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Using the Ignatian *Examen* in Community
to Encourage Spiritual Transformation

A Research Portfolio
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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this portfolio was to bring together three years of work, showing certain thematic connections among the papers. As indicated in the title, the major focus was spiritual transformation, and each paper discussed some aspect of this. During the research and writing, the author learned that spiritual transformation happens to an individual in community. The importance of individual growth and growth in community was evident in the author's spiritual autobiography in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discussed models of spiritual formation, showing connections and common threads among several types, with a focus on Celtic spirituality, which is noted for its emphasis on community. The research which was conducted during the project as discussed in Chapter 4 also showed how one needs community in order to deepen one's relationship with God. The research took place over a period of several months, and involved the author's directees practicing the Ignatian *examen* during this time. Each month, the author met with the participants to discuss the results of practicing this discipline. In addition, the participants journaled about their experience, and the results formed the basis for the discussions. It was determined that, while one is ultimately responsible for one's spiritual growth, it may be more easily achieved by practicing the *examen* and by discussing it with a spiritual director. This shows that the individual needs community—even if it is only a community of one other person—in order to facilitate spiritual transformation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, I embarked on what I thought would be an academic exercise, one which would culminate in a Doctorate in Ministry. I thought that I would do a lot of reading, and that I would be exposed to some writers I had not met before. Since I was already in Pastoral Ministry, I hoped that some of what I learned would prove to be useful to me in the congregational setting. I had considered doing a doctorate in the past, but every time I was about to apply, something stopped me. No matter how appealing a particular programme sounded at first, there was always a reason for me to decide against it. However, when I first heard of this programme—a Doctorate of Ministry in Spiritual Formation—I felt immediately drawn to it, in much the same way as I had felt called to ministry almost ten years earlier. This idea of discerning God’s will for me is discussed in the following chapters.

In the speech given at Pentecost, recorded by Luke in Acts 2:28, Peter quoted Psalm 116, “You have made known to me the paths of life.” This sentiment expresses how I feel about the direction my life has taken—as though God has taken a personal hand in my decisions. I have constantly felt God’s presence in my life, whether alone or in community, and I believe that even now

he continues to make his will known to all people, if only they will listen.

As I read over the papers which I wrote during the past three years, I became aware of recurring thoughts and themes, most of which I did not notice at the time. However, it seems that those themes have affected most of my life, even without my being consciously aware of them. The key theme—in my papers and in my life—is that God speaks to us personally. This was true in the time of the ancients and is still true today, even if many people are no longer able to hear God’s voice. Unlike Moses (Exodus 3:2), we are not likely to encounter a burning bush, nor to be told that we are standing on holy ground. However, that does not mean that we are not likely to encounter God. Nor does it mean that we are not able to hear his voice.

As an individual, I live in the world, so that is the first place I look for God. For the last eight years, I have lived in Québec City, surrounded by people and busy-ness. There were times when it was difficult to find a quiet space to listen for God’s voice. We created a small arbour in the church yard, secluded from the street by a fence on one side and a building on the other. We put an archway in front of it, and surrounded it with plants. We called it “The Sanctuary” and it was meant to be a place of solitude, a place where I could sit and not be disturbed. I found that other people were using it as well, which showed me that I was not alone in wanting such a space. This idea of physically removing oneself from the world speaks to the idea of holy ground, and, while I have never seen a burning bush there, I have used that spot as a place of discernment at different

times.

Now that I have moved to a more rural setting, I find it easier to connect to God on my daily walks. Aside from the fact that there are fewer people around while I am walking, I have discovered several routes which have little or no traffic, so my thoughts are free to wander. There is also something meditative about walking, and noticing things around me. The air smells different here, as though the breath of Spirit has purified it. Some days, as I am walking, I catch the scent of freshly-cut grass, which transports me to a time of innocence, a time before I became part of the world. If I walk after a rain storm, I can still smell the rain, and I see rainbows both in the air and in the puddles on the ground. This brings to mind God's covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:13–14), and I renew my covenant to be faithful to God. There are times, while I am walking, when I catch a scent that I remember from my childhood, and which I find almost impossible to describe. In my childhood, I often went on ocean-going ships. In fact, that was how we traveled to and from Australia, and the smell is one which I associate with those voyages. This smell is associated with new experiences, new thoughts, and new beginnings. When I catch this odor, I wonder what it is that God has in store for me.

The skies have always been a source of wonder for me—whether I was star-gazing or whistling at the Northern Lights. This phenomenon was often connected to spirituality in aboriginal culture, and for me, it has become a sign of the wonder of God. I have developed an attraction towards Celtic Christianity and

spirituality, as will be discussed later in this document, and have noticed a strong affinity between it and North American aboriginal spirituality. Both have a connection to nature, which is often missing in this 21st century. Yet, this connection too reminds us that God speaks to us in and through the created world.

God speaks to people in dreams. This is evidenced in Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. In Jacob's dream, God spoke directly to him at a time when he needed reassurance that he was doing the right thing (Genesis 28:12–15). When Joseph was deciding whether or not he should divorce Mary quietly, an angel came to him in a dream and confirmed what Mary had told him (Matthew 1:20–21). One of my professors at Tyndale spoke to us about the importance of dreams in our spiritual lives. Even before this, I had often felt as though my dreams were guiding me, and after hearing what he had to say, I found myself paying more attention to my dreams. Sometimes, they came during times of stress, and provided me with insight which eluded me during the day. Other times, they came at no particular time and for no apparent reason, but challenged me to approach something differently. I have learned not to disregard what happens in my dreams, because I now realize that this is one way God has of speaking to me when I am free from the distractions of my busy waking life.

I have found reading to be another way of connecting to God. Scripture, of course, is key. As a Presbyterian, I consider the Bible to be our primary standard, as stated in Living Faith. "The Bible has been given to us by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life. It is the standard of all doctrine by which we

must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience. We subject to its judgment all we believe and do” (Hayes 1984, 14). However, even before I became a Presbyterian, the Bible played an important role in my life. My grandmother once told me that, if I had a decision to make, I should consult the Bible. Her own devotional habit was to sit quietly for a while, with the Bible in her lap or on a table in front of her. Then she would ask God for guidance, open the Bible to a random spot, and, with her eyes closed, place her finger on the page. Then she would read the verse, and always found something there to help her make her decision. While I do not encourage this practice because I find it a theologically weak approach to discernment, I do use a life application Bible when I am working out a thorny problem.

There are other books which I have found helpful at different times, and I am constantly finding others. The expression “so many books, so little time” resonates with me, as my to-read list keeps growing. I read several devotional books daily, and always find something helpful or thought-provoking. This shows me that God is using these other writers to point me in the direction he wants me to take, or towards the decision he wants me to make. I also read Henri Nouwen on a regular basis, finding both comfort and inspiration in his words. Even though his life and mine are different in many ways, I am struck by the similarities of our thoughts. Sister Joan Chittister is another author I discovered just before starting the DMin programme. Her work helps me not only in my personal spiritual life, but I also use it in Spiritual Direction. C. S. Lewis, of course, has always been a

favourite of mine. Whether I am reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* or one of his more overtly theological works, I find that his words speak to me in a way that many others do not. He obviously had a close personal relationship with God, which is evident in everything he wrote. One thing that these writers—and others whom I admire—have in common is that they were not afraid to show their anger towards God at certain times in their lives. I think that too many of us are afraid to let God know that we are upset with him, and yet the Psalmist never hesitated to do this in the psalms of lament. These authors have become important conversation partners because they provide clarifying voices to help me discern what God is saying.

Prayer is one of the ways in which God speaks to me. I used to think of prayer as being my way of speaking to God, my way of asking for things, or thanking him, or praising him, or seeking forgiveness, but I have come to learn about listening prayer. One of the courses during my studies was directly about listening prayer, and it opened my eyes to a different aspect of prayer. Now, when I pray, I allow time for God to answer. This happens in different ways, and could be something as simple as a feeling. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that it is like a physical sensation. I am reminded of John Wesley, whose heart was strangely warmed while he was listening to another person speak about the change that God can work in one's heart through faith in Christ. While this was not prayer, as commonly understood, it showed the role that attentiveness can play in spiritual transformation.

God does not only speak to me as an individual; he also speaks to us in in community. Our first community is surely our family, and it is there that I received my early Christian education and spiritual formation. I was blessed to have been exposed to several different denominations in my childhood, and I believe that this gave me an openness which has allowed me to explore my own spiritual life in a different way than if I had not had that experience.

School is also a community, and since I attended a parochial school, it played a role in my spiritual formation. It was run by nuns, and great emphasis was placed on prayer as a daily part of life. In fact, it was partly due to this training that I still find prayer to be an essential part of every day. My school community has expanded through this DMin programme, as our cohort has also become a community, one which I am sure will withstand the test of time and distance after we graduate. We have become too much part of each other's journey to stop just because we are no longer officially studying together.

Now, I am part of several communities, one of which is my particular church. Although, as its minister, I am not—strictly speaking—a member of this congregation, I nevertheless feel a strong connection to each member. By worshiping together we build community, and through community our faith is stronger. The author of Ecclesiastes knew this, when he spoke about two and three being stronger (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12). Jesus stressed the importance of community, when he said that he would be present where two or three came together in his name (Matthew 18:19–20). There are prayer chains involving

people from different places, which also form a kind of community.

The idea of a community of faith is certainly not new. The early Christians banded together, and we have continued this today in our churches. At different times in my life, for various reasons, I have not been part of a faith community. At those times, it was easy for me to drift away from God. I did not do this consciously, but it happened.

While being a member of a congregation is important, it is even more important to me that I am a member of a denomination. In a denomination, I find dogma, which has often been considered negative, but I believe that it is foundational to faith. In a denomination, I find tradition, which connects us to those who have gone before and to those who will come after. In my denomination, I also find change, but a very specific kind of change. We are part of the Reformed tradition, and we believe, as Presbyterians, that we are always reformed, and always being reformed, according to the word of God. This means that we are not so bogged down in either dogma or tradition that we are not open to change when it is necessary.

I am involved in several cyber communities, and I have learned that they are almost as valuable as physical communities. There, as in my physical communities, I find validation for my beliefs. I am also challenged, which serves to help me express myself in such a way that I understand my beliefs better. I am also stretched during our discussions, as I hear different points of view, and different understandings of dogma and foundational beliefs. Often, these cause me

to reflect more deeply on what I believe, but they have never shaken my faith.

Spiritual disciplines are vital in the discernment process. While I would not advocate hair shirts or self-flagellation, many of the other disciplines are part of my daily life. These disciplines include prayer, as mentioned above, and Scripture reading, among others. I am a Spiritual Director, and, as such, I am privileged to walk with others on their journey in a way that is not possible with a congregation. I also have a Spiritual Director, with whom I meet regularly. He encourages and challenges me, and when we have to miss our meeting, I find that there is a gap in my life.

Both Ignatian and Celtic spirituality understand the importance of spiritual direction, and this is discussed later in this document. However, it is necessary to understand that spiritual direction is a way of combining the individual with the community. The individual must seek spiritual direction—it does not come looking. Working with another person can expand our self-knowledge, as long as we are completely honest. There is a concept known as the true self, and it is this self which can be discovered and revealed through spiritual direction, which is explained in chapter three.

One of the Ignatian disciplines which became part of my life is the daily *examen*. Because it was so important to me, I decided to teach it to my directees and to use it as the basis for my project during my final year of studies. Chapter Four provides a detailed report of this project. This shows the importance of the individual's self-awareness during spiritual growth and transformation. While the

examen, done properly, is a great tool, using it in conjunction with spiritual direction enables us to see more clearly what it is that God wants of us. It also allows us to discern God's voice in our daily lives, which are often so busy and preoccupied that we are more like Martha than Mary (Luke 10:41–42).

When we know ourselves more fully, we are better able to be part of a community, partly because we no longer have anything to hide. This means being transparent, rather than fully disclosing. There are still boundaries to be respected, and the *examen* can help with that, too. If we know ourselves, if we know where God is in our lives, then we will be able to stay on the path that God has intended for us since before we were born (Psalm 139:15b–16). The interrelationship of the individual and the community is evident in my own personal story, as is the fact that, while the individual will have a close relationship with God, this relationship will be ideally developed in community. The following chapter provides a glimpse of how God has been at work in my own life, both as an individual and in community. It shows how, over the years, he has been guiding me along his path, the one that has been laid out for me, and that is, ultimately, for my God and for his glory.

In this next chapter—my spiritual autobiography—it is evident that community has been and continues to be a big part of my own spiritual development, and it is because of this that I was led to explore the theme of community in chapter three, which was a model of spiritual formation. This theme was carried through in my research project, which, while it focused on using the

Ignatian examen in Spiritual Transformation, showed how it was more effective in community than in isolation.

CHAPTER II: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Since Erickson suggests that “the richest and most influential time in any person’s life is the time most difficult to remember: early childhood, the years from birth to about age seven,” (1998, 74) I feel particularly blessed that I have many memories of those formative years. When I studied psychology, we were taught that those children who have vivid memories of their early childhood often do so because their childhood was not completely normal; because many events happened which caused things to be imprinted upon the child’s mind. This was certainly the case with me.

A little background is necessary at this point. My parents met during World War II, when my father, a Newfoundlander serving in the Royal Navy, was stationed in Australia. There he met my mother, who was in the Australian Women’s Army Corps. They married as the war was ending, and, after everything was settled, my father returned to Newfoundland, where he waited some months for the paperwork to be completed so that my mother could join him. My mother had been raised as a Roman Catholic, attending convent school, and was—during my growing-up years—still devout. My father had been raised in the Salvation

Army tradition, but became a Presbyterian during the war, partly because the idea of predestination appealed to him. They were married just over four years when I was born, and they never treated me as a baby. There were often religious discussions, and—if I didn't actually take part in them—I certainly listened.

Most of my life was spent in some kind of community, and many of these communities contributed to my spiritual growth. These communities started with my family, and continued to school and church. I went to parochial schools, as discussed below, and these emphasized spirituality in ways which were age-appropriate.

Early Years

My childhood was spent in different countries, with people of different religions. This gave me a wider exposure than many of my childhood friends to slightly different ways of practicing being a Christian.

Newfoundland

I cannot remember my baptism, which would certainly be the first event in my *Spiritual Autobiography*. However, it was often talked about, as I was the first grandchild on my father's side to have been baptized as a Roman Catholic. My grandmother, however, made sure that I was familiar with Bible stories and hymns from both the Anglican and Salvation Army traditions. As a very little girl—before I was three years old—I remember helping with assembling the crèche during Advent. It was stressed to me by my mother that this was a very

important time of year, as we were getting ready to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus. Each day during Advent, we would add another figure to the scene, until, finally, on Christmas Day, the baby was placed in the manger. Even at that young age, I knew that there was something special about this baby. I was told, of course, that the baby was God, and that his mother was Mary. When I placed the baby in the manger, the light that my father had affixed to the roof of the stable shone right on his little head, so that he seemed to glow. It didn't hit any of the other characters, just the baby. Since reading Erickson's book, I wondered if this could have been an early manifestation of photism (1998, 113). I have had others, but I will get to them later.

Australia

Shortly after this, my mother, who was pregnant with my sister, and I returned to Australia, where her mother was dying. While I was upset at leaving my father, they explained to me that he would always be in my heart, and I would always be in his. I remember thinking that this was just like God, who was also always in my heart, and who kept me in his. This was the first time that I really felt as though God cared about me, because I could relate what my parents and grandparents had said to me to what was actually happening in my life.

We traveled by boat to Australia, and there was one very odd experience which my mother and I both felt, although, at the time, I did not realize that she shared the same experience. We left Newfoundland from the small port of Botwood, and passed over the Grand Banks. I felt a strong sense of evil there, and

I became very upset. It was almost as though the world became black, and I didn't understand what was happening. Years later, when we were discussing it said that she felt intense cold at that spot. We found out that it was at this spot that my father's ship had been sunk during the Battle of the Atlantic. There were only three survivors from this sinking, and two of the dead had been my father's best friends. Incidentally, the U-Boat which caused the sinking was # 666, and it was under the command of Kapitänleutnant Herbert Engel. My father spoke of this frequently, but it was just about the only "war story" he told, and I think that it was mainly because of our experience in the area almost 9 years later.

While we were in Australia, of course we lived with my mother's parents. Grandmama was an invalid by this time, and I would spend a lot of time with her. She was a great believer in training small children in religious matters, and she told me that God would answer my prayers. I asked her if she ever prayed to be better, and she said that she didn't. Rather, she prayed for peace, which she seemed to have in abundance. From her, I learned to choose what to pray for, which I think was an incredible lesson for a little girl.

Coming Home

After my sister was born, the time came for me to start school, and, even though my grandmother had not died, it was decided that we needed to return to Canada. My father was missing us, and we were missing him. So we headed back, this time stopping in England and then flying from there to Gander. We spent a few days in London, which was quite exciting for me. I remember vividly the

hotel room with yellow curtains. As they blew into the room, I felt as though they were angel's wings, promising us a safe flight home. In my memory, there seemed to be a glow emanating from the curtains themselves—another example of photism, perhaps? If I try hard, even now, I can still raise that feeling. It was a time when I felt very close to heaven.

Ironically, Grandmama died shortly after we got back home. Of course, it was out of the question for my mother to go to the funeral, but she shared many stories about her mother during that time. While we lived in Australia, it had been the custom for me to go to Grandmama's bedroom each night to say my prayers, and my mother said that, now that she was gone to heaven, she would be listening even more closely, so it was important that I get them right, just as she had taught me. There are times, even now, when I can hear Grandmama's voice, coaching me through a prayer before I go to sleep.

While living in Australia, my friends were, for the most part, cousins, of whom I had many. When we came back to Newfoundland, for the first time, I was allowed to go to the playground alone. I came home one day, very upset, because one of the other children called me a "dirty cat-lik." I had no idea what that was, but I knew that I wasn't one. Both parents sat me down and explained to me that not everyone went to the same church, which made sense to me. After all, in my own extended family at that time, I covered at least five denominations. However, my father said that some people thought that, just because I went to a different church, some people thought that this made me lower than they were. My father

reminded me of the hymn which contained the words “In my Father’s house are many mansions,” and explained that it had been written for just this reason. I am not sure of his theology in this, but it made sense to me at the time. We agreed that this attitude was ridiculous, and I went to bed, assured that there was nothing wrong with being a Catholic, and that I should feel sorry for someone who didn’t even know how to pronounce the word.

It was at this time that I also began to get to know my father’s family. Of course, I knew them before we went to Australia, but, being a little older now, I was able to take in more. I knew that they were not Roman Catholic, but that never mattered to us. I see now that my family was the exception rather than the rule in our small town. Most people were in families who were of the same religion, while in mine I had Catholics, Anglicans, members of the United Church and the Salvation Army. All of this influenced my religious/spiritual growth. My paternal grandparents were the default babysitters, as they didn’t approve of having strangers look after their grandchildren. Nanny made herself responsible for teaching me all the wonderful hymns from both the Anglican and Salvation Army tradition. I remember sitting in her lap in the rocking chair, as we sang such things as *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, and other such militant hymns. Nanny was a strong believer in the concept of missionary work, and believed that it was her duty to bring as many people to Jesus as she could. She would tell me stories of missionaries in far-flung parts of the world, emphasizing the wonderful things they were doing for God. She encouraged me to pray for them, and, thanks to her

vivid story-telling, I could actually picture them, going about God's work in other countries.

Nanny was actually a bit of a different person herself. She had been raised in the Anglican tradition, but when she got married, her husband was a part of the Salvation Army, and, as she told me, "The wife should always turn to the husband." I think now that this was a way of making a crack at my mother, who had not done that. In fact, in order for a Catholic to marry a Protestant, it was necessary for the Protestant person to sign papers agreeing to raise the children as Roman Catholics. My father had not done that, because they had gotten married during the war, and many of the formalities were not observed as strictly. Despite that, we were Catholic, and Nanny felt that it was her duty to lead us to the right way, which was, of course, definitely NOT Catholic. In those days, the divide between Catholics and Protestants was huge, and each tradition sincerely believed that the others were going to hell. Again, this was something which was different about my family. We were ecumenical long before that word came into common use.

Nanny and Poppy were also the people responsible for my reading the Bible. This was not something which Catholics did at that time, and even today, many Catholics only know the Scripture which is read on Sunday mornings. I knew all of the great stories, and the power of God long before I started any formal religious training. I remember the tension of Daniel in the lions' den, wondering what would happen, and being thrilled to know that God had saved

him. I knew, too, that God could save me. However, I also learned about the wrath of God, as expounded in the story of Noah, as well as Sodom and Gomorrah. So, even though I knew that God loved me, I also knew that I really didn't want to offend him, just in case.

Primary School

School started shortly after we got back to Newfoundland. Of course, I went to Catholic school, with the nuns as the primary teachers. At that time, every textbook we used came from a Roman Catholic focus, so we were permeated with religion. For example, a simple Arithmetic problem could read: If Sister Mary said five Our Fathers and one Hail Mary, how many prayers did she say altogether? Instead of Dick and Jane, our primary readers used David and Anne. Our early science books spoke about God creating the world. It isn't that evolution was not taught, but that it was taught in the context of God's creating everything. Each morning, we started class with prayers. We memorized the Baltimore Catechism, and I can still quote from it today.

Before starting school, I had been taught many simple prayers, but now we were required to memorize even more, some of which I still use, and some of which I have changed over the years to reflect my growth and change. The first prayer we were taught was *The Morning Offering*, and it was explained to us that we should say it every day before getting out of bed, since in so doing every single thing we did throughout the day would be dedicated to the glory of God. These were the words we used at the time:

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world. I offer them for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart: the salvation of souls, the reparation for sin, and the reunion of all Christians. I offer them for the intentions of our bishops and of all Apostles of Prayer, and in particular for those recommended by our Holy Father this month.

As you see, there was a strong Roman Catholic orientation, but since it was a school run by the nuns, and since we WERE Roman Catholic, this was to be expected. The fact that I can still remember it all these years later shows me the importance of religious education in early life. It also demonstrates why the Jesuits used to say, “Give me a boy until he is seven years old, and he is mine for life.” While may be apocryphal, this is something we were often told during my time in school. While I no longer use this particular prayer, I do use one which I found elsewhere. I have no idea where it came from, but I have been praying it for quite some time now.

My God, I adore you, and I love you with all my heart. I thank you for having created me, made me to know you, and preserved me this night. I offer you the actions of this day. Grant that all of them may be in accordance with your holy Will and for your greater glory. Protect me from sin and from all evil. Let your grace be always with me and with all my dear ones. Amen.

Sometimes, the words change, but the intent is the same. By beginning each day with words of praise, and by consciously offering my actions to God, I am starting my day with him in the forefront.

One other thing which we did in those early grades caused us to focus even more on God and the role God played in our lives. Our scribblers—later to be replaced with exercise books—were given top and left-side margins. In the

little square formed where the margins intersected, we were taught to write the initials JMJ, meaning Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. In liturgical parlance, this was then called an ejaculation. Now, I would call it a breath prayer. It had the effect of turning my page of work—arithmetic, writing, whatever the subject was—into as prayer. It helped us to refocus on God throughout the day. This habit became so ingrained in us that many of us had to struggle to remember NOT to do when we were in high school and writing the provincial public exams.

Our school shared a parking lot with the cathedral, so the church itself was really an integral part of my early education. Every day, at 6 am, noon, and 6 pm, the church bells would sound. We quickly learned that this was a call to prayer. At those hours, devout Roman Catholics were expected to pray the Angelus, which was based on the story in Luke’s Gospel about Mary and the angel. Even now, living in old Quebec, when I hear the bells from the Basilique de Notre Dame, I pause in whatever I am doing to bring my thoughts to God, and to the birth of Jesus. The hours chosen for the Angelus are known as “Proper Hours,” or the more important times of fixed-hour prayer. Since our lunch hour didn’t start until 12:15, we all prayed the Angelus together before going home to eat. As for the 6 am and 6 pm Angelus—I know that some of my friends did this in their homes, but it was not a part of my family life, even though my mother would often draw my attention to the bells in the evening.

The Rosary

We were all taught to pray the Rosary as part of our religious education.

For me, there was something mystical about the beads. For one thing, the nuns who taught us wore a large Rosary hanging from their waists, which rattles as they walked. One of them told me that it helped to remind her of all of the things which happened in Mary's life. Every Friday, we would pray the Rosary as a class, and during the months of May and October, we would pray it every day, for these were months dedicated to Mary. During October, we wore a medal depicting Mary on our uniforms, and in May, we wore the same medal, but this time it was adorned with a pale blue ribbon. We learned special hymns to Mary, and we were encouraged to go to Benediction on Friday evenings, which was a time in our church when all prayers were aimed at the Mother of God. We prayed different litanies at various times throughout the year, but during May and October, and on every Friday, they were all litanies focusing on Mary. We were also encouraged to have a family Rosary each night, but that would not be something that would happen in my house. For one thing, my father didn't believe in praying to anyone other than God, and my parents were both occupied with other things during the time when the family Rosary would have been prayed. I would often go to my bedroom alone after supper, and pray a Rosary myself. My mother had a beautiful crystal Rosary, and in the crucifix was a small vial of water from the Holy Land. This Rosary had been blessed by Pope Pius XII, and was therefore even more special. Sometimes, she would let me use it, but most of the time, I used my own small Rosary. I remember feeling a bit jealous of some of my friends whose families prayed together every night, but my mother assured me

that she did, indeed, pray each night, and as long as I said my own prayers, that was fine.

Feeling Different

There was one incident in primary school which highlighted for me that there really were different religions in our small town, and that I was somehow less than many of my classmates because I was the product of what they called a “mixed marriage.” My father was a Freemason, and each year, the Masonic Lodge would host a Christmas party for the children of the Lodge members. It was something which was anticipated all year, and I made the mistake of telling my friends about it. That day, the nun who was teaching the class explained exactly what would happen to children who went to parties during Advent. In those days, Advent was more of a time of penitence than of preparation. I was terrified. I didn’t dare to go home, because I knew that my mother would make me go to the party, and then I would go to hell. So I went to a neighbour’s house, not realizing that my mother had already gone to the party, along with my sister, leaving my grandmother at our house, with money for a cab. When I didn’t come home, my grandmother was frantic, and had no way of knowing where I was. Eventually they found me, and my father explained to me that the nun had made a mistake, and said that he was going to the convent to speak to her. I have no idea what he said to her, but that night, my parents and I stayed up quite late, talking about all kinds of things, but mostly about a God who loved little children.

This was not the only time that my different family caused an issue.

During a religion class, we were taught, quite specifically, that non-Catholics could not go to heaven. I look back at it now, and think that we must have been really arrogant. To us, the world was divided into two groups—Catholics and non-Catholics. At some point during the lesson, I realized that my father, and all of his family, fell into the non-Catholic category. When I got home from school that day, I went to my bedroom, where I started to pray for the conversion of these people whom I loved. I didn't want them to go to hell, and, as far as I knew, the only way for them to avoid this was to convert. I was crying as I was praying, because I knew in my heart that this was not going to happen, and I knew that they were going to "burn in hell's fiery flames forever." This was a favourite quote by both my teachers and my grandmother. But then something happened. My bedroom faced west, and a ray of sunlight pierced through the curtains, shining on the floor just in front of me. I moved into the light, and gazed at the sun. As it warmed me, I felt that it was God himself warming me, and I could hear a voice inside my head. The words were not clear, but I knew that it was telling me that God loved all of his creation, and that I did not need to worry about my father's final destination. My tears stopped, and I decided that I needed to discuss this with my mother—before my father came home from work. When I put the problem of his eternal salvation to her, she assured me, in words that I could hear, that God would never condemn someone to hell. She said—and this has become a part of me—that people choose to go to hell, simply by turning their backs on God. When my father came home, he took me on his lap, and together we sang *In*

My Father's House Are Many Mansions, and he assured me that there was room for all of God's children in heaven. He added that the nuns didn't know everything, reminding me about the Christmas party. From then on, I began taking a lot of the dogma which was taught to me with a grain of salt, although I don't think I realized it at the time.

Growing in the Church

Part of my education included religion, but not in the way it is taught now. In those days, the nuns prepared us to receive the sacraments during our regular school days. In fact, Religion was considered a subject just as much as Geography was, and it was necessary to pass the exams in this in order to move on to the next grade. In this way, I learned that religion was an integral part of life.

Sacraments - Penance

The time came for us to make our First Confession and Communion. In the Roman Catholic Church, Confession was then called the Sacrament of Penance, and was considered a sacrament of the dead. By this was meant that confessing our sins to a priest restored us to life in God. The importance of making a good confession was stressed, as were the penalties of making a bad confession. We learned how to examine our consciences, which was rather different from the *examen* which I now do. An examination of conscience was meant to make us aware of the times we had failed each day. Some of us became scrupulous, to the point where we were afraid to do almost anything, for fear of

committing a sin. There were two classes of sin—venial, which were the minor sins, such as yelling at a sibling, and mortal, the really serious sin. Murder would be a mortal sin, and so would missing Mass on Sunday or eating meat on Friday. If one died without having confessed venial sins, then one would spend some time in purgatory, where the sins could be burned away, or living people could pray them away. This was the whole idea of indulgences, which had been so exploited in earlier days, as people would give the church large amounts of money to pray someone out of purgatory. If, however, one died without having confessed a mortal sin, then one would go to hell for all eternity. Hence, it was really important to do a thorough examination of conscience, to make sure that one got to heaven, or at least purgatory. There was a third place, called Limbo, where the souls of the just—who were not Roman Catholic—and the unbaptized babies were waiting for the Apocalypse. This was neither heaven nor hell, but a kind of way station, and the deal was that, at the end of time, these souls would go to heaven. It was not a place of punishment, but rather a place of waiting. Knowing this made the examination of conscience a time fraught with dread, as it could be so easy to miss a minor sin, and fail to confess it.

Sacraments - Communion

Of course, after the first confession, came the first Communion. This was considered a huge day in our young lives. We were all around 7 years old, and this was the first time we were permitted to share in the sacrament. The little boys wore suits, with white shirts and neckties, while the little girls wore white dresses,

shoes, gloves, and even a veil. We made quite a picture, filing in through the church in double file, and filling the first several pews. We had been warned about behaviour during the Mass, and I would guess that most of us felt quite virtuous, not to mention a little scared. We had all been told horror stories about what could happen to people who received the sacrament while in a state of sin. These ranged from being struck dead to having one's mouth fill with blood rather than the host. I remember being really nervous, just in case I had made a bad confession the day before. What would happen to me if I had accidentally forgotten a major sin? We were herded to the altar rail, and knelt on the hard marble, where we waited for the priest and altar boy to come to each one of us. Finally, it was my turn. My heart was pounding as they stopped in front of me. The altar boy held the paten under my chin, just in case a piece of the host should break off or - the unthinkable—the whole thing should fall out of my mouth. For the host was not permitted, under any circumstances, to touch the ground. If it did, the piece of carpet on which it landed would have to be cut out and burned. However, all went well, and the priest placed the host on my tongue. I remember thinking at that time that now I was really united with Jesus, that things couldn't get any better than this. That feeling stayed with me for a long time, and for years it was renewed each time I shared in the sacrament. Interestingly, one of the things I noticed about the difference between the Roman Catholic communion, and communion in other denominations is that, in the one, the priest "gives" the host to the communicant, while in the other, the communicant "takes" the

elements. It is a small, but telling difference, as the one implies a disparity of status—the priest as the person who controls the sacrament, while the other implies a sharing.

Fear

After having made my first Confession, I became very conscious of sin—not the sins of other people, but of my own. Looking back, I feel sorry for the priests who had to listen to small children confessing their “sins,” which were mostly of a very minor nature. I remember confessing things like: yelling at my mother, fighting with one of my siblings—that kind of thing. There were times when I would deliberately “sin” so that I would have something to confess. But there was one time when I did something which I considered really bad. I stole. I wanted to get some candy at the corner, and had no money. My mother was occupied with one of the younger children, so I took a quarter out of her purse. On the way to the store, however, I realized that the owner would know that I had not come by the money honestly, and I would not be able to spend it. I also knew that I couldn’t go home and put it back in my mother’s purse, because then I would be revealed as a thief. I paced around the block, trying to figure out what to do. At last—a solution! I would throw the quarter into a field of tall grass. That way, no one would know what I had done.

