

**An Ethnographic Exploration of Two Catholic Communities:
Thriving Through Unique Parish Cultures**

By

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Abstract

This paper presents an ethnographic exploration of two Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall, conducted over a four-month period of fieldwork, against the backdrop of declining Christianity in Canada. It examines the culture of each parish through the lens of Geert Hofstede's four cultural layers of organizations, providing a starting point for identifying the characteristics of a thriving community based on Catholic ecclesiology. The study finds that the four pillars of a thriving parish—personal encounters with Jesus Christ, synodal leadership, catechetical formation, and missionary commitment—are deeply embedded in its unique culture. Furthermore, it highlights the significant role of the parish priest in shaping parish life and the potentially damaging effects of authoritarian and rigid leadership. The dissertation underscores that every parish has its own culture and tradition, which must be respected and acknowledged. Considering the vast tapestry of faith within the Catholic Church, this dissertation ends with a call to cultivate a culture of intra-Catholic ecumenism among/within local Churches and parishes, which entails respecting and recognizing one another, supporting each other, and progressing together with a synodal spirit.

Keywords: Thriving Catholic communities, ecclesiology, secularization, declining Christianity, positive organizational culture, diversity within the Catholic Church, ecumenism.

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Introduction

“The Church is divinely founded and divinely guided, but it has been in the hands of humans for more than two thousand years. As an organization of humans, it runs the same risk of all organizations: the farther away it gets from the moment of its original founding and from the charism of the original founder, it sometimes loses touch with that charism... hence, the constant need to reform, renew, restore” (Sullivan, 2007).

I am a Catholic priest from Kerala, South India, in an international religious order called the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap), established in 1528. As a Catholic priest and missionary in Ghana, West Africa, I have never experienced such deep pride in being part of the Catholic Church anywhere other than in Africa. What accounts for this sense of pride? In Africa, the Catholic Church has an outstanding reputation, primarily due to foreign Catholic missionaries' immense social, spiritual, and educational contributions.

My religious congregation started a school in 2016 in a remote village called Kpassa, in the Oti region of Ghana, without much expectation of many admissions. However, to our surprise, the response was overwhelming. Hundreds of students sought admission each year, including children of the paramount chief and top political leaders of the town. The demand was so high that the friars struggled to accommodate everyone and had to convince many families to wait until the following year. I had the privilege of overseeing the school's operations for six years and, in the process, met many parents—Muslims and non-Catholics alike. One of the main reasons they shared for choosing a Catholic school was the strong reputation of Catholic education in Ghana. Many of the country's top leaders, whether in politics or education, were alums of Catholic schools. For these parents,

securing a place in a Catholic school was seen as a guarantee for their children's future. Hearing such sentiments, especially from non-Catholic and non-Christian parents, was deeply inspiring.

However, coming to Canada for graduate studies, my emotions and concerns about the Catholic Church have been shaken—sometimes even troubled—by the alarming news of parish closures and declining church attendance. Nevertheless, the situation is not one of complete gloom and despair. Amid the darkness, there are rays of hope—communities that inspire and fill me with optimism. This dissertation is an ethnographic journey into two Catholic communities in the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall that are sustaining and thriving against the backdrop of the general decline of Catholic churches in Canada. It explores what makes them flourish, sustain their faith, and thrive through their unique parish cultures in these challenging times.

Problem Statement

This story encapsulates my initial ecclesial shock while moving to Canada. On Good Friday, 29 March 2024, I went to a traditional old Catholic church in Ottawa to participate in the liturgy commemorating the death of Jesus. This was my first Holy Week liturgical celebration after arriving in Canada. It was around 2:30 p.m. The sacristans were busy making final arrangements for the celebration, which would commence at 3:00 p.m. The altar was completely bare, with no flower bouquets or other decorations. The cross was shrouded. A red carpet was laid for the celebrants to prostrate before the altar. The atmosphere invited a sense of grief and gratitude, penitence and hope, reminding everyone of the greatest sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the world.

However, I was also shocked to see many empty pews in the church waiting for the faithful to fill them. I was reminded of the Catholic parish churches in Kerala, South India (my home region), where the parish churches would be packed with people from all over. Parish priests would have to invite other pastors to help with the Holy Week liturgy, as it would be nearly impossible to carry it

out alone. Another common sight during the Holy Week in almost all Catholic churches in my home region was the long queue for confession, where even five or six priests would need two or three days to hear all the confessions. Similar was the case in St. Michael's Parish, Kpassa, a remote place in Ghana, where I served as an associate pastor from 2016-2022. There, hundreds of people from very far remote villages would come together to celebrate the Sacred Triduum, often leaving their homes exclusively to participate in the liturgy and sleeping under trees or in dilapidated school classrooms on the nights during these days of Holy Week liturgy.

Back in Ottawa, the whole liturgy in the church was concluded by 4:30 p.m. After the liturgy, I chatted with Christiana (pseudonym), whom I call Mama Christiana. She is an older woman, a very active and vibrant church member, and one of the principal sacristans. During our conversation, she lamented the declining number of church members, particularly in this parish. She recalled that ten years ago, parishioners had to buy tickets to reserve seats for the Holy Week celebrations due to the large number of congregants. "Now, we do not have to sell any more tickets, as these empty pews tell you the reason," she told me with a deep sigh.

When I returned to my room, I thought about the causes of these declining churches and why that is so. What can the individuals do to revitalize these declining churches? Is this decline affecting all Catholic churches in Ottawa, or is it just a few? Are there any Catholic Christian communities that are thriving in Ottawa? What are the factors that contribute to the flourishing of Christian communities? Asking these questions led me, in the following months, to discover a more nuanced landscape than I initially expected.

Research Question and Goals

The question "Why do some churches grow, and others do not?" has been a pivotal question posed by the American missiologist Donald McGavran. This query marked the inception of the

Church growth movement and sparked dialogues concerning the vibrancy of Christian congregations, notably in North America (Simpson, 1998, p. 56). My research interest centers around exploring some of the thriving parishes in Ottawa to uncover what makes them thriving and vibrant. Accordingly, I have framed my research question: What defines a thriving Christian community, and what components contribute to its vitality? How can one cultivate a parish culture that enhances the Church vitality and resilience against the overall decline of Roman Catholic churches in the Canadian context?

My research goals are: 1) Identify the key characteristics of thriving Christian communities; 2) Examine the factors contributing to parish vitality; and 3) Develop a theoretical proposal for cultivating resilient parish cultures grounded in Catholic ecclesiology. This research aims to contribute to the existing literature on thriving Christian communities, particularly within the Catholic context. It proposes universal markers that can be applied across various thriving Catholic communities, even though their expression may differ across cultures—whether in conservative, charismatic, traditional, or progressive settings. While there is existing literature on revitalizing the Catholic Church, few studies appreciate the diverse styles and emphases of Catholicism expressed differently across the Church. This research acknowledges the various diversities within Catholicism—whether traditional or progressive—that manifest in distinct parish cultures. It does not advocate for changing these cultures but instead seeks to enhance the parish culture while remaining true to its underlying values and traditions.

The Structure of this Thesis

This paper is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the literature review. It starts by examining various scholarly perspectives on the global challenges and barriers to the vitality of the Catholic Church. It then shifts focus to the religious landscape in Canada, where non-religiosity is

becoming increasingly prevalent. Finally, it explores key models defining Church vitality and concludes by outlining a vision of a thriving Catholic Church.

Chapter 2 proposes a theoretical framework for identifying the cultural characteristics of a thriving Catholic community. It defines organizational culture as a set of basic assumptions and introduces Hofstede's theoretical approach to cultural layers in the Catholic context. The chapter then delineates a positive organizational culture and its fundamental characteristics. It then explores relevant theological literature to establish four foundational pillars of a thriving Catholic community.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodology applied in this paper, explaining the rationale for selecting ethnography as the research approach, along with the data collection and analysis methods. The paper studies two parishes in the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall, St. Mary's and St. Basil's Catholic Parishes, that are thriving through their unique culture. I chose these two parishes because they embody the four pillars of a thriving Catholic community —personal encounter, synodal leadership, catechetical formation, and missionary commitment—each in its unique way. Besides, this chapter also presents ethnography as the most appropriate methodology for this study as it facilitates a deeper exploration of parish culture by enabling immersive engagement with the community.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, exploring each parish's four cultural layers—symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. This analysis reveals that both parishes have distinct and diverse expressions of these cultural elements. St. Mary's emerges as a traditionally conservative charismatic parish, while St. Basil's reflects a more progressive character.

Chapter 5 examines how the four pillars of a thriving Catholic community take shape within the unique cultures of both parishes. It contrasts their distinct characteristics and explores who feels welcomed and who does not. It underscores a key theme that emerged from the ethnographic

research—the recognition that every parish has its own distinct culture and identity. This chapter highlights the importance of maintaining and nurturing the distinct culture of a parish, irrespective of the individual serving as its pastor. It concludes with an appeal to promote a culture of intra-Catholic ecumenism.

The conclusion reflects on the decline of Christianity in Canada and argues that Catholic communities while remaining faithful to their unique identities, must find creative and adaptive ways to engage a generation shaped by individualism and consumerism. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations. The fieldwork was conducted over a relatively short period—hardly two months in each parish. Additionally, the research focuses on only two parishes out of the many within the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall. Furthermore, the dual role of the researcher as both a clergy member and an ethnographer presents its own set of limitations alongside certain privileges. Finally, the dissertation presents three suggestions for future research based on the field data: 1) investigating innovative and practical methods for catechetical formation and liturgical practices aimed at teenagers and youth, 2) analyzing the “well-being initiatives” introduced by the diocese to promote the physical, psychological, and spiritual health of both clergy and congregation members, and 3) exploring the experiences of individuals who cease attending church due to strict and authoritarian leadership. Delving into these topics could yield important insights for fostering reconciliation and renewal in Catholic parishes, highlighting their significance for future research.

1 Literature Review: Assessing the Church Vitality

It is essential to provide a general overview of the global challenges of the Catholic Church that hinder its vitality, as well as to examine the Canadian Church context, given that this research focuses on thriving Catholic communities in Ottawa. Therefore, this chapter reviews the literature on the various challenges the Catholic Church faces worldwide, particularly in Western countries. It then deciphers the religious landscape in Canada, offering a nuanced perspective—while Christianity is indeed in decline across the country, there are still signs of hope for the vitality of Christian Churches.

1.1 Global Challenges and Barriers to the Vitality of the Catholic Church

Lou Gerstner, the famed executive credited with rescuing IBM from near failure, stressed that recognizing a sense of crisis or urgency is the first crucial step in turning around a struggling organization. He pointed out that institutions are unlikely to undergo significant changes unless they acknowledge they are in serious trouble and must act differently to survive (Lagace, 2002). The Church faces numerous challenges and crises at a global level that necessitate deep reflection and repentance. The following section paints a broader picture of some of these challenges that inhibit the transformative potential of the Catholic Church mission. Although these global challenges do not directly drive my later analysis of two thriving parishes, it is important to acknowledge their existence before turning to those case studies.

One major factor that has triggered a profound crisis and significantly eroded trust is the sexual abuse of minors by priests, compounded by the subsequent cover-up by bishops. Since 1950, more than 4,700 priests have been legally accused of sexually abusing adolescents, and over 11,000

alleged victims have come forward to the Church to share their traumatic experiences with their priests (Frawley-O'Dea, 2007). A significant challenge to the Church's credibility is the lack of transparency and accountability in investigations over the last decades following the exposure of child abuse cases. Judges have expressed shock at how such complex institutions were managed so ineptly and how "secrecy" became so ingrained that those overseeing the systems failed to recognize their violations of basic principles of justice (O'Loughlin, 2013, p. 141). The psychological toll on victims deepens the crisis. Studies on sexual abuse have shown that childhood sexual abuse by trusted adults inflicts severe trauma (Rossetti, 1995). These studies suggested that victims' subsequent faith in their religious organization often suffers, and that their relation to God can also be deeply harmed.

In light of clergy sexual scandals, Archbishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, referring to the statistics produced by D'Antonio, stated that there would be a threefold decline in the number of committed Catholics in the future (D'Antonio, 2007). Tens of millions of adults have completely abandoned Catholicism, and church attendance has fallen to all-time lows in a number of the world's economically industrialized nations during the last few decades. Pew Research Centre (2015) reveals a concerning trend: for every adult who converts to Catholicism, six leave the church. Not only is the Catholic Church struggling to attract new members, but it is also failing to retain its youth. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church is grappling with a significant shortage of priests, particularly in Western and Latin American countries. This "spiritual drought" is driven by an aging population and a declining number of clergy. Within a few decades, the Church will have roughly 25% fewer active diocesan priests than it now (D'Aqui, 2022; Lowney, 2017).

The issue of gender equality, particularly the full participation of women in the Church, has been another significant topic of discussion within the modern Catholic Church, which increasingly

emphasizes equality between men and women in all aspects of life (McElwee, 2023). In her book *The Feminization of the Church?* Dominican Sr. Kaye Ashe (1997) held that leadership is closely tied to matters of power and authority and delineated that gender is the deciding factor that links the three together. Kaye makes an honest mockery of the Church hierarchy, pointing out that the Catholic Church is incredibly adept at acknowledging the various ministries carried out by women and praising their expertise while simultaneously and prudently denying them power and authority. She highlights examples such as the absence of women in the highest governing body of the Holy See and in the College of Cardinals, which holds the exclusive right to elect the Pope (Ashe, 1997).

Nonetheless, a “quiet revolution” is taking place in the Catholic Church through so many women who boldly raise significant questions on the Church understanding of leadership, power, authority, ordination, gender and language (McNicholas, 2007). A key piece of evidence on challenges faced by women comes from a survey conducted among female participants in the Church Synod on Synodality (Winfield, 2023). The survey revealed that 43% identified “ordained ministers” as the primary obstacle to their greater involvement in the Church. The fact that even high-ranking religious women faced an unwelcoming attitude from the clergy highlights the profoundly entrenched clerical resistance to the involvement of women and laity in the Church (Winfield, 2023).

Finally, a major barrier to lay empowerment and women’s participation in the Church is clericalism as noted by Pope Francis (La Croix International, 2018). Clericalism refers to the false notion that clergy members belong to a particular class within the Church and that, due to their sacramental ministerial authority, they are superior to laypeople, should get special treatment, and, ultimately, have a closer relationship with God. It is the propensity to give a select few well-respected and exceptional leaders the authority and privilege to decide on the majority of crucial

decisions that affect the organization and its members (Plante, 2020, p. 2; T. P. Doyle, 2003). Unfortunately, religious and theological scholars and experts, who often have more academic and practical experience than priests and bishops, are ignored in important discussions and decision-making processes simply because they are either women or laypersons (Frawley-O'Dea, 2007).

The recent synodal process indeed provides a platform for listening to the concerns of the laity, particularly women and the marginalized. Nonetheless, the Church must work further in formulating concrete actions to dismantle the barriers people face in achieving full participation within the Church. Combined with the challenges covered so far (financial and sexual scandals, shrinking numbers, shortages of ordained ministers and marginalization of women), it seems that the Church set itself for the perfect storm, at least in the Global North. In the next section, I unpack more about the Canadian context and how to qualify for declining church attendance.

1.2 Religious Landscape in Canada: A Nuanced Overview

In the previous section, I unravelled the challenges and barriers that impact the vitality of the Global Catholic Church. Building on this discussion, the current section shifts focus to the religious landscape in Canada, the context in which this research is situated. This narrower focus provides a more transparent framework for understanding the specific dynamics at play in this study.

Christianity was the most dominant religion in Canada from the 19th century until the 1960s. Nevertheless, since then, Christianity has begun to lose its ground. The number of Christians dropping from 96% in 1961 to 67% in 2011 is clearly evidence of a declining trend (Clarke, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, the decline did not stop there: it continues to plummet. According to Statistics Canada, the number has again plummeted to 53% in 2021 (Government of Canada, 2022b). Moreover, the Catholic Church is not immune to this alarming declining trend. One reason for this

decline is the dramatic shift in the growth of those who identify with “No Religion.” For example, in 1961, this group represented less than 1% of the population. However, by 2011, it had grown to almost 25%, making it the second largest “religion” in Canada, and the current statistics show that the figure rose to 34% (Government of Canada, 2022c), which means more than one-third of Canada’s population does not have any religious affiliation. Furthermore, there has also been a notable increase in the presence of non-Christian religions.

What are the factors leading to the decline of Christianity in Canada? The 1960s marked a crucial turning point in Canadian religious history. People began to question the credibility of established institutions, including churches, which eventually led to a decline in religious affiliation and practice. Canadian scholars Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald saw that people’s perceptions of spirituality and values changed during the 1960s. There was also a growing emphasis on individualism and consumerism that contributed to the decline of organized religions. Many people began to seek a more personal understanding of their spirituality, emphasizing individual freedom and personal choice (for instance, the sexual revolution) instead of clinging to the norms of traditional religions, leading again to a decrease in religious affiliation. There is, thus, a growing number of people who have never been socialized into a church. These “non-churched” individuals do not have the same connection to religious traditions as previous generations.

Finally, changes in immigration policies since the 1960s have led to an increase in the number of immigrants belonging to world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. (Clarke, 2017). Sociologists Sam Reimer and Rick Hiemstra (2018) have observed a notable shift in religious identification among immigrants in Canada. The number of immigrants who identify as Christians is steadily declining, while those embracing non-Christian religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, are on the rise. This growing trend of religious diversification among

newcomers is a significant factor contributing to the overall decline of Christianity in Canada, reflecting broader changes in the country's cultural and spiritual landscape.

That being said, this rather bleak view, from an institutional Christian perspective, is far from telling the whole story. Despite these challenges, Christianity still retains a significant presence in the country. Most importantly, among the various Christian denominations, the Catholic Church stands out as the largest religious tradition in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022; Reimer & Hiemstra, 2018). Besides, while there has been a decline in church attendance over the last decades (Bibby & Reid, 2016; Government of Canada, 2022c), at the same time, there has also been a growing movement among Christians seeking a more satisfying church experience, often referred to as the “emerging Church.” Some of these emerging Church models redefine public spaces by holding worship services in unconventional places such as coffee shops, embracing a theology centred on the Incarnation (Heath & Studebaker, 2014).

Moreover, upon examining the research findings on the vitality of Christian churches in Canada carried out by sociologists Bibby and Reid (2016), it becomes apparent that a noteworthy degree of Catholic vitality exists outside Quebec. A cross-Canada survey of 3,000 Canadians revealed that 30% of Catholics had experienced growth in their parishes, while 50% mentioned a consistent size, with only 20% reporting a decline. The situation in Quebec presents a slightly different scenario, though not drastically divergent as some may perceive. Merely 1 in 10 individuals acknowledged increased church attendance, whereas over 3 in 10 admitted to a decline. Nevertheless, nearly 7 in 10 asserted that their congregations have maintained a stable size. Thus, these findings by Bibby and Reid show that, quantitatively speaking, there is significant vitality for Christian Churches in Canada, even amidst the general decline of religiosity. Evidently, the situation

does not depict flawless progress; however, it does not justify an overly pessimistic outlook either (Bibby & Reid, 2016).

One crucial factor I should mention here regarding the sustainability of religiosity, including Christianity, in Canada, is immigration, which is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping Canada's future demographic landscape. As statistics indicate (Government of Canada, 2022a), Canada has one of the largest aging populations globally, which is contributing to the decline in Catholic church attendance among white Canadians. However, this decline is being offset by an influx of immigrants who are bringing and will continue to bring a significant number of new Catholics to Canada from all over the world, helping to sustain the Church presence in the years to come¹ (Bibby & Reid, 2016, p. 103). Lastly, based on my limited experience and my interactions with Canadian Catholics, clergy, and university professors here in Ottawa, I can confidently say that there are at least a handful of parishes that are not in decline but are either sustaining or even thriving.

In short, this section has highlighted the decline of Christianity in Canada at an alarming rate, contrasted by the significant rise in the number of Canadians identifying with 'No Religion.' Nonetheless, Christianity continues to be the largest religious tradition in the country. Movements like "emerging churches" demonstrate that individuals are still in search of genuine spiritual experience through unconventional means, such as holding worship services in coffee shops. Moreover, although the overall national statistics paint a growing decline of Christianity and Catholicism, surveys by Bibby and Reid reveal that a notable number of Catholic parishes have experienced notable growth. The following section reviews some of the existing literature on various

¹ The findings by Bibby and Reid (2016) complicate the broader religious landscape, especially when compared to Reimer and Hiemstra's (2018) earlier-discussed observation showing a steady decline in Christian affiliation among immigrants.

perspectives and models that define Church vitality and offers a Church model from a Catholic perspective.

1.3 Measuring Church Vitality: An Overview

So far, I have examined the various challenges that hinder the vitality of the global Catholic Church, followed by a nuanced overview of the religious landscape in Canada. The discussion now shifts to the question of how to measure the vitality of the Church itself. Can vitality be measured quantitatively, qualitatively, or through a combination of both? This section also elucidates key Church models that define vitality and concludes with a Catholic perspective on the Church model.

1.3.1 The Quantitative vs Qualitative Debate

Can a Church flourishing truly be measured by its attendance statistics alone? This would undoubtedly be a somewhat reductive ecclesiology. It is crucial to identify and evaluate specific and multi-dimensional criteria for assessing the thriving nature of a Church. When one seeks to understand what defines a vital or thriving church and whether this vitality can be measured, it quickly becomes apparent that there is little consensus on the matter. For instance, theologians like Craig D. Allert and Hans Boersma argue that because the Church is a divine institution and the Holy Spirit guides and nurtures the church, no empirical metrics can encapsulate or elucidate theological truths. Hence, it cannot be measured (Reimer, 2012). However, Sociologists like Sam Reimer and Princeton theologian Darrell Guder argue that because the church is a “human, social organism” (Guder, 1998, p. 12), its institutional vitality—often referred to as “congregational vitality” (Reimer, 2012, p. 2)—can be measured to determine the institutional strengths and weaknesses. Another leading figure among those who argue that church vitality can be measured empirically is Donald

McGavran, one of the most influential missiologists of the 20th century. He deemed numerical growth a fundamental parameter for measuring church growth (Kurian & Smith, 2010).

As a Catholic believer and scholar, I do not endorse the perspective on numerical growth as a fundamental principle for a thriving Church because it simply eclipses the deeper theological and spiritual dimension of the Church, which is the “universal sacrament” of God’s saving will (Vatican Council, 1964a, section 9 & 48). The principal focus of the Church revolves around the spiritual growth of its congregation, their union with Christ, and their sanctification and not specifically on numerical growth. A Christian community can flourish when its members grow in their relationship with Christ and establish a genuine connection between their faith and daily life, even if the community is small in numbers. Even Jesus himself was not focused on numerical figures. His primary goal was to establish a group of missionary disciples who would deeply connect with him and spread the message of God’s love (Mark 3:14). Hence, the number of attendees should not be the sole measure of a community’s success or growth.

However, is it not possible to assess the vitality of the Church? Indeed, such an evaluation is possible because, as the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church - ‘*Lumen Gentium*’ section 8 notes, the Church, while divinely instituted, also embodies a human dimension (Tanner, 2012). The human element must be measured and evaluated to foster growth, as emphasized by prominent mechanical engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor, who regarded measurement as a fundamental element of effective management (Taylor, 2012). Nonetheless, one should be cautious about prioritizing the theological and spiritual dimensions of the Church vitality, as the Church is fundamentally a “universal sacrament” of God’s salvific plan (Vatican Council, 1964a, sections 1 & 48).

1.3.2 Some Key Models Defining the Vitality of the Church

The following section briefly examines key Church models such as Natural Church Development, the Missional Church, and the Flourishing Congregation construct, which define and assess Church vitality from various perspectives. It explores their core principles and discusses their limitations from a Catholic viewpoint.

1.3.2.1 *The Natural Church Development*

Natural Church Development (NCD) is a prevalent methodology in church growth, and it is being implemented by many churches worldwide, with participation from church leaders in more than 70 nations who have initiated their individual NCD networks (Gupton, 2011). NCD was established in 1989 by German researcher Christian A. Schwarz to facilitate both quantitative and qualitative growth within churches. Christian Schwarz's "Natural Church Development" model suggests that Churches should grow organically, like plants, by focusing on the inherent abilities given to members by God. Schwarz identified eight vital traits of a thriving Church: 1) empowering leadership; 2) gift-based ministry; 3) passionate spirituality; 4) effective structures; 5) inspiring worship services; 6) holistic small groups; 7) need-oriented evangelism; and 8) loving relationships (Kreider, 2021; Reimer, 2012; Schwarz, 1996).

Several of Schwarz's traits resonate profoundly with the vision articulated by the Catholic Church. For example, "Inspiring worship services" align with the Church's emphasis on the Eucharist as "the fount and apex" (Vatican Council II, section 11, 1964a) of Christian life, calling pastors and liturgy leaders to foster active participation in the sacred liturgy. Likewise, "need-oriented evangelism" echoes the "New Evangelization" called for by St. John Paul II (section 11, 1990), reminding the greater obligation of every Christian to proclaim the good news of Christ, "which responds to the needs and aspirations of the human heart."

However, upon closer examination from a Catholic perspective, it becomes apparent that while Schwarz draws on Jesus' agricultural parables, such as the lilies of the field, to support his views, he overlooks the theological implications of applying natural principles to church life. His model gives equal weight to empirical data, natural theology, and selective scripture, which risks misinterpreting the Bible. Moreover, his nondogmatic and nonsacramental approach downplays the importance of doctrine and sacraments in Church growth (Erwich, 2002; Råmunddal, 2014).

1.3.2.2 The Missional Church Model

The missional Church model emphasizes the Church's involvement in the world, not just as a passive entity but also as an active agent of God's mission. The concept emphasizes that the church aims to send people forth to witness God's work in the world rather than merely bringing people together in a structure (Guder, 1998). The impact of the missional Church model is characterized by its outreach beyond ecclesiastical confines into the societal domain, emphasizing the importance of human development rather than merely the provision of ministerial services (McNeal, 2009). The Missional church model's insistence on dynamic engagement beyond institutional walls resonates with Pope Francis's call in *Evangelii Gaudium* (section 20, 2013) for "a Church which goes forth" from its comfort zone, to reach out to those in the "peripheries". Nonetheless, from a Catholic viewpoint, it is essential to recognize that a model emphasizing mission without a robust sacramental underpinning might be perceived as deficient in the fullness of Catholic spirituality (Vatican Council, 1964a, section 11, Catholic Church, no. 1324).

1.3.2.3 The Flourishing Congregations Construct

Cultural sociologists and practical theologians Thiessen et al. (2019) introduced a conceptual framework termed the 'Flourishing Congregations Construct,' which encapsulates a myriad of perspectives held by church leaders in Canada belonging to the Catholic, mainline Protestant, and

conservative Protestant denominations regarding the essential components of a thriving congregation. These perspectives are categorized into three broad domains, each consisting of various dimensions: 1) Organizational Ethos, 2) Internal Domain and 3) Outward Domain. The domain of organizational ethos encompasses the strategic framework, organizational structure, human resources, competencies, and shared beliefs within an organization (Thiessen et al., 2019, p. 20). The internal domain centers on demographics and spiritual formation at personal and congregational levels. It comprises discipleship, a hospitable community, active and engaged laity, and diversity within the congregation (Nakaska et al., n.d.; Thiessen et al., 2019). The outward domain refers to activities that link those within a congregation to those outside the congregation. It encompasses evangelism, involvement in the local neighbourhood, and partnerships with other organizations (Thiessen et al., 2019).

The Flourishing Congregations Construct's three domains—Organizational Ethos, Internal, and Outward—offer a structured approach to dissect the culture of a thriving Catholic parish. For instance, 'the Organizational Ethos' domain, which encompasses strategic frameworks, governance norms, and shared convictions, offers a means to evaluate how the organizational and leadership structures (e.g., pastoral councils, finance committees) affect decision-making and identity formation within a parish. Nevertheless, similar to the NCD missional Church model, the 'flourishing congregation construct' similarly undervalues the significance of sacraments and the centrality of the spiritual experience as critical determinants of a vibrant Christian community.

As I conclude this section on various Church and sociological models, I find that these approaches, such as the missional Church model, find resonance with some of the key teachings of the Catholic Church, particularly on mission and evangelization and offer meaningful ways to analyze the culture of a thriving Christian community. However, they tend to overlook the formative

and transformative power of the sacraments, apostolic succession, and Church doctrines in sustaining the vitality of the Catholic Church (Catholic Church, 1997; Congar, 1960; Dulles, 2002; Ratzinger, 2018). Thus, there remains a need for a framework grounded explicitly in Catholic ecclesiology, since my research is based on exploring the vitality of the Catholic Parishes.

1.3.3 An Ecclesiological Reframing: A Church Model as Communion Based on Christological and Pneumatological Dimensions

In the previous section, I examined how Church models like Natural Church Development lack a healthy ecclesiology. This section examines a Catholic ecclesiological perspective on a true Church model.

Yves Congar, a prominent theologian and key contributor to the formulation of the Vatican II documents, asserted that communion must be the foundation of true ecclesiology (D. M. Doyle, 1997). Church as communion is a model based on the presence of the Holy Spirit in all the faithful. Communion ecclesiology was the Church's earliest ecclesiological framework in the New Testament. A Church understood as communion recognizes the Holy Spirit as its source of life and fosters a renewed appreciation for the charisms bestowed upon all members by the Spirit for the edification of the Church (Sullivan, 2007).

