspective; diminish our arrogance, our know-it-all attitude and engage with the world, with nature and each other with a bit more humility; begin speaking out publicly, that is, stand up and be counted when we think things are not going the way they should.²²² Cultural diversity and spiritual pluralism call for inter-religious approaches to worship and liturgical practice.

2.4.4.1 Collaborative Practices

Abundant, easily adaptable resources do already exist, averting the need to entirely re-invent the wheel of inter-religious collaboration. The Scarboro Missions *Guidelines for Designing a Multi-faith Prayer Service* is one such excellent source. The guidelines include sample orders-of-service, theme suggestions, ideas for incorporating symbolic objects, such as banners, candles, fountains, plants and flowers, and symbolic gestures, including the lighting of candles, the greeting of peace, and the use of sign language. Other elements such as music, the use of responses or refrains, the use of silence, processions or circle formations, ceremonial or cultural dress, the choice of date and time, and the use of multi-faith songs enhance the inclusiveness, poignancy and profundity of a liturgy.²²³ On any given day, the daily reflection service at SGH is developed around sacred texts and prayers that honour the visiting group: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, etc. When representatives from more than one group

²²² John Renesch, “Humanizing Capitalism: Vision of Hope; Challenge for Transcendence,” in *Journal of Human Values*, V. 14, N. 1 (2008), pp.7-8.

²²³ Paul McKenna, “Guidelines for Designing a Multi-faith Prayer Service,” Scarboro Missions (2008). 2008.interfaith@scarboromissions.ca (accessed Oct. 12, 2016).

are present, readings and prayers are chosen accordingly. All services incorporate candlelight, music, and songs or hymns in tune with the liturgical season. A segment of the service is dedicated to intercessory prayer, where participants can lift up their praises and petitions to Allah, Brahman, God, or the Universe. A screen projects song lyrics, you-tube videos and inspirational stories that theme the sharing time. If the group is predominantly Christian, the service closes with the Our Father; if not, the service closes with a Peace Blessing. All services end with an Exchange of Peace.

Memorials are a special type of liturgical service, and an integral part of the spiritual life of SGH. The majority of clients belong to Christian or Aboriginal traditions, with a minority belonging to the other world religions. Each service reflects the life of the individual being honoured, with prayers and reflection pieces drawn from his / her own practice, as well as non-sacred poetry, memorabilia and music that speaks to their personal lives. An excellent source for multi-faith memorial prayer was compiled by Rev. Patricia Pierce and Rabbi Arthur Waskow for a national US memorial service honouring victims of the Iraq war. This document is a veritable anthology, with beautiful prayers from twelve different traditions that can be readily adapted to other memorial occasions.²²⁴

A great deal of the life and work at SGH revolves around the preparation and provision of food. Food has a strong religious connotation. In a community that provides 1700 meal services daily, using mainly donated goods, observing the dietary prescriptions of the different cultural and faith groups is challenging. The growing number of requests for vegetarian and vegan options points to the necessity of

²²⁴ Rev. Patricia Pierce and Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *Resources for Use in Interfaith Memorial Services*. www.scribd.com/doc. as-Interfaith-Memorial-Servce-Litanies-Prayers-Readings-and-Songs (accessed Oct. 12, 2016).

accommodation and education. Several school boards across the province, in consultation with the Ontario Multi-faith Council, have compiled excellent resources on the dietary requirements of different faith groups.²²⁵ In the minimal means SGH environment, the range of options regrettably is often canned tomato or cream of mushroom soup, and a pasta main dish.

Another aspect of honouring religious pluralism at SGH is in the use of images and symbols. In the dining room, the “Golden Rule” Poster with insignias and faith expressions of the rule from thirteen traditions is an important symbol of welcome for Non-Christian visitors. In the chapel, a similar depiction of the different faith symbols is rendered in glass stain art. These are small gestures in an environment where Christian symbolism has been the predominant feature.

2.4.4.2 Prophetic Possibilities

Several researchers have envisioned conditions and communions capable of creating a sense of a common spiritual family. These visionaries provide direction and inspire momentum in localized efforts like ours at SGH. Jorge Ferrer’s participatory approach is committed to overcoming “oppressive, repressive, and dissociative religious beliefs, attitudes, practices and institutional dynamics.”²²⁶ Ferrer crafted a participatory vision of post-millennial religion and spirituality that ideally surmounts the pitfalls of contemporary universalisms, while honouring the common root of mystery and the generative creativity that exists in all traditions.²²⁷ According to Ferrer, the spiritual unity

²²⁵ Centennial College. *Guidelines for Religious Accommodation* (Toronto: Feb. 2007). www.centennialcollege.ca/pdf/mycentennial/ReligiousAccomodation. (accessed Oct. 20, 2016).

²²⁶ Ferrer (2009), p. 144.

²²⁷ Ferrer (2009), pp. 145-146.

of humankind is not to be found in the Heavens (i.e. in mental, visionary or even mystical visions), but deep down in the Earth (i.e. in our vital, embodied, and co-creative connection with our shared roots.)²²⁸ I would argue that it is found in both, in the conjoining of these two aspects. Correlating with Ferrer is Ursula King's proposal for a spirituality distinguished by its "consciousness of the global."²²⁹ Like Ferrer's, King's spirituality is related to "our rootedness in the earth,"²³⁰ and is summarized in the notion of "flourishing."²³¹ Flourishing denotes gardening and growth, an earthy, organic concept that relates to the whole web of life.²³²

Bruce Sanguin suggested that perhaps the best route to respect for the inherent dignity of other people and faiths is through "paying homage."²³³ Sanguine cites the example of the Magi, who were sufficiently steeped in their own tradition to risk the pilgrimage to another culture and religion. They enjoyed the security of their own faith system sufficiently that they could pay homage to another.²³⁴ Fabrice Blée used the concept of hospitality to describe the posture of openness to the other that is essential for true dialogue. Blée narrated Benedictine Monk Henri Le Saux's journey into Hinduism in response to the inter-religious call. The summons led to years of wandering and renunciation by the monk. Blée described his "limitless disposition to listen and receive

²²⁸ Ferrer (2009), p. 147.

²²⁹ Ursula King, *The Search for Spirituality: Our Global Quest for a Spiritual life* (New York, NY: Bluebridge, 2009), p.45.

²³⁰ King (2009), p. 45.

²³¹ King (2009), p. 54.

²³² King (2009), p. 54.

²³³ Bruce Sanguin, "Paying Homage: Being Christian in a World of Many Faiths," in *The Emerging Christian Way*, ed. Michael Schwartzentruber (Kelowna, BC: Copperhouse, 2006), p. 137.

²³⁴ Sanguin (2006), p.140.

otherness in the depth of himself,”²³⁵ a disposition that eventually gives him access to the heart of Hinduism. Ultimately, the monk experienced a kind of “double religious belonging” that projected him into a no-man’s land.²³⁶ This is a place of utter dependence and vulnerability. The sacred hospitality essential to genuine inter-religious dialogue was brought forth in this “desert of otherness.”²³⁷

Another pathway to inter-religious belonging is the concept of “radical inclusiveness”²³⁸ developed by Anne Squire. Radical inclusiveness is a compelling and radical conception of pluralism. The basis of radical inclusiveness is the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5: 1-12), where the kingdom described by Jesus is present and available to everyone: the leper and the blind man, the poor farmer and the rich young ruler, the tax collector and the widow, the Samaritan and the Jew, children and women, sinners and outcasts, Pharisees and Sadducees, even the lilies of the field and the sparrow that falls.²³⁹ Radical inclusion is quite simply, “the practice of including, in any community, those who are normally excluded.”²⁴⁰ One of the main reasons for the focus on virtual pilgrimage in this research is its capacity for inclusiveness. It is available to anyone with feet to walk. It requires no accouterment save a pair of walking shoes. It is representative of a faith practice that has existed for centuries in every faith and cultural group within the diverse SGH community.

²³⁵ Fabrice Blée, “Exile and Wandering: Spiritual Practice and Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Witness to the Fullness of Light: The Vision and Relevance of the Benedictine Monk Swami Abhisiktananda*, eds. William Skudlarek and Bettina Baumer (New York: Lantern Books, 2011), p.10.

²³⁶ Blée (2011), p.12.

²³⁷ Blée (2011), p.28.

²³⁸ Anne Squire, “Radical Inclusion,” in *The Emerging Christian Way*, ed. Michael Schwartzentruber (Kelowna, BC: Copperhouse, 2006), p. 143.

²³⁹ Squire (2006), p. 145.

²⁴⁰ Squire (2006), p. 143.

2.4.5 New Innovations in Spirituality

Christian spirituality has been criticized for “its other worldly, disengaged, and body-denying distortions.”²⁴¹ Claire Wolfeich emphasizes the need to radically reevaluate the meanings and distortions of spirituality: “in my view, it is important to take critique of spirituality quite seriously while also recovering or sustaining the deep impulses toward transcendence, prayer and contemplation embedded in Christian spirituality.”²⁴² New innovations in religion and spirituality signal a shift in the North American paradigm. Both Charles Taylor and Reginald Bibby describe the trends and movements that laid the groundwork for this shift.

2.4.5.1 Trends and Transitions

Both Taylor and Bibby identify an amorphous zone in the religious-spiritual realm that fosters experimentation and innovation. Taylor calls it the “middle ground.”²⁴³ The middle ground in contemporary religious life refers to dwelling within a faith tradition that provides meaning and structure to lives, on the one hand, and the act of seeking out such meaning and structure, on the other. The middle ground thesis begs the question: “Where will the access lie to practice and deepen engagement with religion.”²⁴⁴ For Bibby, the place for innovation is “the ambivalent middle,” that undecided sector that is not actively participating, but has not shut the door on religion.²⁴⁵ This group’s openness to religion is determined by its facility to gratify their needs, and its capacity to

²⁴¹ Claire Wolfeich, Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology*, Vo. 13 (2009), p 128.

²⁴² Wolfeich (2009), p. 128.

²⁴³ Taylor (2007), p. 515.

²⁴⁴ Taylor (2007), p. 515.

²⁴⁵ Bibby (2012), p.19.

provide worthwhile ministry.²⁴⁶ The ‘middle ground’ and ‘the ambivalent middle’ are the places where new forms of religious expression are being introduced and old forms are being revived and adapted.

2.4.5.2 Taylor’s Ethic of Authenticity

In his analysis of the secular age, Taylor classified the periods that influence Pre-millennial religion and spirituality as the “Age of Mobilization,”²⁴⁷ and the “Age of Authenticity.”²⁴⁸ Taylor identified trends in the Age of Mobilization that destabilized the “ancien régime,”²⁴⁹ setting the stage for the ensuing Age of Authenticity. These trends include: a) the moral order became a way of coexistence among equals, based on the principles of mutual benefit, b) individuals were conceived as capable of exercising their own agency in the development of the forms and structures of society, c) individuals had immediate and direct access to citizenship and all that entails, no longer constrained by class or social grouping, and d) the world view was one of disenchantment, in contrast to the enchanted world view of the ancient paradigm.²⁵⁰ It can be argued that these developments served a more affluent, libertine sector. Regardless, they opened the door to the post war, entrepreneurial ‘Age of Authenticity’ described by Taylor as an “individuating revolution.”²⁵¹ The signature feature of the era was a widespread “expressive individualism.”²⁵² The markers of the ‘Age of Authenticity’ include affluence and consumer lifestyles, social and geographic mobility, outsourcing and

²⁴⁶ Bibby (2012), pp. 20-26.

²⁴⁷ Taylor (2007), pp. 423-472.

²⁴⁸ Taylor (2007), pp. 473-504.

²⁴⁹ Taylor (2007), p.438.

²⁵⁰ Taylor (2007), pp.459-60.

²⁵¹ Taylor (2007), p. 473.

²⁵² Taylor (2007), p. 473.

downsizing by corporations, new family patterns, and suburban spread, among others.²⁵³

The ethic of authenticity generated a pluralistic plethora of options that inspired what Taylor calls the “spirituality of quest.”²⁵⁴

2.4.5.3 Bibby’s Blending of Beliefs

Reginald Bibby argues that in the face of the perennial issues around death and the meaning and purpose of life, there are some needs “that only the Gods can provide.”²⁵⁵ While religion continues to be significant for a stable segment of the population, it is the proportion of people who are ambivalent about religion that changed since the 1960’s. Bibby further discovered that while Canadians exhibit a decreasing inclination to participate actively in organized religion, they show little inclination to abandon supernatural beliefs. Although many reject Christianity as an authoritative meaning system, they continue to draw on and blend assorted beliefs and practices from different traditions, a trend which he refers to as “religion a la carte.”²⁵⁶

2.4.5.4 Resacralization

In another description of innovations in twenty-first century spirituality, Maria Libiszowska-Zoltkowska examines the concept of “resacralization.”²⁵⁷ Libiszowska-Zoltkowska drew on the work of Janusz Marianski to describe resacralization in post-modern culture: “the new spirituality is one of mega-trends...a sacred experience,

²⁵³ Taylor (2007), p. 473.

²⁵⁴ Taylor (2007), pp. 530-533.

²⁵⁵ Reginald Bibby, *Beyond the God’s and Back* (Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada, 2011), p. 38.

²⁵⁶ Bibby, “Religion a La Carte in Quebec: A problem of Demand, Supply, or Both?” in *Globe*, (July, 2007), p. 9.

²⁵⁷ Maria Libiszowska-Zoltkowska, “Resacralisation in the Post Modern Culture: New Developments of Religion and Spirituality,” in *The Religious Studies Review* (Warsaw: Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialisation, No. 4, 2015), p.3.

sometimes nameless, understood in terms of something personal, intimate, something which refers to the power hidden inside a human being. This spirituality emphasizes the role of experience and spiritual exercises, it recognizes an inner spiritual sense in a human body, which manifests the creative force of the spirit; it respects nature and popularizes healthy eating; it attaches great significance to interpersonal relations based on fidelity and love; it is sensitive to art and also emphasizes gender equality. This spirituality is holistic, democratic, easily accessible and not hierarchical; it is opposed to institutional religion, so exists outside the church.”²⁵⁸ This spirituality undergirds new ways of being Church.

2.4.5.5 New Ways of Being Church

In another account of present-day innovations, an American-based study by Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston identified seven themes in the new ways of being church in the twenty-first century. These include: 1) openness to people of all identities and from all stages of their life journeys; 2) experiential truth as opposed to doctrinal truth; 3) participation and co-creation rather than consumption; 4) mission clarity and respect for those who choose not to partake; 5) authenticity; 6) counter-cultural essence; and 7) service to others.²⁵⁹ Despite diversity of creed, religious innovators show a striking unity of vision across Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Secular, Buddhist, and Spiritual-but-not-Religious communities. The researchers found that these new spiritual

²⁵⁸ Janusz Marianski, “Megatrendy Religijne W Społeczeństwach Ponowoczesnych,” in *Studium Socjologiczne*, ed. Adam Marszałek, cited by Maria Libiszowska-Zoltkowska, „Resacralisation in the Post Modern Culture: New Developments of Religion and Spirituality,” in *The Religious Studies Review* (Warsaw: Institute of Social Prevention and Resocialisation, No. 4, 2015), p.8.

²⁵⁹ Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston, *Where We Belong: Mapping American Religious Innovation* (Fetzer Institute, 2015), p. 32.

communities attract people across geography, age, and religious affiliation.²⁶⁰ Against a backdrop of ancient traditions, the new paradigms of belonging beckon spiritual leaders in the direction of entirely new forms of communality.

2.4.5.6 Emergent Configurations of the Spiritual

These new forms already exist in many contemporary settings, but are often not recognized as the working of the spirit. Everyday living experience is germane to the contemporary experience of spirituality. Lived experience is the milieu in which contemporary spirituality is most authentically experienced. Researcher Beth Crisp emphasized the centrality of “lived experience”²⁶¹ in a model developed around rituals, creativity, and place.²⁶² Traditional faith practices are being supplemented by emergent configurations. Crisp’s model is adaptable to the exigencies of SGH life, where meaning is constructed in the midst of ordinary life.

“Rituals” for Crisp refers to the patterns of activity that provide order, a sense of identity, connection and meaning to peoples lives.²⁶³ In the SGH context, rituals mark the milestone events: birthdays, anniversaries, and celebrations of achievement (finding a place to live, finding a job, completing a program of study, getting a promotion, etc.). Rituals also involve acts of solidarity with the wider community: the Good Friday Way of the Cross, the Armistice Day liturgy, etc. Rituals around food acknowledge cultural and faith traditions: Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving, vegetarian and vegan practices, and the ritual blessing of food. Rituals related to death incorporate cultural, faith, personal

²⁶⁰ Kuile and Thurston (2015), p. 2.

²⁶¹ Beth Crisp, *Spirituality and Social Work* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 14.

²⁶² Crisp (2010), p. 90.

²⁶³ Crisp (2010), p. 93.

and family customs into the handling of deceased remains: funerals, and memorials, smudging, special music genres, the use of libations, and the spreading of ashes. Applied to virtual pilgrimage, ritual imbues the act of walking with meaning. It requires continuity, commitment and focus, and has an inherent capacity for centering and connection.

“Creativity” is another manifestation of spirituality in Crisp’s model. In a contemporary milieu, creativity is spiritual in its capacity to lift us beyond our mundane existence to a more mysterious realm. Creativity is not the exclusive purview of the artistic elite, but operates at the level of everyday life.²⁶⁴ SGH is replete with creative genius, in the music, poetry and visual artwork of clients, and the creative talents of volunteers who recycle and restore foodstuff and furniture, decorate indoor and outdoor spaces, organize fundraisers and recognition events, and cultivate the community’s grounds and gardens. Creativity is also brought into the community in the form of concerts, craft workshops, spa events and yoga classes. Creativity is transformative, both as an act of engaging in a creative endeavour, and in exposure to the creative works of others.

The third construct in Crisp’s model is “Place.” Place becomes sacred when it confers identity or a sense of connection and belonging, evokes memories, provides a sense of rooted-ness, offers consolation, and brings about new understandings of ourselves.²⁶⁵ As a place, SGH is a community of hospitality for the homeless and the homeless of spirit. The community cares for those who are dislocated and disenfranchised as a result of the verities of existence. Among the workers, the sense of

²⁶⁴ Crisp (2010), p. 105.

²⁶⁵ Crisp (2010), p. 117.

place is manifested in the brand name shirts, caps and ID badges, in their identities and friendships, their memories, their life narratives, and their vocations, all articulated in and through the shared action of caring for needful people. An extension of the concept of place is the proposition that the service organization itself has a spiritual ethos. Carol Howard Merrit identifies the service organization as a type of spiritual innovation.²⁶⁶ The experience of communality is value-based and purpose-driven in service organizations. In an article on new models of church, Merrit emphasizes that the service model typically brings people together around a common type of social justice activity. It is not uncommon to hear long-time volunteers describe SGH as their “Church.” The meaning vested in place has been enlarged with interactive technologies. The virtual place can also be a place of spiritual encounter. In this research the concept of the virtual journey was extrapolated for use where limited physical or financial means did not permit the actual traditional journey. Virtual pilgrimage is not a cyber-based journey, but it does use the concept of virtual journey to describe the notional, localized journey.

In line with conceptions of spirituality in a ‘lived experience’ milieu is Ursula King’s vision for a global spirituality. King describes the prevalence and appeal of a “householder”²⁶⁷ model of spirituality. In the householder genre, spiritual striving is expressed in the daily round. Householder spirituality is a socially involved and ethically engaged spirituality that adapts well to the evolving mission and purpose of SGH. In the householder approach, inner attitudes and actions are transformed by spiritual disciplines

²⁶⁶ Carol Howard Merrit, “Ten Church Models for a New Generation,” *The Christian Century* (Nov., 2011), <http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2011-11/ten-church-models-new-generation> (accessed Sept. 15, 2017).

²⁶⁷ King (2009), p. 29.

that can be practiced in the immediate setting.²⁶⁸ The discipline of virtual pilgrimage provides opportunities for reflection on the sacred in the midst of ordinary life. The transformative potential is in walking as an act of meaning: intentional, reflective walking is the pathway to rumination and contemplation.

2.4.6 Contemplative Spirituality

Contemplative spirituality is finding new relevance in the post millennial world. Contemplative spirituality is a schema for full human, personal development. In a commentary on the contemplative life, Thomas Merton famously avowed: "Our first task is to be fully human...When I speak of the contemplative life I do not mean the institutional, cloistered life . . . I am talking about a special dimension of inner discipline and experience, a certain integrity and fullness of personal development."²⁶⁹ A contemplative spirituality fosters a vital sense of God in our lives, and restores our faculty for astonishment and wonder. In his work on rediscovering a felt presence of God in ordinary life, Ron Rolheiser sketched out the features of a contemplative spirituality: 1) contemplation allows us to approach reality with a reverence and wonder that opens the door of perception to new uncharted depths; 2) contemplation transforms the subject through a) heightened self-awareness, b) union with the community, c) delight in beauty, d) restoration of the impulse for astonishment, and e) inchoate knowledge; and 3) contemplation enlarges the subject through co-extension with All that is.²⁷⁰ Rolheiser used Paul Ricoeur's notion of "second naïveté"²⁷¹ to describe the childlike sense of

²⁶⁸ King (2009), p. 29.

²⁶⁹ Merton (1992), p. 375.

²⁷⁰ Rolheiser (1994), pp.66-70.

²⁷¹ Rolheiser (1994), p. 192.

novelty, and the second innocence and openness that gives us the fresh eyes to reclaim an instinct for astonishment. Like the ancients, we need to recover the ability to see the finger of God at work in our lives.

2.4.6.1 Contemplation as the Foundation of the Mystical Tradition

Contemplation is the foundation of the mystical tradition. Mysticism is awareness of the presence of the Incarnate God in the verities of ordinary life. This awareness sets in motion the conversion of heart that is articulated through transformed action. Both Perrin and Rolheiser draw on the classical spiritual itinerary as a model for understanding the cyclical movements of grace in contemplative spiritual development. Both authors cite the work of St. John of the Cross to describe the transformation process that culminates in appropriation of the heart and mind of Christ. The model is comprised of three modalities: the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitative way.²⁷² These ways can be taken up by any spiritual disciple.

David Perrin defines mysticism as “not so much the experience of an extrinsic Other who at times intervenes in the order of the world from elsewhere, but rather, a personal God, who emerges from within a common world that humanity and God already share.”²⁷³ In a related vein, Rolheiser draws attention to the ordinariness of the mystical experience, emphasizing that it is not the exclusive purview of the spiritual elite: “At his or her depth, everyone is touched, held and seared by God in such a way that unless one lacks purity of heart...the presence of God will be felt and progressively

²⁷² Perrin (2007), pp. 248-256.

²⁷³ David Perrin, “Mysticism and Art: The Importance of Affective Reception.” in *Église et Théologie*, 27 (1996), p. 51.

swell...God's reality, goodness, forgiveness, and moral demands will be part of the very color of one's life."²⁷⁴

2.4.6.2 Abiding in the Presence of God

In the Christian tradition, the act of abiding in God's presence is quintessential to the mystical tradition. The practice of abiding in God harkens back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the early Monastic period. The seventeenth century Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence, dedicated the entirety of his existence to the practice of abiding in God. Brother Lawrence's contemplative practice is summarized in his conversations and letters, eloquently rendered by an unknown author.²⁷⁵ In his second letter, the brother declares, "There is not in the world a way of life more sweet, more delightful, than continual converse with God. Those only who savour it and practice it can understand....If I were a preacher, I should preach nothing else than the practice of the presence of God."²⁷⁶

A twenty-first century rendition of the practice of abiding in God is described by Fabrice Blée in his account of the exile and wandering of Abhishiktananda, the Hindu-Christian monk. Blée recounts the monk's break with familiar images of God, and the complete stripping away of certainties that ensued. In the course of his journey, in a state of total dependence on the other, the monk discovers the "Grail," the heart of the mystery of God.²⁷⁷ Reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa's grief for the early Church, Abhishiktananda similarly decries present day absolutisms. Just as Gregory mourned

²⁷⁴ Rolheiser (1994), p. 80.

²⁷⁵ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (E. M. Blaiklock, Trans., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), pp. 17-65.

²⁷⁶ Brother Lawrence (1981), p. 38.

²⁷⁷ Blée (2011), p.28.

the early Christian penchant for creating concepts that idolized God, Abhishiktananda laments the strictures that constrain contemporary Christianity. In the words of the monk, “The world is dying from lack of depth, of roots.”²⁷⁸ Blée describes how the practice of wandering “demolishes alienating certainties, and with them the tendency to ritualism, activism, and absolutism,” making way for Christians to “rediscover the deeper meanings for their lives of the rites, sacraments, doctrines and ethic of the Church.”²⁷⁹ The spiritual practice of “wandering” creates a space that makes astonishment possible once again.²⁸⁰ The practice of wandering has a special relevance for this study by virtue of its proximate relationship to pilgrimage. Blée makes the point that “when wandering takes the form of pilgrimage, it becomes the framework wherein an experience of God can be deepened.”²⁸¹ Abhishiktananda’s pilgrimages to the Ganges were a quest. Each step was an invitation to more interiority, greater letting go, and a closer relationship with God.²⁸²

2.4.6.3 Abiding in Beauty

Beauty is also a pathway to a deeper experience of God. Beauty rouses the “dormant divinity” within us.²⁸³ To abide in beauty is to abide in the Divine Presence. The Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar coined the term “aesthetic arrest” to describe the summoning power of beauty: beauty awakens us, enchants us, transforms us... Von Balthasar presents an understanding of beauty as a transcendent attribute, one

²⁷⁸ Blée (2011), p.28.

²⁷⁹ Blée (2011), p.28.

²⁸⁰ Blée (2011), p.28.

²⁸¹ Blée (2011), p.21.

²⁸² Blée (2011), p.21.

²⁸³ Ron Rolheiser, “The Transforming Power of Beauty” RONROLHEISER, OMI (June 25, 1999).

in which the truly beautiful takes possession of the observer. Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics focuses on the concept of nature and our subjective experience of nature. According to Von Balthasar, beauty is God's self-disclosing revelation, which, when presented to humankind is both enrapturing and crushing. Von Balthasar sees in God's beauty both an element of fear and of unattainable majesty, a totality which demands adoration.²⁸⁴ The concept of beauty is interpreted within the framework of the transcendental. Worldly beauty incites a response of love and gratitude. It "provokes and disturbs"²⁸⁵ us, challenging what is mean, ugly, violent and base. To contemplate beauty is to contemplate divine love. In contemplating beauty we are turned away from ourselves and our horizons are lifted. Beauty is a pathway to interiority and mysticism.

2.4.6.4 Theoria and Praxis in the Mystical Tradition

The passage to mysticism requires discipline and a disposition of openness. To that end, Rolheiser makes a distinction between "theoria" and "praxis" in the mystical tradition. 'Theoria' refers to the reception of the presence of God, others, and the cosmic world.²⁸⁶ Theoria includes the modes and stages of transformation that bring us ever nearer to the mystery of God's love. Theoria in the mystical tradition concerns human-spiritual development. 'Praxis' refers to those actions undertaken to correctly dispose one to openness and purity of heart through asceticism, acts of meditation, religious practices, and service to others. Rolheiser maintains that we must give birth to God in our lives through proper praxis. His position is corroborated by Perrin's concept

²⁸⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity" in *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics, IV.*, ed. John Riches, trans. Oliver Davies et al. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1989), p. 321.

²⁸⁵ Ron Rolheiser, "The Transforming Power of Beauty" RONROLHEISER, OMI, June 25, 1999 (accessed Sept. 10, 2017)

²⁸⁶ Rolheiser (1994), p. 81.

of “practice,” defined as “All the activities Christians engage in to grow and mature in relationship to God, each other and the world, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Without practice there is a tendency to end up in theory – believing without living out the beliefs in daily life as witnessed to by Jesus.”²⁸⁷ Distortions in our perceptions and practices atrophy our contemplative faculties and impede our capacity for astonishment and gratitude.

In a virtual pilgrimage framework, praxis includes a simple desire for change, an attitude of openness and surrender to Creator and creation, intentionality, instruction on the characteristics and possible fruits of sacred walking, scriptural references to the discipline of pilgrimage, preparatory meditation, and consistent, faithful practice. Virtual pilgrimage is in fact a locus of encounter with the mystical. The act of participation in the discipline engages the pilgrim’s affective and cognitive faculties, thereby opening up the possibility of the mystical encounter. Virtual pilgrimage embodies a reference beyond its own physical objectivity to a realm of reality outside the conceptual level.²⁸⁸ This alternate reality, which signifies a state of the soul, is an indirect reference constructed through the mood or affect engendered in the discipline (virtual pilgrimage) itself. Through re-appropriation, the pilgrim and her world are re-configured, such that virtual pilgrimage forms the basis of personal and communal transformation.

²⁸⁷ Perrin (2007), p. 267.

²⁸⁸ Perrin (1996), pp. 61-63.

2.4.7 Summary Statement

The second section of Chapter II examined major trends in twenty-first century spirituality. New and old forms of faith expression provide potential pathways to transformation. Section II assessed the altered conditions of belief and practice and subsequent new innovations brought about by post-millennial socio-cultural trends and movements. A major twenty-first century development is the revivalist trend that transposes old forms into new settings, infusing them with meaning that is relevant to the contemporary context.

2.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to address the second task of the practical theological research cycle with the question, ‘Why is this going on?’ This question sought to interpret spiritual decline in light of the broad cultural and spiritual shifts that have impacted the SGH community. Cultural and spiritual issues were addressed separately in this chapter: Section I focused on socio-cultural change as a result of the influence of 1) secularization, 2) the human potential movement, and 3) the pervasive loss of capacity for contemplation. Section II examined spirituality by assessing the different impacts of these movements on western spirituality as a whole, and the subsequent manifestations of contemporary spirituality that have come about. This section sought to interpret how spirituality has changed in response to the major trends and movements of the twenty-first century. Chief among these trends was the ethos of quest and experimentation spurred by diversity and pluralism. Altered conditions of belief gave rise to a plethora of new ideals and practices and an understanding of the

universal nature of human spirituality. Innovations brought forward new spiritual practices and revived and blended old forms. Among the innovations in this brave, new global spirituality are a new psycho-spiritual thrust, the ‘resacralization’ of ordinary experience, new ways of gathering - of being church, a renewal of the ancient disciplines, and revival of the contemplative way.

The next chapter addresses the question “what ought to be going on,” and concentrates on the pilgrimage motif, a restored new-old faith discipline, to assess its potential as a pathway to spiritual renewal for SGH volunteers. This discussion is inspired by leading edge practitioners, scholars and seers whose twenty-first century concerns are articulated in Ursula King’s urgent question: “Who are the guides and pathfinders with visions sufficiently large and inclusive to include both personal and planetary transformation?”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ King (2009), p. 36.

CHAPTER III. VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE: A NEW FAITH PRACTICE

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to address the question: What ought to be going on in the spiritual life of the SGH community? Spirituality has changed in the 21st century. An ethos of quest and a penchant for experimentation has revived and blended old forms of religious expression, and brought about new forms. Pilgrimage is one of these new-old forms. This chapter recounts the historical rise and fall of pilgrimage and the many variations of the pilgrimage motif over the centuries, with the most recent trend being a proliferation of walking practices across the developed world. An historical account of pilgrimage across diverse cultural and faith traditions is the backdrop for a description of Christian pilgrimage. The Christian pilgrimage narrative is profiled from Early Church days through the medieval era to the twenty-first century. The notion of a pilgrimage motif as both a literal and metaphorical construct is explained. The attributes linked to twenty-first century pilgrimage are elaborated, with an emphasis on the ancient practices as pathways to transformation. The Camino de Santiago is cited as a compelling example of a revived practice writ large. The Camino is the framework within which the concept of virtual pilgrimage is developed. Virtual Pilgrimage is put forward as an alternative pathway to the sacred and a new praxis in the mystical tradition.

3.2 What Ought To Be Going On?

The task of “prophetic discernment” in practical theological interpretation addresses the question “What ought to be going.” Richard Osmer identifies this process

as the normative task.²⁹⁰ Osmer envisions prophetic discernment on a continuum, starting with commiseration with the problem and prayerful seeking of God's guidance, to reaching a theological interpretation of the problem (i.e. what would constitute good practice).²⁹¹ Swinton & Mowat use a related approach, one that correlates questions and answers taken from other sources with questions and answers taken from the Christian tradition.²⁹² They call this approach "critical faithfulness."²⁹³ Osmer cites Elaine Graham's "transforming practice" conception as a way to assess best practices in a post-modern context.²⁹⁴ Graham argues that practice must be viewed reflexively. The principles of truth and value which undergird practice must be negotiated with the community, and understood as provisional, yet binding. These practices must witness to God's presence in the world.

Osmer draws on Richard Niebuhr's conception of Christian moral responsibility to augment the activity of prophetic discernment. Niebuhr's model describes patterns of God's action in the world, and fitting patterns of human response. These patterns are based on three images of God: God as Redeemer, God as Creator, and God as Sustainer of Life:²⁹⁵ 1) God the "Redeemer"²⁹⁶ enters into the suffering of creation, especially the suffering of the innocent, seeking to bring good out of evil. The fitting human response is gratitude and faith, as opposed to justifications based on rationalization or

²⁹⁰ Osmer (2008), p. 129.

²⁹¹ Osmer (2008), p.136.

²⁹² Swinton and Mowat (2006), p. 79.

²⁹³ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p. 79.

²⁹⁴ Elaine. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, Oreg: Wipf and Stock, 1996); cited in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p.153.

²⁹⁵ Richard Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," in *Christian Century* 59 (1942), pp. 630-633: cited in *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), pp.145-146.

²⁹⁶ Osmer (2008), pp. 145-146.

victimization; 2) God the “Creator”²⁹⁷ affirms the goodness of creation and bestows dignity and worth on all life forms. The fitting human response is acknowledgement of the sanctity of all God’s creatures, with a call for respect and justice in human communities; 3) God the “Sustainer”²⁹⁸ orders and cares for creation. The fitting human response is to work to discern God’s will in ordering the processes and structures that are life-giving.

Aspects of these patterns, though not formally recognized, already subsist within the SGH community. The purpose of this research is to identify the patterns and give them expression in a form that is simple and life giving. The pilgrimage motif, with its universal appeal and its ease of adaptation, is a fitting medium. In the SGH context, the practice of virtual pilgrimage is accessible and relevant. Walking is germane to the lifestyles of the people in the community. Walking as an act of meaning engages the transcendent dimension of life while also honouring the multi-faith make-up of the community

3.3 The Proliferation of Sacred Walking

Since the turn of the century there has been a proliferation of sacred walking disciplines across the developed world. There are many reasons for this. In his 2012 reflection on pilgrimage revival, Robert McFarlane alluded to the profusion of motivations for walking: “I met people who walked in search of beauty, in pursuit of grace or in flight from unhappiness...I witnessed walking as non-compliance, walking as fierce star-song, walking as elegy or therapy, walking as reconnection or remembrance,

²⁹⁷ Osmer (2008), p. 146.

²⁹⁸ Osmer (2008), p. 146.

and walking to sharpen the self or to forget it entirely.”²⁹⁹ Amidst the plethora of motives, the spiritual and existential dimensions of walking are manifested in many different walking styles: 1) “Afghan walking”³⁰⁰ is a fast-paced style in which the breathing is synchronized with the rhythm of one’s steps. 2) “Conscious walking”³⁰¹ refers to a meditative style that focuses simultaneously on the bodily sensations and the exterior world; it is both a form of exercise, and training for the mind to remain in the present moment. 3) “Shamanic walking”³⁰² is a guided walk that seeks to heal and inspire by heightening one’s awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. 4) “Labyrinth walking”³⁰³ is a form of representational walking that symbolizes the movement from the mundane to the divine in an individual’s spiritual journey; the labyrinth is a patterned path that is often circular in form; the labyrinth is used as a walking meditation or spiritual practice. 5) “Exilic walking”³⁰⁴ is a journey that involves a period of absence or departure from one’s homeland; it follows the patterns cited biblically in Gen. 12.1 (ESV) and Jeremiah 29: 4-14 (ESV). 6) “Exodus walking”³⁰⁵ is a journey towards liberation, that also involves a people displaced, people in flight, people on the move and seeking refuge; exodus walking resembles the patterns cited in Scripture in Ex. 3:22

²⁹⁹ Robert McFarlane, “Rites of Way: Behind the Pilgrimage Revival,” in *The Guardian* (London: June, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com › Arts › Books › Religion> (accessed Oct. 3, 2017).

³⁰⁰ Isabel Conway, “Stepping Out the Afghan Way,” in *The Irish Times* (Dublin, Apr. 20, 2010). <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/stepping-out-the-afghan-way> (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

³⁰¹ Conscious Walking: <http://mohanji.org/conscious-walking> (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

³⁰² Bickle, Kathryn “How to Do a Shamanic Walk Ritual: Basic Elements – Seven Easy Steps,” *Psyche’s Spring* (Oct. 2013). kathrynbickle.com.../how-to-do-a-shamanic-walk-ritual-basic-elements-seven-easy-steps (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

³⁰³ The Gale Group, Inc., “Labyrinth walking,” *Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine* (2005). www.encyclopedia.com › Medicine. (accessed Oct. 4, 2017).

³⁰⁴ *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheatley, IL: Crossway, 2011).

³⁰⁵ *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (2011).

(ESV). 7) “Pilgrimage walking”³⁰⁶ refers to a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal.

The focus in this research is on pilgrimage walking. The pilgrimage motif weaves together physical journeying, inner transformation and moral growth. It can be a place-oriented journey or a motion-centred journey. The focus is twofold: the redemptive power of the destination and the transformative power of the journey. Variations on pilgrimage as a discipline relate to differences in orientation and purpose.

3.4 Pilgrimage across Cultural and Faith Traditions

Pilgrimage is a universal practice that exists across diverse cultural and faith traditions. In major faith traditions, the faithful are drawn into journeys to sacred centers that have become a focal point for rekindling their faith. The journey, the act of walking is compelling and mysterious. Pilgrimage scholar Ian Reader observes that the practice of making journeys that reinvigorate the faith, and visiting places associated with the presence of holy figures is found in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.³⁰⁷ Reader further notes that pilgrimage is a key theme in religious traditions that are specifically connected with one culture or ethnic community. The Japanese Shinto is an example of this. The pilgrimage theme is likewise important in newly formed contemporary religious movements. An instance of this is the New Age Movement, which has adopted pilgrimage destinations associated with pre-modern times. Two such sites are Sedona, USA, a former Native American spiritual center, and Glastonbury,

³⁰⁶ Alan Morinis, “Introduction: The Territory of the Anthropology of Pilgrimage,” in *Sacred Journeys* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, (1992), p. 4.

³⁰⁷ Reader, Ian (2007). www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 10, 2017).

England, notable for its ties to Celtic mythology.³⁰⁸ The pilgrimage theme also operates at the secular level, with destinations that have no particular religious orientation, but that involve a journey that is profoundly spiritual. This phenomenon frequently takes the form of a commemorative journey to honour fallen soldiers (i.e. the Vietnam Memorial Wall) or deceased cultural heroes (i.e. the gravesite of Elvis Presley at Graceland).³⁰⁹

As a theoretical lens, pilgrimage is at once, spiritual and non-spiritual, Christian and non-Christian. This study is conducted within an open, inclusive Christian spiritual framework. The Christian perspective is important for two reasons: 1) to honour the Catholic origins of SGH and the principles and values which laid the foundation for the mission and work of the community, and 2) to locate the research in a context that recognizes that all spiritual experience must originate and take place within a framework of interpretation. A Christian frame of reference positions the research in a faith tradition with a distinct origin and foundation that also has the capacity to be dialogical and intra-religious.³¹⁰

3.5 An Historical Overview of Pilgrimage in the Christian Tradition

Pilgrimage in Christianity was presaged by walking disciplines in other faith traditions. The link between walking and spirituality is older than Christianity. The idea of sacred travel runs deep in human religion. Pilgrimage is inscribed in “man’s condition as one who is on a journey in history, in memories, and in biblical symbolism.”³¹¹ This section traces the evolution of pilgrimage from the Old Testament era, to themes

³⁰⁸ Reader (2007) www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 10, 2017).

³⁰⁹ Reader (2007) www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 10, 2017).

³¹⁰ Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), pp. 26-27.

³¹¹ René Laurentin, *Pilgrimages, Sanctuaries, Icons, Apparitions: An Historical and Scriptural Account* (Milford, OH: The Foundation, 1994), p. 19.

elaborated in the Patristic and Early Christian age, through the Medieval, Modern, and Post-Modern times.

3.5.1 Precursors to Christian Pilgrimage

In the pre-Christian Roman Empire, journeys to sacred sites were a common practice in the pagan Greek and Roman religious traditions. Each of these sites was associated with a particular god - Zeus, Apollo or Asklepoil.³¹²

Festivals at the sites paid homage to the patron god with athletic, equestrian and musical competitions. The range of rituals at a Pan-Hellenic festival included “consultation of an oracle..., sleeping by the shrine of the god in search of healing, giving ex voto offerings... in thanks for a cure or other benefit received, and viewing the image of the god and the votive offerings which demonstrated past cures.”³¹³

While there is a lack of consensus among scholars as to whether these journeys constituted pilgrimages, they were the precursor to the practice of pilgrimage in the Christian tradition.

3.5.2 Pilgrimage in the Old Testament

Scripture is replete with references to pilgrimage. The practice of pilgrimage predates the life of Christ. In the Book of Genesis, the idea of pilgrimage is fundamental to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and the life of exile they subsequently endured (Gen. 3). Throughout the Old Testament, physical journeys have a

³¹² Dee Dyas, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage: Journey, Spirituality and Daily Life Through the Centuries*. York: University of York Center for Christianity and Culture (2007).

www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html. (accessed Oct. 10, 2017).

³¹³ Dyas (2007) www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 12, 2017).

profound spiritual significance. In God's summons to Abraham to "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen 12:1), Abraham was removed from his homeland to found a new nation (Gen 15:7). The call required a definite response, a physical movement, and while the journey was related to the idea of forced travel, it was without the negative connotation of banishment. After Abraham's summoning, there were numerous other divine calls throughout the biblical story: God called Noah: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark..." Gen 7:1); Joseph was brought down to Egypt (Gen 39:1); and Moses, leader of the exodus, was summoned to lead an entire people through a barren land (Ex 5:1). In the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites travelled through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. Gordon McConville explains the Old Testament link between pilgrimage and place. The attachment to place was based on Israel's memory of its delivery from slavery and its formation as the covenant people of Yahweh.³¹⁴ The city of Jerusalem was itself a centre of pilgrimage where God could be encountered in a special way.

3.5.3 Early Christian Pilgrimage

Constantine's mother, Empress Helena, initially brought pilgrimage into vogue by travelling to the Holy Land in 326AD.³¹⁵ By the time of Constantine's conversion, the living tradition of "sancta loca," or travel to holy places pertaining to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, was already thriving.³¹⁶ We have always had a deep human

³¹⁴ Gordon McConville, "Pilgrimage and 'Place': An Old Testament View," in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004), p. 17.

³¹⁵ Christian George, "The Discipline of Christian Pilgrimage," in *Travelling Well* (Kansas City, MI: Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University, 2016), p. 20.

³¹⁶ George (2016), p. 20.

need to identify certain places as significant. Pilgrimage is informed by a “theology of place.”³¹⁷ Place is not just a geographic concept, but a concept that is storied and deeply shared. Pilgrimage sites are steeped in the Christian narrative. Christians have always made pilgrimages to where Christ was born and where He died, where He spoke and where He walked. Peter Scott addresses the paradox of place pilgrimage in the new dispensation: place becomes “sacramentalized” when it is associated with the community’s liturgical memory, and is thereby, constitutive of its identity.³¹⁸ By encountering the places of Jesus’ life, passion, crucifixion, resurrection, we are called to repentance, to see the disunity and divisions in our own place (the place to which we will return): we are summoned to conversion and to service, summoned to transform need and loss into hospitality and care.³¹⁹

Christianity modified the Judaic attachment to place in two ways: 1) in the “universalization” of salvation, and 2) in the separation of pilgrimage from exclusive association with Jerusalem.³²⁰ Christ and the new dispensation broke the particularity of place. Christians no longer regarded Jerusalem as God’s address.³²¹ Jerome, who travelled to Bethlehem on pilgrimage, famously argued that a holy life is more important than a Jerusalem venture.³²²

³¹⁷ Bartholomew (2004), pp. 207-208.

³¹⁸ Peter Scott, “A Theology of Eucharistic Place: Pilgrimage as Sacramental,” in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004), p. 164.

³¹⁹ Scott (2004), p. 165.

³²⁰ McConville (2004), p. 22.

³²¹ Craig Bartholomew, “Journeying On: A Concluding Reflection,” in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004), p. 203.

³²² Philip Schaff, “Pilgrimage and Procession,” in *History of the Christian Church*, Section 89 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Arthur Boers describes the relentless movement of the pilgrim: the themes of “journeying, wandering, exile and pilgrimage are found throughout scripture...and unfold in the New Testament with the movements of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, and then Egypt, the visit of the Magi (the first Christian pilgrims), and Jesus’ travels with “nowhere to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20).”³²³ In the New Testament, Christians are described as ‘pilgrims and strangers on the earth’, ‘temporary residents’ whose true home is in heaven (1 Peter 2:11; Heb. 11:13). Boers notes the “rich implication of journeying and ‘being on the way’...carried forward in the apostles missionary journeys to ‘the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8)”³²⁴ En route to the heavenly homeland, the Christian believer is on a journey through an often alien world (John 14:6; Mark 8:34).

The notion of pilgrimage as a paradigm for life conformed to Christ was first articulated by the apostles and the Church Fathers. By the fourth century, the pilgrimage paradigm evolved as a substitute for monastic life. Desert pilgrimage was an alternative devotion for those whose responsibilities obliged them to live in the world. As Christian pilgrimage to places considered holy developed, *peregrinus* took on a further sense within Christian thought, describing a traveller with a particular religious goal.³²⁵ This evolved into the age of martyrdom, when it was thought that the objects and places of martyrdom held special redemptive powers. The saints and their relics were a dominant feature of the early medieval landscape, and pilgrimages were understood in terms of penitence, expiation, purification and redemption.³²⁶

³²³ Arthur Boers, *The Way is Made by Walking* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), p. 40.

³²⁴ Boers (2007), p.41.

³²⁵ Dyas (2007) www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 12, 2017).

³²⁶ Tomasi (2002), p. 13.

3.5.4 Medieval Pilgrimage

While pursuit of the miraculous through the veneration of the saints and their relics was considered the “milk-teeth”³²⁷ of the medieval Church, the Crusades were the central event of the medieval era. The Crusades ushered in the vicarious pilgrimage: pilgrimage by proxy and patronage pilgrimage. Jonathan Sumption elaborates the “pilgrimage without travel”³²⁸ option in his expansive account of medieval pilgrimage. The practice of indulgences, and the belief that pilgrimage could be a form of “ritual purgation” was the cornerstone on which vicarious pilgrimage developed.³²⁹ Sumpton observes that the practice of indulgences taught the people that merit is a transferable commodity: “If indulgences taught men to regard merit as a transferable commodity, then it was, perhaps, natural for them to think of it (me as transferable.”³³⁰ The purchase of indulgences became a form of repentance, a way of bypassing the need for an actual pilgrimage journey. A later variation on the vicarious pilgrimage was the notional or imaginary pilgrimage undertaken in local convents and communities. Kathryn Rudy conducted an extensive review of this method of “walking in Christ’s footsteps” by Christians of the Middle Ages who lacked the material means, or were constrained by the *stabilitas loci* that accompanied life in a cloister.³³¹ Women in convents developed elaborate strategies for virtually visiting Rome and Jerusalem. This concept will be further elaborated under the “Virtual Pilgrimage” section of this chapter.

³²⁷ Jonathan Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage: The Medieval Journey to God* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 1975), p. 79.

³²⁸ Sumption (1975), p. 428.

³²⁹ Sumption (1975), p. 427.

³³⁰ Sumption (1975), p. 428.

³³¹ Kathryn Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imaging Jerusalem in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), p. 20.

By the Late Middle ages, sixteenth century protestant reformers had begun to denounce pilgrimage as an idolatrous practice. Martin Luther condemned the practice as manipulation of the laity, and a reversal of the movement in the working of God's grace. Pilgrimage, for Luther, had taken on an erroneous connotation: it involved moving towards God in order to merit grace. In a trenchant critique directed to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation in 1520 Luther proclaimed:

All pilgrimages should be dropped. There is no good in them: no commandment enjoins them, no obedience attaches to them. Rather do these pilgrimages give countless occasions to commit sin and to despise God's commandments. This is why there are so many beggars who commit all kinds of mischief by going on these pilgrimages.³³²

In an analysis of Luther's condemnation of pilgrimage, Graham Tomlin further explains Luther's rationale for the abolition of pilgrimage. The distinguishing feature in his argument is Luther's claim that salvation had nothing to do with the 'human merit' principle that permeated medieval theology.³³³ Pilgrimage was inexorably linked to the merit-based theology Luther rejected: pilgrimage had become so infected with 'works righteousness' that it was better to discontinue the practice altogether.³³⁴ A second reason Luther denounced pilgrimage had to do with the idea of restricting God to discrete geographic locations: he argued that under the new dispensation, God was not confined to one place.³³⁵ His third objection to pilgrimage related to the escapist lifestyle it promoted:

³³² Martin Luther, Vol. 44 in *Luther's Works, 55 Vols* (Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1975), p. 171.

³³³ Graham Tomlin "Protestants and Pilgrimage" in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004), p. 111.

³³⁴ Tomlin (2004), p. 113.

³³⁵ Tomlin (2004), p. 113.

Luther felt the time and money invested in pilgrimage would be better spent on helping family, neighbours, or the poor.³³⁶ His fourth reason for condemning pilgrimage was the corruption and extortion associated with pilgrimage destinations: Luther interpreted many of the practices as “money-making scams by avaricious priests and prelates” which brought little if any benefit to the participants.³³⁷ The singular valid reason for embarking on pilgrimage consisted in a personal motivation born out of a “devotion to the honour of the saints, the glory of God, and his own edification.”³³⁸

The Reformation coincided with the end of the Middle Ages and the advent of the Modern Age. The sacred canopy conception of the early and medieval Christian eras was replaced by the enlightenment ideals of the Renaissance. With the rise of secularism and the decline of religion in public life, pilgrimage had largely vanished. Victor and Edith Turner wryly observed that while the Protestant ethic with its emphasis on hard work, thrift, virtue and stasis set the stage for capitalism, it was the pilgrimage ethic, with its emphasis on the journey that created the networks of communication and transportation essential to the building of capitalism.³³⁹ The culture of travel changed radically. The journey had assumed the posture of an exploration involving an assortment of travellers: merchants, aristocrats and intellectuals.³⁴⁰ The shift of focus from questing for the sacred, to questing for knowledge and pleasure, ushered in the “Grand Tour” phenomenon,³⁴¹ and from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, “sentimental” travellers were drawn to the landscape, culture and historical heritage of the countries they visited.³⁴²

³³⁶ Tomlin (2004), p. 115.