However, at bedtime that night, when I was doing my daily examination of conscience—which is very different from my daily *examen* these days—I realized with horror what I had done. I knew that, should I die before going to

confession, I would surely burn in hell forever. What kind of person steals, and from her mother, at that? Surely, I was one of the lowest forms of life in all humanity. This was a Thursday, and there was no way I could get to confession before Saturday morning, so I spent all that night, the next day, and Friday night, afraid to close my eyes, lest the angel of death come while I was sleeping, and I would never have a chance to be forgiven. On Saturday morning, I rushed through my breakfast, and told my mother that I was going to confession. She was quite pleased, as she thought that this was a good habit to get into. I was the first person at the church that morning, and I wept while I told the priest what I had done, sure that he would also condemn me. He got me to explain exactly what had happened, and, at the end, he said, gently, “Do you think that you will ever steal again?” I burst into fresh tears, and promised that I would never, ever again take anything that was not completely mine. He gave me my penance, and absolved me, using the Latin words *ego te absolve*, and said, “Go in peace, my child, and know that I forgive you and God forgives you.”

Looking back at this, I see both good things and bad things. It was bad that I—a seven-year-old child—should have felt like such a great sinner. But the priest handled it well. He did not mock my grief, which he could have done. Rather, he treated it with the gravity that I felt it deserved. It left an indelible mark on me as well, in that I have never stolen anything since then.

Confirmation

The next big stage in my spiritual life was Confirmation in the church.

This was also known as a sacrament of the living, and it was important that we be in a state of grace before it happened. The bishop was the only one who could confirm us, as it required someone of a higher rank than a lowly parish priest or even a monsignor. We were, of course, prepared for confirmation by the nuns, as a part of our school day. This happened during our seventh grade year, and was roughly parallel with the Jewish ceremony of bar and bat mitzvah. Once again, we were dressed appropriately—the boys in their suits and ties, and the girls in mini wedding dresses. We rehearsed the sacrament in our classroom, and, as the time drew closer, we had a practice in the church, with the priest filling in for the bishop. Of course, the nun was not permitted to fill this role, even during practice, because she was a woman. I remember, at the time, thinking that it was unfair that this should happen.

This was not the first time I had observed inequity in the church. Our priests were all male, as were the altar servers. In fact, they were known, in those days as “altar boys,” and there seemed to be no question that girls would never be permitted to get that close to the altar, unless they were there to change the linens or to gather up the dirty chalice after communion to take it away for washing. Typical Martha duties, and that was as far as women were permitted to go in the church of my childhood. They have not advanced much further since then.

Back to confirmation. We were prepared well, and given the questions we would be asked by the bishop. There was a list of 74 questions, and we were required to memorize the answers. We were also expected to memorize prayers.

This was a throwback from the days when ordinary people did not know how to read, so they would have to know prayers and basic tenets of faith by heart. We were told to choose a new name, one which be known as our “Confirmation name,” and the one by which the bishop would address us. The nun who was teaching us told us that, after the anointing with the oil of chrism, the bishop would strike us on the cheek, as a reminder that, at any time, we could be required to suffer for our faith. Then, he would call us by our confirmation names and we would be confirmed in the Holy Spirit. This usually happened at around the same time as Pentecost, and we were told to identify ourselves with the apostles who had been in hiding since the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, but were suddenly transformed into leaders as the result of the Holy Spirit coming upon them. We, too, were meant to be transformed by confirmation, and I remember feeling almost overcome when the bishop addressed me as “Sophia,” the name I had chosen for my confirmation name. I chose that name because it meant “wisdom,” and because it was also used to refer to the Holy Spirit. Even then, I felt an affinity for this person of the Trinity, partly because of the mystery surrounding the Spirit. Unlike the creating God, whom I called and still call “Father” and the redeeming God, Jesus, whom I called and still call “Brother,” I had no direct frame of reference for the Spirit. But I knew that I was destined to have a special kind of relationship with the Spirit, and wanted to reflect this in my confirmation name.

Home and Faith

At this time, also, I was considered old enough to help out around the house, and doing the dishes after the evening meal was one of my chores. Theoretically, we were supposed to do them together, but that was not something which always worked out in practice. When I was alone, doing the dishes, I would often recite the words of the Angelus, thus turning a mundane task into something being done for the glory of God. This is something that had been stressed to us ever since Kindergarten, and I liked finding ways I could offer things to God's glory, even those things which seemed as they were anything but glorious. I think that this may be why I have more of a Martha attitude than a Mary one. I believed then, and I believe now, that anything we do can be a prayer.

First Call

It was at this time that I started more serious reading, guided by some of the nuns who were teaching me. I read about Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare of Assisi, Father Damien, and St. Catherine of Sienna. It was also at about this time that I decided that I was called to religious life—as a nun. Our school was joined to the convent by an overhead walkway, and some of us were occasionally privileged to go to the convent for various errands, or to have a piano lesson. In those days, music lessons were offered during school hours, and we were expected to make up the work we missed in class by taking lessons. Depending on the weather, we were permitted to use the walkway rather than to go outdoors. I would leave class, and upon

entering the convent, I felt as though I had entered a different world. It was so quiet there that I could hear the ticking of the clock. There was a distinct aroma, which I came to associate with sanctity. It was the smell of floor wax combined with burning candles. The floors gleamed, and there was never a bit of dust to be seen anywhere. This contrasted sharply with my home and the homes of my friends. Our houses were usually filled with people, and, while they were clean, they were obviously lived in! There was seldom a quiet time during the day for reading, and as for finding a private place—well, that was out of the question. So the attraction of convent life was understandable.

With this in the back of my mind, I began—in a sense—grooming myself for the religious life. Behind the convent was a long paved strip of land, which bisected the lawn, and the nuns would frequently walk back and forth on this pavement. I decided that I would like to do this myself, and, since it had never been specifically forbidden, I began doing it regularly. I brought my rosary beads with me, as it seemed to me that this would be the perfect accompaniment to my walks. The order of nuns who taught us were known as the Presentation Sisters, a shortened version of “The Presentation of The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple.” As such, they had a particular devotion to Mary, and this was encouraged in our school. In fact, the school itself was named “Notre Dame” in her honour. As I paced slowly back and forth, by myself, praying, I often felt that I was in direct communion with God. Whether it was because of the buildings surrounding the courtyard or for some other reason, that part of town seemed

quieter than other places. Noises of children playing in the school yard were muffled, and traffic sounds rarely permeated the area. However, my time there was not to last. I am grateful that the nun who discovered me was not one who disliked children, as this could have ended badly for me. She explained to me that this was a place that was reserved for the sisters, but offered to find me a quiet place of my own, where I could go to be with God. That worked for me, but I still missed being outdoors as I had been for several weeks. However, since we were about to move from the elementary school to the high school, the private area would have been lost to me in any case, and I would have had to find a new place anyhow, so I really didn't feel too deprived.

Adolescence

Being a teenager in the sixties was quite an experience. We were the first to hear Mass in the vernacular; we were the people who welcomed the British Invasion in popular music; and we were the people who hoped to change the world.

Vatican Two

In my first year of high school, which was really Grade Eight, Pope John XXIII called for the second Vatican Council. We were thrilled with it, believing that we would be a part of the new Church, that the doors to the cloisters would finally swing open to the twentieth century, and that there would be major changes. We anticipated married clergy, ordained women, and all kinds of things

that we hadn't even dared to dream about before this. And there were changes, although not as many nor as far-reaching as we hoped. The biggest change, as far as we could see, was in the Mass. No longer was it in Latin, and the priest was now turned to face the congregation, instead of being back-on to us for most of the service.

It was at this time that I also began attending my father's Presbyterian church once in a while. We now had Saturday Mass in the Cathedral, which was accepted as fulfilling our Sunday obligation, so I could go to Mass on Saturday, and then go to church with my father on Sunday. My father and I were very close, and I loved having this special time with him. The minister was a youngish family man, with an incredible singing voice, and I enjoyed being a part of that community of faith. Being the kind of family we were, we were often visited by the parish priest as well as my father's minister. In fact, sometimes, they would be there at the same time. There were some great discussions, and I was encouraged to take part in them. What I most appreciated was the fact that no one got angry during these discussions. Also, my parents were able to share in theological discussions with the best of them, and they liked it when I participated.

I continued finding quiet places where I could listen for God's voice, and, as time went on, it became clearer and clearer. The high school which I attended also had a boarding section, which meant that there was a chapel available to us. I spent time in the chapel, and I also spent quiet time in the library, where I was encouraged to read theologically. I began to research convents far and wide,

trying to discern to which order I was being called. Was I going to be a White Sister, and go to Africa? Was I going to take nurse's training, and become a nursing sister? Or maybe I would join the Presentation Order right here in Newfoundland, and become a teacher.

Retreat

To help with—or maybe to add to the complication—during our second last year of our secondary education, my high school held a vocation retreat for us. The idea was that women from all walks of life were to speak to us, discussing various career options. This was all guided by one of the priests from the cathedral, and it was stressed that whatever we ended up doing with our lives, we were to look at it as a call from God. I remember feeling quite pleased that I was able to take part in the retreat, for several reasons. First of all, my mother regularly took part in retreats at the Cathedral. These were held each year during Lent, and started at 6 in the morning. It was assumed that this was the only time that married women were available for such a thing, and my mother would walk to the Cathedral each day. We were a one-car family, and my father needed the car for work. He would prepare our breakfast, and get us ready for school—which he usually did anyhow—and leave for work. My mother would usually be home by the time we left, and she would often share some of what happened at the retreat with me. I felt that, since I was having my own retreat, I was closer to being an adult, to being able to make my own decisions. As well, at the retreat, we were treated as adults, as people who were preparing to make life-changing

decisions. The only adults were the nuns, the guests, and the retreat master, and they took our words seriously, and treated us with respect. This was not the norm, other than during the retreat, so I really enjoyed this. Also, we started each day with worship, and I found that this opened my soul in a way I had not previously imagined. Normally, I only went to Mass on Sundays, or Saturday evening, but this every-day-Mass seemed to me to be the perfect start to the day.

Our retreats took place during regular school hours. Our classes were cancelled, and we moved to the chapel in the boarding school for worship and prayer throughout the day. This was my first experience of fixed hour prayer, other than the Angelus. I found it amazing, in every possible way. The music—for we sang almost everything—transported me to another realm. The prayers—each one of which was recited according to the formula in our Daily Missals—provided continuity throughout the day. The speakers—some of whom were nuns and priests from our own diocese—spoke to my heart in a way that I had never heard before.

Altar Server

The most amazing thing for me was that, since we were in a girls' school, there were no altar boys permitted. We were lucky to have priests permitted, in fact! However, this meant that girls had to be trained to serve at Mass. I was the one chosen by Father McCarthy, and he spent some time training me in my new role. I remember feeling so proud, and at the same time, so humble the first time I served. I felt as though I were closer to God, and removed from earthly cares.

There was one day which stood out for me more clearly than the rest. I was preparing the thurible for worship. This meant putting the incense in it, and getting ready to light it. As I placed the incense in the thurible, I plainly heard the words “gold, frankincense and myrrh.” I looked around to see who was speaking, but no one was there. However, there was a manger on the shelf in front of me, one which I hadn’t noticed before. It came to me that this voice was telling me that I was being prepared to be a gift to Jesus, in the same way as the gifts which we traditionally said were brought to the baby by the Magi. I decided that I would investigate this more thoroughly with my spiritual director during the retreat. Even the knowledge that we would be expected to double up on class work and home from the next week did not interfere with my feelings at this time.

When I spoke to my spiritual director about the voice, he agreed with me, and said that it seemed that I was being called by God to do something special. To his credit, he never said specifically that I was being called to religious life. However, he suggested that I needed to start a discernment process, so that I could be sure that I figured out exactly what it was that God was calling me to do. He advised me to explore several different paths, and to speak with other adults in different professions. I often wish that this priest had continued as my spiritual director, but this was a luxury only afforded us during the retreat week. It was not until many years later that I was able to have a regular spiritual director.

In addition to our own nuns and priests, we often had guest speakers from other orders—all Roman Catholic, of course. It would never have done for us to

be exposed to someone of a different faith tradition, or even a different denomination of Christianity. In fact, in our small town, we would have been hard pressed to have someone of a different faith tradition who would have been qualified to speak at a religious retreat. One year, the keynote speaker was from the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and, as she spoke, I knew that I had found where I belonged. There was something about this nun which spoke right to my heart. I was always academically inclined, and it seemed to me that, of all the nuns who spoke to us, this one was the one who most exemplified what I wanted out of life. She had pictures of the Mother House, and explained what would happen, should one of us decide to join them. This order stressed the importance of education, and I knew that I would be able to combine my two loves—God and school—into a seamless whole. At least, that is what I thought at the time.

I spoke with the nun—whose name I can't remember now—and she said that my first step should be to discuss this with another adult, preferably a priest or nun. Well, I couldn't speak to a nun, because I thought that they would be upset that I had chosen another order. So I made an appointment with the priest who was the retreat master and also the spiritual director for those of us who wanted one. I had already spoken to him about my feeling that I was being called to do something with my life, and I thought that this was an ideal way to broach the idea of entering the convent. He quizzed me about my desire to become a nun, and warned me that it would not be an easy life. Then he began telling me of some of the things I should be doing so that my vocation would be recognized.

Since we were near the end of the school year, he suggested that I wait until September before making any drastic changes.

Grade Eleven

This was the year when things seemed to come together for me, as far as my relationship with God was concerned. I went to Mass every morning before school, and received Communion seven days a week. Vatican II was drawing to a close, and, despite my disappointment, I remained hopeful that more dramatic changes would take place. On Christmas Eve, we went to Midnight Mass as a family—or at least part of a family, as my father and the other children stayed at home. In those days, Midnight Mass was immediately followed by a second, simpler Mass, and I decided to stay for this for the first time. My mother went home, because they were expecting guests, as was the custom at our house on Christmas Eve. Only a handful of people remained for the second Mass, which was what we called a “Low” Mass rather than a “High” one. It was beautiful in its simplicity, and while I worshiped with the others, I began to see that this was the kind of worship I preferred. Not for me was the pomp and circumstance of a Pontifical High Mass and Office, although I had often been a part of a choir at such a service. While the majestic hymns moved me, the service itself left me strangely dissatisfied. I think that I had figured out that it was not necessary to praise God in this way, and that, in fact, a more simple form of worship was the way to be closer to God. All of the trappings of more formal worship actually served to distance me from God, as I was more focused on getting things right

than on listening for God's voice.

After Christmas, things went back to normal, with Mass every morning, and Benediction on Friday evening. My parents never questioned this devotion, and I assumed that they would also accept my decision to become a nun. However, I was wrong. My father insisted that I was too young to make such a decision, and, since they had to sign papers to give me permission to enter the convent, my hopes were dashed. They said that I had to do something with my life first, as I had never experienced life as an adult. I tried to tell them that I knew what I wanted, but they remained adamant. Of course, my father, as a Presbyterian, said that if that was what God wanted for me, it would happen, but in his time, not mine. I think that this was the first time I had ever thought about that, and it is something which comes back to me even today, when I am impatient for something to happen. I have learned to live in *Kairos* time for the most part, even though I am much more of a Chronos kind of person. I prayed for God to change my parents' minds, but it didn't happen. They insisted that I apply for university, and said that, if I still wanted to be a nun after a couple of years of working, they would no longer object. So that is what I did.

The month of June arrived, with all the attendant celebrations. It was odd, because we did not actually graduate until our exams were marked, which would happen over the summer months. But we were treated a little differently, because we were now leaving school, and starting the next phase of our lives. My grandmother had a tradition of inviting each of her grandchildren for supper at

some point towards the end of their final year in high school, and this year my cousin and I were invited together. This was quite a big deal. Nanny prepared the meal herself, and nobody else was allowed to be present. We ate in the dining room, which was reserved for special occasions, and we were talked to quite seriously about what we were going to do with the rest of our lives. The grandchildren used to refer to this as “The Last Supper,” and it was truly a rite of passage for us. Nanny knew, of course, that I hoped to become a nun, and she didn’t approve at all. She knew the nuns, of course, and had even sent her daughter to the convent for piano lessons. However, she carefully didn’t say anything throughout the meal. Then came the time for presents. She had chosen gifts for both of us, and when my cousin opened his, I saw that it was a Cross pen and pencil set. I was thrilled, because that was something I had long wanted. But I was to be disappointed. She gave me underwear—very good underwear, silk, made by Kaiser—and it was black and red. She said, “I thought about giving you a pen and pencil set, but I thought that would make more sense, so that when you go to university, the nuns will see that you aren’t meant for the convent.” This incident has little to do with any spiritual awakening, other than the fact that it solidified my desire to go my own way, fancy underwear or not. I went home and prayed that Nanny would come to understand what this meant to me.

University

In those days, in Newfoundland, it was possible to teach without having completed a degree, and that is what I planned to do. Because I was still a Roman

Catholic, I was required to live in Littledale, which was a residence run by the Sisters of Mercy. Because I was studying elementary education, all of my classes took place there, rather than on the main campus of Memorial University. There were some novices in our classes, young women who had completed their postulancy, and were now preparing to be teachers in their order. By this time, there had been some more changes in the Catholic Church, and the nuns no longer wore the habits I had been used to. They still wore veils, but these were short, and did not completely cover their heads. I spoke with the novices about this, because I wasn't sure that I liked that particular change. They, however, felt that it would make things easier for them, as they went about God's work. I had many questions for them, but they wouldn't tell me a whole lot. They suggested that I speak, instead, to one of the nuns who worked at Littledale. I considered this, but, in the end, decided not to bother. I knew that I would have some years before I would be able to consider entering religious life, and, besides, I was starting to have second thoughts about it. It seemed as though this was not what I was being called to at all.

Then, one of the novices asked me if I would like to take part in a guitar Mass. I had never heard of this, and was immediately intrigued by the idea. We worked together, choosing hymns that I had never heard of before—more like the praise songs of today than the traditional hymns I had learned as a child. When we celebrated in the chapel, I felt almost overwhelmed by it. I felt a renewal of closeness to God which I had not had for some months. But I knew that the

convent was not for me. I spoke to the nun who was in charge of our floor in the residence, and asked her if she thought that it was possible that, some day, women would be able to become priests. She suggested that I write an essay, in which I could outline all of the reasons for this to happen. I did this, and realized then that, until I was able to be ordained, my role in the church was to be as a lay person, and not as a nun.

The year continued, with a few more guitar masses, in which I enthusiastically shared, and as we drew near to the end, I decided that I wanted to teach for a while. I was homesick much of the time—remember, I was only sixteen—and thought that I needed to be with my parents for a while, so I could sort out what I wanted to do.

Marriage

That summer, for the first time, I fell in love. The following year, we got married, and I became a full-time housewife, and soon a mother. When my son was born, there were complications, which led to an unusual experience while I was in the hospital. I was brought back to my room, which was a shared one, and told that they would bring the baby to me later. They closed the curtains around my bed, and left the room. I fell asleep, and woke up a little later to find myself soaking wet. I put my hand into the wetness, and discovered that it was blood. I reached for the bell pull, but for some reason, they had not fastened it to the bed where I could reach it, and I was too weak to stretch up for it. I could feel myself getting weaker and I knew that, if something wasn't done, I would die.

Fortunately, the blood started to drip on the floor, and one of my roommates noticed it. She buzzed for the nurse, and all of the sudden, the room was filled with people. I felt myself lift out of my body, and watched what was happening below. Somehow, they had not gotten all of the afterbirth after the baby was born, and that was what was causing the bleeding. I heard them talking, but I could hear other voices, too, voices which were not coming from my hospital room. They were voices of welcome, and they sounded warm. I was strongly tempted to go with them, but then another voice, a sterner one, said, "It isn't your time yet. You have a child and you have to stay with him." There was almost a physical sensation of my body/spirit/soul falling back into the body which was lying on the bed, and I opened my eyes to find the doctor pushing quite hard on my stomach. I said, "Stop that! I have just had a baby and you are hurting me." I was quite irritated at what he was doing, because I didn't realize that this was something which had to be done. Finally they finished, and allowed me to go back to sleep, with an IV replacing the blood I had lost. I tried for a long time to recapture the feelings I had during the out-of-body time, but it didn't work. However, since that time, I have not feared death because I knew that someone was waiting to welcome me on the other side. The odd thing is that those voices didn't belong to anyone I knew; rather, they were voices I had never heard before. Until that time, I had always thought that those who loved me would be waiting to welcome me, but then I realized that heaven was truly open to all, and someone would be there to welcome the newcomers.

Slipping Away

The time came for my son's Baptism, and we made all of the necessary arrangements, but I was in no rush. I don't know what happened at that time, but for some reason, church was becoming less important to me. I decided to go ahead with the Baptism more to keep his grandparents happy than anything else. Despite my experience in the hospital, I was becoming disillusioned with organized religion. I still believed in God, but much of the dogma that I had been taught was starting to seem stale to me. This was at the time when scandals were erupting in the Catholic Church, and I was disgusted by much of what we were hearing. Not only that, I knew that this was only the tip of the iceberg, and there were many more priests and Christian brothers involved in this than we would ever know. I used my son as an excuse not to go to Mass on Sunday, and found that, the longer I stayed away, the less I missed it. I still prayed, but had stopped reading Scripture, and I often felt as though I were praying to nothing. My soul was empty, and I had determined that I would not be trapped by religion ever again. As time went on, I found myself questioning the existence of God. I won't say that I was an atheist, but I was certainly an agnostic for a couple of years.

One of my escapes at the time was going to movies. I could get away from what I saw as my drab, boring life and escape into something else for a couple of hours. During an especially bleak time the movie version of *Jesus Christ, Superstar* came to our small town, and I went to see it. Mainly I went to laugh at it, at the thought of how many people had been deluded by the Church over the

centuries. Looking back, that may have been a mistake, or maybe the smartest thing I could have done. At some point during the movie, I was struck by something. I have no idea what happened, but suddenly, I knew that it was all true. This movie, which was certainly not made with that in mind, became a conversion experience for me. I was glad that the theatre was dark, because I was crying. I didn't make any noise, but tears were streaming down my cheeks long before the end. I was able to compose myself before the lights came up, and I made my way home resolved to change my ways.

Return to Church

I started going to church again, and because I was still living in the same town in which I was raised, it was the Catholic Cathedral which I attended. I thought for a while about going to a different church, but when I mentioned it, my husband and my mother objected strenuously. So I did what was expected of me. I determined that, if I were going to get anything out of this, I needed somehow to recapture the joy I had found in worship when I was younger. To this end, I started volunteering to read Scripture in church. I found that, on those days when I was one of the readers, the whole service was more meaningful to me. I wished that I had been able to be in the choir, but my husband was not willing to stay with our son so I could go to practice, and I really couldn't ask anyone else, so that was out. I knew that being a part of a choir would have satisfied something in my soul. I am not a good singer, but I am a good member of a group, and can sing a strong alto as long as I am supported by others, and can practice on my own.

However, that was not to happen, so I had to content myself with singing as part of the congregation. In the Roman Catholic Church at that time, congregational singing was not encouraged. It was felt by many people that the role of the congregation in worship was much the same as an audience in a theatre.

It was shortly after this time that we decided to adopt a child. After my experience with my son, my doctor had told me that I should never become pregnant again. Although my pregnancy itself was fine, he said that I would never be able to deliver a child. My husband and I discussed this for many months, and we finally decided that I should have a tubal ligation. He was adamantly opposed to having a vasectomy, because he said that it was going against God's laws about conception. I asked him why it was all right for me to go against God's laws, but not for him, and he said that, since it was my body, I had the right to protect myself. After the tubal ligation, however, I knew that I wanted to have another child, which is why we decided to adopt. In due course, we were blessed with a little girl, and our family was complete. We seemed to be the perfect young Catholic family.

Just before our daughter started school we moved to Labrador, where my husband had found work. I did not want to go, feeling that I would be alone there, with no support, but I determined to make the best of it. As soon as we arrived, I went to the Cathedral, and introduced myself. I was warmly welcomed, especially when I told them that I would be willing to be a reader on Sunday morning. That first year was incredibly difficult, and if it had not been for my faith, I do not

know what would have happened. I arrived on Bastille Day, and the weather was absolutely glorious, as though God had planned it especially to welcome me to our new life. But the next day, it started to rain, and it rained every single day until the snow started. By February, I was ready to do anything to get out of Labrador, but since my husband had a job with the Iron Ore Company, it seemed as though I was stuck there. I was very unhappy, and the only place that I felt any sense of belonging was in church. My husband was working shift work, which meant that there were many times when we barely saw each other. When the snow started to melt, I decided that I had to take myself in hand, and make myself happy, since no one else seemed to be willing to do it for me. I became involved in our children's activities, and volunteered in several places. I was becoming a part of the community. Our children were in Catholic school, and on the surface, things seemed to be good. But they weren't.

Changes

My husband had always been somewhat of a control freak, and this was getting worse and worse. I had managed to get a job as a teacher, which I loved. It was in a primary school, where all of the other teachers were women, and that was the only reason he agreed to let me have the job. Our school day finished at 2:45, and we were required to stay for an extra half-hour, in case any parents needed us. Some days, we would have staff meetings after school, which meant that I would have to stay later. On those days, I made sure that dinner was prepared before I left so that there would be no waiting to eat when my husband

came home. But it seemed that, no matter what I did, no matter how many preparations I made, it was never enough. He even started to object to my going to church unless he could go with me. His persona seemed to change almost daily, and I was deeply worried about him. I thought that he was clinically depressed, and urged him to go to a doctor. I prayed for him; I talked to him, but nothing changed.

Then, one day, he came home from work and told me that he wanted a trial separation. I couldn't believe it. He assured me that there was no other woman involved, but that he needed some time apart. Of course, that wasn't true. In fact, as I found out later, this particular woman was only the latest in a long line. I was devastated. I begged him to come with me to talk to our priest, to see if we could work this out. And this is the time when my faith took the worst beating of all. The priest said that it was all my fault; that, if I had been a different kind of wife, my husband would not have strayed. He said that I needed to change if there were to be any hope of our marriage surviving. I was flabbergasted, and couldn't believe what I was hearing. My husband just sat there, looking smug, and I felt like storming out of the office. But I didn't. I told myself that this must be God's will, and I determined to make the effort. Little did I know that my husband had no intention of changing.

A couple of months later, I found myself in a divorce court, something I had never expected to happen to me. That night, as I sat alone in my living room after the children had gone to bed, I looked back over my life, which I felt now

was over. I decided that I could no longer count on God for anything. I had been so badly let down by what had happened that I just couldn't even picture that a God who loved me would have allowed these things to occur. I tried to pray, but the words sounded hollow to my ears. I had no idea what I was going to do, or where I was going to go. I knew that I couldn't leave Labrador, because I had a job there, and my children were settled in school. If it had not been for my children, I think that I would have stopped going to church right then, because I really felt that my church had abandoned me in my time of need. So I went through the motions for their sake. I continued to read, but it was as though my heart had turned to ashes, and nothing meant anything to me any longer. I tried to recapture what I had felt, but it was no use. No matter what I did, I still felt as though I had been tossed aside. And, to make matters even worse, I knew that, as a Roman Catholic, I could never marry again. Not that I minded being alone. In fact, it was rather nice not having to answer to anyone, and not having to explain my every move to someone else.

I decided that the children and I would move into an apartment, because I didn't want to be bothered with snow shoveling—which was quite a chore in Labrador—and tending the garden in the summer. The children were with their father every second weekend, and on those Sundays I didn't go to Mass. They were my only reason for pretending that any of this mattered any more. This was one of the darkest times of my spiritual life. I missed being connected to God, and I missed the joy I used to feel when I was reading Scripture out loud. I still tried

to pray, but it was as though I were praying into a vacuum. I would look at the night sky, and think that it was all lies, and I would wonder how I could perpetuate the myths for my children.

Moving On

As time went on, I settled into a routine. Friends introduced me to eligible men, and I decided that I would get a church annulment. I really have no idea why I sought the annulment, other than the fact that Roman Catholicism was so ingrained into my psyche that I could not imagine attending another church. Also, if I should remarry, I knew that I would want the Church's blessing. Before the annulment was granted, however, I had to go through what I can only describe as the Inquisition. I was required to appear before a Tribunal, and to provide names of witnesses who would also agree to do this. It was far more difficult than the civil divorce. With that, at least, things were pretty black and white. We petitioned for a divorce, and it was granted. With an annulment, there is no guarantee that it will happen. My ex-husband refused to co-operate, saying that an annulment would illegitimize our children. I tried to explain to him the legitimacy had nothing to do with the church; that it was a civil thing which came into existence to protect rights of inheritance. He still refused, and this turned out to be a good thing.

Many people told me that, if I had enough money, I would be able to get an annulment. For the record, this is not true. Money has nothing to do with it. If, after a thorough examination, it is found that there was some reason that a

marriage should not have taken place at all, then the marriage can be annulled.

That is the only way to get a church annulment, if there is just cause. In my case, there was just cause, and the annulment was eventually granted. However, this did not happen in time for me. I had met my second husband by this time, and we had decided to marry. We were married in the church of his childhood, in Carbonear, and we returned to Wabush with our four children—two of mine, and two of his.

By this time, I had stopped attending church, but I realized, after a few months, that I missed it. I knew that I could not go back to the Catholic Church. By re-marrying, I was effectively excommunicated, and, in order to be reinstated, my husband and I would have to visit a priest and “regularize the situation.” (This is a quote from the letter I received from the Tribunal after my annulment was granted.) I remember being so angry when I read this that I wanted to scream. How dare they, I thought, act as though my marriage were a “situation”? But knowing this did not stop me from wanting to be a part of a faith community again. I had come to terms with what had happened to me at the hands of the Catholic Church, and knew that I could no longer be associated with that denomination. I discussed the situation with my husband, and said that we needed to find a faith community that we could share. He said that he would leave it up to me. That very weekend, I discovered that there was a Presbyterian Church just around the corner from our house, so I decided to visit. I don’t approve of church-shopping, but I knew that the only way for this to work was for me to find a church where both my husband and I could be comfortable.

A New Start

It was difficult for me to go into that church that first Sunday. I never realized until then how indoctrinated I had been by my upbringing as a Roman Catholic. Even though Vatican II had removed the strictures against worship in other churches, there was still the idea that choosing to attend another denomination on a regular basis was a pretty serious decision—one that would result in excommunication. As I entered the church, I felt as though I should be looking over my shoulder to see if there were a priest in black robes waiting to swoop down on me and drag me off to the Inquisition, even though I knew that such things don't happen. Funny how things from one's childhood can continue to colour our lives for so long.

The minister at Christ Church was brand new. In those days, the Presbyterians “settled” new ministers for a minimum of three years, and he had arrived just a couple of months before. He was like a breath of fresh air to me. He wore a business suit, with a shirt and tie, and he didn't preach from the pulpit. His message spoke to my heart, and I went home from church feeling excited about worship for the first time in a long, long time. I talked to my husband about it, and he agreed to give it a try the following week. He was as impressed as I was, and we met with the minister to discuss becoming members. We were required to take New Member classes, where we focused on the little book *Living Faith*, which was written by the Reverend Doctor Stephen Hayes. Ironically, many years later, I was to follow in Stephen's footsteps as the minister of St. Andrew's in Québec

City. But that will come later in this story.

The more I studied this book, the more I realized that this was the church in which I belonged. It was conservative enough that I didn't feel I was wandering too far from orthodoxy, and liberal enough that I knew my (sometimes) radical ideas would be met with appreciation. The minister himself was filled with the flush of just about any new minister, and that really went a long way towards convincing us both that we could find a home here. Each Sunday, I would come home from worship, filled with the Good News. Even the slightly disconcerting things couldn't put me off.