For years, the Church had overlooked the pneumatological dimension—the role of the Holy Spirit—a crucial aspect of the Church original foundation. Pre-Vatican II ecclesiology emphasized the Christological component, focusing on Jesus Christ's role in founding the Church while neglecting the Holy Spirit. Thus, the rediscovery of the Holy Spirit as co-founder of the Church, along with the theological significance of the Holy Spirit's bestowal upon every believer at baptism, laid the groundwork for the theology of the laity and the Church teaching on the *sensus fidelium* (Congar, 1997; Sullivan, 2007). The church leaders came to recognize that if the Holy Spirit is

bestowed upon every believer, then every faithful has a rightful voice. Each individual has the potential to be a bearer of truth. This communion ecclesiology marked a significant shift from a monarchical, pyramid-like model of the Church to one of communion, bridging the sharp distinction between clergy and laity.

It is undeniable that pre-conciliar ecclesiology largely disregarded the role of the laity, as it disregarded the Holy Spirit. The laity did not even have any role other than merely following their pastors “like a docile flock” (Pius X, Section 8, 1906; Sullivan, 2007). They were not even afforded the right to a sound religious education on Catholic doctrines. However, over time, the Church came to acknowledge the indispensable role of the laity and their vocation, just as the Church realized the role of the Holy Spirit as the co-founder who is present in all the faithful. Thus, an authentic and thriving ecclesiology fully integrates its Christological dimension—the calling and commissioning of the Twelve Apostles—and its pneumatological dimension—the active presence of the Holy Spirit in every faithful member (Sullivan, 2007).

One of the key concepts of communion ecclesiology is that it promotes and embraces diversity in unity. One can find a rich tapestry of diverse expressions of faith in the Catholic Church². Communion ecclesiology promotes a dynamic interplay between unity and diversity in the Church (Doyle, 2000). Catholic theologian Gerald A. Arbuckle (1993), in his well-known book ‘Catholic Identity or Identities?’ states that the Church has various identities, just as an individual possesses multiple identities. For example, Arbuckle discusses 11 distinct Catholic identities. Two important Catholic identities among these are ‘Traditional Catholics,’ who do not question the hierarchy, and ‘Vatican II Catholics,’ who are deeply inspired by the Council’s theology of the Church and the

² If one takes a closer look at the Catholic Church, one will find that, alongside the Western Rite, there are 23 Eastern Catholic Churches, all in full communion with Rome but following Eastern Christian liturgical, theological, and spiritual traditions (Neţuññăţă, 2002).

world and occasionally challenge the Church when it appears to deviate from this theology. Arbuckle also talks about the risk of sticking to one identity at the expense of other distinctive traits, which leads to fundamentalism. Such an approach stifles dialogue and meaningful conversation.

Similarly, American journalist and educator Peter Steinfels (2004, pp. 147–148) warns that one should “stop thinking about Catholic identity as though this were univocal... [for instance, prioritizing personal salvation with no social commitment to the well-being of others] There may be some overarching principles [for instance, ‘Jesus as the saviour of the world’]... However, there is no single way of embodying them [Jesus as a spiritual liberator who saves one from his/her sins or Jesus as the social redeemer who redeems him/her from social oppression and injustice]. It might be wiser to speak of Catholic identities in the plural.” Communion ecclesiology welcomes and embraces diverse expressions of faith. This ecclesiology is particularly relevant and meaningful in this study on two different Catholic communities, thriving in its unique way.

1.4 Summary

In summary, this chapter reviewed the literature on global challenges and barriers to the vitality of the Catholic Church. It then provided a nuanced picture of the religious landscape in Canada, highlighting that, despite an overall trend of decline, some parishes continue to thrive. Finally, it explored key models defining vitality, noting that they often lack robust ecclesiology, and concluded by presenting a Church model from a Catholic ecclesiological perspective. Having examined the challenges facing the Catholic Church globally and contextually, the next chapter introduces a theoretical framework, using culture as the empirical starting point for understanding whether a Catholic community is flourishing.

2 Theoretical Framework: Culture as A Starting Point of Thriving Catholic Communities

What makes a Catholic community thrive in a world where many churches face decline? This question invites one to explore the more profound cultural dynamics that shape not just individual behaviours but the collective identity and ways of being of a thriving parish. While the importance of culture is nothing new in anthropology, it is an issue that emerged in organizational studies in the 1980s and much later in theology (Wright, 1994). As Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1997) highlighted, culture plays a crucial role in shaping how people think and act, emphasizing the importance of understanding culture within an organization.

Since my research seeks to uncover the defining traits of the culture of a thriving Catholic community, it is essential first to establish what is meant by culture—particularly organizational culture—and to identify the elements that contribute to the success and vitality of a thriving organizational culture. However, given that a Church is a specific organization with a fundamental spiritual mission, it is also important to adapt these elements accordingly. Therefore, this chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding the culture of a thriving Catholic community.

2.1 Defining Organizational Culture as a Set of Basic Assumptions

Culture is one of the most debated and complex concepts in the social sciences. Its definition has sparked extensive discussions, particularly within the field of anthropology. As far back as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn documented an astonishing 164 distinct definitions of culture, noting that if all definitions, including those in the footnotes and monographs, were counted, their work alone would contain nearly 300 definitions (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952)! This staggering number

underscores the depth and diversity of perspectives surrounding “culture.” Since this topic is the object of a passionate scholarly discussion, it is worth looking at organizational culture and what makes such culture thrive.

American organizational theorist and psychologist Edgar Schein’s definition of organizational culture is one of the most widely cited and influential in the field. According to Schein, culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions” (Schein, 1987, p. 385) that a group develops as it learns to cope with problems. These shared assumptions shape how members interact with each other, how decisions are made, and how work is organized. New members learn these assumptions as the right way to think and feel. It is similar to an unspoken organizational code of conduct. These shared assumptions help the group members understand how to relate to the world inside and outside the organization (Schein, 1987).

Though helpful, Schein’s definition is far from the only one. For example, British scholars Maull, Brown and Cliffe (2001) identify four main ways of thinking about organizational culture. The first is culture as a learned entity, that is, as the “way we do things around here” or “the way we think about things around here” (Williams et al., 1993, p. 12). This approach emphasizes that culture is a learned behaviour. When new members join an organization, they are introduced to its rules, values, and accepted ways of thinking and feeling. A simple example could be a new employee being instructed to be on time for their duty. In the context of a Church, it could be that a new member or parishioner is asked or encouraged to attend all Sunday Masses regularly in the parish church. This process helps to sustain the organization’s identity, ensuring its survival and fostering growth.

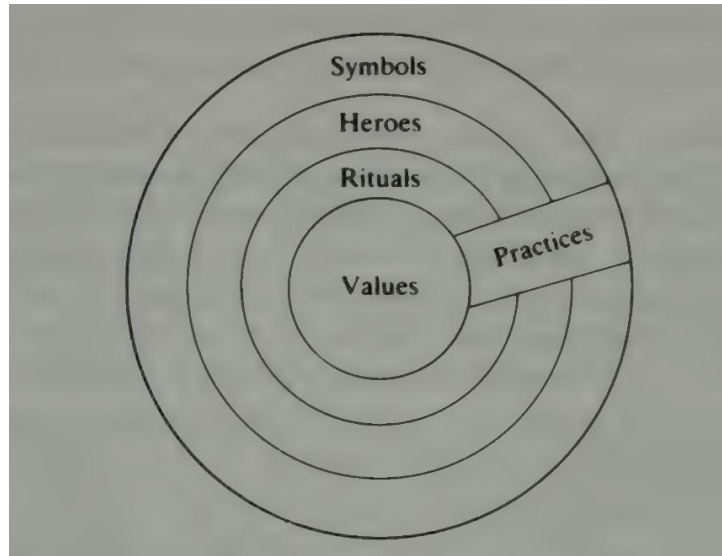
The second approach is culture as a belief system. It emphasizes that culture is a pattern of shared beliefs and values that provide members of an organization with meaning and rules for

behaviour. This concept is further divided into fundamental guiding beliefs and daily beliefs. Guiding beliefs are viewed as core principles rooted in universal truths. For example, the guiding principle can be “customer first.” These guiding beliefs remain unchanged over time, shaping practical and daily beliefs (for example, responding to emails in 24 hours), which are more flexible and adapt to different situations and contexts (Mauil et al., 2001).

The third approach is considering culture as a strategy. This perspective suggests that strategy and culture are not separate, that strategy is a cultural phenomenon, and that strategy development is a cultural activity. Culture shapes the way an organization plans and acts to reach its goals. For example, inclusivity is a core value of an organization’s culture. In that case, it creates a strategic plan to ensure all are represented in an assignment or event. In other words, culture shapes strategy, and strategy, in turn, reflects culture (Mauil et al., 2001).

Finally, a fourth approach is to think of culture as mental software or as the “collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede, 1997, p. 5), which sets one group apart. Though invisible, this programming has considerable implications for how groups lead their daily activities (e.g., around organizing time, space and relationships in the workplace). This definition is close enough to Shein’s definition regarding basic assumptions. To put this definition further, Hofstede breaks down his articulation of organizational culture into four layers enacted by shared practices: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. These layers are often depicted as the layers of an onion, symbolizing their depth within a culture (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – The Culture ‘Onion Diagram’ (Hofstede, 1997, p. 9)



Symbols are the most visible and can include words, gestures, pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning within a culture. They signify something broader or different from their literal meaning. For example, one can think of company logos, jargon, dress code, hairstyles, flags, and status symbols. New symbols are quickly created while older ones fade away, and others often adopt symbols from one culture. **Heroes** are those individuals who embody the company's values. They are often the “winners” or those who are successful within the organization and are considered great “motivators” (Deal, 1982). For example, Canadian cancer activist Terry Fox founded The Terry Fox Foundation, which embodies dedication to the common cause. **Rituals** are collective activities within an organization that are considered socially essential. For instance, one can think of social and religious ceremonies, team meetings or how people celebrate birthdays or greet each other. **Values** are the core of culture and are deeply connected with moral and ethical codes, with fundamental beliefs about what is right and what is wrong (Brown, 1998). They shape people's sense of what should be done and influence preferences, guiding their likes and dislikes.

As shown in Figure 1, symbols, heroes and rituals are grouped under the term “practices.” These are easily observable from the outside, but their true cultural meaning is hidden. It can only

be understood through how insiders interpret and engage with these practices and their underlying values. Hofstede (1997) states that observing these four elements gives one a sense of the company's culture. Using organizational culture strategically, organizations can create a unique identity, motivate employees, improve performance, and gain a competitive edge (Brown, 1998; Sun, 2008).

In this dissertation, I explore the culture of two thriving Catholic communities through the lens of Hofstede's four layers of organizational culture, represented by the onion diagram. This framework provides a valuable tool for describing the multiple layers of parish life, bearing in mind that symbols, rituals, and heroes lay foundational values. Table 1 below suggests a preliminary adaptation of Hofstede's model.

Table 1— Adaptation of Hofstede's Cultural Layers in Catholic Context

Hofstede's Cultural Layers	Catholic Adaptation	Examples in Catholic Context
Core values that shape the identity and behaviour	Image of God, Ecclesiological Perspectives, Theological and Moral Values	Theological doctrines, Human dignity, sense of community
Rituals	Sacraments and Sacred liturgy, Meetings, Catechetical Programmes, Parish Events, Evangelization, Missionary Activities	Mass, Baptism, Confession, Liturgy of Hours, Pastoral Council Meetings, RCIA, Parish Anniversaries, Social Justice Initiatives
Heroes	Church Leaders, Pastors, Key Lay Leaders	Saints, Popes, Parish Priests, lay leaders
Symbols	Church Architecture and Building, Dress Codes, Logos	Church Designs, Liturgical Vestments, Parish Logos

2.2 Defining a Positive Organization

In the previous section, I defined culture as a set of basic assumptions that shape how members think, behave and act. I also looked at four significant approaches to understanding culture: culture as a learned entity, culture as a belief system, culture as a strategy, and culture as mental

software. Now, I quickly delve into what makes an organizational culture thriving and healthy—or, in other words, how one defines a positive organizational culture.

The principles of positive organizational culture are drawn from positive psychology and positive intelligence³. The bottom line is that when employees feel genuinely valued and supported, they are more likely to perform their best work, ultimately benefiting the organization. Industrial psychologists Redelinguys et al. (2019) explored the relationships between workplace culture and positive organizational practices. They found that positive practices such as caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning, respect, integrity, and gratitude are associated with flourishing at work. The research suggested that when employees experience emotional, psychological, and social well-being (EWB, PWB, and SWB), they are less likely to want to leave their jobs and tend to perform significantly better (Redelinguys et al., 2019).

Similarly, organizational culture scholars Charmine E. J. Härtel and Neal Ashkanasy (2011) discuss the concept of positive human cultures as positive work environments (PWEs). They define positive work environments as social environments shaped by three primary characteristics: positive organizational climate, social inclusion, and human flourishing. A positive organizational climate is built on values like openness, trust, teamwork, and encouragement, which boost employee engagement and productivity (Patterson et al., 2004). Social inclusion fosters a culture where diversity is valued, and individuals feel a sense of belonging and support (Hartel, 2004). An emotional climate that promotes human flourishing ensures that positive emotions outweigh negative ones, strengthening social connections and reducing stress (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011). Although this type of benevolent culture seems desirable, it is far less present than one would like, including in the Church.

³ Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that examines the positive dimensions of human behavior and overall well-being and positive intelligence refers to emotional intelligence and self-awareness (Radu, 2023).

For the sake of the exercise, it is also possible to extend the components of a positive organizational culture to propose a more holistic characterization. Organizational psychologist Cătălina Radu (2023, pp. 4–6) identifies nine key dimensions of a positive organizational culture;

- 1) Well-being initiatives: Positive organizations prioritize the physical and mental well-being of employees. They think not only of the tasks they have to accomplish but also of the importance of their physical and mental health as they carry them out. For example, Microsoft introduced “Microsoft CARES,” an employee assistance program (EAP) offering counselling services through in-person, digital, and phone channels, along with support groups and workshops (Held, 2022).
- 2) Psychological safety: Positive organizations create a space where people feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and even mistakes without fear of retaliation. Even taboo topics can be addressed. Such a culture ensures open communication, trust, and transparency across all levels of the organization (Garvin et al., 2008).
- 3) Employee engagement: Organizational members’ engagement refers to how emotionally connected and committed employees are to their work and organization. When employees are engaged, they care about their workplace and their colleagues and are motivated to do their best. Such a positive organization encourages decision-makers to become servant leaders since this kind of leadership helps generate a greater sense of being heard and seen (Northouse, 2022).
- 4) Inclusivity and diversity: A positive organizational culture ensures everyone feels welcome and respected, regardless of background. It recognizes that a diverse team brings a broader range of ideas, experiences and perspectives. It also acts to lift systemic barriers historically

marginalized groups face so that they can identify with the organization and give their best (Gardenswartz, 2008).

- 5) Employee empowerment and autonomy: This is about trusting members and giving them the freedom and responsibility to make decisions about their own work. This dimension is closely related to empowering leadership, which emphasizes granting employees autonomy and enhancing their decision-making abilities, enabling them to truly own their work. It is the opposite of a micro-management culture (Cheong et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2022).
- 6) Collaboration and teamwork: In a positive organizational culture, the members feel they are part of the team. Studies on Organizational Culture have demonstrated that collaboration and teamwork increase productivity, innovation, and creativity and play a crucial role in organizational culture (L.Pathiranage, 2019). This is connected to what German sociologist and political scientist Hartmut Rosa (2019) calls “resonant relationships,” where people are in tune with each other.
- 7) Resilience and adaptability: Resilience and adaptability refer to equipping members with the psychological, emotional, and mental resources necessary to overcome difficulties and grow stronger from challenges. For example, resilience training workshops are organized to help employees view challenges as opportunities for growth and innovation (Duchek, 2020).
- 8) Recognition and appreciation: This dimension recognizes and values an employee’s contributions. When employees or members feel recognized and appreciated regularly, they become more productive. It is more than monetary rewards. For example, a 2009 survey by McKinsey of over 1,000 UK professionals found that non-financial motivators—like praise from managers, one-on-one attention from leaders, and opportunities to lead projects—were

seen as equally or more motivating than financial rewards such as bonuses, salary increment, or stock options (Bawa, 2017; Vrancic, 2015).

- 9) **Fostering a growth mindset:** This final dimension emphasizes continuous learning and development. For example, companies organize training programs, mentorship, and skill-building initiatives. A positive organizational culture encourages employees to try new things, fail, and keep pushing themselves (Rahman & Nas, 2013). Fostering a growth mindset is similar to the findings of David Garvin, a renowned professor at Harvard Business School and his associates (2008), who expounded that an organization's performance and effectiveness depend on three building blocks: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership that reinforces learning.

Drawing these concepts from Härtel & Ashkanasy (2011), Radu (2023), and Redelinghuys et al. (2019), a positive organizational culture can be defined as a collaborative and productive environment that prioritizes the well-being and psychological safety of its members and fosters an atmosphere where they feel empowered to grow to their full potential. In a positive organizational culture, everyone feels welcome, respected, seen and heard. The concept of a positive organizational culture (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Hofstede, 1997; Patterson et al., 2004; Radu, 2023; Redelinghuys et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2022) is highly relevant to identifying and analyzing the culture of a thriving Catholic community. It poses significant questions to anyone interested in studying what makes a Catholic community flourish in the context of declining trends in Western countries.

First, what are the underlying fundamental values of the Catholic community under study? In other words, what is the very core of the Catholic community's culture, manifested through

symbols, heroes and rituals? (Hofstede, 1997). It also asks: What way of being do these values lead? How do they suggest one look at the world?

Second, do the members of the Catholic community experience emotional well-being (EWB), psychological well-being (PWB), and social and spiritual well-being (SWB), which helps them to experience a God who heals and saves and strengthens in times of troubles and distress (Redelinguys et al., 2019)? Do they feel genuinely valued and supported? What are the parish community's well-being initiatives (Radu, 2023) to ensure its members' physical and mental well-being?

Third, how does the community foster positive organizational practices of caring, compassionate support, forgiveness, inspiration, meaning, respect, integrity, and gratitude (Redelinguys et al., 2019)? Is there psychological safety (Radu, 2023) in that the parishioners can express their views and opinions without fearing backlash?

Fourth, is the leadership of the parish one that serves and empowers (Singh et al., 2022)? What are the policies of the parish leadership to foster a culture of social inclusion (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011) where diverse voices—women, indigenous people and other marginalized people in the community—are heard and recognized?

Lastly, what initiatives does the parish take to ensure a growth mindset (Radu, 2023)? Are there continuous learning and development avenues, such as continuous faith formation or Bible classes for parishioners?

Based on what has been discussed in this section on positive organizational culture grounded in positive psychology, I define a positive Church culture as prioritizing its members' physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. Such culture helps its members to experience God's love and compassion in their everyday life experience. A positive Church culture always ensures social

inclusion, where different voices in the community are recognized and valued. In a positive Church culture, members experience psychological safety, feeling empowered to voice their opinions without fear of negative consequences. Finally, a positive Church culture fosters an emotional climate that promotes human flourishing and offers continuous learning and development avenues (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023; Redelinguys et al., 2019).

2.3 Defining a Thriving Catholic Parish: A Four Pillars Approach

I have established a positive organizational culture as a collaborative and productive work environment that prioritizes the employees' physical, mental and social well-being and fosters an atmosphere where they feel empowered to evolve, thrive, and realize their full potential. However, how does this apply to the context of a thriving Catholic community?

While the Catholic Church is divinely instituted, it is also a human institution. In other words, it is both divine and human (Vatican Council II, Section 8, 1964a). Therefore, the principles of a positive organizational culture can be applied to Catholic institutions, including parish communities, while acknowledging the absolute supremacy of God's grace and initiatives in human efforts. Furthermore, it aligns with the call of *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, section 182, 2013) that encourages the Church to engage with a wide range of disciplines, to promote the integral well-being of the human person. Therefore, similarly to positive organizational culture (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023; Redelinguys et al., 2019), a thriving Catholic community—considering its human dimension—must foster environments that contribute to the emotional, psychological, social and spiritual well-being (EWB, PWB, and SWB) of its members, in a way that leads them to God's grace.

With that in mind, I want to highlight two key observations about the vitality of Catholic Churches as I introduce my definition of a thriving Catholic community. First, Reginald Bibby and

Angus Reid make a thought-provoking observation when they write that “The day when priests can declare that people should show up for Mass every week [...] is over” (Bibby & Reid, 2016, p. 121). The old “pray, pay, and obey” model of Catholicism is fading. Faith is not about obligation anymore. Therefore, Catholic leaders must offer a more effective and meaningful ministry to thrive and flourish in this modern world (Bibby & Reid, 2016, p. 121). Suppose Catholic leaders fail to “meet people where they are” and cannot create learning and spiritual growth spaces where individuals can share their struggles and dilemmas. In that case, the gap between faith and daily life will continue, and members will not be motivated to attend church (Kuzmochka, 2024; Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022, pp. 20–24).

The second one is from the Aparecida Document by the Bishops’ Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM), held in 2007. In this document, the bishops observed that many faithful leave the Catholic Church not because of the beliefs of non-Catholic groups but because of the way those groups live and practice their faith (such as worship, community life, pastoral care and sense of belonging) resonates with them (CELAM, 2007). In other words, they leave the Church because they search for answers to the issues and questions they grapple with in their everyday lives. Bishops’ Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean exhorted all Church leaders and members in its territory to enhance four major realms to make the Church thrive: 1) Religious experience, 2) Community life, 3) Biblical and doctrinal formation, and 4) Missionary commitment of the entire community.

Drawing from these two observations in the Catholic context—Bibby & Reid and the Aparecida Document—while incorporating elements of a thriving organizational culture (Cheong et al., 2019; Hofstede, 1997; Redelinghuys et al., 2019; Schein, 1987; Singh et al., 2022), I frame my definition of a thriving Catholic community as follows:

A thriving Catholic community is one where members personally encounter Jesus Christ, find acceptance and belonging within the community, are nurtured through continuous catechetical formation and are driven by a strong missionary commitment to evangelize and serve others, living out the Gospel in both word and action.

Accordingly, there are four key components/ pillars to embody this definition of a thriving Christian community: 1) a Personal encounter with Jesus Christ, 2) a Synodal leadership approach nurturing a supportive community, 3) Catechetical formation, and 4) Missionary commitment. However, one must note that while these four pillars offer a robust vision for a thriving Catholic community, it is important to acknowledge that they represent just one theoretical framework among many other Catholic ecclesiological models.

2.3.1 Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ

A paramount characteristic of a thriving Christian community is its role as a pivotal center where individuals can experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who embodies “the fullness of all revelation” (Vatican Council II, section 2, 1965b). Karl Rahner, one of the most prominent Catholic theologians of the 20th century, referred to Christ as “the absolute bringer of salvation” (Weger, 1980, p. 164). All these teachings and doctrines sound good and empowering, and I fully support them as a Franciscan priest. However, thinking from the grassroots level, how does an ordinary person, after a hectic week of work and family frustrations, experience the saving, healing and empowering Christ in a meaningful and tangible way when attending Sunday Mass at their parish church? This is where the churches must genuinely think about well-being initiatives (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023; Redelinghuys et al., 2019) to ensure the holistic well-being of their members—physical, psychological, and spiritual—through which they can encounter the Lord, who heals and saves. However, one must exercise caution when implementing well-being initiatives. They should be applied discreetly to foster an environment in which individuals become more receptive to the Holy Spirit’s movement, complementing, rather

than replacing, the transformative power of God's grace. Well-being initiatives are never meant to supplant grace but to remove obstacles—physical and mental—which may cloud one's capacity to recognize God's gift.

This encounter with the Lord is the most profound gift and service the Church can extend to its congregants (CELAM, 2007, section 14 & 95). A Church that cannot facilitate this transformative experience of comprehensive well-being of its members cannot flourish (CELAM, 2007, section 154) because, without cultivating a personal relationship with Christ, all its initiatives become “meaningless” (Francis, 2013, section 262).

How can a Church become a centre where people can experience a personal encounter with the Lord? Here, by personal encounter with the Lord, I mean experiencing God's love and compassion, having the conviction of being a child of God, and recognizing that only God can bring true happiness and meaning into one's life. It is a positive environment where its members experience psychological and spiritual well-being. For example, churches offer free psycho—spiritual counselling facilities to their members who are experiencing depression or psychological turmoil, to recognize God's empowering presence in their lives. One can relate offering avenues of personal encounter with the Lord to the resilience and adaptability that every positive organization must have. Positive organizations equip their members with resources to overcome psychological and mental struggles (Duchek, 2020; Radu, 2023). A thriving Church must actively facilitate this transformative experience through liturgical, sacramental and communitarian celebrations. Sacred Scripture (Benedict XVI, 2007; Vatican II, 1965b), sacred liturgy and sacraments (Vatican II, 1963), personal and community prayer, and fraternal community (CELAM, 2007) are some of the key avenues through which the faithful can encounter the Lord.

According to Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher and Catholic writer, every human being has a “perpetual and unavoidable attraction” to God/”Universal Being” (D’Antuono, 2022). Similarly, Article 38 of *Gaudium et Spes* asserts: “The Church knows that only God...meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer...” (Vatican Council II, 1965c). Thriving Catholic parish churches should be places where these “deepest longings of the human heart” are fulfilled. They should cultivate a positive environment where people encounter the compassion and love of the Lord, have their needs for physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being addressed (Radu, 2023; Redelinghuys et al., 2019), and experience an atmosphere that allows them to meet and worship Jesus, “the absolute bringer of salvation” (Weger, 1980, p. 164).

2.3.2 Synodal Leadership Approach Nurturing a Supportive Community

Synodal leadership, firmly grounded in a culture of encounter, is the second pillar of a thriving Catholic community, as Pope Francis articulated. A culture of encounter is a way of life that prioritizes openness, dialogue, and solidarity with others, particularly those on the margins of society (CNA, 2021). This concept aligns with the idea of a positive organizational climate, where values such as openness and trust enhance employee engagement and productivity, as stated by Härtel and Ashkanasy (2011). To foster this culture, leaders must exhibit zeal in engaging with others, identifying common ground, constructing connections, and devising inclusive initiatives (Francis, 2020).

Elements of inclusive leadership are found here, where collaboration and engagement of all group members are given the highest priority (Northouse, 2022). Similarly, synodal leadership fosters a sense of belonging, where each church member feels valued and connected to the community. Through a culture of encounter, leaders encounter their members “where they are”

(Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022, p. 26), listen to them and discern together (CNA, 2021). Such synodal leadership, grounded in the culture of encounter, draws parallels to Peter Block's depiction of a leader as a "social architect" tasked with establishing a platform for engagement, listening and open dialogue among community members (Block, 2008, pp. 85–86). Psychological safety (Radu, 2023) is an important dimension in synodal leadership, where parishioners can express their agreements and disagreements without fear of a backlash. One avenue to nurture synodal leadership and a culture of encounter involves the practice of 'empathic listening' (wherein one perceives the situation from another's perspective) and 'generative listening' (which entails connecting to a "deeper source of knowing"), as emphasized by Otto Scharmer (2007, p. 3). In the milieu of the Catholic Christian community, I perceive the Holy Spirit, the unifying force, as the embodiment of this "deeper sense of knowing" wherein all are united in God's saving will. Finally, synodal leadership is akin to empowering leadership (Singh et al., 2022), where the parish leaders, particularly the parish pastor, grant their colleagues and collaborators autonomy and strengthen their decision-making abilities.

2.3.3 Catechetical Formation

Catechetical formation constitutes the third pillar of a thriving Catholic Church. Every thriving Catholic community must foster avenues of continuous learning and faith-formative programs for its members because an organization can thrive only in such a supportive learning environment and growth mindset (Garvin et al., 2008; Rahman & Nas, 2013). Catechetical formation refers to a community engaged in active interactions, discussions, and reflections on the life of faith, where members can experience a personal encounter with Christ. This catechetical community is beyond the "school model" that often concentrates on theories and neglects real-life experience (Durocher, 2019, pp. 119–124). It calls for creating avenues for experiencing personal encounters

with Christ in their daily experiences (Benedict XVI, 2010, Section 73). Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church serve as the two primary sources of inspiration for catechetical activity in our time. They must guide both biblical and doctrinal catechesis, ensuring that these teachings faithfully convey the authentic message of God's word (Congregation For The Clergy, No.128, 1997)

There are three fundamental elements in catechetical formation (Durocher, 2019) that every Catholic community should be aware of; first and foremost, catechesis is an “ecclesial action”—it is the responsibility of the Church and involves the entire faith community. Secondly, its purpose is to lead the faithful to a “maturity of faith,” helping them grow in their relationship with Christ. Lastly, the subject of catechesis is not just the individual believer but the entire Christian community as a whole, as Block highlights when talking about the restoration of the community, that the attention should be on the entire community (Block, 2008; Durocher, 2019; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1971).

Faith accompaniment is a vital aspect of catechetical formation, where the Church walks alongside people, creating spaces for members to grow into mature Christians. Catechesis is a companion on this journey, listening, attending, and being present to all of life's experiences, especially during dilemmas and challenges (Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022, pp. 27–28). This faith accompaniment is similar to ‘fostering a growth mindset’—a key dimension of a positive organizational culture—that emphasizes continuous learning and development of its members (Radu, 2023; Rahman & Nas, 2013). However, statistics show Canada is no longer a Christian society, as its culture has become increasingly de-Christianized (Clarke, 2017; Government of Canada, 2022c). This raises a critical question, especially considering the growing number of children and teenagers who have never set foot in a church: How can the catechetical activity of the

Church connect with a society that is becoming increasingly disconnected from traditional and organized religion? How can it reach a world increasingly identifying with “No Religion”? Perhaps one way is by creating space for low-key faith discussions open to everyone—skeptics, seekers, and those who identify with “No-Religion” (Catto et al., 2003). I am not suggesting that these faith discussions are the ultimate solution. Instead, they serve as a starting point, an initial step—much like how a mother breastfeeds a newborn. In the same way, gentle, open conversations about faith can be a meaningful first step in reconnecting with a society that is increasingly unfamiliar with traditional and organized religion.