³³⁷ Tomlin (2004), p. 116.

³³⁸ Luther, Vol. 31 (1955-1975), p. 199.

³³⁹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Il Pellegrinnaggio* (Argo:Lecce, 1997), pp. 285-286.

³⁴⁰ Tomasi (2002), p. 16.

³⁴¹ Tomasi (2002), p. 15.

³⁴² Tomasi (2002), p. 16.

The new sciences and an abiding spirit of criticism left “scant respect for traditions, especially for religious tradition,”³⁴³ and pilgrimage all but disappeared.

3.5.5 Modern and Post Modern Pilgrimage

With the rise of secularism and the decline of religion in public life, pilgrimage fell largely into decline in early modernity. For three centuries pilgrimage languished before tentatively flickering back to life in the late twentieth century. By the new millennium, it had exploded across the developed world. For the purpose of this research as a practical theological project, the historical perspective contributes to a contextual understanding of the contemporary surge in walking disciplines, and the revival of post-millennial pilgrimage. Two important contributors to this revival were found to be: 1) the quest-based spirituality of the post-modern West and 2) spiritual tourism.

In post-modernity, pilgrimage became one of the answers to the “spirituality of quest”³⁴⁴ that characterizes our civilization. Pilgrimage and its variants point to a way of appropriating the spiritual dimension at a time when conventional meaning-making frameworks are collapsing. The pilgrimage paradigm functions as a meta-narrative: it provides a context for all kinds of spiritual experiences inside and outside the institutional church. As such, it has the potential to give value and direction to daily life: it fosters a sojourner’s identity among contemporary seekers, and is able to assume different forms to suit the needs of different situations.

Another contributor to the revival of pilgrimage is spiritual tourism. Spiritual tourism has deep roots, extending back to early modernity. In a more recent value shift, a

³⁴³ Tomasi (2002), p. 17.

³⁴⁴ Taylor (2007), pp. 300-308.

burgeoning religious tourism industry has once again inclined towards the sacred end of the spectrum. Inspired by the universal thirst for meaning and wisdom, this shift is based on a deep appreciation of the rich and brilliantly diverse spiritual heritage of humanity, prompting a new willingness to embrace inter-cultural and inter-faith practices. Spiritual tourism has re-defined a form of pilgrimage that values the journey as well as the destination.

The emphasis on the journey (as opposed to the destination) has been carried forward from the post-medieval context. Luigi Tomasi believes that while the pilgrimage destination is important, the transformative power of the journey has taken pre-eminence.³⁴⁵ Tomasi uses the term ‘homo viator’ to describe the human sojourner through the ages on a quest for the supernatural.³⁴⁶ Theologian Doris Donnelly avows that as humans, we hold two citizenships, one in the kingdom of roots, and one in the kingdom of motion. According to Donnelly, “Although a high level of comfort enjoins us to keep two feet on the ground near home, friends and familiar surroundings, the truth is that we are also occasionally grasped by an intense desire to forsake the security of home-base to travel across uncharted and sometimes hazardous terrain.”³⁴⁷ Richard Niebuhr describes this proclivity as “the irresistible conviction that we acquire ourselves not in abiding only, but (also) in moving”³⁴⁸ The moving is towards a destination that has less to do with externals and more to do with the internal realm of transformation.

The pilgrimage motif has prevailed through the storied history of the Christian Church. Contemporary pilgrimage is fundamentally characterized by the practice of

³⁴⁵Tomasi (2002), p. 13.

³⁴⁶ Tomasi (2002), p. 1.

³⁴⁷ Doris Donnelly, “Pilgrims and Tourists: Conflicting Metaphors for the Christian Journey to God,” *Spirituality Today*, Spring Vol. 44 No. 1 (1992), p.20.

³⁴⁸ Richard Niebuhr, “Pilgrims and Pioneers.” in *Parabola* IX (3) (August, 1984), p. 10.

extracting old conventions from diverse sources and adapting them to new innovative contexts and forms. Tomasi observes that “the typical human desire to seek out the sacred though what symbolizes or articulates ‘the sacred’ today is different from the past: the form of pilgrimage has changed, though its meaning endures.”³⁴⁹

3.6 Pilgrimage as an Enduring Motif in Christianity

Pilgrimage has been an enduring motif throughout the history of Christianity, flourishing and declining across the ages in tandem with fluctuations in religious and cultural life. As a multivalent concept, pilgrimage includes ideas of journey, experiencing exile, living as a pilgrim or sojourner, and the quest for a homeland. 'Pilgrim' and 'pilgrimage' are words that have carried a range of meanings over the centuries. The English term 'pilgrim' originally comes from the Latin word *peregrinus* (*per*, through + *ager*, field, country, land), which means a foreigner, a stranger, someone on a journey, or a temporary resident.³⁵⁰ *Peregrinus* is also used in the Vulgate version of the Bible to translate the Hebrew *gur* (sojourner) and the Greek *parepidemos* (temporary resident).³⁵¹ These terms form the basis of a central image of the Christian life. Christians, whose true home is in heaven, are identified as strangers, exiles, and temporary residents in this world. Biblical travel terminology typically addresses the path of human experience as a peregrinatio. In the Judeo-Christian world, the verb *peregrinari* is constructed around the general meaning of "traveling" (Gen 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; Ex 6:4). *Peregrinari* also alludes to the social status of the pilgrim and the protection afforded by middle-eastern laws of hospitality. The host is obliged to provide the traveler with food,

³⁴⁹ Tomasi (2002), p. 20.

³⁵⁰ Dyas (2007) www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 12, 2017).

³⁵¹ Dyas (2007), www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html (accessed Oct. 10, 2017).

water, and shelter. The powerful code of hospitality is accentuated in the admonition: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb 13:2).

In the Medieval conception, pilgrimage is an archetypal image for Christian living. In her exploration of the pilgrimage motif in medieval pilgrimage, Dee Dyas finds the overarching conception to be pilgrimage as a paradigm for the life journey.³⁵² The motif contains three elements: morality, interiority, and geographic place.³⁵³ The central, non-negotiable expression of the life pilgrimage is the living of daily life in obedience to God, in the place on one's calling, resisting sin and serving others, whether as labourer, lord of the manor, merchant or priest.³⁵⁴ Dyas finds strands of commonality between medieval pilgrimage and contemporary pilgrimage. These common threads include a new awareness of the world; a sense of wonder, openness, and discovery; a willingness to embrace adventure; and entry into a new community of fellow travellers.³⁵⁵

In a more contemporary focus, Doris Donnelly identifies three interpretations of the pilgrimage motif: the literal, the allegorical, and the spiritual. The literal pilgrimage involves a physical journey to a place made holy by the Christ, the biblical Mary, or one of the saints, with Jerusalem or Rome representing the most popular sites.³⁵⁶ Other favourite locations include the shrine of St. James at Compostela, the cathedral of Thomas Becket at Canterbury, and the sites of Marian apparitions at Lourdes, Knock,

³⁵² Dee Dyas, "Medieval Patterns of Pilgrimage. A Mirror for Today?" in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2004) p. 97.

³⁵³ Dyas (2004), p. 97.

³⁵⁴ Dyas (2004), p. 98.

³⁵⁵ Dyas (2004), p. 93.

³⁵⁶ Donnelly (1992), p. 21.

Czestochowa, Guadalupe, and Medjugorje.³⁵⁷ The allegorical pilgrimage refers to a journey through a temporary abode on earth to an everlasting home in the world beyond.³⁵⁸ The spiritual pilgrimage extends its understanding beyond the outer physical pilgrimage to the internal spiritual one. Depth, not distance, is the goal. What is valued is not mileage on the odometer, but lived experience consonant with becoming a more fully alive human being.³⁵⁹ The spiritual pilgrimage is given succinct expression by Herman Hesse in his journey to the East as one of a "procession of believers . . . moving towards the Home of Light."³⁶⁰

As a theoretical lens, the scope of the pilgrimage motif is expansive, capable of addressing both Christian and non-Christian belief systems in settings that are both secular and sacred. This thesis explores Christian pilgrimage as a pathway to spiritual renewal and transformation, focusing specifically on the volunteer sector within the SGH community. SGH has been influenced by the trend towards cultural and faith diversity. The practice of pilgrimage is one common denominator among the variable faith traditions represented at SGH.

3.7 Themes in Twenty-First Century Christian Pilgrimage

Christian Pilgrimage has undergone a renaissance in the twenty-first century. Contemporary pilgrimage differs from traditional pilgrimage in a number of ways. The discipline of Anthropology has effectively captured these differences in research into new realms of inquiry. The word "pilgrimage" is being used in increasingly broader and

³⁵⁷ Donnelly (1992), p. 21.

³⁵⁸ Donnelly (1992), p. 21.

³⁵⁹ Donnelly (1992), p. 21.

³⁶⁰ Herman Hesse, *The Journey East* (New York, NY: Noonday Press, 1986), pp. 12-13.

more secular contexts. Anthropologist Alan Morinis proposed a definition of pilgrimage which reflects this more inclusive signification: “the pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal.”³⁶¹ Morinis’ comprehensive definition is also applicable to destination sites which are non-religious, places he describes as repositories of collective ideals: Graceland, the Washington Monument, and Cape Kennedy are examples.³⁶² This view of the pilgrimage as a repository for a culture’s ideals extends the boundaries of the sacred into the precincts of the secular. Morinis identifies six different types of sacred-secular journeys configured around the motivation for the journey. This typology is equally adaptable at the level of virtual pilgrimage: 1) devotional, which has motivated much of the Christian pilgrimage traffic over the millennia; 2) instrumental, which is undertaken to achieve a finite, worldly goal, such as a cure for illness; 3) normative, which is part of a ritual cycle; 4) obligatory, which is imposed as a duty or a form of penance; 5) wandering, which, conceived in the image of Abraham, is the quest for timeless eternity; and 6) initiatory, which includes all pilgrimages which have as their goal the transformation of the participant. Each type of journey represents a point on the formal-informal continuum of structure, from the emphasis on social ritual in the formal pilgrimage to the emphasis on authentic, direct experience in the informal pilgrimage.³⁶³

The old pilgrimage paradigm has distinct ties to organized religion, while new patterns incorporate secular meanings and models of travel. Researchers have started to recognize the secular aspects of pilgrimage, and to acknowledge that other places are also

³⁶¹ Morinis (2010), p.450.

³⁶¹ Morinis (2010), p. 4.

³⁶² Morinis (1992), p. 5.

³⁶³ Morinis (1992), pp. 10-14.

worthy of investigation, including spiritual festivals and sites, war memorials and graves, secular shrines, sports activities, and sacred constructions.³⁶⁴ While debate swirls around the distinction between “pilgrimage and tourism,” Noga Collins-Kreiner makes the further point that no place is intrinsically sacred: rather, pilgrimages and their attendant landscapes, like all places, are social constructions: “pilgrimages are the products of the norms and values of social tradition and order, and, at the same time, have played a meaningful role in shaping such culture and tradition.”³⁶⁵ This could be the point of digression for practical theology, the juncture at which the theologian questions the human penchant for control in favour of a posture of openness to the movements of God’s Spirit. I would argue that it is precisely the intrinsically sacred nature of pilgrimage that has caused it to flourish in the spiritually-famished cultures of the developed world. This section explores the emergent themes in twenty-first century pilgrimage as the new paradigm takes shape.

3.7.1 Pilgrimage as Sacred Archetype

Pilgrimage is a form of a sacred archetypal behavior with the capacity to animate movement from one state of consciousness to another. The concept of pilgrimage is intricately linked to notions of journey, travel and voyage. Geographic displacement has become a symbol of an interior, non spatial operation. The essence of the archetype is the metaphorical use of the familiar to grasp the elusive and mysterious. All journeys start with a departure that involves the uprooting of the individual. Departure implies

³⁶⁴ N. Collins-Kreiner, “Researching Pilgrimage: Continuity and Transformations,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Elsevier, 2010), pp. 441-445.

³⁶⁵ Collins-Kreiner (2010), p. 450.

separation, loneliness, alienation, even exile. The normal reaction is nostalgia and homesickness.

Punishment and purification are a corollary of Biblical and mythological archetypes of pilgrimage. The "penance of travel" theme commenced with Adam's expulsion from the Earthly Paradise, and was subsequently set upon Cain, condemned to wandering about following his fratricide (Gen. 3:23). Similarly in the other religions, penance and purification are linked to the concept of travel and pilgrimage. Buddhism invites its faithful to visit four sacred sites, and Islam promotes pilgrimage to the Ka'ba (al-Hajj) and to the holy tombs throughout the Islamic world. Muhammad explicitly endorsed the pilgrimage quest for religious knowledge.³⁶⁶

The pilgrimage archetype has evolved to include other nuances of meaning. The archetypal pattern is implicitly enacted through prophets and kings who are called, sent, and ordered to go forth, to speak, to lead or to go into battle: Moses (Ex. 3:15); Hezekiah (Ch. 28:1-4); Jeremiah (Jer. 1:17-18); Ezekiel (Ez. 2:3-5); Jesus (Mk. 16: 15-16); the Apostles (Acts 13:4). For Augustine, the verb *peregrinari* evoked a transformative shift from an initial negative movement away from God, to a subsequent positive return to God (De Civitate Dei, 19:18). In his Holy See treatise on pilgrimage, Dr. Adalbert Rebic develops the concept of modern day pilgrimage: "Pilgrimage symbolizes the experience of man as a traveller, (*homo viator*) who sets out, as soon as he leaves the maternal womb, on his journey through the time and space of his existence."³⁶⁷ Humanity is travelling. The movement of mankind contains the "germ of a fundamental desire for a transcendent horizon of truth, justice and peace. It gives witness to a restlessness which

³⁶⁶ Christer Hedin, "Muslim Pilgrimage as Education by Experience," in *Pilgrimages Today* (Symposium at Abo, Finland, 2009), p. 191.

³⁶⁷ Adalbert Rebic, "Pilgrimage 2000," *The Document of the Holy See* (1999), p. 7.

does not become still but in the infinite God, in the harbour where man can refresh himself from his anguish."³⁶⁸ Beyond the symbolic import of the human quest for peace and justice, the pilgrimage archetype has seen tangible transformations in the realm of human rights advancement, the proliferation of science and technology, the increase in inter-religious dialogue, and the rise of hospitality towards peoples and nations fleeing war and disaster.

3.7.2 Pilgrimage as Ritual Revitalization

Contemporary pilgrimage is a form of ritual revitalization. Post, Piper and van Uden conducted an analysis of the accounts of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago to describe the process of ritual revitalization. A “ritual” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “a sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to a set sequence”³⁶⁹ Rituals are a feature of all human societies. Rituals include worship rites, sacraments, rites of passage, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, marriages, funerals, coronations, graduations, sporting events, parades, and activities performed for a concrete purpose (jury trials, scientific symposia, saying hello, shaking hands, etc.).³⁷⁰ Rituals have a surplus of meaning: they evoke a reality beyond.

Pilgrimage is a new-old ritual. Post et. al. drew attention to the connection between the post-modern resurgence of pilgrimage and the ritual revitalization process. Revitalization is often accompanied by the “conferment of new meaning, new functions

³⁶⁸ Rebic (1999), p. 7.

³⁶⁹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual> (accessed Jan. 4, 2018).

³⁷⁰ Donald Brown, *Human Universals* (United States: McGraw Hill, 1991), p. 139

and new underlying factors and arguments.”³⁷¹ The researchers use the concept of “musealization” to explore re-appropriated meanings from the past.³⁷² As the term suggests, musealization refers to the transposition of elements from the past into a new context, where new functions and meanings are conferred upon them.

In a related study, Schnell and Pali researched the meaning-making potential of a Camino pilgrimage from the perspective of “implicit religiosity.”³⁷³ Implicit religiosity involves the use of originally religious modes of expression such as myth and ritual to generate meaning.³⁷⁴ The researchers found that contemporary pilgrimage often takes on the character of a “personal ritual.”³⁷⁵ Personal rituals are “formalized patterns of action pointing beyond the actual event to a particular meaning imbued by the actor.”³⁷⁶ The most frequently reported motive for undertaking a pilgrimage as a personal ritual is not religious. It is rather the need for clarification spurred by a crisis of meaning or a sense of need or quest.³⁷⁷

There is both continuity and discontinuity of tradition in the revitalization of pilgrimage: on the one hand, the Camino is a cherished tradition; on the other, it has been altered and adapted to conform to a twenty-first century context. The pilgrimage acts as a form of “ritual-vessel”³⁷⁸ through which the past is evoked and deployed in accordance with the insights and innovations of individual pilgrims. Used in this way, pilgrimage

³⁷¹ Post, Paul, Jos Piper & Marinus van Uden, “The Modern Pilgrim: A Study of Contemporary Pilgrims’ Accounts,” *The Modern Pilgrim: Interdisciplinary Explorations of Christian Pilgrimage* (Peeters: Tilburg: NL, 1998), p. 223.

³⁷² Post et. al. (1998), p. 234.

³⁷³ Tatjana Schnell and Sarah Pali, “Pilgrimage Today: The Meaning-Making Potential of Ritual,” in *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, Vol. 16 (9), (2013) pp. 887-902.

³⁷⁴ Schell and Pali (2013), p. 887.

³⁷⁵ Schell and Pali (2013), p. 889.

³⁷⁶ Schell and Pali (2013), p. 891.

³⁷⁷ Schell and Pali (2013), p. 899.

³⁷⁸ Post et. al. (1998), p. 237.

acts as a conduit for contemporary manifestations of spirituality. The concept of pilgrimage has been modified to include such alternative genres as labyrinth walking, localized pilgrimage, secular pilgrimage, and virtual pilgrimage. For the purpose of this project, the focus is on virtual pilgrimage.

3.7.3 Pilgrimage as Walking Obeisance

Pilgrimage as walking obeisance is a notion more commonly associated with pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition. The reference to paying obeisance is generally associated with the annual yatra to the Amaranth cave shrine in South Kashmir, considered to be one of the holiest shrines in Hinduism.³⁷⁹ Obeisance is defined as “a gesture or movement of the body expressing reverence or respect; an attitude associated with this gesture as deference or homage.”³⁸⁰ The concept of “walking obeisance” was adapted by theologian Alan Jorgenson in an interpretation which located pilgrimage within a theology of creation. In such a construal, the first task according to Jorgenson is “to drink deeply of our context.”³⁸¹ For those with ears to hear and eyes to see, the paths we trod are replete with the divine, whether a sacred temple or a secular enclave, whether wilderness trails or urban alleyways. Each step is “a deferential act honouring the sacred ground that bears our journey,”³⁸² moving us ever closer to the mystery of life.

The phenomenon of walking as a spiritual discipline has intensified with the revitalization of pilgrimage in the 21st century. Walking Obeisance pays homage to the

³⁷⁹ “New shrine on Amarnath route,” *The Hindu* (Chennai, India. 30 May, 2005).

³⁸⁰ William Morris, ed., *The Heritage Illustrated Dictionary of The English Language* (1975), Boston: American Heritage Publishing Company, p. 904.

³⁸¹ Allen Jorgenson, “A Christian Systematic Theology of Pilgrimage, or, Walking Obeisance” (presented at the Ottawa Theological Congress, July, 2015).

³⁸² Jorgenson (2015).

places of divine connection, where the veil between the physical and spiritual is thin. Obeisance is attuned to the inner and outer landscape of the journey: it honours the external elements of the natural world and is moved by the internal shifts of perception and feeling. While we each must walk the path to revelation and truth alone, a posture of obeisance heightens our awareness of being deeply connected, a part of everything and everyone on this planet, moving / emerging into spirited living and leading.

3.7.4 Pilgrimage as a Focal Practice

Pilgrimage as a “focal practice” is a concept adapted by Arthur Boers. In a theological reflection on his Camino pilgrimage, Boers describes the discipline of walking as a “focal” activity, an antidote to activities which lead to a life that is “disconnected, disembodied and disoriented.”³⁸³ The idea of a focal practice originates with Albert Borgmann, who describes the two aspects of focal reality in terms of 1) its ability to gather social material and arrange it around itself, and 2) its ability to inform truth, to make it central, clear, and articulate.”³⁸⁴ Examples of focal things according to Borgmann are the wilderness, music, gardening, and the culture of the table.³⁸⁵ He emphasizes the importance of going beyond focal things to focal practices. Focal practices involve the rhythm of repetition of discipline. They engage the mind and the body, and have the ability to “center and illuminate our lives.”³⁸⁶ Borgmann contends that “...without a practice, an engaging action or event can momentarily light up our lives, but it cannot order and orient it focally... Through a practice we are able to accomplish what

³⁸³ Arthur Boer, *The Way Is Made By Walking* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), p. 137.

³⁸⁴ Borgmann, Albert, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 197.

³⁸⁵ Borgmann (1984), p. 207.

³⁸⁶ Borgmann (1984), p. 4.

remains unattainable when aimed at in a series of individual decisions and acts.”³⁸⁷ In our culture of distraction, with the abiding sense that there must be a better way, focal practices provide the context for reflection, discernment, and integration.

While focal places like the Camino provide glimpses of “Kingdom possibilities,”³⁸⁸ focal practices like a walking discipline enable us to honour that Kingdom vision. Arthur Boers describes focal reality as a thing, place or practice that is shaped by three qualities: 1) it has a “commanding presence” that requires effort and discipline, skills and habits, 2) it makes wide-ranging connections with other people and with history, nature and God., and 3) it emanates a “centering” or “orienting” power that helps us recognize our most important priorities.³⁸⁹ Focal realities are life-giving. They inspire us, orient us, and empower us. The Camino is in every sense a focal reality: It can only be engaged by walking hundreds of miles, a taxing feat that involves moving at an unaccustomed pace. Pilgrims are connected with other pilgrims, past and present; with the people who offer hospitality along the way; with Spain and its Catholicism; and with the geography of mountains, plains, and forests across the Northern region of the country. Finally, the Camino is a place where priorities are pondered and often realigned.

Virtual pilgrimage is an extension of the link between walking and spirituality. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been references to walking as a spiritual act, walking in faith, and keeping faith with one’s feet. On the Camino de Santiago it is said: ‘The way is made by walking,’ or as one pilgrim professed, “the way is replete with

³⁸⁷ Borgmann (1984), p. 207.

³⁸⁸ Boers (2007), p. 135.

³⁸⁹ Boers (2007), p. 135.

The Way.”³⁹⁰ In a localized setting, virtual pilgrimage is ‘The Way,’ a focal practice, a form of prayer and a restorative healing discipline.

3.7.5 Pilgrimage as Secular Worship

The global resurgence of pilgrimage in the new millennium has extended the reach of the sacred beyond faith-based practice into the secular realm. The ubiquitous allure of pilgrimage in recent decades has pushed it beyond the boundaries of the formally religious. Collings-Kreiner makes the point that pilgrimages are the products of “the norms and values of social tradition and order, and, at the same time, have played a meaningful role in shaping that culture and tradition.”³⁹¹ In a 2002 study, Davidson and Gitlitz observed that since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the exclusively religious scope of pilgrimage has broadened to include secular practices. It is the moment in time when Americans and Europeans head out to places such as Niagara Falls and Yellowstone Park to interface with nature on the grounds that such places are “visible manifestations of the deity.”³⁹²

The “new mobility paradigm” has encouraged researchers to recognize the secular aspects of pilgrimage. Secular pilgrimages typically have no specific religious orientation, though the journey may have a deep spiritual significance for its participants. Dee Dyas notes that memorials commemorating the dead are a prime example of this phenomenon: the war graves of Flanders and northern France, the Vietnam War Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, and the home and grave of Michael Jackson are

³⁹⁰ Jorgenson, (July, 2015).

³⁹¹ Collins-Kreiner (2010), p. 450.

³⁹² L.K. Davidson and D. M., *Pilgrimage from the Ganges to Graceland: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2002), p. 582.

present day examples.³⁹³ Many participants describe journeys to these locations as pilgrimages. The action of being drawn to a place of special significance and participating in a meaningful ritual has a universal quality to it. The pilgrimage idiom has been used to explore ritualistic practices which teeter on the edge of the secular, but which resemble the sacred journey in intention and intensity. Examples abound from New Age journeys to Mount Shasta,³⁹⁴ to the Run for the Wall motorcycle journey,³⁹⁵ to white-water kayaking in Colorado.³⁹⁶

One strand of research claims that pilgrimage and tourism involve movement in opposite directions. Cohen argues that in pilgrimage the individual travels from the periphery toward the cultural centre, whereas in modern tourism, they move away from their cultural centre into the periphery.³⁹⁷ Cohen distinguished five main modes of touristic experiences (recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential). Each type occupies a spectrum between the experiences of the pleasure seeking tourist on one end, to the experience of searching for meaning at the other extreme.³⁹⁸ The “recreational” tourist is on a journey of entertainment and recreation, and is only slightly different from the “diversionary” tourist who is escaping from ‘meaningless’ life. In the “experiential” mode, tourists alienated from their own society search for meaning in the lives of others through travel. Finally, the “existential” tourist is one who has elected to switch centres. Their life ‘at home’ is seen as a kind of exile, while life ‘on holiday’ at their new centre is felt to be the ‘true life’, and is almost

³⁹³ Dyas (2007). www.york.ac.uk/projects/pilgrimage/intro.html. (accessed Nov. 30, 2017).

³⁹⁴ Madeline Duntley, “Spiritual Tourism and Frontier Esotericism at Mount Shasta, California,” in *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 5:2 (2014) pp. 123-150.

³⁹⁵ Dubisch and Winkelman (2005), pp. 135-154.

³⁹⁶ Lynn Ross-Bryant, “Sacred Sites: Nature and Nation in the U.S. National Parks,” in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 15.1 (Winter 2005) 31-62.

³⁹⁷ E. Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences,” in *Sociology* 13 (1979), p. 183.

³⁹⁸ Cohen (1979), pp.180-183.

indistinguishable from pilgrimage.³⁹⁹ The existential tourist most resembles the pilgrim in being intellectually and emotionally drawn to a spiritual center remote from their local culture.

Another line of research focuses on the similarities between pilgrimage and tourist travel. Lazar Kalmic maintains that the journey for the tourist, like the pilgrim, involves the search for a focal point that imbues existence with meaning.⁴⁰⁰ Kalmic uses the term ‘secular religion’ to describe the values, ideals, leaders, etc. that are “absolutized” and “divinized” in a process analogous to traditional religion.⁴⁰¹ According to Kalmic, existential tourists, like spiritual tourists, endeavour to “permeate through the membrane of banal, everyday understanding...to reach the state of self-oblivion and self-transcendence.”⁴⁰² The journey is the nexus between the profane and the sacred, with a destination that represents a point of transcendence. Kalmic concludes that both pilgrims and tourists seek supreme sacred centers where the mundane horizontal intersects with the metaphysical vertical.⁴⁰³

The interface of the profane and the sacred is a platform for other variants of the pilgrimage theme, including the ‘lateral ritual’⁴⁰⁴ theorization put forward by Simon Coleman, and the virtual pilgrimage conception that is the focus of this project. Lateral ritual refers to the episodic involvement of Westerners with their official religious structures.⁴⁰⁵ These short, intense episodes provide a means of encountering the sacred,

³⁹⁹ Cohen (1979), pp.180-183.

⁴⁰⁰ Lazar Kalmic, “The Sacral Places and Centers in Tourism as a Secular Pilgrimage,” in *Quaestus Multidisciplinary Research Journal* (Belgrade, 2014), p. 89.

⁴⁰¹ Kalmic (2014), p. 91.

⁴⁰² Kalmic (2014), p. 95.

⁴⁰³ Kalmic (2014), p. 95.

⁴⁰⁴ Simon Coleman, “On Mirrors, Masks and Traps: Ambiguity, Risk and ‘Lateral Participation’ in Ritual” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 23:2 (2009), pp.43–52.

⁴⁰⁵ Coleman (2009), pp. 43-52.

even whilst participants are uninvolved with or even hostile towards organized religion.⁴⁰⁶ In a parallel way, virtual pilgrimage creates a form of ritual practice that echoes traditional religious discipline while also being separate from it. As such, virtual pilgrimage has the capacity to be adapted to both sacred and secular contexts. From the spiritual plane it can be a conduit for encountering the sacred as a faith-based discipline. From the secular plane it encounters the sacred in the manner of a lateral ritual or a ceremonial practice. Both standpoints fulfil the fundamental spiritual need to be elevated above mundane existence and united with the transcendent. Both standpoints are a pathway to renewal and healing.

3.7.5.1 Secular Pilgrimage as a Healing journey

Secular pilgrimage is quintessentially a quest for healing.⁴⁰⁷ In his research on the social psychology of healing in pilgrimage, Eduardo Chemin found that the term healing encompasses a variety of meanings: “the curing of maladies, the rebalancing of the psyche, spiritual recharging, even finding oneself.”⁴⁰⁸ Like religious pilgrimage, secular pilgrimage contains rituals, ceremonies and traditions. The common denominator for both religious and secular pilgrimage is the journey. The features of the pilgrimage journey include: “the ritual nature of the journey; the power of the special site; the connection of the journey to powerful cultural myths; the social and spiritual connections established on the journey; and the transformative nature of the journey, including the transformation

⁴⁰⁶ Coleman (2009), pp. 43-52.

⁴⁰⁷ Dubisch and Winkleman (2005), p. xv.

⁴⁰⁸ Eduardo Chemin, “Mind, Body and Spirit: The Social Psychology of Spirit,” in *Pilgrimage in a Secular Age: Religious and Consumer Landscapes of Late-Modernity* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2011), p.178.

from illness to health.”⁴⁰⁹ Whether the motivation is athletic prowess, cultural indulgence, a search for clarity, or an act of honour and remembrance, the journey carries the hope of healing and transformation.

Heather Warfield explores the transformational aspect of both religious and non-religious pilgrimages. Warfield’s account of the contemporary secular pilgrimage as a catalyst for transformation points to the existence of the sacred in the ordinary places of life. She cites the “Run for the Wall” motorcycle journey from California to the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial in Washington, DC as an example of a transformative secular pilgrimage.⁴¹⁰ Drawing on Jill Dubisch’s 2005 research, she identifies the pilgrimage-like aspects of the ‘Run’: its separation from ordinary life, the danger and hardship which characterize the journey, the rituals which pay tribute to the dead, the sense of liminality created by the roar of motorcycles, and the sacredness of the destination.⁴¹¹ Dubisch’s research identifies other related attributes: the sense of community, the opportunity to re-frame the Vietnam narrative, the context for grieving, and support for those suffering from PTSD.⁴¹² In her analysis of the concept of pilgrimage, Warfield adopts a holistic approach that honours all aspects of the human person: biological, psychological, social and spiritual. She also proposes a model for describing transformation in secular pilgrimage, using the pattern of general stages in a distance, somatic pilgrimage.

⁴⁰⁹ Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman, “Healing the Wounds that are not Visible: A Vietnam Veterans’ Motorcycle Pilgrimage,” in *Pilgrimage and Healing*, J. Dubisch and M. Winkelman, eds. (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2005): pp. 135-154. Cited in Heather Warfield, “Quest for Transformation: An Exploration of Pilgrimage in the Counseling Process,” in *VISTAS*, American Counseling Association (2012), pp.2-3.

⁴¹⁰ Heather Warfield, “Quest for Transformation: An Exploration of Pilgrimage in the Counseling Process,” in *VISTAS*, American Counseling Association (2012), pp.2-3.

⁴¹¹ Dubisch and Winkelman (2005), pp. 2-3.

⁴¹² Dubisch and Winkelman (2005), p. 3.

Virtual pilgrimage can also be adapted to the secular journey framework. The ritual experience in virtual pilgrimage is defined by inner feelings and motivations, rather than by external institutional forms. Virtual pilgrimage is accessible to everyone, and is typically carried out on local trails and walkways. In a secular journey context, the healing dynamics of virtual pilgrimage play out in the separation from the daily clamour, the break in routine, the metronome of footsteps, the cadence of breath, the space and vibe for reflection, and the sense of creative restoration that accrues through the medium of physical movement.

The stage has been set for the introduction of virtual pilgrimage as a new faith practice. Contextual and historical analyses have identified the trends and patterns that influenced and shaped pilgrimage over the centuries. The linkages to twenty-first century pilgrimage are developed in the next section of this chapter, with a particular focus on reclaiming the ancient practice of pilgrimage as a pathway to deep spiritual encounter. Twenty-first century pilgrimage represents the reinstatement of an ancient discipline as a present day portal to transformation and exuberant new life.

3.8 Ancient Pathways to Mystery

We no longer live in a culture that supports belief in God or a faith that informs our lives. In communities where the essence of meaning cannot be found in outside affirmation (and where committed believers are marginal) we must of necessity seek a deeper, more inner-directed source. In his cogent assessment of the western world's 'dark night' Ron Rolheiser queried, "How do we walk forward and at the same time be realistic and take into account the unique pressures of our age? What vision and what disciplines

do we need to creatively channel the erotic spirit-fire inside of us?”⁴¹³ Rolheiser believes (with Plato) that “We are fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods...”⁴¹⁴ The question becomes how do we channel the “madness” in directions that are life-giving? A generation earlier Karl Rahner provided an inkling in his prophetic decree: “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.”⁴¹⁵

Mysticism is integral to Christian spirituality: it is neither elitist nor mysterious. William Parsons describes mysticism as a “process” that though surely punctuated by moments of visionary, unitive, and transformative encounters, is ultimately inseparable from its embodied relation to a total religious matrix: liturgy, scripture virtues, theology, rituals, practice, and the arts.⁴¹⁶ This thesis is based on the premise that virtual pilgrimage, as an embodied practice, offers new ways of knowing and loving God. Through the faithful enactment of the practice, the participant is lifted up and enlarged, invited and summoned to mystery and transformation. This section reflects on two pathways to mysticism: 1) the desert spirituality that awakens the innate wonder and mystery which is our birthright, and 2) the pilgrimage spirituality of the ancient disciplines which provides access to a state of rich, deep knowing and being, where life is savoured and its complexities complement and enrich each other.

3.8.1 Desert Spirituality

Desert spirituality is integral to the mystical tradition. The spirituality of the desert is constitutive of the shape and substance of pilgrimage spirituality. The deepest

⁴¹³ Rolheiser (1998), p. 40.

⁴¹⁴ Rolheiser (1998), p. 3.

⁴¹⁵ Karl Rahner, *Concern for the Church, Vol. 20: Theological Investigations* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Co, 1981).

⁴¹⁶ William Barclay Parsons, *Teaching Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4-5.

encounters with God occur in desert stillness and solitude. We are able to recognize and respond to our deepest human needs within the contemplative spirituality of the desert. The longing for mysticism and meaning in the post modern soul has given rise to a revival within the mystical tradition. It is out of this depth encounter and response that true communion with the Transcendent is formed.

A contemporary form of desert spirituality is the “poustinia.”⁴¹⁷ The poustina originated within the Russian Orthodox Church, and was adapted to a North American setting by Baroness Catherine de Hueck Doherty. The Baroness and her family fled to Canada to escape the Russian Revolution in 1917.⁴¹⁸ In 1947 she founded the Madonna House Apostolate in Combermere, Ontario, where she introduced the poustinia to honour her spiritual heritage and celebrate her pilgrimage from oppression to freedom. “Poustinia” is the Russian word for desert.⁴¹⁹ In the Baroness’ adaptation, it is a form of interior pilgrimage.

Deserts, silence, solitudes are not necessarily places but states of mind and heart. These deserts can be found in the midst of a city, and in the everyday of our lives. We need only to look for them and realize our tremendous need for them. They will be small solitudes, little deserts, tiny pools of silence, but the experience they will bring, if we are disposed to enter them, may be as exultant and holy as all the deserts of the world.⁴²⁰

A poustinia is typically undertaken in a remote cabin set aside for silence and prayer. But as the “B” (her affectionate moniker) explains, the poustinia is found within,

⁴¹⁷ Catherine de Heuck Doherty, *Poustinia: Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1975).

⁴¹⁸ Catherine de Heuck Doherty, *My Russian Yesterdays* (Combermere, ON: Madonna House Publications, 1951).

⁴¹⁹ Doherty (1975), p. 20.

⁴²⁰ Doherty (1975), p. 21.

where one is immersed in the silence of God, always listening to the Word of God, forever repeating it to others in word and deed.⁴²¹ Since the “B” instituted the poustinia at Madonna House in the late 1940’s, the trope has been embraced across the world.

Desert spirituality and the contemplative disposition it fosters is a pathway to beauty and mystery. As a civilization we have lost touch with the beauty that ignites wonder and mystery: “We are engaged in a battle...as we struggle to evolve, not according to some evolutionary myth of progress, but according to the innate desire within our species to make meaning, to imagine worlds, to create beauty.”⁴²² We thirst for the beauty that seizes and replenishes our weary spirits.

3.8.2 Pilgrimage Spirituality

Pilgrimage spirituality in the contemporary West is effectively a return to the ancient discipline. The ancient paths are literally and symbolically a way to replenishment and renewal in our spiritual lives. Theologian Kenneth Leech advocated the recovery of lost traditions as a remedy for the spiritual distress that accompanies the collapse of the grand narratives.⁴²³ The pilgrimage theme is writ large in Leech’s manifesto for a renewed spirituality. The themes and scriptural references in his manifesto provide valuable insights into an understanding of the contemporary revival of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage spirituality is rooted in the ancient paths, in the upheavals of Jewish history and the growing realization by the people of Israel that God is an ever-present reality. It was in the desert wilderness of the Exodus that the Israelites were

⁴²¹ Doherty (1975), p. 213.

⁴²² Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and War on Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 75.

⁴²³ Kenneth Leech, *The Eye of the Storm: Living Spirituality in the real World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1992), pp. 216-239.

formed into a people and divinely guided out of Egypt.⁴²⁴ Like the Ancients, we need to recover the capacity to see the hand of God at work in our lives. And like the Ancients, we need to be willing to embrace the wisdom and values of the tradition that births compassion and mercy. We need to be willing to make the difficult journey from the static comfort of our secure lives to the volatile uncertainty of lives in transition. Transition involves a response, a choice that is often a split second weighing of alternatives and the action that proceeds from it. Transitions are times of challenge, even terror. The trepidation associated with transitions is portrayed exquisitely by Daanan Perry in his brilliant parable of the trapeze:

It doesn't matter that in all of my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing I have always made it. I am each time afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between bars. Perhaps this is the essence of what mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on to that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. So, for an eternity that can last a nanosecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not yet here." It's called "transition." I have come to believe that the transition is the only place that real change occurs. I mean real change.⁴²⁵

Perry's depiction is corroborated by Audrey Doetzel, who describes the twenty-first century as a liminal time: "It is an in-between time: the state of living between the familiar and the unfamiliar...We are living on many thresholds, and the thresholds keep

⁴²⁴ Leech (1992), p. 227.

⁴²⁵ Daanan Perry, "Parable of the Trapeze," in *The Warriors of the Heart* (Germantown, MD: The Earthworks Network, 1991).

changing...”⁴²⁶ Liminal time is chaotic, unclear and uncertain, a space and time that is at once confusing and uncomfortable, and rife with transformative potential. Doetzel believes that this is the abode of transformation, “when we are not safely and comfortably moored, (but) when we’re unanchored and adrift.”⁴²⁷

Transition zones are a call to integrity and bravery. For fragile, internally-doubting, soul-searching Post-Moderns, transition zones are growth-filled, expansive places where confusion and fear are transformed into clarity and courage.⁴²⁸ Transition is an archetypal feature of the ancient paths. In Victor and Edith Turner’s pilgrimage research, transition is the second stage of a three-stage rite of passage that includes separation, transition, and reincorporation.⁴²⁹ The journey itself is the transition. The Turners describe the transition as a “liminal”⁴³⁰ phase, a catalytic passage, a borderland zone where identity is in flux. The liminal stage is literally outside the realm of ordinary experience. It is the domain of the stranger, the foreigner, the alien and the pilgrim.⁴³¹ Liminality can leave the pilgrim disoriented and vulnerable, but in the structured context of the pilgrimage, it can also be a place of openness to new possibilities. Victor Turner describes the liminal stage as “an instant of pure potentiality when everything trembles in

⁴²⁶ Audrey Doetzel, “The 21st Century Need for Mystics and Prophets,” Presented for a lecture series on *Contemplative Spirituality* (November 12, 2016), p. 4.

⁴²⁷ Doetzel (2016), p. 4

⁴²⁸ Daanan (1991), www.earthstewards.org. (accessed Sept. 14, 2017)

⁴²⁹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) pp. 1-40.

⁴³⁰ Liminality is the transitional experience of “betweenness” in the passage between two states or conditions.

⁴³¹ Deborah Ross, “Introduction,” *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* by Victor Turner and Edith Turner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), xxx.

the balance”.⁴³² Whether it is an extended journey or a brief foray, pilgrimage provides the psychic space to reflect on and engage the new, the strange and the other.

The burgeoning pilgrimage movement is one contemporary manifestation of the turn to the ancient. The shift of emphasis from the destination to the journey signals a return to an original appropriation of pilgrimage as exalted walking. Before the mid-twentieth century, pilgrimages focused on arrival at the destination: Jerusalem for Holy Land pilgrimages and the Santiago Cathedral for the Camino, for example. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the focus shifted to the journey. In the case of the Camino, the journey has become “an individual rite of passage or a pilgrimage to one’s self”⁴³³ for many walkers. The route itself has become the axis mundi, a place of transformation, where the interior, psychic journey parallels the outer physical journey. On the Camino de Santiago that shift is cogently expressed in the motto: *The Way is the Destination*.

3.8.2.1 The Camino

The Camino de Santiago has become one of the world’s most renowned pilgrimage routes. The earliest history of the Camino predates the 8th century, when it was believed the route followed the Milky Way to Fisteria (Lands End). In that pre-Columbian era, Finisterre was the edge of the earth, the thin, mystical region closest to

⁴³² Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology,” *Rice University Studies* 60, No. 3 (1974), p. 75.

⁴³³ Helmut Eberhart, “Pilgrimage as an Example for the Past in the Present,” *The Past in the Present: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Catania: EdIt Press, 2006), p. 160.

the ‘other world.’⁴³⁴ It was centuries later that Santiago de Compostela became one of the pre-eminent pilgrimage destinations of the Middle Ages.

The Camino de Santiago was named in honour of the Apostle James. A blend of history and legend describes the ninth century discovery of the body of St. James by a young shepherd named Pelayo, in a cave in Galicia, Spain.⁴³⁵ St. James had died 800 years earlier. It was believed he had evangelized in that part of Iberia (now Spain), travelling along the ancient Roman trade route that would eventually bear his name. When James returned to Jerusalem in 44 AD he was beheaded by Herod. According to legend, his body was returned to Galicia by two disciples, in a boat led by angels.⁴³⁶ The reigning king built a chapel at the site of his remains.

The Spanish tourist office identifies the Emperor Charlemagne as the first to venerate the tomb of the Apostle.⁴³⁷ It is believed that Charlemagne’s journey across Spain and a similar one by a local bishop birthed the concept of travelling cross-country to the Saint’s burial site. Eventually the chapel was replaced with a cathedral. In the year 1078 construction began on the Romanesque Cathedral de Santiago, and the site became one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in the world, rivalling even Rome and Jerusalem in importance.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Guy Thatcher, *A Journey of Days: Relearning Life’s Lessons on the Camino de Santiago* (Renfrew, ON: General Store Publishing House, 2008), p. 3.

⁴³⁵ Jack Hitt, *Off The Road: A Modern-Day Walk Down the Pilgrim’s Route into Spain* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), p.11.

⁴³⁶ Hitt (2005), p. 10.

⁴³⁷ Paul Moylan, *The Camino de Santiago: A Planning Guide for Those Preparing to Walk the Camino’s French Route* (2011), p. 4.

⁴³⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Santiago de Compostela*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cathedral-of-Santiago-de-Compostela> (accessed July 10, 2017).

The High Medieval Period, from 1100 to 1399 is considered the golden age of Western European pilgrimage.⁴³⁹ The reasons for pilgrimage were variable. Pilgrims were motivated by their faith, by a need to secure salvation, or by a desire to offer penance. Pilgrims were also motivated by money. An arrangement that allowed surrogates to undertake the treacherous trip on behalf of the wealthy citizenry was a lucrative source of income.⁴⁴⁰ It is impossible to know how many people travelled the ‘Milky Way of Stars’ to Santiago in these early centuries, but estimates put the figure at anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 pilgrims per year by the twelfth century.⁴⁴¹ The majority of pilgrims were men, starting their pilgrimages from home parishes, and wending their way across Europe. En route they stopped to honour the relics of other saints, in order that they accrue the benefits of indulgences.⁴⁴²

By the late Middle Ages the Camino had begun to lose its lustre. The Renaissance and the Reformation, two major sixteenth century movements, had profound and lasting effects on the pilgrimage tradition. Martin Luther and his followers denounced pilgrimage and its accouterments as a corrupt, idolatrous practice.⁴⁴³ Pilgrimage fell largely into decline, until it began to re-emerge in the 1980’s. In 1986, the Camino Compostela was awarded to 2,491 people. In 2004, the number had risen to 179, 944. In 2010, the year I walked the Camino, 272,135 pilgrims were awarded Compostelas.⁴⁴⁴ Walking disciplines, including pilgrimage, had exploded across the developed world by the turn of the century. In my pilgrimage it was obvious that the majority of pilgrims did

⁴³⁹ Rudolph Conrad, *Pilgrimage to the End of the World: The Road to Santiago de Compostela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 76.

⁴⁴⁰ Sumption (2003). P. 433.

⁴⁴¹ Osuna Garcia, *Incidents of Travel on the Road to Santiago* (New York: NY, The MacGraw Hill Companies Inc., 1998), p. 23.

⁴⁴² Sumption (2003), pp. 200-206.

⁴⁴³ Tomlin (2004), pp. 111-115.

⁴⁴⁴ The Confraternity of St. James, “Step by Step in the Camino: Pilgrim Numbers” (London: UK, 2017).

not have an explicitly religious motive, but they were on a quest, or responding to a sense of call, and aware that something profoundly transformative was happening. The traditional Catholic Camino route appeared to have morphed into an ecumenical, interfaith and extra-faith adventure for tens of thousands.

3.9 Virtual Pilgrimage as a Conceptual Framework

The Camino was the backdrop and inspiration for this research. Pilgrimage and variations on the pilgrimage motif configured the conceptual framework for the research. The appeal of pilgrimage and the benefits it confers are well documented. Distance pilgrimages are accessible only to the privileged, however, excluding those without the time, strength, or financial means to make the journey. This project was designed to overcome that shortfall. The action of intentional walking is fundamental to the discipline of pilgrimage, and can be adapted to many different contexts. The concept of pilgrimage has been expanded to include alternatives to the traditional, distance, terrestrial pilgrimage. Alternative genres loosely referred to as virtual pilgrimage include such variations as the Stations of the Cross, the labyrinth, cyber pilgrimage, and localized pilgrimage, among others.

3.9.1 The Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross or the Way of the Cross refers to a series of images depicting Jesus on the day of his Crucifixion. The stations grew out of imitations of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, which is believed to be the actual path Jesus walked to

Calvary.⁴⁴⁵ The object of the stations is to help the Christian faithful make a spiritual pilgrimage through contemplation of the Passion of Christ. A series of fourteen images are arranged sequentially to depict the events leading up to the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus. The Stations of the Cross are done in a spirit of reparation for the sufferings and insults endured by Jesus during his passion.

3.9.2 The Labyrinth

The labyrinth is an ancient path that has existed in various faiths and cultures for 5000 years.⁴⁴⁶ The labyrinth was adapted by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages as a form of substitute Holy Land pilgrimage. The pre-eminent Christian labyrinth is the classical eleven circuit design of the Chartres Cathedral. The sacred geometry of the labyrinth represents the spiritual journey. The labyrinth could symbolize the hard and winding road to God, a mystical ascension to salvation, or a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁴⁴⁷ The labyrinth is currently in a period of revival. Labyrinths are being widely used as ministry tools, with churches, institutions, and retreat centers installing them inside and outside, and myriad portable versions on offer.

3.9.3 Cyber Pilgrimage

Cyber-pilgrimage refers to the practice of undertaking a pilgrimage on the internet. Cyber-pilgrimages can be deeply charged, fulfilling and transformative on both an

⁴⁴⁵ Stations of the Cross, <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/lent/stations-of-the-cross> (accessed May 30, 2018).

⁴⁴⁶ Robert Ferre, *12 Reasons to Have a Labyrinth*, www.labyrinth-enterprises.com (accessed July 10, 2017).

⁴⁴⁷ Janice Francisco, *A Creative Walker's Guide to the Labyrinth: An Approach for Beginners* (Toronto, ON: BridgePointEffect, 2006), pp. 16-34.

emotional and a spiritual plane. Mark Mac Williams believes that the ability and desire to undertake a cyber-pilgrimage is “the product of modern technological might and continued devotion to the metaphysical and mystical.”⁴⁴⁸ The cyber-pilgrimage is an option for those who cannot leave for extended times due to health, finances, family obligations or professional commitments. A well known cyber-pilgrimage is the 2012 interactive game called *Journey*⁴⁴⁹ which involves a cyber trek to a sacred mountain that is home to culturally divergent people of all faiths. Mac Williams makes the point that just as physical action can be transmuted, so too sacred space can be transformed.⁴⁵⁰

3.9.4 Localized Pilgrimage

Another type of virtual pilgrimage is localized pilgrimage. Localized pilgrimage is a representational journey undertaken in a specific locale to honour a personage of historical and sacred significance. One example of a localized pilgrimage is the Sons of Norway pilgrimage⁴⁵¹ from Oslo to Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim. The ‘Sons of Norway’ commemorates the routes travelled by St. Olav, in his work as a Christian missionary in Norway. Another example of a localized pilgrimage is St. Brigid’s Way in Ireland, a pilgrimage route through the ancient countryside surrounding Kildare. The pilgrimage honours St. Brigid, and culminates in the Cathedral named for her.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Mark MacWilliams, “Virtual Pilgrimages on the Internet,” in *Religion* 32, 4 (2002), pp. 314-334.

⁴⁴⁹ Thatgamecompany, *Journey*, Sony Interactive Entertainment (2102).

⁴⁵⁰ Mac Williams (2002), p. 334.

⁴⁵¹ Peter Leney, “Norway’s Pilgrim Trail” in *The Montreal Gazette* (March 19, 2012).