However, as time went on, I started to realize that not everybody in the church felt the same way I did. I was hearing rumblings from various members about the minister and his wife. They were from Québec, where it had been made illegal for the wife to change her name when she married, so she used her maiden name instead of his. This did not sit well with some of the congregation. As well, she worked as a nurse, and did not have the time or the inclination to become involved in the church activities which they expected the minister's wife to share. As well, they didn't have children to help fill up the Sunday School, and many people were upset at that. The minister pretended to ignore the snide comments that were made, but I could tell that they were starting to irritate him. And this is the time I let someone down. I did not speak up. I felt that, as a relative newcomer to the church, it was not my place to say anything. I continued to go to worship, and to be moved by his sermons, but I allowed the sniping to continue. I

asked God if I should do anything, but really still felt as though I should not get involved. This sniping and back-talking, of course, led to him deciding to leave as soon as his settlement was finished.

The next minister to come was just about as different from the first one as it is possible to be and still be in the same denomination. He was a second-career minister, having worked in the computer industry for years before being called. He and his wife had six children, four of whom were adopted. She was a substitute teacher, but was interested in everything in the church. Sunday School, women's group, Bible study—you name it, and she was there to help out wherever needed. He wore not only robes, but the Presbyterian tabs, and preached from the pulpit. Yet, even though they were so different, I still felt as if the hand of God was leading me when he was preaching. My husband and I became friends with him and his wife, and I learned afterwards that this was a mistake. Other members of the congregation did not like this, and made their feelings known. Also, they complained that his wife was "taking over" the women's group. It began to seem to me that no minister would be good enough to be acceptable to this congregation.

After the first year, Presbytery was asked to visit, as it was seen that things were going from bad to worse. This time, I did not keep silent. I felt that I had been around for long enough to have my own opinions, and I made them known, as did my husband. But it was to no avail. As soon as he possibly could, this minister also left, and I was left with a bad taste in my mouth. My husband

announced that he was no longer going to worship, because he was fed up with the hypocrites in the church. He had grown up with some of these people, and was never happy about the idea that they had ended up in the same church. He felt—and with some justification—that they were some of the ring-leaders in making the ministers feel unwelcome.

I was very upset about what happened, partly because I had come to know the minister and his wife. He turned into a kind of ad hoc spiritual director for me, although he would probably have been shocked to have heard that word. At the time, the Presbyterian Church would have considered something like that just a little too Catholic for their taste. I shared with him some of my past, and he said that he thought I was being called to religious life. By this time, the PCC had been ordaining women for some time, so it was not beyond the realm of possibility for that to happen. I just laughed at him, and said, that if God wanted me, he'd have to wait. He said that this was one thing I needed to learn about God—he was patient, but demanding, and eventually I would find that I had to answer the call, or at least investigate the possibilities.

That night, I had a dream which I could not explain. I was a child, sitting on a rock in the middle of a stream. I recognized the place as being one of the spots my uncle used to take us on fishing trips. But there was no one with me, and I couldn't see any way of getting from the rock to the shore. I was never a strong swimmer, and I knew that if I tried to swim even that short distance, I would be in serious trouble. So I did what every small child would have done in my place. I

started to cry. Then, something strange happened. I heard a voice from the shore, telling me that it was all right, that I could easily get to shore. Not only that, but the voice told me that he was waiting for me. All I needed to do was to take the first step. I protested that I was afraid, and the voice spoke to me soothingly, saying, “That’s all right, I’ll wait right here for you. I have all the time in the world.” Suddenly I woke up, and realized that I was not a small child; nor was I on a rock in the middle of a stream. I was in the middle of my life, and I was afraid to take the next step. I recognized that the voice in my dream was the voice of God, and that he was encouraging me, but at the same time reassuring me that he was in no rush. I lay awake for a long time, and I don’t know when I last felt so comforted and content. Yes, God was calling me, but he was willing to wait.

Since that time, I have learned much about the idea of settlement for new ministers. It was explained to me that, usually, the first year went well, while everyone was still in the “honeymoon” phase. As the second year started, however, the congregation would start to pull back, feeling that there was no point in getting too connected with the minister because he would only be leaving soon anyhow. (And yes, in those days, it was still pretty well all men.) That was the time when people started finding fault with everything the minister—or his family—did. The sermons were too long, or too short, or not Scriptural enough, or too focused on Scripture. The wife was too involved in the church, or not involved enough. No matter who the minister was, no matter what he did—or didn’t do—he was criticized.

This minister finally decided that he had to leave our small community. The final straw came when the children of some of the church members began tormenting his children, saying horrible things about the family as a whole, and him in particular. I wept with him and his wife when they told us their decision. I was ready to walk away from that church and never darken the doors again. But he convinced me to stay. He said that it was bad enough that he was leaving, but that if members of the congregation started leaving as well, he would really feel that he had failed. He suggested that maybe some of the other members needed leave, but he feared that they wouldn't, as their bullying was the only thing they had in their lives. So I stayed.

Then a new minister came. I was not impressed with him at all. He was a real hell-fire and brimstone kind of preacher—a former Baptist, whose sermons were more concerned with sinning than God's love and forgiveness. It seemed that I was not alone in my dislike, but I stayed out of the discussions. I knew what was going to happen, but I never expected it all to blow up the way it did. After less than a year, he called the Presbytery, and told them that he was leaving. He didn't discuss it with the Elders or the members of the congregation. Instead, when we went to church on what was to be his last Sunday, he tore into us. Sadly, most of what he said about the congregation was true, but that didn't help matters at all. He said that Presbytery would be coming to town next week, and that they would make the final decision. He told us that the congregation was being poisoned by a few people—which was true—and that he could no longer cope

with the Godless things that were happening there. I was absolutely stunned by this. When I got home, I spoke with my husband, and he said that he would definitely be going to meet with the Presbytery, because he had some things that he felt needed to be said. I won't go into the details, but I think that Presbytery got more than they bargained for when they visited us that week. I also believe that the decision had already been made before they arrived, that it was time to close down the church. Many of the congregation began attending other churches in the area—most of them returning to the church of their youth, but we decided that we did not want to be involved in church politics any more, and took a break from regular Sunday worship.

I continued to go to Mass with three of my children, who were Roman Catholics, but I never really felt at home there. It was as though I were a visitor, and everyone was just putting on a show. I had reached a point in my spiritual life where I was content to find God by myself, rather than in community, and for a long time that was enough. I began reading C. S. Lewis, and found much in his writings which spoke to me. One of the odd things was that both *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mere Christianity* caused me to think differently about my faith. The reason I say that this is odd is that, years later, I learned that, generally speaking, if one of these books appealed to a person, the other one didn't.

After about a year, I decided that I needed to be a part of a faith community again. My membership in the Presbyterian Church had been transferred to The Kirk (St. Andrew's) in St. John's, Newfoundland, and I felt no

need to officially join another church. I knew that, in my heart, I was Presbyterian, and that, no matter where I worshipped, I would always belong there. I thought about it for a while, and finally decided that the United Church would be best suited for me right now. I knew that I could not go to the Pentecostal Church or the Anglican, as both were too far afield from the Presbyterian Church. And, as for the Salvation Army, even though my grandmother would no doubt have rejoiced in heaven over this, I did not think that this would be a good fit for me.

For the first time in my life, I met a woman minister, and she was incredible. Her preaching was sound, and her attitude towards life was just what I wished mine to be. I became involved in the church again, reading Scripture, making bread for Communion, teaching Sunday School, and serving on the Stewardship Board. She asked me once if I had considered becoming a member of the United Church, but I just said that I didn't feel I was ready. She left it at that, and life was pretty straightforward for the next year or so.

Problems

When my daughter turned thirteen, our lives changed, and not for the better. She was mouthy, and seemed to have decided that boys mattered more than school. In fact, just about everything mattered more than school. She didn't often cut class, but that was probably because I was a teacher, and therefore would have known about it before the day was over. A time went on, things got worse. In the spring, as we were getting ready for summer vacation, she started

complaining about headaches, saying that they were interfering with her being able to study. However, since they didn't seem to interfere with anything else, we didn't pay a lot of attention to her complaints. As time went on, they got worse, so I finally took her to the doctor. He thought that she might be having migraines, and prescribed a fairly heavy-duty painkiller—Demerol—for her. I gave her the pills, and told her to let me know when she needed more. Within just a couple of weeks, they were gone, so I headed to the doctor's office to get the prescription renewed. However, he said that she couldn't have any more for at least a month. By this time, summer had arrived, and we thought that being out of school might make the difference.

September came, and with it, a new school year, and more headaches. Vanessa had spent the summer with her father, so I didn't know if she had had headaches during July and August or not. One evening, early in September, she was doing her homework in the kitchen, and I noticed that she had her head laid on the table. I questioned her, and she said that this was the only way she was able to read. I looked at her paper, and realized that her hand-writing was almost illegible. I called a friend, who worked in public health, and managed to get an appointment with a visiting ophthalmologist the following Saturday. There, we received news we had never expected. Vanessa had what is known as a cerebellar astrocytoma, a brain tumor at the base of her brain, just where the spinal cord reaches the head, and the prognosis was not good.

During the next couple of weeks, I often felt that God was not with us.

Things moved very quickly, almost too quickly for me to think. We reached her first surgery, which was to insert a shunt to drain fluid from her brain. I was allowed to go with her to just outside the operating room, and it was very different from what I had pictured. She was not given any pre-op medication, because the surgeon wanted her as alert as possible. Not only that, she had to walk from the waiting room to the theatre under her own steam, so that they could observe. We sat on a bench, and when the nurse came, she got up to go, and suddenly turned to me, with absolute terror on her face. I hugged her so tightly that I didn't think I would ever let her go, but managed not to cry, and assured her that everything would be all right. Then the nurse took her away.

I could have gone to the chapel, but at the time, I really didn't want to be there. I didn't want anyone to see me there, and try to comfort me. I also didn't want to go back to her room to wait. I knew approximately how long it would take, and I thought that it would be time enough to go back there close to that time. What to do? As I was thinking, I reached the elevator, and I suddenly thought, "Perfect! People don't talk in elevators, and I can be alone there."

I stepped inside, and the doors closed. My mind was a blank. The elevator began to move, and when it stopped, several people got in. I remained in my spot. I stayed there for two hours. After the first hour, while I was alone in the elevator, I had a sensation as though someone else were with me. The sensation grew stronger with each time the door opened. I felt a sensation of peace, as though everything were going to be all right. This feeling washed over me like a wave,

and was so strong that I felt dizzy. There was an unexpected and inexplicable warmth in the elevator—considering that it was October in Newfoundland, warmth was not something to be expected. I looked at my watch, and saw that it was 11:30. Vanessa had gone into the OR at 10, so it was getting close to the time when she should be finished. I got off the elevator next time we got to the floor where the intensive care unit was, as that was where she would be brought. They were wheeling her bed down the corridor just as I stepped off the elevator. Her doctor was with her, holding her hand, and talking to her, soothingly. He told me that, at 11:30, they had closed her head, and that everything had gone well. He reminded me that it wasn't over yet—as the major surgery was scheduled for two weeks' time. But it didn't matter what he said. I knew, as I had known from that moment in the elevator, that everything was going to be fine.

For the next two weeks, I felt as though I were in suspended animation, and everything seemed surreal. It was at that time that I started some serious knitting. I had always been a knitter, but sitting beside my daughter's bed in the hospital, day after day, I turned into some kind of knitting machine. I treated my knitting in the same way as I used to treat the Rosary in the old days, with every stitch being a prayer. I have continued to do this, and now see a lot of my knitting as meditation. Often, while I am knitting, I do not need to concentrate on the pattern, and am so able to focus on God, and what God is doing in my life. I wonder now if my knitting were my way of creating something in the midst of death. We still had no idea what was going to happen to Vanesa, and there were

children dying all around us.

Vanessa's next surgery—to remove the tumour—happened exactly two weeks after the first one. This time, for me, there was no anxiety. I still had the sensation of God being with me, and surrounding all of us—Vanessa, her medical team, and me—with the warmth of his love. While she was in surgery this time, I sat with my mother in the cafeteria, drinking coffee and sharing memories. She was very concerned, and couldn't understand why I didn't seem as worried as she was. I told her that I was sure that Vanessa was in good hands, and that she would be fine. When Vanessa came out of the operating room six hours later, she was brought to the Intensive Care Unit, where she was only allowed one visitor at a time, and only for short periods of time. That was very difficult for her, because she wanted me with her all the time. But for me, it was the best way. I found the ICU very difficult, mostly because there were many very premature babies there, most of whom were not going to survive. It was only prayer which got me through that time. I was not permitted to bring my knitting into the ICU, for fear of contamination, so I prayed. I asked God to get me through it, but I knew that I didn't need to pray for Vanessa, as I had already been reassured that everything was going to be fine.

As it turned out, Vanessa's tumour was malignant, but because it had been contained in a sac, it had not spread. The doctor told us that as soon as he touched it, it popped out, in one piece. He said that this was very unusual, and that, if it had not been contained, she would have surely died. We had to stay in St. John's

for nine more weeks, because she had to have radiation to make sure that there was nothing left of the cancer. They warned us that she might not be able to have children because of the radiation, but ten years later, she had a little boy, who is now 18 years old. God has a way of making things work out, and it is best for us not to question.

Being Called

By the time Christmas came, we were home again, and things were starting to get back to normal. I had many thank you notes to write, most especially to the churches which had held Vanessa in prayer while we were gone. There was another minister in the United Church, the previous one having served her three years. This one was also a woman, and she asked me if I would be willing to lead worship if she were gone out of town. I agreed, and we set up a Sunday for me to try it. On the Wednesday of that week, I called the church's secretary to ask her when I could pick up my sermon. After she stopped laughing, she told me that I was to write it myself, along with the prayers. After a moment of panic, I set to work. I led worship for the first time and delivered my first sermon. It seemed to go well, and I felt that I would be able to do this again—but not too often.

As time went on, I continued to fill in occasionally, and was starting to get a bit more comfortable leading worship and preaching. There was another change of minister, and yet another woman was settled at the United Church. I was starting to become annoyed by these changes, and wondered why people didn't

want to stay longer. I learned that Labrador was not considered a desirable place to live, and most ministers would only come there for the three-year minimum. Also, unfortunately, many of the instigators from the Presbyterian Church had moved to the United Church after the other one closed, and they were causing the same problems in this church as they had in the other one. I was finding it more and more difficult to worship in that church, but told myself that I was still being nourished, still being fed with God's word, no matter what politics were going on. I was able to ignore most of it, and people soon learned that if they had gossip to share, I was not the one to share it with.

Then, on the day before Trinity Sunday, 2005, the minister herself called me. She had to go out of town for an illness in her family, and she wondered if I would be able to lead worship that day. She assured me that everything was prepared, and all I would have to do would be to read it. I agreed, little knowing what was going to happen the next day. As I mentioned, Keith had already decided that he wanted nothing to do with church, so I left him in bed the next morning, and headed to the church, where I found all the necessary papers waiting for me. I glanced quickly through the prayers and the sermon, but didn't really pay attention to any of the words. The first part of the service was fine, and then came the sermon. This was a very different sermon, one which actually included a hymn. The theme of the sermon was "Answering God's Call," and the hymn was #509 in the *Voices United* hymn book—"I, the Lord of Sea and Sky," which is known in other places as "Here I Am, Lord." The way she had set it up was that I

was to read the first part of the sermon, then sit and let the choir sing the first verse of the hymn. Then I would speak again, followed by the choir with the second verse. The same followed with the third part of the sermon and the final verse of the hymn. Then I was to speak again, tying things together to finish it off.

The first section was fine. However, as I started the second section, I began to feel as though the words were written for me. When the choir started to sing the second verse, I remained where I was, holding onto the pulpit, because I was afraid that, if I tried to move away from it, I would fall down. Now I was reading the third section, and my eyes were filled with tears, so that I could barely see the words on the paper. I felt as though a hand reached into my chest and wrapped itself around my heart. There was no pain, but an overwhelming sense of warmth. I remained at the pulpit during the singing of the third verse, wondering if I would be able to read the final section of the sermon. Just as the choir stopped singing, the sun broke through the clouds, and shone through the window, right onto my face. I could feel it, and it gave me the strength to finish the sermon and to get through the rest of the service. I knew, then, that God was telling me that the time had come to answer the call, and that he was not about to wait any longer.

I drove home, and said to Keith, "We need to talk." When he came downstairs, I told him that I thought I was being called to ministry. His reply was, "I knew that this was going to happen."

We talked for a long time, and then I decided to telephone a friend of

mine. This was a woman who was presently in seminary, but was home for the weekend. She was a second-career minister, and I thought that she would be the best one to talk to about it. I asked her if she were free for a coffee, and we agreed to meet at Tim Horton's. I got there first, and when she came in, she got her coffee before she came to sit with me. She immediately said, "What happened this morning? I saw your face, and I was reminded of Moses when he came out from speaking with the Lord."

So what I had to tell her was no surprise. She said that she was surprised that I hadn't realized it long before, as she was sure that I was being called even before I had led worship. We talked for hours, and I learned from her the next steps I had to take.

That evening, I called the minister at the Kirk, the Reverend Dr. David Sutherland. I explained to him who I was, and what had happened. I said that I would completely understand if he thought I was just imagining things, and I would not be upset if he thought that I was deluding myself because of emotion. However, he also affirmed me, and said that the Education Committee was meeting the next morning, and he would be delighted to put my name before them. That night, he called me, and said that they would like to meet with me, and asked when I would next be in St. John's. Since I was on the Provincial Marking Board that year, I would be there at the end of June, so we set a time for a meeting during that period.

The committee interviewed me, and I said the same things to them as I had

said to Reverend Sutherland. Two of the committee members were women of about my age, one of whom was a second-career minister, and the other an elder at the Kirk. They laughed when I said that my age may be a barrier, and they all agreed that they would support me as a candidate for ordination, so that I could be accepted by the seminary. One of the committee members asked me if I had read any of C. S. Lewis' work, and when I replied in the affirmative, they asked me which one was my favourite. This is where my earlier comment concerning Lewis came into play, as I told them that I really couldn't decide between *The Screwtape Letters* or *Mere Christianity*. The entire committee found that odd, since they normally saw that people who really liked one of those two did not really care for the other.

Throughout the interview, I kept telling myself that someone would surely come up with a reason for me not to pursue this course of action; that someone would say that I should just go back to Labrador and be happy with what I was doing. But it didn't happen. And somehow, I knew that it wouldn't. I had a strong sense that God was telling me what to say in answer to their questions.

At the end of the interview, they suggested that I would be most theologically comfortable at Presbyterian College, in Montreal, and I was pleased to hear that. I felt that Vancouver was too far away, and Toronto was too stereotypical for me, a Newfoundlander. Besides, I thought that I would be able to improve my French in Montreal. Incidentally, that didn't happen. It is very easy to live in English in Montreal. I agreed that I would set things in motion upon my

return to Labrador. I had decided that I would teach for the following year, and then make the big move.

Guidance Conference

Normally, after the first year in seminary, students who are seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church in Canada are required to attend the Guidance Conference at Crieff Hills. At this time, there is a serious evaluation of the candidate's suitability for ordained ministry. I met with the principal of Presbyterian College, Dr. John Vissers, and explained that I would rather go before starting my first year. I used my age as the reason, saying that, if I were not found suitable, I would rather know immediately instead of spending a year away from my family. He agreed that this made sense, so, in mid-August, I rented a car and drove from Montreal to Crieff Hills, stopping overnight to stay in the Tyndale residence in Toronto. That night I had another dream, in which God surely spoke to me.

In my dream, I was driving to Crieff Hills, in a part of the country I had never seen before. Even though it was August, it seemed like winter, as the ground was covered with snow. As I drove, the snow was disappearing, as though I were driving into spring. Then the landscape changed again, into full summer, and then into fall. Suddenly, it was spring again, with no winter in between. I realized that this was to symbolize my new beginning. God was showing me how my life had been all to prepare me for what was to come, and that this was to be the start of the next part of my life. Then, everything was bathed in bright

sunlight, and I could hear music faintly. I strained to listen, and heard the words of the same hymn which had been sung on that Trinity Sunday the year before—I, *the Lord of Sea and Sky*. In my dream, I sang the chorus, which contains the words: *Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will do, Lord, where you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.* Then I woke up, about ten minutes before the alarm clock was due to go off.

We set off early in the morning, stopping to get some fast food for breakfast. Neither of us had been to Crieff Hills before, and I was the driver while my fellow student was the navigator. We arrived in good time, and settled into our rooms. Then it started. We had large group, small groups, one-on-one, meetings with counselors—a very full four days! I was not aware how much hinged on the Guidance Conference, or I may have been more nervous. As it turned out, after it was over, each one of us had to meet for a final interview with our counselors, at which time we would be given their decision. Before the individual meeting, we were told as a group that the counselors, in consultation with the others leading the Conference, were to give us one of four answers. The first was an unqualified “yes,” meaning that all of them felt that the candidate was ideally suited for ministry. They explained that this was the one that was most often given to “cradle Presbyterians,” who seemed to have spent their whole lives preparing for this step. The second was a qualified “yes,” which meant that, while everyone agreed that the candidate would probably make a good minister, they felt that there were certain other things which needed to be done, in addition to seminary

work. That is the answer which I was expecting. The third answer was “not at this time,” which meant that the general feeling was that, while the person may at some point be called to ordained ministry, now was not the time. The recommendation in this case would have been that the candidate should try again at a later date. The final answer was “no,” meaning that, in the opinion of the counselors, the candidate was not being called to ordained ministry.

While I was waiting for my turn to be called in, I decided to walk the labyrinth one last time. This time, I did it differently. I kept my head down, watching my feet, and looking at the ground beneath me. A shadow flew overhead, and as I looked up, a bird flying past lost a feather, which floated slowly to the ground in front of me. I took that as a sign that everything was going to go well for me, so I returned to the residence for my final meeting with my counselors. To my surprise, they gave me an unqualified “yes,” saying that the way I had answered one particular question was what had settled things as far as they were concerned. The question? They asked me what I thought I, a former Roman Catholic, could bring to the Presbyterian Church in Canada. And I told them that I had a great prayer life, and that I felt that Protestantism in general could benefit from this. Most of the Protestants I knew did not have prayer as a part of their daily lives. It was something that they did on Sunday, and that was about it. They might—or might not—teach their children prayers. They might—or might not—say grace before meals. I had been raised saying it before AND after meals. I knew about a morning offering, and the importance of presenting oneself

to God on a daily basis. In fact, even during those times when I felt as though my faith was under pressure, when I felt as though I were separated from God, I would still say some kind of morning offering as I began my day. All of these things, I thought, would be things which would help me on my journey to ordination and the church itself while I was preparing for ordination and after the fact.

Seminary

Upon returning to Presbyterian College after the Guidance Conference, the first thing I did was to set up my apartment the way I wanted it. I had two desks, so one of them was given to the computer, and the other to my books. That one was seldom tidy, as the books seemed to multiply on a daily basis. Then I set out to explore. The building reminded me of nothing so much as Hogwarts from the Harry Potter movies, but at least the chapel was easy to find. I tried the door, and, finding it unlocked, I went in to sit for a minute. Unlike other chapels which I knew, this one didn't have pews, but armchairs, with a padded seat and back. The small organ was the focal point, and there was a skylight in the roof, through which the sun made a coloured circle on the wooden floor below. I sat in one of the chairs for quite a long time—although it seemed very short—and watched the sun move across the floor. I felt a sense of peace, as though I were in just the right place at just the right time. As the warmth of the sun dissipated, I left the chapel to return to my apartment, where I read Psalm 139, focusing on the verses about God knowing me even before I was born.

The next day, we had a brief orientation before classes were to start. I met the people with whom I would be spending the next three years, and didn't even try to take it all in. I knew that, eventually I would come to know them all, and that they would be another family for me. We were all ages—from young men fresh from their first degree to three of us second career folks. Naturally, the three of us gravitated to each other, little knowing how important we would become in each other's lives or how important we still are. Even though I had left Keith back in Labrador, I knew that we would be in touch daily, and that we would be able to be together about every six weeks, as I either had some time off, or he could come to Montreal for a couple of days.

Retreats

Presbyterian College starts each year with a retreat. In my time there, this was largely organized by Shuling Chen, who was the college's chaplain. I have decided to talk about all three retreats in one section, because I believe that I grew a little as the result of each one. At the first retreat, the newcomers—the first-year students—had a lot to learn. We were still feeling our way, and were not sure what was acceptable or not. Rather than go into detail about the retreat—which could take many pages—I decided to focus on the time I truly felt God's presence. Each morning, we began the day with Lectio outside, near the water. Most mornings, there was a fog or a mist over the water, and, as we read and prayed together, the sun gradually cut through the fog. It seemed to me that as the sun was coming through the fog, the hand of God was reaching down to me, and

pointing me in the direction I needed to go. During Lectio, while I heard the voices of the other people, it was as though they were muffled, and I could hear the voice of God. I was not sure what this voice was saying, but it was evident that it was pleased. Each morning, I felt affirmed that I had finally decided to follow the call.

The nuns who operated the retreat centre which we used grew some of their own vegetables, and at the time of year when we held our retreat, the tomatoes were often just starting to ripen. There was one stray vine which had escaped from their careful tending, and it grew up outside the wall of our cabin/residence. Each year, I would find some time alone and go to that small plant, and pick one of the sun-ripened tomatoes to eat. Just one, and just once each year. The first year I bit into it, I did not realize that it would become a tradition for me. I just ate it, slowly, thinking about how God had arranged it so that I could find this small fruit at this time. Each time, as I tasted it, I felt as though I were tasting God's goodness, as though all of God's love were contained in the warm flesh of the tomato. I always liked my tomatoes still warm from the sun, and I looked upon this as a special gift.

Each day during the retreat, we celebrated the Lord's Supper. On the second day, I realized that this was something I missed about not being Roman Catholic any more. In the Presbyterian tradition, communion is not celebrated every day, or even every week, but when we are on retreat, it is definitely a part of our daily life. I felt a closeness to God and to my fellows when we shared in the

Lord's Supper. I still feel that closeness when we celebrate in my church, and wish that we could do it more often. I remember, as a child, the moment of consecration, when—as we believed—the priest changed the host and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, and the almost overpowering sense of awe which hit me at those times. Now, I was starting to feel it again, but for different reasons. No longer did I believe in transubstantiation, but I did believe strongly in the sharing, and I felt a direct connection with Jesus of Nazareth each time the words “This is my body” and “This is my blood” were spoken.

Much of each day was taken up with classes, but these were very different classes from the ones we would be taking at either McGill or Presbyterian College. These were classes which taught us about ourselves, and, while I found them interesting, I did not find that I learned very much. I had always been pretty open about myself to myself, so there really wasn't a lot to discover here. However, I remember being amazed by some of the other people at the retreats. It seemed to me that some of them had never looked into themselves, and I wondered how it was possible to answer a call without having done that. However, during one of the introspective parts of the day—I cannot remember which year, but I think it may have been the third year—I was able to think about some things I had not considered before. After all, my decision to accept the call was going to have an effect on people other than myself. Even though my children were grown up and gone, I had a husband, whose life was about to be drastically changed, and I had not realized just how much it would be until that

minute. I went off by myself, to talk this over with God. I sat on one of the lawn chairs, in the shade of a large tree, and laid it in his lap. Then I waited. As I waited, the sounds of activity around faded into the distance, and I felt surrounded by an ocean of peace. Dimly, I was conscious of a gentle breeze, and even though I was in the shade, I could feel the warmth of the sun. That combination of warmth and cooling breeze showed me plainly that everything was going to be all right, that Keith would continue to support me as he had always done. I remember calling him shortly after that experience, to thank him. He laughed at me, and said, "I figured that I couldn't argue with the Big Guy. If anyone else wanted you, I'd put up a fight, but I think that he'd win this one." That has continued to be his attitude throughout this whole incredible journey.

Studying

Studying has always been a joy for me, and this continued through my time in Montreal. Or, it did until I hit Biblical Greek. I struggled and struggled. In fact, we had decided that it would be best for me to take it during the intercession, so that I would not be doing other courses and could focus solely on that. I spent untold hours working on it, in addition to the time in class. I was stressing more and more, and reaching a point where I felt ready to give up altogether. I think that part of the problem is that I was used to high marks, and I knew that I would not be able to achieve this in my Greek course. Finally, I did what I should have done in the first place. I went to God, and, instead of asking for success in the course, I prayed that he would help me change my attitude, and accept the fact

that my GPA would be lower because of my Greek classes. That night, when I sat down with my homework, I found that, for the first time, I was starting to understand what we were doing. I will not pretend that I became a Greek scholar because of this, but I was able to relax a little more, and I actually started to enjoy our in-class discussions.

After my first year, I found that, in one sense, things were getting easier. I had found a church with which I could associate, and in which I hoped I would be able to do my In-Ministry Year. My classes—except for Greek—were manageable, and I was managing my time well for the most part. However, I also felt as though something were missing. I was no longer sure if I were preparing myself to do God’s work, or if I were just another student. Despite chapel three times a week, and a morning prayer group once a week, there was something missing. The first place I went was to Shuling, as the College’s chaplain. That helped a little, but I thought I needed something more. That night when I went to bed, I was not able to get to sleep. I knew that I needed something more, but I had no idea what. The next day in class, I heard the words “spiritual direction,” and I thought, “That’s it! Why didn’t I think of this before?”

Spiritual Direction

I did a google search, and found that there was an Ignatian Spiritual Direction Centre within an easy bus ride from me. I called, and made an appointment. For me, the biggest criteria was that the director be English, or at least bilingual, as I wanted direction in my mother tongue. I was interviewed by

the nun in charge of the Centre, and, while she felt that I had a good handle on my faith, she thought that I would definitely benefit from spiritual direction. She told me to go home, and she would be in touch with me within a few days. The very next day, I received an e-mail, with a name and phone number. I called her, and made an appointment for that same week. This was the beginning of a relationship which carried me through the remaining two years in Montreal. I met with her every two weeks, when I was in the city, and we explored my life as it was in the past, as it was becoming, and as it would change into after graduation.

Most of what we did was Scripture based, and after each meeting with her, I would come home refreshed and ready to face another two weeks of class. My colleagues wondered where I found the time to meet with her, because we all felt that we were under a lot of pressure to do assignments, and to study for exams. But, oddly enough, I felt as though it was because I was meeting with her that I was able to do all of the other things. Each time I came back to my apartment, I was energized, and able to take in things more easily as well as to write more easily. I felt as though God were sitting right there with me, at times telling me what to write, and what to focus on in my studies. It was amazing. I think that, for the first time, I understood the importance of having a spiritual director in my life. While I am pretty good at working things through on my own, I really benefit from a second set of eyes, a second set of ears, and another person to walk with me.

There was one particular meeting with her which hit me powerfully at the

time, and, even now, remains with me. Each week, one of the third-year students was required to lead worship in the chapel at Presbyterian College, and on this particular week, the student had chosen as his text Luke 10:38–42—the story of Martha and Mary. He made the whole point of his sermon that there were far too many Marthas around, and that too few of us were willing to do as Mary did.

While I agreed with the basic premise, I felt that he had slammed the Marthas just a bit too much, and I spent the rest of the service seething inwardly. When I arrived at my Director's office later that day, that was the only thing that was on my mind. I had left the residence early so that I could walk most of the way, rather than take the bus, because I thought that walking would help me work off some of my bad mood. But it had the exact opposite effect. As I walked, I kept thinking of quick repartees I could have made to the preacher of that day. I kept thinking of things I would have liked to have said to Jesus himself. After all, I reasoned, if Martha hadn't busied herself in the kitchen, who would have made sure that supper was ready for those hungry men? Who would have ensured that clean linen waited for them when they were ready to go to bed? Didn't the laws of hospitality require that all these needful things be done? And, if not for Martha, Jesus and the other disciples would have been cold and hungry when they came to stay.