2.3.4 Missionary Commitment

The Mission is not solely the responsibility of missionaries in distant lands; instead, it is a calling for all Christians, with the entire Church being called to be missionaries (Vatican Council II, Section 2, 1965a). Thus, the last strategy I suggest for embodying a thriving Christian community is converting the parish community into a missionary one.

Pope John Paul II writes that “Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways” (John Paul II, section 41, 1990). For instance, missionary commitment takes on broader meanings when understood as a “prophetic dialogue,” as emphasized by Catholic missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder (2011). Prophetic dialogue is a way of understanding and practicing a Mission emphasizing dialogue and prophecy. It recognizes the importance of engaging in respectful dialogue with people of other cultures and religions, with the poor and the marginalized—such as people of colour, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals— in society while also remaining faithful to the prophetic call to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. One can relate this to social inclusivity and diversity—a key characteristic of a positive work environment— where diverse voices are heard and valued (Gardenswartz, 2008; Härtel &

Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023). Thus, this dialogical missionary commitment embraces the principles of inclusive leadership, where everyone is welcomed, valued, and acknowledged, bridging the gap between outsiders and insiders (Northouse, 2022). Three essential elements of Mission as prophetic dialogue are 1) listening and learning, 2) speaking forth the Good News, and 3) critiquing injustice (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011).

It is important to remember that evangelization and Mission encompass a commitment to comprehensive human well-being—an important dimension of a positive organizational culture (Radu, 2023)—with a preferential option for the poor, without which it would remain incomplete (Francis, 2013, 2020; Paul VI, 1975). Pope Francis (section 199, 2013) writes;

Without the preferential option for the poor, “the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications.

However, Pope Paul VI cautions against narrowing evangelization to merely political or economic concerns, emphasizing that the spiritual essence of the Gospel is the foundation of humanity’s profound liberation (section 35, 1975).

2.4 Summary

I have dissected culture as a starting point for understanding a thriving Catholic community. The paper also delineated the definition of culture as a set of beliefs and values that shape how people interact with one another, think, and behave. Using the theoretical explanation of Radu (2023), I demonstrated a positive organizational culture as a collaborative and productive work environment that prioritizes the well-being of the employees and fosters an atmosphere where they feel empowered to evolve, thrive, and realize their full potential. Similarly, positive Church culture was defined as one that prioritizes its members’ physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being by which the members experience God’s love and guidance in their daily life. I adopted Hofstede’s four

cultural layers in a Catholic context to better analyze the cultural layers within the culture of a thriving Catholic community. Finally, I defined a thriving Catholic community as one where members personally encounter Jesus Christ, find acceptance and belonging within the community, are nurtured through continuous catechetical formation, and are driven by a strong missionary commitment to evangelize and serve others, living out the Gospel in both word and action. Along with the definition, I also established four pillars of a thriving Catholic community—while incorporating the elements of a positive organizational culture, such as 1) a Personal encounter with Jesus Christ, 2) a Synodal leadership approach nurturing a supportive community, 3) Catechetical formation, and 4) Missionary commitment.

The following chapter presents the ethnographic approach used in this study to understand and analyze the culture of a thriving Catholic community. It also introduces the two research sites where the study was conducted, explains how the data was collected and analyzed, and discusses the benefits and risks for the participants involved.

3 Methodology: An Ethnographic Inquiry

Ethnography is not the most popular research approach in either theology or organizational studies. However, the approach most radically centres on listening to and engaging with others in their daily environment, placing this at the heart of research. Moreover, ethnography's focus on empathetic engagement and descriptive analysis is highly compatible with theological frameworks of the Catholic Church that emphasize attentiveness to human experiences. For instance, Pope Francis' vision of a 'listening Church' (Francis, 2015; Reimer-Barry, 2011) that underscores the value of qualitative, person-centred inquiry. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look. This chapter outlines this methodology along with the rationale for choosing it. It details the field research I conducted in two parishes within the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall during the Fall of 2024 and

the Winter 2025 and my rationale for selecting these sites. It also describes the various tools and processes I have used for data collection (participant observation and interviews) and analysis (thematic content analysis). Finally, the chapter addresses ethical considerations, including the potential benefits and risks to participants.

3.1 Ethnography: A Methodology Focused on Presence and Listening

Given my research interest in the components constituting a parish as a thriving Catholic Christian community and my positionality as an ordained minister, ethnography emerged as the most suitable methodology for many reasons. First, this approach entails an in-depth engagement with the community to learn from their lived experiences, enabling the potential for the unfamiliar and the unforeseen, extending far beyond mere field interviews (Moschella, 2008; Vigen & Scharen, 2011b). Ethnography relies on the researcher's competence to engage and immerse oneself in the culture entirely, a competence that places me a little as an outsider if one thinks of Canadian cultures but an insider in terms of Church cultures. This positionality (one foot in, one foot out) is beneficial for ethnographic work. It enabled me to approach each parish with less preconceived notions and be more readily surprised by aspects commonly taken for granted by Canadian-born Catholics.

Second, from a pastoral standpoint, ethnography involves heightened awareness and attentive listening to how individuals express and engage with their faith. As mentioned earlier in the section on Catholic ecclesiology, the Catholic Church does not have a single identity. Instead, it comprises a collection of identities, such as 'traditional Catholics' and 'Vatican II Catholics' (Arbuckle, 2013). These diverse identities result in different expressions of the same Catholic faith based on the culture and context where they are situated. In this regard, ethnography, as a research method, enables the researcher to understand the rich tapestry of collective knowledge and practices that shape the particular culture of the parish (Moschella, 2008). This methodology can function as a valuable

instrument for fostering Christian discipleship by immersing the researcher in the actual context of the individuals or community being analyzed, as Todd Whitmore (2007) demonstrated.

Finally, one last reason I selected ethnography as my methodology is its emphasis on the culture of listening—a quality that every Christian congregation and, more importantly, every pastor should exemplify. St. Francis of Assisi⁴, the founder of my religious order, encouraged all congregation members to practice empathetic listening, urging his brothers to listen with “an ear of the heart” (Francis, 2022). Listening is a key dimension of Franciscan religious life (Ordo Fratrum Minorum, 2017). For example, the Franciscan brothers in my community meet every month for a local chapter to listen to one another and discern together the way of our religious life. Thus, as a Franciscan priest, ethnography is a spiritual practice of listening with “an ear of the heart” to the world’s diverse voices, expressions of faith, and cultures. Through this ethnographic path, I explore “What is happening here [the context under study]?” and What do they[participants] want to tell me? Simply put, I want to be part of the “listening Church” (Francis, 2015; Reimer-Barry, 2011).

3.2 Research Sites

As of 2024, the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall has approximately 130 parishes (Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall, n.d.). Therefore, I employed specific criteria to select suitable parishes for this study.

The first criterion was to identify an English-speaking parish within Ottawa. The second was to select parishes representing different expressions within the Catholic Church rather than focusing on a single style, as the Catholic Church itself consists of a plurality of identities, as

⁴ ‘Canticle of Creatures’ by St. Francis of Assisi – an inspiration for Pope Francis’s *Laudate si*—is a perfect example of how he was attentive even to the most minor things in nature, for whom everything in the world was a reflection of God’s infinite goodness (Wintz, 2018). St. Francis—‘God’s pauper’ —is known for his special charism of listening to the poor and the marginalized.

explained earlier. The third was to assess the receptiveness and openness of the pastors to a two-month ethnographic research project. Finally, I sought parishes that exhibited the four traits of a thriving Catholic parish.

The following two sites were selected based on these criteria as they met all the requirements, and I conducted ethnographic research in these parishes.

3.2.1 Research Site 1: St. Mary's Catholic Church

St. Mary's Catholic Church (see picture 1), situated at the southeast corner of Bayswater Avenue and Young Street, is a parish administered by a religious congregation, the Companions of Cross Fathers. The original structure, built from timber beams and brick veneer in 1891, was destroyed by fire in 1949. This establishment was the second English-speaking Catholic parish in Ottawa and was consecrated in June 1951 (Civic Hospital Neighbourhood History & Heritage Committee, 2016). I had a conversation with Fr. Mark Goring (parish priest) on 12 July and also had the privilege to join for a Sunday Mass on 14 July.

Picture 1 – Front view of St. Mary's Catholic Parish Church (<https://commons.wikimedia.org>)



Here are some of the reasons why I considered St. Mary's Parish a thriving Church using my theoretical model:

1. **Personal encounter with Christ.** During my participation at a Sunday Mass at St. Mary's church in July 2024, I observed that the entire congregation was fully engaged and actively participating in the celebration of the Mass. The church has an Adoration Chapel, open every weekday, where I saw people pray silently, worshipping the Lord. This is yet another sign that this parish functions as the centre of religious experience, where people experience an encounter with the Lord⁵.
2. **Synodal leadership approach.** On the first day of my visit to the parish in July 2024, I observed the pastor engaging in meaningful dialogue with the parish youth. He introduced them to the "72 Hours Challenge"—a wilderness retreat designed to disconnect from technology, emphasizing a life without phones or Wi-Fi. The pastor posed a thought-provoking question: "Can you live without your phone or Wi-Fi for at least 24 hours?" While some boys seemed hesitant, Fr. Mark's enthusiasm and conviction gradually sparked their curiosity. To further illustrate his point, he retrieved a book about the "72 Hours Challenge" from his office and, within minutes, had fully captured their attention. This interaction exemplified a synodal leadership approach, creating a space for dialogue and openness and fostering meaningful relationships with the youth.
3. **Catechetical formation.** A deeper exploration of the parish's website (<https://stmarysottawa.ca/>) reveals that the parish organizes various catechetical formation programs such as Encounter Ministry, Alpha and New Life Retreat. These ministries foster

⁵ However, one should note that the outward active and vibrant engagement of the parishioners during the liturgy could reflect social habit and expectation rather than genuine spiritual receptivity (Kuzmochka, 2024). For this reason, I also sought to explore, through interviews, the depth of their spiritual experiences and their relationship with the Lord—findings that are discussed in chapter 5, with clearer evidence of personal encounter.

Christian discipleship and help parishioners establish a deep and personal relationship with Christ. For example, Encounter Ministry is a 2-year training program designed to teach, equip, and activate Catholic faithfuls to be messengers of Christ based on the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church (St. Mary's Parish, 2024).

4. **Missionary commitment.** The parish also has many outreach initiatives, as shown on its website. For example, one of their ministries, 'Heart of Mercy,' embodies the compassion of Christ by assisting those poor and the marginalized within the parish, its boundaries, the city, and even abroad. Another example is their dynamic youth ministry, 'Bayswater & Young.' Through social gatherings, events, and adoration sessions, this ministry aims to foster a strong, connected community among the young adults in the parish (St. Mary's Parish, 2024).

3.2.2 Research Site 2: St. Basil's Catholic Parish

St. Basil's Catholic Parish, commonly known as the 'Round Church' of Ottawa, is a relatively recent establishment that dates back to 1956. It is located north of the Queensway (Casserly, 2008). During a conversation on August 2, 2024, Fr. Daryold Corbiere Winkler, the parish priest, described St. Basil's as a "progressive parish" due to its active involvement in advocating for social rights and justice.

Picture 2 – Front view of St. Basil's Catholic Parish Church (photo by the author)



Here are some reasons to consider St. Basil's Parish, a thriving Catholic community.

1. **Personal encounter with Christ.** I explored the parish website to learn about its liturgical celebrations. I discovered that the pastor's Sunday sermons and gospel reflections by lay people authorized by him are a great way of experiencing a personal encounter with the Lord. By connecting the Gospel with everyday concrete life examples, these reflections can be described as "consoling encounters with God's word" (Francis, 2013, section 135).
2. **Synodal leadership approach.** The parish leadership recognizes, accepts and respects the laity's voice, particularly women, embodying the vision of fostering a "listening Church" (Francis, 2015). One example is that, according to its website (<https://stbasilsparish.ca/>), the parish nearly conducted over 22 sessions on the synod on synodality, which facilitated avenues for honest dialogue and listening among its members, an essential characteristic of a synodal Church.

3. **Catechetical formation.** Further exploration of the parish website revealed that St. Basil's parish specifically focuses strongly on Catechetical formation, evidenced by its deliberate efforts to invite renowned theologians, such as Dr. Catherine Clifford, to provide biblical and theological education to the community (St. Basil Catholic Church, n.d.).
4. **Missionary commitment.** The parish is renowned for its strong missionary commitment, engaging in numerous outreach activities such as Food Cupboard, Refugee ministry, and other charitable works to serve society's poor and needy. For example, during my first visit to St. Basil's parish, the pastor shared with me that over the past 10 years, the parish has supported four refugee families from Syria who endured very challenging situations in their home country.

3.2.3 Contrasting the Sites

As mentioned earlier, one of my primary criteria for selection was to choose parishes that reflect the diverse expressions and emphases within the Catholic Church rather than focusing on a single style. St. Mary's Parish is a charismatic and traditional Church characterized by "adherence to orthodoxy" (Arbuckle, 2013, p. 15), Christian discipleship, evangelization, and dynamic worship. On the other hand, St. Basil's Parish is a progressive Church deeply influenced by Vatican II teachings and theology. It actively promotes social justice initiatives such as refugee ministry, food banks, and similar outreach programs. Thus, St. Mary's Catholic Parish, with its charismatic and traditional focus on evangelization and proclamation, and St. Basil's Parish, with its progressive orientation toward social justice, provide an ideal contrast and research site for this study.

3.3 Methods of Data Collection

Ethnographers utilize various research methods in their investigations, including participant observation, focus groups, individual interviews, and prolonged immersion within a specific cultural or communal context (Vigen & Scharen, 2011b, p. 17). In the context of my research, I have opted for three tools: participant observation, journaling and semi-structured interviews. My fieldwork formally started only in September 2024, once I got the approval of the Review Ethics Board of Saint Paul University.

3.3.1 Participant Observation

Participatory observation necessitates the researcher's active involvement in the various activities of the people under study, alongside the systematic documentation of observations (Leavy, 2017). I partook in the diverse initiatives conducted by the two parishes under examination for two months in each parish, depending on what emerged (from October 2024 until January 2025). Throughout this timeframe, I preferred to engage as a "participant-as-observer"—observation status acknowledged—as opposed to just being a "complete observer," as explained by James Stevens (1999, p. 61). As a clergy member, I also concelebrated in all the Sunday Masses during this period. Crucially, my positionality as a concelebrant granted insider access to the backstage of ritual preparation (e.g., pre-Mass briefings, post-liturgy debriefs with clergy), enriching my understanding of the parish's liturgical intentionality. Yet, it also required ethical vigilance: I prioritized minimizing disruptions to worship, deferring detailed note-taking to post-Mass sessions to honour the sacredness of the space. Furthermore, I participated in various unique activities organized by the parishes, such as youth ministry, catechetical formation, adoration, Kateri Ministry, Advent prayer services, Lunch & Learn sessions, Christmas Dinners, and parish council meetings. These engagements enabled me to delve into the unique culture, vision, and Mission of the parish

as well as to establish a good rapport with people and thereby learn more about the culture of the community (Leavy, 2017).

3.3.2 Field Notes

Field notes are the documented records of a researcher's empirical observations, feelings and reflections within a specific research setting (Leavy, 2017, p. 136). I maintained a precise record of the temporal details, including the date and time of these field notes, which is crucial for establishing a coherent timeline, alongside noting down other pertinent details like the location, behaviours, dialogues, and engagements with the community as well as the nature of these interactions. For instance, during Sunday morning services, I documented the general tone of the participation in the liturgy, the faithful's behaviours and their interactions during and after the liturgy. Furthermore, I allocated time during the day for meticulous note-taking activities to ensure a structured approach to documenting these field observations (Leavy, 2017, p. 136). I was generally able to record my observations on the same day.

3.3.3 The Open-Ended Interview

The open-ended interviews were another mode of data collection (Reimer-Barry, 2011, p. 104). I employed a semi-structured interview guide comprising open-ended and loosely structured questions related to my definition of a thriving Catholic community, providing participants with the opportunity and adaptability to articulate their viewpoints and interpretations of the scenario (Reimer-Barry, 2011, p. 105; Tisdell & Merriam, 2015, p. 110). For example, "In what ways do you experience your parish as a center for personal encounters with the Lord and the community?". Some of the key themes covered in the interview were personal relationship with Jesus Christ, community and belonging, leadership approach of the parish, catechetical formation, missionary commitment,

role of prayer and sacraments and its meaningful connection with life, intergenerational engagement, resilience in the face of challenges, the role of the pastor, the role of the laity. Given that I had to conduct interviews with the pastors and the parish laity, I developed two interview guides (please refer to the appendix) for pastors and laity groups. I recorded all interviews with participants' consent using an audio recorder. I then created verbatim transcripts with Microsoft 365, part of the data collected (Leavy, 2017, p. 151).

3.4 Selection of Interview Participants

After a few weeks on each site, I identified and approached various key information for an individual interview. In total, 17 of the most suitable participants (eight from St. Mary's and nine from St. Basil, including some couples who did the interview together) agreed to take part in an interview. Their selection was based on a combination of "initial background reading and preliminary conversations" (Vigen & Scharen, 2011a, p. 231) alongside purposeful samplings, such as discerning regular church attendees actively engaged in ministries or leadership roles within the parish. I also ensured that gender and age balance was maintained (Leavy, 2023; Tisdell & Merriam, 2015).

Prior to the commencement of data collection, potential research participants were formally provided an invitation letter to partake in the research endeavour. Those individuals opting to engage were required to sign the informed consent letter. Moreover, it explicitly stated that involvement in the research is voluntary, permitting participants to withdraw from the study within one month of their involvement without facing any negative consequences (Leavy, 2017, pp. 34–35; Pople, 2000). To minimize risks to participants, pseudonyms were employed to ensure their identities remained anonymous, except for the priests, who consented to be publicly identified as their ministry is a

matter of public knowledge. Additionally, I have stressed the absolute confidentiality of participants' responses during the interviews.

There were 17 interviewees (see Table 2), eight from St. Mary's parish and nine from St. Basil's parish. Six were females, and 11 were males, including two priests. Before the fieldwork, I planned to select five participants from each parish: two males, two females, and the parish pastor. However, upon noticing that some participants were involved in ministry alongside their life partners, I invited both couple members to participate in the interview. As a result, four pairs of couples—two from each parish—were included among the participants. The average age of the participants was above sixty years. Most of them were in their retirement years, except for three participants who were in their forties and committed to various professions, like teaching and engineering. These participants are actively involved either in the parish leadership or in the parish's various ministries, are regular on Sunday Masses, and have a good rapport with the other parishioners.

Table 2 —List of Interview Participants

	INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AT ST. MARY'S PARISH	INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AT ST. BASIL'S PARISH
1	Alessandro	Antoine
2	Matteo	Étienne
3	Luca	Pierre
4	Giovanni	François
5	Isabella.	Jean-Luc
6	Sofia	Claire
7	Giulia	Émilie
8	Fr. Mark Goring	Véronique
9		Fr. Daryold

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Keeping in mind the recursive process of collecting and analyzing the data, I worked through the five stages of data analysis and interpretation, as explained by sociologist Patricia Leavy (2023, pp. 163–167).

Data Preparation and Organization. In this first stage, I prepared all the data, especially the ones collected through interviews, by transcribing them. Then, I organized them in my password-protected computer for easy access, with backups for all files. I also sorted the data for analysis as a part of the organizing process (for example, making a separate file for field notes and interview data).

Initial Immersion. Once the data was prepared and organized, the next step of analyzing was to immerse myself in the data, which implies listening again to interview tapes, rereading transcripts and rereading field notes (Reimer-Barry, 2011, pp. 109-110). Feeling the data, developing the initial ideas and data reduction were the three significant advantages of this initial immersion (Leavy, 2023)

Coding. Coding is the process of assigning a specific word or phrase to individual segments of data. Leavy states that the coding should be linked to one's research purpose and research questions. Accordingly, using NVivo, the focus of coding was to find the traces of a thriving Catholic community in the two parishes under study. I did a first wave of coding referring to my adaptation of Hofstede's Cultural Layers in a Catholic Context (1980) —symbols, heroes, rituals, and values—to identify the key elements of each parish's culture. I then identified subcodes inductively. In a second coding wave, I used my theoretical framework of a thriving Catholic Church model, paying attention to the four pillars. I labelled all the codes in my field notes and transcripts through NVivo. It was followed by focused coding, where I tried to “winnow out” all the less

valuable codes and selected the relevant codes related to my research question (Van den Hoonaard, 2015, p. 162). This coding process helped me reduce and classify the data generated.

Categorizing and Theming. After formulating the codes through two stages—using four cultural layers and four pillars of a thriving Catholic Church—I categorized all the codes into groups of similar or seemingly related codes. For example, codes like adoration, uplifting music, personal testimony, appealing liturgy, inspiring homily, and sacraments were grouped under the theme ‘personal encounter with Jesus Christ’ (Leavy, 2017, p. 150).

Interpretation. The final phase of the data analysis process involved interpretation. It was the meaning-making process out of the coded data. I tried to elucidate the insights provided by the data concerning the research question, identifying key patterns within the data and contextualizing them within the existing literature (Leavy, 2023, pp. 163–167). For instance, one can illustrate how these two churches had personal encounters with the Lord in their unique ways. One parish embraced a charismatic style of celebration during the liturgy, characterized by expressive gestures such as waving hands. In contrast, the other parish utilized a less demonstrative but profoundly reflective approach to their liturgy, significantly influencing their everyday lives.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have elucidated the underlying rationale for using ethnography as the methodology. Ethnography is one of the most suitable methodologies, particularly in learning an organization’s culture, as it allows an in-depth engagement with the community under study. Although often underutilized, ethnography has significant potential in Catholic theology. It amplifies diverse and frequently marginalized voices, enabling them to be heard and acknowledged. This chapter introduced the research sites, i.e. St. Mary’s Parish and St. Basil’s Parish, and explained the processes involved in data collection, participant selection, and data analysis for this research.

Participant observation, field notes, and open-ended interviews were the three tools employed in this research to collect the data. Research ethics were a central concern, particularly during the interviews and their transcription. I finally explained the coding process that helped extract relevant data about the organizational culture of both parishes and their unique ways of thriving. Based on Hofstede's theoretical framework, the following chapter provides the results upon examining the four cultural layers of both parishes under study.

4 Results: An Examination of the Culture of Each Parish

In the previous two chapters, I have articulated my theoretical framework and the methodological tools applied in this research. As such, I introduced the concept of culture as my starting point to understand the “collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede, 1997, p. 5) at play in the two parishes under study. I now employ this conceptual framework to illustrate how Hofstede's four cultural dimensions manifest within the contexts of St. Mary and St. Basil. In other words, my goal is to pinpoint what is unique about each parish's culture (symbols, heroes, rituals and values) and how these elements shape their everyday operations and overall functioning as a community (Sun, 2008). This factual description provides an overall picture of both parishes before I proceed to an in-depth analysis of the four pillars of a thriving Catholic community.

4.1 Symbols: The Church Architecture and Design

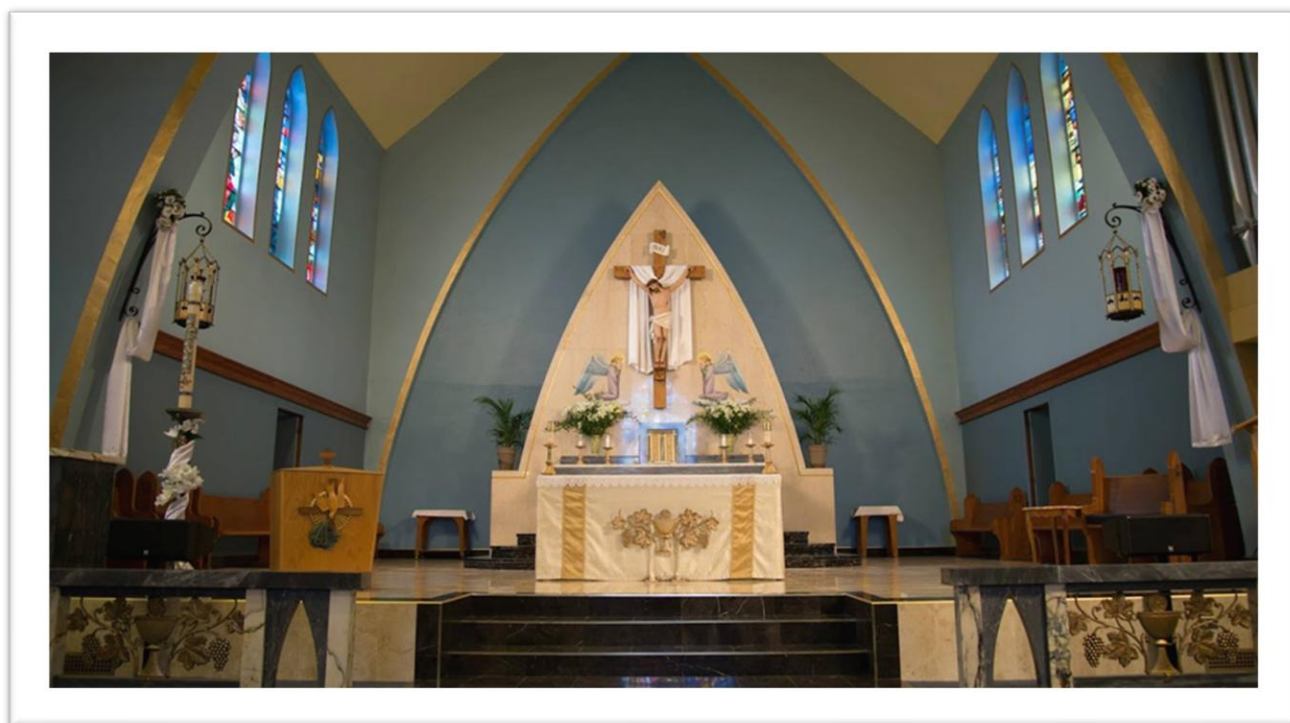
As already seen in the onion diagram, symbols are the outer layers of culture that are most visible among the four layers of the culture. These symbols contain potent stories and messages about a particular culture (Hofstede, 1997). In a Catholic parish church, many symbols such as altar, crucifix, statutes of the saints, parish logos and flags convey meanings and principles about the ecclesiology and theological focus and values of those parishes. Peter Block (2008, p. 152) noted

that the space individuals occupy and gather in serves as a metaphor, indicating the future they envision. Even though there are innumerable symbols associated with a Catholic parish, and many are shared among different churches, in this section, I concentrate on the architectural styles of the sanctuaries in both parish churches where the Holy Mass/Eucharist— the highest form of worship— is celebrated. I particularly examine how the physical disposition of various symbols— such as the altar, tabernacle, and crucifix— is closely connected to each parish worship style, ecclesiological perspective, theological focus and, ultimately, its own culture.

4.1.1 St. Mary's Gothic Sanctuary

The sanctuary at St. Mary's Parish beautifully reflects its theological focus on the transcendence of God, inviting all who enter to worship, adore, and honour the divine with profound reverence. So much like in traditional Catholic churches, the sanctuary (see Picture 3) is elevated, three steps higher than the nave where the congregation gathers for the liturgy. This elevated sanctuary creates a sense of grandeur and transcendence in the atmosphere.

Picture 3 – St. Mary’s Sanctuary (Photo from Google Maps)



A **communion rail/altar rail**⁶ is on the sanctuary’s right and left sides. This is where parishioners (though not all) kneel to receive Holy Communion on the tongue during Mass. Receiving Communion on the tongue with a kneeling posture around the altar rail was common in Roman Catholic churches before Vatican II (Spencer, 2017). The idea was that when one approaches the Lord “with a sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence,” they obtain mercy and grace from the Lord (General Council of Trent, 1562, Session 22, Ch. 2). The parish leadership encourages this traditional practice, as they are considering enlarging the current communion rail to accommodate more people at once. Thus, the presence of these communion rails/altar rails in front of the sanctuary reflects St. Mary’s parish’s appreciation for traditional liturgical practices and how

⁶ Communion rails were a traditional feature in the Catholic church prior to Vatican II. They were a low barrier that separated the laity from the sanctuary. The sanctuary was a symbol of heaven, to which no one was guaranteed entrance except clergy and altar servers. The communion rails also facilitated the communicants’ receiving the Holy Communion, as they were supposed to kneel while they received it (Zimmerman, 2011).

they highlight the significance of approaching the Lord with utmost reverence and honour. One may link the promotion of traditional and pre-Vatican practices, such as communion rails, to Type 1—'Traditional Catholics,'⁷ who emphasize unwavering loyalty to the magisterium (Arbuckle, 2013).

The altar and the gold-plated tabernacle are proper in the center, proclaiming the centrality of the Eucharist. Then, there is a large crucifix prominently placed just above the tabernacle. The angelic figures flanking the crucifix add a heavenly dimension to the scenario. Two other important architectural components are the pointed gold arch framing the sanctuary and the stained-glass windows in the sanctuary. This distinguishing Gothic style is typically associated with medieval Catholicism (Smith, 2006). When one looks at these symbols through the prism of culture, one realizes that they stand for a reason: they speak about the ecclesiological and theological focus of the parish. St. Mary's architecture highlights the prominence of a "Wholly Other"/ transcendent God or heavenly king (Barth, 2004; Otto, 1923). Symbols like communion rails and their actual use tell us how St. Mary's parish appreciates and encourages traditional practices and values of giving the highest honour and reverence to the Lord. These symbols and architectural styles in the church building facilitate St. Mary's Parish, fostering a culture of worship that celebrates God's transcendence and the centrality of the Eucharist.