⁴⁵² Solas Bhríde, “The Perpetual Flame.” *Solas Bhríde: Centre and Hermitages* (2015) <http://solasbhríde.ie/the-perpetual-flame/> (accessed July 14, 2018).

3.9.5 Virtual Pilgrimage

For the purpose of this research, virtual Pilgrimage is a localized form of the traditional somatic, distance pilgrimage. Virtual pilgrimage is a variation of the vicarious pilgrimage that was popularized in the Middle Ages. Vicarious pilgrimages were an option for those with the financial means to purchase pilgrimage by proxy or patronage.⁴⁵³ In medieval times virtual pilgrimage was the ‘poor cousin’ of the vicarious pilgrimage. It was the form adopted by the masses, their only hope of ever collecting the indulgences acquired through traditional pilgrimage. The concept of virtual pilgrimage was first used by Kathryn Rudy to describe medieval alternatives to Holy Land pilgrimages.⁴⁵⁴ The term described the notional or imaginary pilgrimages carried out in the convents and communities of that era. Rudy conducted extensive research into this method of “walking in Christ’s footsteps.”⁴⁵⁵ Virtual pilgrimages were undertaken by Christians of the Middle Ages who lacked material resources, or were constrained by the exigencies that accompanied life in a cloister.⁴⁵⁶

Rudy discovered that women in convents developed elaborate strategies for virtually visiting Rome and Jerusalem.⁴⁵⁷ Texts written in their own vernacular, and images developed around accounts of pain, torture and bloodshed were designed to evoke an imagined pilgrimage. These textual guides were based on travelogues compiled by travellers to the Holy Land, some which linked geographic sites with events of the Old and New Testaments, and some which chronicled the human component of the journey:

⁴⁵³ Sumption (1975), p. 428.

⁴⁵⁴ Kathryn Rudy, *Virtual Pilgrimages in the Convent: Imaging Jerusalem in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011).

⁴⁵⁵ Rudy (2011), p. 119.

⁴⁵⁶ Rudy, (2011), p. 20.

⁴⁵⁷ Rudy (2011), p. 20.

the physical endeavour, the sickness, the boredom, and the joy.⁴⁵⁸ The images for interior pilgrimages were constructed out of maps produced for the actual pilgrimage, together with the souvenirs and relics brought back as mementoes. Typically the imagery provided a panoramic view of Jerusalem, with events from the passion connected to roads along which the imagined pilgrimage could proceed: “Religious women used multi-episodic Passion panels to exercise devotion to the holy places around Jerusalem and to re-enact the pilgrimage devotions that were denied them.”⁴⁵⁹

An extension of the imagined, interior pilgrimage was the somatic, external pilgrimage. Rudy noted that “It was a small step from imagining walking through Jerusalem, to walking through an imagined Jerusalem.”⁴⁶⁰ Based on a principle derived from theatrics, it was believed that the correct set of motions would give rise to the desired set of emotions. One of the many examples cited by Rudy, the Seven *Gloria Patris*, consisted of seven meditations on the suffering Jesus.

The devotee was instructed to strike a series of poses corresponding to the bodily positions of Jesus in his trials, so that, for instance, she was to bend forward in a kneeling position to represent Christ carrying the cross, and to stand with her hands extended outward in the shape of a cross to represent Christ hanging from the cross. In addition to the somatic gestures designed to re-enact Christ’s suffering, the women in medieval convents throughout Europe transformed their living quarters into “Jerusalem surrogates.”⁴⁶¹ They also used proxy images to evoke the sacred landmarks associated with Jerusalem. For example, a local chapel in a European country, or even a hand held image could stand-in for the Church of the Sepulcher in Jerusalem, or for one of the Seven Principal Churches of Rome.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁸ Rudy (2011), p. 171.

⁴⁵⁹ Rudy (2011), p. 173.

⁴⁶⁰ Rudy (2011), p. 171.

⁴⁶¹ Rudy (2011), p. 171.

⁴⁶² Rudy (2011), p. 172-173.

Rudy coined the term “virtual pilgrimage” to describe these improvisations of the traditional terrestrial pilgrimage. Virtual pilgrimage was a way of appropriating the spiritual dimension in a context and time when the conventional paradigm was ineffectual. Rudy’s concept is the basis of the operative term in my research, re-applied to contemporary times and places. Virtual pilgrimage is intentional, localized walking. The themes and messages associated with traditional pilgrimage are enacted in a local setting. It is accessible to all persons, regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, or socio-cultural background, and easily adapted to the SGH environment. Virtual pilgrimage in this research context refers specifically to a virtual Camino.

3.10 Virtual Pilgrimage as Alternative Ritual Practice

The discipline of virtual pilgrimage is organized around a set of clearly delineated actions designed to evoke an internal response. This series of actions is referred to as a “ritual.”⁴⁶³ Ritual is defined as “actions, patterns, forms, gestures and structures...repeated in a particular order...Their sequence and structure itself has meaning.”⁴⁶⁴ Theologian Richard Osmer drew attention to the link between ritual in a faith practice, and transformation: it is through ‘ritual participation’ that new understandings are acquired.⁴⁶⁵ Good practice “can generate understandings of God, the Christian life, and social values beyond these provided by the received tradition.”⁴⁶⁶ Osmer made the further point that “sometimes models of good practice are retrieved from

⁴⁶³ Bernadette Gasslein, *Preparing and Evaluating Liturgy* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1997), p. 15.

⁴⁶⁴ Gasslein (1997), p. 15.

⁴⁶⁵ Osmer (2008), pp. 153-155.

⁴⁶⁶ Osmer (2008), p. 152.

the past.”⁴⁶⁷ In addition to being a model that offers resources and guidance, a good practice is “epistemic,” it “yields knowledge that can be formed only through participation.”⁴⁶⁸

In a related vein, Elaine Graham stressed the importance of reflexivity for discerning and implementing normative practices. In a pluralistic post-modern context, many of the traditional truth claims on which rituals and practices are founded no longer apply. It is therefore essential that the principles which underpin practices are amenable to ongoing scrutiny, reflection, and discernment. While these principles are in essence binding, they must also be provisional.⁴⁶⁹ The measure of a good ritual is its facility for transformation. Good rituals and practices offer a pathway to transcendence that is relevant for the people it is serving. When a ritual ceases to be relevant, there must be the option to alter and adapt it. Through dialogue and reflection with the community, normative practices (rituals) must be negotiated and put to work.⁴⁷⁰

Ronald Rolheiser illustrated the importance of engagement in ritual for our spiritual wellbeing. In an eloquent reflection on that “fundamental dis-ease,” that leaves us forever restless and aching,⁴⁷¹ Rolheiser insists that participation in ritual is crucial to our flourishing as spiritual beings. This is not because it is stimulating or novel, but rather, because it is predictable, repetitive and simple.⁴⁷² Rolheiser stresses the need for proper praxis. The concept of proper praxis aligns with Graham’s idea of the practice that is negotiable and relevant, and Osmer’s conception of the practice that is transformative.

⁴⁶⁷ Osmer (2008), p. 152.

⁴⁶⁸ Osmer (2008), p. 153.

⁴⁶⁹ Graham (1996), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷⁰ Graham (1996), pp.6-7.

⁴⁷¹ Rolheiser (1999), p. 3.

⁴⁷² Rolheiser (1999), pp. 234-235.

From Rolheiser's standpoint, proper praxis is both timely and transformative: a good praxis is made up of a concrete set of attitudes and habits. Among the attitudes formed through good praxis are: 1) receptivity and gratitude, 2) a sense of everyday mysticism, 3) self-abandonment and obedience, and 4), second naivete, a childlike openness and awe.⁴⁷³ Good praxis draws us into the deep, holy core of things where a sense of gratitude and awe is ignited.

By engaging in praxis, our awareness of God and the gift of God's Creation is heightened. In the praxis of virtual pilgrimage, the outer and inner worlds coalesce to form a new understanding and vision, and a new mode of being. The constituent elements of the praxis within a virtual pilgrimage trope are a desire for change, an attitude of openness, intentionality, awareness of the fruits of the discipline of pilgrimage, preparatory meditation, and a consistent, faithful practice of walking.

3.11 Virtual Pilgrimage as the Pathway to Transcendence

As a spiritual discipline, virtual pilgrimage is a hopeful pathway to self-transcendence for contemporary seekers. Self-transcendence presumes an ability to move beyond self-interest to ever greater levels of inclusion and concern for the other. In his amended 'Hierarchy of Needs' model, Abraham Maslow describes transcendence as "the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos."⁴⁷⁴ Bernard Lonergan maintains

⁴⁷³ Rolheiser (1994), pp. 179-197.

⁴⁷⁴ Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1971), p. 269.

that self-transcendence is a precursor to authenticity.⁴⁷⁵ According to Lonergan, authenticity is our “deepest need and most prized achievement.”⁴⁷⁶ To be authentic is to be who we really are, to be the truest version of ourselves in relation to the self and the other.

The goal of all spiritual disciplines and practices is the ongoing integration that leads to authenticity. Daniel Helminiak developed a framework for analyzing spiritual practices around the concept of authenticity. Helminiak believes that humanity is naturally inclined towards that which is true and good. He drew on Lonergan’s construct to describe the distinctive awareness that constitutes the human spirit. The human spirit is the highest functioning realm of the human mind.

The human spirit is a self-transcending and spontaneous, yet structured dynamism built into the human mind: a) it is spontaneous in that it is primordially characterized by wonder, marvel and awe that is given expression in questioning, pondering and desire; b) it is self-transcendent in its continuous movement beyond the former self into new realms of experience; c) it is dynamic in its relentless movement towards fullness of knowledge and love; and d) it is structured in that it has a fourfold requirement for its fulfillment and unfolding – these four foci, referred to as the transcendental precepts, are formulated as follows: a) be attentive, b) be intelligent, c) be reasonable, and d) be responsible.⁴⁷⁷

The transcendental precepts set the conditions for the unfolding of human potential: “They specify the meaning of human authenticity.”⁴⁷⁸ Authenticity does not mean “doing your own thing;” it does not derive from an external authority or impose expectations; it requires only that the person engages in a process of honest discovery and commitment to be the best that he or she can be. Ascertaining authenticity in an

⁴⁷⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 104.

⁴⁷⁶ Lonergan (1972), p. 254.

⁴⁷⁷ Daniel Helminiak, “Treating Spiritual Issues in Secular Psychotherapy,” in *Counseling and Values*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2001), p. 168.

⁴⁷⁸ Helminiak (2001), p. 169.

experience of the transcendent involves questioning the content of the experience: 1) 'What is this experience' in order to achieve understanding of the experience, and 2) 'Is it really so' as an additional level of scrutiny to ensure accuracy and truthfulness. The trajectory of awareness, decision and action represents the conscious unfolding of experience, understanding, decision, and action in Lonergan's framework.

3.12 Virtual Pilgrimage as Praxis in the Mystical Tradition

Praxis' refers to those actions undertaken to correctly dispose one to openness and purity of heart. Praxis involves the habits and disciplines we use to search out the Holy. That search is motivated by an unquenchable desire described by Rolheiser as "a hunger that lies at the center of our lives, in the marrow of our bones, and in the deep recesses of our soul."⁴⁷⁹ Rolheiser calls what we do with that desire/ discontent/ madness, "our spirituality."⁴⁸⁰ It is good praxis that determines whether a spirituality leads to integration or disintegration. Rolheiser identified the four parameters of good praxis as prayer, social justice (a genuine concern for those in need), mellowness of heart and spirit, and participation in a community.⁴⁸¹ Good praxis enables us to have a direct encounter with God in the verities of ordinary life, a mystical experience of God that is pure and unmediated. Karl Rahner described this experience of God as the ground of all experience, the atmosphere in which we live, more intimate to us than we are to ourselves.⁴⁸² Good praxis supports and nurtures the mystical experience of God. There is a dialectical relationship between good praxis and the mystical tradition.

⁴⁷⁹ Rolheiser (1999), p. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ Rolheiser (1999), p. 5.

⁴⁸¹ Rolheiser (1999), p. 53.

⁴⁸² Harvey Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," in *The Way* (52/2, 2013), pp. 43-62.

The praxis of virtual pilgrimage has the potential to foster a vital sense of God in our lives. Undertaken with an attitude of reverence and reflection, virtual pilgrimage opens the door of perception to new uncharted depths. The encounter with mystery enlarges the pilgrim. The accessibility and ordinariness of the practice makes it a readily available portal to the “mysticism of everyday life”⁴⁸³ described by Rahner. In a related vein, Dorothy Solle believes that “We are all mystics.”⁴⁸⁴ Solle envisaged a “democratization of mysticism,”⁴⁸⁵ and conjectured that for everyone, “there ought to be places free of intentionality, places where vision can happen, where the beauty of life is perceived and “frutio” occurs, where God is enjoyed.”⁴⁸⁶ Virtual pilgrimage is one pathway to the ordinary mysticism that uplifts us and allows us to see through fresh eyes, to experience beauty again, and to become re-acquainted with the beauty in everyday simplicities.

3.13 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to respond to the third question in the research cycle: What ought to be going on? This chapter recounted the historical rise and fall of pilgrimage and the many variations of the pilgrimage motif over the centuries, with the most recent trend being a proliferation of walking practices across the developed world. An historical account of pilgrimage across diverse cultural and faith traditions was the backdrop for a description of Christian pilgrimage. The Christian pilgrimage narrative was profiled from Early Church days through the medieval era to the twenty-first century. The

⁴⁸³ Egan (2013), p. 62.

⁴⁸⁴ Dorothy Solle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 2003), p. 302.

⁴⁸⁵ Solle (2003), p. 302.

⁴⁸⁶ Solle (2003), p.302.

notion of a pilgrimage motif as both a literal and metaphorical construct was explained. The attributes linked to twenty-first century pilgrimage were elaborated, with an emphasis on the ancient practices as pathways to transformation. The Camino de Santiago was cited as a compelling example of a new-old practice writ large. The Camino was the framework within which the concept of virtual pilgrimage was developed. Virtual pilgrimage is put forward as an alternative pathway to the sacred and a new praxis in the mystical tradition. The practice of virtual pilgrimage has the potential to provide the depth, clarity and connection so longed for by the contemporary soul. The next chapter introduces the question, “How might I respond?” This question represents the fourth task of the research cycle. The Methodology chapter describes the approaches and procedures used to collect and analyse the research data designed to address the question: “Can virtual pilgrimage be a pathway to spiritual renewal for SGH volunteers?” Other issues germane to research in Practical Theology are also considered, specifically the qualitative approach and quality assurance.

CHAPTER IV METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the fourth task of the research cycle with the question: “How might I respond?” Richard Osmer identifies the fourth task as the “pragmatic” task.⁴⁸⁷ The pragmatic task in this project extends over the final three chapters of the thesis: the Methodology chapter consists of the approaches and procedures used to collect and analyse the research data; the Results chapter enumerates and interprets the data, and the Discussion chapter discusses the implications and possible applications of the findings. The Methodology chapter presents a rationale for the choice of a qualitative methodology and describes the characteristics of qualitative research. It then describes the philosophical assumptions related to qualitative research in Practical Theology. Other considerations in practical theological research are also explored, including 1) multi-disciplinary dialogue, 2) mutual critical conversation, 3) reflexivity, 4) triangulation, and 5) appreciative inquiry. The use of a combined narrative and phenomenology approach for the research design is explained, and the stages of the research process, from sampling, to data collection and data analysis, are described. Finally, issues related to quality assurance are identified from the standpoint of technical robustness and interpretive reliability.

4.2 How Might I Respond? The Research Methodology

The pragmatic task in practical theological inquiry addresses the question “How might I respond?” This question addresses the task of creating a vision for the

⁴⁸⁷ Osmer (2008), p. 175.

community. Richard Osmer advocates a spirituality of “servant leadership” for addressing this question.⁴⁸⁸ Servant leadership is based on the Christian definition of power and authority described in Mark’s Gospel: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-45). This model of leadership invited me to ask the questions, “What would Jesus do?” and “How would Jesus do it?” as I set about finding a way to enrich the spiritual life of the SGH community. This chapter is dedicated to an account of the approaches and strategies used to ascertain whether virtual pilgrimage could be a response that is faithful and effective. The sum total of these approaches and strategies is recognized as methodology.

4.3 Methodology Defined

Methodology refers to the structured process of conducting research. Methodology is the research strategy which outlines the methods used to collect and analyse data for the purpose of verifying the research hypothesis. Methodology is distinct from the term “method,” and implies a “family of methods.”⁴⁸⁹ Methods are specific techniques for data collection and analysis, while methodologies are overall approaches that share particular philosophical and epistemological assumptions. Methodologies determine which methods will be used.⁴⁹⁰ Research methodologies can be quantitative and/or qualitative. This project uses a qualitative methodology, and is conducted within the discipline of Practical Theology. Practical Theology subsists within the overarching framework of Theology.

⁴⁸⁸ Osmer (2008), p. 176.

⁴⁸⁹ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p.75.

⁴⁹⁰ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p.75.

4.4 Qualitative Research Defined

Qualitative research (QR) uses a variety of approaches to explore the social world of individuals and communities. It is a situated activity that locates the observer in a natural setting, where she attempts to make sense of the meanings people ascribe to circumstances and events. In a definition that characterizes qualitative research as a particular way of seeing and discovering, John McLeod describes it as a process of rigorous inquiry into aspects of the social world to produce conceptual frameworks for understanding and adjusting to its pressures and demands.⁴⁹¹ The rationale for my choice of a qualitative approach and the characteristics of qualitative research are explained below.

4.4.1 Rationale for Qualitative Research

This project is an applied QR study. The rationale for a qualitative approach is its facility for “recognizing the world as the locus of complex interactive processes within which human beings struggle to make sense of their experiences.”⁴⁹² QR in a practical theological context assumes that human beings are interpretive creatures engaged in a relentless process of meaning-making, “of making sense of their experiences, including their experiences of God.”⁴⁹³ The purpose of this study is to address what is going on in the spiritual life of the SGH community. The research addresses an immediate and specific need, with a discrete target group, in a specific location. Under the umbrella of applied research, this is a form of action research involving active participation by the

⁴⁹¹ John McLeod, *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 3.

⁴⁹² Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 29-30.

⁴⁹³ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 30.

research participants. The study is exploratory (it addresses the what) and descriptive (it addresses the how), as opposed to explanatory. It is a cross-sectional study, conducted within a discrete population, the volunteer sector, at a discrete point in time.

4.4.2 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

In his seminal work on qualitative inquiry and research design, John Creswell identified several characteristics of QR: 1) QR is situated in a natural setting. Data is collected in the field where the participants directly experience the phenomenon under study. Research is not conducted in a lab or under other contrived conditions.⁴⁹⁴ In this project, the natural setting is the participants' choice of outdoor locales, urban or pastoral, in time-frames and on terms suitable to them, having regard for the parameters of the study. 2) The researcher is the key instrument for data collection. Qualitative researchers collect the data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. They typically do not use instruments developed by other researchers.⁴⁹⁵ As the researcher, I shaped the design of the study by virtue of designing the instructions for doing a virtual pilgrimage, crafting the journal reflections and the questionnaire, providing feedback on the journal accounts, and structuring and facilitating the focus group. Mine is the initial interpretive lens through which the subjective meanings of the participants are filtered. 3) There are multiple sources for data collection in QR. Researchers gather data through documents, interviews, and observation, rather than relying on a single source. The data is then organized in categories or themes which

⁴⁹⁴ Creswell (2007), p. 37.

⁴⁹⁵ Creswell (2007), p. 38.

cut across all data sources.⁴⁹⁶ This project uses three different tools for data collection: the journal accounts of the research participants, a questionnaire, and the focus group. 4) Data is analysed inductively and interactively. Qualitative researchers organize their data from the “bottom up,” working back and forth between themes.⁴⁹⁷ It is through multiple perusals of the data that the dominant themes emerge. For example, “the beauty of nature” has emerged as a crucial theme in the participants’ experience and apprehension of virtual pilgrimage. The focus in QR is on the subjective views and meanings of the participants.⁴⁹⁸ 5) In QR, human behaviour and belief is framed within socio-cultural, historical-political contexts. Researchers try to develop a holistic account of the issue under study, using multiple perspectives and identifying the complex interactions of factors rather than trying to establish discrete cause-and-effect connections.⁴⁹⁹ This study augments resources from Theology and the Christian tradition with theories from the human and social sciences to get an in-depth understanding of the cultural and spiritual shifts that impact SGH spiritual life. 6) The study design in QR is emergent and evolving, as opposed to being prefigured. The interpretative nature of qualitative inquiry calls for multiple layers of reflection by the researcher, including reflection on her role in the research, the role of the participants, and the role of the audience.⁵⁰⁰ For the purpose of this research, the rich, vibrant, revelatory feelings, observations and insights of the participants are illumed with the aid of an interpretive framework. The interpretive framework for this study is Practical Theology, described in detail in the General Introduction.

⁴⁹⁶ Creswell (2007), p. 38.

⁴⁹⁷ Creswell (2007), pp. 38-39.

⁴⁹⁸ Creswell (2007), p. 39.

⁴⁹⁹ Creswell (2007), p. 38.

⁵⁰⁰ Creswell (2007), p. 39.

4.5 The Interpretive Paradigm: Philosophical Assumptions in Qualitative Research

It is essential to make a distinction between an interpretive framework and an interpretive paradigm in QR. The interpretive framework for this study is Practical Theology, and was introduced and examined in the General Introduction. The interpretive paradigm, on the other hand, is included in the Methodology Chapter to reflect its direct link to data collection operations. The interpretive paradigm refers to the five fundamental philosophical assumptions in qualitative research.⁵⁰¹ I shall enumerate these and their implications for the data collection and data analysis processes.

4.5.1 The Ontological Assumption

The “ontological” assumption relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. It poses the question, “What is the nature of reality?”⁵⁰² It is characterized by an understanding of reality as subjective, with polyvalent interpretations as seen through the eyes of the research participants. In my research, those multiple divergent perspectives are evidenced in the quotes and themes elicited through the written and verbal accounts of the participants. This research assumes two ontological perspectives. The “constructivist/interpretive” perspective views truth and knowledge as constructs evolved by the participants and the realities they inhabit.⁵⁰³ Through the discipline of walking and the exercise of reflection, the research participants in this study acquired new understandings of pilgrimage. The “advocacy / participative” perspective focuses on support for transformative change and collaboration with the participants in the data collection

⁵⁰¹ Creswell (2007), p. 16.

⁵⁰² Creswell (2007), p. 17.

⁵⁰³ Creswell (2007), p. 47.

phase.⁵⁰⁴ Through the act of participation in the discipline of virtual pilgrimage, the pilgrim's affective and cognitive faculties were set in motion, thereby opening up the possibility of new appropriations that led to personal and communal transformation.

4.5.2 The Epistemological Assumption

The “epistemological” assumption refers to the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Epistemology poses the question, “How do we know what we know?”⁵⁰⁵ It attempts to answer this question by looking at the relationship between the researcher and those being researched. Characteristically qualitative researchers attempt to minimize the distance between themselves and the study participants by being in the field. In my research I adopted an insider position by virtue of having done a pilgrimage myself. That stance was further consolidated by being privy to the personal, often intensely private reflections of the participants in their weekly journal accounts, and through the feedback I provided when the weekly journal accounts were received. I got to “know what I know”⁵⁰⁶ by virtue of my closeness to the subject matter and the participants.

4.5.3 The Axiological Assumption

The “axiological” assumption concerns itself with the values of the researcher and participants in the study. Axiology poses the question, “What is the role of values?”⁵⁰⁷ This research was motivated by the value I placed on a robust spiritual life for the Shepherds community, and the sense of responsibility I felt to ensure the people were nourished and

⁵⁰⁴ Creswell (2007), p.48.

⁵⁰⁵ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 32.

⁵⁰⁶ Creswell (2007), p. 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Creswell (2007), p. 17.

uplifted spiritually. I also value pilgrimage as a result of my experience of a Camino pilgrimage. I cherish pilgrimage as an enduring and comprehensive discipline, ancient and contemporary, but also simple and accessible, with the capacity to connect us to beauty and mystery. My personal pilgrimage inspired my decision to design a study based on the pilgrimage motif, and was the interpretive lens through which the participant responses and narratives were filtered and analysed. Values also influenced the participants in their decisions to participate in the research. A scan of the data showed that several participants were interested in doing a Camino pilgrimage, and saw this study as a preparatory step. Others were dedicated walkers intrigued by the more disciplined, formal approach imposed by the strictures of research. A number of the participants were also attracted to the Christian spiritual thrust of the research.

4.5.4 The Rhetorical Assumption

The “rhetorical” assumption is based on the recognition that QR has developed its own brand of personal, literary vernacular based on definitions that evolve during the study. It poses the question, “What is the language of research?”⁵⁰⁸ My research was constructed around the notion of pilgrimage, a symbolic construct with allegorical and metaphorical interpretations on multiple levels. Through the research I sought to understand the shifting locus of spirituality at SGH by exploring an alternative expression of it, and the new meanings it gave rise to. Words that describe the purpose and process of the research elicit a sense of open inquiry and discovery. Creswell points out that a ‘Definition of Terms’ section is rarely seen in a qualitative study because the terms as

⁵⁰⁸ Creswell (2007), p. 17.

brought forward and defined by the participants are of primary importance.⁵⁰⁹ In this project, the first-person pronoun ‘I’ was used by the participants at all stages of the data collection process. It was the participant perspectives and meanings that brought understanding to the virtual pilgrimage experience. The language used is personal and literary. According to Dawson, among the written terms most likely to occur in a qualitative research project are words such as ‘discover’, ‘motivation’, ‘experience’, ‘think’, ‘thoughts’, ‘problems’, or ‘behave /behavior’.⁵¹⁰ The qualitative researcher tends not use quantitative concepts like “internal validity,” “objectivity,” and “design replication.”⁵¹¹

4.5.5 The Methodological Assumption

The “methodological” assumption characterizes the research process as inductive logic that studies the topic within its context and uses an emerging design.⁵¹² It poses the question, “What is the process of research?”⁵¹³ In this research, the findings are assembled from the bottom up, using text queries and recurring responses to establish codes, themes, and patterns in the data. For example, a word search that included stem words and synonyms showed that “walking” is the most frequently used word across all data sources, occurring 1,027 times.

The methodological assumption in qualitative research involves continual revision of the research design as changes occur in the field. In this study it became necessary

⁵⁰⁹ Creswell (2007), p. 19.

⁵¹⁰ C. Dawson, *Introduction to Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Anyone Undertaking a Research Project* (Oxford How To Books, 2009), p. 20.

⁵¹¹ Dawson (2009), p. 20.

⁵¹² Creswell (2007), p. 17.

⁵¹³ Creswell (2007), p. 17.

early on to adjust the data collection process, when two participants of the original fourteen ceased to be involved. Later on, in the final stage of the data collection, it was learned that one of twelve remaining participants is not a long term volunteer, but is registered on the SGH data base by virtue of sporadic contacts with the organization. Another example of the evolving design was the late stage realization that an explanatory statement is needed for each of the six reflection questions used in the journal accounts, a requirement that was not anticipated when the reflection questions were initially crafted. Through discerning the complex interplay of factors and participant perspectives, a holistic picture of virtual pilgrimage eventually emerges.

4.6 Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

Academic research is governed by guidelines and processes which offer a number safeguards for those actively engaged in the research enterprise. Saint Paul University has adopted the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#), which addresses the rules and principles that guide faculty, researchers, students and staff members. All documents used for data collection, including the call for research participants, the questionnaire, the reflection and focus questions, and the information and consent document were approved by the university ethics board. See Appendices A,B, C, D, E and F. In addition to the guidelines imposed by the academic institution, the Doctor of Ministry Program and the discipline of Practical Theology place emphasis on the use of reflexivity at every stage of the research process. Reflexivity is the process of

critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process.⁵¹⁴ Reflexivity will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.7 Other Issues and Considerations in Practical Theological Research

As a particular type of action research, Practical Theological research is characterized by several constituent elements including 1) multi-disciplinary dialogue, 2) mutual critical conversation, 3) reflexivity, 4) triangulation, and 5) appreciative inquiry. Each of these features is addressed below.

4.7.1 Multi-Disciplinary Dialogue

“Multi-disciplinary dialogue” in practical theological research involves bringing the theories of several disciplines into conversation simultaneously for the purpose of interpreting the complex, multidimensional systems and issues within the web of life.⁵¹⁵ This type of disciplined investigation produces a thick description of the original loosely conceived deficit or problem. The exchange between Theology and other relevant disciplines produces a dialogue in which both parties are brought into a mutually influential relationship: “In the correlational model of cross-disciplinary dialogue, Theology listens carefully to other disciplines and learns from them.”⁵¹⁶ In this project, a multi-disciplinary approach utilizes frameworks from the human and social sciences to understand the declining relevance of conventional faith forms in the Shepherds community. These same disciplines were able to discern and enunciate the trends and movements which influenced the spiritual climate inside and outside the SGH

⁵¹⁴ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 59-61.

⁵¹⁵ Osmer (2008), p. 164.

⁵¹⁶ Osmer (2008), p. 165.

community, and helped position virtual pilgrimage as an alternative spiritual intervention/response within the volunteer sector of the community.

4.7.2 Mutual Critical Conversation

“Mutual critical conversation” is a refinement of “multi-disciplinary dialogue.” In mutual critical conversation, the other disciplines of influence are brought into dialogue with Theology. While the human and social sciences offer important complementary knowledge, practical theological research adopts a stance of “critical faithfulness,” with Theology assuming priority in the interpretive process.⁵¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat use the metaphor of “conversion”⁵¹⁸ to describe the process of interpreting the findings of QR:

In relation to qualitative research, this will mean that the autonomy of the disciplines that make up this field and their traditional insulation of themselves from God is no longer sustainable. The practical theologian now views them as in God’s service. This does not mean that there cannot be critique and challenge of traditional Christian practices. Such critique is critical for faithful living. It does mean however, that qualitative research methods seek to develop that critique from the inside and not as outsiders.⁵¹⁹

To that end, the revelatory nature of the participants’ walking practices was also interpreted in light of Theology, Scripture and the Christian Tradition in this research. A concerted theological reflection on the data brought to light the features of virtual pilgrimage which constitute a faith practice.

⁵¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 91-93.

⁵¹⁸ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 92.

⁵¹⁹ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 92.

4.7.3 Reflexivity

‘Reflexivity’ refers to the process of critical self-reflection throughout the research process.⁵²⁰ Michael Patton describes reflexivity in qualitative research in terms of “depicting the world authentically in all its complexity, while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.”⁵²¹ I was aware that the research was shaped by my personal interest in pilgrimage and by my commitment to finding a faith practice that could be relevant and enriching. I was a ‘co-creator’⁵²² of the research narrative by virtue of my response to each journal account submitted by participants, by my interpretation of the questionnaires, and by my personal involvement in and facilitation of the focus group. Patton emphasizes that qualitative inquirers must be attentive to their own perspective and voice, as well to the perspectives and voices of their participants.⁵²³ Reflexivity is further explored as an aspect of “bracketing” in the section on “Validity in Practical Theological Research.” In an effort to achieve the desired level of academic integrity for a Doctor of Ministry project, I referred to Tim Sensing’s “Classroom Virtues” as a guide to integrity.⁵²⁴ Among Sensing’s virtues are a desire for truth and accountability to the gifts and responsibilities that the researcher brings to the academy.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 59.

⁵²¹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), p. 41.

⁵²² Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 61.

⁵²³ Patton, (2002), p. 65.

⁵²⁴ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2011), pp. 47-48.

⁵²⁵ Sensing (2011), pp. 48-49.

4.7.4 Triangulation

“Triangulation” is the process of collecting data through the use of more than one researcher, or one data collection technique, or one analytic method. The purpose of triangulation is to ensure that the research problem is being comprehensively addressed, and the findings are indeed valid. Swinton and Mowat describe triangulation as “a combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study”...for the purpose of adding “rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry.”⁵²⁶ This project achieved triangulation through the use of three data collection techniques: journal accounts, a questionnaire, and a focus group. The journal accounts were written in concert with the walking practices of the participants, and are a more immediate and spontaneous rendering of the virtual pilgrimage experience. The questionnaires were completed at the end of the research phase, with the benefit of pondering and reflection to consolidate the participants’ revelations. The focus group was a highly interactive group exercise that generated a further profusion of insights, and a sense of the immense potentiality in virtual pilgrimage. The first two techniques were carried out privately and independently. The third technique was a group activity. The three methods in combination complimented and enhanced each other.

4.7.5 Appreciative Inquiry

“Appreciative inquiry”(AI)⁵²⁷ encapsulates the attitude and approach to qualitative research exemplified by Practical Theology. Richard Osmer invests each of

⁵²⁶ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 51.

⁵²⁷ For the purpose of this thesis, the acronym AI is used to refer to Appreciative Inquiry.

the four tasks in his research cycle with an AI attribute that echoes the transformative thrust of Christian ministry: the descriptive-empirical task he equates with “priestly listening,” the interpretive task with “sagely wisdom,” the normative task with “prophetic discernment,” and the pragmatic task with “servant leadership.”⁵²⁸ AI promotes a highly participative form of inquiry through the use of language and images. In a 2003 synopsis of the principles of AI, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom put emphasis on the “constructionist” principle in AI, the idea that “words create worlds,” and that reality is socially constructed through language and imagery.⁵²⁹ AI conjectures that inquiry creates change, and positive questions bring out the best in people and organizations. Inherent in the AI philosophy is the belief that individual commitment to positive action is inspired by the freedom to choose how and what to contribute.

This project uses AI throughout the data collection process. With exception of the demographic questions in the questionnaire, the questions were open-ended, and designed to encourage a response that was thoughtful and true. As an example, the instructional component for Section V of the questionnaire advised that this section is interested in participants’ experiences of virtual pilgrimage, “what it means for you, and what you see as some of the benefits.” It continues, “These are reflective questions that prompt you to ponder the meaning and value of your virtual pilgrimage walking practice.”⁵³⁰ The questions for the six sets of journal accounts were likewise structured in an AI vein to prompt reflective inquiry into different aspects of virtual pilgrimage vis a vis the participants experience: a sense of awe and wonder, the experience of gratitude and

⁵²⁸ Osmer (2008), pp. 28-29.

⁵²⁹ Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), pp. 56-57.

⁵³⁰ Questionnaire: *Instruction for Section V: Virtual Pilgrimage*, 2016.

blessing, openness to the other, concern for the other, etc. The focus group, the singular occasion of data collection in a group setting, was similarly designed to ensure that an atmosphere of appreciative inquiry prevailed. The session opened with a declaration of respect for all in the form of ground rules which asserted there are “no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view,” and “you don’t need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.”⁵³¹ The focus group questions encouraged openness, dialogue, and recall with a view to visioning and innovation. In my role as facilitator, I was intentional about ensuring that all input was validated. It made for a collegial exchange that was energetic and rewarding.

4.8 The Research Design

The research design for this project combined two approaches: the “narrative” approach and the “phenomenological” approach. The narrative approach captures the somatic, psychosomatic and spiritual experiences of the individual participants who engaged in virtual pilgrimage. The phenomenological approach describes the meaning of the lived experience or phenomenon for the virtual pilgrimage participants.

4.8.1 The Narrative Approach

The narrative approach focuses on collecting the subjective experiences of the research participants as they recount their involvement with virtual pilgrimage. One of the examples of narrative is this excerpt from one of the April journal accounts:

⁵³¹ Virtual Pilgrimage Focus Group Questions, *Ground Rules*. 2016.

“Making a conscious effort to spend time walking in nature as a solitary practice is a form of meditation for me. It naturally leads me to pay greater attention to my life, as it is at this very moment, to my exterior environment, as well as to my inner world, my inner thoughts and preoccupations. As I walk or run, I am watching and listening to the rushing river, breathing in the fields, flitting birds and horses, feeling the growing warmth of the sun, with the early morning air still cool on my face.”⁵³²

While the narrative approach cannot properly be called a methodology, according to Sensing, it does show how participants impose order on their lived experiences. Sensing elaborates, “Narrative research is about a different way of knowing. Knowledge is socially constructed, historically embedded and ‘valuationally’ based.”⁵³³ This compelling account is contextually-grounded. The participant is drinking deeply of her surroundings. It is a story that engages our imaginations and sensibilities, calling us to a response: we are moved, inspired, transformed. Using this very powerful tool, I was able to experience the sense of movement and unfolding, the feelings and impressions, the process of interpretation, of constructing a reality and making-meaning. Through the language of narrative, it is possible to identify common metaphors, themes and patterns for reflecting on and appropriating virtual pilgrimage: i.e. awareness, intentionality, inner and outer landscapes, and affinity with nature. There is also my awareness that I the researcher am on holy ground: I am the custodian of a sacred trust, with a privileged window into a private world.

⁵³² P3, *Journal Accounts*, April 24th to 30th..

⁵³³ Sensing (2011), p. 160.

4.8.2 The Phenomenological Approach

While the “narrative” approach focuses on the subjective experiences of individual participants, the phenomenological approach is a composite description of the essence of the experience shared by all participants. A phenomenological description consists of what the participants experience and how they experience it. Van Manen describes phenomenological research as the interplay of different research activities: researchers first turn to an “abiding concern” that seriously interests them.⁵³⁴ They reflect on the themes that constitute the essence of this experience, and write a description that links the phenomenon to the subject of the inquiry, the research question. Phenomenology is an interpretive process in which the researcher attempts to mediate different meanings.⁵³⁵

Phenomenology attempts to understand how meaning is constructed in human experience. Creswell explains that unlike the narrative approach, phenomenology uses “systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions.”⁵³⁶ In this project, the choice of the phenomenology approach was based on the need to understand the shared experience of virtual pilgrimage. This shared understanding helped discern the value of VP as an authentic faith practice. One of the noteworthy aspects of phenomenology is the requirement that researchers “bracket” their own experiences of the phenomenon.⁵³⁷ To that end, I described my experience of pilgrimage at the outset, and was intentional about exploring the experiences of the participants through their eyes, aware of the resonances and

⁵³⁴ Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, ON: The University of Western Ontario, 1990), p. 31.

⁵³⁵ Van Manen (1990), p. 26.

⁵³⁶ Creswell (2007), p. 60.

⁵³⁷ Creswell (2007), p. 59.

differences from my own pilgrimage experience. The analysis involved several steps: identifying the significant themes and patterns in the participants' experience of virtual pilgrimage; providing textural descriptions of how the participants experienced virtual pilgrimage (including verbatim accounts); organizing and classifying these themes into units of information, or meaning units; providing a structural description of the various settings and contexts in which virtual pilgrimage was experienced (i.e. urban, pastoral, alone, with others); and finally, composing a comprehensive description that captured the essence of the phenomenon of virtual pilgrimage.

4.9 The Research Strategy

The set of procedures used to achieve a particular research objective is described as a research strategy. The research strategy includes the sample, the data collection methods, and the data analysis procedure.

4.9.1 The Sample

This project used a randomly purposive sample. The sample was selected from the SGH volunteer data base. The primary criterion for selection was the willingness and availability to participate in the virtual pilgrimage initiative. Prospective participants responded to a 'request for participants' call that was circulated electronically. Initially, fourteen participants, seven men and seven women, were selected from the pool of respondents. An equal number of male and female participants were chosen to balance out the gender differences. At an early stage in the data collection process two of the

participants, one male and one female, declined further involvement, leaving six men and six women to complete the study.

4.9.2. Data Collection: The Journal Accounts

For the purpose of this study, virtual pilgrimage simulated the Camino de Santiago, which culminates at St. James Cathedral in Santiago, Spain. Simulating the Camino united the local discipline with a larger narrative. Localized virtual pilgrimage is enlarged through its linkage with the history, spirituality, art and legend of the Camino pilgrimage. From the most popular point of origin, at St. Jean Pied de Port in the French Pyrenees, the Camino covers a total distance of 790 kilometers. Due to time constraints, this study was limited the last hundred kilometers of the trail, from Sarria to Santiago. This portion of the Camino is the minimum requirement for pilgrims to earn their Compostela certificate. It was anticipated that most of the participants would need six weeks to cover the distance, virtually. Each week participants were given a reflection question and a standardized set of instructions for carrying out the virtual pilgrimage. Participants were asked to use the reflection question to focus each walk, and to maintain a journal account of each walk. Journaling guidelines were also included with each reflection question. The instructions and journaling guidelines appear in Appendix A.

To ensure that the elements of intentionality and discipline were adequately grasped in the virtual pilgrimage experiment, only walking undertaken within the prescribed parameters was admissible as data. Data collection started on April 10th, 2016 and ended on May 15th, 2016. Each participant wore a pedometer or a *fit bit* to track distances covered. The participants submitted their journal accounts and distance reports

on a weekly basis, and progress was charted on a map of the Camino. Electronic progress updates consisted of the participant's virtual location on the Camino, together with a description of the cultural significance and historical lore associated with the location. The following week's reflection question was also included in the update. The reflection questions are included in Appendix C. By the end of the six week period, all but two of the participants had completed the 100 km. virtual pilgrimage. Even those who did not cover the full distance continued to submit weekly journal accounts of their walking reflections on the week-specific question.

4.9.3. Data Collection: The Focus Group

The next stage in the data collection process was the focus group. The focus group was held on June 10th, 2016 in a meeting room at St. Paul University, a neutral meeting place that provided parking and was easily accessible. Nine of the twelve participants were present. Of the three who were absent, two were vacationing outside the country, and the third had a work commitment. The focus group was the first and only occasion when the participants had a face to face encounter. The focus group opened with closed questions, then evolved to open-ended questions that included queries around motivation, walking in urban versus non-urban settings, and think-back questions that honed in on the six reflection questions spread over the virtual pilgrimage period. The think-back questions were designed to capture the positive and negative experiences of virtual pilgrimage. The focus session was recorded. The audio data was later transcribed into a twenty-two page word document of single space text. The focus group lasted for an hour and forty minutes.

4.9.4. Data Collection: The Questionnaire

The third and final stage in the data collection process was the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five questions developed around five main categories: Demographics, Terminology, Spirituality, Volunteer Experience (at SGH), and Virtual Pilgrimage. With exception of the demographic questions, the questions were open-ended. The “terminology” questions were designed to get a sense of participants’ understanding of concepts that are integral to the research, including religion, spirituality, spiritual practice, walking discipline, virtual pilgrimage and transformation.

The “spirituality” section focused on personal spirituality and practices. Participants were invited to substitute the word “God” with a term more suitable to them, if necessary. The spirituality section queried affiliation or non-affiliation with a spiritual community; their sources of inspiration and life meaning; a spiritual path or practice that has personal significance; sources of hope, peace, connection, etc.; an especially important spiritual/ mystical experience; how truthfulness is discerned in everyday life; how the interconnectedness of life is experienced; how love is experienced; and finally, the connection between individual participant spirituality and volunteer work.

The “volunteer experience” section specifically targeted volunteer work at SGH. Participants were asked why they choose SGH as a venue for volunteering; how they feel about the spiritual life at SGH; whether they see a spiritual aspect to their volunteer work; and what are the most fulfilling and least fulfilling parts of their SGH volunteer work.

The final section in the questionnaire addressed “virtual pilgrimage”. At this stage, the participants had completed the virtual pilgrimage, and were able to respond to

questions about virtual pilgrimage in an informed, thoughtful way. Participants were asked how virtual pilgrimage enhanced their sense of the spiritual; in light of their experience of virtual pilgrimage, how they interpreted St. Augustine's "solvitur ambulano" and Boer's idea of walking as "a form of deep prayer"; how virtual pilgrimage was beneficial for them; how virtual pilgrimage was transformative for them (focusing on one particular walking experience); and how their virtual pilgrimage walking experience might enhance their volunteer experience.

4.10 Data Analysis: NVIVO

The final phase of the research strategy is the data analysis. This project used NVIVO,⁵³⁸ a software product that supports qualitative and mixed methods research. NVIVO is capable of organizing and analysing unstructured, qualitative data acquired from such sources as interviews, open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, articles, and journal accounts. In order to manage the data in this project, I set up a folder for each of the three main data sources: the journal accounts, the questionnaire, and the focus group. The data analysis in NVIVO proceeds by way of different types of coding operations. In the NVIVO world, codes are referred to as "nodes" and "cases."⁵³⁹ Nodes categorize and classify data by theme or topic. Cases gather references to people, places, organizations and other entities, and classify data to analyze 'who,' 'what,' and 'where' questions. For example, in this project, case coding was used to assign demographic data, and to categorize and classify participant responses to each question in the questionnaire. NVIVO features use different tools for exploring data. I did a preliminary perusal of the

⁵³⁸ NVIVO, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov, 2018).

⁵³⁹ NVIVO, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov, 2018).

data using the word frequency query.⁵⁴⁰ More advanced queries include text search queries and matrix queries. In a text search query, words (and stemmed words), phrases, or concepts are queried using ‘and,’ ‘of,’ and ‘near’ operators (search functions).⁵⁴¹ In matrix queries, coded material is compared across nodes, sets, or attribute-values to discover connections and to find new correlations and insights.⁵⁴² NVIVO uses several data visualization tools to provide pictorial representations of data and data findings: coding stripes are colored stripes that correspond to information assigned to nodes (codes) in the data analysis; word clouds display the most frequently occurring words in a data set by way of customized visual representations; and word trees present graphic representations of queried words or phrases and their contexts of surrounding words. Other types of visualization tools which can help understand data findings include charts (pie charts, bar charts, and hierarchical charts), concept maps and project maps.⁵⁴³

4.11 Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) in research essentially asks the question: “Did we get it right?” QA refers to the internal rigor that ensures results are accurate and can be generalized. In an effort to replace the traditional quantitative terms with more naturalistic expressions, early qualitative researchers substituted parallel terms for scientific notions of validity, reliability and objectivity.⁵⁴⁴ QA in qualitative research

⁵⁴⁰ <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov., 2018).

⁵⁴¹ <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov., 2018).

⁵⁴² <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov., 2018).

⁵⁴³ <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products>. (accessed Sept, 2016-Nov., 2018).

⁵⁴⁴ Lincoln, Y.S. and E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), p. 300.

consists of three elements: credibility, transferability and dependability.⁵⁴⁵ In a practical theological context, these elements appear as validity, generalizability and reliability.⁵⁴⁶

4.11.1 Validity in Practical Theological Research

Validity in Practical Theology and indeed all QR differs significantly from the process in the natural sciences. A list compiled by Miles and Huberman examines the validity (credibility) of a qualitative study in terms of the richness of the detail around context and other descriptions, plausibility of the accounts (do they ring true), the internal coherence of the findings, acknowledgement of negative evidence or rival explanations, and participant verification of conclusions.⁵⁴⁷ In Practical Theology, the objective is to understand rather than explain the experiences of the research participants. Validation practices are put in place to ensure that the interpretive process does not distort or misrepresent the phenomenon being explored. Creswell identifies eight validation strategies.⁵⁴⁸ This project used several of these strategies, including: 1) prolonged engagement in the field, 2) triangulation, 3) clarifying researcher bias, and 4) the use of thick, detailed description.

⁵⁴⁵ K. Yilmaz, "Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: Epistemological, Theoretical, and Methodological Differences," in *European Journal of Education*, 48(2) (2013), pp.311-325.

⁵⁴⁶ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 70-71.

⁵⁴⁷ Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994) pp.278-279.

⁵⁴⁸ Creswell (2007), pp. 207-209.

Angen describes validity in research as “a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research.”⁵⁴⁹ Trustworthiness is a way of apprehending the internal rigor of the research. In this project, several steps were taken to enhance trustworthiness: 1) I was intentional about bracketing my own biases throughout the data collection and analysis stages to ensure the integrity of the research: I am open about my own experience and interest in pilgrimage, and aware that the contagious nature of my enthusiasm could influence the dialogue between me and the participants. Reflexivity is the key feeling / thinking activity that enables the researcher to identify potential influence throughout the research process. It is a process that involves the researcher’s honest examination of the personal values and interests that potentially impact the research. Swinton and Mowat describe reflexivity as “the process of critical self-awareness carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings.”⁵⁵⁰ Throughout the data collection process I was aware of my gratitude and joy as the researchers persevered through the six-week, 100 km. walk, and forwarded often copious, profusely-detailed weekly journal accounts. Sensing makes the further point that by acknowledging my own place in the dialogue, the participants and ultimately the readers are challenged to recognize their own value locations vis a vis the topic.⁵⁵¹ My relationship with the participants was collaborative: the participants were “active agents in the constructing of the meaning and interpretation of the research.”⁵⁵² I posed the reflection questions which shaped the journal accounts, the questionnaire and the focus group, but was intentional

⁵⁴⁹ M. J. Angen, “Evaluating Interpretive Inquiry: Reviewing the Validity Debate and Opening the Dialogue” in *Qualitative Health Research* (May 2000), 10, p.387.

⁵⁵⁰ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 59-61.

⁵⁵¹ Sensing (2011), pp. 46-47.

⁵⁵² Sensing (2011), p. 46.

about trying to take in the participants' meanings, and as far as possible used their actual verbatim accounts. 2) The validity of the project is additionally supported by the ease with which the data collection and analysis procedures can be reproduced. These procedures are clearly articulated and can be replicated by an external party for the purpose of finding resonance with the experience of the original research participants. 3) Validity is further enhanced by the capacity of the research to engender new ideas. Angen suggests that interpretive research should contain "a generative promise."⁵⁵³ In this project, the generative promise is the potential virtual pilgrimage holds for the advancement of a new, transformative faith practice.

4.11.2 Generalizability in Practical Theological Research

Generalizability in practical theological research is related to the above idea of reproduction. Similar to all qualitative research, Practical Theology reflects on experiences and situations that are ideographic. "Ideographic" knowledge is distinct from "nomothetic" knowledge in its content and purpose.⁵⁵⁴ This study is designed to describe, rather than explain the experiences of the participants. The experiences of virtual pilgrims are ideographic, uniquely meaningful and life-changing and not amenable to results-duplication in the strict quantitative research sense. For that reason, terms like "identification" and "resonance"⁵⁵⁵ are used to describe the facility for transfer and generalization in QR, more broadly, and Practical Theology, more specifically. QR should "resonate" with the experience of others in similar circumstances. This resonance

⁵⁵³ M. J. Angen (May, 2000), p.389.

⁵⁵⁴ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 41-49.

⁵⁵⁵ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 47.

should invoke a sense of identification.⁵⁵⁶ My task was to provide a sufficiently thick description to enable future researchers to explore the possibility of replication and transferability of findings with different participants and contexts.

4.11.3 Reliability in Practical Theological Research

Reliability in Practical Theology refers to the soundness of the research, and its potential for confirmation. Miles and Huberman reference several attributes in their examination of reliability in qualitative research, including congruence between the research question and the study design, clearly defined constructs, a fulsome description of the researcher's beliefs and biases, explicit data collection protocols, coding checks, data quality checks, and peer reviews.⁵⁵⁷ Reliability is enhanced through meticulous recording by the researcher throughout the collection of data and the data analysis processes. I made extensive use of verbatim accounts by the participants, and word for word excerpts from the recorded focus group session. While I used more than one method (triangulation) for data collection, I do not have the benefit of more than one researcher to assist with coding in the analysis stage.