Needless to say, by the time I reached the office, I had worked myself up into a fine state, and my Director could see it as soon as I entered. Then, proving for sure that God does work in mysterious ways, she gave me the chosen

Scripture for the day—Luke 10:38–42! As usual, she told me that she wanted me to place myself in the story, which I had no trouble doing. I was Martha, and I was pretty angry. She told me to talk to Jesus, and to Mary, and to tell them how I felt, which I did. As I spoke, I could see Jesus smiling at me, but not as though he were laughing at me. It felt as though he understood me, which was not at all what I had gotten from the sermon earlier that day. As I spoke, the room disappeared, and I was there, in Bethany, listening to Jesus, who actually said a whole lot more than “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Suddenly, I understood what was happening. I knew what Jesus meant. He wasn’t putting me (Martha) down at all. Rather, he was telling me that I didn’t need to fret over all those things. He wasn’t telling me that I needed to change, or that he didn’t appreciate my gifts. He was telling me that I would be able to find rest in him, and that all those things which I felt needed to be done would be done. I went home in a much better frame of mind than I had arrived. On the way home, I went to Chapters, where I found a book I had never heard of before—*Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* by Joanna Weaver. I believe that I was guided to that book on that particular day, and that night, I skipped studying and writing papers and even translating Greek, and read the entire book. Later, I read it slowly, journaling and thinking and praying about it. From it, and from my experience with Gospel contemplation that day and many more days to come, I learned that being Martha was not bad. Rather, it was a matter of choosing which

parts of my life were absolutely necessary, and which parts could be pruned to make the time to live as Mary did. I also learned that the life of a woman today isn't really all that different from that of Mary and Martha in the New Testament.

Like Mary, I long to sit at the Lord's feet, but the daily demands of a busy world just won't leave me alone. Like Martha, I love Jesus and really want to serve him, yet I struggle with weariness, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy. Then comes Jesus, right into the midst of my busy Mary/Martha life-and he extends the same invitation he issued long ago to the two sisters of Bethany. Tenderly he invites me to choose "the better part"—a joyful life of intimacy with him, sitting at his feet, one which flows naturally into service for him.

Cuba

During our final year in seminary, we took a mission trip to Cuba. There, we stayed for a couple of days in Havana, and then we went to the seminary in Matanzas, where we spent the bulk of our time. One of the people at the seminary was a very old man, whom we only knew as "The Maestro." In his youth, when he was a professor at the seminary, he had been a great Biblical scholar, and had been proficient in at least six languages—Spanish, French, English, Italian, Biblical Greek, and Biblical Hebrew. Somehow, I think that he was also comfortable in Russian, but that was never stressed to us. When he was middle-aged, he suffered a brain aneurysm, which caused great damage. Even though in Cuba, there are excellent doctors, they have never had great equipment, so the surgery which was done to save his life left a scooped out place in his brain,

which was actually visible from the outside. When he recovered from the operation, it was to discover that the only language he could speak was ancient Hebrew. As you may imagine, there was not much call for that in Cuba! However, he went through extensive rehabilitation, and eventually recovered Spanish and enough English to be able to communicate with us. At the time of his rehabilitation, the relationship between Cuba and the United States was still amicable, and he decided to go to the United States to learn square dancing. He wanted to do this because he believed that it was through music—and especially dance—that the people of the world would become friends. He said that it was impossible to be enemies with people with whom you were dancing. He insisted that every person who came to the seminary be required to take at least a short course in square dancing with him. So we did.

We must have made quite a picture—seminary students from Canada, nuns from Belgium, students in their school uniforms from Germany, and assorted tourists wearing all kinds of different clothing. By the time we spent an hour with the Maestro, we were all laughing. The fact that none of us spoke the languages of the others no longer mattered. We were having fun. It was a gloriously sunny day, but not so hot as to make physical activity uncomfortable. It was just one of those perfect summer days, completely unlike the winter we had left in Montreal. And when I looked at the Maestro's beaming face, I knew that I was looking at the face of God. He was so delighted to have us working together. I don't know how familiar you are with square dancing, but every person has a

specific role to play, and it is when all are working together that the dance becomes a thing of beauty. The Maestro knew this, and knew that this was the way to unity. I came away from that particular session feeling as though God had been smiling at us—which was quite different from some of the other feelings I had in Cuba.

We spoke with the Cuban and other Latin American students, through a translator. We noticed that, when the translator was present, they were guarded in their answers, but when we were alone with them, we often heard what was closer to the truth. Some of the students made comments like, “I cannot answer that question,” and would indicate in some other way that they would have liked to have been able to spend time with us away from the official people. I felt as though I were living with the early Christians, who were forced to hide from the governing Romans, and realized how little things had changed. Despite that, I truly felt God’s presence when we were speaking with the students, and could sense that they had indeed been called by God to do the work they would be doing.

We were privileged to attend a Bible study being held in a private home in Matanzas, where we learned that, despite the fact that, officially, Christianity was accepted in Cuba, the facts were slightly different from what our official guides had told us. We learned that being a Christian in Cuba—unless you attended a state-approved church—meant that your career would never advance, and that your children would probably not be able to get into university. We also learned

that, for many people, this did not matter. Despite this, many Christians chose to hide their faith from the authorities, because they did not want their families to suffer.

Tarafa

We went to Tarafa, a small village some distance from Matanzas, where we were billeted with private families. There I learned what it meant to suffer as a Christian. The pastor—Pastor Carlos—was also a farmer, just like the rest of the villagers, as they could not afford to pay him just to be a pastor. A member of the congregation had given her living room to the church so that they would have a place to worship. Seeing the faith of these people moved me in a way I had not been moved for a long time. They had next to nothing, and yet they shared it with us generously. Each night that we were there, I went to bed full of sorrow that I was not able to do more to help them—even the smallest thing made a difference to their lives.

We visited a Church of the Nazarene outside of Tarafa, where Pastor Manuel lived with his family. He told us that he was called a “fireman” in his denomination, and spent his career going from church to church, putting out fires in the congregations. I guess that churches all over the world have the same types of problems we all have, in that there are going to be dissidents or trouble-makers wherever two or three are gathered in his name. Pastor Manuel’s grandson, who was about four years old, also lived there, along with his parents, and the little boy wanted to show us his toy. It was a small plastic tow-along horse, the head of

which was long gone. He showed us how he was able to put rocks inside the hollow body, to move them from one place to another. I watched him play, and felt my eyes filling up, as I thought of the toys my grandchildren had, back in Canada. I looked at the joy on his little face, and saw the pride with which he showed us his only toy, and knew that God was truly present on this small farm in the middle of Cuba. His family was filled with love, and eager to share it with us.

The one place where I did not see God at work was at the Che Guevara monument. There was an award presentation going on, and I was reminded of nothing so much as the book *1984* by George Orwell. I felt a chill that had nothing to do with the temperature either inside or outside the building, and felt a strong sensation of evil. I realized that this was a place dedicated to a false god—Che, himself. I was almost overcome with nausea, and knew that, if I didn't get out of the building soon, I would be ill. In our conversation afterwards, we checked on what we knew about Che, and came to our own conclusions, based in no small measure on another Orwell novel—*Animal Farm*.

Problems

One of our classes that year was in Pastoral Care. For this class, we were all together—Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Church students. The professor was a United Church minister, with a wealth of experience as a prison chaplain and a hospital chaplain. It sounded as though he would be an ideal teacher. But this did not turn out to be the case. He had one agenda front and centre all the time, and it was homosexuality. I recognized—along with my other classmates—

that this could turn out to be an issue. At that time, the United Church had become an affirming denomination, and our teacher was determined that homosexuality was going to be a part of every single issue we had to discuss. For instance, we spent some time learning how to minister to someone who had cancer, which is definitely a part of any ministry, as cancer had become more and more prevalent. Rather than have us work with an actual cancer patient, he showed us a documentary which had been produced concerning a woman with breast cancer. However, the woman was gay, and living with her partner, who shared in her care. It was very well-done, but his reason for choosing it was that it demonstrated a loving, lesbian relationship. That was the first instance, and we thought that it would be the only one. But it wasn't. I think that the worst was the assignment which required us to watch a movie, and choose one of the characters in the movie to counsel. The movie was *Brokeback Mountain*, and many of us were not pleased with this choice. Some people asked if they could choose another movie, but he insisted that we had to use the one of his choice. I chose to counsel the wife of one of the male characters, who was forced to deal with not only her husband's infidelity, but the fact that he was gay. The only comment on the paper was something about how the professor would rather I had dealt with how one of the men came to accept himself as a homosexual.

This class met on Monday nights, and for many of us, that became the most stressful day of our week. I took it to my spiritual director as well as to the chaplain of Presbyterian College, where I was reassured that I was not alone in

my concerns. I often felt as though the professor were using us as guinea pigs. We were required to keep journals, and to share them with our professor. I wrote about an experience I had had while I was teaching—the suicide of a student, and how I had dealt with it. I described it in great detail, and felt as though I had done a good job. A couple of weeks later, the professor was telling us one of his stories about his experiences as a chaplain, and as I listened, I suddenly realized that he was telling my story. When class finished that night, I telephoned my husband, who is often the voice of reason. My jaw hurt from clenching it, and I was ready to confront the professor. I certainly started to doubt the veracity of the other stories he had told us. I was so angry that I don't even know if I was thinking straight. Fortunately, that class was held in the evening, which meant that I would have overnight to clear my head before saying or doing anything rash. I felt as though, if this is what I were to put up with, then maybe I really didn't belong in seminary any more. Maybe I should just leave and chalk the past three years up to experience. There was no room in either my head or my heart for God or God's love, and I was really upset. I just thought that I would never be able to deal with people who had a single agenda, and I was afraid that I would find too many like them in ministry. Keith let me vent, which took quite a long time. Then he asked me if I felt better. Surprisingly, I did. It was as though giving voice to my feelings was what I needed to do, and that, now that I had done that, I was able to cope. He suggested that it might be an idea to pray for the professor, saying that obviously he had his own set of issues, one of which was using other people's experiences

and presenting them as his own. Because of that conversation, and what I did afterwards, I was able to get through the rest of the classes, without becoming that angry again.

In-Ministry Year

In addition to our trip to Cuba and our various classes during our in-ministry year, we were supposed to be working with a congregation as well as take the classes required to finish the Master's Degree in Divinity. I was blessed to be with a woman minister who was astute enough to know when to push me a little, and when to encourage me. It also helped that she had had her own struggles with Biblical Greek during her own seminary years! She allowed me to lead worship, to preach, to visit members of the congregation, and to do just about everything that would later be required of me as a minister. I think that what I appreciated most about her was that she was definitely a Martha in many ways, being very practical. Yet, at the same time, her love of God showed through in all of the things she did for the congregation. It was an elderly group, with the average age being 86 at that time. She was able to make each of them feel special, and it was obvious that they loved her deeply.

One day, we went to a residence to visit one of the congregation who had advanced Parkinson's Disease. One of the caregivers had called and requested that the minister come, as the lady was feeling quite depressed. As soon as we walked into the room, her face lit up, and she said, "I knew you'd come! They told me that you wouldn't, but I knew you would." We stayed for about half an

hour, as any longer would have been too tiring for her, and for the entire time we were there, I felt as though there were great wings hovering over us, and as though God were sitting in the room with us. In fact, at one point, there was a distinct shimmer on the wall across from me. There was no sun on that day, so it wasn't a reflection of anything, but it was there, nevertheless. I mentioned it to my minister on our way home, and she just smiled and said that she often saw that when she was visiting some people.

Another day, we celebrated a home communion with a lady who, although still living alone in her apartment, was no longer able to come to worship. As my minister spoke the words, I glanced at the lady, and her face seemed to have taken on a whole different aspect, as she knew that she would soon be sharing in the Lord's Supper. I had never thought before this time just how much home communion could mean to some people. I have made it a very important part of my own ministry since then. I found then—and have found since that time—that these home visits, with or without communion, truly bring God to the people I am visiting, but, even more, they bring God closer to me, as I am being his feet in the world.

Seeking the Call

Finally, the time had come for me to start thinking about seeking a call. I had discussed it with my husband, and we both agreed that we did not want to go to Saskatchewan or anywhere in Québec. After three years in Montreal, I felt that I had had enough of la belle province, and, having driven across Canada some

years previously, we felt that Saskatchewan was just too flat. Accordingly, I had sent my profile to congregations in Ontario and the Maritimes, both of which I felt would be good fits for me, depending on the particular congregation.

Then one night, Keith called me and said that St. Andrew's in Québec City was looking for a new minister. I commented that I thought we had decided that we didn't want to live in this province, but he convinced me to check it out—because it was Québec City. I called the Interim Moderator. In the PCC, the Interim Moderator is the contact person when one is considering submitting a profile. He told me to e-mail my profile to him immediately, because the Search Committee was meeting the next morning. Immediately, I was reminded of what had happened when I first realized that God was calling me, and I was overcome with the feeling that this was going to be the church to which I would be called. I e-mailed the profile, and within a week, they had invited me to come to preach—on Trinity Sunday. That was the same day on which I had first realized that I was being called to ministry.

The Interim Moderator warned me not to get my hopes up. He said that this was to be considered pulpit supply, and that they would interview me both before and after the service, and if they liked me, they would invite me back to preach for the call. I agreed to this, thinking that, if nothing else, I would get a free trip to Québec City, which had always been one of our favourite cities.

I flew to Québec City on the Friday, and on Saturday, I met with the members of the Search Committee, as well as the organist. After the interview,

the organist offered me a tour of the church, and suggested that I might like to “rehearse” for a while. When we walked into the church, there was an odd sense of déjà vu, as though I had been here before. This was truly odd, as I had never even been in a church that was laid out like this one. Following the organist’s advice, I practiced walking from the vestry—which in this case, was the church museum—into the sanctuary, and then from the lectern up to the pulpit. It all felt oddly familiar, and I had a sense that someone was smiling at me. I have no explanation for any of this, and I didn’t feel that any explanation was necessary. I just knew. Then he showed me the Manse. As soon as he unlocked the door, I felt as though I were stepping into my own home. There was a sense of welcome, even though the rooms were cavernous and empty. This may have had something to do with the fact that the rooms were filled with sunlight, and it seemed so peaceful.

The next day, Trinity Sunday, I preached, and, even though I didn’t know any of these people, it was as though I were preaching to a congregation whom I had known for years. There was a longer interview of sorts during the lunch which followed, and afterwards, I wandered the streets of vieux Québec for the rest of the afternoon. Next day, I flew back home, and told Keith that I thought that things went well. The next day, I received an e-mail from the organist. His major comment was that it might be an idea for me to start thinking about packing. Even though I was excited by this, I was not surprised. I knew, as soon as I walked into the church on that first Saturday, that I would be coming back.

Sure enough, a couple of days later, I received the “official” call from the Interim Moderator, on behalf of the Search Committee and the congregation. I have been here ever since.

Ministry

I have been here for nearly six years, and there have been times when I have felt God’s presence very clearly, and other times when I have been almost in despair. In this section of my paper, I will describe some of these times.

Death

After a year as a minister, I was called upon to walk with a congregant who was dying. He was a young man, with a young family, and this was to be his second and final bout with cancer. I was very nervous, as I had had little first-hand experience with death. I went to the hospital, where he had entered palliative care, and he asked if he could see me alone. We talked about what was going to happen, and his biggest concern was his wife and children. He had pre-paid his funeral, and made sure that there were no debts. We talked about the hymns he wanted played and the Scripture he wanted read. I prayed with him, and was preparing to leave when he asked me, “How much is this going to cost?”

I replied, “Nothing. You are a member of the congregation, and there is no charge for any of the services we provide.” His face relaxed, and his whole body seemed to sink a little deeper into the bed. It was as though I had given him permission to die, and I felt a sense of peace permeate the room. That peace

stayed with me until after his funeral, and the same sense of peace has been with me ever since whenever I have sat with someone who has been dying. It is almost as though I can see into the next world, as though the door between the two opens just a little so that I can see some of what is waiting on the other side. At times, when I have anointed the dying I can feel them relax. Even though we are not Roman Catholic, Catholicism is a part of the culture of this province, and people here seem to expect an anointing with oil when someone is dying. It brings both the family and the dying person such huge comfort that I will continue to do it whenever I am asked.

Worship

In addition to Sunday worship, there are other special days at St. Andrew's. Each year, on Maundy Thursday, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and commemorate the foot washing done by Jesus at the Last Supper. We do hand-washing instead of foot-washing, and we usually have younger members of the congregation do it. After Communion, the church is stripped, so that there is no ornamentation at all for Good Friday or Holy Saturday. During the reading of the Passion, we turn out the lights in the church, and proceed by candlelight, with one candle being extinguished after each reading, until after the final reading, when the only light left in the church is in the organ loft. After the final prayer, we leave the church in complete silence. On those nights, I feel as though I am at Calvary, watching Jesus die. It is such a powerful emotion that I feel my heart aching, and my eyes burning with unshed tears.

Each Sunday, I finish worship with the Aaronic Blessing. Some members of the congregation have told me that this is what gets them through each week, and, sometimes, if I manage to look up during the blessing, I can tell by the looks on their faces, that they are truly feeling blessed as I say the words. When this happens, I feel such a strong connection between me and God that it is as though he is actually speaking through me.

God Moving Me

There have been other times since I accepted the call to ministry when I have felt God's presence strongly; when I have felt God not just calling me, but pushing me to do something. The first was during a mentorship meeting via the Internet. Presbyterian College decided that, for too long, ministers were cast off into the world after seminary with no follow-up, so the then Director of Pastoral Studies decided that he would set up small groups which would meet on-line on an almost-monthly basis, and in person once a year in Montreal. During one of my small group meetings, a member of my group mentioned that he was doing his practicum as a spiritual director at Tyndale. I had been looking for a spiritual director since leaving Montreal, but had not been able to find one. After our small group meeting ended, I telephoned him immediately, to talk to him about this. He not only agreed to accept me as a directee, but suggested that maybe I should start doing classes at Tyndale, with the idea being to train as a spiritual director myself. It was as though God opened a door for me, and was providing a way for me to go through it.

That fall, I was a commissioned delegate to our Synod meeting in Cornwall, and President Gary Campbell was the keynote speaker. I introduced myself to him, and he told me that Tyndale was considering starting a doctoral programme in Spiritual Direction. He said that, if I were interested, I should talk to some people—like Jeff Loach and Barb Haycraft. At the time, I was doing a course through distance with Jeff, and had to go to Toronto to make a class presentation, so I was able to arrange this without too much difficulty. During the Finding Your Way retreat, I was interviewed by Barb, and soon found myself registered for the practicum myself. It seemed as though things moved into fast motion, and Tyndale received (or gave) approval for the Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation, which I am now doing. Through this whole process, I have heard God laughing. This is not the first time I have heard this, as his plans change mine. I am sure that it will not be the last time. It seems to me that, ever since I first gave in and accepted the call, God has been taking great pleasure in putting me where he wants me to be, and when he wants me to be there. I have also found a great peace of mind since I started accepting his plans, and recognizing that he knows best.

Some Random Thoughts

During our intensive retreats, we were privileged to worship together. I found that each time we came together in worship, my sense of God's presence became stronger. At times, I felt as though God was actually sitting beside me or standing beside me. This was particularly true during the celebrations of the

Lord's Supper. At one of these celebrations, when a person belonging to a non-sacramental denomination shared in the distribution of the elements, she gazed into my eyes while saying, "The body of Christ, broken for you, Katherine." I felt as though Jesus himself were giving me the bread. I cannot think of any other time in my life when I was so moved to be given communion, with the possible exception of the very first time. At another celebration, I was asked to help with the distribution of the elements. One of the people receiving from me placed her hand on my elbow as I was giving her the bread. She smiled at me, and it was as though the sun had broken through a cloud which I did not know was there until that moment. I returned home from that particular retreat with a whole new sense of the Divine in the sacrament.

While re-reading this paper, I was struck by several themes. First of all, I noticed that, even though my inner spiritual life was vitally important to me, I also need the corporate spiritual life to be found in community. As an introvert, I need time alone to recharge, and yet I also need the sense of being with others at times. Sometimes, this need is met simply by meeting with my spiritual director, which speaks to me of the importance of spiritual direction. I have learned that, when I go for an extended period without such a meeting, there is a void in my life. I try to fill this through reading—Scripture and other books—but, even though this helps, I still require the human contact at such times.

God's presence has always been important to me, even as a child. As I grow older, I am even more conscious of his being with me—sometimes at very

unusual times. It is common for many people to sense God while in nature, and I have often done that. He is particularly present when I am near water—either running like a brook, river, or waterfall, or a lake with the sun glinting on it. I also feel him when looking through leaves dappled by the sun. However, sometimes, when I need to speak with him, I will get in the car and drive, with no sounds other than the tires on the road. It seems then that I am insulated from the world and nothing is interfering with my conversation with God.

During one of my courses at Tyndale, I was required to develop a Rule of Life, and I found this very helpful, even though I do not follow it as closely as I would like to. To me, the purpose of living by a Rule is to help me live my life to the glory of God. With this in mind, I would envision it as guiding every aspect of my life—not JUST the spiritual side, not JUST the intellectual side, not JUST the emotional side, not JUST the physical side. All facets of my life work together, and if one is out of sync, the others will not function well. I see my Rule of Life as being somewhat flexible, in the sense that, since I DO live in the world, and since I am a full-time minister, things often happen over which I have no control. These things, invariably, interfere with my plans, and hence the Rule may, on occasion, need to be modified. In addition, if the Rule is totally inflexible, it would smack of legalism, which is one of the things the Jesus was against, saying, at one point, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). That being said, flexibility does not mean wishy-washy. Whenever possible, I live according to the rule which I developed.

I have been practicing the presence, as I learned in one of my courses. This means that, throughout the day, I consciously call God to mind, so that whatever I do is done to his glory. In addition to breath prayers, I do certain physical things which help to bring me back to God when I wander. For example, one of my fingernails is painted a different colour from the rest, and whenever I happen to glance at my hand, I see this. Interestingly, I have explained this to several people who have told me that now, when they see my nails, they also think of God. So that is an unexpected side benefit.

The daily *examen* is important to me—so much so that this is what I chose as my project. As explained in another chapter, I worked with my directees, teaching them the basics of this discipline. We discussed the results each time we met, and for some of them, this has now become a regular practice. Even those who are not doing it daily found that, on the days they did it, they were more conscious of God’s presence in their lives.

Conclusion

There will no doubt be much more to my spiritual autobiography as time goes on, but for now I will stop, knowing that there are many places for extra information. I even hesitated to call this a “conclusion,” knowing that there is much more to be remembered and more to be lived before it is finished. I prefer to look upon this paper as a work in progress, and I anticipate revising this for the rest of my life. I will not be submitting any more words for this paper, however. Rather, in the future, I will revisit what I have already written, trim some parts

which may be too long, add some things which I had forgotten or deliberately omitted, and revise much of what seems to be complete. I look forward to this.

Given the importance of community in my own life, it is not surprising that I would use that as an overriding theme for the remaining chapters.

Sometimes the community is a large one, while at other times it is a community of two. This is further developed in the rest of the portfolio.

CHAPTER III: MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Introduction

There are almost as many different aspects to spiritual formation as there are to spirituality in general. This paper will focus on the importance of a spiritual companion, whether a spiritual Director, a soul Friend—known as *anam cara* in Gaelic—or one of the other permutations to be discussed. It will show how spiritual formation is not something which can be accomplished in solitude, but must have others on the journey. While it may not be necessary for a physical presence, the idea of working with and growing with another is part of the bedrock of spiritual formation. There are many different ways of doing this, but, for me, one of the most effective is to work with a spiritual director. Such a person is qualified to lead another, and will suggest different methods to assist in spiritual formation. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter will provide a definition of terms, so that the reader knows what is meant by each of them. Different spiritualities will be discussed—Benedictine, Franciscan, Ignatian, and Celtic—and similarities and differences will be pointed out. Then, I will examine how some of the characteristics of these spiritualities are found in the practices of key figures. Jesus, as the ground of our

faith, and the one in which we participate in spiritual life, comes first. Henri Nouwen, Sister Joan Chittister, and Thomas Merton are three people whose work resonates with me, so I chose them as exemplars. A more in-depth examination of spiritual direction provides the background of this model of growing in spiritual understanding with the aid of a spiritual director. Since there are many different methods of spiritual formation, I decided to focus on spiritual formation of an individual with the assistance of another individual. This is the model with which I have worked for a number of years, both as a spiritual director and as a directee with my own spiritual director. I have found it to be the most effective way of transformation.

The particular model, described in this chapter and implemented in the research project in the next, focuses on the Ignatian *examen* as the key tool to help in transformation. This was first used by Ignatius with his monks, and has been used ever since then by people both in and out of community. Although it can be used by individuals, it is my contention that sharing it with at least one other person makes it more meaningful. From this assumption, I extrapolated that a community consisting of two people, as it often was for me, both as a young person and later as an adult, provides an ideal environment to help a Christian use the *examen* in order to focus on spiritual transformation. As discussed in the previous chapter, I had several dyadic relationships which were very formational to me, and such relationships can be formational to others. In this chapter, I will point to others who had similar relationships, and who were spiritually transformed as a result of these relationships.

An awareness of different spiritualities, understanding the *examen*, and examining the important grounding relationship with a spiritual director, all lead to the development of the model found in this chapter. The first step of the model is to introduce the participants to the idea of the *examen* and to encourage them to start using it regularly. After having been introduced to the *examen*, participants would begin using it. The results of the *examen* are discussed during regular meetings with a spiritual director. The point of doing this would be to determine if, in the opinion of the directee/participant, there had been any growth in his or her relationship with God.. There would be interviews before, during, and after the project. Each one of these steps would be recorded, along with the participants' comments, as they will be the way the success or failure will be measured.

Although this model could be used with a large group, and such a suggestion will be proposed in the final chapter, for the purpose of this portfolio, this model has been confined to the spiritual director and directee for the purpose of measurability.

In order to understand the model, it is important to begin by defining the terms connected with spiritual formation and personal transformation so that we are aware of what it means for individuals in relationship to seek to become like Christ.

Definition of Terms

Defining terms provides a foundation for this model because without some

kind of common understanding, it is easy to be sidetracked into a discussion of semantics. In a well-known children's books by Lewis Carroll, the character Humpty Dumpty said, "When *I* use a word," . . . "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (1871, 205). In order to make sure that both the writer and the reader have the same understanding, therefore, the following is a list of terms, helpful for the development of the model. Spiritual formation, spiritual direction, and spiritual friend provide a foundation on which the model can be built.

Spiritual Formation

The simplest definition of spiritual formation is "the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Mulholland 2000, 25). There are many different methods of spiritual formation, all of which have been dealt with extensively by other writers, but they all seem to agree that it consists of becoming more like Jesus, no matter what route is taken. However, a key part of the route includes being in community, in relationship. This could be as a group, or in a one-on-one situation, as in working with a spiritual director or some other form of spiritual companion.

Spiritual Direction

Many people feel spiritual formation cannot take place in isolation. It is possible to read many worthwhile books about spiritual formation, and there are myriad places on the Internet which claim to offer spiritual direction. However,

without a spiritual director, it is possible for one to wander aimlessly from book to book and site to site and never even start being spiritually formed. This is not to say that one cannot receive spiritual guidance from other sources, but they are limited at best, and misleading at worst. A spiritual director, ideally, is a person with whom the directee has a personal relationship, and who is able to act as a guide and mentor. Spiritual direction, then, is that process by which a person—the director—works with another person—the directee—on the process of spiritual formation.

Spiritual Companion/*Anam Cara*

A spiritual companion is a person who accompanies another on the journey, in a role similar to, but different from, that of a spiritual director. The importance of such a person has long been recognized. Jesus himself sent the disciples off in pairs (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1). In Celtic Christianity, a soul friend was called *anam cara*, and was a person to whom one could reveal the hidden intimacies of one's life. The importance of the *anam cara* was stressed by no less a person than St. Brigid of Kildare, who said, "Anyone without a soul friend is like a body without a head" (Sellner 1993, 73). It is understood that the people involved in this relationship are equally along the road, with each one cast into the role of director and directee, depending on the circumstances.

My Background

As recorded in the last chapter, I was raised a Roman Catholic, and had

felt for some time a call to religious life as a nun. Of course, having been raised in this tradition, the cloistered life was the only option which was open to me as a woman. But this background did provide at least some limited experience with spiritual direction. Informal spiritual direction was given by various nuns and priests, which provided first-hand knowledge of the benefits to be found in this type of relationship. At different times, particular nuns or priests were able to spend intensive amounts of time exploring spirituality and spiritual growth, but this was never really consistent, in that the director changed from year to year, and sometimes from month to month. While this had the advantage of providing many different viewpoints, it did not lend itself to any kind of continuity, so spiritual growth was uneven, at best. However, thanks to some nuns who were willing to make the extra effort, the role of soul friend became familiar to me long before I knew the term. There are certain people who come into one's life for a particular reason, and who may only be there for a short time, but this does not mean that they cannot be soul friends. They are often able to discern a need in one's life even before one is aware of that need. They are able to answer that need, and to help with gentle guidance. At times, they point out mistakes or misunderstandings, but it is never done with malice. Generally speaking, such a person has certain gifts, all of which can contribute to the spiritual growth of the other. These gifts would include empathy, which allows for the understanding of other people. A spiritual director should also be trained. I have heard of people calling themselves spiritual directors, even though they have not undergone any particular training for this. A spiritual director may often work with very sensitive

issues, so it is vital for this person to be trustworthy and discreet. Also, it is sometimes necessary for a spiritual director to push a directee to discernment, and it is necessary to be able to do this with tact and kindness. It is important to remember that a directee is a seeker, one who may not be able to articulate what it is he or she is searching for. This is where the director's training will come in. In my own training, we rehearsed effective questions, and also learned the value of silence.

The nuns and priests whom I knew as a young person were the people who encouraged the pursuit of a calling to religious life, and provided books to read, many of which became important at that time, and again years later. *My Way of Life*, a simplified version of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, is one of the books which still resonates on many levels, showing that it is not necessary to be a Roman Catholic in order to appreciate the church fathers and mothers. A quote from the introduction shows the purpose of this version.

The volume, here presented, is in full accord with the purpose of St. Thomas. It brings his message from the halls of learning out into the market place and into the home. While primarily meant for everyman, it is profound enough for the most erudite. Hence it can be readily recommended to father and mother, sister and brother, to the high-school and college student, to the convert, the study and Newman Club, to the Confraternity class, to the religious and the priest, in a word, it can be recommended to everyone. (Farrell and Healey 1952, vi)

I found that this little book stressed the idea that spirituality embraces the whole person. Social life—whether as a member of a family, an employee, or in society as a whole—is integral to spiritual life. Since I am a member of a family, and an employee, and part of the society of my country, it is vital that I make all

of these roles work together to assist in my spiritual growth. This also ties in with my habit of practicing the Presence, discussed elsewhere.

Many years later, after a career in teaching, came the call to ordained ministry. This required a lengthy discernment process, which also resulted in mentorship by more experienced people—people who were further along in their spiritual journey. At the time, Dr. John Vissers was the Principal of Presbyterian College, which is affiliated with McGill University in Montreal, and is part of the Montreal School of Theology. It provides seminary education to candidates for ordination in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, who also study at McGill, which awards a Bachelor of Theology as a prerequisite to the College's Master of Divinity. Both of these are required for ordination. Dr. Vissers had a deeply spiritual side, which came as a surprise to many people, as they were unused to that quality in Presbyterian ministers, who are more known for their academic qualifications and gifts. During the school's opening retreat each year, he used *lectio divina* as part of the morning devotions. This was the first time since high school—many years before—that I used this practice, and it soon became part of my daily devotional life.