These symbols shape the parish's identity as a worshiping Christian community rooted in profound reverence and a sense of the Sacred. The broader meaning of the symbols in the church aligns with everything else one finds at St. Mary's parish. For example, the extended worship with

⁷ A cautionary note: the terms such as 'Type 1—Traditional Catholics', 'Type 2 —Vatican II Catholics', and 'progressive' are all sociological labels, mainly borrowed from sociological categorization of Catholic identities by Catholic theologian Gerald A. Arbuckle (1993). They are imperfect tools for describing reality, but they are, nonetheless, important tools for better understanding and describing some of the emphasis of the two parishes under study. As Arbuckle (p. 62, 1993) himself notes, "In practice, the types are not necessarily exclusive of each other, though one type may tend to dominate." Labeling St. Mary's as "Traditional" and St. Basil's as "Vatican II" should not imply that St. Basil's lacks traditional elements or that St. Mary's fails to embrace Vatican II teachings. Such a distinction would misrepresent both parishes' charisms and ecclesiological visions—all of which remain fully loyal to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

waving of hands during the Holy Mass celebrations, charismatic popular songs during the Mass, the homilies and YouTube messages of Fr. Mark, who always ends his YouTube messages saying “Viva Christo Rey”⁸ all points toward a sense of the *mysterium tremendum* (fear-inspiring) *et fascinans* (awe-inspiring), to quote German theologian Rudolf Otto (1923).

4.1.2 St. Basil’s Round Shape

At St. Basil’s Parish, the focus shifts from a Transcendental God to a Kenotic Concept of God, who humbled himself and became poor⁹ (Francis, section 197, 2013; McIntosh, 2000; Von Balthasar, 2000). Known locally as the “Round Church of Ottawa,” the sanctuary’s distinctive circular design sets it apart from traditional church structures. The circular layout was intentionally chosen to bring the congregation closer to the altar – which, years later, became a key emphasis of Vatican II – fostering a sense of unity and intimacy in worship by physically gathering the community around the central focal point of the Eucharistic celebration (Cassery, 2020).

This closely aligns with the statement of Fr. Daryold, St. Basil’s pastor, when he said during an interview: “I want to define this parish as very much influenced by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.” The very absence of the communion rail says something profound. As Claire, a long-time parishioner of St. Basil shared a memory with me: “We used to have a communion rail [since the church was built in 1956]. We used to kneel for communion. But [after Vatican II] they [the parish leadership] took that rail out.” **The removal of communion rails** and the receiving of Holy Communion on hand are all results of post-Vatican II developments (Zimmerman, 2011).

⁸ Interestingly, Fr. Mark Goring has some T-shirts, mugs, scarves and hats – all customized with the caption “Viva Christo Rey,” meaning “Long Live Christ the King”(2024).

⁹ “Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, New Catholic Bible).

Thus, one observes here not only the presence of some symbols but also the removal and absence of others to communicate a theological and ecclesiological emphasis of the Catholic Church, namely wanting the congregation to come closer to the altar “for fully conscious, and active participation” in the Eucharist (Vatican II, No. 14, 1963).

Picture 4 – St. Basil’s Sanctuary (picture by the author)



As shown in Picture 4, anybody accustomed to the elevated sanctuary and gothic architectural styles will be struck with the profound simplicity found in the sanctuary of St. Basil’s parish. The entire space is painted white. There are **no elaborate decorations or gilded elements**, as often found in traditional Catholic sanctuaries. The simplicity of the design seen in the church communicates an intimacy and accessibility that aligns with the idea of God becoming human, who “pitched His tent among us” (America Magazine, 2012).

Unlike at St. Mary’s, **the sanctuary’s low elevation** dissolves barriers and hierarchy, making the altar feel like part of the congregation’s space and reinforcing a welcoming atmosphere. **The presider’s modest and unassuming chair** reflects a poor and humble Christ walking alongside

the people rather than standing above them. Similarly, the ambo and altar are functional rather than ornate, focusing attention on the Word and the Eucharist rather than on visual embellishments. **The green plants** found in the sanctuary are another great symbol that resonates with the parish's unique emphasis on eco-theology and creation spirituality, which affirms the sacredness of every being in nature. This perfectly aligns with Fr. Daryold's interview statement: "Creation spirituality is a big topic in this parish." **The piano** placed near the sanctuary remains a powerful symbol of glorifying and celebrating the immanent presence of the Lord. It serves as a reminder of how music is an excellent part of the liturgical worship at St. Basil's parish.

Another feature I noticed is the **placement of the tabernacle**, which is situated in a side corner rather than at the center. This subtle repositioning reflects a shift in theological focus—from the transcendent God of glory to the Immanent God of relationship. The design suggests that Christ is present not only in the reserved sacrament but also in the gathered assembly of the faithfuls and the breaking of the Word and Bread during the Holy Mass, as found in *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (Catholic Church, section 9, 1967). According to the parish's official website, the **intentional downplaying of statues** and other such elements was a conscious decision to underscore the centrality of the Mass at the altar, elevating it above all other devotional practices (Casserty, 2020). Besides, the crucifix, which is strikingly lean, occupies the central position behind the altar, embodying the sanctuary's focus on simplicity and the immanence of God. This simplicity aligns with the overall architectural aesthetic, reflecting a theology that emphasizes the humility of Christ and the closeness of God, who became man.

Thus, upon closer examination of the presence and absence of symbols in the sanctuary, one comes to realize that the parishioners of St. Basil's Church belong to the 'Vatican II Catholics'—Type 2 in Arbuckle's sociological categorization of Catholic identities (2013), who are profoundly

committed to the Council's theology of the Church and the world¹⁰. Just as the sanctuary's low elevation adds proximity and closeness of the people to the sanctuary and altar, the parishioners foster a Kenotic Concept of God, who humbled himself and became poor. Words of Pierre (pseudonym), a longstanding and active member of St. Basil's parish involved in various initiatives to help the poor and marginalized, aptly testify to and reflect the theological focus of St. Basil's parish: "I think more of a presence here on Earth rather than the idea of a person high in the sky or in heaven or something. I try to see it. Right here and right now." Perhaps this Kenotic Concept of a poor and humble God rather than a transcendental God is one significant reason this parish community spends a great amount of its energy and resources to serve the poor and the marginalized, as they find a God who is suffering and oppressed. The social justice initiatives of St. Basil's parishioners perfectly align with Arbuckle's observation that "Vatican II Catholics" strongly endorse the Council's focus on social justice, grounded in Gospel spirituality.

This section on symbols beautifully contrasts two complementary dimensions of Catholic theology. While St. Mary's parish emphasizes the transcendent God who reigns in glory, St. Basil's parish embodies the Incarnational God who humbles Himself to share in human life. The significance of these architectural styles and symbols lies in the fact that they shape the liturgical experience and the way the faithful come to understand and relate to God and fellow beings.

4.2 Heroes - Key Figures in Shaping the Culture of The Parish

In the previous section, I unpacked the first outer layer of culture —Symbols— found mainly in the sanctuary in both parishes. This section deals with heroes, the second layer in an organization's

¹⁰ I maintain that these labels, such as "traditional" and Vatican II Catholics," are purely sociological in nature. Classifying St. Mary's as "Traditional" and St. Basil's as "Vatican II" does not mean that St. Basil's rejects tradition or that St. Mary's disregards post-conciliar teachings. Such a binary framing would distort the unique charisms and theological visions of both parishes—each of which remains fully committed to the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.

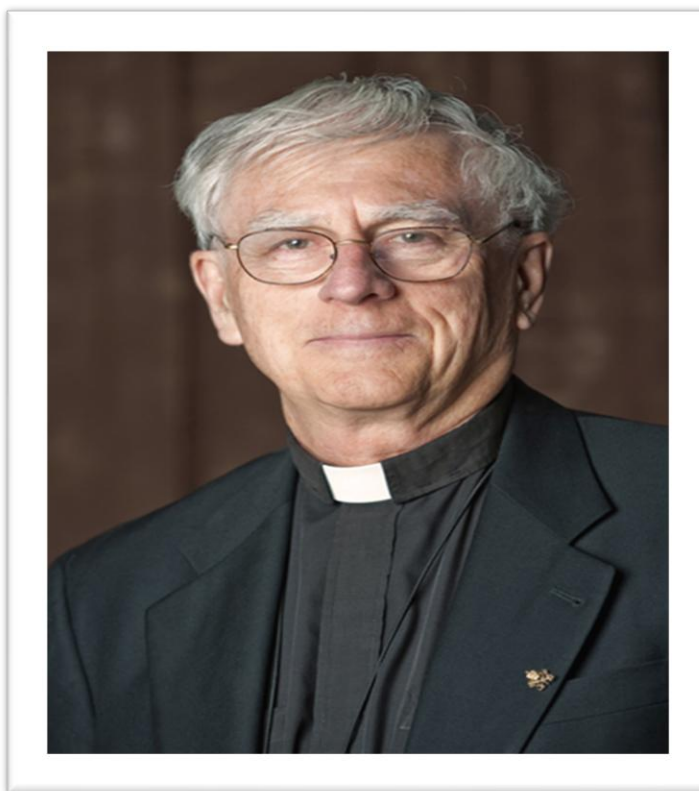
culture. Hofstede defines heroes as individuals who personify an organization's values and beliefs. As shown earlier (see Figure 2, Chapter 2), "heroes" in a Catholic context represent church leaders, pastors, and lay leaders who have a key role in forming a parish culture. Thus, in the following section, I compare who are the key "heroes" in both parishes as they emerged during my fieldwork, and I explore their role in shaping the culture of the parish.

4.2.1 St. Mary's and the Companions of the Cross

During my time at St. Mary's parish, I soon realized through the interactions with many of the parishioners that Fr. Robert J. Bedard and the Companions of the Cross are key figures in the foundation of the parish, as the parishioners highly spoke of these priests. More precisely, Fr. Robert J. Bedard, CC (1929-2011) is the founder of the Companions of the Cross (see picture 5). According to the parishioners, it was Fr. Robert J. Bedard—affectionately known as 'Fr. Bob'—who spearheaded a remarkable revival at St. Mary's Parish. In the fall of 1984, Archbishop Plourde appointed Fr. Bob as pastor of St. Mary's, tasking him with implementing a vision of parish renewal. Drawing on his extensive leadership experience within the Charismatic Renewal movement in Canada¹¹, Fr. Bob undertook this mission with fervour. Later, in 1985, he would go on to establish the religious congregation of priests known as the Companions of the Cross (Companions of the Cross, 2012).

¹¹ From 1975 to 1978, Fr. Bob was appointed by Archbishop Plourde as the official Ottawa Archdiocesan Liaison to the Charismatic Renewal. Between 1982 and 1984, he established the Ottawa Renewal Centre and launched The Lamplighter Newsletter to encourage and educate members of charismatic renewal. These initiatives were part of his efforts to fulfill Archbishop Plourde's vision of integrating the gifts of Charismatic Renewal into the broader Church. The centre provided various services, including daily Mass, a lending library, inner healing prayer, counselling, and meeting space. In addition, Fr. Bob travelled extensively across Canada and the United States, leading conferences and speaking passionately about the renewal of the Church. He shared his vision for parish renewal, emphasized devotion to Mary, and encouraged the development of a personal relationship with the Lord (Companions of the Cross, 2012, pp. 8–11).

Picture 5 – Fr. Robert J. Bedard, CC, the Founding Pastor of St. Mary's (Photo: <https://www.companionscross.org>)



Senior parishioners recall the challenging state of the parish when Fr. Bob assumed leadership. As Lucia, a senior parish member, told me in an informal conversation, “But it [St. Mary’s Parish] was completely dead, and the pastor at the time, Father Bob, said you could throw a snowball from the front of the church to the back without hitting anybody.” Despite this bleak beginning, St. Mary’s Parish experienced significant growth, renewal, and revitalization under his leadership. Although Fr. Bob resigned as pastor in 1990, the parish has since remained under the care of the Companions of the Cross. To put it in the words of Alessandro (pseudonyms): “Even though Father Bedard [Fr. Bob] has been dead for quite a while now, his memory and his direction live on, and they are reinforced by Fr. Mark, Fr. Carlo [pseudonyms], Fr. Domenico [pseudonyms]... you know, again, by the Companions of the Cross.”

Theologically speaking, Fr. Bob and the priests of the Companions of the Cross have strongly emphasized charismatic renewal, fostering personal relationships with the Lord, and promoting devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are deeply committed to fidelity to the Magisterium. Their charismatic approach is especially evident in St. Mary's Sunday Masses, adoration, and spiritual renewal programs. For example, priests and congregants often wave their hands to the music during worship, sing passionately, and sometimes pray in tongues, all while engaging wholeheartedly in the Eucharistic celebration. It is no surprise, then, that Fr. Mark, the current pastor, describes St. Mary's parish as a "conservative, charismatic" parish, which is a reflection of the charism of Companions of Cross. He shared this during our interview:

We [the parishioners and ministers] are open to the charismatic gifts. The praise is exuberant. People lift their hands. There's extended praise. But also, we try to do the liturgy with reverence. We encourage piety... and we also try to keep our teaching orthodox. You know, we don't teach anything that's against the tradition and Magisterium of the Church.

Most people who come to this church are drawn by the authenticity and "conservative, charismatic" style of these priests. As one old lady in the parish told me in a conversation, "These priests don't water down the Gospels and the Church Teachings in their homilies."

4.2.2 St. Basil's, the Basilians and Lay Leadership

Upon examining St. Basil's history, available on the parish website, I realized that lay leaders and the Basilian fathers had played an equal role in shaping the parish's culture. The following section explores these two key groups one by one and how they shaped what can be characterized as "Vatican II Catholics" (Arbuckle, 2013).

It is heartwarming and inspiring to learn that St. Basil's parish was blessed to have such decisive lay leadership under the lay movement called the Christian Family Movement (CFM)¹². The Christian Family Movement at St. Basil's parish was established in 1959. It was a movement led by lay families initially in Chicago (Christian Family Movement USA-History, 2008). The parish history states that these lay couples gathered in small groups to study the Scripture. It is meaningful to note that this kind of Bible study started even before Vatican II when the right to sound religious education for the laity was often denied and unsupported (Sullivan, 2007).

Furthermore, this movement did not limit itself to Scripture learning sessions alone. The members genuinely reflected on how the various insights gained from their study could be integrated into their daily lives and how they could respond to the demands and needs of the society in which they lived. One of CFM's earliest and most impactful initiatives was sponsoring a refugee family and helping them integrate into Canadian society. This act of service, begun in 1958, continues to define St. Basil's reputation for social activism within the Diocese of Ottawa-Cornwall (Casserly, 2020).

Remarkably, these lay members also discussed topics (in the 1960s) such as the role of women in the Church (Casserly, 2020), a subject that has lately gained prominence in the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024). These conversations, taking place well before Vatican II, reflect the progressive spirit and foresight of the parish community. Recently, during my fieldwork, I had the

¹² Christian Family Movement is a national network of parish/neighbourhood small groups of families. Parents meet regularly in one another's homes. Using programming available from the CFM USA Office and the dynamics of small group interaction, Christian values are reinforced, and families are encouraged to reach out in action to others. The CFM group comprises five to seven families, with the adults meeting two evenings a month in each other's homes. Through the use of CFM's many different programs, members discuss what they have observed in their own family or community, judge what they have seen in the light of Jesus' teaching, and then act to improve things. The observe/judge/act technique is the "Jocist Method," pioneered by Canon Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Worker Movement in Belgium. Through this method, many CFM families have become involved in helping others in such ministries as foster parenting, prison ministry, refugee sponsorship, religious education and couple counselling" (Christian Family Movement USA-History, 2008).

opportunity to attend a “Lunch and Learn” session at St. Basil’s church after a Sunday Mass. The Catholic Women’s League convened the session and featured Professor Catherine Clifford, who attended the Synod on Synodality in Rome. She emphasized lay empowerment and the broader participation of women in the Church. This indicates that the progressive mindset initiated in the parish’s early years continues to thrive and is marked by vibrant lay leadership, both men and women. The words of an elderly woman I met at a “Prayer for Peace” event organized by L’Arche Ottawa and St. Basil’s Church capture this spirit: “This parish is full of intelligent Catholics.” Her observation perfectly encapsulates the culture of St. Basil’s Parish—progressive in both thought and action.

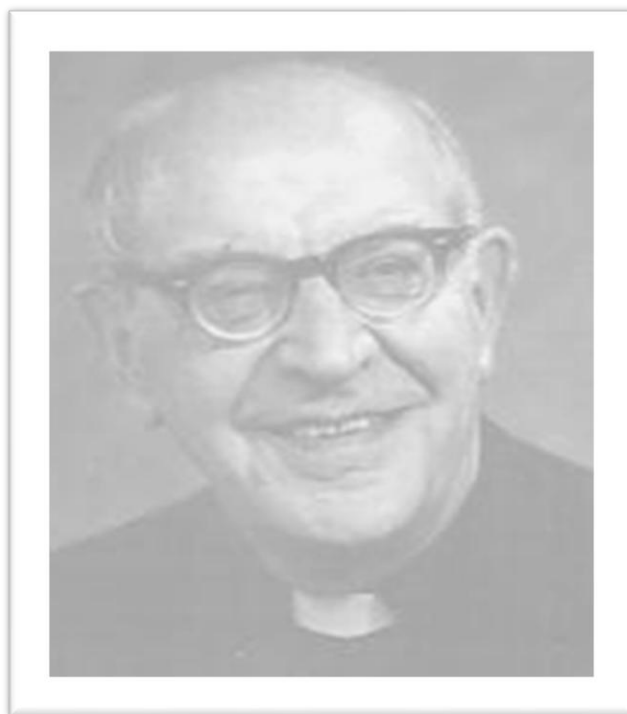
Historically speaking, introducing the Christian Family Movement (CFM) marked a profound shift toward shared leadership between clergy and laity at St. Basil’s. The movement strengthened the lay leadership and laid the foundation for the parish’s enduring commitment to social justice (Casserly, 2020). This legacy of lay-led activism remains a cornerstone of St. Basil’s identity today. The parish website lists Lillian Bergin, Tomas De Fayer and June Lewis under the caption “Parish Heroes,” recognizing their significant influence in the parish and the local community’s spiritual, social and political arenas.

That being said, the central role of lay leaders is only half of the story. The other half is tied to the Basilian Fathers. According to parish records, the original name of the parish was St. Paolo Corsini’s parish when the Congregation of St. Basil assumed leadership of St. Basil’s parish in 1958. The Basilians requested that the parish be renamed in honour of their patron saint, St. Basil the Great, a fourth-century bishop, teacher, and doctor of the Church. This renaming was formalized on 18 January 1958 (Casserly, 2020). Initially, parish gatherings were held at Nepean High School on Sundays and later relocated to the gymnasium of St. Joseph’s High School. On Christmas Eve in

1960, the parish celebrated its first Mass in a newly constructed, distinctive round church. For 34 years, from 1958 to 1992, the Basilian Fathers played a significant role in the spiritual and communal life of the parish. Their contributions, alongside the active participation of the laity, are recognized in the parish Mission statement, which highlights that the parish is “rich in a heritage built by laity and Basilians” (Casserly, 2020).

St. Basil’s parish has been fortunate to have many distinguished pastors from the Basilian congregation who have significantly influenced its ecclesiological and theological perspectives. Among them, Fr. John Ruth (see picture 6) stands out as a remarkable figure. He was the founding pastor of St. Basil’s and served for approximately 21 years across three different tenures. According to the parish website, Fr. John was an “exceptional pastor” who “played a crucial role in shaping the parish’s culture and the worship space itself” (Casserly, 2008, 2020).

Picture 6 – Fr. John Ruth CSB, the Founding Pastor of St. Basil’s (Photo from Parish Jubilee Souvenir)



Fr. John was instrumental in designing the church building's unique circular layout. He had an extraordinary ability to remember the names of all his parishioners and often visited their homes on foot. In addition to being an excellent pastor, Fr. John was deeply concerned about the poor children in the neighbourhood, particularly those unable to attend school. He encouraged parishioners to support the less fortunate in the community actively. A powerful testimony from Marion Dewar, a former mayor of Ottawa and a parishioner of St. Basil's, highlights Fr. John's profound influence on her social activism. Many of the social justice initiatives at St. Basil's can be traced back to this dedicated pastor, who genuinely cared for the poor (Casserly, 2008).

In sum, while the culture of St. Mary's parish has been significantly shaped by Fr. Bob and Companions of the Cross, the identity and ethos of St. Basil's Church have been equally influenced by two key entities: the Basilian Fathers and the laity. Together, these groups have defined the parish's unique character and legacy, serving as "heroes" of St. Basil's parish. The fact that two religious communities have impacted these parishes in different ecclesiological ways speaks volumes about the richness and tensions within the Catholic tradition.

4.3 Rituals: Key Ministries Gathering the Community

I have inspected, so far, the symbols and heroes of St. Mary's and St. Basil's parishes. In the following section, I delve into rituals, the third layer of organizational culture according to Hofstede. As explained earlier, rituals refer to socially established activities within an organization. In the context of a Catholic parish, I have adopted this concept to represent sacraments and sacred liturgy, meetings, catechetical programmes, parish events, evangelization, and missionary activities. Since rituals encompass a wide range of programs and since this paper further analyzes some of these rituals in the next chapter, the focus here is only on some of the key ministries of the parish that I

witnessed during my fieldwork. Sacred liturgy and sacramental celebrations are addressed in the next chapter.

4.3.1 St. Mary's and Its (Re)Conversion Driven Activities

St. Mary's Parish offers its members various 'rituals'/ministries, including New Life Retreat, Alpha, Encounter Ministry, and Youth Nights. While there are many other ministries, such as Evangelization Outreach, I focus on exploring these four in detail. One reason is that these programs are conducted within the parish church building and attract many people aside from Mass. Secondly, these ministries are closely tied to one of their core values—'discipleship'—a key term that appears repeatedly in their Mission statement, vision statement, and values and is a vital component of parish life, as highlighted on the parish website (link: <https://www.stmarysottawa.ca>).

4.3.1.1 *New Life Retreat Ministry*

The New Life Retreat aims to give Catholics and those returning to the practice of their faith an opportunity to hear how they can renew their decision to follow Jesus and come alive in their faith. The parish organizes the New Life Retreat every four months. It is open to Catholics and non-Catholics, including those sincerely seeking meaning in their lives by understanding the truth of God's Word. To some extent, as a ritual, this retreat is a gateway to St. Mary's and a way to help participants bridge the faith-life gap.

Here is an example of how this approach goes. On 18 October 2024, I participated in the opening day of one edition of the New Life Retreat. The retreat began at 7.00 p.m. in the parish hall. Participants were required to register online before the retreat or at the front desk upon arrival. As each person registered, they were given a name tag. The event began with a song by a lady who played guitar while singing, setting a welcoming and reflective tone. Afterward, the coordinators

introduced themselves and the speakers. There were approximately 20 members on the team, some of whom were called “shepherds” and were assigned to assist participants as needed. The introductions were light-hearted, with the speakers incorporating humour to create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. I noticed that the seating was arranged theatre-style, with approximately 40 attendees. Some participants were from the parish, while others travelled from distant parishes.

A wide range of demographics was present: White Canadians, Africans, Mexicans, Filipinos, and Polish people, both male and female, spanning different ages. Some attended for the first time, while others participated in previous retreats. Interestingly, non-Catholics were among the participants, emphasizing the retreat’s inclusivity. During the introductions, several newly immigrated participants expressed their desire to seek the Sacrament of Confession or find a parish to join. In contrast, others desired to deepen their relationship with Jesus or “keep the fire burning.”

The retreat was structured with talks by various speakers, praise and worship, baptismal renewal, the Sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist (see picture 7). It began on Friday and concluded on Sunday. The first talk was given by a parishioner from St. Mary’s, who spoke about the unconditional love of God the Father, emphasizing that all are His beloved children. The speaker shared personal experiences, which seemed to resonate with the audience. I noticed that when she became emotional during a particularly touching and traumatic story, many participants were visibly moved, and some even cried. The talk concluded with a video presentation— “A Letter from God the Father,”—crafted from Bible verses arranged in the form of a letter. It was an impactful way to wrap up the session. As participants left, they were given a physical copy of the letter, rolled up and tied with a ribbon, providing them with a tangible reminder of the message shared.

Picture 7 – Prayer Service during Encounter Ministry (Photo from Parish website: <https://www.stmarysottawa.ca>)



Due to unforeseen circumstances, I could not participate in the subsequent days of the retreat. However, many participants shared that it was a profoundly enriching experience that renewed and deepened their faith. They particularly highlighted the renewal of Baptismal vows, describing it as deeply moving, as it reminded them of the profound value of the Christian vocation they received at their Baptism. As I listened to more testimonies and interviewed some parishioners who attended the New Life Retreat, I realized that the retreat truly lives up to its name—it brings new life and meaning to those who feel lost, whose dreams have been shattered by life's hardships, and who are searching for hope. Isabella's story is a striking example.

Isabella (pseudonym), whom I had the privilege to interview, was a Protestant before marrying her first husband, a Catholic. Tragically, she endured an abusive relationship that left her feeling broken and eventually led to divorce. In the aftermath, Isabella found no meaning in her life.

Faith seemed irrelevant, and she began to question whether Jesus was even alive, given the immense pain she was enduring. She experienced what Kuzmochka and Ste-Marie (2022) describe as a “faith-life gap.” Here is an excerpt from my interview with her:

Well, my personal relationship [with Jesus], I’d say, didn’t start until I came to Saint Mary’s. The pastors here taught us how to do that. Plus, the New Life Retreat was huge in my life. I took that in 1994, when I first came here. At that point, I had been divorced and separated from my husband. Before I met Luca [her second husband], there was a 22-year span where I wasn’t married. I was single, not dating—nothing. But through the New Life Retreat, it really woke me up. **It made me realize that Jesus was alive, that he was real, and that he loved me.** Even though I had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit probably 15 years before that, I wasn’t able to walk in my faith because I was in an abusive relationship that held me back. Once that ended in 1994, I came here. That’s when my relationship with the Lord really blossomed.

If one connects Isabella’s transformative experience with the insights of Kuzmochka (p.34, 2024) in her newly released book—” Every person has the right to adult catechesis that helps them deeply discover their identity and affirm their dignity as beloved of God”— it becomes clear that the New Life Retreat serves as a powerful tool for individuals like Isabella who felt abandoned and lonely, to experience the divine forgiveness and God’s unconditional love. This retreat sparked a profound transformation in her life, enabling her to move from isolation to one of belonging and purpose. Today, Isabella is an active St. Mary’s Parish member and one of the animators in a spiritual ministry group, inspiring others through her faith journey.

Furthermore, the diversity of the participants—representing different cultural backgrounds and faith journeys—highlights the parish’s role as a hub of spiritual renewal for its members and the wider community, including non-Catholics. This dynamic suggests St. Mary may become a spiritual center for those beyond its immediate congregation. Another aspect that stood out was that the retreat coordinators and speakers were all parishioners rather than outside facilitators. This underscores the parish’s strong internal capacity for spiritual leadership.

4.3.1.2 *Alpha*

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions that delve into the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Each session focuses on a different question, fostering open, meaningful conversations in a relaxed, welcoming environment. There is no pressure, no follow-up, and no cost—it is intended to be a safe space to explore life’s big questions with others. Designed for adults aged 18 and up, Alpha includes engaging teaching films and opportunities to ask questions. It covers the core beliefs shared by Christian Churches, making it an ideal starting point for those curious about faith. Alpha is especially suited for individuals who have yet to experience a relationship with Jesus or the profound and lasting warmth of God’s love. It is a journey of discovery, offering a foundation to build upon (St. Mary’s Parish, 2022c).

I attended the Alpha experience at St. Mary’s, scheduled from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., on a Monday evening. The meeting was held in the basement hall of the parish. The room was brightly lit, with tables arranged for group interactions. A projector was set up to display teaching videos, and coffee and snacks were available. At the front desk, I was greeted by Giovanni and Giulia (pseudonyms), an elderly couple who coordinated the Alpha Program. They warmly introduced me to the Alpha experience, noting that it was my first time. Giovanni explained that the Alpha program is not about ‘stealing sheep’ but creating an honest space for participants to explore life’s big questions, regardless of their religious beliefs. He requested that I not disclose my identity as a priest to maintain a safe environment. I did not perceive withholding my clerical identity as ethically problematic, as the program’s design explicitly prioritizes participant anonymity regarding religious affiliations. Moreover, there were no precise critical occasions that required disclosing my identity. By adopting the positionality of a “newcomer” (akin to first-time participants), I adhered to the program’s norms while mitigating risks of perceived authority influencing discussions. This

approach ensures the psychological safety of all participants, promoting open communication and understanding—a key dimension of positive organizational culture (Radu, 2023). Ensuring psychological safety is also one of the crucial building blocks of a learning organization (Garvin et al., 2008). I also noticed that the parish pastors were not present to supervise or direct the event, giving Giovanni and Giulia the freedom to lead in their way. This reflected a broader culture of shared leadership (Northouse, 2022) within the parish, where laypeople are empowered to take the initiative without constant oversight from the clergy, a practice I found refreshing.

Picture 8 – Alpha Group Interactions (Photo from Alpha Website: <https://alphacanada.org>)



The gathering comprised three groups of around ten participants, a mix of young adults and elderly individuals, white Canadians, and people of colour, most dressed casually. Interestingly, the session started with snacks and coffee rather than prayer, likely to accommodate the diversity of religious and non-religious backgrounds. The participants gathered their refreshments and sat in circles at their tables, as instructed by the coordinators. Each group had a leader from the Alpha team to facilitate discussion. Giovanni briefly addressed the participants, setting expectations for

group behaviour: respecting each other, allowing everyone to speak without pressure, and humorously reminding the participants that “this program is not about grabbing sheep.” He then played the worship song “What A Beautiful Name” by Hillsong Worship, which created a spiritual atmosphere. Many participants sang along, which was a beautiful moment of unity. This was followed by a teaching video on faith, which concluded with the question, “What does faith mean to you?”—the starting point for our first group discussion. In my group, participants represented a variety of ages and backgrounds, both religious and non-religious. The group leader encouraged voluntary sharing and reminded us there were no right or wrong answers, fostering an open, supportive environment. As the discussion progressed, the leader periodically reiterated the question to keep everyone focused.