4.11.4 Evaluative Summary of the Research Methodology

A final consideration in QA is an evaluative summary of the research methodology. This is the connecting link between the methodology phase and the results phase. As the project moves into the results and discussion phase, it is essential to assess

⁵⁵⁶ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p.47.

⁵⁵⁷ Miles and Huberman (1994), pp. 278-279.

whether it has met the technical and interpretive standards for good research within a practical theological framework. I used Creswell's standards for evaluation to assess the robustness of the research findings.

4.11.4.1 Technical Standards

Creswell's standards for evaluation served as a helpful guide for auditing my methodology.⁵⁵⁸ My assessment is as follows: 1) The data collection and analysis procedures were driven by the research question, from the standpoint of technical, methodological competence. 2) The theoretical constructs were meaningful and viable within the practical theological community; the study was robust and used respected theoretical explanations. 3) The assumptions, including my personal biases, were acknowledged throughout the data collection and analysis processes; I tried to maintain a posture of critical subjectivity. 4) There was reciprocity between me (the researcher) and the participants; I respected the sacredness of the relationships with them, and honoured the confidentiality of their privileged sharing. 5) The study has value both for informing and improving practice; the research contributes to the discipline of Practical Theology in general, and to the development of a new, enlivening faith practice for the SGH community in particular.

4.11.4.2 Interpretive Standards

In related vein, Richardson and St. Pierre identify interpretive standards for assessing the veracity of a qualitative study. These include consideration of the

⁵⁵⁸ Creswell (2007), pp. 211-212.

substantive contribution of the study, the aesthetic merit of the research, the author's reflexivity, and the power of the research to generate action, new questions, and new practices.⁵⁵⁹ The discipline of Practical Theology ensures that the theological dimension is given epistemological priority in the interpretive process, while qualitative methods contribute "clarification" and "complexification" to the practical theological inquiry.⁵⁶⁰ The interpretive process in both the analysis and results stages is facilitated by attributes that smooth the way for collaboration among Practical Theology, the social science disciplines and qualitative methodologies. Swinton and Mowat identify these attributes as "hospitality," "conversion," and "critical faithfulness."⁵⁶¹

Hospitality is "the spirit-enabled ability to show kindness, acceptance and warmth when welcoming guests or strangers."⁵⁶² In the context of this research, it involves welcoming and respecting other forms of knowledge and alternative approaches to research "with no a-priori assumption that Theology needs to merge, follow, or accept"⁵⁶³ these other perspectives.

Conversion is the process whereby the research is "grafted into God's redemptive intentions for the world."⁵⁶⁴ For the practical theologian, that means disciplines that are considered autonomous and separate from God are used in the service of God. In this project, the human and social sciences contributed hugely to an understanding of the changing socio-spiritual climate, and the context and nature of twenty-first century pilgrimage. The findings from these disciplines were analyzed and understood within a

⁵⁵⁹ Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed., Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005), pp. 959-978.

⁵⁶⁰ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 86-87.

⁵⁶¹ Swinton and Mowat (2009), pp. 91-94.

⁵⁶² Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 91.

⁵⁶³ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 91.

⁵⁶⁴ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 92.

Christian theistic framework. The practical theological task is a correlative exercise. It allowed me to dialogue with partner disciplines, while also holding onto the reality of God's revelation.

Critical faithfulness acknowledges "the genuine working of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of what is given."⁵⁶⁵ The knowledge brought forward through the "hospitable conversation"⁵⁶⁶ and "creative conversion"⁵⁶⁷ enabled me to appraise established faith practices at SGH. It also required that I draw on the Christian tradition to inform my use of qualitative methodologies and knowledge from other disciplines.

4.12 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the pragmatic task of the research cycle with the question "How might I respond?" This fourth and final task extends over the Methodology, Results, and Discussion chapters. These chapters describe the protocols and procedures used to collect and analyse the research data, and the significance of the results for virtual pilgrimage as an authentic spiritual practice. The research design outlined the combined narrative and phenomenological approaches to the research inquiry process. The research strategy described the sample, tools for data collection (journal accounts, questionnaire, and focus group), and the NVIVO software used to code, theme, and analyse the results. Issues related to quality assurance were identified in relation to the integrity of the methodology and the credibility and soundness of the research findings. The pragmatic task culminates in the upcoming Results and Discussion chapters, where the data is enumerated and interpreted, and the implications and possible

⁵⁶⁵ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 93.

⁵⁶⁶ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 93.

⁵⁶⁷ Swinton and Mowat (2009), p. 93.

applications of the findings are discussed. There is a concerted effort to bring the research findings into dialogue with the Christian tradition. This conversation and alignment/ conversion with the tradition will help to discern the merit of virtual pilgrimage as a transformative faith practice within the SGH community.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The Results Chapter, Chapter V in this research is a continuation of the pragmatic task, the fourth task in the research cycle designed to answer the question “How might I respond?”⁵⁶⁸ The pragmatic task involves “forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable.”⁵⁶⁹ The study has identified the present day inability of conventional faith forms to provide spiritual support to the majority of SGH volunteers, and offers virtual pilgrimage as a pathway to spiritual renewal. The pilgrimage motif acknowledges and gives voice to the various spiritual currents in a form that resonates with the different cultures and faiths in the community. Claire Wolfteich pointed out that “practical theologians play an important role in helping communities to think critically about the implicit and explicit spiritualities in their midst and live into a Christian spirituality that is faithful within their own context.”⁵⁷⁰ Wolfteich further advised that “Without attention to these implicit and often unnoticed spiritualities, faith communities buy into a privatized notion of spirituality and often find themselves without the language or tools for robust public engagement.”⁵⁷¹

Chapter V describes the data analysis process and communicates the results of the study. The demographic features of the research participants are described, and the procedures used to collect, code and analyze the data are explained. The research results are interpreted in light of Stephen Bevans’ three-movement praxis model. The results are presented by way of the participants own accounts of the virtual pilgrimage experience.

⁵⁶⁸ Osmer (2008), p. 4.

⁵⁶⁹ Osmer (2008), p. 176.

⁵⁷⁰ Wolfteich (2009), p. 123.

⁵⁷¹ Wolfteich (2009), p. 127.

5.2 How Might I Respond? The Research Results

The task of creating a vision for the community is addressed by the question, “How might I respond.” The challenge for the researcher is to create a vision that is both true to the mission of the community and contextually relevant. Visioning presumes change. Change follows two basic patterns: evolutionary change, which is gradual and incremental, or revolutionary change, which punctuates the equilibrium of the community at a deep, structural level.⁵⁷² I envisioned a gentle, evolutionary change: an invitation to participate in a practice which is already familiar and established in the lives of many SGH volunteers. Many were already dedicated walkers. The virtual pilgrimage paradigm provided the incentive and structure to encounter their walking practice as a spiritual exercise. VP also gave them a language and motif for recognizing the Sacred in the community.

The purpose of the results section is to interpret the data in light of the research problem, and present the findings in units of meaning that resonate with an audience. NVIVO software was used as a qualitative data management and analysis tool. The major themes in the study were identified and organized around the three dimensions of the praxis model: committed action, reflection, and committed and intelligent action. The research design consisted of a melding of the narrative and phenomenology approaches to allow for the use of the participants’ verbatim accounts, and to provide for the researcher’s narrative summations of participant epiphanies and insights. The results section concluded with a review of the participant’s assessments of the challenges and strengths of virtual pilgrimage as an alternative faith practice.

⁵⁷² Osmer (2008), p. 204.

5.2.1 Participant Demographics

The twelve research participants were SGH volunteers. For the purpose of data analysis within the NVIVO classification system, each participant constituted a “Case.”⁵⁷³ Each Case was a repository for demographic information and other data specific to each participant. There were six women and six men. The participants ranged in age from 46 to 85, with five of the participants in the 56 to 65 age group. One participant was in the 76 to 85 age group. All participants identified their educational levels as college or university; two had graduate or post-graduate level educations. In terms of religious affiliation, eight identified as Roman Catholic (one was a non-practicing Roman Catholic), three identified as Christian, and one identified as Atheist. Four of the twelve participants were retired. Eleven of the participants identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, and one identified as Hispanic.

The participants self-selected by responding to an electronic “call for research participants” that was circulated thorough the volunteer data base. The actual study participants were then randomly selected from the pool of respondents. In what appears as an anomaly, given the proportion of SGH volunteers from other ethnic and faith backgrounds, eleven of the twelve participants were Caucasian, and eleven of the twelve were Christian: Caucasians and Christians were disproportionately represented in the research sample. It was outside the scope of the study to explore this discrepancy, but it did point to a curious variable response pattern among the different ethnic and faith groups in the SGH community.

⁵⁷³NVIVO, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products> (accessed Feb. 15, 2018).

5.2.2 Data Analysis

Swinton and Mowat describe data analysis in the context of Practical Theology as the “process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that is generated in the research process...Analysis is the process of breaking down the data and thematizing it in ways which draw out the meanings hidden within the text.”⁵⁷⁴ Creswell describes the data analysis process as a “spiral” that moves through a series of loops, starting with data management.⁵⁷⁵

5.2.2.1 Data Management

The first step in the process of analyzing the data and presenting the results is data management. In an NVIVO environment, data management commences with a “data cleaning”⁵⁷⁶ procedure. Cleaning the data involves organizing the morass of information within each data set. This project used three data sources: the journals composed by the participants during the walking phase of the research, the questionnaires at the end of the walking phase, and the focus group. The sum total of the data collected from each of these sources was a data set. Each of the three data sets was assigned to a folder. Within each folder, the data was organized chronologically and thematically: 1) The journal accounts were structured according to the weekly time frames and the reflection question for that week. Each participant was assigned a code number to ensure anonymity was preserved. The participant’s journal accounts followed the same pattern of numerical sequencing for each week. 2) The questionnaire responses underwent a process of

⁵⁷⁴ Swinton and Mowat (2006), p. 57.

⁵⁷⁵ Creswell (2007), p. 151.

⁵⁷⁶ Philip Adu, “Presenting Qualitative Findings: Using NVIVO Output to Tell The Story” August, 2016.

cleaning and reorganizing, and the twelve participant responses were arranged sequentially for each of the twenty-five questions. 3) The focus group audio recording was transcribed into twenty-two pages of verbatim text and stored as a Word processing document. Once the data was cleaned and re-organized, each data set was uploaded into NVIVO.

5.2.2.2 Coding the Data

The next step in the data analysis process involved getting an overall impression of the entire database to discover the main themes. Creswell refers to this loop in the analysis process as “reading and memoing.”⁵⁷⁷ It requires revisiting the data and becoming re-acquainted with the material in a process of immersion that is both daunting and exhilarating. It was through a meticulous reading of the data that the major themes were identified.

While the sheer quantity of data was overwhelming (there were 239 pages of coded text, referred to in the NVIVO world as nodes), the depth and richness of the participant’s observations and reflections was exciting. The three data sets were explored to identify major organizing ideas. Codes and categories were developed to sort text in a process Creswell describes as “winnowing.”⁵⁷⁸ In NVIVO, codes are referred to as “Cases and “Nodes.”⁵⁷⁹ Codes are comprised of all the references to a specific topic, person or entity in a single node. Cases gather references to people, places, organizations and other entities, and classify data to analyze “who,” “what,” and “where” questions. Nodes categorize and classify data by theme or topic. For example, in this project, case

⁵⁷⁷ Creswell (2007), p. 151.

⁵⁷⁸ Creswell (2007), p. 152.

⁵⁷⁹ NVIVO, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products> (accessed Feb. 15, 2018).

coding was used to assign demographic data, and node coding was used to categorize and classify participant responses to each question in the questionnaire.

Creswell cautions against becoming weighed down with too many categories. He advocates for a “lean coding” approach to organizing data so that not more than 25 to 30 codes are developed.⁵⁸⁰ Then data is further classified to elicit broad groupings of “nodes” or “themes,” with “child nodes” representing sub-themes within the data.⁵⁸¹ Creswell suggests small, manageable sets of themes, with ideally a limit of five to seven theme families.⁵⁸² In this project, the theme families were organized around the three movements of the Praxis model used for the data analysis. These movements are: 1) Committed Action, 2) Reflection, and 3) Committed and Intelligent Action.

5.2.2.3 Interpreting the Data

In this project, Stephen Bevans’ “praxis model” was used as the framework for identifying and organizing the major themes in the data. The spiral pattern of the praxis model complemented Osmer’s four-task movement in the practical theological cycle. Unlike the more traditional process of “faith seeking understanding,” the praxis model in theology is “faith seeking intelligent action.”⁵⁸³ It is a boots-on-the ground approach that involves actually doing the truth, an action that leads to new understanding and new practice.

The concept of praxis was originally coined by American educator, Thomas Groome, as an approach to working with issues and problems in an immediate context,

⁵⁸⁰ Creswell (2007), p. 152.

⁵⁸¹ NVIVO, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-products> (accessed Feb. 15, 2018).

⁵⁸² Creswell (2007), p. 153.

⁵⁸³ Bevans (2019), p. 73.

through a process of dialogue and reflection. Dialogue and reflection are informed by the wider Christian story and vision.⁵⁸⁴ Praxis has since been adopted as a model for doing contextual theology. The praxis model carries a social change connotation that used to be principally associated with liberation theology, but was later adapted to the discipline of Practical Theology. Steven Bevans developed this newer thrust in his book *Models of Contextual Theology*.⁵⁸⁵ Identifying / naming the experience of the self, the other and the world is the first stage in praxis. Identifying the experience segues to the reflection and integration necessary for an appropriate response. In a praxis context, the appropriate response involves revising an established practice or appropriating a new practice in concert with the new meanings and understandings evinced.

The praxis model focuses on the “identity of Christians within a context, particularly as that context is understood in terms of social change.”⁵⁸⁶ It has a rough precedent in the prophetic Christian tradition that insists “not only on words, but also on action (Isaiah, Amos)” and the New Testament dictum of the need “not only to hear the word, but to do it (Jas. 1:22).”⁵⁸⁷ The praxis model is a way of doing theology through reflective action: it is “about discerning the meaning and contributing to the course of social change, and so it takes its inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behaviour, but from present realities and future possibilities.”⁵⁸⁸ The model recognizes the revelatory nature of God: God manifests God’s presence not only in the fabric of history, but in the events of everyday life, “where God’s presence is one of beckoning

⁵⁸⁴ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

⁵⁸⁵ Bevans (2010), pp. 70-87.

⁵⁸⁶ Bevans (2010), p. 70.

⁵⁸⁷ Bevans (2010), p. 71.

⁵⁸⁸ Bevans (2010), p. 70.

and invitation, calling men and women of faith to locate God and cooperate with God in God's work of healing, reconciling, liberating."⁵⁸⁹ Bevans uses the analogy of the garden to describe praxis in action: "the garden needs to be constantly weeded; the work never ends; practice makes one a better gardener."⁵⁹⁰ The method of doing theology as praxis is represented as an unending spiral of practice/reflection/practice. There are three essential movements in the praxis model: 1) committed action, 2) reflection, and 3) committed and intelligent action.⁵⁹¹ The thematic structure of the analysis and interpretation in this research is developed around these three movements.

From a praxis standpoint, the "committed action" movement requires faith, but a faith that is more than "believing propositions or opening up to an encounter."⁵⁹² Committed action refers to the "doing of the truth."⁵⁹³ The action themes associated with virtual pilgrimage are drawn from the biblical tradition and from more recent research and writing in the repository of Christian literature. These themes explore virtual pilgrimage in terms of: 1) ritual, 2) walking obeisance, and 3) focal practice. Each of these themes is developed under "The Committed Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage."

The "reflection" movement in praxis refers to a critical appraisal of action in a particular context. Reflection flows from committed action and is a two-part movement: it involves re-casting the action or practice within the Christian tradition, and revising it in "dialogue with life as it is actually lived, suffered through and celebrated."⁵⁹⁴ It is

⁵⁸⁹ Bevans (2010), p. 75.

⁵⁹⁰ Bevans (2010), p. 142.

⁵⁹¹ Bevans (2010), p. 76.

⁵⁹² Bevans (2010), p. 76.

⁵⁹³ Bevans (2010), p. 80.

⁵⁹⁴ Bevans (2010), p. 81.

through the process of reflection that new understanding is evolved. The reflection themes around which virtual pilgrimage is developed are: 1) contemplative awareness, 2) communion with the sacred, 3) realizing personal blessings, 4) the journaling requisite, and 5) the absence of technology. Each of these themes is developed under “The Reflection Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage.” Each of these themes segues to the third movement, and can be a constituent part of it. Reflection occurs in two ways: 1) as the participant’s concrete reflection in a given situation, and 2) as an observation on the act of reflection by the participant.

The “committed and intelligent action” movement in the praxis model takes the form of an authentic expression of truth. “Authenticity” is assessed in light of the Christian understanding of the Sacred. An authentic spiritual practice is revelatory, hospitable, inclusive, and open. It provides the impetus for inspired practice or action in the world.⁵⁹⁵ The action in this movement is “more refined, more rooted in the bible, and more rooted in contextual reality.”⁵⁹⁶ The virtual pilgrimage themes associated with committed and intelligent action are the characteristics which distinguish the practice as transforming. These include 1) aesthetic arrest, 2) healing and peace, 3) connectivity and community, 4) the impetus to serve, and 5) everyday mysticism. Each of these themes is developed under “The Committed and Intelligent Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage.” In the interest of preserving the anonymity of the research participants, each participant was assigned a number from P1 to P12. Direct references were cited accordingly. It is important to note that the participants’ texts may have more than one application, and were occasionally cited in relation to more than one result.

⁵⁹⁵ McCarthy (2000), pp. 192-206.

⁵⁹⁶ Bevans (2010), p. 76.

5.2.3 The Committed Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage

Committed Action is the first movement in the praxis model. Each of the three themes associated with committed action was explored separately. These themes looked at virtual pilgrimage in terms of: 1) ritual, 2) walking obeisance, and 3) focal practice. There was similarity and overlap among these themes. The researcher made slight distinctions between the three terms: ritual has a nuanced faith connotation, walking obeisance refers to an understanding of the sacredness of and reverence for the context, and focal practice has a quality of commitment and focus in the walking practice. The verbatim texts used in this section are found in the Appendix in the “Summary of Results Table 1: The Committed Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage.”

5.2.3.1 Virtual Pilgrimage as Ritual

“Ritual” for Beth Crisp refers to patterns of activity that provide order, and a sense of identity, connection, and meaning to peoples lives.⁵⁹⁷ Ritualized forms of the sacred often prosper outside the purview of conventional religious beliefs and practices. Catherine Bell believes that “the more that religion is unable to control the sacred, the more the sacred may thrive in a wide range of ritualized forms and activities”⁵⁹⁸ Applied to virtual pilgrimage, ritual imbues the act of walking with meaning. It has an inherent capacity for centering and connection. P10 remarked, “I also have found how walking with a deliberate intention of reflection offers a different level of perspective and sense of calmness that is different from working out or even doing yoga. I am thinking that being

⁵⁹⁷ Crisp (2010), p. 93.

⁵⁹⁸ Bell (1997), p. 201.

active, walking (not running), enables a deeper connection and observation with/of nature and the beauty that surrounds us. It offers many doses of being very present in the moment and being connected to the universe and God through all five senses.” P11 found that, “Disciplined solitary walking naturally allows for a form of meditation.” The repetitive pattern of the steps has a releasing, restorative quality.

According to Ron Rolheiser, participation in ritual is crucial to our flourishing as spiritual beings, not because it is stimulating or novel, but rather, because it is predictable, repetitive and simple.⁵⁹⁹ The repetitive nature of ritual has a sustaining quality. It has the power to invoke a sentiment or a state of being. For P10: “The steps back and forth provide a good rhythm as well, and is meditative in many respects... it helps the thinking, the connection with universe and God.” It is through participation in the ritual that new understandings are acquired. P10 asserts: “The power of walking means you move on, step by step, to let go of what was because it is no longer there... Time moves forward... walking helps to bring many perspectives into the thinking and helps to provide clarity for next steps and truisms with God.” Richard Osmer makes the point that a good ritual is “epistemic,” it “yields knowledge that can be formed only through participation.”⁶⁰⁰ An exemplary approach to ritual was modeled by P9, whose deferential approach to virtual pilgrimage made way for the revelatory content of the ritual: “I think walking by yourself, without any distractions is a form of worship, when focused on the Creator. Sometimes I ask God to reveal something new to me today, before walking, and then just soak it all in.”

⁵⁹⁹ Rolheiser (1999), p.p. 234-235.

⁶⁰⁰ Osmer (2008), pp. 153-155.

5.2.3.2 Virtual Pilgrimage as Walking Obeisance

Obeisance is defined as “a gesture or movement of the body expressing reverence or respect; an attitude associated with this gesture as deference or homage.”⁶⁰¹ A posture of obeisance heightens our awareness of being deeply connected, a part of everything and everyone on this planet, moving / emerging into spirited living and leading. P10 declares: “I’m present in this world; I am alive. My feet are sturdily placed on the ground as I take each step. The virtual pilgrimage confirms my existence. I take deep breaths of the cold air that circulates around me. In each breath, I try to inhale the beauty of the season. I’m conscious of my blessings and in the crossroads of life, my hand has always been held. This week’s walk confirms my desire to be a tool for those in my community.” The concept of “walking obeisance” was adapted by theologian Alan Jorgenson in an interpretation which located pilgrimage within a theology of creation. In the present context, each step is “a deferential act honouring the sacred ground that bears our journey,”⁶⁰² moving us ever closer to the mystery of life. P10 affirms a sense of the presence of God with the following statement: “My walk again brought me close to God in my thoughts, especially when walking in vast open areas. I felt the presence of God in the light—I felt goodness, warmth, compassion, love and generosity and forgiveness through senses (the sun embrace in the heart; the breeze/winds; the smell of budding trees; the quiet of nature; the sheer blue sky; the beauty of the landscape, the presence of birds, animals and so on). When I got back home, I wanted to bring more closure to my day’s journey and did some meditative yoga. I found this to be a very powerful experience after the pilgrimage walk...Was grateful again for the commitment of doing the pilgrimage.” P3 asserts: “Walking encourages reflection

⁶⁰¹ Morris, ed. (1975), p. 904.

⁶⁰² Jorgenson (2015), Ottawa Theological Congress.

perhaps in a way that running may not. The mere act of slowing down one's physical movement may allow for greater introspection." Obeisance implies "drinking deeply of our context"⁶⁰³ in the way that P7 observed: "By paying attention to the surroundings, one can notice the interconnectedness of the world." Obeisance is attuned to the inner and outer landscape of the journey. It honours the external elements of the natural world and is moved by the internal shifts of perception and feeling. P11 expressed the sense of both dimensions: "I benefit from just being alone, at one with nature, and feeling the stillness, the calmness of the surroundings through my walks. It strengthens me especially when I have things to sort out. I need both kinds of walk in my life." P10's eloquent rendering clinches the obeisant nature of the pilgrimage: "Walking enables a dialogue with God in a very deep respect; more than a prayer ----a true dialogue and feeling of close embrace with God with each step because one is in tune with so much beauty and diversity of what's in our surroundings that we see through walking." Walking obeisance is further developed in the discussion section.

5.2.3.3 Virtual Pilgrimage as Focal Practice

A focal practice originates in realities that offer "something more," a quality of life that we miss and long to find.⁶⁰⁴ Several of the research participants captured this 'something more' in their accounts of virtual pilgrimage. P3 described it this way: "On days when I walk, I feel that I am experiencing my life with greater intensity. I feel more alive and connected to the world. I am alive!" P7 found that: "By making time to walk consistently, you are improving the positive energy flow and experiencing more to life." P8

⁶⁰³Jorgenson (2015), Ottawa Theological Congress.

⁶⁰⁴ Boers (2007), p. 134.

remarked: “I found that it made the walking process more valuable in the sense that it forced us to think about a variety of things other than just walking for exercise purposes.” Arthur Boers coined the term focal practice to describe his Camino pilgrimage in 2007. Boers drew on the work of philosopher Albert Borgmann to develop the concept. Borgmann believed that “Through a focal practice we are able to accomplish what remains unattainable when aimed at in a series of individual decisions and acts.”⁶⁰⁵ Implicit in the statement is the necessity of continuity and consistency. Without a practice, an engaging action or event can momentarily light up our lives, but it cannot order and orient it focally. P9’s understanding of this aspect of the practice is expressed this way: “It forced me to make a deliberate discipline that focused on walking versus other workouts. As mentioned before, I average 16,000 steps a day on my *Fitbit* through various excretes and it was a planned effort to focus on a time of day that I could participate in this consistent practice.” P10’s experience was a further endorsement: “I really like the discipline of walking, and I coined a phrase in my head, of it being active, deliberate walking. So it’s different than just walking, and so much richer of an experience, because you observe a lot more, you become a lot more aware.”

Focal practices have a “commanding presence” that requires effort and discipline, skills and habit.⁶⁰⁶ P6 found that: “Every day when I am out walking I feel more alive, for that hour at least, I have connected with the earth and the world.” Referencing the disciplined character of virtual pilgrimage, P3 remarked: “Put simply it is walking with a purpose in mind (so many kms. within a period of time on a form of a schedule) and being deliberate in the act of walking, in the pacing forward methodically with a keen eye of

⁶⁰⁵ Borgmann (1984), p. 207.

⁶⁰⁶ Boers (2007), p. 135.

observation of surroundings and the effects of our walking on our breathing and five senses: feeling, sensing, viewing, tasting and hearing.” P1 described the essence of habit and necessity in virtual pilgrimage: “I have now arrived at the point where my daily walks are a necessary part of my daily activities in the same manner as eating or brushing my teeth...” P1 continues: “I normally stop a couple of times while on my longer walks and sit on a bench or fallen tree trunk to rest, ponder and reflect. While listening to birds and rustling trees I gaze up at the trees to openings at the tree tops onto sunny blue skies with rolling white clouds and realize the vastness of our universe.” Focal practices emanate a “centering” or “orienting” power that helps us recognize our most important priorities.⁶⁰⁷ In a description of the merit of virtual pilgrimage, P6 affirms: “It allows me more quiet time to reflect, pray and contemplate the future and make plans.” P7 noted: “It removed me from life’s business...it gave me ‘me’ time...and all that goes with having time for your own thoughts, feeling, etc.” Focal practices provide the context for reflection, discernment, and integration. P10 iterated: “I conclude how developing (and maintaining) focal practices can only make me stronger and help me be centered on the right things, right values to be happy and at peace. For me this means finding, adjusting or reaffirming “our way in life” periodically with an open heart and an open mind; aligning ourselves to possibilities to better ourselves, enrich our lives.”

Pilgrimage is a focal practice. In a localized setting, virtual pilgrimage is an extension of the link that has existed between pilgrimage and spirituality throughout the history of Christianity. The capacity for making wide-ranging connections with other people and with history, nature and God is an inherent attribute of focal practice.⁶⁰⁸ P3

⁶⁰⁷ Boers (2007), p. 135.

⁶⁰⁸ Boers (2007), p. 135.

expressed it this way: “It is interesting to know that others are walking this week and pondering the same question as I am. And those who are hiking the Camino at this very minute, what is going on in the hearts and minds of all of those pilgrims at this very moment? What are their individual thoughts? What joys and sorrows do they carry with them on their journey? What struggles are they facing, each of them, at this same moment in time? Sometimes I catch myself wondering in a crowd what each person is thinking about at that very minute, something one can never know. The Camino travellers, virtual and actual, we are all out there walking, searching for something.”

5.2.4 The Reflection Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage

Reflection is the second movement in the praxis model. Reflection is a two part movement that involves 1) a contextual analysis of an action or practice in concert with Scripture and the Christian tradition, and 2) generation of narratives that are meaningful and relevant within the ministry context. Each of the six themes associated with the reflection movement in this research is explored separately. These themes explore virtual pilgrimage in terms of: 1) contemplative awareness, 2) creative problem-solving, 3) communion with the sacred, 4) realizing personal blessings, 5) the journaling requisite, and 6) the absence of technology. The verbatim texts used in this section are found in the Appendix in the “Summary of Results Table 2: The Reflection Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage.”

5.2.4.1 Virtual Pilgrimage and Contemplative Awareness

Contemplative spirituality is finding new relevance in the post millennial world. The terminology used by the participants throughout this research (i.e. contemplation, meditation, presence of God, abiding in the presence, etc.) is similar to the language of the classical itinerary for contemplative spiritual development.⁶⁰⁹ It is important to note a casual, informal approach to these terms, however. Instances of conformity with the itinerary are for the most part incidental. The transformation process in contemplative spiritual development is described in terms of three modalities: the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way. These ways can be taken up by any spiritual disciple, including pilgrims and virtual pilgrims. The “purgative” way associated with ‘Beginners’ on the path of discipleship most aptly describes the movements of grace in the participants’ reflections and revelations. The “illuminative” way associated with the spiritual ‘Proficients,’ and the “unitive” way associated with the spiritual ‘Perfects,’ are much more advanced states of discipleship.⁶¹⁰ While it cannot be presumed that there was an intentional movement away from “debilitating boundaries and dispositions”⁶¹¹ in the way described by David Perrin, grace did work in ways that were unanticipated and surprising. There were numerous instances of the participants’ movement towards more truthful relationships, or to more authentic concern for others, or a more concerted impulse to serve. The results of this project point to a potential in virtual pilgrimage as a framework for the classical contemplative exercises. It was not the intent of the project, however.

⁶⁰⁹ Perrin (2007), p. 248.

⁶¹⁰ Perrin (2007), pp. 252-256.

⁶¹¹ Perrin (2007), p. 250.

The term, ‘contemplative awareness,’ was adapted from Marie McCarthy’s discourse on spirituality in the post-modern era. McCarthy describes contemplative awareness as a discipline that “enables us to see levels of awareness not readily apparent,”⁶¹² one that requires “stillness, receptivity and availability”, and involves “deep listening which is marked by “attending and presence.”⁶¹³ P3 had some valuable insights into conditions conducive to attending and presence: “To walk with another and to engage in constant conversation would not yield the same benefits. It is solitary meditative walking that makes it special. The practice inevitably leads the walker to think about the concerns and preoccupations in her or his life. Not everyone will be open to that or wish to confront themselves that way.” P3 further acknowledges: “But freeing your mind is not that easy. My mind can easily get anchored with all kinds of things, (to do lists, scheduling, house improvement ideas, etc., etc.) I realize that it is easy to miss out on an offering because of either distracting thoughts, or moving too quickly. I try to resist my natural temperament to always want to be energetic and make exerted efforts, but sometimes abundance is effortless. Today’s walk will serve me well in remembering that not squandering time sometimes means just letting it stand still.” P10 believes that those who participated in the virtual pilgrimage were responding to a call: “I believe that this project called those who were open to it and who were perhaps drawn to an internal journey. It inevitably results in introspection and confronting oneself. Those who answered your call must have been open to that and ready for that.”

There are two essential strands of activity in the contemplative awareness process. On one level, the participants observe and comment on their observations of the

⁶¹² McCarthy (2000), p. 199.

⁶¹³ McCarthy (2000), p. 200.

external world, with its felt impressions and impacts. P5 was attuned at this level, and very cognizant of the external environment: “I noticed last week the differences in the care of the land - the garbage or cleanliness, manicured lawns and tended gardens vs. weeds and wildflowers. I also noticed the infrastructure and how the city areas accommodated (or didn't) walkers, cyclists and vehicles, wheelchairs and skateboards. I was thinking as I walked about how the city can encourage more walkers and cyclists with some small changes to the infrastructure.” On a second level, there was an internal, more introspective sense of reckoning and struggle as participants plumbed the depths and pondered their revelations. P10 captured an experiential sense of the ebb and flow of this movement: “I find myself doing a retrospective of my life in bits on these walks...Naturally....Trying to get to my authentic me and observing in my head how I got to where I am now; what really makes me feel at peace and happy; what are illusions and true pillars of happiness; where I need to focus my thinking now; and on where I'm needed and how I'm needed. For some time now, I find I'm less inspired by worldly things; they mean less and less to me. I feel so strongly how very much I am committed to my family, friendships and helping within community.”

A contemplative sensibility opens the door to uncharted depths. P12's 'river' rumination yielded that sort of deep insight: “Today's walk along the river made me see fullness of life in every moment. The water has purpose and meaning. It has its trials and tribulations, yet it's filled with life and is necessary for the provision of life. There are many insights to be found with a river. Perhaps for me today I was able to feel a small sense of mysticism prevailing in that river.” For P11, a rock became a point of reference for similar deep pondering: “I was walking beside a lake and out of the many stones I saw

one that stood out since it was black. That started me on a reverie of where it came from and ultimately where I came from. It made me feel that everything was special, me included.”

In his work on rediscovering a felt presence of God in ordinary life, Ron Rolheiser sketched out the elements of a contemplative spirituality. One feature identified by Rolheiser is heightened self-awareness.⁶¹⁴ P3 found that “Walking or “pilgrimage,” when part of the purpose is to think about your level of self-awareness, encourages greater observance of the exterior world, in all its beauty, as well as one’s interior world and preoccupations.” For P7, “Being asked to walk on a routine basis, and reflect upon questions while doing so, resulted in preoccupations floating to the surface. It allowed me to become more self-aware, and to reflect upon what matters most to me, my goals. It also inspired reflection about who I am as a person.” P3 remarked: “What I have noticed during this first week is that the question and this project has inspired a greater consciousness within me, a greater sense of being “present” and observant on my walks, runs and hikes, than might normally be the case for me.” P8 found: “It forced a greater degree of personal contemplation than would otherwise have been the case with the same amount of walking. This was due to having to respond to the thought-provoking questions set out for each segment.

The introspective phase of the contemplative awareness reveals a high level of intensity in the ruminations of the participants. For P11, the reflection process regularly follows a social justice trajectory: “I was thinking of the different types of dwellings I encountered. Some were very substantial with nicely tended lawns. Others were not so nice. I noticed one house that had undergone substantial cosmetic improvement. It was

⁶¹⁴ Rolheiser (1994), pp.66-70.

attractive but I wondered if it would now be rented or sold at a price that would disqualify most working families. Who gets the good housing and who has to settle for the sub-standard? Can it all come down to hard work? What part does simple luck, inheritance etc. play? It is too easy to write people off who do not live up to the model of upward mobility. We must value each person for their uniqueness and not be misled by varying circumstances.” At a later stage P11’s reflection followed a similar justice trajectory: “Meditative walking calms me and moves the focus of my thoughts away from my personal and puny concerns. This allows me to see the grandeur of the world around us and also come to some realization that we are all in this pilgrimage together. When I contemplate the differences in wealth between the one-percenters and the rest of humanity, and the spectacle of politicians seemingly interested only in their own power and egos, I realize how much we all need transformation. The virtual pilgrimage also gives me a sense of hope even though progress still seems such a difficult task.”

Several of the participants engaged in open, honest, self-appraisal. P12 inquired: “So why didn’t I take a moment and clarify with this stranger his intention...I felt that he was offering a kindness, and hoping for a kindness from me in return. I no doubt got caught up in some kind of potential negativity...better known as distrust.” P4 took inventory of his personal relationships: It caused me to reflect on many of the relationships in my life and how I should be more active to show or demonstrate my love to family and friends. It also caused me to reflect on some of the hurts that I have either suffered or caused over my life, and how, for the most part, I had caused them. This reflection did not lead me to make any resolutions or actions, but at least recognition is the first step towards change.” It was in the midst of reflection that participants also realized their vulnerability and inability to control

every detail of their lives. P11 remarked: “For a week I had tendonitis, but it was a good thing in a sense because it made me feel how little in control I really was of life and everything else... and you know, it’s all very well to have these plans, and to consider what you are going to do, but life interferes with that very often.”

5.2.4.2 Virtual Pilgrimage and Creative Problem-Solving

One of the fruits of the reflection process was the ability to solve problems. The participants frequently alluded to the occurrence of breakthrough insights that allowed them to find creative solutions to problems. In Beth Crisp’s “lived experience”⁶¹⁵ model of spirituality, creativity operates at the level of everyday life. Creativity is spiritual in its capacity to lift us beyond our mundane existence to a more mysterious realm.⁶¹⁶ Creative problem solving for the participants was one of the elements that accompanied contemplative awareness. P2 provided a concrete example: “Well say you’re walking in the woods, you can just clear your mind and think about an issue, or whatever, walking, walking, you’re trying to figure out things. I find it’s a lot easier if you’re focused and you’re outside, I find you come to a conclusion. If you’re home or some place else, your thinking about this and something else happens, you kind of drop it, you know. I think you can finish what you’re thinking, make it a conclusion, that’s what I think.” For P2, virtual pilgrimage afforded the freedom from distractions that allowed for figuring things out and arriving at a conclusion. P12 echoed a similar sentiment: “Remove distractions by walking. Remove tasks by walking. Walk long enough until focus and concentration is the only issue at hand. Your contemplations will ultimately be guided to a resolution.” P6 found

⁶¹⁵ Crisp (2010), p. 14.

⁶¹⁶ Crisp (2010), p. 105.

that: “It gave me a sense of peace and allowed me to think about things in an unstructured unhurried way.” P1 found “It allows me quiet time to review issues and effectively arrive at conclusions, make plans to solve problems that arise daily.”

Several participants found that problem-solving was connected to the action of walking in virtual pilgrimage. P5 remarked: “I have had solutions and ideas pop into my head while walking and usually I am not chewing them over; it comes more from the subconscious.” For P7, “A simple walk can clear your mind, allow your conscious mind to wander on to something beautiful and then BOOM - the idea that was plaguing you is solved.” P4 alluded to St. Augustine’s truism, “It is solved by walking.” “If there is an issue that needs to be thought through, away from its source, contemplative walking is a way to do it. There are also probably other ways, though in St. Augustine’s day, it could well have been the most effective.”

In virtual pilgrimage, the slower pace associated walking seems the most relevant factor in creative problem-solving. P3 found that: “Walking encourages reflection perhaps in a way that running may not. The mere act of slowing down one’s physical movement may allow for greater introspection.” P3 further explained: “If I am walking or running in nature, I find myself reflecting always. As I reflect, I tend to slow down physically. Allowing myself to reflect upon an issue, a conflict or incident, particularly after a certain period of time has passed, allows me to view it more dispassionately, with less emotion, more rationality. It allows me to assess the matter through a wider lens, from more angles, from the perspectives of others.” P7 drew a comparison: “I have a sign on my wall at work that says: ‘The bicycle is a simple solution to some of the world’s most complicated problems.’ Walking is similar – it makes you slow down; it requires you to use your own

energy rather than wasting limited resources; it does not pollute or harm the earth in any way; it keeps a body fit; and allows time and energy for conversation when you walk together.” For P6 “Long slow contemplation on a problem will lead to its solution. Also, this process leaves one open to God’s input and influence on the ultimate outcome.”

5.2.4.3 Virtual Pilgrimage and Communion with the Sacred

Another aspect of the reflection movement in virtual pilgrimage is communion with the Sacred. The Sacred in this usage can mean a higher power, a life force, nature or God. For several participants, reflection occurred seamlessly in concert with the Christian tradition. For others, the existence of a supreme personage did not seem plausible. For P3, communion with nature was the portal to transcendent experience: “I do not believe in a supreme being who is directing the orchestra. I do not believe there is someone in the sky or that there is a heaven. But nor do I deny the miracle of nature. I am happiest when I am in the woods, in winter, on my skis, on a glorious winter day, with the trees laden with freshly-fallen snow. Nature brings me my peace. But even logic dictates that something cannot come from nothing, how can life come from non-life, energy from non-energy? I do not rule out what I call an "answer" or an "explanation." Being in nature inspires me to contemplate the questions, whether it is a morning like this morning, a winter’s day on a rolling, back-country ski trail, a summer run along a country road with red-winged blackbirds flitting about and cows and horses in the fields, or a starry night with a waxing moon. Walking in nature inspires introspection, observation, and contemplation in me. Preoccupations rise to the surface. I am never not thinking about something.” Communion with the Sacred did not reflect an exclusively Christian spiritual emphasis. However, all

participants seemed to relate to some conception of creation, an understanding that life must come from life, some notion of an unmoved mover. P3 experienced communion in nature, “Feeling oneness with nature is for me very spiritual. I reflect on how landscapes, water and rivers and flowers are key ingredients in my day to day that transform me from living with a high level of being focused on many things at once, to being present in the moment. A true gift once perfected.”

Several participants experienced the Sacred as God. For P10 the virtual pilgrimage was an occasion for a depth encounter with a personal God: “Feeling very close to God, family and friends. Enjoy the quiet while walking. Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice / soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind.” P9 experiences communion with God in the daily round: “I experience him in the humdrum of everyday life. When I walk outside, he’s personally revealing a small piece of what he’s made, and it’s never the same experience twice.” For P4, commitment to the practice of pilgrimage placed God at the forefront of life: “Overall the virtual pilgrimage has led me to think about God and his creation throughout the day, and to consciously plan and make room for the walks. I find myself thinking more throughout the day of God’s place in my life.” The seventeenth century Carmelite monk, Brother Lawrence, dedicated his entire existence to thinking of God, abiding in the presence of God. In his second letter, Brother Lawrence declared, “There is not in the world a way of life more sweet, more delightful than continued converse with God. Those only who savour it and practice it can understand.”⁶¹⁷ P10 echoes that seventeenth century sentiment in a rapturous discourse: “I felt the presence of God in the light-I felt

⁶¹⁷ Brother Lawrence (1981), p. 38.

goodness, warmth, compassion, love and generosity and forgiveness through senses (the sun embrace in the heart; the breeze / winds; the smell of budding trees; the quiet of nature; the sheer blue sky; the beauty of the landscape; the presence of birds, animals...)” Abiding in the Presence animates a willingness to trust, the kind of surrender born of certitude. P6 desires to emulate surrender in all facets of life, but selection into this research project was a case in point: “I’ll leave it up to him if I’m chosen. For me, from the beginning it was spiritual. It was a tool. It was my base, my route to begin the walk; it was a mutual relationship with Him.”

5.2.4.4 Virtual Pilgrimage and Realizing Personal Blessings

Virtual pilgrimage is a pathway to the realization of abundance and blessing in personal lives. The realization of blessings is the precursor to an inner experience of gratitude. As the participants walked they reflected and pondered. Their open hearts and dispositions moved them from limitation to largess. They were in the realm of new possibility, able to intuit broad connections, but also impelled to look deeply at the little things. Their writing teems with acknowledgements of bounty and expressions of appreciation and deep gratitude. A sampling has been included.

P1 offered: “Upon reflection I have lived a very fortunate and happy life with many breaks sprinkled upon life’s daily ups and downs. In some ways lately, I have drifted into enjoying more and more the good things of life... I am becoming more aware that due to the many health issues that I have been battling over the last 30 or more years, I should probably have departed this great world by now.” P2 reflected: “I am very grateful for my energy and good health and the fact that I can still walk, run, play tennis, swim, do all of these things. I am grateful every day for the quality of life that I have.” P3 counted myriad

blessings: “I am grateful for the beautiful place where I live, for my home, where I feel safe and secure, for my health, my friends, my body, and my mind. The beauty around me as I walk inevitably inspires me to reflect on all that is good and beautiful in my life. And so much is.” P12 recognized that: “I am now more inclined to want to take time to really appreciate the wonderful things that I see, hear, and smell when out walking. It's as though my senses have been born again. And once more, it's as though all those wonderful things that I experience, are like a flower....a kind of metaphor for many things in life; appreciate those things that engage you as though it's not going to last.” P10 is grateful for the relationships in her life: “I am feeling very grateful to God for my wonderful husband and sons, family, friends and colleagues and my dog -- the best.” P3 expresses gratitude for the beauty of the surroundings: “I focus on the beauty around me, the early morning light filtering through the wood slats of the old red barn, the river, the rolling brown fields, the birdsong.” P9 attributed a new found sense of gratitude to the virtual pilgrimage: “A great enhancer was the questions of reflection. It has been a change to how I walk through life, and it reaffirms that I need to be grateful for the gifts and the extras that come with life.” P9 found the virtual pilgrimage to be an instrument for continued growth in the faith, and made the point that “Thanksgiving is the meaning of the Greek word “Eucharist.” For P12, time is a gift and blessing. Time passages are precious, fleeting realities that can never be reclaimed, and so must be cherished: “So this walk on this sunny day, a day when neighbours were outdoors because winter finally announced its defeat, and spring was now the victorious season, reinforced a life lesson that I am learning more and more as I age....don't squelch time. It can never be recovered, it can never be replaced. Enjoy every

day, enjoy every occasion, and take every opportunity as though it will come around one time only.”

5.2.4.5 Virtual Pilgrimage and the Journaling Requisite

Journaling is a tool for recollection and reflection. The participants maintained journal accounts of their walking practices over the six week research period. These accounts contained their chronicles, explorations and musings. The often copious, richly detailed narratives of their walking episodes were a crucial source of research data. The journaling exercise was a way to tangibly record sights, smells, sounds, impressions, insights, inspirations, workings of grace, and movements of the Spirit. Several of the participants commented on the journaling requirement, recognizing it as a chore, but also conceding the value of it. P10 remarked: “I think that the journaling was a fantastic discipline, even though it was a chore, a lot of work. But I thought it made the experience that much more rich.” P5 also found it burdensome but valuable: “I also thought about the past reflection of Boers’ concept of “focal practice” and how journal writing, (although difficult for me), has been very engaging for me. I thought that perhaps journal writing, or writing letters, may be a way for me to consider “spring cleaning” my mind, from time to time...” The journaling requisite was important for maintaining attention and focus. P4 commented: “I did find myself becoming more aware of my surroundings in the varied locations of the walks, mainly, I think, because of the need to chronicle each of the walks for these journals.” For P8 the ‘provocative question’ seemed a formidable force: “I do agree that writing is an important element. Because you are thinking that I need to be aware of this because I need to write about it. So you are more observant because you know you have to remember, right? What do you make out of it? You’ve got this provocative

question...it's a deliberate act of thought, so I thought journaling was important for virtual Camino." P8 also felt that journaling helped offset the complacency that goes with being in familiar territory: "Because you are still in your home environment, it's important to have (the question)...otherwise you may not draw the same benefits."

P12's more formal approach to journaling involved announcing the intention and theme for the journal entry: "This is what I'd like to focus this journal entry on...the river. The river was a magnet for life of all forms. I saw Canada geese and newly hatched goslings. I saw a mallard and her brood being propelled by the swift current..." P1 did an account of the actual walking experience, and a post-account reflection on thoughts and feelings: "As for the virtual Camino, I am thinking on this walk today that "journaling" is also key to the experience. Not only is it a great discipline but it requires a more involved commitment. I take note that I am much more observant and awake to my feelings on these walks because of the need to journal. I also reflect on the feeling I had after journalingwriting down one's thoughts helps bring clarity and focus to one's mind and deepens the experience." P3 endorsed journaling as a portal to the interior life: "Committing the experience to paper is a key part of this exercise. The exercise, this virtual pilgrimage, inspires me to pay greater attention to my inner life, to my thoughts, as well as to my exterior surroundings. It may also inspire me to reflect on my perceptions and to consider using a different lens." The act of journaling releases psychic material that would otherwise remain dormant. On that subject P3 explained: "The act of journaling, the mere act of putting pen to paper regarding the virtual pilgrimage experience, inspires greater openness on the page. When we walk, we reflect, and when we journal later, we are journaling about our reflections. Thus we will be talking about our concerns, our preoccupations. Thus we

end up sharing these thoughts with you. You are the audience, the fellow pilgrim for each of us. The virtual pilgrimage experience perhaps encourages each of us to be open with you, more open than one might normally be with someone we do not know. Pilgrimage inspires reflection about our lives. Because we are asked to write about it, we are naturally drawn to write about what we have been reflecting upon.”

5.2.4.6 Virtual Pilgrimage and the Absence of Technology

A common thread throughout the reflection process was the absence of technology, the intentional decision to leave electronic devices behind. For P6 it was an essential aspect of the pilgrimage: “Yeah, that was really key for me too...just the quiet, no technology, no music, just the walk.” Silence and solitude are the hallmarks of a contemplative spirituality. Silence and solitude created a break with the inner and outer commotion in P6’s life. Silence and solitude combined with the rhythmic, centering movement of the walk, opened the way to a deeper interiority, a place of rest and restoration.

Nicolas Carr describes the permeation of technology in contemporary life as “the eco-system of interruption technologies.”⁶¹⁸ For P1 the virtual pilgrimage necessitated leaving home. Home was itself the point of access to the electronic devices: “More and more I am foregoing TV and computer time for walks... In addition to improving my health it provides me more time for reflection and contemplation about issues that really matter...” P1 further explained that the decision to leave home (to walk) created the ideal conditions for reflection and examination: “Well I thought that just the fact that it got me away from the noise, and the TV’s and computers, and started thinking about where I stand, and I

⁶¹⁸ Carr (2010) p. 91.

guess you have that feeling internally, not doing quite as much as you should be, and it started to do that every day, you figure you better start doing something more positive...At least thinking about some kind of action plan.” P12 similarly found that the conditions conducive to reflection involved being away from home: “We are not distracted with household chores like meals and clean-up, and technological communications such as e-mails and texts. It’s like removing the four walls also removes the mental “to do” lists and work stresses...”

There are generational differences in the modes of access to technology. For several participants, the decision to bypass technology meant not bringing mobile devices into their walking practices. For P6 it was a ‘no-brainer:’ “I should add that whenever I walk, I always walk unplugged. I would rather not have music interfering with thinking.” P3 described the effect of walking unplugged in terms of an internal process: “Walking alone, assuming no ear buds emitting distracting noise, results in the thoughts turning inward; one has to listen to one’s self; one is connected to the body and mind, recognizing physical changes - to gait, pain in joints; and mindfulness changes wherein the thoughts flow and turn to insight.” Walking unplugged became a way to reclaim a contemplative sensibility for these participants.

Margaret Wheatley believes we are distracted beyond recall. While we might still value curiosity, contemplation, privacy, conversation, and teamwork, these values are not visible in our lives because technology has taken over.⁶¹⁹ P3 observed that: “The act of meditative walking without electronics or friends to distract us leads inevitably to more acute observations and more introspection... The practice will not be attractive to everyone because not everyone wants to be so acutely aware of their thoughts or even

⁶¹⁹ Wheatley (2012), pp. 87-101.

allow themselves time to reflect. For some, life is easier if they are too busy to reflect much; it may be easier for some to walk with a pod-cast so that their mind is occupied. Walking in solitude leads naturally to introspection.” The decision to leave the electronics behind clearly was a deliberate and challenging choice for P3: “If I were to run or walk with an electronic device that would allow me to listen to pod-casts, this introspection would not occur. Do people choose to do that to avoid thinking about their lives? Do people choose to walk or run with others to avoid introspection? There was a time when I thought that I was wasting time by not listening to a lecture, a language, whatever, while walking or running or skiing, and that I should not go for long walks or skis on my own without taking technology so that I could listen to something, to avoid wasting my brain so to speak, that I was losing valuable time for learning.”