However, seminary was a busy time, and *lectio* often fell by the wayside. Many seminary students have more than enough to cope with, as they deal with classes, and this was certainly true for students who were split between Presbyterian College and McGill University. The pressure of studying, preparing papers, making presentations—all of this often leads to neglecting the spiritual side of one's life. Students were expected to attend chapel twice a week, as well

as to worship with a specific congregation on Sunday morning. There were prayer groups, some of which met regularly, while others were more *ad hoc*, with people meeting when a particular need arose. Despite this, there was often a void, one which was eventually filled by finding a spiritual director through the Ignatian Centre in Montreal. Elisabeth Koessler was a laywoman, whose job was the Director of Education with the Diocese of Montreal. Weekly meetings with her at the Diocesan offices made a tremendous difference, and much of what was done there is still part of daily life. This is discussed more fully in the previous chapter.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation was the basis on much of my work during the years of studying at Tyndale. It was also part of my life prior to this, and has continued to be part of my life. It was spiritual formation which started me on this journey.

What is Spiritual Formation?

As explained above, spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. However, it is also a general term, and, according to Evan B. Howard, it refers to “all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth processes of spiritual direction” (2008, 23). M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. suggested that “the purpose of the Christian life is to be like Jesus” (2006, Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 1, Location 58). As mentioned earlier, true spiritual

formation cannot be accomplished in isolation. Some people—particularly those who live in a religious community—find that community life is the best way to develop spiritually. Others find that working with another individual is the best way. But no matter the method, the end result is the same—the individual becomes more Christ-like, by working in community, even if that community is a community of two. This is something to be desired, as it brings us closer to our roots. In Genesis 1:27, we read: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Ever since the fall, we have been striving to return to this ideal. While some have taken it to mean that we should become more God-like, and hence more powerful, the model presented by Jesus is more accurate when we are discussing spiritual formation, and this has nothing to do with power. This model will be discussed later in this paper.

History of Spiritual Formation

Many people seem to believe that the whole idea of spiritual formation is a new thing. Actually, it has been around, in some form or other, almost from the very beginning. There were the ancient prophets, who were guided by God and who, in turn, guided their followers. Abraham brought word from God when Israel was just being formed as a nation, telling the people what it was that God wanted them to do. Moses met with God personally several times, and each time, returned to the Israelites with guidance. There was Jesus, the ultimate spiritual director, who guided his disciples, and can still guide us today. If we pay attention

to the New Testament, we will see that Jesus taught his followers, in large groups as in the Sermon on the Mount, in small groups as in the twelve disciples, and with individuals, as in the Samaritan woman at the well. His direction was, of course, different from what we know as spiritual direction today. For one thing, he did not have to ask the kinds of questions a spiritual director would have to ask, since he already knew what he needed to know. Referring again to the woman at the well, who said (John 4:28) “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did” shows that Jesus was able to get right to the heart of the matter without any of the trappings which must be used now. His intimate knowledge of his followers made it easy for him to give them the spiritual direction which they needed. He spoke to each of his followers using the words which were most beneficial to them. It is important at this stage for us to understand the word “disciple.” The dictionary meaning, and the one which most people accept is that a disciple is a follower. Similarly, in the first century, “the cultural understanding of *disciple* was *follower*” (Hull 2006, 67). So Jesus’ disciples were followers, and today’s disciples are also followers of Jesus. The early disciples followed in community, working and learning together; just so do modern disciples work and learn in community, even if it is a community of two—the directee and director, or two soul friends.

Throughout history, people sought spiritual direction from others. People such as Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Ignatius, Francis of Assisi, and many others, assisted in the spiritual formation of others both on an individual basis and in community. At the time of the Reformation, spiritual formation for

Protestants took on a different slant. Given the opportunity to hear and/or read Scripture in their own language, many people now felt able to take charge of their own spiritual lives, instead of relying on a member of a religious order to guide them. In fact, for many people at the time, the idea of spiritual formation was felt to be connected with the Roman Catholic Church. This is not to say that the early Reformers eliminated it altogether, but it may have been called by a different name, and it would likely not have been as common as it was for religious communities such as monasteries or convents. While there would have been small groups, these would not necessarily have had spiritual formation as their aim. Spiritual formation during this time was based on a communal approach, because most people were unable to read. They would memorize the liturgy, and were able to meditate on it. But the important thing is that the formation took place in community. “[P]erhaps one reason so many present-day disciples struggle to do devotions alone is that they are best done in community” (Hull 2006, 91). Spiritual disciplines also changed at this time, again being seen as more Roman Catholic than some people would have wanted. This is not to say that spiritual disciplines were eliminated, but it was felt that spiritual formation was more of an individual thing, and depended on the person’s personal relationship with God.

In later years, however, this seems to have changed, thanks in large part to the realization that much of what the early church fathers and mothers taught will still benefit us in the 21st century. The benefits of solitude, which were well known to the desert mothers and fathers (*ammās* and *abbās*), are still encouraged today. During my preparation time as a spiritual director, I was required to make a

three-day “Silence and Solitude” retreat. Even now, when I often find myself incredibly busy, I try to make time each day to disconnect from everything. The Ignatian disciplines are now used by people world-wide. In fact, one of them—the daily *examen*—formed the basis for my project, which will be discussed later.

Christian spiritual formation began in Scripture, and continues today. This is not limited to the New Testament, but includes the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms, which have always had a significant role in Christian spirituality. When speaking of spiritual formation, one is referring to ways in which the soul changes and transforms. “One reason why the book of Psalms so powerfully affects us is that it is a soul book. It touches us at the deepest levels of our life, far beyond our conscious thoughts and endeavors” (Willard 1998, 104). The Psalms are often used for contemplation, and, as such, can lead the seeker to a deeper sense of self-knowledge, and a probing beneath the mask which so many people wear, even to themselves. However, one needs to remember that historic forms of spiritual formation are particular to their own context, and therefore need some kind of explanation in order to have them applicable to the Christian today.

Spiritual Formation in Various Contexts

The most common arena for spiritual formation has been in community. Monks and nuns alike lived together, and worked together to conform themselves to Christ. The convents and monasteries had spiritual directors—usually, but not always—priests. Priests themselves had spiritual directors, who were expected to provide guidance regularly. This still happens in some places, but for Protestants

who are involved in spiritual formation, there have been many changes. Most people do not live in community, so are not afforded the opportunity for the kind of spiritual direction which was available in the past. It is necessary, then, to become creative in the search for spiritual formation. This will often involve a physically present spiritual director, but this is not necessarily the only way.

This paper will look at only the types of spiritual formation which involve self and the other. Jesus is the foremost spiritual director, and was the first in the New Testament to recognize the necessity of spiritual companions. However, it is important to note that working together also happened in the Old Testament. For instance, in Exodus 17:12, we read: “When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady until sunset.” Without the help of his companions, the outcome of that day could have been very different. While this is not—strictly speaking—spiritual direction or even formation, it still shows the importance of the other. This is yet another example of the role of community and its importance in every aspect of life. Again, in Exodus 18:18–19, we read, “You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me, and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you.” As before, even though this is not—strictly speaking—spiritual direction, it is certainly similar to the advice which would be given by a spiritual director who was concerned that the directee may be suffering from burn-out or stress. The work which is referred to in the above quote is the work which Moses was doing

for the people, and the advice was given by his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses was trying to do everything by himself, but Jethro recognized the folly of this, and gave him appropriate counsel. This is not unlike the scene in Matthew 11, when Jesus exhorted all who were weary and heavy-laden to come to him for rest. He did not promise the removal of the burden, but rather that they would be fitted with a more suitable one. In just such a way can a spiritual director help a directee to discern which burdens are appropriate, and which are not. If the burdens fit the person, then it is easier to focus on spiritual formation and transformation.

In the New Testament, we are told that Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs, as mentioned above (Mark 6:7). There are several possible reasons for this, some of which are Scripturally based. According to Old Testament writings, a partner bestows strength: “For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn’t have another to lift him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:10). Not only do partners protect each other from physical danger, but they also provide pleasant companionship and encourage each other in difficult circumstances.

A second person lends credibility. In his emphasis on community, Jesus builds on principles found in the Old Testament Laws. Deuteronomy 15:19 requires two or three witnesses to convict a person of a crime, because a single witness is likely to make a mistake. For that same reason, one witness has less credibility than two—an important consideration when sending disciples to bear witness. Jesus could have sent them in groups of three, but two people are usually

more effective than three. In a group of three, often two will bond with each other and will not fully accept the third person.

A partner fosters accountability. A person is less likely to succumb to temptation when accompanied by a partner.

There are also some practical reasons for traveling in pairs. First, it could have been to avoid loneliness. Second, it could have been for safety, as brigands were more likely to attack solitary travelers. Third, it could have been so that each would serve as a witness to the other upon their return. Without a witness to the miraculous acts and conversions which happened, the disciples may not have been believed. However, the most important reason for their traveling in pairs was so that they could be spiritual companions—*anam caras*—to each other. For together, they could explore their beliefs, and solidify their lives as followers of Jesus.

Today, as spiritual formation is rediscovered, it has been recognized that people need help in order to be spiritually formed. There are people who believe that they can do it on their own, or, at the most, through particular reading. There are many self-help books available which claim to do this, even though they may not use those exact words. Books such as Sarah Ban Breathnach's *Simple Abundance* (1995) promise a type of peace which is associated with good people. Henri Nouwen's books offer guidance, as do books by Sr. Joan Chittister. Thomas Merton's writing can help with spiritual formation on a different level, since they are not instruction manuals in the way that some other books are. Rather, they lead the reader to a deeper way of thinking and understanding spiritual life. And

of course, there are people like C. S. Lewis, whose works may have been instrumental in bringing more people to an awareness of God than many others in the 20th century. All of these books plus a myriad of others can be helpful. But without direction, it is easy for an individual to pick and choose from among the many words other people have written in order to find things which appeal to the particular person. For this reason, it is better to use such things as part of spiritual direction, working with another person to discern which words would be most useful in certain situations.

There are many Internet sites which promise spiritual satisfaction, through following particular rituals. Some may call these spiritual disciplines, and, indeed, they may be, but again, even though the individual does this at home, it is still, in a sense, done in community, albeit a virtual one. Various Daily Offices are available online, as are Bible studies. The benefit of such sites—provided they are used regularly—is that they help the individual develop self-discipline. However, as with the books, they would be better used for spiritual formation if another person were involved in some way. This would be particularly true if the other person were a spiritual director. As stated above, a spiritual director will challenge the directee. In contrast to this, a person working alone would be less likely to set truly difficult challenges, and even to give up if it seems that things are going to be difficult. And yet, this is part of spiritual growth—working through difficult things.

Moving from books and the Internet, we cannot forget things like the Alpha Course, developed by Nicky Gumbel in the United Kingdom, which has

become internationally known, and which has been used by Christians of all denominations. Even though this is not inexpensive, many churches—and others—are using it as a means of spiritual formation as well as a means of evangelism. Many of those who take an Alpha course are already members of the sponsoring church, and therefore would find something different from what an outsider would see. It seems to have a high success rate, if you look at their statistics, and this alone speaks to people’s need for guidance in this area. A recent conversation with Ron Huntley, the Director of “Making People AWESOME” at Saint Benedict Parish in Halifax, Nova Scotia, demonstrated the possibilities to be found in an Alpha Course. Often, church groups are unaware of these possibilities, and seem to spend their time in preaching to the choir, as it were. Huntley explained that a properly used Alpha Course was an outreach tool, one which is successfully used to bring people to Christ as well as to help those who are already there to deepen their relationship. The Alpha programme itself consists of group meetings, under the direction of a trained person. The participants share prayer and Scripture as well as their own stories. While it definitely assists in spiritual formation, the key aspect of it is spiritual formation in community. When I did an Alpha course years ago, the idea of community was paramount. We were required to commit to attend every meeting, unless something really serious interfered. On the final night, we shared a meal together, which cemented the bonds of fellowship we had forged during the meetings. There is no such thing as an individual Alpha course, and many people who share in a course end up forming close friendships with other members of their cohort.

Many of the greatest stories resulting from this programme come from people who have been largely unchurched, and, had they not been brought to the sessions by another person, would likely have remained so (Huntley 2016). This is one way in which a soul friend—an *anam cara*—can be a tool for another. Just by extending an invitation, it is possible to change a person's life. Thus, being a soul friend offers important missional opportunities and advantages as well, and may be considered a vital aspect of outreach.

In a time of seeking—which has been here since at least the 1960s—people explore many paths. Buddhism seems to be one which appeals to seekers, as does what is often referred to as New Age. Then there are some who gather bits and pieces from all kinds of religions and pseudo-religions and try to blend them together in some cohesive whole. The thing that most of these paths have in common is that they ignore Jesus. Therefore, they cannot be considered as any kind of aid to spiritual formation in the context of this paper.

For the purpose of this paper, even though different types of spirituality will be discussed, including how they have influenced thinking and how they may be used today in spiritual formation, the focus will be mainly on the role of relationship and how it is not only useful but necessary in order for one to be formed into the image of Christ.

Types of Spirituality

Anyone planning to speak mainly about types of spirituality could spend pages on this section, as there are so many different types—some of which have

been alluded to above. However, this paper will focus on those types which have been significant in my life. It will speak particularly to four types, and will do it historically, rather than a personal chronological account. There will be a brief introduction to each of the types, and this paper will show how each one of them encourages—or even insists upon—some kind of relationship in order for spiritual formation to happen in the individual.

Benedictine Spirituality

The spirituality of St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–542), who founded several monastic communities and whose Rule was adopted by many others, has played a large part in shaping Western Christianity for 1,500 years. It is unique in that Benedict himself, rather than determining to reform what he perceived as a corrupt society, chose to “walk a different path, to live the life that everyone else lived—but differently” (Chittister 2011, ix). This is possibly why Benedictine spirituality is enjoying a revival amongst both laity and clergy today.

Interestingly, reading has revealed that this is not confined to Roman Catholics, as many Protestant clergy and lay people have also discovered it, and are actually living it in the world.

One of the key elements of Benedictine spirituality is the whole idea of a Rule of Life. First-year students in this DMin programme are required to study various Rules, and to develop one of their own. This exercise is useful for many reasons, not least of which is that the developing of a Rule of Life is itself a spiritual discipline. Benedict developed the Rule of Life for his monks, basing it

on his own studies, and believing that the structure provided by it was the surest way to be formed into the likeness of Christ. This Rule of Life is the one which is still followed today in Benedictine monasteries throughout the world, and has proven to be very effective there. Benedict envisioned a balanced life of prayer and work as the ideal. Monastics would spend time in prayer so as to discover why they're working, and would spend time in work so that good order and harmony would prevail in the monastery. Benedictines should not be consumed by work, nor should they spend so much time in prayer that responsibilities are neglected. According to Benedict, all things—eating, drinking, sleeping, reading, working, and praying—should be done in moderation. Sister Joan Chittister, founder of The Monastery of the Heart, writes that in in the Benedictine life, "All must be given its due, but only its due. There should be something of everything and not too much of anything" (Chittister 1991, 185).

But what about in the world? What about those people who do not live in monasteries but in a very secular world? They are trying to live a meaningful spiritual life in the centre of the world today, rather than to withdraw from it. *The Monastery of the Heart* is one of the tools which can be of great help to people who are wanting to do this. This will be discussed further below, but for now, it is sufficient to know that it has taken Benedict's Rule, and moved it from the monastery to the world; from a group of men to the individual; from sixth-century Italy to 21st-century anywhere in the world.

Part of Benedictine Spirituality is *lectio divina*, which, strictly speaking, means *divine reading*. It is usually, but not always, taken from Scripture, and is

removed from both doctrine and dogma. Rather, as Kathleen Norris notes in her book *The Cloister Walk*, the reader—or listener, for *lectio divina* is often done in community—allows “the powerful biblical images, stories, and images to flow freely, to wash over you” (1996, xxi). *Lectio divina* is reading slowly; it is finding a passage; it is finding words or phrases that speak to you; it is sitting with that, contemplating it, meditating upon it, hoping that it will call you to some sort of prayer or action. So it could be said that it is reading for a deeper understanding, a deeper meaning. Simply put, it is reading with intention and attention, and then just casually reading, in the way that one would read a novel or the daily paper. It is sitting with the words for a time, allowing them to sink into one’s being. This intentional reading is another way of helping to discern God’s will for us.

Franciscan Spirituality

Many people’s first real exposure to Franciscan spirituality comes about when someone introduces them to Richard Rohr, who is a contemporary member of the Franciscan order. Francis of Assisi, of course, is well known as the person who lived simply and loved animals. But Rohr’s daily e-mails can start a quest which can result in the discovery that there is much in it which resonates with the seeker. To begin, Franciscan spirituality is about relationship. In the poem/hymn *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, one is brought to an awareness of the fact that Francis believed that we are brothers and sisters with all of creation. Franciscan spirituality has a profound reverence for the human person as one made in the image and likeness of God, and is therefore intimately connected to spiritual

formation—being formed in the image of Christ, in relationship with the world.

Contemplation, which is different from Gospel contemplation, is essential for those who practice Christian spirituality. True contemplation is more than just navel-gazing, and involves having the individual take the time to focus inwardly every day. By doing this, one is better able to focus outward when necessary.

Rohr sends a daily newsletter, which speaks to some aspect of contemplation, but expands it. Recently, he wrote, “I believe that learning to do compassionate acts from a contemplative foundation is the greatest art form” (2017. Newsletter).

This can be done through centring prayer, through *lectio divina*, and through many of the other spiritual disciplines. Franciscans today have monasteries world-wide as well as an active Internet presence. People such as Richard Rohr work with people at arm’s length, helping them on their journey.

Ignatian Spirituality

Like Francis, Ignatius of Loyola believed that it is important to “see God in all things” (Still 1998, 7). As a military person, Ignatius knew the importance of companions, and this belief followed him into religious life, when he eventually formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1534, even before he was ordained in 1536. There are many aspects of Ignatian spirituality which can influence one’s daily spiritual life, and which can help one to grow.

Beginning with the daily *examen*, which is an integral part of Ignatian spirituality, it is first necessary to understand how it differs from the *examination of conscience*, which was seen as the only acceptable way of preparing for

confession. This examination of conscience was taught in Catholic school, and it focused on things one had done to displease God, those things which were worthy of punishment. Children were taught the difference between venial and mortal sins, and what kind of punishment—hell or purgatory—would result from each unforgiven sin. This was very personal, mostly negative, and had very little to do with relationship. The *examen*, on the other hand, is a way of looking back over the day in a relational way. “The Daily *Examen* is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us” (Loyola Press). There are five basic steps to be observed when doing the *examen*. They are:

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow (Loyola Press)

One looks for those places where God is obviously present, and also for those places where God seems to be absent. These are most often times when one is interacting with another, for good or ill. However, there are times when one is really conscious of God’s presence when one is alone. For example, walking in nature, and appreciating the beauty to be seen and felt there is a time when many people are astounded by the grandeur of God.

Even though *lectio divina* did not originate with Ignatius, it has become a great part of Ignatian spirituality. It includes Scripture and other readings, which

could be devotionals, or books by theologians or spiritual writers. In either case, it would involve reading and allowing the words to speak to us. In this case, then, there is a relationship between the reader and the words/writer.

Gospel contemplation is one of the Ignatian practices which is often used by Spiritual Directors. It bears similarities to *lectio divina*, in that it uses Scripture. However, it involves choosing (or being given) a passage from one of the Gospels which tells a story. The person who is practicing Gospel contemplation would insert him or herself into the story, looking for physical details, and deciding why the particular scene was helpful. It could be done alone; however, it is much more effective when it is done with another person. Questions can be posed, and a discussion can result. Again, this shows how relationship is a necessary part of spiritual formation.

In order to properly understand Ignatian Spirituality, it is necessary to do the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius. The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius Loyola to help people deepen their relationship with God. For centuries the Exercises were most commonly given as a “long retreat” of about 30 days in solitude and silence. In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on the Spiritual Exercises as a program for laypeople. The most common way of going through the Exercises now is a “retreat in daily life,” which involves a month-long program of daily prayer and meetings with a spiritual director (Loyola Press).

One key component of the spiritual exercises is the use of the imagination. Even a quick glance through Ignatius’ instructions reveals a number of exercises

that invite participants to use their imagination in order to develop their relationship with God.

The point is to have your own picture, the image that arises in your imagination when you have put yourself in the hands of the Holy Spirit in prayer. That will be the picture that belongs to your relationship with God as you pray over this mystery. It could be a busy motorway or it could be a starlit footpath; either could be the setting in which God chooses to communicate with you. (Hebblethwaite 1999, 54)

As a spiritual director, I know how important an imagination can be at times like this because it is necessary to be able to think outside the box if one hopes to be open to the guidance of the Spirit. God often chooses to reveal his own creativity through our imagination. Very pragmatic people are less likely to enjoy such activities. However, with time, it is possible to introduce imaginative sessions even to those who don't particularly care for them.

Celtic Spirituality

There seems to be a growth in Celtic Spirituality, with all of its accoutrements. People who have become disillusioned with mainstream churches, or people who have never been churched, are looking for something which they claim not to be able to find in mainline denominations. Some turn to New Age-y movements, others to aboriginal spirituality, and still others look to the spirituality of their forefathers—Celtic Spirituality. This seems to be truer of people whose ancestors are from one of the places where Celtic Spirituality originated. I believe that this is because we—as Canadians in particular—have never developed our own spirituality. Other continents—Africa and South America, for example—still

have a strong aboriginal spirituality, so the inhabitants feel no need to look outside.

Some of the characteristics of Celtic spirituality—which are still seen today—include:

1. Simplicity and small communities. This was exemplified by the rural environment, the strong tribal relationships, and a deep love and appreciation of desert Christians/hermits.
2. A love of learning, which is still important today.
3. Appreciation of women's leadership and gifts, especially as compared to other branches of Christianity. This can be traced back to long before Christianity arrived in the area.
4. Collaboration and Non-Dualism, as noticed in male/female equality.
5. Appreciation of the marginalized.
6. A profound love of beauty, an intuitive sense and deep love, directly linked with the ancestors of the Christian Celts.
7. Respect for sin and the desire to heal its destructive power. This respect for sin should not be taken to mean respect for evil. Rather, it meant that the early Celtic Christians were on guard for those things which could separate them from God. This is something which Christians of today need to keep in mind, as when one loses respect for sin, it is easy to fall into it.
8. Overall, the Celts had a yearning of the heart for God, which is obvious in their prayers as well as their music. (Milton 1995, 23)

While many of the prayers used in worship today have a touch of Celtic spirituality in them, there is a difference in that the Celtic prayers are more personal, even the corporate ones.

When one thinks of Celtic spirituality, Patrick is often the first one who comes to mind, who, even though he was not actually a Celt himself, is still considered part of Celtic Christianity because of his role in the early days of

Christianity in Ireland. In fact, much of what he brought to Ireland was absorbed into Celtic spirituality, and is still a part of it. There are so many stories about him that it is often difficult to separate the myth from the fact, but it remains that he was and remains one of the great evangelists of his time. As well, he is one of the few early Celtic Christians who left us a written record of his own life and ministry. We know that daily prayer was an important part of Patrick's life, no matter what else was happening, and that he was frequently guided by dreams (Sellner 1993, 72). Dreams have often been God's way of speaking to his people, from the earliest of times even to today. This is particularly true of Celts, who seem to have a closer connection with that part of their lives than many people in mainline churches do.

Lately, there seems to be a resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality, as we have once again become a seeking people, and have recognized that our modern lives are missing something. John O'Donohue is one modern writer who is partly responsible for this resurgence, and his writings are attracting more and more people to explore this ancient mode. He has found—and shared with others—the idea of our desire to belong, and he has likewise explored how it is that Celtic spirituality can help us to achieve this belonging. He wrote: “In post-modern culture there is a deep hunger to belong. An increasing majority of people feel isolated and marginalized... Society is losing the art of fostering community” (1999, xxiv). Those people who are attracted to Celtic spirituality recognize this loss of community, and are hoping to reclaim it, whether in real life as through joining communities, or through the help of the Internet by becoming involved in

virtual communities such as Sr. Joan Chittister's *Monastery of the Heart* or the more recent *Contemplative Fire*.

Scripture was and remains central to Celtic spirituality. Leslie Hardinge wrote: "By far the most influential book in the development of the Celtic Church was the Bible. It moulded their theology and guided the worship of the early Christians. It suggested rules of conduct and transformed the ancient laws of Irish and Welsh pagans into Christian statutes" (1972, 29). Two works by Patrick which have survived to this day—*Confessions* and *Letter to Coroticus*—contain no less than 340 quotes from 46 books of the Bible. (Mitton 1995, 130).

Prayer was an essential element of Celtic spirituality, with their daily routine almost echoing the Office as recited by monastics. Prayer was used to start many activities, and this one is one which was often used before reading Scripture.

I open myself to the wisdom of the Word of God
I open myself to the guiding of the Word of God
I open myself to the Power of the Word of God
Father, you spoke your Word, and the earth was birthed
Speak new life to me this day;
Jesus, you came to us as the Word of God
Speak new life to me this day;
Spirit, you awaken me to the Word of God
Speak new life to me this day.
Father, Son, Spirit,
Welcome me now to the Word of Life. (Mitton 1995, 133)

Many of the early Celtic saints founded communities of believers, possibly emulating the early Christians, who often also lived in community. The best known today are the ones on Iona and Lindisfarne, which have survived and changed over the centuries, but which still hold to the basic elements of Celtic

Christianity. The importance of community cannot be overstressed, as it is in community that people grow. As a spiritual director, I hear from many directees about their loneliness, about the fact that they cannot find a faith community which nourishes them.

There are other disciplines practiced by followers of Celtic Christianity, but the ones briefly discussed serve to show some of the unique things about it. The idea of the “thin place” mentioned above, for instance, could also be applied to dreams, which are key to the development of an individual’s spiritual life, and to hearing God’s word. The term “thin place” is used to refer to a time and space where one feels closer to the other world, closer to heaven, closer to God. A thin place is not static, but may be felt in different places. Personally, although I have found thin places in specific areas—on a silent retreat at the Hermitage in the Eastern Townships, as one example—I often find one when I am in the room of a dying person. It is as though the veil is lifted briefly to allow a glimpse into what is to come. The Celts understood this, and this is why so many places in Ireland and Scotland have earned reputations as thin places. This has even made a move into fiction, as in Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander* series, which turns a thin place into a portal between times. The role of children in the church is something which mattered deeply to Celts, who believed that visions were not restricted to adults, and who treated children with deep respect. The Celts were known for their creativity, which has given much to us today, as in the Book of Kells, among other things.

Spiritual Companions

There are several different types of spiritual companions, each of which will be discussed here, along with a more personal experience with each type. This paper will use specific people, rather than speak in generalities. It is certain that other people may have different spiritual companions, but these are the ones with whom the writer has worked over the years, for various reasons. One type is not necessarily categorically better than the others, but it is sure that one type would resonate more than another type, depending on the individual circumstances. This list is not exhaustive, and it will be added to over time, as the journey continues.

Jesus

Without looking upon Jesus as the foremost spiritual companion, as the quintessential *anam cara*, it would be difficult to believe that one is actually being formed in his image. Jesus himself was well-trained in Scripture. He often quoted from what is now called the Old Testament, and he could not have done this without great knowledge, and much time spent immersed in Scripture. It is of paramount importance that a spiritual companion be well-versed in Scripture. This is partly because, for Presbyterians, Scripture is the primary standard. It is also because, in order to be conformed more closely to the image of Christ, it is necessary that Scripture be the foundation of spiritual formation.

It is common to consult Scripture when one has a difficult question, or when one is attempting to discern just about anything. This is because we

recognize Scripture as being God's Word to shape his people, so it makes sense to look for answers there. In the Presbyterian Church in Canada, one of our secondary standards is a small booklet called *Living Faith*. This explains what it is that we, as Presbyterians living in this time and place, believe. The reason I mention it is because every statement in this publication is footnoted with Scripture references. When I was in seminary, we were taught that—if we had a question about faith—we should consult Scripture. As a Presbyterian, I believe that the Bible is “the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience” (*Living Faith*, 14).

However, it is not only such questions which require guidance from God's Word. We live in a world which is becoming increasingly secular, and we often have questions about the way we should live here. There are several “application” Bibles which are very helpful for this. In fact, there are such Bibles aimed at specific groups of people, as well as a more general application Bible. A good application Bible would, first of all, be a good translation, one which is faithful to the original and which maintains the spirit of God's word. It would contain questions which prompt further study, as well as explanations of more obscure passages and commentaries on specific themes. There are several teen study Bibles, which focus on the adolescent who is seeking a closer relationship with God or on being formed more closely into the image of Christ. In addition to the good translation which is crucial for any Bible, such a Bible would answer teen-specific questions in a way that a secular book would not. It would be helpful for a young person who was, for example, trying to discern a future path. There are

also application Bibles which are aimed at women. These are of benefit when a woman feels that she has been left out of commentaries, or when other Bibles appear to be male-centric.

Jesus described himself as the Way and the Truth and the Life. This makes him an ideal mentor, which is a little more than an *anam cara*. When he is looked upon as a mentor, then he will be seen more as a spiritual director, as one who is able to guide us. However, that is part of the beauty of Jesus. He can be both—a director and a soul friend. As a soul friend, he will sit with a person, and allow that person to say what needs to be said. As a director, he will guide people, if they but let him. In the Gospels, it is easy to find those words of Jesus which can readily be applied to a particular situation. For example, think of the story of Martha and Mary at Bethany. When Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen the better way, he was also speaking to each of us, telling us that we need to rest in him in order to be renewed. Using examples such as this can make Gospel Contemplation most effective, provided one is truly ready to listen to what Jesus says, and to hear what he is saying to one's life. There are several places in Scripture where the importance of Jesus to spiritual growth is emphasized. In John 15, he invites to remain (or abide) in him. This word has several connotations, each of which demonstrates just how we, as Christians, can find our identity in Christ.

We need to think about connection, dependence, and continuance, each of which is important to spiritual formation. Abiding in Jesus means having a life-giving connection to him. Jesus points out that the vine is connected to the branch,

but equally, the branch is connected to the vine. This is what we often describe as “union with Christ.” Jesus himself points out the mutuality of this connection, and says that, just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, neither can we bear fruit unless we abide in him. This connection speaks to the idea of relationship, which is one of the key points of much of my own spiritual formation.

Abiding also suggests dependence, and we are dependent on Jesus. The branch, in Jesus’ analogy, derives its life and power from the vine, and without the vine, there will be no fruit. Sap flows from the vine to the branch, supplying it with water, minerals, and the nutrients which make it grow. We see this here in the maple tree, when they are tapped each spring. Only healthy trees produce syrup, and any branches which are broken off are useless. Just so are we, as believers, dependent on Jesus for everything that counts as spiritual fruit.

The third word—continuance—is a matter of semantics. The word “abide” suggests an ongoing action, not one which is ever completed. This tells us that, once we are in relationship with Jesus, we need to remain in that relationship in order to continue growing into his likeness. As we are doing this, we will find ourselves echoing the words from the Acts of the Apostles, and saying, “For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

It should go without saying that Jesus is the best model as both a spiritual director and an *anam cara*. Of course, we do not seek to model Jesus, but—as the paragraphs on identity have emphasized—we seek to participate in his very life and mission. Because of this, then, it makes sense that time is spent with him. As

long as he is allowed to work in and on and through a person, then that person will, of necessity, become more closely aligned to his image. “Jesus Christ is the fullness of God, come to us in human flesh to offer us the example of a life lived perfectly under the guidance and direction of God” (Demarest 2003, 14). As seekers, people can find what they want in the person of Jesus, as revealed in Scripture. A spiritual director can use Jesus’ words in working with directees. It is necessary to realize that every recorded conversation that Jesus had and every teaching he gave offered some kind of spiritual guidance. This is the role of a spiritual director, and also the role of a spiritual companion. Just as any good *anam cara* would, Jesus focused on directing people to right beliefs, right relationships, and right conduct.