Throughout the evening, participants watched several teaching videos, each ending with a question for further group interaction. The videos featured individuals speaking about their personal faith journeys and how they developed a relationship with Jesus Christ. The following discussions were heartfelt; some participants even moved to tears as they shared deeply personal experiences. It was touching to witness others offer comfort with simple gestures and warm glances, underscoring the sense of connection that emerged within the group. As some shared their stories, others often related, remarking that they had similar thoughts or experiences, which deepened communal understanding. There were moments of light-heartedness as well, with participants sharing amusing anecdotes from their lives.

Reflecting on the Alpha programme, I was struck by how it provided a space for everyone to be heard, fostering a sense of healing through shared dialogue. This may have been the only venue for some participants to openly discuss their views and experiences, particularly on deep, faith-related topics. This inclusive, dialogue-driven approach embodies the essence of synodality

(Francis, 2015b), which emphasizes the importance of listening to one another. It was also remarkable to witness a Catholic parish hosting an event that brought together individuals of diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds, creating a space to explore and share their faith journeys in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. The energy and enthusiasm of the Alpha participants—Catholics and non-Catholics—demonstrate the practical significance of low-key faith discussions open to everyone, as envisaged by Catto et al. (2003). These discussions, with their practicality, are powerful tools for the local parishes to reconnect with a society increasingly identifying with “No Religion” (Government of Canada, 2022c). Having explored the Alpha program as a tool of low-key faith discussion, I illustrate the following ritual: Encounter Ministry.

4.3.1.3 Encounter Ministry

The Encounter School Ministry is an international charismatic-formative programme designed to “activate” disciples of Christ, focusing on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It has campuses worldwide, all reviewed and approved by the local bishop(s). In Ottawa, the program is hosted by St. Mary’s Parish, which serves as its local campus (link: <https://encounterschool.org/ottawa/>).

The Encounter School of Ministry offers a part-time, two-year training program for Christians of all backgrounds (see picture 9). The program is rooted in Catholic tradition and teachings (Encounter School of Ministry, 2020). Sr. Anna Chan, SC, was the coordinator of the Encounter Ministry in Ottawa. Sessions include worship, small group discussions, teachings, activations, and testimonies. These activities aim to deepen participants’ relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Encounter Ministry is held at St. Mary’s every Tuesday evening from 6:15 to 9:30 p.m.

I attended one of these sessions in October. I arrived at 7:00 p.m. as group discussions were underway. A volunteer explained that this cohort began in early September, and participants have

been in assigned groups since then. When I briefly shared my research purpose, she encouraged me to observe, mentioning that a teaching session would follow the discussions. About 50-60 people were present, gathered in seven groups facilitated by team leaders, including Servants of the Cross Sisters. Participants engaged with visible joy and attentiveness, listening and sharing freely, evoking a sense of community involvement like recent synodal table-group discussions.

After the group discussions, a pre-recorded teaching session by Fr. Mathias Thelen, Co-Founder and President of Encounter Ministries was displayed on the big screen. The teaching session focused on repentance and the universal call to holiness. Fr. Mathias drew on sources from Catholic tradition, including the Catechism of the Catholic Church, reinforcing that every Christian is called to holiness by baptism. A memorable moment came when he invited participants to declare, “Sin has no power over me because Jesus is in me,” which participants repeated aloud, strengthening the communal sense of identity in Christ. The journal writing exercise for this session asked, “Jesus, how do you want me to shift my mindset in this season to see myself as dead to sin?” The room fell into a deep, reflective silence as participants journaled.

Testimonies followed, and participants shared profound personal stories. One woman identified herself with the “prodigal son” and shared that the session helped her view herself as God’s beloved daughter. Another woman expressed that God had reminded her, “How can I not love you if I am your Father and Creator?” She added that before joining the Ministry, she had struggled to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Since attending Encounter, she felt compelled to attend Mass regularly, strengthening her belief and commitment.

Picture 9 – Encounter Participants Engaging in learning sessions, Praise and worship, Socialization

(Photo from Ottawa Encounter Ministry:

<https://encounterschool.org › ottawa>)



Witnessing these stories, I reflected on the ministry's powerful impact. Without such ministries, would these individuals have found the same transformative experience? The testimonies suggested that Encounter Ministry provided vital support for growth in faith and commitment.

Archbishop Marcel Damphousse’s vision of Encounter Ministries - “equipping Catholics to become missionary disciples through encounters with Jesus Christ”- resonated in this setting (Encounter School of Ministry, 2020).

What stood out was journal writing as a key “Activation” exercise in Encounter Ministry. The participants were guided by a prompt: “Jesus, how do you want me to shift my mindset this season to see myself as dead to sin?” The room fell into a deep, reflective silence as participants journaled. Soft music played as participants reflected and wrote in their journals, creating a meditative atmosphere. Journaling and coaching are powerful tools for transformative learning in the learning process of the participants (Meyer, 2009). It helps the participants revisit, recreate and reinterpret their stories. For example, the testimony by a woman shifting her image as a “prodigal son” into God’s beloved daughter could be interesting, as it shows how journaling and coaching are beneficial for people with low self-esteem and who feel cut off from the community.

Encounter ministry encourages participants to examine themselves and fosters a more profound, intentional relationship with Jesus through guided practices such as journal writing and coaching. However, it is crucial to approach the emphasis of Encounter Ministry on supernatural gifts, signs and miracles with discernment (Encounter School of Ministry, 2020). While the gifts of the Holy Spirit are powerful and transformative, an overemphasis on charismatic experiences without discernment can sometimes lead to the neglect of ordinary human life, genuine relationships within one’s family and society, and the call to serve the poor and suffering (Francis, section 198, 2013). This imbalance warrants serious caution. In my 10 years of pastoral ministry, I have encountered situations where individuals deeply engaged in charismatic worship and evangelization overlooked their essential responsibilities to their families and communities. For instance, some were so focused on spiritual activities—such as prayer meetings, healing services, or evangelization

events—that they neglected their roles as parents, spouses, or caregivers. This disconnect can create a false dichotomy between spiritual life and everyday responsibilities, as if the latter were unrelated to one’s faith journey. True discipleship requires a holistic approach, where charismatic gifts are exercised harmoniously with the ordinary yet sacred duties of family life, social responsibility, and care for the marginalized.

As I left, I spoke with Matteo (pseudonym), the parishioner who had introduced me to the ministry. He shared that Encounter Ministry had inspired him to go for the sacrament of confession for the first time in years, deepening his faith in tangible ways. His story echoed the recurring theme I had observed throughout the Encounter Ministry: a commitment to discipleship and personal transformation (Encounter School of Ministry, 2020). When one steps back and reflects further, one understands that St. Mary’s parish is transforming into a spiritual military camp by hosting this two-year-long intensive international formative program based on Catholic heritage and teachings. It trains and forms Christian soldiers—empowering Christian disciples through a process of ‘(Re)Conversion Driven Activities.’ These initiatives align closely with one of the core values of St. Mary’s parish culture: ‘discipleship’(St. Mary’s Parish, 2019).

4.3.1.4 Steadfast + Spirited Youth Nights

‘Steadfast + Spirited Youth Nights’ is a program designed for youth in grades 6-12 to gather and deepen their Catholic faith in a fun, faith-filled environment. The theme for this program is taken from Matthew 10:32: “Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father” (St. Mary’s Parish, 2022b). Held every Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., the evening includes various activities such as games, worship, talks, snacks, adoration, confession, and small group discussions.

I had the opportunity to witness the Youth Night program once. Approximately 80-90 youth attended the program. The evening began with a greeting and introduction from the pastor, Fr. Mark, who gathered everyone in a circle in the church courtyard. As I observed the large group, I could not help but wonder how this parish succeeded in drawing so many young people when other parishes often struggle to attract even a few. The evening then transitioned to games, where the youth animator, Paolo (pseudonym), divided the participants by age and assigned them different spaces in the parish hall. Alongside Paolo, three other leaders were present to facilitate the activities, some of whom were youth leaders. It was evident that Paolo had a strong rapport with the youth, as the room was filled with laughter and excitement. What stood out to me was the absence of gender segregation during the games; everyone played together seamlessly.

Picture 10 – St. Mary's Youth participating in various cultural/social/spiritual activities (St. Mary's Photo Library)



While the games were ongoing, I spoke with a young man from Brazil who approached me. We exchanged greetings, and he expressed interest in learning about my religious congregation, the Franciscan Capuchins. Our conversation touched on Catholicism in our home countries and how it

differs in Canada. This interaction highlighted that many young people are eager to learn more about Catholicism and explore a deeper relationship with the Church and Jesus.

After about an hour, Paolo announced it was time to move to the church for a talk. The topic was Marian consecration, which a member of the Youth Animation Team delivered. The youth were scattered throughout the church, some paying close attention while others were distracted, chatting or checking their phones. Despite this, the talk was well-received by those sitting closer to the front. The young woman speaker shared her testimony of consecrating herself to the Blessed Virgin Mary. A PowerPoint presentation accompanied the talk, though the text was complex to read from a distance.

Following the talk, adoration was held, and Paolo announced that priests were available for confession. I, too, heard confessions along with Fr. Mark, and the sincerity of the youth struck me as they approached the sacrament with seriousness and heartfelt intentions. The night continued with small group discussions, where the youth engaged in lively conversations with their peers. This segment of the evening returned to age- and gender-based groups, with youth leaders facilitating discussions. The evening concluded with coffee, snacks, and a strong sense of fellowship. Overall, I believe ‘Steadfast + Spirited Youth Nights’ successfully blended fun, games, and social interaction with more profound moments of worship, confession, and faith-sharing. Seeing such a vibrant and engaged group of young people actively participating in parish life was encouraging. It also demonstrates how creative St. Mary can be in addressing the pastoral needs of various constituencies with the same message—” To worship God, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, lead others into relationship with Him, and grow together as His disciples” (St. Mary’s Parish, 2019)—but with different “packaging.”

The active presence of Canadian youth at St. Mary's parish is a refreshing contrast to the declining trend of religiosity in Canada and other Western countries (Clarke, 2017; Government of Canada, 2022b). This unique situation prompts one to appreciate the collaborative culture of St. Mary's parish. The dynamism and creative ways of St. Mary's youth gatherings, viewed through the lens of positive organizational culture scholars like Radu (2023) and L.Pathiranage (2019), highlight the role of collaboration and teamwork in enhancing productivity, innovation, and creativity. The parish's teamwork environment, where it substantially collaborates with other young lay leaders in their pastoral ministry rather than relying on a single priest for every task, is a key factor in fostering youth engagement.

4.3.2 St. Basil's and Its Community-Building Activities

Like in St. Mary's Parish, one can find a wide range of "rituals" at St. Basil's Parish too. However, the nature of these rituals is very different since the extra-liturgical activities I have observed are more geared toward social than standard worship activities. I analyze four here to explore the parish culture: mission and social justice, refugee ministry (which includes the refugee ministry), socialization and community building, and Kateri Ministry.

4.3.2.1 *Mission and Social Justice and Refugee Ministry*

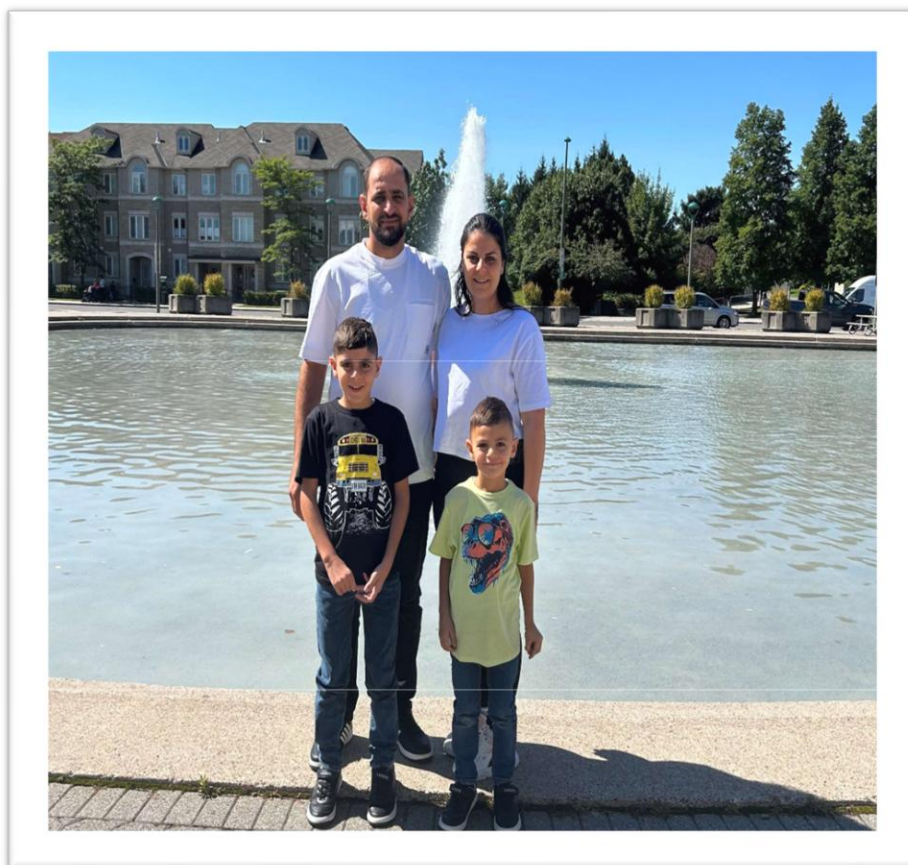
The parish has a dedicated Mission and Social Justice Committee, the largest committee in the church, with 14 members. This committee organizes various activities focused on mission and social justice, like collaborating with the Multifaith Housing Initiative and hosting workshops by Jesuit Refugee Services Canada. They meet monthly to discuss matters related to community engagement and the allocation of funds for their initiatives.

During my fieldwork at St. Basil, I had the opportunity to interview Étienne (pseudonym), one of the key leaders in the Mission and Social Justice Committee. His emphasis on the term

‘empowerment’ over charity was particularly striking. He articulated that their goal is not merely to provide temporary relief but to enable the poor and marginalized to achieve self-sufficiency. This perspective highlights a shift from passive aid to active partnership in transformation. He stressed that authentic engagement with people is critical for fostering a sense of mission. The committee views all their social justice endeavours as living out the Gospel, turning faith into action.

One important endeavour under the Mission and Social Justice committee is the Refugee Ministry. I had an insightful conversation with François (pseudonym), who has been a parish member for 40 years and actively involved in the Refugee Ministry for the past decade. During this time, the parish has supported four refugee families from Syria. François explained that the parish commits to supporting these families for one year, assisting with accommodation, food, Canadian residency paperwork, and education access. An inspiring aspect of this refugee ministry is the involvement of retired parish teachers who voluntarily teach English to the refugees.

Picture 11 – The Alkhoury family, refugees from Syria sponsored by St.Basil's (St. Basil's Refugee Committee Update, 2024)



I can provide a brief account of how St. Basil's Church has been instrumental in offering vital support to the Alkhoury family, Syrian refugees who recently arrived in Canada after a challenging journey marked by displacement, war, and adversity(see picture 11). The parish sponsored the family through a process spanning over three years, ensuring their safe arrival and transition to a new life in Ottawa (St. Basil's Refugee Committee Update, 2024). Upon their arrival, St. Basil's demonstrated tangible care by securing and furnishing a townhouse for the family. The parish also facilitated their integration by enrolling the parents in English language training and arranging for the children to attend school, laying the foundation for their education and future opportunities. Furthermore, the church's Refugee Committee mobilized community support to assist

with the family's financial and social needs, underscoring their commitment to fostering stability and hope for the Alkhourys (St. Basil's Refugee Committee Update, 2024).

Through these actions, St. Basil's enabled the family to escape a precarious situation and gave them a sense of safety, community, and optimism for the future. These extensive efforts exemplify the parish's dedication to its refugee ministry and its broader mission of compassion and social justice. Although the families that have been adopted over the ten years by St. Basil's parish were all Catholics, the parish also has a history of adopting families from other faiths, such as Muslims, as one of the parishioners who was in charge of the refugees during its earlier stage told me very emphatically and proudly that their only demand to the Catholic Immigration Service was "Give us a family that nobody wants." This mindset further speaks to St. Basil's interfaith conception of the world. St. Basil's parish welcomes everyone, regardless of their faith, where the marginalized are valued and heard, a quality of a positive organizational culture (Gardenswartz, 2008; Radu, 2023). Having elucidated the social justice initiatives by St. Basil's, the subsequent section analyzes another key dimension: socialization and community building.

4.3.2.2 Socialization and Community Building

St. Basil's parish focuses on fostering socialization and community building. It also significantly emphasizes creating opportunities for parishioners to connect and build relationships. During my visit, I attended three dinners hosted at the parish during Christmas. Upon inquiring, I learned from parishioners that such gatherings are not limited to Christmas alone. For example, the Knights of Columbus organize community dinners four times yearly, among other social events.

One particularly memorable event was the Christmas Turkey Dinner, organized by the Knights of Columbus, which I attended alongside parishioners. This gathering exemplified the

parish's commitment to nurturing a sense of belonging and togetherness among its members, reflecting the broader culture of hospitality and engagement that defines the community.

Picture 12 – Christmas Turkey Dinner at St. Basil's Church (photo by the author)



The Christmas Turkey Dinner at St. Basil (see picture 12) Parish provided a vivid snapshot of community life, blending tradition, celebration, and social purpose. The hall was beautifully decorated, exuding a festive atmosphere. Tables were neatly arranged in long rows, covered with white cloths and accented with red napkins, reflecting the season's warmth. Poinsettias, garlands, and red ribbons adorned the walls and pillars, creating a truly inviting environment. The evening began with Fr. Daryold blessing the meals. It was profoundly moving that Fr. Daryold decided to say grace in his Indigenous language, translating each word into English and encouraging attendees to repeat it in the Indigenous language. Witnessing how he integrated cultural elements into this parish event added layers of inclusivity and depth. This act bridges cultural divides, reminding me of the importance of recognizing and honouring diverse identities within a community.

The attendees, predominantly older parishioners, radiated remarkable energy. Their laughter and singing filled the space, demonstrating that the spirit of celebration transcends age. Despite many being retirees, their vibrancy was contagious, highlighting their active engagement in parish life. The food was delicious, but the interactions and exchanges during the meal truly stood out to me. Volunteers dressed in red cheerfully moved through the hall, ensuring everyone had what they needed. Their dedication and visible joy underscored the collective effort that made the evening special. The evening's singing was a standout feature, adding vibrancy and joy to the event. The group performed several popular songs, but "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" rendition was particularly memorable. Their spirited singing still resonates with me. The parishioners fully immersed themselves in the music—singing along, snapping their fingers, and swaying to the rhythm. The joy on their faces was indescribable, radiating a sense of unity and shared happiness..

This gathering was far more than just a shared meal; it was a heartfelt celebration of community and togetherness. The enthusiastic participation created harmonies that reflected the deep connections among parishioners. As Fr. Daryold rightly pointed out during the interview.

Through things like dinners, Christmas dinner, Yeah, the Knights of Columbus are often, I mean 4 times a year. They make a brunch after mass, we come down and they make eggs and sausage and potato and beans and stuff like that. So that is a real way to create to build community.

Adding to the significance of the evening, the funds raised during the dinner were directed toward parish development programs and social justice initiatives, giving the celebration a meaningful and purposeful dimension. Toward the end of the program, I was invited to draw the ticket for the lucky dip winner—a small yet meaningful role that added a personal touch to the evening. The prize was around CAD 250, and the winner, an elderly lady, declined to keep the money. Instead, she generously directed it to parish development programs and social justice

initiatives. This act of selflessness exemplified the commitment of parishioners to the growth and mission of their community.

The event lasted nearly two and a half hours, seamlessly blending food, fellowship, and fun. Reflecting on the experience, I was struck by how this dinner encapsulated the essence of a thriving parish. It was not simply about enjoying a meal; it was a testament to the parish as the community's beating heart. The evening showcased the beauty of collective celebration, mutual support, and a shared mission, leaving a lasting impression of joy and unity. In short, this gathering marked cultural inclusivity, volunteer engagement, and the transformation of a religious community into an extended family. One might agree with Archbishop Durocher (2019) that the trustworthiness of a Church that declares God's love lies in these fraternal gatherings, where members share their love and belongingness to the community.

Picture 13 – Senior members playing Bridge at the Parish Basement Hall (photo by the author)



St. Basil's Bridge Club (see picture 13) provides an opportunity for senior parish members to gather weekly for fellowship and recreation. Every Wednesday afternoon, participants meet in the parish's basement hall to play Bridge, often occupying five tables with four players each. The

sessions begin at 1:00 p.m. and include a tea break around 2:30 p.m., after which they reconvene to play until approximately 3:45–4:00 p.m. (St. Basil’s Parish, n.d.).

Originally started as “Ladies Bridge Clubs at Home,” the group began over 50 years ago with women hosting games in each other’s homes for companionship and card playing. Over time, as membership declined, the club was reimagined as St. Basil’s Bridge Club to include senior men. The group welcomes new players and has become a longstanding parish tradition. Each year, its members contribute donations to support the parish’s development and social justice projects, reflecting their commitment to the community. Thus, one understands how socializing and community building are indispensable ‘rituals’ of St. Basil’s parish, manifesting its underlying values of the significance of fostering fraternal communities in a thriving Catholic parish. In the next section, I explore Kateri ministry, another beautiful “ritual” at St. Basil’s parish.

4.3.2.3 Kateri Native Ministry

The Kateri Native Ministry has been devoted to Indigenous peoples’ healing, reconciliation, and spiritual growth for over two decades. Their monthly Eucharistic celebration occurs on the second Saturday of each month at 5 p.m. at St. Basil’s Parish. This Mass offers Indigenous people a sacred opportunity to rediscover their connection with the Catholic Church, expressing gratitude to the Creator, lifting their prayers, and participating fully in worship. Beyond the liturgy, it fosters community reconnection through shared food, music, and fellowship (Kateri Native Ministry, 2024; St. Basil’s Catholic Parish, 2024).

The Mass on 14 December 2024 was presided over by Fr. Peter Bisson, a Jesuit priest of Indigenous heritage, alongside Deacon Arnel Guillemette and Fr. Daryold, who also have Indigenous backgrounds. This context imbued the liturgy with a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual significance. The celebration on Gaudete Sunday radiated an atmosphere of joy and hope. Fr. Peter

wore pink vestments, a liturgical colour signifying joyful anticipation. He began the Mass in an Indigenous language, saying, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” to which the congregation responded with smiles and a warm “Amen.” His opening remarks included a thoughtful reflection: “Why do we rejoice today? Because God became human so that we may become divine.” His words set the tone for the celebration, weaving together Indigenous spirituality and Catholic tradition.

A distinctive and meaningful aspect of this Indigenous Catholic Mass was the smudging ceremony (see picture 14), integrated into the Penitential Rite at the beginning of the liturgy. Sacred medicines, a blend of traditional herbs, were placed in a clay pot at the front of the altar. After lighting the herbs and letting the flames extinguish, Fr. Peter fanned the smouldering smoke with a feather, a sacred Indigenous symbol. He was assisted by a woman dressed in a vibrant red garment, who represented the Indigenous community’s role in the ritual. The smudging ceremony symbolized purification and spiritual readiness. The fragrant smoke was carried through the congregation, and participants guided it reverently over their heads, eyes, mouths, hearts, and bodies. I joined the ritual, mirroring the gestures with a sense of unity and respect. The ceremony’s significance was amplified by the visible participation of nearly 100 people, including Indigenous community members and non-Indigenous parishioners, whose presence embodied solidarity and a shared commitment to healing and reconciliation.

Picture 14- Kateri Mass (Screenshots from Parish website : <https://stbasilsparish.ca>)



Music was one of the most enriching and dynamic aspects of the Mass. The choir seamlessly blended traditional Indigenous drumming with modern instruments such as guitar and keyboard. Songs were sung in both Indigenous and English languages, with bilingual lyrics projected on a large screen to encourage full participation. This thoughtful integration of cultural and liturgical

elements ensured the congregation's active engagement and created a profoundly immersive worship experience.

Deacon Arnel proclaimed the Gospel while holding a feather, a powerful symbol of reverence and respect in Indigenous culture. This added a unique visual and spiritual dimension to the reading. The Gospel focused on John the Baptist's call for repentance and preparation for the Lord's coming. In his homily, Fr. Peter urged the congregation to prepare their hearts for the arrival of baby Jesus, emphasizing spiritual readiness as an essential response to the Advent season. The Prayers of the Faithful offered another poignant cultural expression. During the prayers, an Indigenous woman stood at the altar and, with each petition, lifted a small symbolic object toward the heavens. This gesture symbolized the offering of the community's prayers to the Creator, reinforcing a sacred intention and deep spirituality that resonated throughout the church.

The Mass concluded with a lively hymn to the Virgin Mary, during which the congregation clapped rhythmically—a joyful and unique expression of faith. This was followed by a community Christmas dinner, welcoming everyone, including visitors. The dinner featured traditional songs with Indigenous musical instruments and a PowerPoint presentation about the ministry's various projects and team members. As people dined, Fr. Daryold added a touch of humour and joy by singing “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” complete with playful dance steps that delighted the crowd. The event radiated warmth, laughter, and a genuine sense of togetherness, fostering an atmosphere of belonging and celebration.

One can link the Kateri Native Ministry approach to Inclusive leadership, where everyone feels a sense of belonging and fewer status differences, ensuring everyone's participation and involvement. St. Basil's is an excellent example of an inclusive and collaborative parish leadership (Northouse, 2022) that fosters a strong shared identity among its members, making everyone feel

they are all part of a united team. This kind of shared and inclusivity is a key aspect of a positive organizational culture (Gardenswartz, 2008; L.Pathiranage, 2019; Radu, 2023).

In sum, in this section, I have explored a wide range of “rituals”—the third layer of the culture. At St. Mary’s parish, I examined four key “rituals”: New Life Retreat, Alpha, Encounter Ministry, and Youth Nights. These “rituals” closely align with St. Mary’s parish’s mission and vision statement and are deeply rooted in evangelization and forming Christian disciples like a spiritual military camp. On the other hand, at Basil’s parish, the “rituals”—mission and social justice, refugee ministry, socialization and community building, Kateri Ministry—reflect a strong social, cultural, and communitarian commitment. Like at St. Mary’s, these “rituals” are closely tied to St. Basil’s Mission statement, which I discuss in the next section.

4.4 Values: The Parish Theological Focus

As previously stated, values are the foundation of culture. They are closely linked to moral and ethical standards (Brown, 1998; Hofstede, 1997), establish what people believe should be done, and reveal “likes” and “dislikes” (Sun, 2008, p. 139). As important as they are, they are also the immersed part of the iceberg that is nonetheless visible in all these parishes. The following section describes the fundamental values that form the culture of both parishes under study and determines how they behave and act.

4.4.1 St. Mary’s —A Lighthouse of Renewed Discipleship

As noted earlier in the discussion on symbols, the dominant image of God is a transcendent being who is to be worshipped and honoured—infinately superior to creation. Luca (pseudonym) from St. Mary’s Parish echoed this and described God in an interview as the “CEO of the Universe.” This emphasis on a transcendental God can be seen in their Mission statement and vision outlined

on their parish website (St. Mary's Parish, 2019). The parish has clearly articulated its Mission statement: *"To worship God, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, lead others into relationship with him and grow together as his disciples."* The parish also considers "Whole-Hearted Worship, Openness to the Holy Spirit and Sound Preaching and Teaching" its values (St. Mary's Parish, 2019). As a "conservative, charismatic parish," teachings such as personal encounters with the Lord, radical discipleship and evangelization are emphasized more highly.

The parish identifies five vital components of parish life to actualize this vision.

1) **Worship.** The parish sees itself as a worshipping community, actively encouraging participation in Sunday Mass, the sacraments, and personal prayer. A visible sign of this commitment is the parishioners who sign up for silent worship at the Adoration Chapel. They firmly believe that transformative encounters with God occur through worship (St. Mary's Parish, 2019).

2) **Community.** The parish upholds the belief that human beings are created for relationships. It is committed to sharing life as brothers and sisters. This communal spirit is expressed through small groups, fellowship over coffee after Sunday Mass, and responding to the needs within its parish community (St. Mary's Parish, 2019).

3) **Relational Discipleship.** Discipleship is a lifelong commitment to follow Christ, focusing on community building and friendships (St. Mary's Parish, 2019).

4) **Evangelization.** The parish prioritizes sharing the Gospel and inviting others to encounter Christ, implementing Bible-centered activities and relationship-building initiatives (St. Mary's Parish, 2019).

5) **Apostolate.** The parish believes each individual has a God-given purpose and a unique calling. They strive to help members discover their gifts and discern where they can best serve,

whether in evangelization, music, healing ministry, youth outreach, hospitality, or other areas of parish life (St. Mary's Parish, 2019).

Thus, St. Mary's parish's fundamental value and emphasis lie in renewed discipleship, expressed through worship, evangelization, community, and openness to the Holy Spirit. If one refers back to the other three cultural layers of St. Mary's parish that have been discussed—its Gothic sanctuary and its symbols, the Companions of the Cross as its “heroes,” and its (re)conversion-driven activities as “rituals”—it becomes clear that the overarching culture of St. Mary's parish is a renewal of missionary disciples, profoundly influenced by Charismatic Movement. This aligns with Fr. Mark Goring, the pastor of St. Mary's parish, who articulated his vision for the parish as a missionary model in contrast to a “maintenance mode”: “We want a parish that's fully alive—one that's vibrant, filled with love, and filled with zeal. A parish that's missionary.”