Wheatley advocates an attitude of openness to the world as a remedy for the distraction and the alienation created by technology: “By opening to the world as it is, we may find that gentleness, decency and bravery are available – not only to us but to all human beings.”⁶²⁰ For P10, virtual pilgrimage provides a riposte for the distraction and alienation: “The virtual pilgrimage takes me away from everyday distractions. The mobile phone is turned off; no Internet, no text messages, no artificial distractions -- just the opportunity to absorb the impersonal stimulation of the surroundings, be they country or urban; familiar or new. Even the familiar surroundings display different nuances from day to day. I am at peace while contemplating my engagement with my human and natural surroundings and the lack of artificial distractions permits a constant reassessment and adjustment, both of the value of my contributions to those surroundings and the importance of those surroundings to me.”

⁶²⁰ Wheatley (2012), p. 130.

As the reflection movement segues into the committed and intelligent action movement in this discourse, it is worth reiterating the parallel between the purgative stage of the classical spiritual itinerary and reflection in the praxis model. The purgative stage is often accompanied by an awareness of distortion and shortcoming in one's life and a deep desire for personal and spiritual betterment. In a similar way, the reflection movement is an experiential process of internal probing and pondering that yields the insights and depth understanding that inspire outcomes. These outcomes take the form of attributes that define or characterize the new action or practice, laying the groundwork for the 'Committed and Intelligent Action Movement' in the praxis model.

5.2.5 Committed and Intelligent Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage

Committed and intelligent action is the third movement in the praxis model. Intersection and overlap between 'reflection' and 'committed and intelligent action' prevents a clear delineation between the features of the two movements. It can be argued, for example, that features of the committed and intelligent action movement also rightly belong to the reflection movement. The ambiguity is acknowledged, and recognized as an embedded feature of the praxis model, which functions in an up and down spiralling fashion. Stephen Bevans describes the third movement as the place where faith is articulated in intelligent action.⁶²¹ It is a movement to faithful practice based on the fruits of theological reflection. In this context, the faithful practice is virtual pilgrimage. The constituent elements of the intelligent and committed movement are the features which define virtual pilgrimage. The virtual pilgrimage themes associated with committed and intelligent action are: 1) aesthetic arrest, 2) pathway to healing and peace, 3) connectivity

⁶²¹ Bevans (2010), p. 76.

and community, and 4) the impetus to serve, and 5) everyday mysticism. The verbatim texts used in this section are found in the Appendix in the “Summary of Results Table 3: The Committed and Intelligent Action Movement in Virtual Pilgrimage.”

5.2.5.1 Virtual Pilgrimage and Aesthetic Arrest

One of the characteristics of virtual pilgrimage as committed and intelligent action is the experience of delight in nature described by Hans Urs Von Balthasar as aesthetic arrest.⁶²² Von Balthasar coined the term to describe the summoning power of beauty. The arresting beauty of nature is a preeminent feature of this study. Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics focused on the concept of nature and our subjective experience of nature, expressed eloquently in P10's compelling account: “It's a beautiful day and I am wanting to go for a walk to feel connected to nature quickly. I do this after cycling 23 km. earlier in the day with friends. I am curious to see if I can reach a meditative place in my mind, fast, by going back to my centering trail. It works. I walk to a familiar place in the Army Base Forest, take deep breaths and feel the embrace of the sun. I am in the moment. I am grateful for this feeling.” In another walk, P10 exclaimed: “I realized how my mind likes to flow with the wind; focuses me immediately on breathing deeply to really take it in. The wind brings my entire body into awareness as I feel the whisks of wind on my face and body...Awesome!” The exuberance and joy in P10's renderings is visceral.

P3 was similarly arrested by the beauty of the season: “My observations as I walk have inevitably been connected to the cyclical events of nature during this period: the

⁶²² Hans Ur Von Balthasar, *Seeing The Form: The Glory of the Lord, A Theological Aesthetics, Volumn I*, Joseph Fessio and John Riches, eds. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), p. 5.

return of the geese, the blooming of the first spring flowers in my gardens, Mrs. Moon (Pulmonaria), Helen (Helleborous) and my Poets' Daffodils (Narcissus poeticus), the unfurling of the deep burgundy leaves of my Norwegian Maples, the wild plum trees, the white trilliums that grow along the roadside near the river, the blackbirds that nest in the cedars and flit about the fields and meadows." P12 was likewise drawn in: "There was often the magnificent fragrance of lilacs and lily of the valley in the air. Such a treat! At times I would stop to inhale the sweetness. Tulips were in full bloom. I thought to myselfenjoy these beautifully exquisite cups now...their petals will soon be dropping. That's what makes flowers so glorious...their splendour is fleeting, and so you don't take their short lives for granted. And of course, maple and oak trees once again were in full dress...offering some welcome shade." For P12, beauty was also manifested in creaturely encounters on the pilgrim path: "This section of trail was alive with frogs awakening from their hibernation and calling out for new friends. One little pond was almost frothing with frogs popping to the surface and chattering away at each other. We took a sound-video of it to remember." On another walk P12 declares: "But the beauty on the river today was actually flying low above the water. It was a magnificent heron. It was cruising up the river, with its neck kinked in and long, slender legs trailing behind. There is something prehistoric looking about this stately bird."

In contemplating beauty we are turned away from ourselves: our horizons are lifted in the way P3 described: "Today as I walked the first 17 km of the week, I saw the signs of spring. Just over two weeks ago, the trees still looked like November - stark and almost dead; just over one week ago, they were covered in snow. Today they had started small buds and shoots. I walked near a busy road, similar to many sections of the Camino,

but I could still hear the birds singing to each other and starting their nests. In the orchard I passed, the squirrels were running up and down the trunks. I've always found the signs of spring calming and comforting; the promise of warmer days and cherry blossoms and daffodils.” The virtual pilgrimage trail is a pathway to beauty for those with eyes to see. P3 found one oasis of beauty in the midst of urban chaos: “And there was a little piece of nature...a constructed wetland area with all the trimmings that a wetland promises. How wonderful to be in the company of red-winged blackbirds, Canada geese, ducks, goldfinches, milkweed casings, dry yellow plumed grasses, and a few wild purple asters. But that was not all, as I discovered. If one really lingers in nature, so much more transpires. It truly was a little oasis within a surrounding backdrop of black asphalt, steel and rubber, putrid fumes, and vrooming motors.” P3 echoes Ron Rolheiser belief that beauty challenges what is mean, ugly, violent and base.⁶²³ “Such a contrast! It was as though dwelling in peace and existing in chaos was deliberately laid out as a lesson in living. The choice, one would think, would be obvious, but as it turned out, it was clearly not.”

Worldly beauty incites a response of love and gratitude. P10 expresses gratitude for the presence of nature in the urban morass: “The forested parks provide an escape from the urban sprawl and cars, noise and pollution and an anchor of sorts to get my mind out of the day- to- day. How grateful and fortunate I am to have this rich blend of beauty in spaces or through the calm and beauty of nature in the forested parks.” Beauty awakens the resonances of divinity we carry within us: “The overwhelming sensation this week has been the beauty and wonder of the signs of spring. The birds and animals and plants are emerging from their winter hiding places with renewed beauty and vigour. To walk in this

⁶²³ Ron Rolheiser, “The Transforming Power of Beauty” RONROLHEISER, OMI (June 25, 1999).

re-emergence and to feel it surround one reminds us again of the constant, caring presence of the creator of all that we see and makes us even more aware that we are also a component of this creativity” (P10). The interior transformation wrought by beauty is interpreted within the framework of the transcendental in P10’s exquisite account: “The air was fresh. The wind is a brisk, inspiring feel. I am so motivated to do the walk. The air and wind reach deep within me. The Ottawa River, at the base of the bike pathways, by the locks and museums is mesmerizing. The birds are close by; joggers and cyclists are abounding of energy. The place is buzzing with positivity. I love being here. I feel so refreshed and happy...So grateful to have this spot of beauty in our home town.”

5.2.5.2 Virtual Pilgrimage as a Path to Healing and Peace

Committed and intelligent action is characterized by ongoing integration and transformation. An essential feature of virtual pilgrimage is the integration that leads to healing and peace. Daniel Helminiak believes that humanity is naturally inclined towards that which is true and good. Helminiak identifies this impulse as a universal human feature.⁶²⁴

Healing is an elemental feature of a transforming spiritual practice. Pilgrimage has always involved a quest for healing. In his research on the social psychology of healing in pilgrimage, Eduardo Chemin found that the term healing encompasses a variety of meanings: “the curing of maladies, the rebalancing of the psyche, spiritual recharging, even finding oneself.”⁶²⁵ In this project, healing was frequently associated with peace. A common denominator for the participants was the experience of peace in

⁶²⁴ Helminiak (1998), p. 166.

⁶²⁵ Chemin (2011) p. 178.

virtual pilgrimage. Peace denotes relief and healing. For P3, “Walking (and in my case sometimes running) in nature brings me a sense of peace. I find consolation in nature, in the beauty of it. Walking in nature is my form of meditation. It relaxes me, calms me down. It allows for reflection and thus enables me to bring context to the events of my life.” P4 found that: “My attitude during the walks is definitely becoming more peaceful. I find myself checking my distance and speed much less frequently. Also, I find myself looking to make eye contact with, and greeting fellow walkers that I meet along the way.” P3 expressed it this way: “I am more at peace as a result of the walk. Feeling oneness with nature is for me very spiritual” P6 describes the validation and peace experienced this way: “Today’s walk reassures me. I am where I’m supposed to be. It brings me a sense of peace. I take the walk with my children. I hope they have learned something. Was I the teacher? Or was I the pupil? The virtual pilgrimage allows me to meditate on the question and to be the protagonist of my life. I sought peace, but then again I wake up every morning asking for it.”

Several participants found that the pilgrimage walk provided relief from anger in a way that P4 described: “I was so mad I forgot my hat and watch. By the time I reached the half way point of my walk I was much better and truly enjoyed the sound of the birds chirping and the trees budding. On Wednesday, I was mad again because the furniture company again messed up the delivery of the chair. In addition, I had planned to go to the Champlain Bridge to walk but the traffic was so bad I could not get there. As a result I went to Hampton Park and walked through the park, down some side streets and eventually to Fisher Park High School. This turned out to be a fabulous walk as they were my old stomping grounds when I was a kid. I eventually walked from Fisher to my childhood

home in the Veterans houses near Carling and Merivale. While I did not do much contemplation during the walk, I did lots of reminiscing about my childhood and adolescence. It was truly enjoyable.” P4’s reminiscence is a testament to the healing power of nostalgia. The wonder and joy embedded in P4’s childhood memories was a transformative force. The recollection of cherished people and times brought a sense of deep connection with both the past and the present. P3 also described the cathartic effect of walking: “I felt angry and upset. I just wanted to come home. I felt like I needed to escape. I came home and went for a 9 km very brisk walk along the river. It was a beautiful evening. It helped. By going for the walk I felt I had turned what felt negative into something positive. I had come home and done something good for me, something positive for my physical and emotional being, better than sitting at home stewing about it. (OK, I also had a chocolate covered ice-cream bar on the way home first, but I like to think I walked it off!).” P12 applied the wisdom acquired through a teaching career to resolving anger: “Putting one foot in front of the other, time and time again, accompanies thought. It aids the flow of thought. It releases stresses and tensions that can restrict thought. I can think back to when I taught children who had challenges with self-regulation....namely, anger control. The first step in attempting to resolve an issue always started with my instructing the angry child to “walk it off” first and then we’d talk. Well, walking has a power to bring calm to the body so that the mind can think. It can give a restless mind tranquility.” For P7, virtual pilgrimage provided a purging, re-orienting function: “I was both thinking about the day and the several meetings and interactions with others while at other times being aware of the sights and sound around me. It was as much a walk of shedding the day as being aware of surroundings.”

Heather Warfield's research found that both religious and secular pilgrimages contained transformational elements, including the transformation from illness to health."⁶²⁶ In virtual pilgrimage, the transformative nature of the journey includes the transformation from physical or existential distress to health and wholeness. While there is a dearth of published research on pilgrimage and healing, there is ample evidence in this project of a correlation between the two variables. P10 describes the transformation that takes place through one pilgrimage walk: "In the first hour of my walk, I realize I am walking faster than last week. I also take note of how really tense I am feeling this day; how life's challenges with loved ones are weighing on me, and how the tension is impacting me physically and in mind. I find myself counting often to 100 the first couple of hours of this walk, to block my wandering mind and to get into that 'open space' for some rest and tranquility. Heading back home, I really am feeling the walk physically now; feeling every muscle and bone in my body. I am tired and exhausted but feel much of the tension in me has been released. So very happy I did the walk, this very long walk. I head back more at peace and my body more rested because of the walk with excess energy expended. I pray for peace and blessings for my loved ones; to be embraced by light and warmth. I do this each walk, but more so today." The experiential nature of the transformation for P10 was cathartic and intensely real. The movement from a state of distress to a place of peace is palpable.

The role of nature in the healing transformation is crucial. P3 attests: "Every day when I am out walking I feel more alive, for that hour at least, I have connected with the earth and the world. I am very much in my head when I walk, thinking about many things, but I am trying to pay attention to what I see around me. No matter how my work day

⁶²⁶ Dubisch (2005), pp. 135-154.

unfolds, I have had one lovely pleasant hour in nature.” In another account P3 remarks, “On days that I spend at least an hour walking in nature, I will always have a better day because it has started positively. I have done something that makes me feel good and connect with the beauty around me. Perhaps it reminds me of what matters most.” P12 expressed the peace of nature this way: “It’s pretty easy to miss sight of wonderful things that abound. You need to slow down and let them wash over you. When you permit these things to infiltrate, and I mean really take time to allow them to be savoured by your senses, they can calm you. There is something very peaceful about just dwelling for a while in a place of nature.”

5.2.5.3 Virtual Pilgrimage: Connectivity and Community

The third characteristic of the committed and intelligent action movement is connectivity and community in the practice of virtual pilgrimage. Conceptions of connectivity were referenced implicitly and explicitly throughout the participants’ records. Several participants found that walking the pilgrim path inclined them towards connection with their surroundings and with other people on the path. P1 described an overt connection with creation: “I normally stop a couple of times while on my longer walks and sit on a bench or fallen tree trunk to rest, ponder and reflect. While listening to birds and rustling trees I gaze up the trees to openings at the tree tops onto sunny blue skies with rolling white clouds and realize the vastness of our universe.” On another occasion P1 remarked: “I believe that all actions affect our interconnectedness in life... Currently I try to reduce global warming etc. by using less energy and by recycling plastic, metals and paper.” P4’s reflection had a curious ecological slant: “While I am a long way from being a tree hugger, it made me think on nature and how we are all responsible for and affected by it.”

P3 remarked: “What I have noticed during this first week is that the question and this project has inspired a greater consciousness within me, a greater sense of being “present” and observant on my walks, runs and hikes, than might normally be the case for me.” P10 experienced connection this way: “I felt the sense of being connected to the earth, to the sky, the water, and I think in that way I felt closer to people...feeling a connection; so I guess in that way, it opened up what might have been some natural walls, you’re looking and I am interested, and I feel a connection.”

Conceptions of community were also represented as an aspect of virtual pilgrimage. There was an uncommon openness to others while on the pilgrim path. P7 found that: “I note that when I walk I smile and say hello to those I pass and they respond in kind. I think the slow pace of walking and the many minutes that it takes to approach and pass each other on the sidewalk makes it more difficult to choose to ignore the people along the way. We have an opportunity to notice, to smile, to connect that doesn't happen in the usual fast pace of cars or even bikes. We are not establishing a relationship, but we make a connection and the smile and greeting makes it a positive one and every positive connection improves the community and improves ourselves.” The elemental desire for community was captured by P3 in this excerpt: “There is a comfort and community in knowing that others are walking the same virtual path, reflecting upon the same question.” The innate impulse towards community was suggested in another observation by P3: “This journey is a process of discovery to some degree, isn’t it? And a group of us are engaged in it. So whether we think we desire a greater sense of community in our lives, our participation in this group project suggests we are drawn to camaraderie of like spirit. Being drawn to do it, being open to participating in it, unites the group in some way.” P3

felt a connection with the whole company of pilgrims: “It is interesting to know that others are walking this week and pondering the same question as I am. And those who are hiking the Camino at this very minute, what is going on in the hearts and minds of all of those pilgrims at this very moment? What are their individual thoughts? What joys and sorrows do they carry with them on their journey? What struggles are they facing, each of them, at this same moment in time? Sometimes I catch myself wondering in a crowd what each person is thinking about at that very minute, something one can never know. The Camino travellers, virtual and actual, we are all out there walking, searching for something.” P12 felt a similar connection with pilgrims on other pathways across the world: “While I am doing my disciplined walking, I am conscious of others who have undertaken a more formal pilgrimage. I too am on the pilgrimage. However, I also see it metaphorically. It means being aware that we are all on our journeys through life and are all pilgrims and thus we have much in common, and face many of the same joys, sorrows and challenges.”

An important aspect of connectivity and community is the experience of hospitality. The pilgrim path is conducive to a spirit of hospitality. Hospitality is fundamental to building community. Hospitality becomes sacred when openness to the one who is different leads to a genuine encounter. P9 used a biblical text to contextualize hospitality: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it....It can be enhanced by being mindful of the plight of the clients and remaining as a mindful servant.” P9 was referring to hospitality towards clients in his regular SGH volunteer commitment. P3 demonstrated genuine hospitality in the struggle to accept value differences in dissimilar others: “Can I try to see those colleagues I do not like in that way, can I try to see them as kindred spirits in a broad

sense? We do not share the same values and I do not like how they treat others but can I try to see them differently and focus on their good points. Is it too late to try to improve relationships with those with whom I feel no affinity?” For P11, hospitality took the form of collegial acceptance of difference in others: “My walks allowed me to come to the conclusion that it doesn’t matter. I concluded that each person has to approach life, God and spirituality in their own way. Whichever way they choose, or don’t choose, has no bearing on me and I should not judge their personal choices...” P11’s receptiveness to the other involves experiences and meanings that point beyond the ordinary to a transcendent reality. Spiritual receptivity is the capacity to “encounter otherness, to appreciate difference, to acknowledge other possible interpretations and perceptions.”⁶²⁷ P11’s respect for heterogeneity and difference is an authentic attribute of a culture of hospitality. The capacity of P11’s practice to generate the kind of inclusiveness that builds community is the mark of an authentic spiritual practice. One of the principle features of the virtual pilgrimage is the facility of the practice to engender hospitality and a quality of openness to the other. In the post millennial world, that represents a shift from the emphasis on self-care and individual care that permeates the contemporary cultural ethos to a focus on social action and community building. The implications for virtual pilgrimage will be further elucidated in the Discussion Section.

5.2.5.4 Virtual Pilgrimage and the Impetus to Serve

The fourth characteristic of committed and intelligent action movement is the impetus to serve. The impetus to serve in this project involves 1) a desire to be helpful to others, and / or 2) the expression of that desire in a gesture of action or service. The

⁶²⁷ Puchalski (2009), pp. 885-904.

participants in this research were already engaged in service by virtue of their volunteer contribution to the SGH community. For the purpose of this project, however, service refers to inclinations, reflections and actions that arose in relation to their participation in virtual pilgrimage.

Virtual pilgrimage was an occasion for the participants to reflect on their volunteer involvements. Reflecting on the motivation for volunteering, P1 acknowledged that: “My spirituality was probably the main reason for my initial volunteering and now causes me to continue with intentions of increasing my level of involvement.” P4 remarked: “To help another is a spiritual act. Compassion is an integral part of spirituality.” P10 reflected: “I think I’ve always wanted to serve the public interest, but I find I take a lot of satisfaction in just trying to help out on a daily basis, like the Shepherds of Good Hope... opening your mind to being there for someone else, and I don’t think that would have happened without the power of observation and seeing how much you miss out day to day, and just deliberately thinking about how we’re all connected... I think in some ways for sure that has been part of my thinking for the intention or the purpose, or next years to come, what can I do, what can I do more and more purposeful, which I’m still thinking of... for sure, it’s opened up a new dimension. I also found that for whatever reason, doing this Virtual Camino I coincidentally I met others who have done the real Camino... It’s so bizarre... there are a lot of people with a lot of good intentions, if we could harness all that energy together, that would be fantastic. Maybe through this, social media, and so on we could do this.” P9’s assessment of volunteering was simple: “Just serving those in need, and accepting each individual unconditionally and just wanting them to get a good meal in a non-judgmental setting.” On another occasion P9 explained: “My volunteering is a physical

extension of worship. As a consultant, it ‘costs’ me financially to participate. As a Christian, interacting with the clients humbles me, makes me appreciate life more. When issues arise at work, my faith reminds me that I’m serving them, not myself and keeps things in perspective. By serving others, I’m worshiping God and he continues to teach me.” Describing a basic impulse to serve, P6 remarked: “My spirituality encourages me to lead a helpful life, without expecting anything in return. My various volunteer activities are aimed at helping those who need help.”

There is an ethical component to service that was implicit in P12’s philosophical musing: “I try to understand and live a life that does not put me first... in other words, my rights, freedoms, desires, needs, etc., etc.... well, they all end where everyone else’s rights, freedoms, desires, etc. begins.” The pragmatic concerns expressed by P5 and P11 carried nuances of ethical concern for those who are marginalized and for the community at large. P5 reflected: “I noticed last week the differences in the care of the land - the garbage or cleanliness; manicured lawns and tended gardens vs. weeds and wildflowers. I also noticed the infrastructure and how the city areas accommodated (or didn’t) walkers, cyclists and vehicles, wheelchairs and skateboards. I was thinking as I walked about how the city can encourage more walkers and cyclists with some small changes to the infrastructure.” P11’s reflection showed an abiding concern for the underprivileged: “I was thinking of the different types of dwellings I encountered. Some were very substantial with nicely tended lawns. Others were not so nice. I noticed one house that had undergone substantial cosmetic improvement. It was attractive but I wondered if it would now be rented or sold at a price that would disqualify most working families. Who gets the good housing and who has to settle for the sub-standard? Can it all come down to hard work?

What part does simple luck, inheritance etc. play? It is too easy to write people off who do not live up to the model of upward mobility. We must value each person for their uniqueness and not be misled by varying circumstances.”

Virtual pilgrimage inspired participants to expand their service commitments or to adjust their outreach in other ways. P6 remarked: “I also reflect on how much my volunteering at Shepherds of Good Hope is giving me satisfaction in helping others, being compassionate toward others and how I would like to do more of this kind of work in the future.” P2 described the sense of fulfillment experienced in volunteer work at SGH: “Helping the needy, offering them words of comfort and support. Sometimes just listening and wishing them a good day can perk them up.” On another occasion P2 stated: “On my walk I decided that I would send a cheque again directly to the hospital or other organization such as Terry Fox instead of giving a cheque to the organizers.” P2 also became more intentional about extending care to friends: “Walking gives me time to focus and think about the people in my life... I am aware that I do not do enough for others and I know I need to do more for my friends...” P1 reflected: “I am realizing that at this time in my life I should be actualizing a more giving lifestyle rather than solely enjoying my good fortunes... Hopefully by the end of this pilgrimage I will have developed and implemented such a plan.” Ultimately P1’s musings took the form of concrete action: “On one of my walks through the woods I ended up with the strong desire to do more with my life and decided to pursue volunteering for the Cancer Society... I will be attending an orientation meeting on July 6th.” P10’s resolve was expressed this way: “I would like to help others in new active ways... to be a healer and teacher of sorts leveraging my own life experiences, and wisdom acquired putting my family first, friends and colleagues close second, and

community/ Canada – serving the public interest --- close third.” The impetus to serve is inspired in the practice of virtual pilgrimage. New social action meanings and values are constructed through the embodied action of intentional, reflective walking. The pilgrimage calls us to live more deeply, to create connections within and beyond, and to serve others in a spirit of gratitude and compassion.

5.2.5.5 Virtual Pilgrimage and Everyday Mysticism

The fifth characteristic of committed and intelligent action is everyday mysticism. Mysticism is integral to Christian spirituality. David Perrin defines mysticism as “not so much the experience of an extrinsic Other who at times intervenes in the order of the world from elsewhere, but rather, a personal God, who emerges from within a common world that humanity and God already share.”⁶²⁸ P9 expressed this sense of a personal God in the practice of virtual pilgrimage: “I experience him in the “humdrum” of everyday life. When I walk outside, he's personally revealing a small piece of what he's made and it's never the same experience twice.” For P6, virtual pilgrimage was a portal to reflection on mysticism. “The mysticism of the every day does prevail in our homes, leisure and everyday mundane activities. One reason to be thankful... God was the creator of all things. He made us to his image. This week’s walk was mundane. I walked the same path. The week was a rush, rush. Many things were going on, my loved ones counting on me to get things done. Under the circumstances, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of his presence. Feel free to call it mysticism.”

⁶²⁸ Perrin (1996), p. 51.

The concept of spirituality has been taken on different connotations with the recent explosion of interest in the topic, and the multitude of influences that impinge on it. Marie McCarthy fashioned a definition that contains the different facets of spirituality: it involves the “deepest desires of the human heart for meaning, purpose and connection,” and consists of a “deep life lived intentionally in reference to something larger.”⁶²⁹ McCarthy recognized that spirituality is not the property of any particular religious group, but invited study in this area in an interdisciplinary way that has roots in a tradition and is directed towards action.

Martin Walton believed that ‘lived experience’ is the context within which even the smallest detail of life may support and express the spirituality of a person.⁶³⁰ P11 encountered the miraculous in ‘small things’ on the pilgrim path. These encounters were expressed in a series of reflections: “I found it interesting to note about finding the miraculous in small things, and going into nature, seeing a rock or a feather, or something, seeing the mystery behind it and wondering how it got there ...to me, anyway, it grows into a kind of transcendence ...the idea that everything has its mystery, everything has a purpose, and it brings me close to something greater.” On another occasion P11 reflected: “The black rock I found was near the river. It was rounded due to its many contacts with other stones and was a black colour unlike the other rocks. I reflected on what must have been its journey to where I found it. Was it dislodged by glaciers? Was it part of a volcanic eruption or a meteor strike? It was certainly at one time star dust just like all the elements in our body. A small black rock with a history stretching back to the big bang...So very ordinary and so very remarkable. There is mystery and connectedness in the very small

⁶²⁹ McCarthy (2000), p. 193.

⁶³⁰ Walton (2013), p. 2.

things that make up our lives. Meditating on a feather or a stone can tell us a lot about ourselves and how we are related to the divine.”

Walton asserted that spirituality is shaped by the experience of the spiritual in ordinary and existential forms, in nature, human service, beauty, art, friendship, and everything that is done with attentiveness.⁶³¹ P12 experienced the spiritual in nature and in friendship: I suppose that those few minutes of our walk, when we stopped engaging in business affairs and became drawn in by the birds, was a reminder that there are lovely things in nature that can serve to diminish the stresses of everyday living. Enjoying these simple things and sharing them with a friend makes for the nicest of days. Because they are so simple, there is always the hope of having them time and time again.” The accessibility and ordinariness of the virtual pilgrimage practice makes it a readily available avenue to the “mysticism of everyday life.”⁶³² For P3, encounters with nature were transformative: “Feeling a oneness with nature is for me very spiritual. I reflect on how lands and landscapes, water and rivers and flowers are key ingredients in my day to day life that transform me from living with a high level of being focused on many things at once, to being present in the moment.” P5 affirmed the experience of being transformed on the pilgrimage walk: “The frame of mind I was in at the beginning of a walk often changed during the walk, usually for the better. Early morning walks we have a more heightened awareness of our surrounding...”

Dorothy Solle believes that “We are all mystics.”⁶³³ Solle conjectured that for everyone, “there ought to be places free of intentionality, places where vision can happen,

⁶³¹ Walton (2013), p. 3.

⁶³² Egan (2013), p. 62.

⁶³³ Solle (2003), p. 302.

where the beauty of life is perceived and “frutio” occurs, where God is enjoyed.”⁶³⁴ For P6, virtual pilgrimage is the place where vision can happen: “Walking gives time to think. At times, my thinking seems guided. At times, my thinking is provoked in a certain direction. Where does this come from? Is it an unseen force?” P10 became aware of life’s deep interconnections: “I feel that through my reflections on the virtual Camino, my inner dialogue with my higher self and God is linking me to others who also are feeling connected to the universe and who are very spiritual. I am thrilled that I learned that two people I met just in the past few weeks were doing the real Camino this summer.” P12 experienced the mystical in a sense of presence on the virtual path: “I have been on this trail in the past, but today was particularly enjoyable and I am not sure that I can explain why. I think that the best way to explain it, no matter how corny this is going to sound, is that I had a feeling that I was being welcomed. It was as though nature was taking delight in my being there, as much as I was taking delight in all the things I experienced in nature.” On another occasion, P12 expressed a sense of being nurtured on the pilgrim path: “There is a kind of fullness in even ordinary, routine things. Sometimes walking the same, familiar route can offer a wonderful comfort; it’s like an old, favourite blanket or sweater that has been around for a while.” P8 described the frutio of the walk this way: “I think that the strongest thing for me was observing the complexity of nature on these walks, being asked to think more deeply about them.”

According to David Tracy “We are mystics in waiting...eager to confirm with our own experience the existence of forces beyond the mundane.”⁶³⁵ For P10, virtual pilgrimage was a gateway to the mystical life: “Meditative walking in nature, as I call it,

⁶³⁴ Solle (2003), p. 302.

⁶³⁵ Tracy (2004), p. 7.

walking in nature when we are truly present in our surroundings, can play a role in spiritual transformation. Or at least connect us more to that spiritual, compassionate side of us.” P10 further explained: “for me this means finding, adjusting or reaffirming ‘our way in life’ periodically with an open heart and an open mind; aligning ourselves to possibilities to better ourselves, enrich our family life; asking for God’s help where needed; providing a helping hand and guide to loved ones and those in need-- without judgment, with compassion and with gratitude for life’s gifts.” For P10, virtual pilgrimage supported and nurtured the mystical experience of God. The practice opened P10’s heart and mind to the deep holy core of existence: the facility for compassion, a sense of gratitude and awe, genuine concern for betterment of the self and others (especially those in need), and a desire to participate in and build a just community. The relationship between the mystical encounter and practice is further developed in the Discussion Chapter.

5.2.6 Participant Experiences of Virtual Pilgrimage

The final portion of Section I is dedicated to an exploration of the participants’ assessment of virtual pilgrimage. Given the groundswell of support for this project, and the surprising enthusiasm of the research participants, it seemed important to corroborate the authenticity of the results. To that end, a validation check was carried out. The participants were asked to identify the challenging and rewarding aspects of the experience of virtual pilgrimage. This query also honed in on the Participants’ perceptions of urban versus pastoral walking. The verbatim texts used in this section are found in the Appendix in the “Summary of Results Table 4: Participant Feedback on Virtual Pilgrimage.”

5.2.6.1 Challenges and Issues Associated with Virtual Pilgrimage

The challenges which arose in virtual pilgrimage were recorded as a counterbalance to the rewarding aspects of the participants' experiences. P7 found the solitary nature of virtual pilgrimage to be challenging: "I think the fact that you're alone, every day you're doing the walk by yourself, it's not as if you're doing the walk with hundreds of thousands of people...makes it more difficult than if you were actually doing the pilgrimage." P10 pointed out several advantages of the Camino de Santiago over and above a virtual pilgrimage: "In some ways, walking 895 Kms., not 100, I think, would make a huge difference – the distance alone and being away from home for many weeks in one block at one time would really provide an opportunity for an extraordinary experience to let go and be open to new possibilities and perspectives. It occurs to me that one likely has to work harder on the virtual Camino to get into the mindset of an open, transformative mind: first, I am thinking one needs to walk long enough to get into the rhythm of the beat and absorb the benefits; and second, needs to be disciplined to do it frequently to enable deeper reflection consistently over time. And third: needs to be truly focused on the purpose of the walk always - as an enabler for deeper reflection and open mindedness." P10 did not find the system of tracking and aligning distances with the Camino de Santiago helpful: "I found I didn't actually relate to the distance travelled on the Camino. I related to how many kilometres I travelled, but the locations I travelled through, I found that too abstract...And I think it would have been fun to have a map, and just sort of plot where you're going, but at the same time, it's a Virtual Camino, so you're not there." Two of the participants struggled with the concept of virtual pilgrimage. P8 remarked: "I'm still having

difficulty distinguishing between the virtual pilgrimage and my every day walks in terms of its benefits. The thoughtful questions were interesting and perhaps point to a validation of this form of contemplation. If I were confronted in the future with a major philosophical / spiritual issue, I might pursue it in this way. At least it would beat joining a monastery.” At one point P9 mused: “I’m not sure what you mean by authenticity, as this is a “virtual” experience, in another environment, on another continent, pretending to be on the “authentic” pilgrimage experience. I’m still thinking about this...”

5.2.6.2 Rewards and Strengths of Virtual Pilgrimage

The experience of virtual pilgrimage was unquestionably rewarding for some of the participants. P4 expressed it this way: “First of all, I loved it! My normal spring/summer exercise is riding a bike, but because of the commitment to the El Camino I have had to keep my bike in the rafters of the garage. I have discovered that walking is much more enjoyable than biking because you move at a much slower pace and so can observe, and enjoy the smaller things in life and, because you don’t have to pay as much attention to the road/bike path, your mind is freer to contemplate things. While St. Augustine did not have the option of riding a bike or taking a car, I think he was on to something when he said “it is solved by walking.” For P3, the concept of virtual pilgrimage resonated on multiple levels: “Why did I feel called to do this virtual pilgrimage? I did indeed feel ‘called.’ As soon as the idea was presented, I immediately thought: ‘Oh yes, I totally want to do that!’ Why? The idea resonated with me because it involves many things that I love: physical activity, being in nature, observation, meditation, introspection, beauty, solitude, writing... I have considered walking the Camino as a spiritual exercise for some years but now I find

myself wondering about doing my own Camino in Canada, traversing this country, or at least covering the same distance of the Camino but exploring the Canadian landscape and writing about it. Now that would be something.”

Several participants alluded to ‘time and space for reflection’ as important aspects of their virtual pilgrimage practice. P2’s assessment was crisp and concise: “It allows me more quiet time to reflect, pray and contemplate the future and make plans.” For P6, “It (virtual pilgrimage) gave me a sense of peace and allowed me to think about things in an unstructured unhurried way.” Time for reflection was also important to P3: “It makes me more conscious of the beauty of my life and the world around me and more aware of the present. It creates space and time for me to reflect and to view matters more dispassionately, though reasoning rather than emotion. The practice allows one to re-gain balance and equilibrium” P10 similarly reflected: “Having aha moments of finding truths that bring clarity to one’s purpose and next journey from deep within our soul yielding peace and happiness and strengthened faith and courage and wisdom in the face of challenges.” For P3, virtual pilgrimage provided breathing space and the impetus for creative expression: “This project called me at a time when I was in the midst of figuring out how best to write this book I have longed wanted to write. In some way I think it has taken the pressure off of me and inspired me to spend less time researching and thinking about the structure of the book and more time simply letting my writing and my thoughts flow on a routine basis and seeing what develops and what story unfolds.”

There were several references to the importance of the reflection questions as fundamental to the practice. P1 remarked: “By the very nature of the project and the question, I think this physical undertaking inspires greater self-awareness and consequently

a greater appreciation of the beauty around us because we are consciously reflecting on the question while walking (largely in nature in my case).” P6 found that: “The Virtual Pilgrimage has been an instrument to continue growing in my faith. A great enhancer was the questions of reflection.” On another occasion P6 remarked: “The virtual pilgrimage was beneficial to me as it made me reflect on issues that should have been reflected on and if I had not done the pilgrimage I would not have acted on things so quickly. I am going to use the same theme questions you gave us when I walk in the upcoming weeks.” P2 likewise resolved to continue using the reflection questions: “I think I’m going to go through your questions again, but do it in a different area, and continue with this. Yes.” P4 also remarked that: “In the past, I’ve done this walk, or at least portions of this walk. My main purpose was always to get exercise. But today the focus would be to contemplate the question Ann assigned us, and I have to admit that I found this quite a challenge. It is much easier to walk and allow thoughts to come to mind randomly, than to try and focus on particular thoughts.” P8 observed that the reflection question brought a sense of order and purpose to the walking practice: “I sense I’m closing in on the end of this virtual pilgrimage and find myself looking back over the past few weeks of walking experiences and comparing them. My motivation for doing this was to consider whether my thought processes would differ in a pilgrimage from the normal everyday walking exercise to which I had become accustomed. I’m still not sure of the answer, but I have sensed a difference from the beginning to now, in that I do try more to focus on meaningful contemplation than random observations of the moment. It forced a greater degree of personal contemplation than would otherwise have been the case with the same amount of walking. This was due to having to respond to the thought-provoking questions set out for each segment.”

P10 underscored the importance of the journaling component in virtual pilgrimage: “I was contemplating in my mind how it would be more different to do a Virtual Camino than the real Camino. And in my mind I thought, the Virtual Camino, you’re still in your surroundings. So you can’t really, fully escape for a period of time. So the journaling, and the awareness and the observation, I think the questions provided a good mechanism to again, be deliberate...and I concluded that the experience was very rich because I thought it was remarkably different from just walking.” On another occasion P10 again highlighted the discipline of journaling: “The journaling, and the awareness and the observation, I think the questions provided a good mechanism to again, be deliberate...and I concluded that the experience was very rich because I thought it was remarkably different from just walking. Because of the intention, and I’d go to places where I could get to that spot sooner so I wouldn’t have to work up the mind set of being a little bit more meditative...But kudos...overall I thought it was really good... And I think a lot of people would benefit from it.” P3 also found that the discipline of writing was an essential part of the practice: “What I have found is that, for me, solitary walking in nature creates more time for focussed reflection that may affect spiritual growth. Writing about the experience also plays a role in this. Committing the experience to paper is a key part of this exercise. The exercise, this virtual pilgrimage, inspires me to pay greater attention to my inner life, to my thoughts, as well as to my exterior surroundings. It may also inspire me to reflect on my perceptions and to consider using a different lens.”

The distinction between pilgrimage walking and walking as exercise was identified by several participants as a positive attribute of virtual pilgrimage. P9 remarked: “It forced me to make a deliberate discipline that focused on “walking” versus other workouts. As

mentioned before, I average 16,000 steps a day on my *Fitbit* through various exercises and it was a planned effort to focus on a time of day that I could participate in this consistent practice.” On one occasion P4 exclaimed: “I love the virtual pilgrimage. It forces me to walk and get out with nature. Trying to fit the walk into my day also forces me to think of the pilgrimage and its reflection throughout the day.” For P12, being in nature was an important aspect of virtual pilgrimage: “It seems that most people walking about in an urban area are in a hurry. Maybe this is a result of life moving faster...one must keep pace. But there is no ‘pace of life’ when one enters the woods; hence, slowing the walking speed and taking in what surrounds seems fitting. Clearing my mind is easier to do when there is no concern for traffic, and the smells and noises are far more pleasant. I believe that the St. Augustine quote, “It is solved by walking,” holds true when one is under the influence of Mother Nature.”

Recording distances travelled and aligning these distances to the Camino de Santiago trail was meaningful for some participants. P11 remarked: “The feedback of where I was on the journey was key to the experience of the pilgrimage. More importantly, the things I actually experienced have made me include walking as a part of my routine.” P4 noted: “I realize that I am walking a bit faster with each week; my walking shoes are truly broken in now. I am surprised how fast-- relatively speaking-- one can walk 100 kilometers if one is committed to do this. It’s a good thing too, to have a pedometer. The tracking of the steps makes the distance travelled more real, more grounded. And it’s factual.”

In a synopsis of the overall experience of virtual pilgrimage P4 reflected: “I am celebrating in my head the accomplishment of having walked my 100th Km and loving it.

I feel this virtual Camino has had some lasting benefits. The discipline of walking with a deliberate motive to reflect on life; to reflect on the present; to just walk without any thought; to observe and take in and absorb new images, feelings, the air, all five senses and feel our spirit and connection to each other, to nature and God is so enriching.” P10’s summation further authenticated the transformative aspects of the practice: “I reflect on my last three weeks of the Virtual Camino and realize just how much deliberate thinking I have been doing on life, on what counts, on challenges, on values, on help and compassion, and above all else on love and priorities. I feel deeply the presence of God as I focus my thinking on deep reflection. I find for me the transformation occurred as a result of the entire walking experience: more in touch with my true self (my soul); and more at peace and very much strengthened faith. Feel very close to God, family and friends. Enjoy the quiet while walking. Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice/soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind.”

5.2.6.3 Reflections on Urban versus Pastoral Walking

Virtual pilgrimage by its localized nature can be adapted to both urban and pastoral settings. For the purpose of this project, urban settings referred to populated areas where commercial or industrial activity created an accelerated pace of life. Pastoral settings, by comparison, were typically less populated, natural spaces devoid of the activity associated with human cultural development. Pastoral settings are abundantly available in metropolitan areas in the form of dedicated green spaces such as conservation areas and parklands. It was surprising to learn that several participants found urban walking had its own unique rewards. For P11, the familiarity of the urban

route contributed to a meditative sensibility: “I had a different experience of urban walking, simply because I was walking areas I knew. There was the noise, there was the distraction, but because I knew it, it was sometimes easier to meditate because I didn’t have to think about it, because I had already seen it. But I enjoyed the nature more.” For P5, there were interesting discoveries to be made on the urban pathways: “As much as seeing new things it is important to see familiar things with new eyes.” With new enthusiasm for urban walking, P5 took on the semblance of a tourist: “We parked on Spruce Street and proceeded to walk down Wellington Street through Hintonburg. Wow was that fun; met many people in stores and shops with some amazing conversations. A woman who owned an antique lighting store was packing everything up and moving to Toronto. A fly fishing store, wood working store, stopped at a Lebanese restaurant for lunch. We walked 5.26 km. and felt like we were tourists in our own city.” There was also a quality of sociability about urban walking that did not exist in rural settings. P5 remarked: “I have to admit, I particularly enjoyed the urban walks, and some of the neighbourhoods you just move through in a car...to stop and walk through was delightful; I guess I wasn’t really meditative. Joan and I would start yakking to people, and we’d tell them what we were doing, and they got intrigued and interested... So I found the urbans a nice treat, really... Except Collannade Road...” On another occasion P5 remarked: “We were thinking at first linear country walks but are now much more enthusiastic about exploring urban areas. This is what both Joan and I felt at the best moments in the walk. I think we both are nature lovers but particularly enjoyed our urban jaunts and made discoveries in the most inhospitable places.”

Urban walking afforded a level of stimulation that was inspiring in its own right. P3 was transported back in time - a veritable trip to the wild side: “I was walking downtown on Elgin Street, a Friday night, the first wonderful Spring day in May, and the place was just alive. I thought, my gosh, how long has it been since I was down on Elgin Street with my girlfriends on a Friday night, thirty years, I don’t know. But it felt, God, I’m getting old here!!! All the café’s were buzzing, just alive with people, I was so struck. It was more self-revelation that we need to get down here to take back Elgin Street. A fifty-five year old girl coming down and taking back Elgin Street... But yeah, the noise, so different from nature walks... such a totally different experience from observing nature...”

For several participants, urban walking detracted from the ability to be reflective. P2 stated it simply: “My first two walks were along city streets and I found the traffic noise and distractions really limited my time of reflection.” For P8, urban walking was less conducive to focus: “I found that walking in urban settings it was more difficult to focus...the various distractions, traffic lights, the pedestrians, the traffic, the buildings, things like that....It’s not so much the negative; it just didn’t contribute as much to contemplation for me as walking where there were fewer distractions. It still enabled you to focus on life in the city as opposed to life in the country...and that in itself is kind of interesting...walking down a railway line for example.” P3 expressed a similar sentiment: “But I must say that I did not realize how challenging the reflections would be. One might imagine that walking and thinking would not be terribly difficult to coordinate! But freeing your mind is not that easy. My mind can easily get anchored with all kinds of things, (to do lists, scheduling, house improvement ideas, etc., etc.). And lately I have come to realize that when I walk in an urban setting, it is more difficult for me to let go of those anchors.”

For P10 there was merit in having both urban and pastoral walking experiences: “Not only does my new route have nice sites but it also has a combination, of forest, park, and city and, with Carleton University, also a sense of knowledge and betterment– truly beautiful sites of Ottawa – and sites I connect with deeply. I want to really breathe and reflect on this walk, and find new energy and some new balance and perspective.” Reflecting further P10 remarked: “I needed to have a combination of both. And if it had to be one it would be more nature focused as opposed to just urban focused... so I’d be targeting parks, or the Rideau River, or the canal, or the army base – there’s a lot of greenery...even-though you could be alongside some urban centers. I thought that for me was important. I couldn’t meditate as much if I was just walking around a few blocks, it had to be that combination.”

5.3 Conclusion

The purpose of Chapter V was to continue to explore the question “How might I respond?” The “Results” Chapter marked the second phase of the pragmatic task, which for the purpose of this research included the research methodology, the results, and a discussion of the results. The pragmatic task was concerned with creating a new vision for the SGH community in the form of an accessible, inclusive, relatable spiritual practice. Virtual pilgrimage was put forward as a potential new spiritual practice for SGH. The research results were presented by way of the participants own accounts of the virtual pilgrimage experience. The purpose of the results section was to interpret the data in light of the research problem, and present the findings in meaningful units of information. Stephen Bevans’ three-movement praxis model was the framework used to

identify and organize the fourteen themes elicited from the research data. The last section of the Results chapter was dedicated to an exploration of the participants' individual experiences of virtual pilgrimage. This was done as a validation check of the authenticity of the results. To that end, the participants were asked to identify the challenging and rewarding aspects of virtual pilgrimage. This query also honed in on the Participants' perceptions of urban versus pastoral walking.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The Discussion Chapter, Chapter VI, rounds out the pragmatic task of the practical theological research cycle. The Discussion interprets the significance of the results in relation to previous research in pilgrimage studies and related disciplines. It is important to note that to a large extent, the Discussion has already been incorporated into the Results narrative for the purpose of contextualizing the research results. For that reason, the Discussion is primarily focused on those results which need further elucidation or results which were significant or unanticipated. Chapter VI is comprised of a brief overview of the interpretive paradigm within which the research results are framed and interpreted, followed by an examination of the research findings in each of the three stages of the praxis model.

6.2 How Might I Respond? Discussion and Interpretation of Results

The broad interpretive framework for this study is Practical Theology. John Creswell held that an “Interpretive” perspective views truth and knowledge as constructs evolved by the participants and the realities they inhabit.⁶³⁶ The research participants in this study experienced spiritual renewal through the discipline of walking and the exercise of reflection. Practical Theology assumes that theology is a contextual enterprise, influenced and shaped by the diverse contexts in which it operates. In this research the praxis model of contextual theology was used to interpret the data. Within the framework of the praxis model, Theology finds its fulfillment not in mere ‘right

⁶³⁶ Creswell (2007), p. 47.

thinking' (ortho-doxo) but in 'right action' (ortho-praxy).⁶³⁷ The praxis model is a way of doing theology through reflective action, discerning meanings that contribute to the course of change. There are three essential movements in the praxis model: 1) committed action, 2) reflection, and 3) committed and intelligent action.⁶³⁸ The thematic structure of the analysis and interpretation in this research was developed around these three movements. Each theme and sub-theme is discussed sequentially in the Discussion. It is important to once again reiterate that the participants' texts may have more than one application, and are occasionally cited in relation to more than one result.

6.3 Discussion of 'Committed Action' Results

The results of the 'committed action' movement explored virtual pilgrimage in relation to three themes: 1) ritual, 2) walking obeisance, and 3) focal practice. These constructs are similar, almost interchangeable, with slight nuances of difference described in the 5.2.3 section of the Results.

6.3.1 Ritual

In a virtual pilgrimage framework, the simple, repetitive act of reflective walking imbues the practice with meaning. The findings related to 'ritual' pointed to the meaning-making potential of virtual pilgrimage, beyond the enactment of the ritual itself. A ritual practice quiets the mind, brings order and harmony in the face of disorder, and unleashes the inner power that leads to new understandings and new actions. P10 alluded to this aspect of virtual pilgrimage: "The power of walking means you move on, step by step, to

⁶³⁷ Bevans (2010), p. 72.

⁶³⁸ Bevans (2010), p. 76.

let go of what was because it is no longer there...Time moves forward... walking helps to bring many perspectives into the thinking and helps to provide clarity for next steps and truisms with God.” P10 further explains: “The steps back and forth provide a good rhythm as well, and is meditative in many respects... it helps the thinking, the connection with universe and God.” It is through participation in the ritual that new understandings are acquired in the “epistemic”⁶³⁹ sense alluded to by Osmer: it is only through active engagement in the practice that new meanings are generated and transformation occurs. Post et. al. described pilgrimage in the context of ritual revitalization. The ritual is often accompanied by the “conferment of new meaning, new functions and new underlying factors and arguments.”⁶⁴⁰ P3 described the anatomy of that process: “Walking or ‘pilgrimage,’ when part of the purpose is to think about your level of self-awareness, encourages greater observance of the exterior world, in all its beauty, as well as one’s interior world and preoccupations.” Ritual has a steadying, stabilizing quality, a feature identified by Rolheiser as “subjunctive power.”⁶⁴¹ The subjunctive quality of ritual serves as a container that invokes emotion and holds and sustains a relationship beyond the ebb and flow of transitory fluctuations. The walking ritual served to hold the participants steady through boredom, distraction, fatigue, irritation, etc., until a state of peace and balance was restored. In this way ritual activated the ‘act-to-become’ principle, the idea that our lives are shaped not only by the ideas we hold in our minds, but more even, and principally, by the actions we perform in our bodies. The embodied nature of ritual is one of the linchpins of its effectiveness. The physicality of virtual pilgrimage served to ground and re-orientate the participants in time and space, where the rhythmic walking

⁶³⁹ Osmer (2008), pp. 153-155.

⁶⁴⁰ Post et. al (1998), p. 223.

⁶⁴¹ Ron Rollheiser, “The Value and Power of Ritual” RONROLHEISER, OMI (1) (July, 2015).

movement brought them into a state of flow, mindsets were altered, and imaginations were engaged.