By looking at the Gospels story by story, it is possible to see Jesus as the best possible model for anyone. Each encounter he has with a person can be used to show how spiritual companionship—whether as a spiritual director or an *anam cara*—will deepen people’s own encounters with the Divine, and will lead to spiritual transformation. Of course, this does not happen without the Spirit, the person of the Trinity who was given us to be our guide. Jesus himself prepared us for this when he said,

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16–17)

By listening to the Spirit, we are better equipped for true transformation. The Bible is filled with examples of people being led by the Spirit of God. It was a

common occurrence for such people as David, Elijah, Elisha, and many others. Jesus was certainly led by the Spirit. In fact, Matthew 4:1 says that he “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” As our example, Jesus depended on the Father for everything he did upon this earth, and the Father led him by the Holy Spirit, just as he leads others.

The first story that comes to mind is the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. John 4 records that Jesus purposefully went through Samaria in order to give living water to a woman at the well. It would have been unusual for a Jew to go through Samaria because of the long-standing enmity between the two groups, so it seems logical that Jesus was Spirit-led to do this. The woman, in turn, went and told the men of the city, and, because of her testimony they came out and accepted Christ. We know little about her, other than what Jesus told her. And we are never told how he knew the things he did, so again, we can believe that it was the Spirit guiding him by giving him this knowledge. But we do know that, when he offered her living water, she was quick to take it. Not only that, she wanted to share what he had given her with others. This showed the transformative power of an encounter with Jesus, and, even though he is not physically present with us, we can have that same encounter, if only we are open to it.

We know that Jesus worked with his disciples—his small group, to use a modern term. Today, we use group spiritual direction as part of spiritual formation, following Jesus’ model. We also know that Jesus spoke to individuals, such as Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, modeling today’s personal

spiritual direction.

Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen is one of those people who has become very important to anyone seeking spiritual formation. Even though he was a Roman Catholic priest, there is much in his work which resonates with people of different denominations, and even, in some cases, different faith traditions. This is one of the great joys of spiritual formation—that one is open to listen to others, to learn from others, and to grow through the words of others. This is particularly true of such people as Nouwen, who may truly be said to have something of value to give to anyone who is willing to take it.

One of his books that resonates deeply with many people is *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, which deals with one of Jesus' best-known parables in a different way. Often the expression "familiarity breeds contempt" can be applied to the better-known parables, as people feel that they have already studied them enough, and that there is nothing more to learn from them. This little book gives lie to those thoughts. Unlike many other books, the cover of this one is an integral part of it, for it is a reproduction of Rembrandt's painting by the same name. It was this painting which started Nouwen on a spiritual adventure, one which he shared with the world when he wrote this book. (1994, 3–14). This serves to show how *visio divina* can also be used to move one further along on the journey. Where *lectio divina* is praying with Scripture, *visio divina* most often uses works of art for the same purpose. By using *visio divina*, it is possible to dig a little more

deeply into one's inner self, and to find things that could otherwise remain hidden. Nouwen's use of Rembrandt's painting, combined with his own words on the parable, make this book a useful tool which can be used by individuals, as part of one-on-one spiritual direction, or in group spiritual direction. No matter how it is used, it will open one's eyes to a different way of looking at the familiar. We all think that we know the story of the prodigal son, but Nouwen's book, which includes his own powerful reaction to Rembrandt's painting, gives us the opportunity to explore aspects of the story which we may not have considered before.

A spiritual companion—whether a spiritual director or an *anam cara*—need not be physically present in order to take on this role. This is definitely true of Nouwen. In particular, his book *The Way of the Heart* can serve as a fellow traveler. While it is not, strictly speaking, a “how-to” manual, it can, if used correctly, accompany one and guide one from point A on the journey to point B. The book was aimed more specifically at ministers/priests, and as such, can be of great benefit to anyone who is living a life of vocational ministry. However, it can also be used by almost anyone who is a seeker, in that it is not filled with jargon. This is one of the great appeals of much of Nouwen's writing. In the introduction, Nouwen acknowledges the difficulties of ministry in this world, filled as it is with turmoil and agony. It is his hope that this book will help those who minister to figure out where to find nurture and strength, and to alleviate their own spiritual hunger and thirst (1991, 3).

Nouwen makes passing references to other writers, but his primary focus

is on the spiritual life of the Desert Fathers, and how following what they did can help with spiritual formation/transformation. He starts with the story of Abba Arsenius, who earnestly desired the way of salvation. A voice came to him, saying, “Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the sources of sinlessness” (1991, 5). The book is then divided into three parts, as noted below.

Solitude

In this section, Nouwen speaks about transforming solitude, that place where the old self dies and the new self is born. It is possible to experience this—to a slight degree—with a silence and solitude retreat, such as the one which is required of DMin candidates in this programme. Solitude, according to Nouwen, is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image, (1991, 22) and is this not the purpose of spiritual formation? And after a time of solitude, it is possible to analyze more deeply what has happened when one is back in community.

Silence

Silence is almost impossible to come by in this busy world. Wherever one goes, one is surrounded by words and noise. One quote which resonates is: “The Word of God is born out of the eternal silence of God, and it is to this Word out of silence that we are to be witnesses” (Nouwen 1991, 40). This reminds me of Elijah who did not hear God in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the silence which followed (1 Kings 19:11–12). Until I came across this quote, I had not really understood the importance of silence, although I knew that without it,

my soul felt shriveled. When I am part of a group of people for an extended period of time, I find myself looking for quiet corners, for places where I can be alone. It is not that I do not like people, but there are times when they interfere with what is happening inside me. It is important also to note that without silence there can be no listening, and without listening, there can be no guidance. This means that silence is an integral part of spiritual formation, whether with a spiritual director or a soul friend. There are times when this means just sitting and waiting, instead of rushing to fill the void with words. There are times when, without silence, we cannot hear what the other is saying.

Prayer

This third component discussed in Nouwen's book is seen as the ideal result, the outgrowth, of silence and solitude. One must think of solitude not as being alone, but as being alone with God. Likewise, silence is more than just not speaking—it is listening to God, listening for the still, small voice which is not found in the wind or in the fire, but in the silence which follows. In particular, one needs to learn to practice heschaystic prayer—prayer of the heart. Nouwen says that this kind of prayer is “standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart; that is, at that point of our being where there are no divisions or distinctions and where we are totally one” (1994, 74). This is connected with the Scripture quoted above, in which we are to abide in him, and he in us. It also reminds me that we are to be in relationship with God, just as the Persons of the Trinity are in relationship with each other. This is a unique relationship, in that it is like a dance.

The theological term for this is *perichoresis*, which means that God is not just IN a dance, God IS the dance. The Incarnation is a movement—Jesus comes from the Father and the Spirit to take us back with him into this eternal embrace from which we first came. We are invited to join in the dance, and have participatory knowledge of God through the Trinity. The hymn “Lord of the Dance” also reflects some of this, and, despite its dark spots, is nevertheless a hymn of joy and a hymn of relationship.

These three disciplines are essential to spiritual formation/transformation, and as the formation continues, one will eventually reach the point of being a living witness to Christ. One will finally be remade into the image of Christ, which is the ultimate goal of spiritual formation. This little book demonstrates quite clearly that it is not necessary to be with someone in a physical sense in order to form a bond. However, like other books, it could also be used with a spiritual director or soul friend as a jumping-off point on the journey.

Nouwen kept journals throughout his life, many of which have now been published. One which would be particularly beneficial to travelers is *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. Nouwen described this book as a secret journal, and shared it so that others would realize the high costs of some of his insights as revealed in other books. (1998, xvii). Books such as this one are especially useful when one is going through one’s personal dark night of the soul, or when one is questioning things which one had always accepted. It is helpful to know that there are many who suffer in the same way, especially when the other has found a way out or a way back. One quote which resonated with me,

and which would help others undergoing this journey, reads:

When suddenly you seem to lose all you thought you had gained, do not despair. Your healing is not a straight line. You must expect setbacks and regressions. Don't say to yourself, 'All is lost. I have to start all over again.' This is not true. What you have gained, you have gained. (1998, 25)

In particular, this quote reminds the seeker that spiritual formation is not a straight line, but something which can take twists and turns. Despite this, the seeker will keep moving forward towards transformation. With Nouwen, I believe that the Holy Spirit works on the individual through church—or spiritual director, through Scripture, and through prayer. In the first we encounter the living Christ in time and space; in the second we encounter the incarnate presence of God in concrete terms; and in the third, we cultivate an inner awareness or receptivity to God.

Sr. Joan Chittister

Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, is the founder of an online monastery which has attracted followers from all over the world and from most Christian denominations. The welcome message on the site's homepage states: "Welcome! You have found an online movement that shares Benedictine spirituality with more than 14,000 contemporary seekers worldwide" (<https://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org>). She has also written a multitude of books, one of which is directly connected with the online ministry. This book, *The Monastery of the Heart*, took Benedict's Rule and "translated" it so that it could be used by lay people in their daily lives. (2011, vii–x). The idea is that there are people all over the world participating in this "monastery," and sharing their

experiences as part of the online community. This demonstrates, more clearly than anything else, that the Internet can actually be used to create a community of faith. The various courses that are offered provide cyber contact with other people, whether seekers or teachers, and, while they are not as effective as actual meetings in real time, can serve as a conduit for many people to be able to share in the journey.

Her many other books can be used to accompany an individual on the journey, or, as with the Nouwen books mentioned above, may be used by a spiritual director in group or individual work. The little book *Listen with the Heart: Sacred Moments in Everyday Life* is an invitation to the reader to seek the sacred and thus made the mundane meaningful again (2003, xi). Too often, people are bogged down in the quotidian minutiae which can take over their lives, and fail to appreciate the beauty which surrounds them. It is through establishing rituals and developing mindfulness that one is able to bring back joy in daily life. This is one of the things a spiritual director is able to help one do. Also, an *anam cara*—through sharing many of the same thoughts and feelings—can often show one that—no matter what is happening or not happening—the soul can always be reawakened.

Whether one is working with a spiritual director, or walking with an *anam cara*, one has questions which can be answered or explored more readily in company than alone. Chittister's book *Between the Dark and the Daylight* deals with many of these questions. This is a book full of contradictions, as evidenced in the subtitle—*Embracing the Contradictions of Life*—and discusses the

paradoxes of our own time which live within every person. The last chapter is particularly useful, as it speaks about the pain of the search for spiritual painlessness. She wrote, in part,

We struggle to maintain a dead past in the name of peace, and refuse the new life that running water brings to everything. We confuse ‘stagnant’ with ‘calm’ and call it holiness. We miss the power of the paradox that peace is not passivity and that a living death is neither death nor life. (2015, 165)

Having lived for many years with the kinds of paradoxes that Chittister discusses, I found that the contradictions she discussed and debunked were ones which had affected me at different times, and her explanations were both succinct and easy to understand.

The final book to be considered in this section is *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*. Title to the contrary, this has nothing to do with eating healthily or exercising or any of the other things which occupy the secular world. It is a book which goes beyond the physical dimension which occupies too many people for far too long, and moves into the spiritual, the realm which concerns all people seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ. Each chapter is short, running from four to six pages, making them ideal for sessions with a spiritual director or for discussions with an *anam cara*. The chapter titles are single words, words which occupy people at different stages of life, but never more so than in later years. For example, there is a title “Relationships,” and the chapter shows how the whole idea of relationship changes over time. Think, for instance, about the first flush of new love. After a time, the couple will settle into an easy familiarity, feeling that there are no surprises left. While this may or may not be

true, the relationship has changed from what it was at the beginning to something different—and some would say “better” at a later date. At the end of this chapter, as at the end of every chapter, Chittister gives a “burden” of relationship in old age followed by a “blessing” of relationship in old age. (2008, 79–83). This serves to focus the reader on particular aspects of whichever theme is under discussion.

There are many other books by Joan Chittister, and each one of them may be used in the journey towards confirmation in Christ’s image. She has a way of speaking to everyone—male, female, Roman Catholic, Protestant, or any of the other permutations in between and beyond. The language is clear without being simplified, and each book contains gems which may be carried on the journey. It is difficult for me to choose any one quote which resonated with me, as there were many. However, in her book *Following the Path*, she showed how one’s age has little bearing on changing the direction. She wrote, “Life is the vessel we have been given in order to find out what life is really meant to be about” (2013, 83). This was very helpful, as I have constantly found myself reinventing who I am, and changing from what I was to something different.

Thomas Merton

As part of the DMin programme, we were given the opportunity in one of our classes to choose someone whom we would like to have as an *anam cara*, I chose Merton, partly because I wanted to be challenged to learn more about him, and partly because of some comments made by the professor which intrigued me.

Merton’s poetry speaks to people. His imagery is intense, and he played

with words in a way that is not very common in this type of writing. Although it does not all have a specifically religious slant, it all cries out to the human condition. One in particular, which is titled *For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943*, contains the lines:

Sweet brother, if I do not sleep
My eyes are flowers for your tomb;
And if I cannot eat my bread,
My fasts shall live like willows where you died.
If in the heat I find no water for my thirst,
My thirst shall turn to springs for you, poor traveler. (McDonnell 1974,
71)

These words resonate with anyone who has suffered a loss. Many who mourn find themselves unable to sleep because of their grief, and thinking about the eyes as flowers makes those long nights a little easier. Grief also often causes a decrease in the appetite, and when Merton wrote about his experience with that, it made the reader realize that others suffered from the same feelings. The imagery in this short excerpt works its way into the heart and soul of the reader, causing a cathartic effect. As well, poetry lovers everywhere would have a deep appreciation for anyone who can craft poetry in the way the Merton can. It is invaluable to be accompanied by him on the journey. Each one of his poems speaks to the heart; each one in a different way. In many ways, they are reminiscent of the psalms, given that they deal with every emotion one can feel. However, it is not the poem—no matter how good it is—that makes anything happen. It does not solve any problems simply by virtue of having been read. A good poem, then, is essentially contemplative. This explains the use of poetry as prayer, or as an aid to contemplation, and seems to be something which Merton

understood, since even single lines of his poems can point the reader to deeper levels of understanding.

When sun, light-handed, sows this Indian water
With a crop of cockles,
The vines arrange their tender shadows
In the sweet leafage of an artificial France. (Shannon et al 2002, 47)

Merton's imagery allows the reader to see things differently, to take what is known and transfer it to a new experience. His use of personification helps me to understand the relationship between nature and humanity, and causes a sensation of comfort in my heart. When I find a poem such as this one, *Aubade—Lake Erie*, I know that it can be used to show people how powerfully words can conjure up images.

Knowing that spiritual formation involves being conformed to the image of Christ can give people a superior sense of self. Merton, despite the fact that he was a brilliant writer as well as a deeply spiritual person, never felt this. Rather, he was always careful to retain a natural humility, writing, "But although God our Father made us free, He did not make us omnipotent. We are not gods in our own right . . ." (1957, 14). The book from which this quote came—*The Silent Life*—describes monastic life in such a way that even those who know very little about it are able to learn about it in so that they will understand the how and why monasticism operates.

Merton's seminal work—*The Seven-Story Mountain*—is one of the most honest modern-day journals one can find. As an example of a spiritual autobiography, it is certainly to be ranked with any of such writings by early

church fathers as well as modern writers in the genre. This book has been quoted in many places, but, to date, it is only the quotes from other sources which are used in this paper. There is one quote in particular which deserves mention. At the time of its writing, Merton had not yet had his conversion-to-Catholicism-experience, but in hindsight, he could see where it started. He was referring to his time at Columbia University, and wrote, “Now I come to speak of the real part Columbia seems to have been destined to play in my life in the providential designs of God” (Cunningham 1992, 63). This points very strongly to the idea of God’s having a providential design for each person, which is something that appeals to many people who consider themselves as belonging to the Reformed tradition. The other book which helps one to understand Merton in a deeper way was *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, which was written by Michael Mott. This book, the only authorized biography of Thomas Merton showed his sometimes all-too-human side. Mott analysed Merton and his work in a way that was honest and accessible. In fact, this is probably the book which can bring one closer to understanding Merton’s *raison d’être* better than anything else. Mott does not paint Merton as a saint, but as a living, breathing man with all of the foibles of any human. Despite these failings, Merton listened to the call of God, and followed it both deeply and passionately.

Merton was himself a convert. He was not raised with any religious beliefs, which is probably why, as an adolescent, Communism appealed to him. It seems that, from reading his work as well as from reading about him, he was a seeker, even then, but did not know what it was that he was seeking. It was while

he was still at Columbia University that he was re-introduced to Aldous Huxley, an author whom he had admired as a novelist. But then, thanks to his friends, he read *Ends and Means*, which had the effect of beginning his life-long interest in Eastern mysticism. (Cunningham 1992, 74). The idea of practicing mindfulness, which also comes from the Eastern tradition, seems to be growing, but it is possible to do it using a Christian focus. This is another time when a spiritual director or *anam cara* would help keep one pointing in the right direction—towards Christ. It was at this time, as well, that Merton discovered the works of William Blake, one of the greatest poets of his time. Blake had what Merton described as a “vital faith” and it was learning of this which ultimately led him to the realisation that he wanted to live in a world which was “charged with the presence and reality of God” (Cunningham 1992, 78). Those words are strongly reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem “God’s Grandeur,” which Merton must also have read at some point. The great mystical poets influenced Merton, giving one yet another reason to have him as a spiritual guide of some sort.

At one point in his life, Merton published a booklet entitled “What is Contemplation?” Later, after recognizing that this booklet no longer reflected his own philosophy, he wrote “The Inner Experience,” which showed clearly how much he had grown and how far he had come. It is, in one sense, a guidebook for anyone who wants to experience the contemplative life, and in another sense, a sharing of Merton’s own experience of contemplation. As such, it is not an easy read, but at the same time, an essential one for anyone hoping to come close to understanding Merton. As well, it is an excellent guide for Christian

contemplation. By the time he wrote it, he was already exploring eastern mysticism, and this study reflects a fusion of it with Christianity. There is nothing wrong with borrowing from other traditions, especially if one can do it and still remain faithful to one's own beliefs. This is what Merton did with "The Inner Experience," even though, by the end of his life, it seems that he may have been moving away from Christianity. The main difference between the two would be the change of Merton's focus—from being Christ-centered to something a little less orthodox. However, that is not the focus of this paper, which will concentrate on the Christ-centered parts of Merton's life and work.

After a brief introduction to eastern contemplation, Merton showed how the Christian approach moves beyond this, writing, "In Zen there seems to be no effort to get beyond the inner self. In Christianity, the inner self is simply a stepping stone to an awareness of God" (Cunningham 1992, 302). This particular quote is one that makes Merton an ideal companion on a journey of discovery—discovery of self, discovery of God, discovery of the relationship between the two.

For a long time, Christians regarded contemplation as something reserved for those who had nothing better to do. Merton disproved this once and for all with "The Inner Experience." He also proved that there were different kinds of mystic experiences, and this would be extremely interesting for many people, for many reasons. It seems that many people believe—at least implicitly if not explicitly—that such an experience had to be something similar to Saul's experience on the road to Damascus, or else it really didn't count. Merton wrote,

“As we grow in knowledge and appreciation of oriental religion, we will come to realize the depth and richness of its varied forms of contemplation” (Cunningham 1992, 323). By reading Merton, one will be able to see how to apply other traditions to one’s own, and therefore enrich one’s own devotional and prayer life.

In addition to explaining how to become a contemplative person, Merton wrote a short essay entitled “Contemplation in a World of Action.” The entire essay is helpful to people living in the busy-ness of the 21st century, and in particular, these sentences show the importance of contemplation, no matter how busy life can be.

Without a more profound human understanding derived from exploration of the inner ground of human existence, love will tend to be superficial and deceptive. Traditionally, the ideas of prayer, meditation, and contemplation have been associated with this deepening of one’s personal life and this expansion of the capacity to understand and serve others. (Cunningham 1992, 369)

It is clear, from reading this, that contemplation is not just something extra to be tacked onto an already full day, but something which is absolutely necessary for spiritual formation. It is also clear, from reading the entire essay, that Merton intends contemplation to be a part of everyone’s life, and not restricted to cloistered orders.

One thing to be stressed in one’s spiritual life is the importance of a faith community, and there is support for this in many places. However, there are not as many Christian authors who demonstrate how necessary contemplation is for living the life God intends for us. Merton wrote:

He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to

love, will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas. (Cunningham 1992, 375)

Given that we do live in the world, it is sometimes difficult to read the works of contemplative writers, knowing that much of what they espouse is beyond our reach.

Sr. Joan Chittister, mentioned above, points out in many places that living a contemplative life is not beyond the reach of one living in the world. And now, Merton reinforced this idea, and carried it further with the idea that the externals of Christian life are not enough to deepen one's personal relationship with God. It harkens back to Jesus himself, who said to his followers, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" (Matthew 6:6). In essence, this is what contemplatives do, and this is one of the things which is really appealing about contemplation. The aim of spiritual formation is to become more Christlike, and contemplation is one of the tools one can use to come closer to this. Then, with Paul, one can say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1)

It is important to note that, even though books are helpful in spiritual formation, they are only one tool, and should not be used in isolation. It is good to study them with a spiritual director, as this can help the seeker to delve deeper into the meanings of the writings.

Spiritual Direction

There are two main kinds of spiritual direction—individual, in which one meets with a spiritual director on a one-to-one basis, and group, in which several directees meet with the same director at the same time. Both have advantages and disadvantages. We also need to consider mentoring as well as the concept of *anam cara*, which is something we have taken from Celtic spirituality.

Mentoring

The idea behind mentoring is that a wiser, more experienced person guides another person in a particular way. It is common in the business world as well as in education, and it is certainly one kind of spiritual direction, even though it is not specifically aimed at transformation. Nor is it usually as formalized as spiritual direction. Often a mentor is in a person's life for a specific reason, and for a relatively short period. This is not to say that a mentor cannot be a spiritual companion but rather that this is not really the role of the mentor. However, having a mentor at the start of a spiritual journey can be beneficial.

Individual Spiritual Direction

Throughout the centuries, ministries of spiritual guidance have been a gift of grace for the people of God. Looking back, one can see such people as Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich who worked with individuals in order that they should be remade into the image of Christ, which is the purpose of spiritual direction. Now, in this 21st century, spiritual direction and the whole field

of spiritual guidance are enjoying a revival, partly due to some seminaries, but also due to the many seekers who feel the need for renewal and a fresh direction. It is because of this that many people are looking for training as spiritual directors, in the hopes that they will be properly equipped for this new role.

In individual spiritual direction, the director meets with the directee on a regular basis. Usually, the director sets the tone and chooses the materials to be used—*lectio divina*, *visio divina*, Gospel contemplation, or whatever other tools the director wants. However, there are times when the directee will have a specific topic to be explored, in which case the director often can modify the plans to accommodate this. While it is not uncommon for one person to have the same director for an extended period of time, it can also happen that a change is needed, for various reasons. This could include geography, or it could simply happen that the directee feels the need for a different focus. Also, the director could feel that the directee would benefit from the insight of another person, in which case a change would be a good thing.

The biggest advantage of individual spiritual direction is that the people involved come to know each other very well over time, and the director would be better able through the leading of the Holy Spirit to discern the needs of the directee. That is not to say that individual spiritual direction is for everyone. Some people find it difficult to open up in the way that is necessary during an individual spiritual direction session, and for such people group spiritual direction may be the answer.

Group Spiritual Direction

There are a couple of different ways of having group spiritual direction. One common way is to have a group of people who have decided that they need some guidance—more than they are finding during Sunday worship or Bible study. This group meets regularly—possibly once a month—with a director, who is the person responsible for determining the focus of the group. The director sets the tone, and, as in individual spiritual direction, chooses the materials to be used. There may or may not be homework assigned, but there would almost certainly be readings from either Scripture or other sources which should be prepared before each meeting.

The other way of group spiritual direction would involve a group which is self-directed. In this case, each member of the group would take it in turn to lead the group. Over time, the members of the group would develop a special relationship, almost like that of an *anam cara*, as they shared more and more with each other. This has the advantage of not putting any one person in a position of “authority” over the others, and it also exposes the members of the group to a variety of styles of spiritual direction. Each member can learn from the others, discovering that all have much to share.

The biggest problem with group spiritual direction is the commitment which is needed from all members. If a member is consistently absent, or consistently not prepared, then the whole group suffers. If, however, each member takes it seriously, then this can be one of the most exciting ways to journey

together.

The Road to Spiritual Formation

People often refer to life as a journey, and a journey requires some kind of road. Hence, the title of this section—“The Road to Spiritual Formation.” There are many images of roads and paths in literature as well as art, and it is easy to see why this metaphor is applicable here. One starts at Point A in one’s spiritual life, and moves through a series of points until one arrives—not that one is every likely to arrive completely. But with a spiritual director or an *anam cara*, one will have less of a chance of getting lost along the way.

M. Robert Mulholland Jr.’s book *Invitation to a Journey* talks about four stages of the classical Christian journey. While these are not original with Mulholland, his explanation of them is clear and easy to understand. The stages he refers to are: awakening, purgation, illumination, and union, and they “move us from our separation and alienation from God, our unlikeness to the image of Christ, to transforming relationship with God and wholeness in Christ” (1993, 75). The awakening part of the journey often starts in isolation, as one becomes a seeker, looking for some kind of transformation. It can result from a particularly powerful sermon, or from reading a profound book, or from myriad other nudges in one’s daily life. Whatever the inciting force, once it happens, one begins a journey from which there is no turning back. At this stage, one becomes aware of how different one is from Christ, and the desire to conform to his image is born. This is the time when a spiritual director or an *anam cara* would be able to help

with discernment, as the journey starts. This is the time when one needs to listen to another, because it is difficult to start this journey alone. This is also the time when the whole idea of true self/false self comes into play, as one needs to be completely honest with oneself in order to move forward. For many people, this is terrifying, as they have spent so much time hiding who they really are from others, and even from themselves. But once it happens, there is a sense of relief simply from knowing that there is no further need to hide. A companion on the way is invaluable in helping one see the false self for what it really is—something which works only to separate one from Christ, from others, and even from oneself.

The next stage—referred to as purgation—also depends on being honest with oneself, as one recognizes the ways in which one is different from Christ. Without this self-knowledge, then spiritual transformation is impossible. It is in this stage that spiritual disciplines are most helpful in keeping the traveler focused on what is happening. It is in this stage that one begins to renounce what used to be referred to as the ways of the world, and moves towards the acceptance of the Way. During purgation, one must also become aware of the patterns and routines of one's daily life which interfere with one's relationship with Christ. An *anam cara*, one who truly knows the traveler, is well-suited for helping with this. Such a person is honest, but in a caring manner, and is able to speak knowledgably about those habits which need to be changed.

Eventually, the traveler comes to a point of trust, and is able to move to the beginning of illumination, or self-knowledge. At this stage, a companion is

even more important, so that one does not become complacent and think that the journey is over. God is now a vital and living reality in one's own being, and one is also able to see God more plainly in others. It is at this time that we can truly pray not only to see Christ in others, but that others may see Christ in us. Spiritual transformation has started, and it is now just a matter of continuing, of digging deeper, of being more open to the power of the Spirit. Being more open to the Spirit, of necessity, opens one more to the world, as one becomes aware of others around us who are also on the journey.

The final stage is union, and this happens when we realize, with Augustine, that "our heart is restless until it rests in you" (Chadwick 1991, 3). In the early church, this was often referred to as ecstasy, and there are many paintings of saints in such a state. However, this type of union is rare, and not something which most people ever reach. This is partly because daily life interferes, as most people are not in a position where they can spend hours and hours in contemplation. Rather, one can reach a place in which one is willing to submerge oneself, and to surrender one's will to the will of God. This is more easily accomplished with the assistance of another person—a spiritual director or an *anam cara*.

As stated above, one of the roles of a spiritual director is to accompany another person on the road to transformation, or formation in the image of Christ. This journey continues throughout one's life, and will never be completely achieved until one is reunited with God in Christ. In this sense, then the spiritual director or the *anam cara* will be working with the Spirit, serving as a guide for

this most important journey.

Spiritual Disciplines

In order to be transformed, it is necessary to practice spiritual disciplines, and a spiritual director is able to help one discern which disciplines are best for a particular person or at a particular time in one's life. Of course, many of the disciplines are practiced in solitude, but even those would benefit from some kind of involvement by another person, if only for the support to be found by sharing what is happening.

Prayer is the first and most important spiritual discipline, but it is important to remember that prayer is more than something we do in order to get results. It is meant to be a dialogue rather than a monologue. Henri Nouwen defines prayer as “the act by which we divest ourselves of all false belongings and become free to belong to God and God alone” (1979, 6). This definition is very different from the shopping list type of prayer which characterizes so many prayers in which people ask God for things, or for forgiveness, or for healing, or for just about anything you can name. It differs also from prayers of thanksgiving, necessary though they are. It allows a true relationship to develop between the person praying and God being prayed to.

Whenever a spiritual direction session starts, it is opened with prayer. This allows both the director and directee to place their focus where it rightly belongs. It is clear that prayer is a necessary part of any kind of spirituality, and hence even more important to spiritual formation. Simply by praying, the individual enters

into the dance of the Trinity.

Spiritual reading is vital to spiritual transformation, as it allows the individual to hear the thoughts of other, more experienced people. This is not confined to Scripture, but may include devotional books or other books of a spiritual nature. Most of the authors mentioned in this paper write the kind of material which would be considered spiritual. Also, there are internet sites which specialize in such writing, as many authors now have blogs which contain prayers, reflections, or commentaries. Sadly, most of the reading we do is informational rather than formational, and we need to move away from that kind of reading into reading material which will actually help in the process of transformation. A spiritual director can help choose the kinds of books or other reading materials which will best facilitate transformation. Those texts which become a place of encounter with God are the ones which control us, and this is often a difficult concept for us to grasp, especially since we have become accustomed to our controlling the texts. This is one reason a lectionary reading of Scripture is so valuable, as it forces the reader to confront passages chosen by someone else.

Lectio divina, discussed above, is one type of spiritual reading, but one with a precise pattern or formula. One starts with a time of silence as a preparation for the reading. This is often done through a centring prayer, which will allow one to move from the busy-ness of the world into the receptive place necessary for *lectio divina* to happen properly. Then there comes the actual reading, but it needs to be a particular type of reading. One reads slowly, noting

any words or phrases which leap to the forefront. This is followed by a time of silence, and a second or even third reading of the same passage. After the reading is finished, and after the reader has sat in silence with the words, there is normally a time of prayer, in which the reader enters into dialogue with God, as mentioned earlier. Another time of silence, which is really a part of the prayer, follows, while the person sits again, waiting to hear what God will reveal as a result of the reading. Overall, *lectio divina* is one of the most important of the spiritual disciplines in our growth towards being transformed into the image of Christ.

The term liturgy is commonly used to refer to corporate acts of worship, such as the Sunday services or other days of celebration. However, it can also include such things as one's daily devotions. Mulholland defines liturgy as "the corporate and individual patterns of devotion, worship, fellowship, and obedience that enable us increasingly to manifest in the world God's kingdom of love, forgiveness, cleansing, healing, and holiness" (Mulholland 1993, 117). People—even the unchurched—are familiar with worship. It is part of the culture, whether or not individuals take part in it. Worship refers to the gathering of a group of believers, usually, but not always under the leadership of a priest or minister. Each denomination has its own formula for worship, but most have certain things in common. There will be prayers, some of which are memorized (such as the Lord's Prayer), while others may be scripted or extemporaneous. There will be Scripture, with up to four selections from different parts of the Bible. There is usually music, whether sung or instrumental. No matter which denomination one worships in, there are these commonalities. Another part of liturgy is the daily

office, which is more familiar to Roman Catholics and Anglicans. However, it is growing in popularity among other denominations, as people realize that it need not be as elaborate and complex as the monastic hours. Rather, the daily office may be seen as the regular and consistent daily behaviours which remind us that we belong to God. It could be as simple as a daily quiet time with God or regular grace before meals or more elaborate as in a daily gathering with others for some kind of Christian fellowship. There are several books of daily devotionals which are available as well as on-line groups which can help with a personal liturgical life.