The parish primarily focuses on (re)conversion-driven activities such as Alpha, the New Life Retreat, and the Encounter Ministry. These initiatives aim to (re)form the parishioners and activate them as missionary disciples, equipping them for active, Holy Spirit-driven evangelization. In short, St. Mary's parish functions like a spiritual military camp, training, forming, and activating its members as missionary disciples. It transforms into a lighthouse of renewed discipleship, particularly for those drawn to Charismatic Renewal movements. In the next section, I explore the theological focus of St. Basil's parish.

4.4.2 St. Basil's— A Church, “Poor and for the Poor”

I think Pope Francis' vision of “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (section 198, 2013) best captures the theological focus of St. Basil's parish because St. Basil's parish clearly expresses its preferential option for the poor and the marginalized in all its endeavours. For example, in ministries such as the Refugee ministry, Food Cupboard, Kateri ministry, or the Ministry for

Catholic Single Mothers, women empowerment demonstrates their extraordinary commitment to the marginalized in society. The parish emphasizes “the love of God as the foundation of all life and ministry” (St. Basil’s Parish, 2025). The parishioners put into action this fundamental value of Love of God in all their ministries and initiatives. It is also encouraging and heartwarming to see the parishioners recite their Mission statement at the beginning of all the Sunday masses to instill the parish’s fundamental values in the hearts of all who participate in the Sunday liturgy:

We at Saint Basil’s Parish regard the love of God to be the foundation of all life and ministry. We believe in the ever-present love of God, as witnessed through Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We believe that each person is loved by God and is of sacred worth. Therefore, through God’s grace, we welcome all persons to our parish. We express God’s hospitality by creating a safe, healing, accessible and transforming place for all to enter (St. Basils Parish, 2025).

Because the parish strongly emphasizes an Immanent God and “the love of God as the foundation of all life and ministry,” they deeply uphold the dignity of every human being on earth. This commitment is also reflected in their openness to LGBTQ+ individuals—an initiative widely embraced by progressive parishes in Western countries. A visible sign of this inclusivity is the rainbow logo displayed at the entrance, signalling the parish’s welcome to those often ostracized by society (see picture 21, Chapter 5). Moreover, the parish highly respects the dignity of every woman in the parish. For example, a woman is invited to deliver Sunday gospel reflections every fourth Sunday of the month. Furthermore, many active and vibrant women’s associations, such as ‘Women in Church Ministry’ and Catholic Women’s League, highlight the parishes’ dedication to empowering women in spiritual and communal roles.

Another manifestation of the theological emphasis on the poor and humble God can be seen in their promotion of eco-theology and creation spirituality. As noted earlier in the section on symbols, the presence of the green plants in the sanctuary reflects their commitment and response to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”(Francis, section 49, 2015a). The parish takes many

initiatives to educate the parishioners on eco-theology. For example, there was a lunch and learn session on one Sunday mass, where the parish invited Dr. Heather Eaton to speak on the theme ‘Sacred Universe.’ Thus, the theological focus/the core value of St. Basil’s parish is the love of a poor and humble God, who is present everywhere (immanent), in the poor and the oppressed and in the whole creation, who is to be loved and worshiped in word and deed. It is a “Church which is poor and for the poor” (Francis, section 198, 2013).

As explained in the theoretical framework on organizational culture, the core values/theological focus of the parish remains the foundation of a parish’s culture and determines how the parish as a whole feels, thinks, behaves and acts (Hofstede, 1997). For St Mary’s parish, the theological focus is on God, “wholly other” and transcendent (Barth, 2004; Otto, 1923), a heavenly King who is to be worshiped, honoured, glorified and proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Therefore, St. Mary’s parish, like a spiritual military camp, fully engages in forming the missionary disciples who would proclaim and announce the good news of the heavenly King—a worshipping Christian community of missionary disciples. Whereas for St. Basil parishioners, the theological focus is on a poor and humble Christ; therefore, they are out in “the peripheries,” serving the poor and the marginalized (Francis, section 197, 2013; McIntosh, 2000; Von Balthasar, 2000). They are out in “the peripheries,” listening to “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (Francis, section 49, 2015a).”

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I examined the culture of both parishes under study using the Catholic adaptation of Hofstede’s four cultural layers: symbols, heroes, rituals and values (see Table 3).

Table 3 – A Comparative Table of Four Cultural Layers of St. Mary’s and St. Basil’s

Hofstede’s Cultural Layers	St. Mary’s Parish	St. Basil’s Parish
Core values that shape the identity and behaviour	Image of God- “Wholly Other” Theological Focus- A Lighthouse of Renewed Discipleship Ecclesiological Focus- Traditional Catholics	Image of God- Poor and Humble Christ Theological Focus- A Church, Poor and for the Poor Ecclesiological Focus- Vatican II Catholics
Rituals	Alpha, the New Life Retreat, and the Encounter Ministry etc.	Mission & Social Justice, Refugee Ministry, Kateri Ministry, Food Cupboard etc.
Heroes	Companions of the Cross	The Basilians and Lay Leadership
Symbols	St. Mary’s Gothic Sanctuary, Communion Rails, Large Crucifix, Angelic Figures	St. Basil’s Round Shape, Sanctuary’s Low Elevation, Intentional Downplaying of Statues, Removal of Communion Rails

In the first section, I analyzed some symbols present at both parishes. At St. Mary’s, I observed symbols such as the elevated sanctuary, communion rails, large crucifix, angelic figures, and pointed gold arches of Gothic styles, which shape the parish’s identity as a worshipping Christian community of Missionary disciples, rooted in profound reverence and sense of the Sacred. I also noted that one might associate promoting traditional and pre-Vatican practices, such as communion rails, with Type 1—’ Traditional Catholics,’ who emphasize unwavering loyalty to the magisterium (Arbuckle, 2013). In contrast, at St. Basil’s parish, I noted the presence and absence of certain symbols in the sanctuary—such as the circular layout, the sanctuary’s low elevation, the intentional downplaying of statues, the removal of communion rails, and the absence of elaborate decorations

or gilded elements. I concluded that the parishioners of St. Basil's Church belong to the 'Vatican II Catholics'—Type 2 in Arbuckle's sociological categorization of Catholic identities (2013).

In the second section, I unravelled the second layer of the parish culture: heroes/key figures who shaped the culture of both parishes. At St. Mary's, I identified Fr. Bob and the priests of the Companions of the Cross as the heroes of the parish, who, according to the parishioners, brought great spiritual revival in the parish through a strong emphasis on charismatic renewal. At St Basil's, I demonstrated two entities—the Basilian Fathers and the laity—who played equal roles in shaping the parish's culture. Upon reviewing the parish history(Casserly, 2020), I observed that the Christian Family Movement (CFM) constituted a significant evolution towards collaborative leadership between clergy and laity at St. Basil's. In the same vein, Basilian fathers —particularly Fr. John Ruth—also played a key role—in forming the parish into what can now be categorized as “Vatican II Catholics” (Arbuckle, 2013).

I explored “rituals” in the third section by examining key ministries at both parishes. These “rituals” closely align with each parish's Mission and vision statement. It becomes clear that they are deeply connected to each community's distinct culture and fundamental values. At St. Mary's parish, I examined four key “rituals”: New Life Retreat, Alpha, Encounter Ministry, and Youth Nights and identified that these rituals are deeply rooted in encountering Christ through charismatic renewal and theological training programmes. On the other hand, at St. Basil's parish, the “rituals”—Mission and social justice, refugee ministry, socialization and community building, and Kateri Ministry—reflect a strong social, cultural, and communitarian commitment and are designed to encounter the Lord in the poor and the marginalized.

Finally, I analyzed the innermost layer of the culture—the core “values”—of both parishes and established that all four layers—symbols, heroes, rituals and values—are interrelated, and each

parish's values/theological focus shapes how they behave (Hofstede, 1997). For St Mary's parish, the theological focus is on God "wholly other and transcendent" (Barth, 2004; Otto, 1923), a heavenly King to be worshiped, glorified, and proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Another core value is renewed discipleship grounded on charismatic movement and theological training. Therefore, St. Mary's parish, like a spiritual military camp, fully engages in forming the missionary disciples who would proclaim and announce the good news of the heavenly King, evolving itself as a lighthouse of renewed discipleship. Whereas for St. Basil parishioners, the theological focus is on a poor and humble Christ; therefore, they embody the vision of Pope Francis of a "Church which is poor and for the poor" (Francis, section 197, 2013; McIntosh, 2000; Von Balthasar, 2000).

5 Analysis of the Parishes' Culture and the Four Pillars

The previous chapter provided an overview of the activities in the two parishes under study and identified the values promoted through these various initiatives. However, the question remains: how do these activities contribute to making these parishes thriving communities? To address this, I must articulate this "thick" cultural description within my theoretical framework. This framework states that a thriving Catholic community rests on four key pillars: 1) a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, 2) a synodal leadership approach that nurtures a supportive community, 3) catechetical formation, and 4) missionary commitment. Hence, this chapter now analyses the culture I have already unpacked in light of these four pillars and explores how these parishes manifest the traits of such a thriving Catholic community despite their fundamental ecclesiological and theological differences.

5.1 A Church Fostering a Personal Encounter with the Lord

As previously noted, one of the primary reasons many Catholics in the United States have joined other faith communities is the Church inability to adequately meet their spiritual needs (Pew Research Center, 2009). This section examines how St. Mary's Parish and St. Basil's Parish strive to address the spiritual yearnings of the faithful and foster a personal encounter with the Lord in a meaningful and transformative way through two key avenues: the sacred liturgy and the welcoming nature of their communities.

5.1.1 Encountering the Lord in Sacred Liturgy

In the Catholic tradition, the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Celebration, is seen as the central act of Christian worship, a means of grace, and a source of personal and communal sanctification. It is a space for encountering Christ, expressing faith, and building up the Church (Vatican II, section 2 & 47, 1963). The liturgy is the summit toward which the Church's activity is directed and the source of all its power flows (Vatican II, section 10, 1963). The document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasizes that the liturgy is not just a ritual but a transformative experience that should involve the active participation of all believers "for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (Vatican II, section 14, 1963). With this in mind, the following section investigates how St. Mary's and St. Basil's parishes facilitate a personal encounter with the Lord for their parishioners through the sacred liturgy.

5.1.1.1 *St. Mary's and Encountering the Lord in Charismatic-Empowered Liturgy*

In the last chapter, I have already delineated the four cultural layers of the parish—symbols, heroes, rituals, and values—and stated that the core "value" and emphasis of St. Mary's parish lies

in discipleship. This is expressed through [charismatic] worship, evangelization, community, and openness to the Holy Spirit (St. Mary's Parish, 2019). The image of God at St. Mary's parish is that of a "Wholly Other"/ transcendent God (Barth, 2004; Otto, 1923), who is to be worshiped and obeyed with the highest honour. Therefore, as this section unpacks the first pillar of a thriving Catholic community—the personal encounter with the Lord—one must remember this particular image of a Transcendent God. In this section, I analyze how liturgy is a powerful means through which parishioners encounter the Lord.

For instance, the vibrant and charismatic empowered celebration of sacred liturgy plays a significant role in helping the faithfuls to encounter the Lord and to experience His love. Let me illustrate this with one of my personal experiences attending a Sunday Mass there. It was a fine Sunday morning. I, along with Fr. Mark Goring, the parish priest, and his associate pastor, Fr. Stefano (pseudonym), vested for Mass. Before proceeding to the sanctuary, Fr. Mark offered a brief, spontaneous prayer in the sacristy that deeply touched me. It reminded me of the importance of spiritual preparation for the Eucharist, the highest form of liturgy. It led me to reflect: How do I, as a priest, spiritually prepare myself daily for the celebration of the Holy Mass? Seven young altar servers were dressed in their liturgical attire, with polished black shoes, which was very impressive. The church was already full, and I noticed a striking diversity among the congregation—men and women of all ages, from grandparents to children, teens, and young adults. Compared to many Canadian parishes where older adults dominate, the demographic was a refreshing mix. Here, the diversity extended beyond age; people of various races and backgrounds stood together—white Canadians, Black individuals, and people of colour. There was no visible segregation by gender, class, or race.

Picture 15- Eucharist Celebration by Fr. Mark Goring CC, St. Mary's Pastor (screenshot from parish website: <https://stmarysottawa.ca/>)



Unlike many churches in Ottawa, there were no empty pews; latecomers struggled to find seats. Despite this being the third Sunday Mass at 11:00 a.m., over 500 people filled the church. What draws such a large, diverse group to this parish while others struggle to survive? The altar was adorned with three candles on each side of the tabernacle and two tall candles on golden stands on the altar, creating an atmosphere of sacred reverence. Many people were already praying silently, preparing for the Mass. The live-streaming team of two persons was set up, ready to broadcast the service and precisely at 11:00 a.m., the choir led the entrance hymn, “Holy Spirit, There Is No One Like You.” The lyrics were projected onto a screen, inviting the congregation to join in singing. Even in the narthex, screens were set up, showing the parish’s dedication to fostering active participation in the liturgy. This practice aligns with the desire of the Church that “all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (Vatican II, section 14, 1963).

As the Mass procession began, led by the candle bearers, cross bearers, and the deacon holding the Gospel, the church was filled with families—parents joyfully bringing their children to worship. This reminded me of how Mother Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus to the temple, as described in the Gospels. I also noticed some children holding Christian cartoon books in their hands.

As priests processed to the altar, led by the cross-bearer, many worshippers raised their hands and gently swayed to the music, fully engaged in the celebration. Unlike the one that sang for the Saturday evening Mass, the choir was exceptional. I learned later that the parish has multiple choir groups. This choir consisted of three young women, two of whom played the keyboard and violin. Fr. Mark led a heartfelt, spontaneous prayer at the end of the entrance hymn, asking the Lord to “set our hearts on fire,” preparing everyone spiritually for the liturgy. He welcomed everyone warmly, reminding them that the Mass is a foretaste of heaven.

The penitential rite followed, accompanied by the Latin hymn ‘Kyrie eleison’ (Lord, have mercy), which elevated the liturgical atmosphere to new heights. The sublime singing reminded me of St. Augustine’s words, “He who sings prays twice” (Catholic Church, 1997). The Gospel for the day was about Jesus sending the apostles on a mission, and Fr. Mark delivered an inspiring homily, sharing about his vocation journey and emphasizing the significance of Christian discipleship. He preached with great passion, his whole body moving as he spoke. The congregation was deeply engaged, including an older woman who cupped her hand behind her ear to hear every word better. His preaching visibly touched many, especially with its authenticity and spirit-filled message.

Communion was notable for its inclusivity. Fr. Stefano (pseudonym) and I stood at either side of the church, distributing Communion in hand, while Fr. Mark offered Communion at the rail

for those wishing to receive on the tongue. This openness to both forms of reception reflected the parish's inclusivity, respecting individual preferences for traditional or modern practices.

After the communion prayer and announcements, Fr. Mark gave a special blessing to the congregation. Reflecting on the Gospel, where Jesus sent the disciples to heal the sick, he asked the congregation, "Do you want the healing of Jesus Christ?" The congregation responded enthusiastically with a resounding "Yes!" Fr. Mark proceeded to bless each congregation section, starting from the left and moving to the right, offering spontaneous prayers. I could see the joy and happiness on the faces of the people as they received this unique blessing, reinforcing a vibrant spiritual and pastoral connection between the pastor and his flock. The Mass concluded with a solemn blessing and a communal recitation of the Prayer to St. Michael, invoking his protection against the forces of evil. The choir's final hymn was uplifting and empowering, with lyrics like "Now my soul can sing a new song, now my heart has found a home." The congregation remained engaged, singing until the very end, contrasting to other churches where people often leave immediately after the final blessing. The entire liturgy lasted just over an hour.

After the Mass, priests stood outside to greet the parishioners. A mother introduced me to her daughter, requesting the Sacrament of Confession, which I humbly administered. Many others approached me for greetings, prayers, and blessings, making me feel part of this vibrant community. One older woman in a wheelchair even offered to pray for me, holding my hands and asking God to grant me wisdom and success in my studies—a humbling and beautiful gesture.

The parish's commitment to fostering a welcoming and spiritually enriching environment was evident. I just wondered, thinking how did this community foster such a vibrant, Holy Spirit-empowered culture. The liturgy sounded like a beautiful response to "the human universal quest for meaning hardwired into the human being" (Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022, p. 32). Perhaps the

charismatic style of liturgy and worship may not be appealing to everyone. However, it is important to note that Magisterium under the papacy of St. Gregory the Great recognized charismatic renewal as “a chance for the Church” and as “the first signs of a great springtime for Christianity” (Cantalamessa, 2003, p. 188).

During the interviews with the parishioners, two individuals highlighted Eucharistic Adoration as a profoundly transformative experience that shaped their faith and conviction in the living presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. For instance, Sofia, a very active young woman, shared her experience of adoration of the Eucharistic Lord:

And so, I had an experience where I was in adoration looking at Jesus. There was worship music playing. And I just—that was what happened—was all of a sudden, the knowledge that Jesus was present in the Eucharist moved from my head into my heart, and he was so real to me. I was like, almost in shock that, like, I’m here thinking like: Jesus, whose feet touched the earth—the actual ground that I also touched—is right there in front of me in the Eucharist. And it was—I think it was just a pivotal moment for me of Jesus becoming real in my life. And so that just, that has just carried through into my adulthood and, of course, it’s changed. And there’ve been seasons of dryness, and, you know, like, as I’ve encountered more suffering in my life, of course, that’s—it changes the way that my relationship with Jesus is. But I think that, like, the core of knowing that He is real and that He loves me has stayed really consistent by His grace. And so that’s...yeah, that’s...and yeah, I think the fact that I had that experience with Him through the Eucharist is a huge part of why I love my Catholic faith so much and even probably why I’m so passionate about wanting parishes to be places of renewal is because Jesus is so real to me in the Eucharist, yeah.

It was her sublime experience of Jesus’ living presence in the Eucharist during adoration that serves as a powerful motivation for her love of the Catholic faith and her dedication to working for “Jesus’ parish,” as Sofia once remarked, in an informal conversation about St. Mary’s parish, “It is Jesus’ parish and not Fr. Mark’s, stressing the primacy of Jesus. Sofia is an active and vibrant member of the parish community and plays a key role in parish leadership. She is also a talented musician who enhances the Sunday liturgy by helping the congregation sing and praise the Lord.

Additionally, she shares her musical talents with children and youth, teaching them music and nurturing their faith through song.

Picture 16 – Adoration Chapel and Eucharistic Adoration at St. Mary’s (photo from St. Mary’s photo gallery)



Luca is an active member of the Knights of Columbus at St. Mary’s Parish and is involved in numerous charitable activities. For him, spending time in the Adoration Chapel—nicknamed the “Engine Room” of the church (see picture 16), in the basement of St. Mary’s Parish—has been a profoundly transformative experience. Here, he feels empowered by the Lord, gaining spiritual insights that guide his life. He describes his time there as “the biggest growth” in his spiritual journey. In Luca’s words:

I've never been in an Adoration Chapel. I never knew there was such a thing coming from another area. And, you know, this is something that's growing in you because when you're face to face with the CEO, right, of the universe—I call him the CEO of the Universe—all you have to do is just ask, 'Can you just flood me with insights?' And when I walk out of there, I feel like 1,000,000 bucks. I mean, not just physically but also strategically. And I get ideas. And sometimes I have to put down ideas because He knows, like, I've surrendered that to Him because He knows He's got the better plan. And so it makes it easy for me to just listen to what He has to say because what He has to say is phenomenal. He gives me insights and prophetic sometimes as to how He connects the dots for me. And I walk out of there after an hour, I say, 'Isabella' (Luca's wife), 'Holy cow, you're not going to believe what came to me. You're not going to believe what the Lord said or whatever.' You know, so that's—to me—that is the biggest growth area." Luca further described the spiritual vitality of St. Mary's parish : "We really feel that this parish is anointed. There's so much going on here. It's like a Mecca of spirituality. People come from the [United] states...So it seems that the Lord has chosen this place where people can come in with their different gifts and be part of the body of Christ.

Luca's encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, which filled his heart with profound insights, and Sofia's sublime experience of Jesus' living presence during Eucharistic adoration illustrates an innate and "perpetual and unavoidable attraction" to God, whom Pascal referred to as the "Universal Being (D'Antuono, 2022)." Human language, however, is limited in defining or rationalizing such sublime and transcendental experiences. Raniero Cantalamessa¹³ writes in his book *Come, Creator Spirit*:

The rationalism of our day has pretended to circumscribe, to enclose the Spirit in concepts or definitions, texts or tracts, more or less as though Spirit can be packed in cans or sachets, like milk. But all that this achieves is that the Spirit is lost, rendered trivial and vain (Cantalamessa, 2003, p.20).

Furthermore, these testimonies by Luca and Sofia align closely with Article 38 of *Gaudium et Spes*, which asserts that only God can satisfy "the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer" (Vatican Council II, 1965c). It further states, "Only God, who created man to His own image...provides the most adequate answers to the

¹³ Raniero Cantalamessa OFM Cap is an Italian Catholic cardinal who served as the Preacher to the Papal Household from 1980 until 2024, under Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

questions [of man], and this [the Church] does...through Christ...who became man” (Vatican Council II, 1965c).

If only God can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart, then parish churches should indeed strive to be places where these profound spiritual needs are met. The testimonies by Sofia, Luca and many others in this parish prove that St. Mary’s parish operates as a sacred space offering a transcendent experience of the Lord—particularly for those drawn to a charismatic style of worship. Moving forward, the following section addresses how St. Basil’s parish facilitates a personal encounter with the Lord for its parishioners.

5.1.1.2 St. Basil’s and Encountering the Lord in Reflective and Uplifting Liturgy

Having explored how St. Mary’s parish, through its charismatic-empowered liturgical celebrations, becomes a venue for personal encounters with the Lord for its parishioners, the subsequent section illustrates how reflective and uplifting liturgical celebrations at St. Basil’s Parish serve as an excellent hub for nurturing a personal relationship with the Lord.

The liturgical celebration at St. Basil’s parish is a profound occasion where parishioners feel uplifted. It is led by Fr. Daryold, the minister, and supported by an exuberant choir. As he mentioned during the interview, “[...]my goal for liturgy is that people leave here feeling good after Mass; they feel like they have experienced something positive. That they feel uplifted. Yeah, that they feel encouraged and leave with a little more hope, yeah.” Fr. Daryold plays a key role in making the Sunday liturgy meaningful, primarily through his homilies, where people can encounter the Lord. His calm demeanour and gentle smile lend him a soothing presence throughout the Mass. Many parishioners appreciate his homilies because he always connects scripture to the grassroots level, making it easy for anyone in the church to understand and relate to their daily lives and current global events. Hearing a woman praising Fr. Daryold’s homily after Sunday mass was

heartwarming, saying, “Father, your homilies are always excellent. The whole world should hear them.”

One homily drew from the Genesis creation account, warning against viewing others as inferior: “The moment we begin to think others are inferior, that’s the beginning of disaster. The moment we regard another culture as lesser, that’s the root of conflict, war, and devastation.” His words are often deeply reflective and inspiring. Parishioners listen intently when Fr. Daryold delivers his homily, often leaving the church with something meaningful to ponder. As Étienne expressed, “And when he speaks, I think people listen, yeah. So, he can transmit and communicate values and Christianity through his homilies. So, I think he inspires people.”

For Christmas Eve, there was a special children’s liturgy, and one of its highlights was the puppetry storytelling (see picture 17) that replaced the usual homily. Fr. Daryold used two stuffed dolls, Cary and Billy, on his hands. The story revolves around Billy, a selfish character who transforms into a kind and helpful boy, teaching an important moral lesson about caring for others as one grows up. The children were attentive and fully engaged throughout this inspiring service.

Picture 17 – Puppetry Storytelling by Fr. Daryold (Screenshot from Parish Website)



At the end of the Mass, Fr. Daryold invited all the children to bring their stuffed toys to the sanctuary. Witnessing their excitement as they eagerly approached the sanctuary with their toys was heartwarming, which Fr. Daryold blessed. The children's joy was palpable, making it a memorable Christmas celebration. This unique children's liturgy was a testament to Fr. Daryold's love for children and his exceptional skill in communicating with them meaningfully and engagingly.

One of the most striking aspects of the vibrant liturgy at St. Basil's is the choir. The group, consisting of approximately 16 members, delivers uplifting and heavenly performances. Their unity in singing is remarkable, especially given the diverse composition of the choir, which includes older men and women alongside younger members. It is particularly heartening to see Robinson (pseudonym), an international student from India, as part of the group, showcasing the parish's inclusivity and welcoming spirit. The acoustics of St. Basil's Church amplify the choir's voices beautifully, confirming the sentiment I had read in a Google review: "This church has good acoustics

for choirs” (Google Maps, n.d.). I found myself wholeheartedly agreeing with this observation. The choir members sit in three or four pews, led by a woman as the cantor. What stands out most about the cantor is her radiant smile, which remains unwavering as she leads the choir and participates attentively in the Eucharistic celebration. Her smile spreads joy throughout the congregation, fostering an inclusive and spiritually uplifting environment. The congregation’s wholehearted participation in the singing, often accompanied by cheerful smiles, proves how the liturgy at St. Basil’s helps everyone worship the Lord and have a profound spiritual experience.

One particularly touching scene during Mass is the congregation’s reverent practice of standing throughout the Communion. This act demonstrates their profound belief in the living presence of the Lord in the Eucharist and their profound honour for Him, a sentiment echoed by Archbishop Paul-André Durocher: “The awareness of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament nourishes the personal relationship he has inscribed in our hearts through baptism” (2019, p. 133). Such moments underscore how the liturgy at St. Basil’s fosters a communal and profoundly spiritual worship experience, strengthening personal relationships with the Lord.

Moreover, this uplifting and vibrant liturgy does not just end with a momentary emotional charge but inspires participants to live daily in alignment with Christian spirituality. The number of charitable works and ministries, such as the Refugee Ministry, Kateri Ministry, and Single Moms Ministry, prove this transformative impact. As Antoine (interview participant) explained, the impact of the Mass goes beyond the immediate experience: “I just love coming to the Mass. Yeah, I get a lot out of Mass. I get a lot out of knowing, you know, the Lord is here, and I try to do the best I can to be a good person.” This connection illustrates how vibrant worship fosters spiritual growth and ethical living in the participants’ daily lives.

In summary, I have elucidated that St. Basil's parish offers a meaningful and vibrant liturgy under the leadership of Fr. Daryold, who inspires the congregation through his reflective and life-touching homilies. Moreover, the excellent choir makes the whole liturgy uplifting and soothing. The following section discusses how the welcoming nature of both parishes serves as another way to experience the warmth of God's love.

5.1.2 Encountering the Lord in a Fraternal and Welcoming Community

The second avenue through which both parishes serve as places where people encounter the Lord is through a fraternal and welcoming community. Archbishop Durocher writes, "The credibility of a Church that proclaims God is love depends on this [Church] fraternal life" (2019, p. 124). Both parishes excel in creating a warm and fraternal community, continually striving to embody the essence of a genuinely welcoming Church. I elucidate how the parishes under study embody the welcoming spirit.

5.1.2.1 *St. Mary's and Encountering the Lord in Intentional Welcoming Community*

During my first visit to St. Mary's, Fr. Mark shared that the parish is amidst a three-year revival program to deepen parishioners' faith and engagement. Moreover, this year (2024-2025), the main focus of the parish is on becoming a 'welcoming community.' As such, I consider St. Mary's Parish to be very intentional in creating a welcoming community. Here is an excerpt from the interview with Fr. Mark:

We try to be a welcoming community that people who are struggling in life, with whatever struggles [...] Well, we have a phenomenon. A lot of people visit St. Mary's and so we have new people, and we know that it makes a huge difference that when new people come, if they feel welcomed, they're more likely to want to make St. Mary's their home and come back, you know. And be welcoming. And that's just being Christian, you know? And so it's basic kindness. It's basic courtesy. It's being gracious, you know. And so again, there's in some Catholicism, there's a mindset of a more of a, you know, like a, a cultural Catholicism that's more focused on

fulfillment, of duty...whereas we believe in giving the Lord a lot more than that, you know, being wholehearted and being a community.

One can observe the sense of belonging among the parishioners, particularly on Sundays. Fr. Mark emphasized that parishioners do not simply attend Mass as a duty and leave right after. Instead, they engage in friendly and lively interactions, particularly in the basement, where they come together for the coffee ministry after Mass. People engage in genuine conversations and take time to connect with their fellow parishioners. Furthermore, committees like ushers, greeting teams, and welcoming teams show that the parish intentionally makes newcomers feel at home. Luca, an active parish member who has been a member of the parish for more than 10 years now, testified to the welcoming and fraternal nature of the parish: “I think the moment you walk in here, you can see that you are welcomed, and people show genuine care. I mean, we’ve had people come back to the faith. The first time I came, I couldn’t believe how welcoming they were.”

I have also observed that both pastors at St. Mary’s play a key role in fostering a welcoming and fraternal spirit within the community. Fr. Mark Goring and his associate pastor, Fr. Lorenzo (pseudonym), greet parishioners with warm smiles before and after Mass. Sometimes, they even take the little children into their arms with fatherly affection or give them high-fives. It is heartwarming to witness such moments, which demonstrate that the clergy are spiritual leaders and essential members of the parish family. Moreover, during every Mass, the priests make a point to welcome new members and encourage them to attend the church for the next five consecutive Sundays, ensuring they have a fruitful and meaningful experience of the parish. I also witnessed several parishioners approaching the pastors before and after Mass, engaging in warm, friendly interactions. The pastors never seemed to be authoritarian, but they were consistently approachable, listening attentively, welcoming, and encouraging in all their interactions.