6.3.2 Walking Obeisance

The findings related to ‘walking obeisance’ uphold an attitude of reverence towards the walking environment. Obeisance is defined as “a gesture or movement of the body expressing reverence or respect; an attitude associated with this gesture as deference or homage.”⁶⁴² Obeisance originally signified the vow of obedience made by a vassal to his lord or a slave to his master, but in time it denoted the act of bowing as a token of respect. The word appears in the King James translation of the bible nine times, usually denoting the prostrate posture of the worshipper in the presence of a deity, as in Genesis 33:6, 7. A variation on the usage of the word refers to a vow of homage, or fealty to a king on the part of a subject. For example, in Joseph's dream, his brother's sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf (Gen. 43:28).

In present-day usage, obeisance is a notion more commonly associated with pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition. The reference to paying obeisance is generally associated with the annual yatra to the Amaranth cave shrine in South Kashmir, considered to be one of the holiest shrines in Hinduism.⁶⁴³ Walking obeisance as a contemporary Christian concept was put forward by Lutheran theologian Alan Jorgensen. Grounded within a ‘theology of creation’ perspective, walking obeisance is deeply conscious of the interconnectedness of all life and reverently attuned to the sacredness of the earth. Several participants experienced this level of awareness in the way P10

⁶⁴² William Morris, ed. *The Heritage Illustrated Dictionary of The English Language* (1975), Boston: American Heritage Publishing Company, p. 904. The word “obeisance” can be traced back to the Anglo-French verb “obeir,” which means “to obey.” “Obeisance” first appeared in English usage in the late 14th century. At that time the word shared the same meaning as “obedience.”

⁶⁴³ “New shrine on Amarnath route,” *The Hindu* (Chennai, India. 30 May, 2005).

declared: “I’m present in this world; I am alive. My feet are sturdily placed on the ground as I take each step. The virtual pilgrimage confirms my existence. I take deep breaths of the cold air that circulates around me.” For those with ears to hear and eyes to see, the paths we trod are replete with the divine, whether a sacred temple or a secular enclave, whether wilderness trails or urban alleyways. Thich Nhat Hanh highlighted the importance of being aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth: “Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet...We bring peace and calm to the surface of the Earth and share the lesson of love. We walk in that spirit.”⁶⁴⁴

6.3.3 Focal Practice

The preponderance of findings for committed action were associated with ‘focal practice,’ possibly because it aligned more readily with what Ursula King describes as a “householder”⁶⁴⁵ model of spirituality. It is the informal, organic nature of focal practice that distinguishes it from ritual. In the householder model, asceticism is secondary to living like the ordinary householder, who combines spiritual striving with the daily duties of family-life and work responsibilities. In the householder approach, inner attitudes and actions are transformed by spiritual disciplines that can be practiced in the immediate setting.⁶⁴⁶ The discipline of virtual pilgrimage provides opportunities for reflection on the sacred in a localized context as an extension of the daily round. The transformative potential is in walking as an act of meaning: intentional, reflective walking is the pathway to rumination and contemplation. Arthur Boers describes the discipline of walking as a “focal” activity, in contrast to activities which lead to a “disconnected, disembodied and

⁶⁴⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), pp. 28-29.

⁶⁴⁵ King (2009), p. 29.

⁶⁴⁶ King (2009), p. 29.

disoriented”⁶⁴⁷ life. Boers explained the concept of focal practice: 1) focal practices require energy and effort, and are outside our ability to control or manipulate, 2) focal practices have deep and evident connections with the wider world, including people and our ecosystem, and 3) focal practices put us in touch with something greater than our selves, something of ultimate significance.⁶⁴⁸

The research results bore out the ‘energy and effort’ required in the commitment and discipline of the practice. Several of the participants alluded to this. P9 remarked “It forced me to make a deliberate discipline that focused on walking versus other workouts...” and P10 noted: “I coined a phrase in my head, of it being active, deliberate walking...” The idea of a focal practice originates with Albert Borgmann.⁶⁴⁹ Borgmann pointed out that a key characteristic of focal practices is that the sense of burden associated with them disappears once the threshold of effort is crossed: once the activity is embarked on the sense of burden lifts and a deep sense of satisfaction ensues. Crossing the threshold of effort, or, ‘getting started,’ becomes easier when the practice becomes habituated in the way P1 described: “I have now arrived at the point where my daily walks are a necessary part of my daily activities in the same manner as eating or brushing my teeth.” For P1 the habituated nature of the walking practice removed the element of choice and pushed through resistance and negative emotion. For P7 the focal practice transformed negative emotion in a way that was pleasantly surprising: “I had been somewhat worried that I would be bored with myself in the long walks; that I would be desperate for companionship, but during the virtual Camino I found that was not the case. I treasured the time walking alone and enjoyed noticing new surroundings or things I hadn’t noticed in

⁶⁴⁷ Boers (2007), p. 135.

⁶⁴⁸ Boers (2007), pp. 134-136.

⁶⁴⁹ Borgmann (1984), p. 197.

familiar surroundings.” P10 was strategic about achieving a focused, contemplative state: “I am curious to see if I can reach a meditative place in my mind fast, by going back to my centering trail. It works. I walk to a familiar place in the Army Base Forest, take deep breaths and feel the embrace of the sun. I am in the moment. I am grateful for this feeling.” In contrast to the frenzied, multi-tasking nature of our daily lives, focal activities have a purposeful, contemplative quality about them that absorbs and centers us. They are rejuvenating even as they require self-investment.

Virtual pilgrimage is a focal practice. It involves an active reception of the world while also engaging the deeper dimension of the intellect and soul. This aspect of virtual pilgrimage was echoed by P3: “On days when I walk, I feel that I am experiencing my life with greater intensity. I feel more alive and connected to the world. I am alive!” P6 expressed a similar experience of receptivity and connection: “Every day when I am out walking I feel more alive, for that hour at least, I have connected with the earth and the world.” P6 also appreciated the internal dimension of the practice: “It allows me more quiet time to reflect, pray and contemplate the future and make plans.” Focal practices make life meaningful: they engage the body and mind, our creativity and ingenuity, and ultimately our sense of community in the way P3 described: “It is interesting to know that others are walking this week and pondering the same question as I am. And those who are hiking the Camino at this very minute, what is going on in the hearts and minds of all of those pilgrims at this very moment? What are their individual thoughts? What joys and sorrows do they carry with them on their journey”

6.4. Discussion of ‘Reflection’ Results

The results of the ‘reflection movement’ in virtual pilgrimage are explored in relation to six themes: 1) contemplative awareness; 2) creative problem-solving; 3) communion with the sacred; 4) realizing personal blessings; 5) the journaling requisite; and 6) the absence of technology. The discussion of the results was largely incorporated into the results narrative in Section I, so the focus here is on results that were unique and unanticipated and need further exploration.

6.4.1 Contemplative Awareness

In an essay on spirituality in the postmodern era, Marie McCarthy identified contemplative awareness as a mark of authentic spirituality.⁶⁵⁰ According to McCarthy, awareness as a discipline opens us to levels of reality not immediately apparent: it requires stillness, receptivity and availability. The discipline of awareness involves deep listening which is marked by waiting, attending and presence.⁶⁵¹ Jacob Needleman argued for a science of awareness that enables us to see both our animalism and our divinity. Such a discipline is necessarily connected to the body and must involve the whole person.⁶⁵² This level of awareness, according to Needleman, permits us to see ourselves, our circumstances and our world without illusion, to see both “the terrors of our present situation and the greatness of our possible inner evolution.”⁶⁵³

One of the qualities of contemplative awareness was the soul-searching nature of the participants’ ruminations: P4 took stock of personal relationships, while P11 was

⁶⁵⁰ McCarthy (2000), p. 199.

⁶⁵¹ McCarthy (2000), p. 200.

⁶⁵² Jacob Needleman, *Consciousness and Tradition* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), p. 64.

⁶⁵³ Needleman (1982), p. 39.

struck by the evidence of social injustice on the walking trails, and P12 felt the sting of self-reproach for unkindness to a stranger. There was poignancy and honesty in their revelations that was quite touching. These deep disclosures suggest the working of grace in the discipline. This aspect of VP points to other possibilities for the practice. As a framework, virtual pilgrimage is able to be adapted in different ways: on the one hand, it adapts to different contexts; on the other, the framework itself is adaptable. This opens up possibilities for incorporating alternative devotional elements into the practice. For example, the four stages of *Lectio Divina* (read, meditate, pray, contemplate)⁶⁵⁴ could be integrated into the practice by replacing the reflection questions with select biblical passages. Other possibilities include the integration of such guided exercises as the Ignatian spiritual exercises, or meditation on specific prayers, or on events and mysteries in the life of Jesus at different stages in VP.

6.4.2 Creative Problem-Solving

One of the remarkable fruits of the reflection process was an enhanced aptitude for problem-solving. Different aspects of virtual pilgrimage contributed to breakthrough revelations: For some it was being in nature the way P2 described: “Well say you’re walking in the woods, you can just clear your mind and think about an issue...” For several participants, being forced to slow down was beneficial. P3 noted the merits of the slower pace of walking: “Walking encourages reflection perhaps in a way that running may not. The mere act of slowing down one’s physical movement may allow for greater introspection.” Thich Nhat Hanh described this slower type of walking as “walking not in

⁶⁵⁴ David Foster, *Reading with God: Lectio Divina* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 44.

order to arrive, but just to walk.”⁶⁵⁵ Hanh pointed out that though we walk all the time, “our walking is usually more like running. When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the earth. We have to walk in a way that we print peace and serenity on the earth.”⁶⁵⁶ P6 found the overall slower pace of virtual pilgrimage conducive to problem-solving: “Long slow contemplation on a problem will lead to its solution.” Another advantage of prolonged contemplation according to P6 is that: “this process leaves one open to God’s input and influence on the ultimate outcome.” The absence of distraction was also important for problem-solving. P12 observed: “Remove distractions by walking... Walk long enough until focus and concentration is the only issue at hand. Your contemplations will ultimately be guided to a resolution.” The action of walking itself seems connected to problem-solving. P7 explained: “A simple walk can clear your mind, allow your conscious mind to wander on to something beautiful and then BOOM - the idea that was plaguing you is solved.” P5 similarly found: “I have had solutions and ideas pop into my head while walking and usually I am not chewing them over; it comes more from the subconscious.” P4 concurred with a reference to St. Augustine’s maxim, ‘It is solved by walking’: “If there is an issue that needs to be thought through, away from its source, contemplative walking is a way to do it...”

6.4.3 Communion with the Sacred

Communion with the sacred emerged as a recurrent theme throughout the reflection movement. Several participants found that the discipline of virtual pilgrimage occasioned a depth encounter with God. P6 affirmed: “For me, from the beginning it was

⁶⁵⁵ Hanh (1992), pp. 18-20.

⁶⁵⁶ Hanh (1992), pp. 18-19.

spiritual. It was a tool. It was my base, my route to begin the walk; it was a mutual relationship with Him,” P10 expressed the experience of communion this way: “Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice / soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind.” Two of the participants experienced a spill over effect that extended the reach of the discipline beyond the enactment of the ritual. For P9 it was in the daily round: “I experience him in the humdrum of everyday life...” and for P4: “...the virtual pilgrimage has led me to think about God and his creation throughout the day, and to consciously plan and make room for the walks. I find myself thinking more throughout the day of God’s place in my life.”

Communion with the sacred was closely tied to the awe and reverence inspired by being in nature. Even for those who do not hold a conventional God-image, the experience of communing with creation (nature) was compelling and transformative. P3 testified: “I do not believe in a supreme being who is directing the orchestra... But nor do I deny the miracle of nature...Nature brings me my peace...” P3 further explained: “Feeling oneness with nature is for me very spiritual. I reflect on how landscapes, water and rivers and flowers are key ingredients in my day to day that transform me from living with a high level of being focused on many things at once, to being present in the moment...”

6.4.4 Realizing Personal Blessings

The reflection process seemed to naturally lead several participants to contemplate the blessings in their lives. Blessings are closely allied to gratitude. For several participants, the realization of blessings preceded an inner experience of gratitude. In a conceptual

analysis Robert Roberts described gratitude as a deeply social emotion that involves “givers, gifts, recipients and the attitude of giver and recipient toward one another.”⁶⁵⁷ Cosmic gratitude entails a “to-for”⁶⁵⁸ structure that requires the agency of a benefactor. For Christians and other theists, that benefactor is typically God.⁶⁵⁹ P1, P4, P9, and P10 regularly identified the giver as “God,” while for P6 it was sometimes the personal pronoun “Him,” as in “I’ll leave it up to Him if I’m chosen.” For several of the participants, a pronounced experience of blessing and gratitude was not accompanied by any reference to a God image. Nevertheless, the presence of a transcendent source of benefice was implicit in their enumerated blessings (health, home, friendship, nature, etc.). P3 articulated this quite coherently: “I do not believe there is someone in the sky or that there is a heaven...But even logic dictates that something cannot come from nothing, how can life come from non-life, energy from non-energy? I do not rule out what I call an “answer” or an “explanation.” In the absence of a conception of God, agency might be attributed to “the universe,”⁶⁶⁰ for example, although there was no such specific reference by any of the participants.

The experience of gratitude predisposes one to dwell on that which is hopeful and promising in life. Gratitude possesses life-blessing properties that enhance life. The constitutionally grateful person has a shield against debilitating negative emotions. Emmons and McCullough noted that “the personal commitment to invest psychic energy in developing a personal schema, outlook or worldview of one’s life as a “gift” or one’s life as

⁶⁵⁷ Robert Roberts, “The Blessings of Gratitude: A Conceptual Analysis,” in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 7.

⁶⁵⁸ Robert Roberts, “Cosmic Gratitude,” in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (Innsbruck: University of Innsbruck, 2014), p.66.

⁶⁵⁹ Roberts (2014), p. 68.

⁶⁶⁰ Roberts (2014), p. 69.

“gifted” holds considerable sway from the standpoint of optimal psychological functioning.⁶⁶¹

A distinction is made between episodes of gratitude, which occur at a given moment in response to an action or event, and a disposition of gratitude, which is a character trait formed in the person over time.⁶⁶² Gratitude has a generative property. “Trait-gratitude”⁶⁶³ or gratitude as a “virtue”⁶⁶⁴ builds over time. The virtue of gratitude forms through habitual practice. Barbara Frederickson predicted that experiences of gratitude tend to build not only social bonds, but to lead to a disposition to think creatively about how to repay benefactors and benefit others.⁶⁶⁵ Gratitude perpetuates a cycle of benevolence and helpfulness that tends to bind us together in relationships of reciprocity. Frederickson’s premise implies that the discipline of virtual pilgrimage, once habituated as a practice, has the potential to produce the virtue of gratitude. As such, it is a precursor to the ‘communal orientation’ and ‘other-focus’ phases of the committed action movement in the praxis model.

6.4.5 The Journaling Requisite

It was surprising to discover that the practice of journaling was so valued by the participants. P1, P3, P5, P8, P10 and P12 considered the journaling requirement to be an integral part of the reflection exercise. P3 captured the sense of discipline and effort involved: “This project inspired me to pay greater attention to my life, and to be here in the

⁶⁶¹ Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough, “Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experiential Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vo. 84., No. 2. (American Psychological Association Inc. 2003), p. 378.

⁶⁶² Roberts (2014), p. 60.

⁶⁶³ Roberts (2014), p. 60.

⁶⁶⁴ Roberts (2014), p. 65.

⁶⁶⁵ Barbara Frederickson, “Gratitude and Other Positive Emotions Broaden and Build,” in *The Psychology of Gratitude* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.145-166.

present. It has made my life feel more vivid, more real. This is at least in part because we were given questions to reflect on as we walked, and asked to record our thoughts and observations. Knowing that I had to record my thoughts and observations commanded me to pay attention.” P10 attested to the benefit accrued through journaling: “I think that the journaling was a fantastic discipline, even though it was a chore, a lot of work. But I thought it made the experience that much more rich.” The reflection questions functioned as scaffolding to shore up the reflection process. The questions provided a strategic framework for sifting through the experiences on the pilgrim trail. Over the course of the six-week research period, the content of the questions evolved from a focus on the self to a focus on the other. The ‘other’ was interpreted variously by the participants as persons, community, nature, God, and mystery. The reflection questions are found in Appendix C.

Journaling as a habituated practice contributed to a process of spiritual formation. P3 described the formative nature of the discipline this way: “I take note that I am much more observant and awake to my feelings on these walks because of the need to journal. I also reflect on the feeling I had after journaling week (#) I ...writing down one’s thoughts helps bring clarity and focus to one’s mind and deepens the experience.” P3’s insight was corroborated by Heather Walton’s discourse on the merit of different writing genres in theological reflection. Walton extolled journaling as a key learning tool: a record of our heat-of-the-moment experience, it tunes self-awareness and develops insights.⁶⁶⁶ Through the practice of journaling, the participants reviewed and pondered the substance of their lives. Journaling enabled them to explore sensory experience and communicate ideas. Journaling served as a strategy for wrestling with emotion, thereby providing an integrating / healing function. The act of journaling also sparked creativity and generated

⁶⁶⁶ Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM Press, 2014), pp. 5-8.

new perspectives and possibilities. P3 explained: “Committing the experience to paper is a key part of this exercise. The exercise, this virtual pilgrimage, inspires me to pay greater attention to my inner life, to my thoughts, as well as to my exterior surroundings. It may also inspire me to reflect on my perceptions and to consider using a different lens.” In an essay on journaling David Mathis described the benefits of journaling as being able to “disentangle our thoughts, draw out our emotions, and dream about new endeavours. The discipline of writing facilitates careful thinking, catalyzes deep feeling, and inspires intentional action.”⁶⁶⁷

In her study of journaling as a spiritual practice, Helen Cepero lauded combining a journaling practice with a physical discipline. Cepero’s avowal that “every spiritual practice, including journaling, begins with an embodied self,”⁶⁶⁸ was for this project an endorsement of the corporeal nature of virtual pilgrimage. Cepero observed that though we are able to manipulate the body’s truth with our minds, the body is always the truer witness. Less capable of rationalization, denial and excuse, wanting to offer its more authentic voice if we can find a way to listen.⁶⁶⁹ Cepero pointed out that the Gospels insist that Christian faith finds its most exquisite expression in the resurrection of the body.⁶⁷⁰ In a description of the mind-body fusion, Cepero further elaborated: “Usually filled with thoughts that seem trapped in my head, I was able from the beginning to let thoughts and feelings flow to my hand and onto the page.”⁶⁷¹ P3 had an innate grasp of the cathartic link between journaling and awareness: “The act of journaling, the mere act

⁶⁶⁷ David Mathis, “Journal as a Pathway to Joy,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/journal-as-pathway-to-joy> (accessed June 10, 2018).

⁶⁶⁸ Helen Cepero, *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God through Attentive Writing* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), p. 63.

⁶⁶⁹ Cepero (2008), p. 63.

⁶⁷⁰ Cepero (2008), p. 64.

⁶⁷¹ Cepero (2008), p. 62.

of putting pen to paper regarding the virtual pilgrimage experience, inspires greater openness on the page. When we walk, we reflect, and when we journal later, we are journaling about our reflections. Thus we will be talking about our concerns, our preoccupations.” Another observation by P3 segues into the next section, ‘the absence of technology: “Walking alone, assuming no ear buds emitting distracting noise, results in the thoughts turning inward; one has to listen to one’s self; one is connected to the body and mind, recognizing physical changes - to gait, pain in joints; and mindfulness changes wherein the thoughts flow and turn to insight.” Walking unplugged became a way to reclaim a contemplative sensibility for these participants.

6.4.6 Virtual Pilgrimage and the Absence of Technology

The decision by participants to conduct their walking exercises devoid of mobile electronic devices was not suggested or recommended by the researcher. It was astonishing therefore to discover that all participants made an exclusively individual decision to walk without a digital device. For those who mentioned walking unplugged the choice seemed a “no-brainer,” as stated by P3. P10 explained: “the lack of artificial distractions permits a constant reassessment and adjustment.” It is important to note that the age range for the participants was from 46 to 85 years. None of the participants belonged to the category identified by Joubert as “Net Geners,”⁶⁷² the generations who grew up in the digital world, for whom digital media and technology are integral to their lives. The participants, rather, occupied the perspectives identified by Elaine Graham. Graham identified three theological perspectives on technology. The participants seemingly

⁶⁷² S.J. Joubert, “Annus Virtualis: Enkel Uitdagings Wat Die Vituele Era Van Web 2.0 Aan Relevante Kerklike Bediening Stel,” *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskif* 51 (3/4), p. 52.

occupied the first two of these perspectives. The first perspective views the pervasive nature of digital media as a potential threat to face-to-face relationships.⁶⁷³ The second perspective views digital media as a social construction and points to the consequences of its application as the determining factor. This view applauds creativity, but is wary of the potential for misuse.⁶⁷⁴ A third, more hopeful perspective views technology and digital media as a liberating force that provides the tools for reaching deep into human communities and cultures to address such issues as hunger and poverty.⁶⁷⁵ Graham called for a dialogical relationship between Theology and technology: the Christian faith can provide an alternative vision to assist with understanding of God's creative work in and through technology.⁶⁷⁶

Another theologian, Michael Burdette, contributed to the call for a theological response in a 2015 exploration of eschatology and technology. Burdette identified an important role for theology in the "transhumanism"⁶⁷⁷ narrative. Transhumanism refers to a cultural trend committed to improving the human condition; it includes efforts to eliminate aging and enhance human physical, intellectual and psychological attributes.⁶⁷⁸ In a November, 2017 interview on "Technology, People and Religion," Burdette described some of the anti-Christian beliefs and practices of transhumanism as: "the denigration of bodily existence, self-aggrandization and solipsistic transcendence, poor understanding of relationships with others and especially the vulnerable, and a

⁶⁷³ Elaine Graham, "Being, Making and Imagining: Towards a Practical Theology of Technology," in *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (10) 2, (2009), p. 225.

⁶⁷⁴ Graham (2009), p. 225.

⁶⁷⁵ Graham (2009), p. 225.

⁶⁷⁶ Graham (2009), p. 235.

⁶⁷⁷ Michael Burdett, *Eschatology and the Technological Future* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 81-82.

⁶⁷⁸ Burdett (2015), p. 81.

reductionist account of personal and social sin/ills.”⁶⁷⁹ In his study, Burdette used an eschatological approach to frame a Christian perspective and response to transhumanism, using the concept of “adventus.”⁶⁸⁰ Adventus welcomes novelty and innovation in a spirit of possibility and promise. Adventus coincides with Margaret Wheatley’s suggestion for a posture of openness to the world as a remedy for the alienation created by technology: “By opening to the world as it is, we may find that gentleness, decency and bravery are available – not only to us but to all human beings.”⁶⁸¹ Burdett queried in reference to transhumanism: “Is the good life nothing but infinite pleasure, the absence of pain and an infinite will?”⁶⁸² He concluded his investigation with the following assertion: the Christian “does not deny death’s place, but is released from its power through Christ entering into death and overcoming it.”⁶⁸³ Transcendence in Christianity is God’s bestowal of new possibilities in and through death. The participants in virtual pilgrimage did not explicitly identify the source of their reservations vis a vis technology, but their certitude around excluding it from their walks was itself a subtle rejoinder of the transhumanist trend.

This concludes the discussion of the reflection movement. The reflection movement in the Praxis model is an experiential process of internal probing and pondering that yields the insights and depth understanding that inspires outcomes. These outcomes take the form of attributes that characterize and lay the groundwork for the new action or

⁶⁷⁹ Michael Burdett “Michael Burdett on Theology and Technology: What Does God Have To Do With Technology,” *Technology, People and Religion* (Subtle Engine - Medium, November, 2017), <https://medium.com/subtle-engine/theology-and-technology-2ca9dc7a7f1a> (accessed Nov. 4, 2018).

⁶⁸⁰ Burdette(2017), p. 3.

⁶⁸¹ Wheatley (2012), p. 130.

⁶⁸² Burdett (2015), p. 239.

⁶⁸³ Burdett (2015), p. 239.

practice. The third segment of the Discussion elucidates the ‘committed and intelligent action’ movement of the Praxis model.

6.5 Discussion of ‘Committed and Intelligent Action’ Results

The results of the ‘committed action’ movement explored virtual pilgrimage in relation to five themes: 1) aesthetic arrest, 2) pathway to healing and peace, 3) connectivity and community, 4) the impetus to serve, and 5) everyday mysticism. Intersection and overlap between the ‘reflection’ and ‘committed and intelligent action’ movements was acknowledged in the Results chapter as an embedded feature of the praxis model, which functions in an up and down spiralling fashion. Stephen Bevans describes the third movement as the place where faith is articulated in intelligent action.⁶⁸⁴ Bevans identified the challenge of pinning down an operative methodology in the praxis model because of the immediate and transitory nature of theology done out of this approach.⁶⁸⁵ In the context of this research, the emphasis on orthopraxis over orthodoxy, and the centrality of reflection fulfills the requirements of praxis.⁶⁸⁶ Committed and intelligent action is a movement to faithful practice based on the fruits of theological reflection. In this context, the faithful practice is virtual pilgrimage. The constituent elements of the intelligent and committed action movement are the features which define virtual pilgrimage.

6.5.1 Virtual Pilgrimage and Aesthetic Arrest

The first theme in the committed and intelligent action movement is aesthetic arrest. Aesthetic arrest is an unequivocal attribute of the practice of virtual pilgrimage.

⁶⁸⁴ Bevans (2010), p. 76.

⁶⁸⁵ Bevans (2010), p. 79.

⁶⁸⁶ Bevans (2010), p. 79.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar coined the phrase “aesthetic arrest”⁶⁸⁷ to describe the transformative power of natural beauty. Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics focused on the concept of nature and our subjective experience of nature. The arresting beauty of nature is a preeminent feature of this study.

Jonathan King identified four categories of theological aesthetics: 1) natural theology of beauty, 2) theology of the arts, 3) religious aesthetics, and 4) theological aesthetics.⁶⁸⁸ The most applicable category for the purpose of this project is the natural theology of beauty. Several of the participants found the splendour of nature to be a compelling and transformative force on the pilgrimage trail. Eloquent renderings of encounters with their natural surroundings were offered by P3, P4, P10 and P12. For these participants, sensory experience was the mediator for transcendental beauty. Examples abounded: P3 saw “the unfurling of the deep burgundy leaves of the Norwegian Maples...,” P4 heard “the sound of the birds chirping,” P10 felt “the embrace of the sun,” and P12 smelled “the magnificent fragrance of lilacs and lily of the valley in the air.” Other, more cerebral accounts perceived beauty as a form of intellectual delight. P5, P8 and P11 were captivated by the workings of nature: P5 tended to adopt an objective observer stance as was evidenced in this report: “It was a bit foggy; looked up as we heard honking and two geese appeared out of the mist.” P8 displayed a distinctly academic slant: “I think that the strongest thing for me was observing the complexity of nature on these walks, being asked to think more deeply about them.” P11 typically embarked on a meditative reverie: “The black rock I found was near the river. It was rounded due to its many contacts with other stones and was a black colour unlike the other

⁶⁸⁷ Hans Ur Von Balthasar (1982), p. 5.

⁶⁸⁸ King (2018), p. 2.

rocks. I reflected on what must have been its journey to where I found it. Had it been dislodged by glaciers? Was it part of a volcanic eruption or a meteor strike? It was certainly at one time star dust just like all the elements in our body. A small black rock with a history stretching back to the big bang...So very ordinary and so very remarkable.”

The participants’ perceptions’ and interpretations followed two essential patterns. On the one hand, an intuitive, emotional approach was expressed in the ambiguous language of imagery and symbolism; spiritual phenomena in this mode were represented in qualitative accounts of individual’s subjective experiences, notably evident in the renderings of P3, P10, and P12. The rational, analytic approach, on the other hand, sought to understand and explain phenomena in terms that were explicit and precise. P5 and P8 typically followed this pattern.

Many scholars have addressed the workings of aesthetics in the transformation process. Elizabeth Julian referred to landscape as a “spiritual classic,”⁶⁸⁹ describing it as “a catalyst for transformation.”⁶⁹⁰ Julian professed that there are two books of revelation: the natural world and the bible. People can return again and again to the natural world, engaging it with multiple readings or interpretations as the landscape challenges, inspires, evokes responses, and elicits revelation. John de Gruchy described the transformative power of beauty as “supplying images that contradict the inhuman, and thus provide alternative transforming images to those of oppression. We are in a profound sense redeemed by such beauty.”⁶⁹¹ Beauty in nature called forth deep transformative experiences

⁶⁸⁹ Elizabeth Julian, “Landscape as Spiritual Classic: A Reading from Paekakariki,” in *Land and Place: Spiritualities from Aotearoa, New Zealand*, Helen Bergin and Susan Smith, eds. (Auckland: Ancient Publications, 2004), p. 99.

⁶⁹⁰ Julian (2004), p. 107.

⁶⁹¹ John de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 199-200.

in the research participants. They were drawn into an awareness of the connection between themselves and nature, and the inter-connection of all things in the universe. They were changed by this connection, and enlarged by it, as was evidenced in the copious inferences to reverence, marvel and wonderment in their accounts.

6.5.2 Virtual Pilgrimage as a Pathway to Healing and Peace

The second theme in the committed and intelligent action movement is healing and peace. One of the features of virtual pilgrimage is its facility for the ongoing integration and transformation that leads to healing and peace. Healing is elemental in a transformative practice, and as was previously referenced, has a long association with pilgrimage.⁶⁹² In a study of pilgrimage and healing, Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman enumerated the healing dynamics embodied in pilgrimage as follows: pilgrimage is 1) a physical journey with social, symbolic, and physical effects; 2) an act of personal empowerment; 3) an assertion of the individual's identity in relation to sacred 'others' that integrates self within collective models; 4) the particularizing of individual suffering within broader frameworks that provide meaning; 5) a source of felt social solidarity from an active connection with a community of fellow pilgrims; 6) an alteration of consciousness, eliciting psychosocial dynamics conducive to supporting a range of bodily healing responses.⁶⁹³

In this research, healing and integration were frequently associated with peace. P3, P4, P6, P7, P10, and P12 made explicit and eloquent references to healing as peace. These references were elaborated in the Results section. As a transformative healing

⁶⁹² Chemin (2011), p. 178.

⁶⁹³ Dubisch and Winkelman (2005), p. x.

phenomenon, virtual pilgrimage is notably beneficial to its practitioners. Among the transformative action components cited on the pilgrimage path were P3's "it relaxes me, calms me down...allows for reflection...brings context to the events of my life;" P4's "checking my distance and speed much less frequently," and "looking to make eye contact with, and greeting fellow walkers;" P6's "allows me to meditate...and to be the protagonist of my life;" P7's "shedding the day," and "being aware of surroundings;" P10's "feeling the walk physically now...much of the tension in me has been released;" and P12's "aids the flow of thought."

Virtual pilgrimage was also at times a "vicarious"⁶⁹⁴ act of healing. Eduardo Chemin identified this theme in his 2011 research on the Camino pilgrimage. Conducted as a vicarious act, pilgrimage contains an aspect of remembrance. Chemin described the dynamics of vicarious healing this way: "the process of slowing down the body and 'resetting the mind' offered a space to reflect and remember others that were either suffering from an illness or who had died. Remembering friends and praying for their health was something that was engaged with even by travellers who had no religious motivation or held no beliefs of any kind."⁶⁹⁵ A number of P2's accounts reflected vicarious healing, as the following excerpt bears out: "Walking gives me time to focus and think about the people in my life. I feel guilt. I am aware that I do not do enough for others and I know I need to do more for my friends. And my friend Jacquie, who is clearly depressed and sad since this separation threw her life into chaos. She copes with her severely learning-disabled daughter, who at 12, still cannot read and write. I think of my friends as I walk and I send positive thoughts to them. 'May you be happy, may you be

⁶⁹⁴ Chemin (2011), p. 179.

⁶⁹⁵ Chemin (2011), p. 180.

healthy, may you be safe, may you live in peace.” P10’s accounts also contained references to vicarious healing: “I pray for peace and blessings for my loved ones; to be embraced by light and warmth. I do this each walk, but more so today.”

As a practice, virtual pilgrimage provides a holistic framework for individuals to engage on biological, psychological, social and spiritual levels. In a postmodern context, the pilgrimage motif contains immense meaning-making potential and endless possibilities for human thriving. The transformational nature of pilgrimage positions it well for addressing issues of healing, identity formation, and spiritual development. While Warfield believed that pilgrimages need not be religious to be a sacred journey, Marie McCarthy underscored the importance of placing retrieved new-old practices like pilgrimage into dialogue with the various spiritual traditions. McCarthy advocated a ‘hermeneutics of restoration’⁶⁹⁶ that explores the historical context of retrieved practices: the transformative power of the pilgrimage motif is more potent and relevant for today’s world when the origin and roots of the practice are appreciated and its advancement through time is understood.

6.5.3 Virtual Pilgrimage: Connectivity and community

The third theme in the committed and intelligent action movement is connectivity and community. This part of the discussion focuses on connectivity and community, and the attitude of openness that characterizes an experience of genuine community. One of the features of VP is the disposition of openness it fosters. All of the participants displayed a quality of openness, either in encounters with their surroundings, and/ or with other people on the pilgrim trail. P1, P3, P7, P10 and P12 notably provided accounts of

⁶⁹⁶ McCarthy (2000), p. 203.

openness to and connection with the cosmos, the environment, and the people on the path. There was an emotive, existential quality to these accounts that suggested transformative movement and change. P5 and P8 tended towards summaries that were more analytical, although equally valid as articulations of a present action (virtual pilgrimage) that yielded new understandings. Marie McCarthy described the quality of openness that distinguishes an authentic spirituality this way: it is “marked by letting go of preconceived notions and ideas, openness to the new and unexpected, and availability for surprise.”⁶⁹⁷

Related to connectivity and community in VP is its facility for hospitality. M. A. C. Warren famously declared: “Our first task when approaching another people, another culture, another religion is ‘to take off our shoes.’”⁶⁹⁸ While the participants extended hospitality in very different ways, there was a signature quality of humility in their reflections. For example, P3 struggled “to see those colleagues I do not like ... as kindred spirits.” P9 was intentional about being “mindful of the plight of the clients,” and P11 acknowledged “I should not judge their personal choices.” These participants possessed the moral courage to move beyond their comfort zones into the rhythm of the other. Their accounts reinforce McCarthy’s argument that when spirituality is authentic, “we experience a sense of hospitality to persons and ideas, a capacity to allow the familiar to become unfamiliar, a willingness to enter into experiences, ideas, relationships, without knowing where they will lead. We learn to sit and wait respectfully before the unfamiliar, making ourselves ready to hear a new word of revelation, as well as to hear anew the

⁶⁹⁷ McCarthy (2000), p. 200.

⁶⁹⁸ W.A.C. Warren, *Christian Presence Series* (London: SCM Press, 1959-1966), Preface.

word of revelation. This authentic spirituality is marked by an active openness of one's self towards otherness."⁶⁹⁹

Closely allied to McCarthy's 'active openness' is Elaine Graham's concept of "alterity."⁷⁰⁰ Graham describes alterity as a key hermeneutical criterion for a reconstructed Christian practice. According to Graham, alterity in practice favours strategies that encourage empathy and solidarity with others, opens up enlarged horizons of understanding and commitment, and fosters pastoral encounters that engender new perspectives on human experience and divine reality.⁷⁰¹ This aspect of alterity was evident, for example, in P9's "being mindful of the plight of the clients and remaining as a mindful servant," and P11's revelation: "I concluded that each person has to approach life, God and spirituality in their own way." These accounts show a regard for diversity and inclusiveness that is at the heart of alterity. Alterity is the essence of community when it draws the participant into meaningful encounters with the other. Beneath the diversity of lifestyles and values lies a deeper unity of experience that is available to all who bring an open, generous mind and heart. The transformative potential of alterity functions on two levels in virtual pilgrimage: 1) Through the mystery of encounter with the other, VP has the potential to draw its practitioners into a deeper understanding of their own identity; and 2) VP has a facility for generating a new awareness and concern for others on the path. The practice is "epistemic"⁷⁰² in its facility to transform the practitioner. New knowledge and understandings are formed through participation in the practice. For the participants, it was as if they experienced a level of compassion that urged them towards responsible action.

⁶⁹⁹ McCarthy (2000), pp. 200-201.

⁷⁰⁰ Graham (1996), P. 154.

⁷⁰¹ Graham (1996), P. 154.

⁷⁰² Osmer (2008), p. 153.

The concepts of connectivity and community provided a framework for articulating their insights and values. The experiential aspect of connectivity and community is further manifested in the impetus to serve.

6.5.4 Virtual Pilgrimage: The Impetus to Serve

The fourth theme in the committed and intelligent action movement is the impetus to serve. The impetus to serve was given expression on two levels in this research: 1) on the psycho-spiritual level where the participants became aware of needfulness in the other, and were invested with a desire to ameliorate that need, and 2) on the performance level where awareness and desire were transposed into concrete action. The impetus to serve lays the groundwork for the pragmatic task in Richard Osmer's model. Osmer advocated a spirituality of "servant leadership" for addressing the pragmatic task.⁷⁰³ Servant leadership is based on the Christian definition of power and authority described in Mark's Gospel: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-45). The impetus to serve which motivated the participants' responses was evocative of the qualities of altruism and egalitarianism in servant leadership. The pragmatic task complements the 'committed and intelligent action' movement of Bevans' praxis model. The pragmatic task marks the culmination of the research cycle, and is the point at which strategies of action are formed and enacted.⁷⁰⁴

All of the participants were already engaged in service by virtue of their volunteer activity at SGH. P1, P2, P4, P6, and P10 made specific references to their spirituality as

⁷⁰³ Osmer (2008), p. 176.

⁷⁰⁴ Osmer (2008), p. 176.

either the incentive for their acts of service, or as an integral part of their service commitment, or both. The participants' SGH-based volunteer commitment was itself a form of service. For the purpose of this discussion however, the focus was on the impetus to serve brought about as a result of participation in virtual pilgrimage.

The impetus to serve is linked to the concept of praxis. Elaine Graham et al. described praxis as "theology in action."⁷⁰⁵ Praxis is a way of knowing that is inseparable from doing. While praxis in the twentieth century tended to be explicitly associated with theologies of liberation, it has a deeper continuity in Christian history that has manifested itself in Christian movements founded on peace, justice, and personal integrity.⁷⁰⁶ In this project, VP perpetuated an already existing inclination to serve. The 'turn to practice' involved reshaping of priorities that urged the participants towards outreach and action.

Several participants alluded to ethical aspects of the impetus to serve. Ethical considerations were treated by Osmer as part of the "normative"⁷⁰⁷ task in theological interpretation. However, it aligns with the 'committed and intelligent action' movement in Bevans' praxis framework, and the current discussion of service. Don Browning made the point that the entire process of interpretation in practical theological inquiry is ethical, from pre-understanding, to recognizing the deficit that spurs inquiry, through the strategies of inquiry which generate new understandings.⁷⁰⁸ Concern for ethics animates the entire research process. The participants' accounts contained different accents in their ethical references. For P1, it took the form of an environmental pledge: "Currently I try to

⁷⁰⁵ Graham et. al. (2005), p.170.

⁷⁰⁶ Graham et. al. (2005), p. 172.

⁷⁰⁷ Osmer (2008), p. 147.

⁷⁰⁸ D. S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 39.

reduce global warming etc by using less energy and by recycling plastic, metals and paper.” P5 was interested in finding ways to make the city safer and more habitable: “I also noticed the infrastructure and how the city areas accommodated (or didn't) walkers, cyclists and vehicles, wheelchairs and skateboards. I was thinking as I walked about how the city can encourage more walkers and cyclists with some small changes to the infrastructure.” P11 expressed a heartfelt social justice concern: “Who gets the good housing and who has to settle for the sub-standard? Can it all come down to hard work? What part does simple luck, inheritance etc. play? It is too easy to write people off who do not live up to the model of upward mobility. We must value each person for their uniqueness and not be misled by varying circumstances.” P12 expressed an elemental desire for honourable living: “to understand and live a life that does not put me first.”

6.5.5 Virtual Pilgrimage and Everyday Mysticism

The fifth theme in the committed and intelligent action movement is mysticism. The loss of access to the mystical tradition and the need to reclaim its practices was explored in this discussion. The nature of mysticism as a reality of ordinary, lived experience was considered in reference the participants encounters with the sacred on the VP path. The essential role of pondering in the mystical life, and the desire for personal and spiritual betterment that follows was examined, as were the experience of a cosmic conscience, and the sense of interconnection and union with all Creation.

Mysticism is defined by David Perrin as the experience of a personal God, “who emerges from within a common world that humanity and God already share.”⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁹Perrin (1996), p. 51.

Mysticism is a long-standing tradition in Christian spirituality. It is often viewed, exclusively and erroneously, as the purview of a privileged few who achieve high levels of spiritual advancement. Perrin described the accessible nature of Christian mysticism this way: it “is part of the potential reality of everyday life. Without negating those expressions of Christian mysticism that may include extraordinary moments such as auditory experiences, levitations or visions, the foundation of Christian mysticism is the ongoing intimate presence of God active in the everyday life of the Christian.”⁷¹⁰ Understanding of the nature of mysticism as integral to everyday life refocuses the life of Christians in the ordinary reality of their world. God’s presence is routinely communicated in creative expressions of thought, word and action.

Within a common world, the lived experience of everyday life is the milieu within which contemporary spirituality is most authentically experienced. Beth Crisp and Martin Walton developed theories of spirituality around conceptions of “lived experience.” Crisp’s model defines “lived experience”⁷¹¹ in terms of rituals, creativity, and place,⁷¹² while Martin’s model defines spirituality in terms of “lived experience” and “receptivity.”⁷¹³ For Walton, ‘lived experience’ is the context within which even the smallest detail of life may support and express the spirituality of a person.⁷¹⁴ In this project, the VP practice was the context for “lived experience.” The participants experienced sacred encounters on the pilgrim path through cognition, intuition and sensory perception. Their accounts were full of such numinous references as P3’s

⁷¹⁰ Perrin (2007, p. 239.

⁷¹¹ Crisp (2010), p. 14.

⁷¹² Crisp (2010), p. 90.

⁷¹³ Martin Walton, “Discerning Lived Spirituality: the Reception of Otherness” in *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (UK: Sage Journals, June, 2013), pp. 1-3.

⁷¹⁴ Walton (2013), p.2.

“Feeling a oneness with nature,” P 6’s “At times, my thinking is provoked in a certain direction. Where does this come from,” P10’s reference to “I felt the presence of God in the light,” and P11’s “seeing a rock or a feather, or something, seeing the mystery behind it and wondering how it got there.” Virtual pilgrimage was the ground for authentic encounters with the transcendent. Their walks became occasions for them to discover, reclaim, and cherish the beauty of their internal and external realities. Ron Rolheiser once proclaimed: “There is more than enough mystery, secret, marvel and miracle ablaze in ordinary reality. Unfortunately most of the time we don’t see this because we stand before it trying to claim, name, number, psych out and render familiar...when our true task is, instead, to ponder and to wonder.”⁷¹⁵

Rolheiser identified “pondering”⁷¹⁶ as one of the commandments on the road to becoming a mystic. Rolheiser described pondering in the biblical sense as the “brand of mysticism we most need.”⁷¹⁷ A distinction was made between pondering in the manner of the Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), as a form of intellectual contemplation on life’s mysteries, and pondering in the Hebrew Gospel sense of holding the tension that comes from patiently standing before life’s mysteries.⁷¹⁸ Rolheiser cited the Scriptural example of Mary: she “kept these things in her heart, and pondered them Luke 2:51).”⁷¹⁹ According to Rolheiser, the willingness to carry tension as Mary did is the type of mysticism we most need today to revitalize our faith.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁵ Ron Rolheiser, “Ordinary Ground is Holy.” RONROLHEISER, OMI (May, 1993).

⁷¹⁶ Rolheiser (1999), p.216.

⁷¹⁷ Rolheiser (1999), p.219.

⁷¹⁸ Rolheiser (1999), p.220.

⁷¹⁹ Rolheiser (1999), p.220.

⁷²⁰ Rolheiser (1999), p.220.

Virtual pilgrimage was a natural setting for pondering. P7 described the linkage between the walking discipline and pondering, and the consequential rise of suppressed psychic material into conscious awareness: “Being asked to walk on a routine basis, and reflect upon questions while doing so, resulted in preoccupations floating to the surface.” As an interesting aside, P7 also discovered that “I had been somewhat worried that I would be bored with myself in the long walks; that I would be desperate for companionship, but during the virtual Camino I found that was not the case.” The characteristic tension alluded to by Rolheiser found frequent expression in the participants’ ruminations, including the tension of maintaining a focus: P3 remarked: “Freeing your mind is not that easy. My mind can easily get anchored with all kinds of things, (to do lists, scheduling, house improvement ideas, etc., etc.).” For P4, tension resolved itself on the walk: “I was so mad I forgot my hat and watch. By the time I reached the half way point of my walk I was much better and truly enjoyed the sound of the birds chirping and the trees budding.” Among other expressions, tension for P11 involved loss of control: “It made me feel how little in control I really was of life and everything else.” For several of the participants, pondering led to expressions of regret and remorse: P2’s “Walking gives me time to focus and think about the people in my life. I feel guilt..;” P4’s “It also caused me to reflect on some of the hurts that I have either suffered or caused over my life and how, for the most part I had caused them;” and P12’s “So why didn’t I take a moment and clarify with this stranger his intention...I felt that he was offering a kindness, and hoping for a kindness from me in return. I no doubt got caught up in some kind of potential negativity...” There was a palpable sense of struggle and often heartfelt remorse in their accounts that was reminiscent of early stage contemplation. The purgative stage in contemplation is often accompanied

by an acute awareness of one's failures and a deep desire to reform one's life. The desire for personal and spiritual betterment may be manifested in remedial or charitable actions towards another.

One of the characteristics of the mystical tradition is the sense of a cosmic unity in relation to God, humanity, nature, or the universe. The participants made references to experiences of interconnection, oneness, or union. Examples include: P3's recognition that "Feeling a oneness with nature is for me very spiritual. I reflect on how lands and landscapes, water and rivers and flowers are key ingredients in my day to day life that transform me...;" P8 remarked that: "Everything is connected to everything else. The longer one lives, the more this interconnectedness drives one's decisions. Some would call it wisdom;" P11 experienced oneness in solitude: "I benefit from just being alone, at one with nature, and feeling the stillness, the calmness of the surroundings through my walks." Their reflections expressed a sense of the sacredness of the whole order of nature. The cosmic sensibility honours all life forms, including the ordinary objects encountered on a daily basis. The existential dimension of corporeal objects was a recurring theme in the participants' accounts. A few examples include P1's "rolling white clouds," P3's "early morning light filtering through the wood slats of the old red barn," P10s "forested parks at the military base," P11's 'small black rock,' and P12's "magnificent heron" in a mystical encounter with "the river." The elements on the path were sometimes alluded to in relation to a persona or a kind of being-ness, as in P9's "When I walk outside, he's personally revealing a small piece of what he's made, and it's never the same experience twice," P10's feeling "the Presence of God in the light," or even P12's "being drawn in by the birds." In the context of the VP

practice, material cosmologies in the natural world mediated encounters that were healing and life-giving.

The sense of a cosmic consciousness is a pre-eminent thesis in the work of modern-day prophets. For example, Thomas Berry has advocated that the cosmos be accepted as “the primordial sacred community.”⁷²¹ Berry is deeply disturbed by the present day ecological crisis, and the inability of existing cultures to deal with this tragedy. His passion for beauty and nature are manifested in the same aesthetic awareness expressed in the accounts of the participants, especially in the writing of P3, P10, P11, and P12. P10’s sense of a direct and immediate cosmic connection was a frequent iteration, as in this excerpt: “I feel almost instantly an immediate connection to this forest, as though I am part of a bigger picture; a connection with God and the universe.” P3 and P12 related with nature on a visceral level. Their reflections invested the elements of nature with an animistic quality. The plants in P3’s garden were named, a life-giving gesture that endowed them with a sense of personhood: “My observations as I walk have inevitably been connected to the cyclical events of nature during this period: the return of the geese, the blooming of the first spring flowers in my gardens, Mrs. Moon (Pulmonaria), Helen (Helleborous) and my Poets’ Daffodils (Narcissus poeticus)” P12 connected to the spirit of the river: “The water has purpose and meaning. It has its trials and tribulations, yet it’s filled with life and is necessary for the provision of life. There are many insights to be found with a river.” P12 also related to the personage of the trees: “I actually believe that it’s the trees that are soothing me. My father loved trees and I love trees.” The pilgrim path itself had life and presence for P12: “I have been on

⁷²¹ Thomas Berry, “The Earth: A New Context for Religious Unity,” in *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*, Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, eds. (Mystic, Ct: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), p. 38.

this trail in the past, but today was particularly enjoyable ...I had a feeling that I was being welcomed. It was as though nature was taking delight in my being there..."

The Divine presence was alive and active on the pilgrim path, in the participants' quickened senses, passionate emotions, and depth insights. It was a level of engagement that signalled the mystical working of the Spirit, in a context that was so ordinary and accessible. As a concrete, embodied practice, virtual pilgrimage is a pathway to beauty, blessedness, and renewal.

A final point in this discussion relates to concern for authenticity in spiritual practice. With a resurgence of interest in the mystical traditions and spirituality generally, authenticity has become a focal point of importance. Marie McCarthy addressed authenticity in terms of identifiable characteristics common to all mainstream spiritualities. At its broadest level, authentic spirituality is an integrative, holistic response that usually includes such dispositions and disciplines as contemplative awareness, communality, and effective action in the world.⁷²² The goal of all spiritual disciplines and practices is the ongoing integration that leads to authenticity. Daniel Helminiak developed a framework for analyzing spiritual practices around the concept of authenticity.⁷²³ He drew on Lonergan's precepts⁷²⁴ to describe the distinctive awareness that constitutes the human spirit. It seems fitting to conclude using Helminiak's

⁷²² McCarthy (2000), p. 199.

⁷²³ Helminiak (2001), p. 168.

⁷²⁴ The human spirit is a self-transcending and spontaneous, yet structured dynamism built into the human mind: a) it is spontaneous in that it is primordially characterized by wonder, marvel and awe that is given expression in questioning, pondering and desire; b) it is self-transcendent in its continuous movement beyond the former self into new realms of experience; c) it is dynamic in its relentless movement towards fullness of knowledge and love; and d) it is structured in that it has a fourfold requirement for its fulfillment and unfolding – these four foci, referred to as the transcendental precepts, are formulated as follows: a) be attentive, b) be intelligent, c) be reasonable, and d) be responsible.

framework to develop an anatomical sketch of virtual pilgrimage as an authentic spiritual practice:

1) The meditative character of VP walking opens the practitioner to the dynamism of the human spirit, expressed through emotions, images and memories.