Fasting and abstinence are two disciplines which seem to have fallen into disfavour over time, but they can actually be very helpful in helping one be remade into Christ's image. We know from Matthew's Gospel that Jesus fasted, and since the goal of spiritual formation is to become more Christ-like, it makes sense that the seeker would also fast. We seem to think of these only in relation to food or drink, but they can both be applied to many aspects of our lives. The purpose of fasting or abstinence is not to feel deprived, but to choose to become more dependent on God. Just as other spiritual disciplines, fasting and abstinence are "tools that prepare us to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and as it needs to be done" (Hull 2006, 141).

Many people use retreats to help with spiritual transformation. There are several types, each one of which involves stepping aside from the normal flow of life, from the secular world, to give God one's full and undivided attention. All of the other disciplines mentioned above do serve as means to focus us more closely

on Christ, the special time marked by a retreat can clarify the direction in which we are going. This time also gives us the opportunity to listen more carefully to God's voice, and to discern if we are doing the other disciplines just for the sake of doing them, or if we are, in fact, using them as a means to an end.

For some people, dreams are essential to their spiritual life. It is necessary to be careful when interpreting dreams, as it is possible to make them mean whatever it is we want them to mean. However, dreams can also be God's way of speaking to us. We see this over and over again in Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments. Joseph, after having been thrown into jail in Egypt, rose to prominence because of his ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. The Magi were warned in a dream to return home by another way after they found the Messiah. Great mystics have often experienced God's presence during dreams. I have noticed myself that dreams often serve help me discern what it is that God wants me to do. My dreams tend to be vivid, and provide clarity at times when I am not able to see my way ahead. I have learned to pay attention to my dreams, because they so often fit into some specific aspect of my life, especially during times of confusion.

As has been explained above, God uses many different spiritual disciplines to draw us to himself. A spiritual director can be of great assistance in drawing our attention to the disciplines and in discerning which disciplines would be best suited for the individual. The spiritual director can also teach us how to use the spiritual disciplines. Most importantly, by working with a spiritual director, we will become aware of the ways in which God is transforming in

Christ through the Spirit, thus bringing us to a greater awareness of the Triune God.

The research project, which is covered in Chapter IV, sought to discover how the Ignatian *examen* enhances the individual's relationship with God. The *examen* has been used for centuries by members of Ignatian communities as well as other groups, so it has stood the test of time as a spiritual discipline. Because of my own experience with the *examen* as well as research into its use by other groups, I determined that by introducing it to people who were already seeking to become closer to God, it would be possible to see how useful it would be for others. The participants were drawn from the researcher's directees, and research was primarily conducted through personal interviews during regularly scheduled meetings over the course of almost a year. It was originally intended to be a three-month project, but it has been extended, as the participants are still intentionally using the *examen*. Over the course of the project, the seven participants used the *examen* regularly and journaled about the process and their reaction to it. I asked specific questions during each meeting and also journaled about what I saw happening with each of the participants. I learned that, for some people, the *examen* was a good fit, but that it does not work for everyone.

Conclusion/Future Direction

One of the most difficult things about finding a spiritual director is the actual finding and choosing. Often, people need to work with a variety of directors before finding the right one, but it will be worth the effort, as the right

director will challenge as well as guide. One does not have the same issue with an *anam cara*, as this would be someone with whom one already has a relationship. Alternatively, one could decide to work for a time with a particular author, such as one of the ones mentioned above or one of the many others who are well-known as theologically sound. Think of people like C. S. Lewis, N. T. Wright, or John O'Donohue, to name just a few. These, along with many other authors, would provide new insights into spiritual transformation. Choosing books judiciously can be a chore, and one which can be made easier by working with a spiritual director or by discussing possibilities with an *anam cara*. Of course, one should not neglect the books which are recommended by professors or pastors, as they usually have some insight into a particular field.

It is important to remember that we are all, always, being conformed. We are either being conformed to the world's image of us, or we are being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. It is up to us to choose which image we prefer.

My suggested model for spiritual formation is to meet regularly with a spiritual director. There are several ways of finding a spiritual director, and it is important to choose the right one. In my experience, the best way to find a spiritual director is to go to a recognized centre, and go through an interview process which will help match director and directee. It would be necessary to make a real time commitment in order to get the most benefit from direction. I suggest a minimum of one year, meeting at least once a month. The director will be responsible for planning the sessions, and deciding what—if any—readings

will be used. Spiritual disciplines will be taught and practiced, with the ultimate goal being to determine which specific disciplines will be of the most benefit. It will be expected that there will be periodic evaluations of the sessions, by both director and directee, so that each one will be able to track change and growth. I believe that, by working with a spiritual director, the directee/seeker will be equipped to be transformed.

The first step for a seeker, then, is to find a spiritual director. The project which I did, which is highlighted in the following chapter, is contingent upon there being a director and a directee. Not everybody is fortunate enough to live in a city which has a place like the Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Montreal. Not everybody is fortunate enough to live in a place where access to a spiritual director is an easy thing. However, thanks to the Internet, it is possible not to be bound by geography. Once this has been done, then it is possible to move ahead on the journey.

This model could also be used with a larger group, but it would be slightly modified. If I were to use it in my congregation, I would introduce it to them as part of worship, possibly over a couple of weeks. After having explained exactly what the *examen* is, and having demonstrated one way of doing it, I would make the basic questions available to the congregation, by including them as an insert in the bulletin. I would make myself available to meet with individuals to explain it in more detail, should they find this necessary. In this way, a modified model would be developed, which could then be used by other people in other contexts.

As a spiritual director, I chose to work with my directees for the project

which is described in the next chapter. Since God speaks to us both personally on an individual basis and in community, I placed the relationship between the spiritual director and the directee at the centre of my ministry project. I intended to show how this relationship can be of great help in the transformation of the individual. Because I had had such success myself with using the Ignatian discipline of the daily *examen*, I wanted to share this with others. At different times in my life, the *examen* helped me to become aware of God's daily presence in my life. Sharing this with others is another aspect of missional behaviour, as in addition to modeling it myself, I wanted others to have the same experience. My next chapter, then, will focus on the teaching and implementation of the *examen*, and the effect using it can have on building a person's relationship with God.

CHAPTER IV:
THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF THE
EXAMEN ENHANCES AN INDIVIDUAL'S
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Introduction

As a spiritual director, I have explored many different ways of helping my directees connect more closely with God, since this is one of the goals of spiritual direction (Howard 2008, 23). This year, I decided to use the Ignatian *examen* as a tool to help my directees on their journey. Having used it myself, I can attest to its benefits. This is a discipline with which I have been familiar for a long time, as it was part of my growing up in a Roman Catholic system which used both the *examen* and an examination of conscience on a regular basis. In my researching a model of spiritual formation in the previous chapter, I learned more about it, and decided that would be useful as a spiritual discipline in community as well as on an individual basis. In fact, using the *examen* as a jumping off point for spiritual direction seemed to me to be a useful tool for discussion as well as growth. It is necessary to differentiate between the two, as there can be some confusion. The differences between the *examen* and the examination of conscience are easy to understand, and having understood them, it is easy to see why the *examen* is

useful in building a relationship with God.

As a child preparing for my first confession, I was taught that to do an examination of my conscience before going to confession. It was explained to us that this was a prayerful self-reflection of our thoughts, words, and deeds in the light of the Gospel to determine how we may have sinned against God. Therefore, in my experience, it was primarily negative. Later, I learned about the Ignaitan *examen*, which seemed to me to be a much more user-friendly (to borrow from a different world) way of examining myself. The examination of conscience required me to look only upon the things I did which I should not have done, or the things I had omitted to do which I should have done. The *examen*, on the other hand, looked at both the positive aspects of my day as well as the challenges I may have faced. Instead of focusing on sins, I was able to reflect on my experience of God's grace. Even the language was different. The *examen* is a method of prayer which was developed by Ignatius of Loyola (Reed 2015, 118). The words "consolation" and "desolation" play a key role in the *examen*, with consolation being understood to be those things which draw us closer to God, and desolation being understood to be those things which draw us away from God. Doing the *examen* is a way of making ourselves aware of God's presence in us, in other people, and in the world which surrounds us.

One reason for doing this kind of discipline is because of what Augustine wrote in his confessions: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you" (1992, 4). The people with whom I am working know that they are looking to discover God and how God works, and are anxious to find their purpose in God's plan, and are

ready to do what is necessary to find that deeper connection. In order to find rest in God, the practice of spiritual disciplines is helpful, and by using the *examen*, it is possible that the practitioner will, indeed, find the rest that he or she is seeking. I found the *examen* a way to do more than simply focus myself on God's presence during my day. It was also a way to bring closure to the day, and to pass everything over to God.

Specifically, the Ignatian *examen* involves spending time each evening looking back over the day. It is guided by specific questions which are aimed at helping the individual see those times when God's presence was felt during the day, as well as those times when it seemed that God was far away. I believe that using detailed, specific questions at the beginning is necessary because this is a new idea for most of the participants, and it is often helpful to have a template to use as a guide. It is hoped that, after some time of using the template, the participants will develop their own list of questions, and modify the *examen* to suit them as individuals. In a traditional *examen*, the questions are set, but I have found, in my own experience, that I often modify them to suit particular events happening in my life. This personalizes the *examen* for me, and could well do the same for others. Having a spiritual director to discuss these questions with helps them to become as useful as possible.

Participants in this study were drawn from the researcher's directees. The reasons for this were simple. First of all, they were a group of people who had already expressed an interest in deepening their relationship with God, simply because they had sought out spiritual direction. After understanding the

possibility that the *examen* could help with this desire, they were interested in at least trying the *examen*, and therefore would enter into the practice with open minds. Second, they had already built a certain level of trust in me, and were therefore likely to accept the idea that the *examen* would help them. Finally, using my directees meant that I did not have to find other people who were willing to take part in this project. If I had done that, I would have had to start from the beginning again, and it would have taken longer for me to get everything going. I would have had to build up the level of trust, and also I would also have had to learn about the participants in a way which I had already reached with my directees.

One aspect of this project which is not necessarily a part of the *examen* is the discipline of journal keeping. While this was not essential, I felt that this would make our meetings flow more smoothly, since they will have things written down and will not have to depend on their memories. I also kept my own journal, as well as notes on each of the meetings, and these became the data sets that are analyzed in this report.

Context

I am an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Although spiritual direction as such is not a part of my denomination, it has worked its way in under other names, and there are now many Presbyterians who use it, and who practice other spiritual disciplines which were once more common to the Roman Catholic church. In particular, I think of Presbyterians David Sherbino and

Barbara Haycraft, both of whom have been instrumental in my own journey to this place. Being a minister, as well as a person who has completed the practicum in spiritual direction offered at Tyndale has given me an insight into spiritual journeys. I have learned to recognize when people are truly looking for something, and I have been able to figure out some of what they need in order to help them move along on their journeys.

This research project has taken place with my directees, who are scattered over the world. Some of them live in Québec City, and I meet with them face-to-face at least once a month. I am also available at times during the month for specific issues. The other people with whom I meet are scattered—in Canada, the United States, Thailand, and Turkey. We meet via Skype, which has proved to be a real asset to spiritual direction. Some of them I came to know through my congregation. Others came to me through Tyndale, when they were required to have a spiritual director as part of their own studies. The fact that so many of them have continued to work with me demonstrates to me the benefit of having a spiritual director. I knew this from my own experience, and from various books which encourage spiritual direction, but for a time, I felt as though few other people felt the same way.

In addition to being my directees, all of the participants are practicing Christians. That is, they are members of particular denominations, and worship regularly in community. They already have some kind of relationship with God. Also, because they sought out spiritual direction, I can be fairly certain that they want to deepen this relationship. They are aware that, in order to do this, they will

need to make some effort. All of the people taking part in this project are interested in learning new things—about themselves as well as about God. The *examen* is one way of doing this, since the questions help the participant to go deeper into him or herself and to learn things that might have been overlooked.

By examining our lives, we can see where we have been and where we are going. Through regular examination of ourselves, we can come to understand ourselves better. And if we add God to the mix, which we do with the *examen*, then we can better see our relationship with God and deepen it.

Each one of the participants has expressed an idea to become more Christ-like, and to deepen their relationship with God. This happened even before I had the idea for this project, and when I suggested that we try using the *examen* as a tool to do this, they were enthusiastic about it. One of the most important things about the *examen* is that it is prayerfully directed, which keeps God at the forefront during the actual time of the *examen*. If nothing else results from this, then they will at least be able to see God in places where they may not have seen him before.

The data for this project was gathered during our meetings and conversations as well as some of their journal sharing. I decided to use narrative research for this project for this reason, mainly because it is difficult to be quantitative about these things. Right from the beginning, I assured the participants of confidentiality. I also made it clear that they did not have to share anything with me unless they wanted to do so. From things that they have said to me—which will appear later in my paper—I believe that the participants

appreciated the fact that I was following the practice along with them. This made them feel that they were companions on a journey rather than guinea pigs in an experiment, and helped them to be more open to the Spirit's moving in them.

The Kirk Session of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Québec City has been aware of this project from the beginning, and has been supportive of me throughout my studies. They frequently ask questions, and I will be glad to be able to share the completed project with them. My peer group has been invaluable in helping me focus. As well, Dr. Mark Chapman has guided me along the way, taking extra time to point out things to me, and I very much appreciated his input. However, it is the directees themselves who provided the impetus for and much of the content of this paper, and it is for them that I hope my original expectation is helpful.

Models

Since Spiritual Direction has a long history, there were many models from which to choose. As can be seen below, I used personal experience as well as research in deciding which method I would use for this project.

Background from Theology, Scripture, and Literature

Before embarking on any project, it is necessary to have some kind of background. In this section, I will explain some of the rationale for choosing to use the *examen* the way I did. I will demonstrate its value for myself, and explain

how I hope it will be valuable for others.

Background from Spiritual Autobiography

Having been raised as a Roman Catholic, I was familiar with the Ignatian *examen* as one method of deepening one's relationship with God. This practice came out of Ignatius' book called the *Spiritual Exercises*, which was based on his own experiences, and was meant to show people how to become increasingly sensitive to God's action in our lives (Silf 1999, 14). Originally used mostly in monasteries or convents—among people living in community—this has now become better known among lay people. In part, this is due to the information which can be found on the Internet, but there are also people who are using it because they have been introduced to it by spiritual directors or others who were already familiar with it.

While I do not presently practice the *examen* on a daily basis, I do it regularly, and have found that, the more I do it, the easier it is to discern God's presence in my daily life. In particular, when I am on retreat, the *examen* is often built in to the routine. I have also found it helpful to do an annual examen, which I have also introduced to the participants in this project. Their responses appear later in the paper.

Scriptural Basis

If one looks at the *examen* as a time of speaking with God, as well as a time of reviewing the day—or other period of time—then it may clearly be seen

as having a definitely Scriptural basis. Solomon (1 Kings 3:9–12) recognized the importance of speaking with God, asking for discernment. Specifically, he spoke to God in a dream, saying, “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” In this way, he was not only able to feel God’s presence, but to hear God’s will for him. Although this was not specifically an *examen*, it had the same result, so may be considered part of the same discipline. Practicing the *examen* leads to discernment, which is what Solomon wanted as a gift from God. If one examines oneself closely, then one is able to see the ways in which one draws closer to God as well as the ways in which one shuts oneself off from God.

There is a general pattern of the *examen* in Scripture, even though that word is not specifically used. If the *examen* is understood as a time of seeking out God, then all of the prophets could be said to have done that. Moses met with God personally on several occasions, most notably in front of the burning bush, and again on top of a mountain. Elizabeth Barret Browning, in her poem “Aurora Leigh” probably said it best when she wrote:

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit around and pluck blackberries. (GoodReads.com)

Unless one is conscious of God’s presence, then it is easy to sit around and pluck blackberries. One of the best ways to become conscious of God’s presence is through actively seeking him. In this process, we discover that God is already seeking us. The *examen* is certainly one way to look for God’s presence, and one

which yields more results the more one does it.

The psalmist understood about the *examen* centuries before Ignatius. He wrote: “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me” (Psalm 25:4–5a), and: “Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind. For your love is ever before me and I walk continually in your truth” (Psalm 26:2–3). These two quotes plainly show how important it was for the psalmist to listen for God’s voice, and one of the best ways to hear that voice is to seek it actively. The psalmist recognized that God’s love was primary, and that the seeking was in response to God’s prior activity. This can be done in many ways, but it is the *examen* on which this paper is focusing, and it seems to me that the psalmist was using some kind of *examen* to discern God’s will. Especially notice that the psalmist’s focus was not on his offences or anxieties, but on having God’s love continually before him so that he can walk consistently in God’s truth. This is the point of the *examen*—to help the individual to be constantly reminded of God’s love which comes, not in response to our seeking, but exists prior to it, and calls us forward in our seeking.

Jesus frequently went off by himself to pray. At such times—particularly in the Garden of Gethsemane—he expressed his desire to do his Father’s will, even if this conflicted with his own desires (Mark 14:36). In order to discern God’s will for us, we need to be able to see God in our daily lives, and the *examen* allows us to find God, even in some unexpected places. When Jesus did this, he was alone, which is the way that the participants will be doing the *examen* themselves. The purpose of doing it alone is so that the individual will be able to

build his or her own relationship with God, sensing God's presence throughout the day, and discerning God's will. This is followed by a discussion with the spiritual director. Thus, the *examen* becomes the ideal tool to aid formation that has both individual and community elements. We know that Jesus was well-versed in Jewish Scripture, and would have probably used Psalm 26 as part of his prayer life. There is no doubt that this way of reflective, gentle praying helped him to rely continually on the Holy Spirit, and to persist in the love of the Father. As Jesus did, we can keep our hearts and minds open to the Father through using the prayer of *examen* regularly. In my experience, after some time of consciously doing the *examen*, people will find themselves recognizing such moments as they happen during the day, even though they may never have noticed them before.

Model of Spiritual Formation

To connect this with other work done in this programme, it is necessary to refer to the Model of Spiritual formation which I explored in the previous chapter. In this paper, I demonstrated the importance of the other in spiritual formation. That is, I explored the ways in which a spiritual director, a spiritual companion, or a soul friend—*anam cara*—could help an individual in his or her quest. Part of this included some version of the *examen*, and the other—whether spiritual director, spiritual companion, or *anam cara*—helped the individual discern the presence of God in daily life. While this practice of the daily *examen* was, at first more specifically Roman Catholic, this practice is now spreading into Protestantism, as it is becoming better known. (O'Donohue 1999, 16).

St. Brigid of Kildare is thought to have been the first to elucidate the importance of a soul friend. She is quoted as having said that “Anyone without a soul friend is like a body without a head” (Sellner 1993, 73). One of the purposes of a soul friend was to ask the kinds of questions which are to be found in the *examen* so that the presence of God in daily life could be discerned.

John O’Donohue is one modern writer who is partly responsible for the resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality and, along with it, the idea of having a companion on the journey. Although this is not specifically connected with the *examen*, as noted above, the questions which would be asked in spiritual direction are similar to the questions which one would use in an *examen*. O’Donohue wrote: “In post-modern culture there is a deep hunger to belong. An increasing majority of people feel isolated and marginalised. . . Society is losing the art of fostering community” (O’Donohue 1999, xxiv). One way of finding this community is by exploring the presence of God with another. However, the *examen* expands upon this by helping the individual to explore the presence of God every day.

Other Sources

As a music teacher, I understood the importance of practice in order to improve one’s playing. As the mother of athletic boys, I learned the importance of practice in order to improve one’s ability on the soccer field or in the arena. As a person who would like to be physically fit, I understand the importance of regular exercise in order to improve my body. It is just as important to practice spiritual

disciplines in order to improve one's spiritual life. This is explained in John Ortberg's book *The Life You've Always Wanted*. "Spiritual disciplines are to life what calisthenics are to a game" (2005, 72). This book is particularly useful because it is not a deep theological treatise, but rather is aimed at ordinary people, and therefore is written in accessible language. The above sentence is just one example of the ways in which he connects the spiritual life to the physical life, and is helpful for reinforcing the idea that the regular use of a spiritual discipline—in this case, the *examen*—will improve one's spiritual life.

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (2005) lists three complete pages of spiritual disciplines and explains each one. In the section on the *examen*, she explains in detail what the *examen* is, and gives some very helpful tips to enhance it. She also suggests specific words which the participants will find useful. Calhoun concurs with my belief that the *examen* provides a useful method of finding direction for their lives, saying, in part, that it "provides a way of noticing where God shows up in our day" (2005, 53). The questions which she provides are presented almost paradoxically, as she moves from the positive to the negative. One example is: "For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?" (2005, 53). The questions become more complex as the chapter moves on, and each one leads the practitioner more deeply into his or her consciousness. Her reason for pairing positive moments with more negative ones is that both the high and low points can be thus recognized as an invitation to prayer (2005, 54). Interestingly, the section on the *examen* is followed immediately by a section on

journaling, which is something else the participants will be encouraged to do (2005, 53–59). Each chapter of Calhoun’s book is followed by a series of reflection questions and spiritual exercises, all of which are designed for a transformational journey.

When one is considering practices which will deepen one’s relationship with God, David Sherbino’s workbook *re:connect* (2013) is possibly one of the most helpful. In addition to explaining a number of disciplines, including the *examen*, this book gives specific methods for doing each one. He points out that followers of Jesus still need to be connected to God, whether they were the early disciples or people who are participating in Christ’s life and in ministry in this 21st century (2013, i).

Research Resources

Getting into the practicality of writing this paper, I was most helped by the classes on the topic. As well, my peer group gave me excellent advice as did others in my cohort. Without them, I would have been floundering even more than I did. With them, I was able to make sense of things which at first appeared incomprehensible.

Richard Osmer’s *Practical Theology* (2008) was invaluable for many reasons—mainly because of the language. It was clearly written, and almost jargon-free. It rose from his own experience, which made it more than suitable for someone taking on a task such as this one. In particular, the section on “Priestly Listening” helped me during the interview times with the participants. I learned

how to ask questions as well as what kind of questions to ask. I also learned how to listen to what they were not saying as well as what they were saying so that I could draw more out of them. This is what Osmer called a “spirituality of presence” (2008, 33). I believe that, by following his example, I was able to glean more than I had expected from the participants.

The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2015) by Johnny Saldaña was not nearly as user-friendly as Osmer’s book, but in many ways, it was even more useful. I found the section on analytic memo writing helpful when it came to making my own journal entries, as it helped me choose from among many thoughts and feelings so that I could write what was most appropriate (2016, 43–64). This book also helped me to crack the mystery of coding, so that I was able to understand what was expected of me.

The major research text for qualitative elements of this project was *Qualitative Research* by Tim Sensing (2011). The consent form in this book helped me to write the consent form which I used (2011, 235). Chapter six of Sensing’s book—*Taking Note*—combined with what I gleaned from Osmer’s chapter on analytic memo writing, was of tremendous benefit when it came to writing up the project.

Methodology and Methods

The methodology for this project was narrative research. Although there are many methodologies that work well with individuals, because of my background, and because I would be sharing people’s stories, the narrative

approach made the most sense. I received approval from the Tyndale Research Ethics Board on January 27th, 2017 and from the Kirk Session of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on September 6th, 2016. Since this would occupy some of my time, it was necessary to have the approval of the Kirk Session. They were very supportive of this project, and are interested in hearing the outcomes. I chose to work with seven of my directees, and to do my research during our regularly scheduled meetings.

I explained the project to each directee individually, and told them why I wanted them to participate. I explained that I wanted to find out if the *examen* would be helpful in deepening their personal relationship with God. I gave them copies of the explanatory letter and the consent form, which are included in the appendices of this paper. Although I told them that they did not have to decide immediately, without exception, they all agreed during their initial meetings.

As mentioned above, they were a diverse group. They ranged in age from late 20s to 65. There were three men and four women. One was single, one divorced, and the others married. Their religious backgrounds were also diverse. There were members of mainline denominations as well as members of more evangelical ones. One of them was a pastor, who is presently involved in church planting. Two are very active lay leaders in their churches/denominations. Four of them are members of congregations, but not necessarily involved in leadership roles. A table included at the end of this paper gives the exact details in that format. All of them were chosen because they had expressed a desire to grow into a likeness of Christ, to deepen their relationship with God. This gave them an

incentive to take part in the *examen*, whether they had heard about it before or not.

Field

To help the reader in following this project, I have provided brief biographies of the participants. While I knew all of them before the project started, I had not really discussed the depth of their relationship with God during our time together. Even though I was their spiritual director, that particular question had never come up. Rather, we had been journeying together, and I had been guiding them on the path towards an imitation of Christ. All of the names have been changed, in the interest of maintaining confidentiality.

I met with Bob to begin this project on October 3rd, 2016. I went to his house for this meeting as he was not able to drive to my office. His health is deteriorating, and this was a focus of some of our conversations.

Janet is divorced and has grown children as well as one still at home. She is still working through anger about her marriage, and is trying to establish herself in her chosen field. She has encountered many challenges in her vocational pursuits. We first met on October 6th, 2016, in my office. She can get there easily after work.

Carol is one of the people who sought spiritual direction because it was a requirement of a course she was doing at Tyndale. We had worked together for some years before this project started. We first met for the project via Skype on October 10th, 2016.

Tom is another directee who came to me through Tyndale. He was very interested in practicing the *examen* regularly, having had some experience with it during retreats. Our first meeting for the project was on October 17th, 2016.

Mary is a young mother living with her husband. They have lived in several countries, and she is open to learning new things. She became a directee because of course work at Tyndale, and continued after she was finished. We first met on October 21st, 2016 to begin the project.

Peggy is married, and has adult children. She also became my directee because of course work at Tyndale. She is very involved in her church, and has been for a number of years. She primarily works with women and children. Our first meeting for this project was on October 24th, 2016.

Richard is single, in his early thirties. He has been one of my directees for a number of years. He has an active prayer life, and is a member of a congregation in his new home. Sometimes he visits other churches, just to see what they are all about. We meet via Skype once a month. Our first meeting for this project took place on October 31st, 2016.

Table 1. Participants and Demographics

Person	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Age	68	47	59	52	27	54	32
Denomination	Presbyterian Church in Canada	Anglican	Central Christian Assembly	Presbyterian Church in Canada	Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	Christian Reform Alliance	Presbyterian Church - USA
Church Involvement	Board Member	Choir	Pastor	Member	Member Mission Worker	Sunday School Women's Group	Member Men's Group

Education	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate
Occupation	Retired	Teacher	Pastor	Civil Servant	Mother	Counsellor	Researcher

Scope

As stated above, this project is limited to the participants already described. I introduced them to the concept of the *examen*. In some cases, this was a refresher, because they had already either practiced it in the past or had at least heard of it. In other cases, this was a completely new idea, so it took some time to make sure that they understood what they were going to be doing.

This project has been limited to people with whom I have been working for some time. They are people who have already expressed an interest in moving forward on their faith journeys, and people who already have a relationship with God.

The purpose of this project is to determine whether or not the regular practice of the *examen* can, in fact, be used to deepen an individual's relationship with God. According to the literature, the regular practice of spiritual disciplines can do this, so I was hopeful that the participants would benefit from the exercise. I explained to them that I did not know if this would happen, and that I would be depending on their accurate reporting of their experiences.

This project began with a teaching session, in which I explained exactly what I wanted them to do. There were specific interview questions—which are included in Appendix C—to determine their individual starting points. This enabled me to judge whether or not there were any changes over time. I had to be

careful not to let my own enthusiasm for the *examen* colour my explanation, but to make sure that they understood that this was only one of a multitude of disciplines, and that I had chosen it for many different reasons. Foremost among these was the fact that I found it a very useful practice, one which helped me greatly in seeing God in my daily life. The *examen* is structured, and therefore easy to use. This makes it a discipline which can be practiced on various levels, and the practitioner is free to explore as deeply as he or she wants. It is also a discipline which lends itself to journal writing, so the practitioners are able to record their progress and have a record of what changes—if any—occurred over time.

The project “finished” with another interview. I put the word in quotation marks because, even though it is now finished as far as this portfolio is concerned, it is ongoing for most of the participants. To me, this is a very positive outcome, and one for which I had hoped at the beginning, even though I did not express that to the participants.

Methodology

As stated above, I used the Narrative Research method for this project, since this approach lent itself to what I was doing better than other methods. Narrative research tends to focus on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories. Data was collected and recorded in my research journal. It consisted of my observations as well as the observations of the participants. Because there was a series of interviews with each participant, more data was collected. It was

also collected at different times during the project, thus allowing me to see if there had been any change or development in the individual participant. This idea came from the book *Qualitative Research* (2011, 92).

Sensing's book was also helpful in preparing the material for this report (2011, 102–113). There were guidelines for conducting the interviews, as well as very practical suggestions for specific types of questions, which could be extrapolated to almost any narrative research. *Practical Theology* also provided suggestions for the interview, in the section called “Priestly Listening” (Osmer 2008, 35–41). Often, when one is conducting an interview, it is easy to get caught up in preparing the next question, thus not paying attention to what the interviewee is saying. By practicing priestly listening, I was able to focus on the moment, and to truly hear what was being said.

There were times during the project when I did verbatim recording. However, this was not the primary method of collecting data, as I found that it could be distracting. Rather, most of the time, I used a kind of shorthand, which I later transcribed. I also noted my feelings and reactions to the responses to the interview questions, as well as to what the participants wanted to share with me over and above that information.

As far as the analysis was concerned, analytic memo writing was extremely helpful (Saldaña 2016, 44–65). By doing this promptly, I was able to include my own reactions as well as what the participants said and did. Having learned how to write a theological reflection during my time in seminary, I was able to apply those skills to this task. Theological reflection is a way of doing

theology which starts from the experiences of life, and leads to searching in faith for a deeper meaning and for the living God. This fits in well with the *examen*, since its purpose is to deepen one's relationship with God. Theological reflection may also be described as a process in which an individual or small group reflects on their personal or collective experience(s) in light of their faith. The aim is not only to come to new understandings about the circumstances in which people live and the faith they profess, but to identify new ways of responding that validate their experience and give voice to their truth. Therefore, theological reflection is an essential part of spiritual transformation, and something which can be used in spiritual direction as well as in report writing.

Table 2. Phases and Timetable.

PHASE	ACTION	TIME	WHO	HOW
Project Proposal	Approved		Dr. Mark Chapman	
REB Application	Approved	January 27, 2017	Tyndale Research Ethics Board	By e-mail
Involving the Participants (A)	Met with St. Andrew's Session	September 6 th , 2016	Katherine Burgess and Session	Project explained
Involving the Participants (B)	Met with Directees individually; letter given; consent form given.	October 3 rd –31 st , 2016	Participants and Katherine	Consent form returned; preliminary interview

Methods

The first thing which was done was to explain the purpose of this project to the potential participants. They were interviewed before the project began and after it was finished. (See the interview questions in Appendix C.) Using Sherbino's *re:connect* (2013), Reed et al's *Spiritual Companionship* (2015), and Howard's *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (2008), as well as my own experience, I developed a template for a daily *examen*, which I gave to each of the participants. I also shared a template for a yearly *examen*, which I had developed for myself when I wrote a Rule of Life some years ago. (See Appendix D and E for these templates). Participants were encouraged to keep a journal of their experience with the *examen*. If they wanted to share anything in it with me, that would have been permitted, but they were under no compunction to do so.

Throughout the project, I met with each participant on a monthly basis, since that was the routine we had established for spiritual direction. We took the first few minutes of each session to discuss the *examen* and how it seemed to be working in their lives. In addition, I was available via e-mail or telephone if any of the participants needed to explore some particular revelation which happened during a particular *examen*. These sessions will be discussed below in the sections on each of the participants.

Ethics in Ministry Based Research

Considering the possibility of a power differential, I am, in a couple of senses, in a position of power. First of all, I am the pastor of the congregation

which one of the participants attends. One other participant has also been a member of this congregation. I am the spiritual director for all of the participants. However, despite this, I did not think that this would have any effect on the outcome of the project, or, indeed, on actually conducting the project. All of the participants, as noted above, have worked with me for some time, and we have built up a level of trust which allows them to be honest with me. Also, the consent form, explained below, acknowledges the possibility of any power differential, and seemed to reassure the participants that this would not be a problem.