The parishioners spoke emphatically about the welcoming nature of the pastors. For example, Isabella commented during the interview:

Everybody loves to go to them [pastors at St. Mary's] for confessions. Everybody loves to talk to them like they're just they're wonderful and they that's not just Father Mark and, Fr. Lorenzo (pseudonym) , these are all pastors that I dealt with here at Saint Mary's for the past 30 years. It's, there's a commonality. There's a thread of compassion and love for God. And that's what I love about this place.

Alessandro also spoke highly of both pastors, Fr. Mark and Fr. Lorenzo (pseudonym), saying, "It's very easy to associate with Fr. Mark and Fr. Lorenzo (pseudonym)." He noted that their welcoming, fatherly nature significantly makes St. Mary's a thriving, vibrant community.

5.1.2.2 St. Basil's and Encountering the Lord in Genuine Welcoming Community

Like St. Mary's parish, St. Basil's Parish fosters a personal encounter with the Lord through its deeply genuine welcoming spirit. The parish Mission statement begins: "We, of St. Basil's Parish, strive to be a welcoming community of Christian believers." This sentiment is not just words but a lived reality that anyone attending the parish can feel. In my cultural analysis of the "rituals" of St. Basil's parish, I described in detail, 'socializing and community building' where the parishioners organize many events such as community dinners four or five times a year, 'lunch & learn' sessions, and Bridge games for the seniors. Community building is one of the top priorities of St. Basil parishioners.

My time with them gave me the impression that parishioners at St. Basil welcome everyone with genuine love and affection and without judgment. During a visit, an Indian family from my region, who regularly attends Sunday Mass at St. Basil's, shared their experience when I asked why they chose this parish. They said, "We come to this church because of the hospitality. The parishioners greet us with genuine smiles, and we always feel truly welcomed here. This neighbourhood has four or five parishes, but we love St. Basil's Church the most."

Alongside St. Basil's parish's vibrant, welcoming team, Fr. Daryold's pastoral presence stands out as a cornerstone of this welcoming atmosphere. His warm demeanour and engaging smile create a sense of belonging as he moves around the church. He greets parishioners by name, including the children, demonstrating a deep personal connection with his flock. After Mass, I overheard a parishioner tell Fr. Daryold, "We are lucky to have you as our pastor." His interactions with children are particularly heartwarming. For instance, two young girls enthusiastically spoke to him about his cat at the presbytery. Reflecting on this, Fr. Daryold told me, "This is what every pastor in a flourishing parish does," emphasizing the importance of a welcoming and personal approach. Observing him taught me how vital it is for a pastor to embody a spirit of hospitality in fostering a vibrant parish community.

Fr. Daryold can remarkably captivate his audience, whether small children or grandparents. It is heartwarming to see him greeting parishioners at the entrance with his chubby cheeks and captivating smile, spreading a positive vibe to everyone entering the church. As Fr. Daryold aptly said, the goal is for people to "leave with a little more hope." Whether it is a first-time visitor, someone struggling with psychological turmoil or depression, or feeling demotivated in their faith journey, St. Basil's vibrant Sunday liturgy becomes a powerful source of consolation and uplifting.

Thus, in the analysis of the first pillar of a thriving Catholic community—a personal encounter with the Lord—I established that in both parishes, the liturgy, particularly the Holy Mass, is celebrated in ways that deeply engage the faithful. The pastors excel in communicating the compassionate and fatherly love of the Lord to their parishioners, creating a spiritual environment that resonates with God's mercy and grace. Uplifting liturgy and music, an inspiring homily, and a warm, hospitable atmosphere create an environment where people can experience God's love and

compassion. Additionally, both parishes have well-organized teams dedicated to welcoming parishioners and visitors, ensuring that everyone feels embraced as part of the family of God.

In the theoretical framework, I have articulated a thriving organizational culture as a collaborative and productive work environment that prioritizes the well-being and psychological safety of the employees and fosters an atmosphere where they feel empowered to grow to their full potential (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023; Redelinghuys et al., 2019). Everyone feels welcome, respected, and empowered in a positive organizational culture. If one closely examines the vibrant liturgical celebrations and the welcoming nature of these parishes— as I have unpacked here—it becomes evident that they embody these qualities and thereby facilitate a conducive environment, where the parishioners encounter the Lord. They offer dignity, inspiration, and empowerment to their members through their liturgy, welcoming nature, and various other elements that I analyze in the following sections.

5.2 A Church Fostering Synodal Leadership Grounded on Inclusivity, Collaboration and Listening

In the previous section, the paper discussed how St. Mary's and St. Basil's parishes operate as centers of personal encounters with the Lord for their parishioners. The focus now turns to examining how both parishes exhibit traits of synodal leadership grounded on inclusivity, collaboration and listening.

5.2.1 Inclusive and Collaborative Leadership

In both parishes, I observed a synodal style of leadership that fosters inclusivity, collaboration, and active listening, as envisioned by Pope Francis (CNA, 2021; Francis, 2020). For example, at St. Mary's, I had the chance to attend the Lead Team meeting, which was unique and

different from pastoral council setups in other parishes. The meeting began with a prayer and began in the living room of St. Mary's parish hall. I found myself in a somewhat unfamiliar setting, as I have typically only encountered pastoral councils in parishes, so I was curious about the role and dynamics of this Lead Team.

The team consisted of two pastors, Fr. Mark and Fr. Lorenzo (pseudonym), alongside Chiara (pseudonym), the operations manager, Riccardo (pseudonym), the communications and technology manager, and one additional team member. The atmosphere was collaborative, with everyone seated in a circle, facilitating an open exchange of ideas.

I learned that Chiara, as operations manager, oversees the staff at St. Mary's Parish and helps coordinate various projects, events, and long-term plans. During the meeting, she and Riccardo took the lead in presenting several proposals, such as the idea of shifting the 8:00 p.m. Christmas Mass to a midnight Mass. It struck me that the pastors were not driving most of the plans, but rather Chiara and Riccardo. They proposed initiatives to not only improve the logistics of the parish but also to enhance its appeal and vibrancy. For instance, Riccardo, in particular, contributed to the conversation around communications strategy, suggesting ways to advertise parish events and ministries more effectively. His idea to make Christmas Mass a more significant event aimed at attracting non-Catholics, stood out as a deliberate effort to extend the parish's reach beyond its traditional boundaries.

As I observed, I reflected that the traditional view of a parish pastor as the sole leader or decision-maker did not apply here. Instead, I saw a leadership team where the laity, particularly Chiara and Riccardo, played key roles in shaping the parish's direction. This collaborative model (Northouse, 2022) seemed to empower the entire team, with the pastors actively listening and contributing but not dominating the conversation. Later, on further exploration, I asked about the

leadership dynamics of the Lead Team. Chiara shared that there is freedom for all members of the Lead Team and that every member can express their agreements and disagreements. I realized that St. Mary's leadership approach always ensures open communication and psychological safety, where people feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions without fear of a backlash. This psychological safety and inclusivity are a key characteristic of a positive organizational culture (Gardenswartz, 2008; Garvin et al., 2008; Radu, 2023). Fr. Mark himself mentioned this collaborative style of leadership during the interview; “We highly value our leadership, and you know, Companions of Cross (the name of his religious congregation) have a bit of an approach of collaborating with the laity and that’s in our constitutions, you know, and so you see that like our Lead [team] meeting, it’s, you know, it’s two priests and three lay people.”

At St. Basil’s, collaboration is a defining feature of parish life, particularly in its involvement in significant social projects that require substantial financial resources and careful decision-making. The laity plays a prominent role in making crucial decisions, reflecting a leadership style prioritizing accountability and transparency. One can relate this leadership approach of granting members freedom and individual autonomy to the empowering leadership model, where the leaders empower and enhance the decision-making capabilities of the members in a group (Cheong et al., 2019; Radu, 2023; Singh et al., 2022). The following excerpt from an interview with Émilie, who is a member of the leadership team, illustrates how the parish leadership of St. Basil’s ensures individual freedom and autonomy:

From a decision-making perspective, though there are, you know... we can only speak of the ministries or the activities we were involved in, people are prepared to step up and make the decisions and brief father Daryold. And you know, like, I don’t know, the organizing of the dinner [Christmas turkey Dinner] that you went to. Well, there’s a lot of decisions made there. There’s a lot of leadership to get that thing running smooth like a hot knife through butter. And so that’s the laity, that make the Knights of Columbus, CWL the partnerships that they have, for example, you know the Ministry of Social Action...yeah, they’re making decisions on allocating

thousands of dollars to various communities that need help. That's leadership that's taking, you know, doing decision-making. Yes, they notify the pastor, but that's laity making decisions.

Furthermore, Fr. Darold's approach to leadership is highly collaborative (Northouse, 2022), often emphasizing the value of teamwork as he stated: "We are smart when we work together." As organizational culture experts Radu (2023) and L.Pathiranage (2019) stated, collaboration and teamwork are key dimensions of a positive organizational culture. Sunday homilies by Fr. Daryold frequently highlight the importance of listening and fostering collective wisdom through wider consultation with parishioners. The following excerpt from the interview with Fr. Daryold illustrates how deeply he respects the wisdom of his congregation:

The idea that together we're smarter, that we consult or that we try to hear other people's opinions. Because, even though, none of them have degrees in theology, they have degrees in experience in their lives and a lot of in this particular parish with lots of professionals, we have teachers and principals, doctors, lawyers, engineers and lots of professional people. That's our particular demographic, so it's an educated Community.

One notable aspect of St. Basil's is women's significant role in the parish, which further amplifies the inclusivity and diversity (Gardenswartz, 2008; Radu, 2023) of the parish leadership approach. Women are visibly active in various capacities, including as altar servers, Eucharist ministers and members of organizations such as Women in Church Ministry, Catholic Women's League and Single Moms Ministry. Their leadership and participation are integral to the parish's operations and spiritual life. In contrast, while St. Mary's also has women in leadership roles, there is room for improvement. Although a few women are visibly active, the parish lacks a more structured and organized approach to empowering women through dedicated ministries or groups.

5.2.2 Listening as a Powerful Action

Peter Block (2008, p. 88) states that listening is "the single most powerful action that a leader can take." Both pastors strongly emphasize the significance of listening in their pastoral ministry

and leadership. For example, as an observer, I had the privilege of attending the pastoral council meeting at St. Mary's parish. The meeting was held in the St. Catherine of Siena Meeting room. The group sat in a circle around the table, fostering an atmosphere of inclusiveness and openness.

The meeting began with a prayer, followed by the secretary reading the printed agendas. One of the more interesting topics discussed was the proposed change of the 8:00 p.m. Christmas Mass to a midnight Mass. As each agenda item was presented, feedback was actively encouraged, and I noticed how Fr. Mark paid particular attention to concerns raised. For example, one person voiced some honest observations concerning the Midnight mass, and Fr. Mark promptly asked the secretary to take note, emphasizing the importance of honest assessments on the proposal of midnight Mass. Throughout the meeting, I observed that the members' concerns were heard and given due consideration, particularly by Fr. Mark. His leadership style struck me as genuinely collaborative (Northouse, 2022) and deeply pastoral. Rather than coming across as an authoritative figure, Fr. Mark demonstrated a listening heart (Francis, 2015), which, I believe, is a significant factor in why he is so well-regarded within the parish.

Similarly, at St. Basil, Fr. Daryold gives special significance to the culture of listening (Block, 2008; Francis, 2015). Listen to this excerpt from the interview with Fr. Daryold, where he describes the synodal discussions held in the church and how transformative it was when the pastor and the entire congregation came together to listen to each other. This eventually led to the formation of a team called 'Women in Church Ministry,' aimed at amplifying women's voices in the Church.

Out of the 22 people there [synodal session in the church], women who said, you know, we don't feel that no one hears us or we don't feel like we have a voice in the church...it was just breathtaking what we experienced that morning. I thought it was complete working of the Holy Spirit for sure...And it affected me as pastor listening to these people. It's not like I was oblivious to it, but to hear it from the words, you know, these people. And that's what we're trying to do here. We can't solve the problems of the Universal Church, but we can do something about our community here to make it a community that seeks reconciliation with indigenous people, a

community that hears the voices of women. So we started, there was a group that started called 'Women in the Church Ministry' and once a month we have a woman share their reflections. On the gospel. We can hear woman, they have a different perspective. Last Christmas [2023], we heard about what it was to give child what it was to have a birth experience. Childbirth. It's like you can't get a priest to talk about that. But she talked about her own experience of having a baby and having a child. That was amazing, was beautiful too. We've had people talk about postpartum depression after they gave birth. Oh, you know, the depression they experienced, and they had to really, they felt like they were going crazy. And in this particular homily, the person said, you know, when I needed someone most, no one came. And I thought that was a wake-up call for us. To be more attentive, to try to be more attentive to people who are at their weakest moments. Hence, we can come to their help. Yeah, St. Basil Parish is cultivating a culture of listening.

Listening to Fr. Daryold was also eye-opening as I reflected on how I, in my pastoral ministries, Mission work, and school administration, have often overlooked the power and impact of listening to the voices of women and the marginalized. The culture of listening at St. Basil is about acknowledging voices and fostering tangible change and deeper communal bonds. It serves as a profound reminder that genuine pastoral care and leadership begin with attentive ears and an open heart, paving the way for transformative growth in the community.

In summary, in this section on the synodal leadership approach, I analyzed how both parishes highly value leadership grounded in inclusivity, collaboration and listening. I observed that laypeople are crucial in making significant decisions about parish activities and designing plans to execute various ministries. Both parishes ensure wider consultation with the laity, reflecting one of the significant emphases of the recent Synod on Synodality. A notable example is St. Basil's parish, which involves women at higher levels, even empowering them to deliver gospel messages during Sunday masses. This initiative amplifies women's voices in the Church and demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity. The analysis also identified key dimensions of a positive organizational culture, such as inclusivity, diversity, psychological safety, individual autonomy and collaboration in the parish leadership approach of both parishes. As previously discussed in the literature review, in a global Church where women and laypeople are often marginalized, and where top-level clerical

authority sometimes stands in the way of empowering them with greater leadership and decision-making authority (Winfield, 2023), St. Mary's and St. Basil's serve as compelling local models. These parishes demonstrate how women and laity can be meaningfully incorporated into the administration and leadership of the Church, and how such collaboration contributes to the vitality and flourishing of parish life. The following section delves into the third pillar: transformative catechetical formation.

5.3 A Church Fostering Transformative Catechetical Formation

Earlier in the second chapter, I demonstrated that fostering a growth-mindset is a key dimension of a positive organizational culture (Garvin et al., 2008; Rahman & Nas, 2013). In this section on catechetical formation, I examine how St. Mary's and St. Baasil's parishes offer avenues for continuous learning and faith-formative programs for their members and how they differ, given the different demographics present at both parishes.

5.3.1 St. Mary's and Introductory and Faith-Renewing Formation

During my fieldwork at St. Mary's, I realized that many Catholics have been away from the Church for years, feeling disconnected from the experience of God's love and forgiveness. Besides, there are many youths out there who are curious about Christianity and Catholicism. In the last chapter, I explored how catechetical programs like Alpha and New Life Retreat (explained earlier in the previous chapter) provide an open space for people from religious and non-religious backgrounds. These programs offer a healing and transformative experience, allowing participants to share their faith journeys. Through these shared experiences, a strong sense of community is fostered among them. Our parishes truly need open platforms where members can share their life experiences, be genuinely listened to, and have opportunities to encounter God's love and

forgiveness. The parish can offer the support and guidance they need by creating spaces for open dialogue and asking about each person's faith journey.

Let me share what I witnessed at an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) session at St. Mary's. St. Mary's has tailored its RCIA program for not only non-baptized adults but also for those baptized outside the Catholic Church, those baptized in the Catholic Church but not confirmed, and others curious about Catholicism (St. Mary's Parish, 2022a). Around 20 young adults, primarily women, were in attendance, seated in an oval arrangement around a table with a large screen for viewing teaching videos. A team of five animators was present to facilitate and guide the participants. The day's video focused on the Holy Spirit, presenting it as the Comforter and Sanctifier, with speakers sharing personal stories that made the teachings relatable. For instance, one speaker, Johnnette Benkovic Williams, shared her experience of finding comfort in the Holy Spirit after losing her son and husband to illness. Another speaker described the Holy Spirit as a "prompting voice within," which can inspire reconciliation even in challenging moments.

After the video, the attendees broke into small groups for discussions, sharing personal reflections on the Holy Spirit's role in their lives. During the discussion, a young man asked, "I am not baptized, so can I receive the grace of the Holy Spirit or even know the Holy Spirit at all?." The leader gave a beautiful analogy, explaining that just as a radio picks up signals within its frequency range, baptism brings one into a closer "frequency" with the Holy Spirit. However, even those not baptized can still experience the Spirit, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree. Another participant asked if Catholics emphasize the Holy Spirit like Pentecostal Churches do. The leader explained that the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is central to Catholic belief, as professed in the Creed, and encouraged everyone to refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church for a deeper understanding. I found what I had outlined in my theoretical framework—a community actively

engaged in interactions and reflections on the life of faith, where members can experience a personal encounter with the Lord (Durocher, 2019, pp. 119–124). I also observed that there is psychological safety and a sense of trust—key dimensions of a positive organizational culture— in these environments of RCIA, Alpha and New Life Retreat, where the participants can raise their questions, doubts and concerns without fear of being judged (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023). Moreover, the spirit of collaboration and teamwork among the animators was particularly noteworthy, a key factor behind the success of these programs at St. Mary’s.

I later spoke with Marco and his wife, the primary leaders of RCIA, who shared that they cover topics like the sacraments, the Gospels, and Pauline letters. Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church serve as their two primary references for teaching Catholic faith and doctrines, aligning with directives from the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation For The Clergy, No.128, 1997). Moreover, they use resources from the website “Formed” by the Augustine Institute, which provides Catholic teaching videos on topics such as baptism, reconciliation, and matrimony. It was inspiring to witness these young adults’ curiosity and eagerness to learn about the Catholic faith, particularly those not baptized. RCIA offers a welcoming space for them to ask questions, express doubts, and find clarity as they explore their faith journey.

One of the essential parts of faith formation is strengthening their foundation in God’s love and compassion. Many, like the “prodigal son” (as mentioned earlier in the description of Encounter Ministry), feel distant from God, believing they cannot receive His forgiveness and love. As stated earlier: “every person has the right to adult catechesis that helps them deeply discover their identity and affirm their dignity as beloved of God (Kuzmochka, 2024, p. 34).” Once these spaces for dialogue and listening are established, supported by teaching and pastoral guidance, the transformation can be profound. For instance, Alessandro, who participated in the Alpha program,

had not attended Mass for many years. Now, not only is he actively involved, but he has also taken on a leadership role within the parish. The fruits of such an approach can indeed be transformative. This aligns with the principles of a positive organizational culture, which states that members are likelier to thrive when they feel genuinely valued and supported (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023). In the following passage, I explain how the catechetical formation is unfolded at St. Basil's.

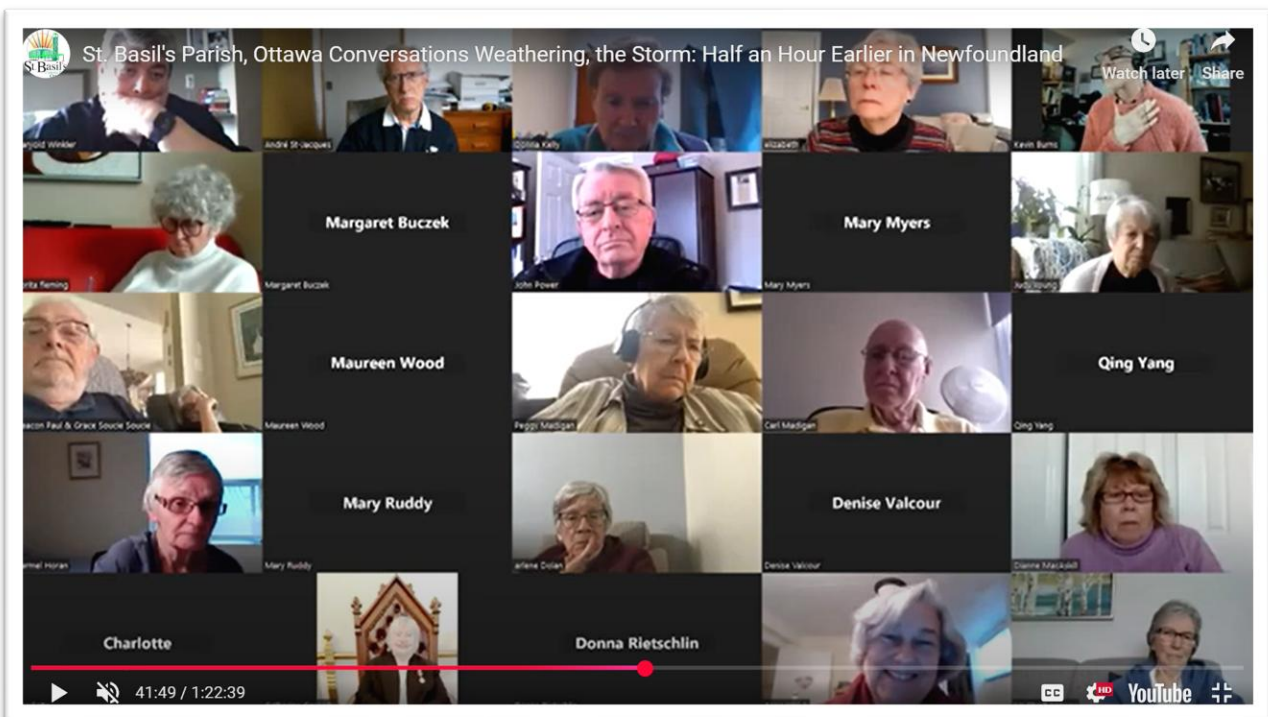
5.3.2 St. Basil's and Community-Building Faith Formation

The demographics of St. Basil reveal that most parishioners are professionals, including lawyers, doctors, teachers, and engineers, most of whom have a strong Catholic background. Notably, when the Archdioceses of Ottawa and Cornwall merged, the lawyer who helped draft its constitution was from St. Basil. Former Mayor of Ottawa, Marion Dewar, was a St. Basil's parish member. I also met one parishioner who had experience as an advisor to the Prime Minister and an assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I highlight these demographics because programs like Alpha may not serve as the most effective catechesis in a parish where professionals with strong Catholic roots form the majority. Such programs are generally designed for individuals with little to no affiliation with the Church or religion and those who have drifted away from the Church for various reasons. These catechetical programmes like Alpha could still create opportunities for individuals in the surrounding community who are curious about Christ, faith, or Christianity. It may also serve as a valuable reintroduction for those who have been away from the Church for many years, as in the case of Alessandro at St. Mary's, who was brought back to the Catholic Church through Alpha.

So how does faith formation operate at St. Basil's parish, given its demographic of highly educated professionals, including doctors, professors, engineers, and lawyers? When asked about this, Fr. Daryold described 'Conversations for Our Times'—a series of teaching sessions held over

Zoom that the parish has been organizing since 2020 (see picture 18). Fr. Daryold considers these sessions a vital form of adult faith formation. They cover a wide range of church teachings, encyclicals, and social justice topics, including Pope Francis's vision for our world, racism and white privilege, sexuality and Catholic thought, the gap between faith and life, social Isolation and loneliness among older adults, the encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, the synod on synodality, creation spirituality, and medical assistance in dying in Canada from a Catholic perspective. St. Basil's parish invites eminent scholars from the country to lead these sessions, creating a rich and diverse learning environment. Notable contributors include Cardinal Michael Czerny, Dr. Doris Kieser, Dr. Carol Kuzmochka, Dr. David Conn, Dr. Catherine Clifford, Dr. Mary Jo Leddy, Dr. Simon Appolloni, Dr. Rosella Kinoshameg, and Dr. Christopher De Bono.

Picture 18 – 'Conversations for Our Times' session (screenshot from parish website: <https://stbasilsparish.ca>)



Fr. Daryold highlighted the impact of these sessions, particularly those on creation spirituality, as a means of building community through education. During an interview, he shared:

Creation Spirituality-That's a big topic in this parish—an echo theology of creation, spirituality, and things like that—that people come to because they want to know more. And there is this desire to be concerned. You know, Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si'*. So this was already something our parish was concerned about. That added fuel to this desire to learn more about the environment and creation spirituality.

'Conversations for Our Times' educates parishioners and fosters a sense of shared purpose and community. These sessions exemplify the parish's commitment to living out its Mission in dialogue with the world by engaging with critical issues of faith, social justice, and environmental stewardship. This initiative is a testament to St. Basil's dedication to prophetic dialogue (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011), where learning and reflection inspire action and deeper connections within the community. The three fundamental elements of catechetical formation—ecclesial action, the formation of mature disciples, and the community's involvement (Durocher, 2019)—are practiced in catechetical programs such as "Conversations for Our Times." As stated, every local church must promote ongoing learning and faith-building initiatives for its congregation because an organization can flourish only in a supportive learning environment and growth mindset (Garvin et al., 2008; Rahman & Nas, 2013).

However, while Fr. Daryold spoke positively about 'Conversations for Our Times' as the adult faith formation initiative, he acknowledged that the parish lacks a substantial ministry or outreach program for youth and teenagers. During the interview, he admitted, "We have no outreach to teenagers. You know, that's a real gap. We all feel it. There's a real loss in our parish and, well, we can say, a real gaping hole." I heard from a parishioner that St. Basil's Parish introduced a Youth Mass with videos and music some time ago, but it did not succeed. This experience may highlight an important lesson: making the Mass creative and attractive with some videos and music alone may not be enough to draw young people to the church. Many youths grapple with fundamental questions

and doubts that must be addressed thoughtfully rather than silenced. As Andrew Williams, marketing director at KPMG, aptly puts it, “If you’re not going to talk about their questions, they’re not interested in hearing your answer” (Catto et al., 2003, pp. 72–80).

This underscores the importance of faith accompaniment, where the Church meets people “where they are,” engaging with them, listening deeply, and creating spaces for meaningful interaction, particularly during times of doubt and challenge (Kuzmochka, 2024; Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022, pp. 27–28). In an age of skepticism, faith cannot simply be assumed or taken for granted (Catto et al., 2003, pp. 72–80). The parishes must address the issue of the “faith-life gap,” especially as churches in Canada face a severe crisis of declining membership (Kuzmochka & Ste-Marie, 2022).

In summary, in this section on transformative catechetical formation, I identified that the congregations and cultures of both parishes under study are different. Therefore, the means of catechetical formations at both parishes are also distinct. I demonstrated that St. Mary’s parish caters to groups who have been away from the Catholic faith due to challenging life experiences and to people from non-Catholic and non-religious backgrounds. In such contexts, programmes like Alpha and RCIA, with their interactive discussions, have proven to be highly effective. These initiatives attract participants of diverse ages, religious backgrounds, and life experiences, fostering a welcoming and transforming environment. There is psychological safety and trust (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023), and the participants can open up their hearts and share their concerns and dilemmas, eventually leading them to a transformed life.

In contrast, St. Basil’s parish primarily serves a demographic of highly educated professionals with strong Catholic roots. Therefore, I established that programs like Alpha, which are designed for those with little to no affiliation with the Church, are less suitable. Instead, St.

Basil's parish has developed its creative approaches to catechetical formation. For example, the parish organizes 'Conversations for Our Times,' inviting scholars from different parts of the country to lead the sessions. This initiative creates a rich, diverse learning environment that resonates with its congregation. However, I also elucidated that St. Basil's could benefit from implementing platforms to address the "faith-life gap" (Kuzmochka, 2024) among its youth. Such efforts would make catechetical formation more intergenerational and inclusive, ensuring it meets the needs of all parishioners.

5.4 A Church Fostering Missionary Commitment

In the previous sections, I have demonstrated that St. Mary's and St. Basil's parish embody the three pillars of a thriving Catholic community—a personal encounter with the Lord, synodal leadership, and transformative catechetical formation. The following section explores how the missionary commitment¹⁴, the fourth and last pillar, manifests in these parishes under study.

5.4.1 St. Mary's and Mission as Prophetic Dialogue

St. Mary's focuses on evangelization ministries, including street ministry (see picture 19) and fostering conversations about God's goodness and compassion in everyday settings like coffee shops, restaurants, and door-to-door ministry (visiting houses). Parishioners actively bring the message of Christ into the world, initiating conversations to share their faith and facilitate spiritual encounters. This approach reinforces the understanding that evangelization and Mission are not the exclusive responsibility of priests or religious leaders; instead, the entire Church is called to be a missionary (Vatican Council II, 1965a).

¹⁴ Missionary commitment is a broad term encompassing evangelization and a dedication to social justice, particularly empowering the poor and marginalized (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011; John Paul II, 1990; Paul VI, 1975).