2) The decision to remain with this places the practitioner in the presence of God / the Sacred / the Divine.

3) The action of remaining with this awareness, in the presence of God, alters the accrued structures of the personality.

4) With regular, habitual practice, the practitioner becomes more attuned to the exigencies of the spirit.

5) This alignment with the spirit increases the facility for self-transcendence and authenticity.

6) As the practitioner becomes more attuned and more authentic, innate but rarely actualized human powers are released.

7) The habitual, deliberate entrance into the natural functioning of the universe leads to ever more sensitive attuning to the unfolding of the Divine plan in the practitioner's life.

8) The process of ongoing alignment and refinement deepens the practitioner's capacity for love and effective action in the world.

In the context of virtual pilgrimage, the practitioners offered themselves as they were, with their preoccupations, cares and hopes. Through the habitual action of “keeping

faith with their feet”⁷²⁵ they were able to form new understandings, and enter into new mysteries of being and doing.

6. 6 Discussion of Participant Feedback

Chapter VI closes with a discussion of the participants’ experiences of the rewarding and challenging aspects of virtual pilgrimage. Given the overwhelmingly positive support for the project, there was a felt need for corroborative endorsement and authentication of the results. To that end, the data was mined for instances of challenge and reward on the part of the participants.

6.6.1 Challenges and Issues

The participants identified several challenges and issues related to virtual pilgrimage. The solitary nature of the practice was highlighted as a challenging aspect of VP, suggesting the need to build in a communal feature. My own Camino experience corroborated the need for a counter-balance to solitary walking. This need could be met by building in an option for communal walking at designated points in the six week time-frame.

The difficulty of achieving a reflective mindset in short bursts of localized walking was identified as a challenge for some participants. Distance pilgrimage removes the pilgrim from ordinary life distractions for a prolonged period of time, opening up more possibilities for new perspectives and meaningful revelations. Virtual pilgrimage requires a more concerted effort, and more discipline and focus on the part of the practitioner to achieve the same effect.

⁷²⁵ Boers (2007), pp. 144-157.

A desire to have the virtual route mapped out in advance of their walks was cited as an issue for several participants. In addition to the progress updates and the geo-cultural descriptions of their virtual locations on the Camino, it would have been helpful to have a detailed map of the route from the start of the pilgrimage.

The need for more education on the concepts of pilgrimage and virtual pilgrimage was also cited as an issue. One participant wanted more clarity around the difference between walking and virtual pilgrimage. Another participant questioned the VP claim to authenticity as a form of pilgrimage.

A final challenge relates to the capacity for cross-verification to ensure the validity of the research. Tim Sensing uses the term “slippage”⁷²⁶ to describe sought-after inconsistencies in data. According to Sensing, slippage seeks disconfirmation in data. It is the inconsistencies that clarify the limits and meanings of the patterns and themes in the data, offering opportunities for different slants and deeper insights. There was an absence of slippage in this project. With exception of a rare question or expression of dissent, the lack of discord in the participants’ commentaries was conspicuous. While their enthusiasm for the project was undoubtedly motivated by personal interest, it was also a gesture of solidarity towards the researcher. Their desire for this project to succeed was a potentially biasing factor in the data they provided. It required drilling down into their responses to unearth aspects of VP which they found challenging.

6.6.2 Rewards and Strengths

The participants highlighted various rewards and strengths in virtual pilgrimage. Chief among these was discovering the benefits of the slow pace of walking, and the

⁷²⁶ Sensing (2011), p. 200.

occasions for close up encounters with nature and people. Augustine's maxim "it is solved by walking" resonated for the opportunity it afforded for introspection and reflection. VP was a place away from the distractions and responsibilities of daily life that provided breathing space and a gateway to creative expression. A factor in the participants' affirmative responses to the 'call for research participants,' was that most were already dedicated walkers. Being able to combine the physical act of walking with a focused reflection exercise had enormous appeal.

Among the unanticipated strengths of the practice were the reflection question and the journaling requisite. The reflection question provided focus and direction for the participants' reflections, an exercise that required surprising intentionality and discipline, but one which they lauded for its benefits in terms of self-awareness, attention to unresolved issues, and faith enhancement. The journaling requisite, similarly, necessitated effort and discipline on the part of the participants. It urged attentiveness to the interior life, as well as to the external surroundings, and functioned as a conduit to new perspectives and revelations. Committing their reflections to writing helped to clarify and organize their experiences, and consolidate their insights. One participant pointed out the unique importance of journaling for localized pilgrimage, given the difficulty of extricating the practitioner from the demands of life in the home environment.

Perhaps the greatest strength of VP was the opportunity it afforded for transformation. In a retrospective on the practice, the participants extolled the benefits of the practice as a whole. Once the practice became habituated, walking episodes were accompanied with a reassuring sense of rhythm and flow. Over the six week period, back-

burner issues got addressed and priorities got aligned. There was an overall sense of enrichment and peace that accompanied the practice. For the most part, the reflection process moved them towards others in expressions of concern, regret, and closeness, expressions that were accompanied by pledges to take some form of constructive action.

6.7 Conclusion

The ‘Discussion’ chapter rounded out the pragmatic task of the practical theological research cycle. The significance of the research results was explored through the researcher’s own reflections, and by way of previous research in pilgrimage studies and the human science disciplines. The Discussion consisted of a brief overview of the interpretive paradigm within which the research results were framed and interpreted, followed by an examination of the research findings in each of the three stages of the praxis model. The transformative power of virtual pilgrimages was borne out in the fourteen themes educed from the research data.

The three-movement framework of the praxis model closely paralleled the progressive pattern of transformation in virtual pilgrimage. On the level of committed action, the varied nuances in the ways the participants engaged VP corresponded to the operational constructs of ritual, walking obeisance, and focal practice. Facets of one or all of these constructs existed in each participant’s walking practice. On the level of reflection, the centrality of the reflection questions and the journaling requisite for the exercise of reflection were a surprising and edifying discovery. It was equally surprising to discover the participants’ aptitudes for creative problem-solving, and their inclination to move away from technological consumption on the VP trail. One of the features of VP that

endorsed it as an authentic spiritual practice was the quality of contemplative awareness exhibited in the participants' heartfelt personal inventories and their sensitivity to need in others. A further endorsement was the sense of gratitude and personal blessing they experienced on the VP path. The probing and pondering that accompanied the reflection process yielded the insights and understandings that activated outcomes. On the level of committed and intelligent action, these outcomes took the form of the attributes that characterized the practice of virtual pilgrimage. Chief among these were aesthetic arrest, the compelling beauty of nature as a transformative force, and the quality of healing and peace imparted by the rhythm of the footstep and the aura of the landscape. Healing is elemental in a transformative practice, and has been associated with pilgrimage across the millennia. The attitude of openness that fostered connectivity and community on the VP trail, and the impetus to serve ignited by that spirit of community signalled the working of grace in the hearts of the participants. A final attribute was the facility for mystery that revered both the grandeur of the universe and the minutiae of the daily round. An anatomical sketch of virtual pilgrimage endorsed the practice as an authentic spiritual discipline attuned to the primitive and peaceful in the psalmody of the cosmos. The Discussion concluded with a reflection on the participants' feedback, focusing on the areas of challenge and strength that informed the recommendations put forward in the General Conclusion.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This thesis presented my research into virtual pilgrimage as a new faith practice for Shepherds of Good Hope volunteers. A localized, substitute form of the traditional pilgrimage trope was adapted in a form identified as ‘virtual pilgrimage.’ The research addressed the question: “Can virtual pilgrimage be a pathway to spiritual renewal for Shepherds of Good Hope volunteers?” The study had three purposes: 1) to respond to the loss of a vibrant spiritual life within the SGH community, 2) to find an inclusive framework for honouring the diverse spiritual currents in the SGH community, and 3) to contribute to the literature and scholarship in pilgrimage studies.

The research used a qualitative methodology. It was conducted within the interpretive framework of Practical Theology, and structured around the tasks in the PT research cycle, as delineated by Richard Osmer’s four questions: 1) What is going on? 2) Why is this going on? 3) What ought to be going on? and 4) How might I respond? The data analysis process utilized Stephen Bevans’ “praxis model” for identifying and organizing the major themes in the data. The spiral pattern of the praxis model complemented Osmer’s four-task movement in the practical theological cycle.

7.2 The Background and Context of the Problem

Chapter I addressed the first question in the research cycle: 1) ‘What is going on?’ This question contextualized the need that gave rise to the research problem as a function of the evolving Shepherds community. The first step involved “attending” for the purpose of discerning and describing the deficit (the decline in the spiritual life of the community)

and envisaging a potential remedial intervention. An historical overview of the SGH community was the backdrop against which the changing ethos called for new forms of faith expression. The community was founded in 1983 as a response to the burgeoning homelessness problem in Ottawa's "Lowertown." The spiritual impetus that founded the Shepherds community was the creative energy at the heart of its Christian mission. The work of serving people with complex, challenging needs was inspired by faith-based values.

In the early 1980's, homelessness was a new phenomenon on the socio-cultural scene. Deinstitutionalization and gentrification were identified as major contributors to the emergence of homelessness as a social problem. With the passage of time the spiritual tenor of the community fluctuated to accommodate expansion and specialization within the community. Beyond the necessity of meeting basic material needs, a number of complex psycho-social problems needed to be addressed. Among the disturbing trends within the homeless population were untreated mental illness, epidemic substance abuse, and the rampant spread of HIV AIDS and Hepatitis B and C. As the community evolved, the population being served had grown increasingly more diverse, with a corresponding diversity among workers, including among the unpaid workers, the volunteers. Participation in the structured prayer times and traditional liturgies dwindled with increasing operational demands and the seeming lack of relevance of conventional faith forms for workers who were younger, and in many cases, from non-Christian faith backgrounds. The former vibrant spirituality had dissipated, and all but disappeared. There was an unmistakable need for new spiritual pathways to inform and support a caring, compassionate community.

7.3 The Changing Social and Cultural Landscape

Chapter II responded to the second question in the research cycle: ‘Why is this going on?’ This question sought to interpret spiritual decline in light of the broad cultural and spiritual shifts that have impacted the SGH community. The socio-cultural changes that lead to declining participation in conventional Christian faith practices were analyzed. In addition to resources from theology and the Christian tradition, theories from the arts and sciences were used to augment the breadth and depth of information related to the problem. This chapter addressed cultural and spiritual issues separately: Section I focused on socio-cultural change as a result of several macro-level trends and movements, and Section II assessed the impacts of these movements on western spirituality as a whole.

7.3.1 The Changing Socio-Cultural Landscape and SGH

Section I of Chapter II assessed the impact of three broad socio-cultural trends on the SGH community, using theories from the social science disciplines to provide a rich, thick understanding of the conditions behind the trajectory of spiritual decline. The context within which the spiritual life of the SGH community subsisted was correlated with several major socio-cultural developments: 1) secularization of the western world, 2) the human potential movement, and 3) loss of Capacity for Contemplation. These macro level trends impinged on the cultural élan of the community, with a trickle-down effect that influenced the spiritual ethos of the community. Charles Taylor’s “secularization theory” was used to explain trends in religion across North America, including a retreat of religion in public

life, and changing conditions of belief. The “great malaise,”⁷²⁷ one of the negative consequences of secularization, contributed to the tsunami of psychiatric diagnoses and hospitalizations that found mental health institutions full to capacity. At the same time, secular ideals began to steer traditional, medical treatment modalities in the direction of more humanitarian, community-based alternatives in the mental health field. The culmination of this shift was the large-scale discharge of patients from psychiatric institutions across the developed world, in a trend that came to be known as de-institutionalization.⁷²⁸ De-institutionalism was well-intentioned. The unanticipated downside was the inability of many patients to achieve even a minimal standard of living in the absence of dedicated support networks in the community. The trends and offshoots of secularization ran parallel to a nationwide mental health and homelessness crisis in the late twentieth century.

A related, though seldom recognized factor in discussions of homelessness is the “Human Potential Movement” (HPM). There is a lack of research to conclusively formulate a direct correlation between HPM and homelessness, yet for those who work in the field, the link is compelling. Fundamental to HPM is the belief that through the development of human potential, humans can experience an exceptional quality of life filled with happiness, creativity, and fulfillment.⁷²⁹ HPM was one of the most available and plausible meaning systems on offer, and it had a special appeal to those on the fringes, especially those beleaguered by addictions or mental illness. Countless numbers were attracted to the movement in the hope of finding meaning, purpose and healing in

⁷²⁷ Taylor (2007), p. 299.

⁷²⁸ Torrey (1997), Ch.1-3.

⁷²⁹ Human Potential Movement, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Potential_Movement. (accessed June 5, 2016).

their lives. The consequence of HP for some SGH clients resembled the effects of Taylor's malaise: the sad recognition that the daily round still felt futile, flat and fruitless.⁷³⁰ For others suffering from serious psychotic symptoms, and in need of intense and specialized treatments, HP offered unattainable outcomes it was ill-equipped to deliver.

Related to secularization and the human potential movement is a condition described by Ron Rolheiser as the loss of capacity for contemplation, and with it the loss of a sense of God. Rolheiser portrayed a type of western persona that fluctuates between depression (being out of touch with the deep source of our personal energies) and inflation (being unable to channel and contain these energies).⁷³¹ The constellation of elements that extinguishes the capacity for contemplation in post-modern civilization is as prevalent in the SGH community as in society at large. As SGH became more specialized and access to resources became more formalized and secure, protocol and sure provision displaced the sense of adventure and mystery and the everyday need for providential intervention. Other contributors to the loss of a contemplative sensibility include the failure of established institutions to recognize and support non-conventional expressions of the sacred, and the "the ecosystem of interruption technologies"⁷³² that characterizes the technological take-over of our lives, so that we are at once incessantly connected and totally distracted.

⁷³⁰ Taylor (2007), p. 309.

⁷³¹ Rolheiser (1999), p. 25.

⁷³² Carr (2010), p. 91.

7.3.2 The Changing Spiritual Landscape and SGH

Section II of Chapter II rounded out the second task of the research cycle with an exploration of the changing spiritual conditions inside and outside the SGH community. The changing conditions of belief and practice in the 21st century have inspired new understandings of the universal nature of spirituality. An ethos of quest and a penchant for experimentation have revived and blended old forms of religious expression, and brought about new forms. Several of the features of these new forms were investigated to apprehend the undercurrents of spirituality that exist within the SGH community and in society at large.

Theologians and scholars in the psycho-spiritual field have underscored the universal nature of human spirituality. Daniel Helminiak drew on Bernard Lonergan's conception of the human spirit to underscore the universal impulse towards self-transcendence. Lonergan's precepts provide a compass for inspiring principled decisions and actions in communities such as SGH, where conventional faith forms are no longer meaningful. Several researchers used biological and psychological interpretations to establish spirituality as a natural phenomenon within humanity (Piedmont and Leach, 2002; Hay and Socha, 2005).

A review of the literature shows that the psycho-spiritual approach is one of the most pervasive influences in contemporary understandings of transformation and growth. This thrust marks a shift away from the "negative," secular psychologies born of the Human Potential Movement, to Positive Psychology⁷³³ models and theories that call attention to the positive characteristics generally recognized by the major religions as

⁷³³ Pargament (2007), p. 320.

“virtues.”⁷³⁴ Pargament, Perrin, Schermer, and Vitz, among others conceive spirituality in the context of an embodied, distinctly human psyche, and advocate for psychological approaches that acknowledge and include the spiritual dimension of life. The psycho-spiritual approach has a further relevance for this study in its implications for volunteer activity. A qualitative study of crisis center volunteers was cited to underscore the inherently spiritual nature of acts of giving. Expressions of spiritual motivation were expressed as 1) altruism, 2) realizing personal blessings, 3) sensitivity to others, and 4) a heightened sense of social justice and / or a desire to give back to the community.⁷³⁵ These findings were borne out in the participants VP accounts in this project.

There were several other themes associated with the changing spiritual landscape, including ‘diversity and pluralism’ and ‘new manifestations of the sacred.’ The implications for communities like SGH include a shift of the sacred from designated times and places, to non-conventional spiritual genres. New collaborative practices are combining elements from different traditions, and prophetic forms of communality hold out promise as inclusive pathways to inter-religious belonging. Other indicators of the changing ethos include: 1) Taylor’s “expressive individualism;” 2) Bibby’s ‘blending of beliefs’; and 3) the ‘resacralization’ trend that respects nature, popularizes healthy eating, and attaches significance to interpersonal relations based on fidelity and love. On the dimension of communality, an American-based study by Casper ter Kuile and Angie Thurston identified seven themes in the new ways of being church. The researchers discovered a striking unity of vision across Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Secular, Buddhist, and Spiritual-but-not-Religious communities. It was

⁷³⁴ Vitz (2005), p. 6.

⁷³⁵ Praetorius and Machtmes (2005), pp. 121-129.

also found that these new spiritual communities are attracting people across geography, age, and religious affiliation.⁷³⁶ Other emergent configurations of the spiritual include models which highlight “lived experience”⁷³⁷ as the milieu in which contemporary spirituality is most authentically lived out, and a “householder”⁷³⁸ model envisioned by Ursula King, in which spiritual striving is expressed in the daily round. Householder spirituality is a socially involved and ethically engaged spirituality that adapts well to the evolving mission and purpose of SGH.

The last trend identified in this analysis was contemplative spirituality. Contemplation is the foundation of mysticism, a tradition that is finding new relevance in the post-millennial world. Both David Perrin and Ron Rolheiser accentuated the ordinariness and accessibility of mysticism, emphasizing the openness and humility in which a conversion of heart is set in motion. In the participants’ accounts, the movement of the heart was frequently accompanied by a desire to make amends, or an impulse to serve. On a more ascetic level, the work of Fabrice Blée was cited to explicate the mystical practice of abiding in God. Blée drew on the exile and wandering of the Hindu-Christian monk, Abhishiktananda, to illumine the complete stripping away of certainties that creates space for a deeper experience of God. This discussion ended with a distinction between “theoria” and “praxis” in the mystical tradition. Theoria refers to the modes of transformation that bring one nearer to the mystery of God’s love. Praxis refers to actions undertaken to correctly dispose one to openness and purity of heart through asceticism, acts of meditation, religious practices, and service to others (praxis). This section ended on a cautionary note: without practice there is a tendency to

⁷³⁶ Kuile and Thurston (2015), p. 2.

⁷³⁷ Crisp (2010), p. 14.

⁷³⁸ King (2009), p. 29.

end up in theory: belief without living out the beliefs in daily life atrophies our contemplative faculties and impedes our capacity for fullness of life.

7.4 Virtual Pilgrimage: A New Faith Practice

Chapter III addressed the question: “What ought to be going on?” This chapter assessed the potential of the pilgrimage trope as a pathway to spiritual renewal. The historical rise and fall of pilgrimage was sketched out, and variations of the pilgrimage motif were delineated. Aspects of twenty-first century pilgrimage were elaborated, and the concept of virtual pilgrimage was developed. The historical roots and constituent elements of virtual pilgrimage were described, and its adaptability as an SGH alternative practice was put forward.

The proliferation of sacred walking disciplines across the developed world was the backdrop against which pilgrimage walking was explored. The universal nature of pilgrimage, and its existence in all major cultural and faith tradition, endorsed the pilgrimage motif as a theoretical lens. For this research, pilgrimage was adapted within a Christian spiritual framework 1) to honour the Catholic origins of SGH and the principles and values which laid the foundation for the mission and work of the community, and 2) to position the research in a framework of interpretation with the capacity to be dialogical and intra-religious.

The history of Christian pilgrimage was summarized, from the pre-Christian precursors in the form of journeys to sacred sites in pagan Greek and Roman traditions, through Old Testament renderings of exile and exodus, to the practice of “sancta

loca,”⁷³⁹ initiated by Constantine’s mother, Empress Helena, who brought Christian pilgrimage into vogue by travelling to the Holy Land in 326AD.⁷⁴⁰ The paradox of place pilgrimage in the new dispensation was identified: on the one hand, Christianity modified the Judaic attachment to Jerusalem; On the other hand, pilgrimage is largely informed by a “theology of place.”⁷⁴¹

Pilgrimage was also portrayed as a paradigm for life, from the Early Church Fathers, the first to construe pilgrimage as a prototype for life, to fourth century devotees, for whom pilgrimage served as a substitute for the monastic life. By the Early Middle Ages, Christian pilgrimage had come under the influence of the cult of martyrdom. The saints and their relics were a dominant feature of the early medieval landscape. Pilgrimages in the Middle Ages were understood in terms of penitence, expiation, purification and redemption.⁷⁴² Vicarious types of pilgrimage in the form of pilgrimage by proxy and patronage pilgrimage emerged at this time. A variation on the vicarious pilgrimage, the notional or imaginary pilgrimage, was identified. This form of vicarious pilgrimage was researched in depth by Kathryn Rudy in a 2011 study. Rudy’s conception was a precursor to the concept of virtual pilgrimage advanced in this project. The demise of medieval pilgrimage was examined in relation to the practice of indulgences, the cornerstone of the vicarious pilgrimage. Indulgences had become a breeding ground for abuse and corruption. Pilgrimage was denounced as a fraudulent and idolatrous practice by Martin Luther and protestant reformers. The Reformation coincided with the advent of Modernity, and the enlightenment ideals that gave rise to

⁷³⁹ George (2016), p. 20.

⁷⁴⁰ George (2016), p. 20.

⁷⁴¹ Bartholomew (2004), pp. 207-208.

⁷⁴² Tomasi (2002), p. 13.

secularism and the decline of public religion. Pilgrimage subsequently largely vanished for three centuries, making a tentative re-appearance in the late 1900's.

The penchant for pilgrimage to endure throughout history was explained as a function of the multivalent nature of the motif. As a concept, pilgrimage includes ideas of journey, exile, living as a sojourner, and searching for a homeland. As a practice, pilgrimage has flourished and declined in tandem with fluctuations in religious and cultural life. By the turn of the century, it had exploded across the developed world. Two important contributors to this revival were identified as: 1) the quest-based spirituality of the post-modern West and 2) spiritual tourism. Post-millennial pilgrimage was explored in relation to several contemporary themes, including sacred archetype, ritual revitalization, obeisance, focal practice, secular healing, and pathway to mystery. The Camino pilgrimage was cited as a pre-eminent form of contemporary pilgrimage. The Camino has morphed from a traditional Catholic route to an ecumenical, interfaith, extra-faith adventure for tens of thousands. The chapter concluded with a definition of virtual pilgrimage and an appraisal of potential applications of the concept, including VP as an alternative ritual practice, VP as a pathway to transcendence, and VP as a praxis in the mystical tradition. Virtual pilgrimage was put forward as an alternative pathway to the sacred with potential to provide the depth, clarity and connection so longed for by the contemporary soul.

7.5 Methodology

Chapter IV introduced the pragmatic task of the research cycle developed around the question, 'How might I respond?' The response to this question extended over the final three chapters of the thesis. Chapter IV, the Methodology Chapter,

described the approaches and procedures used to collect and analyse the research data. A rationale for the choice of a qualitative methodology was provided and the characteristics of qualitative research were described. To ensure clarity, a distinction was made between the “interpretive framework” and the “interpretive paradigm” in QR. The interpretive framework for this study was identified as Practical Theology. The interpretive paradigm, on the other hand, was linked to the data collection operations, and formed around the five philosophical assumptions in qualitative research. The ethical requirement related to data collection for ‘research involving humans’ was identified, and relevant PT issues for this project were addressed, including multi-disciplinary dialogue, mutual critical conversation, reflexivity, triangulation, and appreciative inquiry. The research design identified and defined the combined narrative and phenomenological approaches utilized in the inquiry process, and the research strategy described the sample, tools for data collection (journal accounts, questionnaire, and focus group), and the NVIVO software used to code, theme, and analyse the results. This chapter closed with a discussion of issues and standards related to quality assurance.

7.6 Results

Chapter V addressed the second part of the pragmatic task. The Results Chapter in this research was a continuation of the fourth task in the research cycle. Chapter V proceeded by way of a description of the participant demographics, a sketch of the data analysis process, and the introduction of Stephen Bevans’ praxis model for interpreting the results. NVIVO software was used as a qualitative data management and analysis

tool. The major themes in the study were identified, organized and interpreted using the three dimensions of the praxis model. The final portion of Chapter V was dedicated to the participants' own assessments of virtual pilgrimage. This was done as a validation check of the reliability of the results. The participants were asked to identify the rewarding and challenging aspects of the experience of virtual pilgrimage. The participants' feedback also honed in on the positive and negative aspects of urban versus pastoral walking.

7.7 Discussion

Chapter VI marked the culmination of the pragmatic task and the conclusion of the PT research cycle. The Discussion Chapter interpreted the data in light of the research problem, and presented those findings which supported virtual pilgrimage as a meaningful faith practice. Chapter VI was comprised of a brief overview of the interpretive paradigm within which the research results were framed and interpreted, followed by an examination of these results in relation to the three movements of the praxis model. The praxis model was elaborated as a way of doing theology. Through reflective action the model discerns the meanings which contribute to the course of change. Fourteen themes were extracted from participants' verbatim accounts in the data repository. The significance and value of virtual pilgrimage as a spiritual practice was explored in relation to the themes appended to each movement, and the implications and possible applications of the findings were highlighted.

7.8 Participant Feedback on Virtual Pilgrimage

The participants identified several challenges and issues related to virtual pilgrimage, including the solitary and localized nature of the practice, and the desire by some participants to have a clearly articulated map of the virtual trail in advance of their walking episodes. The need for more elaboration of the concept of virtual pilgrimage was also highlighted. The participants identified the rewards and strengths associated with the practice. Chief among these was the opportunity it afforded for close up encounters with nature and people, and the time and space for introspection and reflection. The participants generally felt that the reflection questions and the journaling requisite were essential features of the practice. The intentionality and focus demanded by the reflection questions unleashed creative energy and depth insights. New ideas and perspectives were further clarified by way of the writing discipline.

7.9 Recommendations

The recommendations for future research and for advancing VP as a spiritual practice were drawn primarily from the participants' feedback.

The need for a communal feature in the VP framework was brought forward in the journal accounts and the focus group. An additional focus group and a possible group walking episode could be built into the framework, without compromising the solitude needed for reflection.

The need for more education on the concept of pilgrimage was suggested: 1) How pilgrimage is different from other walking disciplines, and 2) How virtual pilgrimage is

authentic: how as a microcosm of distance pilgrimage, VP contains similar themes and messages, and accrues similar benefits.

Provision of a map of the entire virtual route at the beginning of the pilgrimage was also recommended.

From the standpoint of the researcher, the template for VP as it exists seems appropriate. Unless or until the practice becomes habituated, it is recommended that the six-week time frame and 100 km. walking distance be maintained. The discipline requires a large amount of time, energy, and personal commitment that may be difficult for beginners to sustain over a greater geographic distance and a longer period of time.

Provision for more contrast and slippage in the research results is recommended. This can take the form of more triangulation⁷⁴³ in data sources, multiple researchers, and multiple theoretical perspectives to achieve robust results.

7.10 Contributions

On a practical level, virtual pilgrimage contributes an accessible, inclusive practice that resonates well with the holistic orientations in the western world. The research was first intended to contribute to spiritual renewal among volunteers in the SGH community. But the framework can be adapted to human wellness and spiritual health in any organization dedicated to human service. For example, VP brings a value-added spiritual dimension to the occupational and physiotherapies for patients in such areas as geriatrics, long-term care and stroke rehabilitation. It can also be used to promote spiritual wellness among the service providers in these organizations.

⁷⁴³ Sensing (2011), pp. 72-78.

There is scant research on the correlation between the pilgrimage motif and healing. As a practice, virtual pilgrimage provides a holistic framework for individuals to engage on biological, psychological, social and spiritual levels. The transformational nature of pilgrimage positions it well for addressing issues of healing, identity formation, and spiritual development. In a post-modern context, the pilgrimage motif contains immense meaning-making potential and endless possibilities for human thriving. The transformative power of retrieved new-old practices like pilgrimage is more potent and relevant when placed in dialogue with the various religious traditions. And, as was evidenced in this research, a pilgrimage need not be religious to be a sacred, healing journey.

On a conceptual, theoretical level, this project linked up the interplay of a very ordinary habituated practice with mystical reflection and contemplation. This is an unusual foray for Practical Theology, where the focus is usually more pragmatic. Traversing the divide between mysticism and Practical Theology, where, according to Claire Woldteich, “mystical texts or experiences are rarely included,”⁷⁴⁴ represents a departure and advancement within the field. The amalgam of the embodied act of walking and focused reflection is a portal to deep awareness and connection with the practitioner’s inner and outer worlds.

A pre-eminent strength of virtual pilgrimage is the versatility and adaptability of the VP framework. As a practice, the possibilities for adapting VP to an array of different contextual settings are endless, from hospital hallways to the space station. As a conceptual framework, it has the facility to accommodate different modalities, including

⁷⁴⁴ Woldteich (2012), p. 161.

meditation, devotional elements, and discernment exercises. Two of the examples cited were *Lectio Divina* and a variation of the Ignatian spiritual exercises.

Another contribution to both theory and practice is the link between virtual pilgrimage and creative problem-solving. There was nothing in the literature to support this finding, but the correlation in this research was compelling. The participants frequently alluded to the occurrence of breakthrough insights that allowed them to find creative solutions to problems. Creative problem solving for the participants was one of the fruits of the reflection process. It seemed there were several reasons for this: On the one hand, being removed from the familiar routine, with its demands and distractions was a contributing factor; on the other, some participants connected problem-solving to the action of walking, the motion and rhythm, the slowed down pace of life, the absence of structure, the quiet and peace, and the opportunity it afforded for rumination and contemplation.

Yet another contribution is the furtherance of the notion of “virtual” pilgrimage as a construct for framing and imaging adaptations of the traditional spatial / temporal pilgrimage. In 2011, Kathryn Rudy coined the term “virtual” pilgrimage in her research on simulated Holy Land pilgrimages in the convents of medieval Europe. Although there are many potential variations on virtual pilgrimage (i.e. cyber pilgrimage, labyrinth walking, the Stations of the Cross), to my knowledge, the concept has not been adapted in the form of a localized somatic pilgrimage until this project. The act of simulating a distance, somatic pilgrimage by way of disciplined, intentional, reflective walking in a localized context encompasses many of the themes historically associated with the

traditional pilgrimage, including: walking to clarity, walking as a restorative practice, walking in faith, and walking to connect with Creation.

7.11 The Last Word

This project does not belong to me. It was consigned to my care, a sacred trust. On September 14, 2014, my work ended, and for all intents and purposes my research was dead in the water. I no longer had a place of ministry, one of the fundamental criteria for a Doctor of Ministry thesis. But the accommodation of the university and the dogged determination of the SGH volunteers enabled it to proceed, reclaimed it and breathed new life into it. When the participants' journal accounts began to filter into my in-box, I discovered the poignancy and synchronicity in their reflections. Despite being separate from each other, each seemed empowered by some unseen greater movement, a force of grace and beauty. Time and again in my desert hours of sluggish mind and flagging courage, I revisited their writing, and was strengthened and uplifted by the power and beauty of their words. I leave the last word to one of their company:

I reflect on my last three weeks of the Virtual Camino and realize just how much deliberate thinking I have been doing on life, on what counts, on challenges, on values, on help and compassion, and above all else on love and priorities. I feel deeply the presence of God as I focus my thinking on deep reflection. I find for me the transformation occurred as a result of the entire walking experience: more in touch with my true self (my soul); and more at peace and very much strengthened faith. Feel very close to God, family and friends. Enjoy the quiet while walking. Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice / soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind. P10

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann

APPENDIX A

Instructions for Virtual Pilgrimage

- Use your intuition to find a path on which to walk (either an urban or natural setting).
- Be aware of your reflection question for the week.
- Walk consciously, slowly, and deliberately.
- Tune into the subtle magnetism of your surroundings: sites, smells, sounds. How does this route change during different daylight hours or in the evening?
- If you are familiar with the area, notice something new.
- Be perceptive and sensitive to any shifts in your consciousness.
- **Journal:** Ponder your reflection question, and journal about your findings. Take a few minutes to record your impressions and perceptions. **How did I feel after this walk?** How did your reflection question impact your walk? Also, briefly describe your walking trail, whether you followed a fixed route, how you prepared for your walk, whether you walked alone or with others, and other information that you feel is relevant.
- Submit your reflection with your weekly distance report

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire consists of five sections. The first section has questions about such demographic factors as age and gender. The second section is about your understanding of key terms. Section III contains nine questions related to spirituality. Section IV consists of six questions about your volunteer experience at Shepherds of Good Hope. Section V has five questions about your experience of virtual pilgrimage. By participating in this survey you are consenting to have your responses used anonymously in the research project. Your participation in this study will help us to learn more about the benefits of virtual pilgrimage as a transformative discipline. The survey takes approximately forty-five minutes to complete.

SECTION I. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Place of Birth _____
4. Marital Status _____
5. Education _____
6. Ethnic Origin _____
7. Religion _____
8. Occupation _____

SECTION II. TERMINOLOGY

In Section II you are being asked about your perception of several key concepts. Your immediate reaction to each question is your best response.

1. What is “Religion” for you?

2. What is “Spiritual” for you?

3. What is your understanding of a “Spiritual Practice”?

4. What is your understanding of a “Walking Discipline”?

5. What is your understanding of “Virtual Pilgrimage”?

6. What is your understanding of “Transformation”?

SECTION III. SPIRITUALITY

In section III you are asked about your personal spirituality and practices. If you feel un-comfortable with the term “God”, feel free to substitute it with a term you find suitable, such as “higher power” for example. It is also possible to complete the questionnaire if you have agnostic or atheistic beliefs - the questionnaire takes such beliefs into consideration.

1. Are you part of a spiritual or religious community? Is this helpful to you and how?

2. How do you draw inspiration from God/ a Higher Power / a Greater Source? What motivates you / brings meaning to your life?

3. Describe a spiritual path or practice that is important for you (e.g., devotions, scripture reading, meditation, yoga, prayer)?

4. What are sources of hope, strength, comfort, meaning, peace, love, connection for you?

5. Describe significant spiritual experiences that you have had (e.g., mystical experience, near-death experience, 12-step spirituality, drug-induced, dreams, sense of awe). How have these experiences influenced your life?

6. Describe how you discern truthfulness in a person's words and actions. How does that affect your life and work?

7. How do you experience the interconnectedness of life? What does that mean for your day to day living?

8. Is there a person or group of people you really love or that you feel a deep connection with? How does that connection impact your life?

9. How does your spirituality influence your volunteer work?

SECTION IV. VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

In this section I will ask about your volunteer experience at Shepherds of Good Hope. Your immediate reaction to these questions is important, but any and all information that you feel is relevant is important and welcome.

1. Why did you choose to volunteer for Shepherds of Good Hope?

2. How do you feel about the spiritual life at Shepherds?

3. Do you see your volunteer work as related to the spiritual? If there is a spiritual aspect to your volunteer experience, how can it be enhanced?

4. What is the most fulfilling aspect of your volunteer work at Shepherds?

5. What is the least fulfilling aspect of your volunteer work at Shepherds?

SECTION V. VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

A virtual pilgrimage is a form of substitute pilgrimage that involves a practice of disciplined walking in a local setting. In this study, the virtual pilgrimage route is on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. GPS tracking software was used to transpose your weekly pedometer reports to a virtual map simulating the Camino. In this section I will ask about your participation in virtual pilgrimage, what it means for you, and what you see as some of its benefits. These are reflective questions that prompt you to ponder the meaning and value of your virtual pilgrimage walking practice.

1. How does your walking discipline (virtual pilgrimage) enhance your experience of the spiritual, according to your definition of spiritual?

2. Can you comment on the following quotations:

a) St. Augustine said: ““*solvitur ambulando*,” (it is solved by walking).”
What does that mean for your walking practice?

b) Arthur Boers described walking as more than a means to prayer, Walking is itself a “form of deep prayer.” What does this mean for your own walking practice?

3. It is believed the discipline of walking has a beneficial effect on those who participate in this practice. How is virtual pilgrimage beneficial for you?

4. Describe a walking experience in which you felt transformed.

5. How might your walking discipline enhance your volunteer experience?

APPENDIX C

VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Virtual pilgrimage is a substitute form of the traditional walking pilgrimage. Like traditional pilgrimage, virtual Pilgrimage is a metaphor for the spiritual journey, and a powerful tool for transformation. Here we can discover the rhythms of our surroundings, the sights, sounds, smells and stillness that would normally be lost in our daily scurrying. Virtual pilgrimage increases our awareness of the gift of Creation.

When our walk becomes laced with Divine purpose, the visible and invisible touch, allowing us to create a journey where process and destination open us to spiritual experience. A spiritual experience is a subjective revelation of the Divine that brings new, clearer meanings and a shift towards inclusiveness and compassion. Virtual pilgrimage is open to anyone who wants to reconnect with the world, walk in beauty, and form right relationship with the Other (God, humanity, the universe).

In virtual pilgrimage, the themes and messages associated with pilgrimage are enacted in a local setting. As a walking discipline, it has the potential to transform us and our world. It teaches us to slow down and touch the planet with our senses.

WEEKLY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Week 1.

How does virtual pilgrimage connect you to a sense of your life purpose?

Week 2.

How does virtual pilgrimage bring heightened self-awareness, a delight in beauty, a desire for community into your life?

Week 3.

How does virtual pilgrimage foster compassion in your life, your work, and your world?

Week 4.

How does virtual pilgrimage bring about personal and communal transformation for you?

Week 5.

How does virtual pilgrimage change how you walk through life?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS SESSION QUESTIONS

To further assess the fruits of the practice of virtual pilgrimage (VP), the following questions will be discussed in a group focus session:

1. How does this practice (VP) allow you to have some sense of peace and authenticity about your life?
2. How does VP encourage you to feel that you are being the best that you can be?
3. How does VP inspire you to relate to others with greater respect and concern?
4. How does VP push you to seek a better world, where there is more fairness and truth?
5. How does VP transform your relationship with the universe and mystery?

APPENDIX E

INFORMATION AND CONSENT

This research is interested in the discipline of virtual pilgrimage as a source of spiritual transformation. Transformation entails a range of experiences: being uplifted, inward togetherness, being connected to some larger reality, openness to others, etc. Your participation in this study will help us to learn more about the benefits of this form of walking discipline, and whether these benefits include renewal and transformation.

In order to collect the research data, you are being asked to virtually walk the last hundred kilometres of the Camino de Santiago, from Sarria to Santiago. Your walks will be conducted locally. It is expected that you will need four to five weeks to cover the distance. You will wear a pedometer to track distances covered. GPS tracking software will be used to chart your progress on a virtual map of the Camino. You will be given a standardized set of instructions for carrying out your virtual pilgrimage walks, together with a weekly reflection question. You are being asked to keep a brief account of your walks: a journaling guideline is included in your instructions. You will submit these journal accounts together with your weekly distance (steps accrued) report. Each week you will in turn receive a progress update of your location on the Camino, together with a description of the lore and significance of that location. The following week's reflection question is also included in the update. Once you have completed the virtual pilgrimage, you will be asked to complete a five-part questionnaire and participate in a one-time focus session. The questionnaire takes about forty-five minutes to complete. The focus session will be scheduled at a time suitable to all the research participants. The session will be held in a St. Paul University conference room. The purpose of the focus session is to reflect as a group on the experience of virtual pilgrimage. The focus session will be of a two-hour duration, and will be recorded.

The Research Ethics Committee of St. Paul University has approved this project. Your participation is completely voluntary. To protect your anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying information will be taken. You can withdraw at any time, or choose not to answer certain questions. A decision not to participate will have no consequences for your activity as a volunteer at Shepherds. By participating in this research you are consenting to have your responses used anonymously.

The purpose of this research is to explore virtual pilgrimage as one of many possible pathways to transformation. The research integrity depends on honest reporting. Thank you for contributing to this research project.

Researcher

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APPENDIX F

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Ann MacDonald, a former employee of the Shepherds of Good Hope, is conducting research through Saint Paul University. Ann is looking for Shepherds Volunteers to participate in her research study. The research involves looking at a form of substitute pilgrimage, identified as virtual pilgrimage, as a possible avenue to spiritual transformation. In virtual Pilgrimage, the traditional, long-distance, walking pilgrimage takes place locally. In this study, the virtual pilgrimage simulates the Camino de Santiago. The study participants are asked to virtually walk the last hundred kilometres of the Camino, from Sarria to Santiago. Participants wear a pedometer to track distances covered. Ann will use GPS tracking software to chart your progress on a virtual map of the Camino. It is expected that you will need four to five weeks to cover the distance, averaging 20km. to 25 km. per week. You will be given a standardized set of instructions for carrying out your virtual pilgrimage walks, together with a weekly reflection question. You are asked to keep a brief account of your walks. A journaling guideline is included in your instructions. Each week you will submit these journal accounts together with your weekly distance (steps accrued) report. Each week you will in turn receive a progress update of your location on the Camino, together with a description of that location. The following week's reflection question is also included in the update. Once you have finished the virtual pilgrimage, you will be asked to complete a five-part questionnaire and participate in a one-time focus session. The questionnaire takes about forty-five minutes to complete. The focus session will be scheduled at a time suitable to all research participants. The focus session will be recorded, and will take approximately two hours.

The qualitative nature of the study limits the number of participants. An equal number of male and female participants will be randomly selected from the pools of respondents, and as far as possible, different faith (and on faith) groups will be represented.

Participation is anonymous and voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time or choose not to answer certain questions.

PLEASE NOTE: Shepherds of Good Hope is not affiliated with nor is it sponsoring or endorsing Ann's research in any way. This Call is being delivered to you as a favour to Ann.

To respond or for more information, please contact:

Ann MacDonald
 Doctor of Ministry Candidate
 Saint-Paul University
 E-mail: a.macdonald@ymail.com

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

TABLE 1: THE COMMITTED ACTION MOVEMENT IN VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

Virtual Pilgrimage as Ritual	I think walking by yourself, without any distractions is a form of worship, when focused on the creator. Sometimes I ask God to reveal something new to me today before walking and then just soak it all in. P9 I also have found how walking with a deliberate intention of reflection offers a different level of perspective and sense of calmness that is different from working out or even doing yoga. I am thinking that being active, walking (not running) enables a deeper connection and observation with/of nature and the beauty that surrounds us. It offers many doses of being very present in the moment and being connected to the universe and God through all 5 senses. P3 There is a deliberate purpose to the walk, and active observation keeps you focused on the present of your surroundings; the present of your thinking... The steps back and forth provide a good rhythm as well and is meditative in many respects; Helps the thinking, the connection with universe with God. P10 Disciplined solitary walking naturally allows for a form of meditation. P11 The power of walking means you move on step by step, and let go of what was because it is no longer there. Time moves forward. Walking helps to bring many perspectives into the thinking and helps to provide clarity for next steps and truisms with God P10
Virtual Pilgrimage as Walking Obeisance	I'm present in this world; I am alive. My feet are sturdily placed on the ground as I take each step. The virtual pilgrimage confirms my existence. I take deep breaths of the cold air that circulates around me. In each breath, I try to inhale the beauty of the season. I'm conscious of my blessings and in the crossroads of life, my hand has always been held. This week's walk confirms my desire to be a tool for those in my community. P10 Walking allows time for reflection and for seeing. It allows me to be in nature, which brings me peace. On days that I walk, I always have a better day because I have done one sure thing that I enjoy. P3 Walking encourages reflection, perhaps in a way that running may not. The mere act of slowing down one's physical movement may allow for greater introspection. P3 My walk again brought me close to God in my thoughts, especially when walking in vast open areas. I felt the presence of God in the light—I felt goodness, warmth, compassion, love and generosity and forgiveness through senses (the sun embrace in the heart; the breeze/winds; the smell of budding trees; the quiet of nature; the sheer blue sky; the beauty of the landscape, the presence of birds, animals and so on. When I got back home, I wanted to bring more closure to my day's journey and did some meditative yoga. I found this to be very powerful experience after the pilgrimage walk... Was grateful again for the commitment of

	doing the pilgrimage. P10 I benefit from just being alone, at one with nature, and feeling the stillness, the calmness of the surroundings through my walks. It strengthens me especially when I have things to sort out. I need both kinds of walk in my life.P11 By paying attention to the surroundings, one can notice the interconnectedness of the world. P7 Walking enables a dialogue with God in a very deep respect; more than a prayer - ---a true dialogue and feeling of close embrace with God with each step because one is in tune with so much beauty and diversity of what's in our surroundings that we see through walking. P10
Virtual Pilgrimage as Focal Practice	Every day when I am out walking I feel more alive, for that hour at least, I have connected with the earth and the world.P6 I really like the discipline of walking, and I coined a phrase in my head, of it being active, deliberate walking. So it's different than just walking, and so much richer of an experience, because you observe a lot more, you become a lot more aware. P10 It made me realize that lots of things can be happening all around you and for some reason, (usually, the reason being that you are distracted by too many other things going on in your life), you are blind to it. I have always prided myself on being observant....but not this time. I guess I learned that if you step out of a routine now and then, it might be a good thing, because it enhances your chance of discovery. P3 I conclude how developing (and maintaining) focal practices can only make me stronger and help me be centered on the right things, right values to be happy and at peace. For me this means finding, adjusting or reaffirming "our way in life" periodically with an open heart and an open mind; aligning ourselves to possibilities to better ourselves, enrich our lives. P10 It allows me more quiet time to reflect, pray and contemplate the future and make plans. P6 By making time to walk consistently, you are improving the positive energy flow and experiencing more to life. P7 On the positive side, I found that it made the walking process more valuable in the sense that it forced us to think about a variety of things other than just walking for exercise purposes. P8 This time, on the second day of pilgrimage, the forested parks at the Military Base was very calming and peaceful. Noticed far more buds on trees and fish in ponds. ..Was in the rhythm of the step on the walk... Concluded for certain that the breeze/wind was invigorating... Enjoyed the sun pouring down on me... Still counted to 100 when my mind would drift back to day- to -day issues – it worked; made me refocus. Brought the reflective questions with me and periodically would remind myself of them; took care to make sure I noticed something new on each block I walked. P10 It removed me from life's business....it gave me "me" time...and all that goes

	with having time for your own thoughts, feeling, etc. P7 It forced me to make a deliberate discipline that focused on “walking” versus other workouts. As mentioned before, I average 16,000 steps a day on my Fitbit through various excretes and it was a planned effort to focus on a time of day that I could participate in this consistent practice. P9 I have now arrived at the point where my daily walks are a necessary part of my daily activities in the same manner as eating or brushing my teeth.... I normally stop a couple of times while on my longer walks and sit on a bench or fallen tree trunk to rest ponder rest and reflect. While listening to birds and rustling trees I gaze up the trees to openings at the tree tops onto sunny blue skies with rolling white clouds and realize the vastness of our universe. P1 On days when I walk, I feel that I am experiencing my life with greater intensity. I feel more alive and connected to the world. I am alive! P3 It forced me to make time to walk, to reflect and to block out other worldly pressures or concerns. The extended duration (two hours on average), allowed me to get into a different space and be more reflective. P4 Put simply it is walking with a purpose in mind (so many kms. within a period of time on a form of a schedule) and being deliberate in the act of walking, in the pacing forward methodically with a keen eye of observation of surroundings and the effects of our walking on our breathing and five senses: feeling, sensing, viewing, tasting and hearing. P3 I had been somewhat worried that I would be bored with myself in the long walks; that I would be desperate for companionship, but during the virtual Camino I found that was not the case. I treasured the time walking alone and enjoyed noticing new surroundings or things I hadn’t noticed in familiar surroundings. P7
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TABLE 2: THE REFLECTION MOVEMENT IN VIRTUAL PILGRINAGE:

Contemplative awareness	I reflect on my last three weeks of the Virtual Camino and realize just how much deliberate thinking I have been doing on life, on what counts, on challenges, on values, on help and compassion, and above all else on love and priorities. I feel deeply the presence of God as I focus my thinking on deep reflection. P10 Being asked to walk on a routine basis, and reflect upon questions while doing so, resulted in preoccupations floating to the surface. It allowed me to become more self-aware, and to reflect upon what matters most to me, my goals. It also inspired reflection about who I am as a person. P7 I realize that it is easy to miss out on an offering because of either distracting thoughts, or moving too quickly. I try to resist my natural temperament to always want to be energetic and make exerted efforts, but sometimes abundance is effortless. Today's walk will serve me well in remembering that not squandering time sometimes means just letting it stand still. P3 I find myself doing a retrospective of my life in bits on these walks... Naturally.... Trying to get to my authentic me and observing in my head how I got to where I am now; what really makes me feel at peace and happy; what are illusions and true pillars of happiness; where I need to focus my thinking now; and on where I'm needed and how I'm needed. For some time now, I find I'm less inspired by worldly things; they mean less and less to me. I feel so strongly how very much I am committed to my family, friendships and helping within community.P10 What I have noticed during this first week is that the question and this project has inspired a greater consciousness within me, a greater sense of being "present" and observant on my walks, runs and hikes, than might normally be the case for me. P3 I believe that this project called those who were open to it and who were perhaps drawn to an internal journey. It inevitably results in introspection and confronting oneself. Those who answered your call must have been open to that and ready for that. P10 I t is a time to look outward and increases your awareness of life in general. P6 When I am walking or running in nature, I find myself reflecting always. As I reflect, I tend to slow down physically. Allowing myself to reflect upon an issue, a conflict or incident, particularly after a certain period of time has passed, allows me to view it more dispassionately, with less emotion, more rationality. It allows me to assess the matter through a wider lens, from more
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	angles, from the perspectives of others. P3 When I think about the final reflection for this project, I think that it was fortuitous that my final walks were with my young grandson, who is learning about the world, and that's because I, too, have come to "relearn" about the world, in a way. P12 Walking or "pilgrimage," when part of the purpose is to think about your level of self-awareness, encourages greater observance, of the exterior world, in all its beauty, as well as one's interior world and preoccupations. P3 It is interesting to know that others are walking this week and pondering the same question as I am. And those who are hiking the Camino at this very minute, what is going on in the hearts and minds of all of those pilgrims at this very moment? What are their individual thoughts? What joys and sorrows do they carry with them on their journey? What struggles are they facing, each of them, at this same moment in time? Sometimes I catch myself wondering in a crowd what each person is thinking about at that very minute, something one can never know. The Camino travellers, virtual and actual, we are all out there walking, searching for something. P3 So why didn't I take a moment and clarify with this stranger his intention...I felt that he was offering a kindness, and hoping for a kindness from me in return. I no doubt got caught up in some kind of potential negativity...better known as distrust. P12 Today's walk along the river made me see fullness of life in every moment. The water has purpose and meaning. It has its trials and tribulations, yet it's filled with life and is necessary for the provision of life. There are many insights to be found with a river. Perhaps for me today I was able to feel a small sense of mysticism prevailing in that river. P12 I was walking beside a lake and out of the many stones I saw one that stood out since it was black. That started me on a reverie of where it came from and ultimately where I came from. It made me feel that everything was special, me included. P11 I felt that because for a week I had tendonitis, but it was a good thing in a sense because it made me feel how little in control I really was of life and everything else... and you know, it's all very well to have these plans, and to consider what you are going to do, but life interferes with that very often. P11 It forced a greater degree of personal contemplation than would not otherwise have been the case with the same amount of walking. This was due to having to respond to the thought-provoking questions set out for each segment. P8 I found it interesting that to note about finding the miraculous in small things, and going into nature, seeing a rock or a feather, or something, seeing the mystery behind it and wondering how it got there ...to me, anyway, I grows into a kind of transcendence ...the idea that everything has its mystery, everything has a purpose, and it brings me close to something greater...P11 To walk with another and to engage in constant conversation would not yield the same benefits. It is solitary meditative walking that makes it special. The practice inevitably leads the walker to think about the concerns and preoccupations in her or his life. Not everyone will be open to that or wish to
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	confront themselves that way.P3 The black rock I found was near the river. It was rounded due to its many contacts with other stones and was a black colour unlike the other rocks. I reflected on what must have been its journey to where I found it. Had it been dislodged by glaciers? Was it part of a volcanic eruption or a meteor strike? It was certainly at one time star dust just like all the elements in our body. A small black rock with a history stretching back to the big bang...So very ordinary and so very remarkable. P11 I noticed last week the differences in the care of the land - the garbage or cleanliness; manicured lawns and tended gardens vs. weeds and wildflowers. I also noticed the infrastructure and how the city areas accommodated (or didn't) walkers, cyclists and vehicles, wheelchairs and skateboards. I was thinking as I walked about how the city can encourage more walkers and cyclists with some small changes to the infrastructure. P5 It caused me to reflect on many of the relationships in my life and how I should be more active to show or demonstrate my love to family and friends. It also caused me to reflect on some of the hurts that I have either suffered or caused over my life and how, for the most part I had caused them. This reflection did not lead me to make any resolutions or actions, but at least recognition is the first step towards change. P4 I was thinking of the different types of dwellings I encountered. Some were very substantial with nicely tended lawns. Others were not so nice. I noticed one house that had undergone substantial cosmetic improvement. It was attractive but I wondered if it would now be rented or sold at a price that would disqualify most working families. Who gets the good housing and who has to settle for the sub-standard? Can it all come done to hard work? What part does simple luck, inheritance etc. Play? It is too easy to write people off who do not live up to the model of upward mobility. We must value each person for their uniqueness and not be mislead by varying circumstances. P11 But freeing your mind is not that easy. My mind can easily get anchored with all kinds of things, (to do lists, scheduling, house improvement ideas, etc., etc.) P3 Some of the words from Richard Rohr really resonate with me. He talks about Action and Contemplation they are connected so he says the most important word is and I believe we do need both. P5
Communion with the Sacred	I look to the sky and notice the sun through the trees...I feel close to God. I take the time to open my heart and reflect with God through prayer and talk. Is this what "liminal" is? My mind turns to just being and reflecting on life's challenges... pathway to take not always clear.....feeling vulnerable, worried, courageous, trusting, etc..... I pray for good perspective, guidance and wisdom. I know clarity may take time but I find the walk in the forest gives me strength and a measure of peace if only for a few minutes during this day. I am happier for having walked this trail. I feel my perspective is getting broader. I also reflect on how much my volunteering at Shepherds of Good Hope is giving me satisfaction in helping others, being compassionate toward others and how I would like to do more of this kind of work in the future. P10 I think walking by yourself, without any distractions is a form of worship, when focused on the creator. Sometimes I ask God to reveal something new to me

	today before walking and then just soak it all in. P9 Feel very close to God, family and friends. Enjoy the quiet while walking. Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice/soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind. P10 I'll leave it up to him if I'm chosen. For me, from the beginning it was spiritual. It was a tool, it was my base, my route to begin the walk, it was a mutual relationship with Him. Like you said, you posed your questions and the questions began with you and then it went communal, it was beautiful...because that's where I connect with my community of Shepherds of Good Hope...It was beautiful...thank you. P6 I prayed while I was walking – it was natural – a dialogue with God and better connectivity with God. It was sunny and I felt embraced by God as was going through this day's journey. It became a wonderful opportunity to connect with God. P10 I think walking by yourself, without any distractions is a form of worship, when focused on the creator. Sometimes I ask God to reveal something new to me today before walking and then just soak it all in. P6 Overall I would say that my commitment to the virtual pilgrimage has led me to think more about god and his creation throughout the day and to consciously plan and make room for the walks. I find myself thinking more throughout the day of God's place in my life. P4 Meditative walking calms me and moves the focus of my thoughts away from my personal and puny concerns. This allows me to see the grandeur of the world around us and also come to some realization that we are all in this pilgrimage together. When I contemplate the differences in wealth between the one percenters and the rest of humanity and the spectacle of politicians seemingly interested only in their own power and egos, I realize how much we all need transformation. The virtual pilgrimage also gives me a sense of hope even though progress still seems such a difficult task. P11 My walk again brought me close to God in my thoughts, especially when walking in vast open areas. I felt the presence of God in the light—I felt goodness, warmth, compassion, love and generosity and forgiveness through senses (the sun embrace in the heart; the breeze/winds; the smell of budding trees; the quiet of nature; the sheer blue sky; the beauty of the landscape, the presence of birds, animals and so on. When I got back home, I wanted to bring more closure to my day's journey and did some meditative yoga. I found this to be very powerful experience after the pilgrimage walk. Was grateful again for the commitment of doing the pilgrimage...P10
Realizing Personal Blessings – Gratitude	Upon reflection I have lived a very fortunate and happy life with many breaks sprinkled upon life's daily ups and downs. In some ways lately, I have drifted into enjoying more and more the good things of life... I am becoming more aware that due to the many health issues that I have been battling over the last 30 or more years, I should probably have departed this great world by now. P1 I feel almost instantly an immediate connection to this forest and as though I am part of a bigger picture; a connection with God and the universe. Wow. I feel the warmth of the sun. I feel strong and embraced by God. Today, I also notice the sky in the forest. I feel very grateful for being part of this scenery. How lucky I feel yet again to have such beauty in our surroundings – I take many

	deep breaths. P10 Being in nature reminds me of all of the beauty and good things in my life. It is particularly helpful when I am facing challenges, as we all do. I focus on the beauty around me, the early morning light filtering through the wood slats of the old red barn, the river, the rolling brown fields, the birdsong. P3 I feel so strongly how very much I am committed to my family, friendships and helping within community. I am feeling very grateful to God for my wonderful husband and sons, family, friends and colleagues and my dog -- the best. P10 The virtual pilgrimage has been an instrument to continue growing in my faith... A great enhancer was the questions of reflection. It has not been a change to how I walk through life, but it reaffirms that I need to be grateful for the gifts and the extras that come with life. The Psalm 116;12 was my reading for tonight: How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me? The reflection in the Magnificat book was: "Thanksgiving is the meaning of the Greek word "Eucharist". P9 A good thing is that when I walk outdoors I spend 10-15 minutes in prayers and giving thanks for my good fortune that I have had during my life... Another good thing was that the hills eventually got to me and forced me on several occasions to stop and sit on a bench to recuperate.... I was the able to look up through the trees to the sun filled blue sky and appreciate the vastness of our planet.... I am looking forwards to the next couple of weeks to become more immersed in this pilgrimage....P1 I pay more attentive those around me, appreciating the "little moments", enjoying the fellowship and interactions with others and finally protecting the planet and its beauty. Psalms 19:1 - "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."P9 We reflected on how lucky we were to be able to walk and enjoy these experiences while others we know cannot. P2 I'm present in this world; I am alive. My feet are sturdily placed on the ground as I take each step. The virtual pilgrimage confirms my existence. I take deep breaths of the cold air that circulates me. In each breath, I try to inhale the beauty of the season. I'm conscious of my blessings and in the crossroads of life, my hand has always been held. This week's walk confirms my desire to be a tool for those in my community. P10 I try though to find joy and pleasure in every day and to be grateful for my good fortune and my beautiful life. I have worked hard but I have also been lucky. I know that. P2 I am now more inclined to want to take more time to really appreciate the wonderful things that I see, hear, and smell when out walking. It's as though my senses have been born again. And once more, it's as though all those wonderful things that I experience, are like a flower....a kind of metaphor for many things in life.. appreciate those things that engage you as though it's not going to last. P12 I feel the breeze today. I love the wind. I also think of what I ought to be grateful for. I take deep breaths; count a few times; and find myself truly enjoying the trails and not really thinking that I'm walking them 3 times.... It's
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	all so beautiful.....p10 I am very grateful for my energy and good health and the fact that I can still walk, run, play tennis, swim, do all of these things. I am grateful every day for the quality of life that I have. P2 I am grateful for the beautiful place where I live, for my home, where I feel safe and secure, for my health, my friends, my body, and my mind. The beauty around me as I walk inevitably inspires me to reflect on all that is good and beautiful in my life. And so much is. P3 So this walk on this sunny day, a day when neighbours were outdoors because winter finally announced its defeat, and spring was now the victorious season, reinforced a life lesson that I am learning more and more as I age....don't squelch time. It can never be recovered, it can never be replaced. Enjoy every day, enjoy every occasion, and take every opportunity as though it will come around one time only. P12
The Journaling Requisite	As for the virtual Camino, I am thinking on this walk today that "journaling" is also key to the experience. Not only is it a great discipline but it requires a more involved commitment. I take note that I am much more observant and awake to my feelings on these walks because of the need to journal. I also reflect on the feeling I had after journaling week I writing down one's thoughts helps bring clarity and focus to one's mind and deepens the experience. P3 Because you are still in your home environment, it's important to have (the question)...otherwise you may not draw the same benefits. P8 I also thought about the past reflection of Boers concept of "focal practice" and how journal writing, (although difficult for me), has been very engaging for me. I thought that perhaps journal writing, or writing letters, may be a way for me to consider "spring cleaning" my mind, from time to time. P5 Committing the experience to paper is a key part of this exercise. The exercise, this virtual pilgrimage, inspires me to pay greater attention to my inner life, to my thoughts, as well as to my exterior surroundings. It may also inspire me to reflect on my perceptions and to consider using a different lens. P3 This is what I'd like to focus this journal entry on...the river. The river was a magnet for life of all forms. I saw Canada geese and newly hatched goslings. I saw a mallard and her brood being propelled by the swift current...it was actually quite comical watching them...little, fluffy, feathered babies keeping pace with their mother, bobbing along at a rapid speed in the torrent. The mother led them to calmer water, and they almost disappeared in the reeds. P12 As for the virtual Camino, I am thinking on this walk today that "journaling" is also key to the experience. Not only is it a great discipline but it requires a more involved commitment. I take note that I am much more observant and awake to my feelings on these walks because of the need to journal. I also reflect on the feeling I had after journalingwriting down one's thoughts helps bring clarity and focus to one's mind and deepens the experience. P1 I do agree that writing is an important element. Because you are thinking that I need to be aware of this because I need to write about it. So you are more observant because you know you have to remember, right? What do you make out of it? You've got this provocative question...it's a deliberate act of thought,

	so I thought journaling was important for Virtual Camino. P8 The act of journaling, the mere act of putting pen to paper regarding the virtual pilgrimage experience, inspires greater openness on the page. When we walk, we reflect, and when we journal later, we are journaling about our reflections. Thus we will be talking about our concerns, our preoccupations. Thus we end up sharing these thoughts with you. You are the audience, the fellow pilgrim for each of us. The virtual pilgrimage experience perhaps encourages each of us to be open with you, more open than one might normally be with someone we do not know. Pilgrimage inspires reflection about our lives. Because we are asked to write about it, we are naturally drawn to write about what we have been reflecting upon. P3 I think that the journaling was a fantastic discipline, even though it was a chore, a lot of work. But I thought it made the experience that much more rich. P10 I did find myself becoming more aware of my surroundings in the varied locations of the walks, mainly, I think, because of the need to chronicle each of the walks for these journals. P4 This project inspired me to pay greater attention to my life, and to be here in the present. It has made my life feel more vivid, more real. It has made me feel more conscious and attuned to my surroundings. This is at least in part because we were given questions to reflect on as we walked, and asked to record our thoughts and observations. Knowing that I had to record my thoughts and observations commanded me to pay attention. P3`
The Absence of Technology	Walking alone, assuming no ear buds emitting distracting noise, results in the thoughts turning inward; one has to listen to one's self; one is connected to the body and mind, recognizing physical changes - to gait, pain in joints; and mindfulness changes wherein the thoughts flow and turn to insight. P3 Well I thought that just the fact that it got me away from the noise, and the TV's and computers, and started thinking about where I stand, and I guess you have that feeling internally, not doing quite as much as you should be, and it started to do that every day, you figure you better start doing something more positive...At least thinking about it some kind of action plan, that's the way it effected me. P1 Yeah, that was really key for me too...just the quiet, no technology, no music, just the walk. P6 More and more I am foregoing TV and computer time for walks... In addition to improving my health it provides me more time for reflection and contemplation about issues that really matter...P1 We are not distracted with household chores like meals and clean-up, and technological communications such as e-mails and texts. It's like removing the four walls also removes the mental "to do" lists and work stresses. P12 The act of meditative walking without electronics or friends to distract us leads inevitably to more acute observations and more introspection... The practice will not be attractive to everyone because not everyone wants to be so acutely aware of their thoughts or even allow themselves time to reflect. For some, life is easier if they are too busy to reflect much; it may be easier for some to walk with a podcast so that their mind is occupied. Walking in solitude leads naturally to introspection. P3

	The Virtual Pilgrimage takes me away from everyday distractions. The mobile phone is turned off; no Internet, no text messages, no artificial distractions -- just the opportunity to absorb the impersonal stimulation of the surroundings, be they country or urban; familiar or new. Even the familiar surroundings display different nuances from day to day. I am at peace while contemplating my engagement with my human and natural surroundings and the lack of artificial distractions permits a constant reassessment and adjustment, both of the value of my contributions to those surroundings and the importance of those surroundings to me. P10 I should add that whenever I walk, I always walk unplugged. I would rather not have music interfering with thinking. P6 If I were to run or walk with an electronic device that would allow me to listen to podcasts, this introspection would not occur. Do people choose to do that to avoid thinking about their lives? Do people choose to walk or run with others to avoid introspection? There was a time when I thought that I was wasting time by not listening to a lecture, a language, whatever, while walking or running or skiing, and that I should not go for long walks or skis on my own without taking technology so that I could listen to something, to avoid wasting my brain so to speak, that I was losing valuable time for learning. P3 One of the benefits of walking alone with one's thoughts is that one can avoid the daily noise and disruptions caused by distractions such as stereos, computers, the TV and telephone....P1
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TABLE 3: THE COMMITTED AND INTELLIGENT ACTION MOVEMENT IN VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

Aesthetic Arrest	It's a beautiful day and I am wanting to go for a walk to feel connected to nature quickly. I do this after cycling 23 kms earlier in the day with friends. I am curious to see if I can reach a meditative place in my mind fast, by going back to my centering trail. It works. I walk to a familiar place in the Army Base Forest, take deep breaths and feel the embrace of the sun. I am in the moment. I am grateful for this feeling. P10 The overwhelming sensation this week has been the beauty and wonder of the signs of spring. The birds and animals and plants are emerging from their winter hiding places with renewed beauty and vigour. To walk in this re-emergence and to feel it surround one reminds us again of the constant, caring presence of the creator of all that we see and makes us even more aware that we are also a component of this creativity.P3 I am now more inclined to want to take more time to really appreciate the wonderful things that I see, hear, and smell when out walking. It's as though my senses have been born again. And once more, it's as though all those wonderful things that I experience, are like a flower....a kind of metaphor for many things in life.. appreciate those things that engage you as though it's not going to last. P12 The air was fresh. The wind has a brisk, inspiring feel. I am so motivated to do the walk. The air and wind reach deep within me. The Ottawa River at the base of the bike pathways, by the locks and museums is mesmerizing. The birds are close by; joggers and cyclists are abounding of energy. The place is buzzing with positivity. I love being here. I feel so refreshed and happy...So grateful to have this spot of beauty in our home town. P10 This section of trail was alive with frogs awakening from their hibernation and calling out for new friends. One little pond was almost frothing with frogs popping to the surface and chattering away at each other. We took a sound-video of it to remember.P12 There was often the magnificent fragrance of lilacs and lily of the valley in the air. Such a treat! At times I would stop to inhale the sweetness. Tulips were in full bloom. I thought to myself....enjoy these beautifully exquisite cups now...their petals will soon be dropping. That's what makes flowers so glorious...their splendour is fleeting, and so you don't take their short lives for granted. And of course, maple and oak trees once again were in full dress...offering some welcome shade. P12 It was a bit foggy but looked up as we heard honking and two geese appeared out of the mist. At the same time we could hear the cardinal calling from the woods. It is the first day of our virtual Camino. P5 My observations as I walk have inevitably been connected to the cyclical events of nature during this period: the return of the geese, the blooming of the first
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	spring flowers in my gardens, Mrs. Moon (Pulmonaria), Helen (Helleborous) and my Poets' Daffodils (Narcissus poeticus), the unfurling of the deep burgundy leaves of my Norwegian Maples, the wild plum trees, the white trilliums that grow along the roadside near the river, the blackbirds that nest in the cedars and flit about the fields and meadows.P3 I realized how my mind likes to flow with the wind; focuses me immediately on breathing deeply to really take it in. The wind brings my entire body into awareness as I feel the whisks of wind on my face and body. Awesome...P10 But the beauty on the river today was actually flying low above the water. It was a magnificent heron. It was cruising up the river, with its neck kinked in and long, slender legs trailing behind. There is something prehistoric looking about this stately bird. P12 By the time I reached the half way point of my walk I was much better and truly enjoyed the sound of the birds chirping and the trees budding. P4 And that was a little piece of nature...a constructed wetland area with all the trimmings that a wetland promises. How wonderful to be in the company of red-winged blackbirds, Canada geese, ducks, goldfinches, milkweed casings, dry yellow plumed grasses, and a few wild purple asters. But that was not all, as I discovered. If one really lingers in nature, so much more transpires. It truly was a little oasis within a surrounding backdrop of black asphalt, steel and rubber, putrid fumes, and vrooming motors. Such a contrast! It was as though dwelling in peace and existing in chaos was deliberately laid out as a lesson in living. The choice, one would think, would be obvious, but as it turned out, it was clearly not. P3 I think that was the strongest thing for me, was observing the complexity of nature on these walks, being asked to think more deeply about them. P8 The black rock I found was near the river. It was rounded due to its many contacts with other stones and was a black colour unlike the other rocks. I reflected on what must have been its journey to where I found it. Had it been dislodged by glaciers? Was it part of a volcanic eruption or a meteor strike? It was certainly at one time star dust just like all the elements in our body. A small black rock with a history stretching back to the big bang...So very ordinary and so very remarkable. P11 I have come to the conclusion that I love the edge of places and on this walk it is the edge of the hardwood bush...Lots of birds and of course atmosphere. P12 Today as I walked the first 17 km of the week, I saw the signs of spring. Just over two weeks ago, the trees still looked like November - stark and almost dead; just over one week ago, they were covered in snow. Today they had started small buds and shoots. I walked near a busy road, similar to many sections of the Camino, but I could still hear the birds singing to each other and starting their nests. In the orchard I passed, the squirrels were running up and down the trunks. I've always found the signs of spring calming and comforting; the promise of warmer days and cherry blossoms and daffodils. P3
Healing and Peace	I head back more at peace and my body more rested because of the walk with excess energy expended. I pray for peace and blessings for my loved ones; to be embraced by light and warmth. I do this each walk, but more so today. P10 My attitude during the walks is definitely becoming more peaceful. I find myself checking my distance and speed much less frequently. Also, I find

	myself looking to make eye contact with, and greet, fellow walkers that I meet along the way. P4 Walking in the bush in where I feel that I can recover from stresses and upsets. I actually believe that it's the trees that are soothing me. My father loved trees and I love trees. Yesterday's talk with Walter put sad memories of my father upfront in my mind. Today's walk on the trail among the trees eased those memories. I remembered not to squelch time. P12 Virtual pilgrimage connects me to others, at least notionally. It reminds me that others are journeying too, that we are all pilgrims. This is cliché I know but no less true. The greatest literature is always about a journey of some kind. Can I try to see those colleagues I do not like in that way, can I try to see them as kindred spirits in a broad sense? We do not share the same values and I do not like how they treat others but can I try to see them differently and focus on their good points. Is it too late to try to improve relationships with those with whom I feel no affinity? P3 It caused me to reflect on many of the relationships in my life and how I should be more active to show or demonstrate my love to family and friends. It also caused me to reflect on some of the hurts that I had either suffered or caused over my life and how, for the most part I had caused them. This reflection did not lead me to make any resolutions or actions, but at least recognition is the first step towards change. P4 I also take note of how really tense I am feeling this day; how life's challenges with loved ones are weighing on me, and how the tension is impacting me physically and in mind. I find myself counting often to 100 the first couple of hours of this walk; to block my wandering mind and to get into that "open space" for some rest and tranquility. P10 Walking (and in my case sometimes running) in nature brings me a sense of peace. I find consolation in nature, in the beauty of it. Walking in nature is my form of meditation. It relaxes me, calms me down. It allows for reflection and thus enables me to bring context to the events of my life. P3 Today's walk reassures me. I am where I'm supposed to be. It brings me a sense of peace. I take the walk with my children. I hope they have learned something. Was I the teacher? Or was I the pupil? The virtual pilgrimage allows me to meditate on the question and to be the protagonist of my life. I sought peace, but then again I wake up every morning asking for it. P6 Walking gives me time to focus and think about the people in my life. I feel guilt. I am aware that I do not do enough for others and I know I need to do more for my friends. And my friend Jacquie, who is clearly depressed and sad since this separation threw her life into chaos she copes with her severely learning-disabled daughter, who at 12, still cannot read and write. I think of my friends as I walk and I send positive thoughts to them. "May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you live in peace." P2 There is a kind of fullness in even ordinary, routine things. Sometimes walking the same, familiar route can offer a wonderful comfort, it's like an old, favourite blanket or sweater that has been around for a while. P12 Putting one foot in front of the other, time and time again, accompanies thought. It aids the flow of thought. It releases stresses and tensions that can
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	restrict thought. I can think back to when I taught children who had challenges with self-regulation....namely, anger control. The first step in attempting to resolve an issue always started with my instructing the angry child to “walk it off” first and then we’d talk. Well, walking has a power to bring calm to the body so that the mind can think. It can give a restless mind tranquility. P12 I was so mad I forgot my hat and watch. By the time I reached the half way point of my walk I was much better and truly enjoyed the sound of the birds chirping and the trees budding. On Wednesday, I was mad again because the furniture company again messed up the delivery ... In addition, I had planned to go to the Champlain bridge to walk but the traffic was so bad I could not get there. As a result I went to Hampton Park and walked through the park, down some side streets and eventually to Fisher Park High School. This turned out to be a fabulous walk as they were my old stomping grounds when I was a kid. I eventually walked from Fisher to my childhood home in the Veterans houses near Carling and Merivale. While I did not do much contemplation during the walk, I did lots of reminiscing about my childhood and adolescents. It was truly enjoyable. P4 On days that I spend at least an hour walking in nature, I will always have a better day because it has started positively. I have done something that makes me feel good and connect with the beauty around me. Perhaps it reminds me of what matters most. P3 I was both thinking about the day and the several meetings and interactions with others while at other times being aware of the sights and sound around me. It was as much a walk of shedding the day as being aware of surroundings. P7 I need to really unwind this day through a very long walk. I choose my route deliberately. I want to see how far I can go in a full afternoon and how connected I can get with my mind, spirit and body. Not only does my new route have nice sites but it also has a combination, of forest, park, and city and, with Carleton University, also a sense of knowledge and betterment– truly beautiful sites of Ottawa – and sites I connect with deeply. I want to really breathe and reflect on this walk, and find new energy and some new balance and perspective. P10 I felt angry and upset I just wanted to come home. I felt like I needed to escape. I came home and went for a 9 km very brisk walk along the river. It was a beautiful evening. It helped. By going for the walk I felt I had turned what felt negative into something positive. I had come home and done something good for me, something positive for my physical and emotional being, better than sitting at home stewing about it. (OK, I also had a chocolate covered ice-cream bar on the way home first but I like to think I walked it off!). P3 Heading back home, I really am feeling the walk physically now; feeling every muscle and bone in my body. I am tired and exhausted but feel much of the tension in me has been released. So very happy I did the walk, this very long walk. P10 It’s pretty easy to miss sight of wonderful things that abound. You need to slow down and let them wash over you. When you permit these things to infiltrate, and I mean really take time to allow them to be savoured by your senses, they can calm you. There is something very peaceful about just dwelling for a while in a place of nature. P12
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	Whenever I found my thoughts moving toward negativity or stress, I pulled myself back by thinking of the reflection question instead. P7
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Connectivity and Community	While I am doing my disciplined walking, I am conscious of others who have undertaken a more formal pilgrimage. I too am on the pilgrimage. However, I also see it metaphorically. It means being aware that we are all on our journeys through life and are all pilgrims and thus we have much in common, and face many of the same joys, sorrows and challenges. P12 You have to be flexible in dealing with different people and situations. P2 Our participation in this group project suggests we are drawn to camaraderie of like spirit. Being drawn to do it, being open to participating in it, unites the group in some way. P1 I am a solitary creature. I feel more of a connectedness often when I am alone in nature I feel more connected than I do in crowds.P11 Everything is connected to everything else. The longer one lives, the more this interconnectedness drives one's decisions. Some would call it wisdom. P8 Appreciate the contribution of nature, all life forms, beings to one's own existence and how their presence, beauty, friendship can bring peace, love and joy and closeness always to God. You cherish and acknowledge their contribution to the universe. P10 What I have noticed during this first week is that the question and this project has inspired a greater consciousness within me, a greater sense of being "present" and observant on my walks, runs and hikes, than might normally be the case for me. P3 Taking time (scheduling) a consistent time and place for experiencing the interconnectedness. Reading my Bible, first thing in the morning before anyone is up is one way of consistently experiencing this (day to day). Physical training daily is another way. P9 Walking or "pilgrimage," when part of the purpose is to think about your level of self-awareness, encourages greater observance, of the exterior world, in all its beauty, as well as one's interior world and preoccupations. There is a comfort and community in knowing that others are walking the same virtual path, reflecting upon the same question. P3 I am more attentive to those around me, appreciating the "little moments", enjoying the fellowship and interactions with others and finally protecting the planet and its beauty. Psalms 19:1 - "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." P9 I believe that all actions affect our interconnectedness in life... Currently I try to reduce global warming etc by using less energy and by recycling plastic, metals and paper. P.1 It is interesting to know that others are walking this week and pondering the same question as I am. And those who are hiking the Camino at this very minute, what is going on in the hearts and minds of all of those pilgrims at this very moment? What are their individual thoughts? What joys and sorrows do
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	they carry with them on their journey? What struggles are they facing, each of them, at this same moment in time? Sometimes I catch myself wondering in a crowd what each person is thinking about at that very minute, something one can never know. The Camino travellers, virtual and actual, we are all out there walking, searching for something. P3 While I am a long way from being a tree hugger, it made me think on nature and how we are all responsible for and affected by it. P4 Pushing my mother in a wheelchair and seeing her take in the beauty of nature and enjoying the moment, minute by minute, warms my heart and soul. Thank you Camino... I am eager to say hi to people we meet on the street. P10 Opening your mind to being there for someone else, I don't think that would have happened without the power of observation and seeing how much you miss out day to day, and just deliberately thinking about how we're all connected...I think in some ways for sure that has been part of my thinking for the intention or the purpose, or next years to come, what can I do, what can I do more and more purposeful, which I'm still thinking of ...for sure, it's opened up a new dimension. I also found that for whatever reason, doing this Virtual Camino I coincidentally I met others who have done the real Camino...It's so bizarre....there are a lot of people with a lot of good intentions, if we could harness all that energy together, that would be fantastic. Maybe through this, social media, and so on we could do this. P10 I also have found how walking with a deliberate intention of reflection offers a different level of perspective and sense of calmness that is different from working out or even doing yoga. P3 I normally stop a couple of times while on my longer walks and sit on a bench or fallen tree trunk to rest ponder rest and reflect. While listening to birds and rustling trees I gaze up the trees to openings at the tree tops onto sunny blue skies with rolling white clouds and realize the vastness of our universe. P1 There is a deliberate purpose to the walk, and active observation keeps you focused on the present of your surroundings; the present of your thinking. P10 Virtual pilgrimage connects me to others, at least notionally. It reminds me that others are journeying too, that we are all pilgrims. This is cliché I know but no less true. The greatest literature is always about a journey of some kind. Can I try to see those colleagues I do not like in that way, can I try to see them as kindred spirits in a broad sense? We do not share the same values and I do not like how they treat others but can I try to see them differently and focus on their good points. Is it too late to try to improve relationships with those with whom I feel no affinity? P3 My walks allowed me to come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter. I concluded that each person has to approach life, God and spirituality in their own way. Whichever way they choose, or don't choose, has no bearing on me and I should not judge their personal choices. P11
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Impetus to Serve	I would like to help others in new active ways....to be a healer and teacher of sorts leveraging my own life experiences, and wisdom acquired putting my family first, friends and colleagues close second, and community/ Canada – serving the public interest --- close third. P10 I am realizing that at this time in my life I should be actualizing a more giving lifestyle rather than solely enjoying my good fortunes.... Hopefully by the end of this pilgrimage I will have developed and implemented such a plan... Cheers. P1 Helping the needy, offering them words of comfort and support. Sometimes just listening and wishing them a good day can perk them up. P2 .I have the time now to give back personally and to serve, be there for those in need. I am very happy to be helping in the soup kitchen each week since early this calendar year among other projects I’m involved in to serve the public interest. P10 I try to understand and live a life that does not put me first....in other words, my rights, freedoms, desires, needs, etc., etc. ... well, they all end where everyone else’s rights, freedoms, desires, etc. begins. P12 My spirituality encourages me to lead a helpful life, without expecting anything in return. My various volunteer activities are aimed at helping those who need help. P6 I noticed last week the differences in the care of the land - the garbage or cleanliness; manicured lawns and tended gardens vs. weeds and wildflowers. I also noticed the infrastructure and how the city areas accommodated (or didn't) walkers, cyclists and vehicles, wheelchairs and skateboards. I was thinking as I walked about how the city can encourage more walkers and cyclists with some small changes to the infrastructure. P5 I think I’ve always wanted to serve the public interest, but I find I take a lot of satisfaction in just trying to help out on a daily basis, like the Shepherds of Good Hope...opening your mind to being there for someone else, and I don’t think that would have happened without the power of observation and seeing how much you miss out day to day, and just deliberately thinking about how we’re all connected...I think in some ways for sure that has been part of my thinking for the intention or the purpose, or next years to come, what can I do, what can I do more and more purposeful, which I’m still thinking of ...for sure, it’s opened up a new dimension. I also found that for whatever reason, doing this Virtual Camino I coincidentally I met others who have done the real Camino...It’s so bizarre....there are a lot of people with a lot of good intentions, if we could harness all that energy together, that would be fantastic. Maybe through this, social media, and so on we could do this. P10 Feeling that I am helping others and perhaps bringing them some happiness and letting them know that someone else cares about them. Helping them feel more positive about who they are and their future. P1 My volunteering is a physical extension of worship. As a consultant, it “costs” me financially to participate. As a Christian, interacting with the clients humbles me makes me appreciate life more. When issues arise at work, my
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	faith reminds me that I'm serving them, not myself and keeps things in perspective. By serving others, I'm worshiping God and he continues to teach me. P9 Walking gives me time to focus and think about the people in my life. I feel guilt. I am aware that I do not do enough for others and I know I need to do more for my friends. And my friend Jacquie, who is clearly depressed and sad since this separation threw her life into chaos she copes with her severely learning-disabled daughter, who at 12, still cannot read and write. I think of my friends as I walk and I send positive thoughts to them. "May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you live in peace." P2 To help another is a spiritual act. Compassion is an integral part of spirituality. P4 I was thinking of the different types of dwellings I encountered. Some were very substantial with nicely tended lawns. Others were not so nice. I noticed one house that had undergone substantial cosmetic improvement. It was attractive but I wondered if it would now be rented or sold at a price that would disqualify most working families. Who gets the good housing and who has to settle for the sub-standard? Can it all come down to hard work? What part does simple luck, inheritance etc. play? It is too easy to write people off who do not live up to the model of upward mobility. We must value each person for their uniqueness and not be misled by varying circumstances. P11 On one of my walks through the woods I ended up with the strong desire to do more with my life and decided to pursue volunteering for the Cancer Society... I will be attending an orientation meeting on July 6th. P1 "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it"...It can be enhanced by being mindful of the plight of the clients and remaining as a mindful servant. P9 On my walk I decided that I would send a cheque again directly to the hospital or other organization such as Terry Fox instead of giving a cheque to the organizers. P2 Serving those in need, accepting each individual unconditionally, wanting them to get a good meal in a non-judgmental setting. P9 I also reflect on how much my volunteering at Shepherds of Good Hope is giving me satisfaction in helping others, being compassionate toward others and how I would like to do more of this kind of work in the future. P6
Everyday Mysticism	I experience him in the "humdrum" of everyday life. When I walk outside, he's personally revealing a small piece of what he's made and it's never the same experience twice. P9 I suppose that those few minutes of our walk, when we stopped engaging in business affairs and became drawn in by the birds, was a reminder that there are lovely things in nature that can serve to diminish the stresses of everyday living. Enjoying these simple things and sharing them with a friend makes for the nicest of days. Because they are so simple, there is always the hope of having them time and time again...P12 On days when I walk, I feel that I am experiencing my life with greater

	intensity. I feel more alive and connected to the world. I am alive! P3 I found it interesting that to note about finding the miraculous in small things, and going into nature, seeing a rock or a feather, or something, seeing the mystery behind it and wondering how it got there ...to me, anyway, I grows into a kind of transcendence ...the idea that everything has its mystery, everything has a purpose, and it brings me close to something greater. P11 The mysticism of the every day does prevail in our homes, leisure and everyday mundane activities. One reason to be thankful... God was the creator of all things. He made us to his images. This week's walk was mundane I walked the same path. The week was a rush, rush. Many things were going on, my loved ones counting on me to get things done. Under the circumstances, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of his presence. Feel free to call it mysticism. P6 The black rock I found was near the river. It was rounded due to its many contacts with other stones and was a black colour unlike the other rocks. I reflected on what must have been its journey to where I found it. Was it been dislodged by glaciers? Was it part of a volcanic eruption or a meteor strike? It was certainly at one time star dust just like all the elements in our body. A small black rock with a history stretching back to the big bang...So very ordinary and so very remarkable. There is mystery and connectedness in the very small things that make up our lives. Meditating on a feather or a stone can tell us a lot about ourselves and how we are related to the divine. P11 Walking gives time to think. At times, my thinking seems guided. At times, my thinking is provoked in a certain direction. Where does this come from? Is it an unseen force? P6 I am now more inclined to want to take more time to really appreciate the wonderful things that I see, hear, and smell when out walking. It's as though my senses have been born again... P12 I benefit from just being alone, at one with nature, and feeling the stillness, the calmness of the surroundings through my walks. P11 The frame of mind I was in at the beginning of a walk often changed during the walk usually for the better. Early morning walks we have a more heightened awareness of our surrounding...P5 Walking in the bush in where I feel that I can recover from stresses and upsets. I actually believe that it's the trees that are soothing me. My father loved trees and I love trees. Yesterday's talk with Walter put sad memories of my father upfront in my mind. Today's walk on the trail among the trees eased those memories. I remembered not to squelch time. P12 My walk again brought me close to God in my thoughts, especially when walking in vast open areas. I felt the presence of God in the light—I felt goodness, warmth, compassion, love and generosity and forgiveness through senses (the sun embrace in the heart; the breeze/winds; the smell of budding trees; the quiet of nature; the sheer blue sky; the beauty of the landscape, the presence of birds, animals and so on. When I got back home, I wanted to bring more closure to my day's journey and did some meditative yoga. I found this to be very powerful experience after the pilgrimage walk. Was grateful again for the commitment of doing the pilgrimage...P10
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	I think that was the strongest thing for me, was observing the complexity of nature on these walks, being asked to think more deeply about them. P8 I am now more inclined to want to take more time to really appreciate the wonderful things that I see, hear, and smell when out walking. It's as though my senses have been born again. And once more, it's as though all those wonderful things that I experience, are like a flower....a kind of metaphor for many things in life.. appreciate those things that engage you as though it's not going to last. P12 Feeling a oneness with nature is for me very spiritual. I reflect on how lands and landscapes, water and rivers and flowers are key ingredients in my day to day life that transform me from living with a high level of being focused on many things at once, to being present in the moment. A true gift once perfected. P3 I feel almost instantly an immediate connection to this forest and as though I am part of a bigger picture; a connection with God and the universe. Wow. I feel the warmth of the sun. I feel strong and embraced by God. Today, I also notice the sky in the forest. I feel very grateful for being part of this scenery. How lucky I feel yet again to have such beauty in our surroundings – I take many deep breaths. P10 Everything is connected to everything else. The longer one lives, the more this interconnectedness drives one's decisions. Some would call it wisdom. P8 Today's walk along the river made me see fullness of life in every moment. The water has purpose and meaning. It has its trials and tribulations, yet it's filled with life and is necessary for the provision of life. There are many insights to be found with a river. Perhaps for me today I was able to feel a small sense of mysticism prevailing in that river. P12 What I have found is that, for me, solitary walking in nature creates more time for focussed reflection that may affect spiritual growth. Writing about the experience also plays a role in this. Committing the experience to paper is a key part of this exercise. The exercise, this virtual pilgrimage, inspires me to pay greater attention to my inner life, to my thoughts, as well as to my exterior surroundings. It may also inspire me to reflect on my perceptions and to consider using a different lens. P3 I have been on this trail in the past, but today was particularly enjoyable and I am not sure that I can explain why. I think that the best way to explain it, no matter how corny this is going to sound, is that I had a feeling that I was being welcomed. It was as though nature was taking delight in my being there, as much as I was taking delight in all the things I experienced in nature. Meditative walking in nature, as I call it, walking in nature when we are truly present in our surroundings, can play a role in spiritual transformation. Or at least connect us more to that spiritual, compassionate side of us. P10 There is a kind of fullness in even ordinary, routine things. Sometimes walking the same, familiar route can offer a wonderful comfort, it's like an old, favourite blanket or sweater that has been around for a while. P12
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TABLE 4: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

Positive Experience of Virtual Pilgrimage	First of all, I loved it! My normal spring/summer exercise is riding a bike, but because of the commitment to the El Camino I have had to keep my bike in the rafters of the garage. I have discovered that walking is much more enjoyable than biking because you move at a much slower pace and so can observe, and enjoy the smaller things in life and, because you don't have to pay as much attention to the road/bike path, your mind is freer to contemplate things. While St. Augustine did not have the option of riding a bike or taking a car, I think he was on to something when he said "it is solved by walking". P4 Why did I feel called to do this virtual pilgrimage? I did indeed feel "called." As soon as the idea was presented, I immediately thought: "Oh yes, I totally want to do that!" Why? The idea resonated with me because it involves many things that I love: physical activity, being in nature, observation, meditation, introspection, beauty, solitude, writing... I have considered walking the Camino as a spiritual exercise for some years but now I find myself wondering about doing my own Camino in Canada, traversing this country, or at least covering the same distance of the Camino but exploring the Canadian landscape and writing about it. Now that would be something. P3 I look to the sky and notice the sun through the trees...I feel close to God. I take the time to open my heart and reflect with God through prayer and talk. Is this what "liminal" is? My mind turns to just being and reflecting on life's challenges... pathway to take not always clear.....feeling vulnerable, worried, courageous, trusting, etc..... I pray for good perspective, guidance and wisdom. I know clarity may take time but I find the walk in the forest gives me strength and a measure of peace if only for a few minutes during this day. I am happier for having walked this trail. I feel my perspective is getting broader. I also reflect on how much my volunteering at Shepherds of Good Hope is giving me satisfaction in helping others, being compassionate toward others and how I would like to do more of this kind of work in the future. P10 It allows me more quiet time to reflect, pray and contemplate the future and make plans. P2 It (virtual pilgrimage) gave me a sense of peace and allowed me to think about things in an unstructured unhurried way. P6 It makes me more conscious of the beauty of my life and the world around me and more aware of the present. It creates space and time for me to reflect and to view matters more dispassionately, though reasoning rather than emotion. The practice allows one to re-gain balance and equilibrium. P3 Having aha moments of finding truths that bring clarity to one's purpose and next journey from deep within our soul yielding peace and happiness and strengthened faith and courage and wisdom in the face of challenges. P10 This project called me at a time when I was in the midst of figuring out how best to write this book I have longed wanted to write. In some way I think it has taken the pressure off of me and inspired me to spend less time researching and thinking about the structure of the book and more time simply letting my writing and my thoughts flow on a routine basis and seeing what develops and what story unfolds. P3
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	The virtual pilgrimage was beneficial to me as it made be reflect on issues that should have been reflected on and if I had not done the pilgrimage I would not have acted on things so quickly. I am going to use the same theme questions you gave us when I walk in the upcoming weeks. P6 By the very nature of the project and the question, I think this physical undertaking inspires greater self-awareness and consequently a greater appreciation of the beauty around us because we are consciously reflecting on the question while walking (largely in nature in my case. P1 The Virtual Pilgrimage has been an instrument to continue growing in my faith. A great enhancer was the questions of reflection.P6 I think I'm going to go through your questions again, but do it in a different area, and continue with this. Yes. P2 In the past, I've done this walk, or at least portions of this walk. My main purpose was always to get exercise. But today the focus would be to contemplate the question Ann assigned us, and I have to admit that I found this quite a challenge. It is much easier to walk and allow thoughts to come to mind randomly, than to try and focus on particular thoughts. P4 The journaling, and the awareness and the observation, I think the questions provided a good mechanism to again, be deliberate...and I concluded that the experience was very rich because I thought it was remarkably different from just walking. Because of the intention, and I'd go to places where I could get to that spot sooner so I wouldn't have to work up the mind set of being a little bit more meditative...But kudos...overall I thought it was really good... And I think a lot of people would benefit from it. P10 I sense I'm closing in on the end of this virtual pilgrimage and find myself looking back over the past few weeks of walking experiences and comparing them. My motivation for doing this was to consider whether my thought processes would differ in a pilgrimage from the normal everyday walking exercise to which I had become accustomed. I'm still not sure of the answer, but I have sensed a difference from the beginning to now, in that I do try more to focus on meaningful contemplation than random observations of the moment. It forced a greater degree of personal contemplation than would otherwise have been the case with the same amount of walking. This was due to having to respond to the thought-provoking questions set out for each segment. P8 I was contemplating in my mind how it would be more different to do a Virtual Camino than the real Camino. And in my mind I thought, the Virtual Camino, you're still in your surroundings. So you can't really, fully escape for a period of time. So the journaling, and the awareness and the observation, I think the questions provided a good mechanism to again, be deliberate...and I concluded that the experience was very rich because I thought it was remarkably different from just walking. P10 It forced me to make a deliberate discipline that focused on "walking" versus other workouts. As mentioned before, I average 16,000 steps a day on my Fitbit through various excretes and it was a planned effort to focus on a time of day that I could participate in this consistent practice. P9 I love the virtual pilgrimage. It forces me to walk and get out with nature.
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	Trying to fit the walk into my day also forces me to think of the pilgrimage and its reflection throughout the day. P4 It seems that most people walking about in an urban area are in a hurry. Maybe this is a result of life moving faster...one must keep pace. But there is no 'pace of life' when one enters the woods; hence, slowing the walking speed and taking in what surrounds seems fitting. Clearing my mind is easier to do when there is no concern for traffic, and the smells and noises are far more pleasant. I believe that the St. Augustine quote, "It is solved by walking," holds true when one is under the influence of Mother Nature. P12 The feedback of where I was on the journey was key to the experience of the pilgrimage. More importantly, the things I actually experienced have made me include walking as a part of my routine. P11 I realize that I am walking a bit faster with each week; my walking shoes are truly broken in now. I am surprised how fast-- relatively speaking-- one can walk 100 kilometers if one is committed to do this. It's a good thing too, to have a pedometer. The tracking of the steps makes the distance travelled more real, more grounded. And it's factual. P4 I am celebrating in my head the accomplishment of having walked my 100th Km and loving it. I feel this virtual Camino has had some lasting benefits. The discipline of walking with a deliberate motive to reflect on life; to reflect on the present; to just walk without any thought; to observe and take in and absorb new images, feelings, the air, all five senses and feel our spirit and connection to each other, to nature and God is so enriching. P4 I reflect on my last three weeks of the Virtual Camino and realize just how much deliberate thinking I have been doing on life, on what counts, on challenges, on values, on help and compassion, and above all else on love and priorities. I feel deeply the presence of God as I focus my thinking on deep reflection. I find for me the transformation occurred as a result of the entire walking experience: more in touch with my true self (my soul); and more at peace and very much strengthened faith. Feel very close to God, family and friends. Enjoy the quiet while walking. Enjoy the sense of discerning / listening to my inner voice/soul and feeling the deep embrace of God, Spirit through sun rays and wind. P10
Negative Experiences of Virtual Pilgrimage	I think the fact that you're alone, every day you're doing the walk by yourself, it's not as if you're doing the walk with hundreds of thousands of people...makes it more difficult than if you were actually doing the pilgrimage. P7 In some ways, walking 895 Kms not 100, I think, would make a huge difference – the distance alone and being away from home for many weeks in one block at one time would really provide an opportunity for an extraordinary experience to let go and be open to new possibilities and perspectives. It occurs to me that one likely has to work harder on the virtual Camino to get into the mindset of an open, transformative mind: first, I am thinking one needs to walk long enough to get into the rhythm of the beat and absorb the benefits; and second, needs to be disciplined to do it frequently to enable deeper reflection consistently over time. And third: needs to be truly focused on the purpose of the walk always ---as an enabler for deeper reflection and open mindedness. P10 I found I didn't actually relate to the distance travelled on the Camino. I related to how many kilometres I travelled, but the locations I travelled through, I found that too abstract...And I think it would have been fun to have a map, and just sort

	of plot where you're going, but at the same time, it's a Virtual Camino, so you're not there. P10 I'm still having difficulty distinguishing between the virtual pilgrimage and my every day walks in terms of its benefits. The thoughtful questions were interesting and perhaps point to a validation of this form of contemplation. If I were confronted in the future with a major philosophical / spiritual issue, I might pursue it in this way. At least it would beat joining a monastery. P8 I'm not sure what you mean by authenticity, as this is a "virtual" experience, in another environment, on another continent, pretending to be on the "authentic" pilgrimage experience. I'm still thinking about this. P9
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FIGURES:

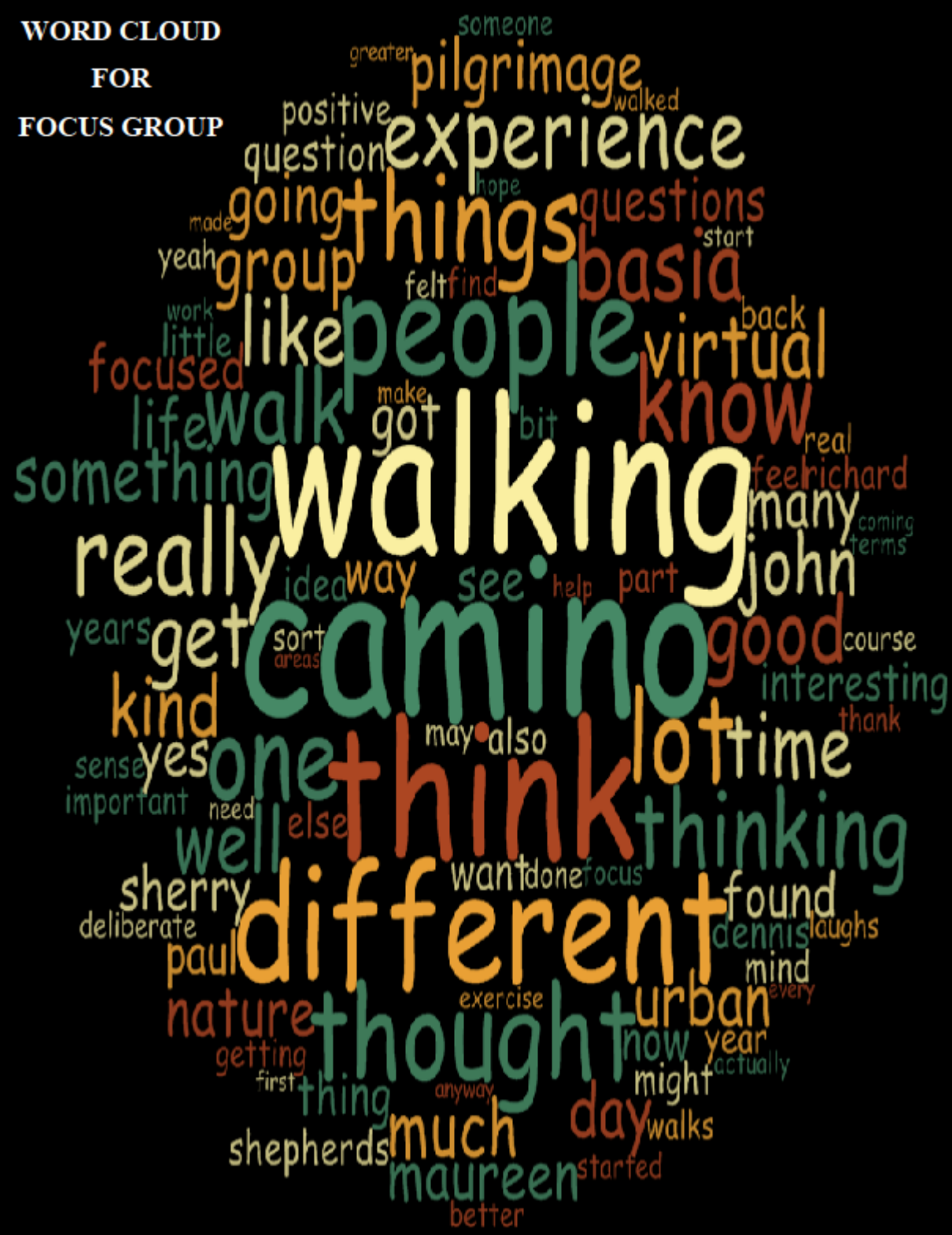
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