Picture 19 – Door-to-Door Evangelization Ministry (Photo from St. Mary’s Photo Gallery)



Below is an excerpt from an interview with Matteo (pseudonym), who describes his first street ministry experience, where he and his colleague Giovanni (pseudonym) shared the message of Christ. During this encounter at a food court, they met a homosexual man who had been expelled from his family at the age of 16:

We walked across the center part of the food court and there was a man on the other side about 20 feet away, and he was talking very loud. And my reaction was, oh, he’s got a mental health condition, right, because he was hollering. And I said, well, we

won't talk to him. And Giovanni (pseudonym), said that's exactly why we are going to talk to him. So Giovanni and I started making our way through the chairs to go talk to him. And there was only one chair available, and that was in front of him and closer to us, so I sat down and I said, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' And he said, 'Yes, I do'. I said, 'Well, tell me how you know Jesus Christ'. And he said, 'I read the Bible'. I said, 'You do?' And he said, 'Yeah. But I only read the red lettering'. And I thought, whoa, this guy does read the book. So I said—because I thought he still had a mental health condition—I said, 'So tell me, quote me some Scripture'. And he did. He started quoting Scripture. He told us his story in 10 minutes. He was homosexual and he goes to a church over here in Sussex. He named the priest he knows and talked about his life—how he had left home at age 16, was kicked out of the family, a very wealthy family from British Columbia's big farming community. And yeah, so in 10 minutes he was basically telling us his life story. Being homosexual, he was concerned. I asked, 'Is there anything we can pray about?' And he said, 'Yeah, pray for my health. My lifestyle is not conducive to a healthy lifestyle.' The priests knew about it, and he had gone to confession. But he wanted us to pray over that, and we did. We prayed over him. So I left there, and my heart was filled. I think that was all. Yeah. It was the Holy Spirit leading, right? Because I said yes to going out, and the Holy Spirit, you know, was able to fill in the blanks and allow me to talk to these men. And the results were amazing. Absolutely amazing. ...*But the ultimate goal, I think, was to hear them.*

Matteo's experience highlights that many individuals yearn to be heard and open their hearts.

His encounter reveals that some carry profound psychological and spiritual wounds, seeking someone who can truly listen to them without judgment. As Matteo emphasized, listening with "no judgment" is key to creating these transformative moments of connection. When one analyzes this approach of engaging in dialogue with others—whether on the street or in restaurants—with the primary goal of listening rather than converting them to Catholicism or Christianity, it aligns with the concept of prophetic dialogue. As Bevans and Schroeder (2011) emphasize, this approach prioritizes listening and learning from the people and contexts being served.

That said, St. Mary's parish also engages in ministries that support the poor and the marginalized. For example, 'Heart of Mercy' is a charitable ministry by St. Mary's Parish dedicated to helping those in need. Elena (pseudonym), one of the leaders in 'Heart of Mercy,' explained that their ministry provides food, clothing, and sometimes financial assistance to the poor and marginalized. They also support refugees by providing them with food and shelter and offering

outreach to seniors within the parish. Heart of Mercy collaborates with a local Protestant Church on various charitable initiatives and participates in “The Big Give,” a nationwide day of generosity. The ministry also partners with Samaritan’s Purse, a nondenominational Christian organization that supports the poor and the marginalized worldwide. Thus, it is evident that St. Mary’s parish, through its missionary commitment, reaches out to respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalized and, at times, with other denominations. Having explored the missionary commitment of St. Mary’s parish, which prioritizes evangelization, I move on to the next section to establish the missionary commitment of St. Basil’s, for whom the Mission is primarily a “preferential option for the poor”(Francis, section 198, 2013).

5.4.2 St. Basil’s and Mission as a Preferential Option for The Poor

At St. Basil’s, the emphasis of their missionary commitment is on tangible expressions of social justice initiatives. While analyzing the four layers of St. Basil’s parish, I have already illustrated how it has been committed to helping people experiencing poverty and sponsoring refugees since its establishment. As mentioned, St. Basil’s parish embodies Pope Francis’s vision of “Church, poor and for the poor”(section 198, 2013). Along with the Refugee Ministry, Single Moms Ministry, Kateri Native Ministry and other social justice initiatives, another notable outreach program to empower the poor and the marginalized is the Food Cupboard, whereby St. Basil’s parish distributes food and groceries to the poor people in the neighbourhood (see picture 20). The active involvement of the parish community makes the Food Cupboard ministry possible. The ministry organizes a Christmas hamper program, where parishioners organize food boxes and gifts for families with children. Each year, the parish helps well over 100 people with this program. The parish has also set up a food bin at a local grocery store where customers donate food to St. Basil’s parish, which is distributed to people experiencing poverty in the neighbourhood.

It is important to note that Food Cupboard ministry is open to everyone, regardless of whether they are Catholics or non-Catholics. This further emphasizes their interfaith understanding of the world, ensuring everyone is respected and valued. St. Basil's parish is open to all, irrespective of their faith or religion. Their openness is not just a statement but a reflection of their core values of inclusivity and diversity, which are key characteristics of a positive organizational culture (Gardenswartz, 2008; Radu, 2023). St. Basil's parish believes in a God who welcomes the poor and the marginalized and is committed to living out this belief in its community. As explained earlier, the profound social activism and legacy of the key 'heroes'—Fr. John Ruth and the first members of St. Basil's parish—continue to guide and inspire the culture of St. Basil's parishioners in their Mission to serve the poor and the marginalized (Hofstede, 1980).

Picture 20 – Food Cupboard Ministry Members engaged in Christmas Hamper and Food distribution (picture by a parishioner)



Furthermore, one finds elements of Mission as prophetic dialogue in many initiatives at St. Basil's parish, emphasizing the importance of allowing ourselves to be evangelized by others before seeking to evangelize them (Barbour, 1984; Bevans & Schroeder, 2011). For instance, the initiative by St. Basil's parish to invite women to give gospel reflections every fourth Sunday of the month exemplifies this vision in practice. Recalling the interview excerpt with Fr. Daryold (discussed in the section on synodal leadership), he described a Christmas Mass where a woman reflected on the pain of childbirth and the postpartum depression she experienced afterward. She poignantly stated, "When I needed someone most, no one came." The priest noted that this reflection served as a wake-

up call for the entire parish, highlighting the importance of listening to one another and caring for each other. This example illustrates what Barbour (1984) describes as a “Mission in reverse,” where one becomes open to being evangelized by those they are sent to evangelize. St. Basil’s parish embodies this approach by fostering spaces for authentic listening and learning from the lived experiences of others. Furthermore, St. Basil Parish’s welcoming approach toward LGBTQ+ individuals reflects the concept of Mission as a prophetic dialogue (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011), which emphasizes respectful dialogue and engagement with the poor and the marginalized in society. As I explained in the last chapter while unpacking the theological focus, St. Basil’s parish is a “Church, which is poor and for the poor.”

St. Mary’s and St. Basil’s are deeply committed to their missionary call, but they express this commitment in distinct ways. St. Mary’s prioritizes evangelization by reaching out to people in public spaces and initiating conversations about faith. Meanwhile, St. Basil’s focuses on social justice initiatives such as the Food Cupboard, refugee ministry, Kateri Native ministry and other outreach programs to empower the poor and the marginalized.

5.5 Contrasting Both Parishes’ Cultures

St. Mary’s and St. Basil’s represent the Catholic Church and remain loyal to the Catholic magisterium. They guide and renew their members through Catholic teachings and doctrines, with the Eucharist as the highest form of worship. However, there are differences in their rhythms, expressions of faith, and inclusivity—similar to the contrast between extroverted and introverted siblings within the same family. By understanding and acknowledging these differences, the Church can foster a sense of unity in diversity. Instead of finding fault with one another or claiming superiority, the local Churches can inspire each other and learn valuable lessons from the varied expressions of the Catholic faith.

5.5.1 Different Rhythms

There is something that I noticed about the rhythm of parish life at St. Basil's during weekdays, particularly the quieter atmosphere compared to the vibrant engagement seen on Sundays. At St. Basil's, the weekdays lack significant gatherings or regular programs, offering fewer opportunities for spontaneous interactions within the church premises. This quieter rhythm prompted me to take more initiative in connecting with parishioners and learning about their ministries. Many of St. Basil's ministries, such as the Refugee Ministry and Food Cupboard, operate predominantly in outreach contexts outside the church building. This external focus highlights the parish's commitment to social justice and community service but also means these ministries are less visible within the parish space.

Regarding spirituality, St. Basil's parishioners exhibit a deep, steady relationship with the Lord, marked by faithful Sunday Mass attendance. Their spirituality is more private and contemplative than the visibly expressive worship in charismatic communities like St. Mary's. This contrast reflects the diversity of Catholic expressions—equally valid but distinct in style. In contrast, St. Mary's Parish presents a more dynamic weekday schedule, with programs like Alpha, prayer groups, and Bible studies fostering regular communal interactions and a high attendance of approximately sixty or seventy parishioners on daily masses. This charismatic culture encourages vibrant worship, active testimony, and evangelization efforts, creating a strong weekly community—not just on Sundays.

5.5.2 Different Faith Expressions

One observes two distinct expressions or emphases of Catholicism, reflecting the diversity that Catholicism has always embraced. These are not opposing extremes but rather complementary focuses. For example, I belong to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap), one of the three

main branches of the Franciscan Order. The other two are the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) and the Order of Friars Minor Conventual (OFM Conv). While all three share St. Francis of Assisi as their founder and follow his ideals of evangelical poverty and brotherhood, they each embody the Franciscan charism with a unique emphasis. These differences are not contradictions but variations along the same path. Similarly, I would not say St. Basil's Parish or St. Mary's Parish is better than the other. What matters is how the four key pillars of a thriving parish are reflected in parish life and how these distinct expressions of Catholicism respond to the post-Christian religious landscape of Canada. The two parishes I studied embody these four pillars uniquely, so my title is 'An Ethnographic Exploration of Two Catholic Communities: Thriving Through Unique Parish Cultures.'

The differences between these parishes illustrate the diverse ways Catholic communities adapt to their unique cultural and spiritual landscapes. St. Mary's draws on conservative, charismatic renewal movements to energize its parish culture, while St. Basil's emphasizes contemplative faith and missionary outreach programs based on social justice initiatives. Both approaches are valuable expressions of Catholicism, offering insights into thriving parish life within the Canadian context. Ultimately, these observations highlight two equally meaningful pathways to cultivating thriving Catholic communities. St. Mary's outward charismatic vibrancy fosters visible engagement and evangelization, while St. Basil's contemplative approach reflects a steadfast faith deeply rooted in action and outreach.

5.5.3 Different Constituencies and Definitions of Inclusion

At St. Mary's Parish, various ministries and programs like Alpha, the New Life Retreat, Encounter Ministry and RCIA provide opportunities for individuals with diverse spiritual backgrounds to grow in faith. These initiatives cater to those lacking a strong Catholic upbringing

or orientation to religious practices, offering meaningful exploration of organized religion and fostering deeper Christian discipleship. They also welcome people who may have drifted away from the Catholic Church and wish to reconnect, as well as individuals from other denominations who are curious about the Catholic faith and seek to deepen their spiritual journey.

St. Mary's is an ideal community for those desiring a profound charismatic worship experience, with its vibrant liturgies and active ministries. However, individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their families may feel conflicted, as the parish upholds traditional Catholic teachings that may not align with their perspectives and sometimes increase the stigma they already deal with in society. Nevertheless, the parish remains open to everyone as children of God, inviting all to participate in its spiritual life. For example, my earlier reference to Matteo's (pseudonym) encounter with the homosexual person at the mall perfectly illustrates St. Mary's openness to everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation. As Matteo noted: "But the ultimate goal, I think, was to hear them."

In contrast, St. Basil's Parish is known for its inclusivity and progressive approach. It warmly welcomes everyone, especially LGBTQ+ individuals and their families who may have experienced hurt due to judgmental attitudes or rigid practices in other parishes (see picture 21). During the interview, Fr. Daryold told me, "We're open to diversity. Whatever your [LGBTQ+ individuals] orientation is, you are a human being, first of all. You know, and we welcome you. We thank you for coming here and being with us. You contribute to our spirituality." St. Basil's is also renowned for its refugee ministry, empowering those who fled their homelands for safety. Immigrants are fully integrated into the parish community, with many contributing actively to groups like the Pastoral Council, Knights of Columbus, and Justice and Peace Commission.

Picture 21 – Inclusive Welcoming Poster at the Entrance Door of St. Basil's (picture by the author)



Finally, the parish also celebrates its strong connection with the Indigenous community, some of whom are key contributors, particularly in the choir. However, those who prefer a more charismatic worship style or an emphasis on evangelization ministries may find the traditional and less demonstrative liturgical approach at St. Basil's less aligned with their preferences, if not too intellectual and cold. Here, worship tends to be more reflective and structured, with fewer outward expressions like hand-waving or praise and worship sessions.

5.6 Summary

Thus, in this chapter, I analyzed the culture of both parishes with a four-pillar approach. (see Table 4).

Table 4 - A Comparative Table of Four Pillars of St. Mary's and St. Basil's

Four Pillars	St. Mary's Parish	St. Basil's Parish
Personal Encounter with the Lord	Charismatic-Empowered Liturgy Intentional Welcoming Community	Reflective and Uplifting Liturgy Genuine Welcoming Community
Synodal Leadership	Inclusive, Collaborative and Listening	Inclusive, Collaborative and Listening
Catechetical Formation	Introductory and Faith-Renewing Formation	Community-Building Faith Formation
Missionary Commitment	Mission as Prophetic Dialogue	Preferential Option for the Poor

The analysis of the first pillar of a thriving Catholic community—a personal encounter with the Lord— showed that, in both parishes, uplifting liturgy and music, inspiring homilies, welcoming pastors and a hospitable community facilitate an environment where people can experience God's, fatherly love.

Secondly, I analyzed how both parishes highly value synodal leadership grounded in inclusivity and collaboration. I observed that both parishes ensure wider consultation with the laity and that the laity has a significant role in making decisions in their various capacities and the overall running of the parish administration and ministry. Parish pastors are not the sole leaders or decision-makers. They respect and recognize the voices and opinions of the parishioners through pastoral council meetings and synodal discussions. Their leadership approach demonstrates that parish leadership's core values are collaboration, inclusivity and listening.

Upon analyzing the third pillar —transformative catechetical formation— I observed that both parishes have distinct and effective means of catechetical formation, given that their demographics and culture differ. Along with interactive RCIA programmes, St. Mary's parish organizes catechetical programs like Alpha and New Life Retreat to cater to many faithfuls who do not have any Catholic/religious backgrounds or were driven away from the Church due to some life experiences. At St. Basil's parish, which has a demographic of parishioners from professional backgrounds with strong Catholic roots, the parish offers catechetical programmes like 'Conversation for Our Times' that cover a wide range of Church teachings, encyclicals, and topics related to social justice.

Coming to the fourth and final pillar, I analyzed the missionary commitment of both parishes and established that St. Mary's parish and St. Basil's parish both demonstrate strong missionary commitment. The difference lies in their emphasis: St. Mary's prioritizes evangelization, while St. Basil's parish focuses on social justice programs, with a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized. Citing an example of an encounter of Matteo (pseudonym) with a homosexual at a mall, I stated that St. Mary's parish approaches the Mission as a prophetic dialogue (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011) where they go out to the street and share the message of Christ but not particularly for compulsive conversion but to listen to those whomever the Lord brings on the way. At the same time, ministries such as Heart of Mercy prove that the poor and marginalized have a place in the heart of St. Mary's. At St. Basil's, the Mission is primarily a "preferential option for the poor," following the teachings of Pope Francis. St. Basil's parish embodies what it means to be "Church, poor and for the poor" (Francis, section 198, 2013). The refugee ministry, food bank, Kateri Ministry, Women in the Church Ministry, Catholic Women League, and Single Moms Ministry demonstrate how St. Basil's parish is committed to empowering the poor and marginalized.

I then contrasted the two parishes and stated that the culture and charism of each demonstrate two equally meaningful expressions of fostering thriving Catholic communities. St. Mary's is an ideal community for those desiring a profound charismatic worship experience, with its vibrant liturgies and active ministries. In contrast, St. Basil's Parish, with its progressive approach, warmly welcomes everyone—especially LGBTQ+ individuals and their families—who may have distanced themselves from the Catholic Church due to the judgmental and conservative attitudes of some pastors and parishes. Instead of looking at what the right or wrong approach is, I believe the ethnographic description I did demonstrates that it is instead a matter of answering different needs while keeping an open mind to different expressions of faith.

Conclusion

The changing religious landscape in Canada and other Western countries cannot be ignored. Many people, particularly youth, disengage from traditional religious structures and organized faith communities (Clarke, 2017). The limited presence of young people at St. Basil's Parish reflects this broader trend, which is prevalent across the churches in Canada and Western countries.

However, Catto et al. (2003) observe that many Canadians, including those who identify as unaffiliated, maintain an interest in spirituality and social justice and seek spiritual fulfillment and meaning amidst the challenges of modern life. This observation is echoed in the interview with Véronique (pseudonym), a parishioner at St. Basil, who shared, "But I find that I really, if there's always a want that I have, to know the Lord, to know God, to talk to God, to feel God. Moreover, um, there's always like, me, kind of searching for different ways to do that, yeah." Similarly, the participation of many individuals without religious affiliation or belief in God in the Alpha program, a program designed to introduce people to the basics of the Christian faith, at St. Mary's provides further evidence of this spiritual curiosity. These examples highlight an opportunity for Churches to

connect with individuals seeking meaning and purpose outside conventional religious frameworks. By fostering inclusive spaces for such spiritual exploration and engaging in impactful social action, Churches can demonstrate the enduring relevance of their traditions in addressing modern challenges.

To thrive in a post-Christian society, Churches must adapt to the realities of a more diverse and less religious population. This requires rediscovering the “founding impulse for Mission” and embracing innovative ways to connect with individuals who find traditional forms of Christianity unappealing (Catto et al., 2003; Clarke, 2017, p. 239). I am hopeful that, with Pope Francis’ current emphasis on the Synod on Synodality—where the Mission is one of the three key pillars—local Church leaders will initiate new efforts to engage the youth, reconnect with those who have left the Catholic Church, and reach out to those who have yet to encounter it. Parishes should provide opportunities for creative adult faith formation, Bible study, and faith-sharing that draw in various people. Leaders must embrace a continuous growth and improvement culture, as this is the key to maintaining the Church relevance and effectiveness in the modern world (Barga, 2023; Garvin et al., 2008; Radu, 2023; Rahman & Nas, 2013). Failing to do so could lead to a lack of direction and effectiveness in the parish.

Insights Emerging from This Ethnographic Journey: A Plea for Intra-Catholic Ecumenism

One important insight emerged from my ethnographic journey: every parish has its own unique culture, traditions, and fundamental values. These distinct identities must be respected and acknowledged. Undoubtedly, the current parish priests in both parishes play a key role in their thriving state. However, what happens if a priest with a rigid mentality takes charge? All four pillars

of a thriving Catholic community could be dismantled overnight. One parishioner, recalling a former rigid pastor, succinctly expressed this sentiment: “The easiest way to kill the Church [parish] is to make everything mandatory.” The remark highlights the damaging effects of an authoritarian leadership. As Block (2008, p. 88) notes, “Listening is the greatest virtue every leader must possess,” a principle echoed by Pope Francis through the Synod on Synodality. A pastor who listens, empowers, and collaborates with the community can foster a parish culture where people feel valued and heard (Härtel & Ashkanasy, 2011; Radu, 2023; Redelinghuys et al., 2019).

So, this speaks something significant about safeguarding the culture of each parish. Hofstede’s cultural theory defines a culture as built upon four essential layers: symbols, rituals, heroes, and values. Like any other organization, a parish sustains its identity and thrives over time through these elements. Ignoring this truth can lead to polarized positions and potentially damaging conflicts. The ongoing liturgical conflicts in the Syro-Malabar Church in my region, Kerala, India (Akkara, 2024), perfectly illustrate the consequences of disregarding cultural differences of local churches¹⁵. This serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the need for fostering a culture of ‘Intra-Catholic ecumenism’ among and within the local Catholic Churches and parishes. .

Historically, ecumenism can be defined as an initiative to promote Christian unity among the different Christian denominations, and the term ‘ecumenism’ is traditionally associated with inter-denominational unity (Vatican Council II, sections 1 & 4, 1964b). However, I intentionally employ “Intra-Catholic ecumenism” to highlight the need for greater respect and dialogue among/within different parish cultures. Many Catholics experience internal divisions based on

¹⁵ The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in India has been deeply divided for several years due to an intense conflict over liturgical practices. At the heart of the issue is the enforcement of a unified liturgy, which has faced significant opposition from a group of priests and laypeople in the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese. They favour the traditional *versus populum* (facing the congregation) style of Mass, contrasting with the *ad orientem* (facing the altar) format that the Synod of the Syro-Malabar Church has mandated (Coppen, 2024; Tulloch, 2024).

liturgical preferences, theological emphases, and pastoral priorities. For example, fundamentalist Catholics who see Vatican II reforms as a departure from the tradition and resist it as such (Arbuckle, 2013). Just as the Catholic Church seeks unity with other Christian traditions, the Church must also cultivate unity within its diverse expressions of faith.

"Intra-Catholic ecumenism" also highlights the significance of promoting adult catechesis across different expressions of faith to help all members understand and appreciate the Church's rich diversity. I hope this research will encourage an openness to different expressions of Catholicism within the Church and foster greater respect for diverse parish cultures. By embracing intra-Catholic ecumenism, parishes can learn from one another, collaborate, and enhance their respective ministries. This could lead to a stronger, more unified Church that respects the rich diversity of spiritual practices while maintaining a shared commitment to the core teachings of the Catholic Church. Finally, the call to "Intra-Catholic ecumenism" aligns with synodality's emphasis on journeying together despite differences, where differences are not erased but held in charitable dialogue (Synod of Bishops, 2024).

Limitation

This dissertation is but a drop in the ocean. Attempting to understand the culture of a parish—its visible and invisible dynamics, special charism and Mission—within a short period of one or two months presents inherent limitations. I could only witness certain activities and ministries during this time during the study period. Undoubtedly, many other ministries and events occur throughout the year as the liturgical cycle transitions from Advent to Ordinary Time, Lent, Easter, and beyond.

Moreover, my observations were limited to what occurred within the church premises. However, a significant number of outreach ministries happen outside the church grounds. For example, at St. Mary's, the street ministry involves parishioners venturing into malls and restaurants,

initiating conversations with strangers to share their faith. Similarly, at St. Basil's, outreach initiatives such as the Food Cupboard, refugee ministry, and social justice projects like the Multi-Faith Housing Project operate beyond the Church walls.

Another limitation lies in the sample size of interviewees. I conducted interviews with only approximately eight parishioners from each parish. Engaging with a larger group would have provided a broader understanding of the parishes. For instance, many individuals actively involved in various ministries were not included in this study, which limits the depth of insights into the parishes' diverse activities. Additionally, this study focuses on only two parishes out of more than a hundred in the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall (Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall, n.d.). Expanding the scope to include six or eight parishes across the archdiocese would offer a richer understanding of the different dynamics and contexts within the diocese.

Finally, my status as a foreigner from a different continent, having spent only a year and a half in Canada, might have further constrained my ability to fully grasp and interpret the cultural nuances of the two parishes under study. As a clergy-researcher, I had significant advantages, including access to various aspects of parish life, such as pastoral council meetings and direct engagement with ministry leaders and parishioners. This afforded me a unique perspective and level of freedom. However, this dual role may also have posed a disadvantage. While parishioners welcomed me as a newcomer learning about their parish, some may have hesitated to share openly, seeing me primarily as a member of the clergy.

Future Research

Future research could explore practical and creative approaches to catechetical formation and liturgical celebrations for teenagers and youth. This is particularly relevant in a context where increasing numbers of people are distancing themselves from organized and traditional religions.

Despite declining Catholic youth participation, the success of ministries like the one at St. Mary's Church, which attracts hundreds of young people every Friday, serves as a beacon of hope. It demonstrates that innovative and engaging programs can connect Canadian youth effectively with the Church. Additionally, it is worth exploring ways to effectively integrate different Catholic worship and liturgy, bridging conservative and progressive emphases, to ensure the parish remains welcoming and inclusive.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to study the "well-being initiatives" (Radu, 2023) implemented by the diocese which aim to ensure the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of both pastors and parishioners, enabling them to experience the God who loves, heals, guides and saves. In past years, tensions arose between previous pastors and parishioners in both parishes, which may have also occurred in many others. The crucial question is: How does the diocese or religious congregation address these moments of tension? Are adequate support systems in place to prevent pastors and parishioners from becoming emotionally and psychologically overwhelmed? Identifying strategies to keep priests positively motivated and resilient during stress and loneliness is essential for a thriving parish.

My last recommendation follows the same scenario of tensions between the pastor and parishioners previously explained. Future research could also examine what happens to parishioners who stop attending church due to authoritarian and rigid leadership. Do parishes take proactive steps to reach out to these "lost coins" and reintegrate them into the faith community? Exploring these questions could provide valuable insights into fostering reconciliation and renewal within Catholic parishes, making it a crucial area for future research.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Title of the study: An Ethnographic Exploration of Two Catholic Communities: Thriving Through Unique Parish Cultures

Name of the Student Researcher- Fr. Xavier Chingamthara Vincent
MA in Leadership, Ecology and Equity
Faculty of Human Sciences
Saint Paul University Ottawa

Name of the Supervisor - Dr. Michaël Séguin
Assistant Professor
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Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by MA student researcher Fr. Xavier Chingamthara Vincent under the supervision of Dr. Michaël Séguin, and duly approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Saint Paul University.

Purpose of the Study: This study aims to explore the key elements that define a thriving Christian parish community, through a comparative case study between two parishes in Ottawa. By examining various elements, the study seeks to understand how to cultivate a parish culture that enhances the church's resilience and vitality among the catholic churches in Ottawa.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of an interview expected to last approximately 60–75 minutes. The interviews are scheduled for parishioners of St. Mary's Church from October to November and for those at St. Basil's Parish from November to December. However, the dates can be adjusted to accommodate my availability. I may choose to have the interview conducted at parish facilities or another quiet location of my preference. During the interview, I will be asked a series of open-ended questions about my personal experiences and

impressions regarding the culture, leadership approaches, lay involvement, spiritual and catechetical formation, and missionary commitment of my parish. With my consent, the interview will be audiotaped for accurate transcription. A follow-up interview may be requested within two weeks if clarifications are needed.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer my personal experience and impression about my parish and its culture and this may cause me to feel emotional or psychological discomfort. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. Moreover, I can withdraw myself from the study within a period of one month of my involvement, if I prefer.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to current research on flourishing Catholic Christian communities in Canada, particularly by exploring various factors that constitute a thriving Christian community. This research will assist pastors and parish communities in analyzing their strengths and identifying areas for improvement. Furthermore, this comparative study between two parishes, each with its own distinct vision and mission, will offer insights into how integrating these perspectives can benefit the overall growth of not only their own congregation but also other Catholic churches in Ottawa.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used solely for data analysis related to this research project and that my confidentiality will be protected by the use of pseudonyms instead of my real identity. Anonymity will also be protected in the following manner: any unique details pertaining to my identity that could possibly trace someone to find me will be changed, or not included in order to protect my privacy.

Conservation of data: The data collected in the form of hard copy transcripts or tape recordings will be kept in a secure manner in the residence of the primary researcher. The only people who will have access to the data will be the primary researcher, his supervisor and committee members. The data will be conserved until June 2030. After the required retention period, all electronic data will be permanently deleted and hard copies and transcripts will be destroyed using a cross-cut shredder.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study within a period of one month of my involvement and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal, will be deleted and destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____ (Name of participant), agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Fr. Xavier Chingamthara Vincent, M.A. student in Leadership, Ecology and Equity at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Michaël Séguin.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4 Tel.: (613) 236-1393

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Parishioners

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

1. Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ: How would you describe your connection to God or Christ?
2. Community and Belonging: Why do you choose to belong to this parish when there are so many others you could join? What does this parish mean to you?
3. Synodal Leadership Approach: How would you qualify the leadership of this parish?
4. Catechetical Formation: What is the best thing about the catechesis being offered in your parish? What kind of faith formation (e.g. retreat, Bible study, etc.) have you been involved in over the last few years?
5. Missionary Commitment: Over the past few years, what kinds of missionary service and outreach programs (helping the poor and marginalized, charitable works) have you been engaged in?
6. Role of Prayer and Sacraments and its meaningful connection with life: Does the liturgy in this church help you live a meaningful life? Why? Does it bind the community together?
7. Intergenerational Engagement: Based on your experience, how does this parish engage with different age groups?
8. Resilience in the Face of Challenges: In light of the various challenges facing Roman Catholic churches in Ottawa, what do you believe this parish is doing to maintain its vitality and resilience? What could be done better?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Pastors

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Thanks for participating – explain the project.

1. Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ:

Can you share how the parish facilitates personal encounters with Jesus Christ for its members? In what ways do you think the personal relationship with Jesus Christ influences the overall vitality of our parish community?

2. Community and Belonging:

In what ways does the parish work to create a sense of acceptance and belonging within the parish? How do you address situations where members may feel disconnected or marginalized?

3. Synodal Leadership Approach:

How does the parish leadership embody a synodal approach in its relationship with the members of the parish? Can you describe a situation where this approach has strengthened the parish? What challenges have you faced in implementing a synodal leadership model, and how have you addressed them to foster a thriving community?

4. Catechetical Formation:

How does the parish prioritize ongoing Catechetical formation for its members, and what role does this play in the vitality of the community? Can you describe how the parish's Catechetical programs have evolved to meet the spiritual needs of different age groups and backgrounds?

5. Missionary Commitment: (missionary service and outreach)

How do you guide the parish in its missionary commitment to not only evangelize but also serve those in need within the community? What specific outreach programs or initiatives have been most impactful?

6. Role of Prayer and Sacraments:

What is your perspective on the role of prayer and the sacraments in fostering a thriving parish community? How do you see these spiritual practices influencing the daily lives of your parishioners?

7. Intergenerational Engagement:

How do you ensure that the parish is engaging with all age groups, and what role do you see intergenerational relationships playing in the vitality of the community?

8. Vision for the Future:

How do you envision the future of this parish in the context of various challenges in Ottawa? What strategies are essential to ensuring its continued growth and relevance?