As can be seen on the consent form, each participant was assured that there was no obligation to participate. Additionally, they were all assured that they could withdraw from the project at any time, without consequence. While they were asked to journal about their experience with the *examen*, they were under no obligation to share anything in it with me. That some of them chose to do so added to the project, but at no point did I insist that they share what they had written with me. I received permission from each one of them to use what they told me in my paper, and told them that I would change their names in the interest of confidentiality. Even though I did this, they said that they would not have minded if I had used their real names. There was very little sensitive information contained in the interviews, as they were specifically aimed at the discipline of the *examen*. It would have been during spiritual direction that personal matters came up, and that was not the focus of this project.

The possibility of potential bias leaning towards a positive outcome was addressed at our first meeting for this project, when I told them that I had

personally benefited from doing the *examen*. However, I also told them that this was not a one-size-fits-all activity, and that not everyone would react in the same way. As will be seen in the conclusion, this was the case, as some people found the exercise not as beneficial as others did.

Material gathered during this project will be safely kept in a locked file cabinet, and will be destroyed after five years. Since there are no audio interviews, I do not have to worry about that. The material on USB keys will also be deleted, since these will contain my notes and transcripts of interviews.

Findings, Interpretations, and Outcomes

Findings

In order to discuss my findings, I have done a separate section on each of the participants. I felt this to be an effective way of keeping their reactions and results separate. Then I will combine parts of these sections in the Conclusions and Implications section of this paper. I will not give separate headings for each of the participants, but will deal with them as I wrote them, as one narrative. In the Interpretations section of this paper, I will share my own thoughts on the project, and its challenges. I had originally planned to do this with six directees, thinking that this would be a large enough group to work with. However, one other directee requested to take part, so I added her.

Table 3. Data Collection 1: Pre-Interviews

Participants	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date Collected	3-10-2016	6-10-2016	10-10-2016	17-10-2016	21-10-2016	24-10-2016	31-10-2016
Data Collected	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>	Familiarity with <i>examen</i>
Method of Collection	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview	Interview
Method of Analysis	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative

In the pre-interviews, I learned the familiarity or lack thereof with the *examen*. This allowed me to determine how much time I would need to spend actually teaching it.

Table 4. Data Collection 2: During Observation

Participants	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date Collected	Various	Various	Various	Various	Various	Various	Various
Data Collected	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction
Method of Collection	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation
Method of Analysis	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative

During the project, I met with and interviewed the participants several times. We discussed their progress with the *examen*, and whether or not they felt it to be beneficial. This would have been the time when we would have discussed their journals, since this was where they recorded their practice of the *examen* and their reaction to it. Janet was the participant who journaled most faithfully, partly because she had always found journaling to be an effective way of connecting to

her deeper feelings. She noticed—through her journaling—that on those days when she did the *examen*, she felt that God was more present in her life. Carol’s journaling was more sporadic, but she also found that it helped her to become more aware of God. The difference for her was that the *examen* and subsequent journaling prepared for noticing God’s presence the next day, rather than the day just past. She commented that it seemed that journaling about it was opening her eyes to what was to come, rather than what was over. Richard’s journal was more of an academic exercise, in which he noted the questions he used each day, and his responses to them. However, he also noted changes in his journal. During our third interview, he said that he felt that this was opening him up to the presence of God in a way that he had not expected. When I asked him to elaborate, he said that he was starting to see God—to experience God—in places he had not seen him before. For instance, when he was waiting and couldn’t go anywhere, he often felt God’s presence. Tom’s journal seemed to serve a different purpose. He said, in our second interview, that he found himself looking for signs of God so that he would have something to write that night. While this was not what I had intended, I believe that it was effective for him.

At the end of the project, I met with each participant to determine how it had worked for them. Not surprisingly, the results were different for each one.

Table 5. Data Collection 3: After Interviews

Participants	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date Collected	9-1-2017	12-1-2017	16-1-2017	23-1-2017	20-1-2017	23-1-2017	30-1-2017

Data Collected	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction	Participant reaction
Method of Collection	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation	Interview/ Observation
Method of Analysis	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative

As the project was nearing to an end, I met with each participant for one last time to discuss the *examen*. I have continued to meet with them, and occasionally, one of them will bring it up, but this is no longer our focus. During the final interview, I was most interested in learning if they would continue doing the *examen*, and, if so, how they would do it. While Bob felt that he benefited from it, he did not think that he would do it daily. Rather, he decided to choose one day a week on which to do it. Janet will continue with the *examen*, feeling that by doing it she was better able to stay in touch with herself as well as with God. She had gone through a difficult time, and looking for God gave her hope. This was, for me, an unexpected benefit of the *examen*. Carol decided not to continue with the *examen*. She decided that it made her feel as though she were trying to do something that didn't seem natural to her, and she thought that she would be better off moving to a different method of bring God closer to her. The biggest benefit Tom received from the *examen* was something like a gratitude journal. He found that each day he was able to discover things in his life for which he was thankful. Mary decided not to continue with the *examen* as she had been practicing it. She felt that it worked better for her when she and her husband did it together. While I did not expect this, it reinforced for me the idea of community. Peggy had not enjoyed the *examen* at all; nor had she journaled much

during the project. She felt that, while it may work for other people, she had her own ways of coming closer to God—primarily through prayer, Scripture, and other devotional reading. Richard, of all of the participants, seemed to take the *examen* and make it his own. He modified the questions, and started each daily *examen* with prayer. This, he felt, made the *examen* itself a prayer.

Table 6. Data Collection: Start of Project

Person	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date	3-10-2016	6-10-2016	12-12-2016	19-12-2016	21-10-2016	24-10-2016	31-10-2016
Method	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation	Interview/ explanation

I had anticipated that this would be the same for all participants. However, it was modified slightly depending on their knowledge or lack thereof of the *examen*. Participants who had attended Tyndale seminary were already familiar with it because of course work. One other participant had encountered the *examen* while on retreat. The other two had not heard of it before, and were quite interested in seeing how it worked. They all agreed to try it, for at least the first month, after which time we would evaluate how things were going, and if it were having any effect on their spiritual growth.

Table 7. Data Collection: During Project

Person	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date	5-12-2016	8-12-2016	12-12- 2016	21-11- 2016	18-11- 2016	21-11- 2016	28-11- 2016
Method	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion

Each session started with a review of the *examen*. All of the participants

had attempted to do it on a daily basis, with varying degrees of success. Bob found it eye-opening in ways he had not anticipated. He said that, not only was he actively looking for God's presence in his daily life, he was finding God in places he had never expected. Janet was grateful for the re-introduction of the *examen* into her life. She said that it reminded her of a time when she actually had the time to practice it regularly, and she was grateful for the chance to do it again. She is the kind of person who needs to have a reason to do something that doesn't seem to have an immediate bearing on her life, and she felt that doing the *examen* in this way was beneficial. She noted that sometimes during the day, she would find herself stopping and noticing how God was moving in her life. She attributed this to a heightened awareness brought about by the *examen*. Carol was having difficulties finding time for the *examen*. However, she said that, on the days she did it, then the following day seemed different, almost as though doing the *examen* prepared her for looking for God in the future, rather than in the past. Tom was really enjoying the *examen*, although he said that he often did it at different times during the day. He said that, if he waited until the end of the day, he was sometimes too tired to focus, and he wanted to be able to give it the attention he felt it deserved. He was journaling about his experience, and noted changes in his life after just one month of conscientiously doing the *examen*. He said that he found himself stopping during the day and actually looking and listening for God's presence. Mary, who was slightly familiar with the *examen*, was surprised by how it connected her with God in her daily life. After just a week of doing it, she discovered that God was in her thoughts at random times

during the day. She also noticed that she became more conscious of God's absence at times, and she was learning to stop at such times to look for God in a conscious way. Peggy used the *examen* rather differently. She chose some of the questions I had given her, and would ask them of herself through the day, instead of doing the whole thing at night. For her, this was more effective, as she could break the *examen* into smaller, more manageable chunks. Peggy was not enjoying the *examen*, but because she had committed to doing it, she was making a genuine effort. She said that, on the days she did it, she found that she noticed things which she would have missed previously. However, she was not feeling any real connection to God while she was doing it. Richard was new to the *examen*, and found it interesting on several levels. He felt that he had a good relationship with God, and was surprised to discover places in his day where he felt God's presence. This happened after about a week of doing the *examen*. He was treating it somewhat like an academic exercise, and the journal entries which he shared with me reflected this.

Table 8. Data Collection: During Project

Person	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date	5-12-2016	8-12-2016	12-12-2016	19-12-2016	16-12-2016	19-12-2016	26-12-2016
Method	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion

All participants had now been practicing the *examen* for two months, some with more success than others. Bob said that he was really pleased that I had introduced this to him, and he intended to make it a regular part of his life. He had

decided not to journal about it, but he wanted to tell me that he felt that it had brought him closer to God, and to discerning God's will for him. One unexpected result for him was that he was able to notice God's absence at times during the day. At those times, he paused, and did one of the breath prayers we had worked on some years ago, and found that he was quickly able to bring God back beside him. Janet continued to journal about her experiences with the *examen*. For her, this was an effective way of tracing the path she was taking. She said that she would frequently look over past journal entries to see where and how she had changed. She said that she would continue to use the *examen*, but possibly would modify it to use her own questions. Carol was continuing to struggle with finding time for the *examen*. She said that, even though it was—for her—a good way to end her day, it was still difficult to consciously make the time to do it. She didn't think that it had much of an effect on her relationship with God, and thought that it was just another tool that she could use or not. Tom was continuing to use the *examen* regularly, albeit at different times during the day. He needed quiet time to be able to do it effectively, that this was often not possible in the evening, so he just chose times when he was likely not to be disturbed. He said that the *examen* definitely made him more conscious of God's moving on his life, and that he felt he was better able to discern God's will for him. Mary stopped doing the *examen* for about a week, due to a busy schedule. However, when she started again, she realized how important it had become to her. She shared some of it with her husband, and on those days when they had both been busy apart from each other, they found it beneficial to do a form of the *examen* together. She was determined

to keep this practice part of her spiritual life, since she saw that it made her more aware of God’s presence in her daily life. Peggy was also struggling with the *examen*. It was becoming more and more difficult for her to take the time to do it daily, and on the days when she didn’t do it, she felt guilty, as though she were letting herself down. I reassured her that the *examen* was not a “one size fits all” practice, and told her that if she wanted to stop, that was fine. Richard was continuing to do the *examen*, although not on a daily basis. He felt that three or four times a week was enough to keep him in touch with God, and with God’s will for him. He did say that doing it made it easier for him to communicate with God.

Table 9. Data Collection: End of Project

Person	Bob	Janet	Carol	Tom	Mary	Peggy	Richard
Date	9-1-2017	12-1-2017	16-1-2017	23-1-2017	20-1-2017	23-1-2017	30-1-2017
Method	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion	Interview/ Discussion

At the conclusion of the study, each of the participants expressed appreciation for having taken part. Some of them, as explained below, will continue to use the *examen* regularly as part of their spiritual lives. Others will use it infrequently, while at least one will probably not use it at all. But even she said that she found it beneficial even if only as a tool for self-understanding.

Narrative Summary

At the start of this project, Bob was eager to learn anything which would

help him move closer to God. He had not heard of the *examen*, so that took some time to explain to him. He was immediately intrigued by it, and compared it to the Twelve-Step idea of taking a personal inventory. I had not thought of this before, and found that I agreed with him. After having done the *examen* regularly for a month, he found that he was learning things about himself that he either didn't know or had chosen to keep hidden. One comment he made at this session was that he felt that he was seeing himself more honestly. This was an outcome I had not expected. His journaling was also regular, although he would often wait until the next day to write. There were times when he was sorry he had not written as soon as he was finished with the *examen*, but, due to his health, he was often not physically able to do both on the same day. As time passed, Bob found that he was spending more than ten minutes a day with the *examen*. He said that he often did it twice a day, and felt that doing it in the morning made it easier for him to look for God's presence during the day. At night, he was often tired, and not able to concentrate. There were times when his medication made it difficult for him to focus, and he found that having the template made it a little easier. He mentioned that on what he called "ordinary" days, the *examen* helped him see the extraordinary in his life. This was one of the outcomes I had hoped for, and I was not surprised that he was one of the participants who expressed a growing awareness of God's touch upon his daily experiences. He really liked the annual *examen* I gave him. He said that he decided that he would do it on a day that was significant to him, rather than on New Year's Eve, which was what I had suggested. He found that, by choosing his own day, he could relate his life more

easily to the questions. He found that there were things about the *examen* which upset him—most especially when he became aware that there were areas in his day when he could have done things differently and been more responsive to God’s will. Overall, he felt that, after several months of doing the *examen* regularly, he had built a closer relationship with God, and he intends to continue doing it. He also wanted us to continue talking about it after the project finished, because he felt that there would still be times when he expected questions to arise.

Janet came to spiritual direction full of pain and questions. She soon learned that I would not give her answers, but that I would help her to find the answers herself. When I mentioned the *examen* to her, she was eager to get started. She had experienced it briefly several years before, but had not done it consistently, and she was curious to see if it would bring her into a closer relationship with God. She was especially grateful for the template, because she said that, without it, she would have focused on the negative parts of her life. The template, however, covered both joys and challenges, or consolations and desolations, to use Ignatius’ words (Reed 2015, 118). Janet was probably the most faithful about journaling her experience with the *examen*, and each time we met, she would bring a new insight about which she had written. There were times when her journaling took longer than the *examen*, and each time we met she would consult her journal as a way of reminding herself about specific incidents. She was not able to do it every day, as she worked full-time in addition to being a mother. She also had responsibilities outside of the home, and these had to be taken care of first. However, in the third session, she mentioned that she had

noticed that on the days she didn't do the *examen*, she felt disturbed when she went to bed. At such times, she would often do an abbreviated version, which would allow her mind to shut down enough to go to sleep. By the final month, she was doing the *examen* every day, and commented that it had become as important to her as her morning cup of tea. She found that the *examen* reminded her of certain truths about herself which she had begun to overlook. The annual *examen*, in particular, helped her to see the big picture, and to isolate what she referred to as "God moments." This was evidence of the success of the project, at least as far as she was concerned. She said that, prior to starting this practice, she saw mostly negative things about her life—those places where she felt that she fell short of what God wanted. Doing the *examen* allowed her not only to see God in her day, but to listen for God's voice. She felt that her relationship with God was definitely closer than it had been before the project started, and she has committed to continuing to do it on a regular basis.

Carol found it difficult to do the *examen* regularly. She was in the middle of a major life change, and it seemed that things were conspiring to interfere with her time for this. She managed to do it once a week, and altered the template I gave her so that she could reflect back over her week rather than every day. The problem with that was that she often couldn't remember things that had happened earlier in the week. I suggested that, even if she were doing it only once a week, she should focus on just that particular day. Once she started doing it that way, she found it easier. She said that, even though it was helpful in helping her discern God's presence in her daily life, she really didn't feel that it brought her any

closer to God. She already had a close relationship with God, and to her, this made it a little artificial. She didn't journal very often either, saying that this made it feel artificial to her. She was willing to continue until the closing interview, but she didn't think that she would do the *examen* very much once we were done. However, she did say that doing it made her more conscious of God moments in her day, and by thinking about it early in the morning, she found that she was more open to receive them. So, even if it didn't work for her quite as I had hoped, I was pleased with this result because it made me look at the *examen* from a different perspective. I had not thought of doing it before starting my day, as a way of anticipating where I would find God, and her response allowed me to see that this could also be effective. In the future, I will also share this method with others.

Tom was familiar with the *examen* from course work at Tyndale. He also knew it from various retreats he had taken part in, and at those times, he found the practice very beneficial in making him look for God during his day. However, when he was at home, he rarely practiced it, due to the busyness of working fulltime, and being the parent of active children. Nevertheless, he was willing to commit to it for a period of time, just to see what, if anything would happen. He found the template very useful, and used it regularly. He started with a brief centering prayer, much like the ones we used as part of our spiritual direction meetings. He said that this helped him move away from the world outside, and into the spiritual world. One of the things which he found most useful was looking for things to be thankful for. This made him realize, even on those days

when he was having a “crappy” day, he had much in his life that was good. After having done the *examen* for about a month, he found himself looking for God every day, and, to his surprise, he was finding God in unexpected places. On the days when he didn’t recognize God in his life, the *examen* caused him to reflect a little more deeply, and he often found that God had, indeed, been present, even when he didn’t notice. Looking back over his day often made him see this. He was one of the participants who kept a thorough journal. He said that, by writing things down, he felt that they were solidified in his mind. Despite his busyness, he found that a daily *examen* was the thing that worked the best for him. On the days when he didn’t do the *examen*, he often went to bed feeling as though something had been missing. He said that he was going to experiment with changing the time of the *examen*, just to see if that made any difference. There were times when he was simply too tired in the evening to give it the attention he felt it deserved. He felt that, over the past few months, his relationship with God definitely changed for the better. He thought that doing the *examen* brought God back into his life on a personal level. The journaling part of the exercise helped him to focus even into the next day. He has committed to continuing the *examen*, and is looking forward to what else it will bring.

Mary knew about the *examen* from several sources, and said that, at different times in her life, she had practiced it. However, she had never been consistent, and wasn’t sure if it would do much for her. But she was willing to give it a try. She had always had a personal relationship with God, having been raised in the Pentecostal tradition, where this kind of one-on-one, Jesus as your

personal saviour was something that was to be expected rather than something that was unusual. One of the things which really helped her get into the *examen* was doing it with her husband. She asked me if it would be acceptable for her to do it that way, and I assured her that it certainly was. She found that, after they did it a couple of times, she was better able to do it on her own. She stuck pretty closely to the template for the most part, finding that it was easier to go through the questions almost as a checklist. When she and her husband did the *examen* together, it took longer, as they would have conversations, exploring things that they would not have otherwise discussed. For that alone, she felt that this had been worthwhile. She found it easy to see God in her daily life, but, to her surprise, the *examen* also allowed her to zero in on her shortcomings, and to see ways in which she could actually improve her faith life. Through the *examen*, she learned to see herself mercifully, which means that she was able to see that her faults were not as serious as she had felt them to be. She was also able to see that she was, in fact, coming closer to God. Journaling has always been a part of her spiritual life, and she found that the *examen* was guiding her writing as she explored parts of her spirituality that she had not explored before.

Peggy was another person who had learned about the *examen* during her course work. She had practiced it briefly, but had never been given a template, and never really felt that there was much point to it. She got off to a rocky start, as the month that she started, there were several personal crises, and each one of them interfered with her plans to do the *examen*. Each month when we met after that, she said that she had tried to practice the *examen*, but each month, she felt

less and less successful. Part of the problem was that she thought she SHOULD be able to do this. After all, she was not a child, and she had a strong faith in God. So she should have been able to see God in her day. At least, that's what she thought. But she found the *examen* somewhat artificial, with or without the template. I suggested that she try just sitting with God for a few minutes at the end of the day, and look quietly back over whatever had happened during that day, with no expectations and no questions. She found that better, but, overall, she didn't think that this was a discipline that would work for her. She had never kept a journal, other than when it was required for course work, and she didn't keep one during this study. Sometimes she commented that, if she had done this, she would have been able to remember things better. I should add that she is a very pragmatic person, one who has some difficulty with Gospel Contemplation as it is outside the realm of her comfort zone. So I was not really surprised that the *examen* didn't work for her. However, she made a genuine effort, according to her reports. I think that she was quite relieved when we did the final interview, and she no longer had to feel guilty about letting me down. That, too, was something I had not anticipated—that a participant would want to do the *examen* to please me, rather than to improve their relationship with God.

Richard had not heard of the *examen* prior to our starting the project. He expressed interest, but asked for some time to think about it before committing. I was pleased that he did this, because it showed me that, if he did decide to take part, he would be doing it after due consideration of the implications. One of the things Richard had been doing before he started practicing the *examen* was to

prayerfully seek the Holy Ghost. He wanted to live more intentionally into God, and felt that the *examen* may have been one way for him to do this. So he entered into the practice wholeheartedly—after some time of discernment. He changed some of the questions in the template, and at times, modified it drastically to make it more his own. This is what I had hoped would happen with all of the participants, so I was delighted to find it happening with at least one of them. When he tried the annual review—which he actually did on New Year’s Eve—he found that it opened up things for him of which he had not been aware. He realized that his prayer life had not actually been going well for some time, so he decided to focus on that in the new year. After some months of practicing the *examen*, he no longer follows the template. Rather, he starts with prayer, and then listens for the Spirit to guide him where he needs to be. He has structured the *examen* to suit his own circumstances, and found that this is really working for him. He has committed to continuing at least three times a week, at the end of the day, but before he is too tired. He has noticed that, the more he does it, the more he notices certain patterns in his life, and is better able to discern those times when he chooses to be blind to God’s presence. He found changes in his relationship with God. He said that it was more personal than it had been before. He is from the Dutch Reformed tradition, where the distance between God and the individual is something that is to be expected. He was surprised to find this personal God, and felt that it was the *examen* which had made it happen.

Interpretations

Looking over all of the participants, I have to say that I was pleased with the results. Although they were not 100% positive, there was enough positivity that I will continue to use the *examen* with directees and other people who are looking for a closer relationship with God. Looking at them individually, I can see that some of them were just not the kind of people for whom something this structured really worked. Others really needed and appreciated the structure of the template. In hindsight, it may have been good to have done a personality analysis such as Myers-Briggs or the Enneagram to see if the *examen* would have been suited to each one. It was particularly interesting to see how some people took the template as a starting point and moved on from there. This is one of the things I hoped would happen, and it was gratifying when it did. That being said, I was also pleased that some decided to follow the template closely and will continue to do so. This showed me that the work which went into developing it was not wasted.

While not all of the participants were able to deepen their relationship with God, they were all able to learn things about themselves, which was an interesting corollary. I expected that to happen, but since it was not a part of my original hypothesis, I did not put it in the beginning. I have learned that, when one starts asking such questions as are in the template, one does come to certain self-awareness which one did not have before. It is also possible that it is this self-awareness which leads to a deepening of one's relationship with God. That is something for another investigation.

Outcomes

As a result of this study, some of the participants—according to their own reports—have deepened their relationship with God. Even those who did not experience this described it as a valuable experience for self-knowledge. I began this study with the assumption that spiritual disciplines—in particular, the Ignatian *examen*—would help deepen an individual’s relationship with God. This was based in part on my own background, in which I had been taught that this was the only way to move closer to God. While the *examen* was not referenced specifically to me, the idea of spiritual discipline in general has always been stressed to me as useful. Among the spiritual disciplines which had been stressed to me were: prayer, reading Scripture, meditation, fasting, and abstinence. These last two were meant to be done to the glory of God, not for health reasons.

Each participant spoke about their experiences, and, with their permission, I transcribed some of their comments, which I share below.

Before starting this practice, I felt as though God and I had a pretty good relationship. However, after doing it for several months, I realized that I was like the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like other people. I have learned humility by practicing the examen. (Bob)

I found that I liked doing some form of the examen twice a day. In the morning, it helped me to focus on what could happen during the day to come, while at night I was able to see the big picture. I often found the examen being interrupted by prayer, but I came to see that as a positive thing. (Janet)

It was too easy for me to let life interfere. I faced many problems during this time, and found that I could not concentrate on the examen when there were other things on my mind. Even when I decided to do it only once a week, I often found that to be too much for

me. (Carol)

This has been such a positive experience for me. It was a real joy to be able to focus on myself for a while each day. Even when I was really tired, and on days when I had a lot on my mind, just doing a centering prayer brought me to the place I needed to be. I also found out that I could do the examen even in public places, and was able to block out the noise of other people. If I put on headphones, other people thought that I was listening to music or a podcast, and they wouldn't interrupt me. This is definitely a part of my life now. (Tom)

For me, one of the most positive things to come out of this was the ability to treat myself with mercy. It is very easy for me to find negative things about myself or my life, but the practice of looking for God in my day really helped me to see the good things. Even though I was not able to do it every day, I am glad that I learned this discipline, and I hope to continue to do it and to expand on it. (Mary)

I feel badly that I was not able to do the examen regularly, and that when I did do it, I never felt as though I was doing it correctly. It seemed that I should have been able to get more out of it, but it just never felt right to me. Maybe this is because my life is just too busy right now, and if I try it again at another time, it may go better for me. (Peggy)

This [the examen] was new to me, and I was pleased to learn about it. I am always looking for ways to involve God in my life and to bring me closer to him. This was a real blessing to me, and I intend to continue it. (Richard)

As a result of the interviews and the discussions at each of our sessions, I determined that this was a valuable exercise. I decided that I would continue to teach the *examen* to any new directees, as well as to other people with whom I have a similar relationship. Even though it may not be the answer for everyone, I think that there were enough positive comments that I would like others to have the opportunity to benefit from practicing this spiritual discipline. I was struck by how often people made comments about how surprising it was to find God in

unexpected places during the day. Even those participants who did not feel that the *examen* was particularly beneficial in furthering their relationship with God said that they had noticed themselves becoming more conscious of God's presence as they went about their daily lives.

The outcomes of this project will impact me in my role as a spiritual director. I will be more aware of the possibility that the *examen* can help others grow closer to God, or become more aware of God's presence in their lives. I would like to share some of this with other spiritual directors, with a view to their possibly trying a similar study with their own directees.

One interesting outcome of this project was the way it impacted me and my own spiritual life. I found that, by teaching others how to do the *examen*, and by reviewing it with them on a regular basis, my own practice of it deepened. This was something I had not expected, and is something I would like to be able to share with others. I had always known that the best way to learn something is to teach it to others, but hadn't realized how deeply I would be affected personally. After all, I had been doing the *examen*—off and on—for a number of years. Surely I was already where I needed to be. But by the time I was a couple of months into the project, I discovered new insights about myself and my life. This was an interesting side benefit, and I will be exploring it more at a later date.

Conclusion

I found this action research project eye-opening in many ways. I worked with seven people of diverse backgrounds, with their only commonality being a

desire to know God better. I learned their stories in a way I had not envisioned, since I felt at the beginning that I already knew them very well. I was particularly moved by their honesty, which was partly the result of the letter and consent form, in which they were told that their co-operation was completely voluntary. Also, they trusted me.

When I first came up with the idea of this project—people using the *examen* to deepen their relationship with God—I knew what pool I would draw the participants from. I felt that to access people who already were in a relationship with God would give authenticity to the project, partly because they would already have been familiar with the language I would be using. This saved me at least one step in the preparatory stage, and allowed certain assumptions to be made. It also meant that I would not have to persuade people to take part, as would have happened had I chosen to draw exclusively from my congregation. It also made scheduling our meetings easier, since we were already on a more-or-less regular schedule of meetings.

As mentioned above, one unexpected result was the deepening of my own relationship with God during this project. I found myself consciously looking for God throughout my day. As the participants shared their experiences with me, I discovered that some of what they were experiencing resonated with me. This included challenges as well as joys. I feel that, because of this project, I have learned things about myself and my relationship with God which might otherwise have taken me years to discover. This is possibly because I was being more intentional about what I was doing, and also because the conversations with the

participants kept me focused in a way that I was not without the conversations. This, then, in ways other than technical, was a learning experience for me as well as for the participants.

One huge joy for me which came from this project is the result of my choice of participants. As mentioned, they were drawn from my directees, which means that I will continue to meet with them. Even though at least one of them has decided not to continue with the *examen*, she still wanted to use some of the questions in her devotional life. Some of the others have decided that they will continue to use it on a daily basis, and this is a source of joy for me. While this is not the only way to deepen one's relationship with God, I believe that it is a very powerful one, provided the participant is honest with him or herself. Without this honesty, then the *examen* will not accomplish anything, least of all what I hoped it would do.

During the past three years, I have learned a lot about spiritual formation, both theoretically in class and practically through this project. Mulholland defined spiritual formation as "a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Mulholland 1993, 25). The participants in this study are definitely sharing in this process and all of them want to be conformed to the image of Christ. This is why they were willing to try the *examen* and why they sought out spiritual direction in the first place. The *examen* is not the only way to deepen one's relationship with God, but it is—I believe—a valuable tool for people to use. It has been used by Jesuits since the 16th century, and is still used in monastic communities. This endurance factor shows me its validity. It is a way of learning

to live in the light of God's presence, or, as we studied during our first year of this programme, a way of practicing the presence of God. It is through practicing the presence of God that we become closer to God, and learn more about ourselves, both of which are crucial to spiritual formation.

The *examen* is something which can be done by almost anyone. It requires no special equipment other than a willing mind—and, in this case, a template to get started. It is something which can be discussed, and can be used alone, as most of the participants did, or with another person, as one did.

The *examen* also lends itself to journaling, which was another component of this study. Those participants who journaled the most seemed to have the most success. This is not to say that journaling is or even should be a required part of the *examen*, but it did seem to enhance the desired results.

My hope was that this project would prove the importance of the *examen*, and, even though it was not 100% successful, there were enough positive outcomes to persuade me of its usefulness in a person's life. One thing which was important to me was the fact that the participants were people who were living in the world, not isolated in a monastery or convent. They had jobs and families. They were involved in their various communities. Some of them were in leadership roles in their particular churches, but others were simply followers of Jesus. But none of that mattered, because they all were willing to give this a try. If it had only helped one individual I would still have counted the study a success, and would still have wanted to share it with others. In the future, I will continue to use the *examen* myself, and to teach it to others. Even the participants who have

decided not to continue on a regular basis have commented that they often find themselves discovering God moments at unexpected times. It reminds me of something my husband once told me about Alcoholics Anonymous. He said, “Once a person has come to AA, they never look at drinking in the same way again.” Just so, once a person has experienced the *examen* in any kind of meaningful way, they will look at their days differently. By using the *examen* as a starting point, the individual will be able to move forward. In addition, using it to spark a discussion with the spiritual director takes the *examen* beyond practicing it in isolation, showing once again the importance of community in spiritual transformation.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Four years ago, I embarked on what I thought would be an academic exercise, one which would culminate in a Doctorate in Ministry. I thought that I would do a lot of reading, and that I would be exposed to some writers I had not met before. Since I was already in Pastoral Ministry, I hoped that some of what I would learn would prove to be useful to me in the congregational setting. I had considered doing a doctorate in the past; however, every time I was about to apply, something stopped me. No matter how appealing a particular programme sounded at first, there was always a reason for me to decide against it. However, when I first heard of this programme—the Doctorate in Ministry in Spiritual Formation—I felt immediately drawn to it, in much the same way as I had felt called to ministry almost ten years earlier.

Ever since I acknowledged that first call, God has been not only opening doors for me, but it seems as though he has been pushing me through them. As I highlighted in my spiritual autobiography in Chapter 2, God's call into ministry was unmistakable on Trinity Sunday, 2005. Another push happened again after I completed my studies, when I was called to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Québec City. This also happened on Trinity Sunday, but four years later. Later,

thanks to my spiritual director, I heard about the practicum at Tyndale, and it was again as though God were telling me that I had to do this. Towards the end of the practicum, I was told about this new programme which Tyndale was going to offer, and I was encouraged to apply for it. After discussing it with my husband and my church's Session, I did so, and was accepted. And now, just over three years later, I am at the end and trying to synthesize everything which has happened in the intervening time.

Reading over the papers which I wrote over the past three years shows recurring thoughts and themes, most of which I did not notice at the time. However, it seems that those themes have affected most of my life, even without my being consciously aware of it. That is one of the things for which I owe a debt of thankfulness to Tyndale and to this programme in particular. The most important themes are found in Celtic spirituality, which surprised me, as I did not know very much about it prior to starting the DMin. However, looking back, I can see that it was actually present in my life for many years, ever since I was a child. This was likely due to the way I was raised by my parents, with the influence of my grandparents, and my early education by nuns whose origins were in Ireland.

The two overriding themes are reflected in my title—the ideas of spiritual growth as an individual, and in community. It is important that one works alone to develop a relationship with God, but community can be beneficial in doing this as well. I explored many key aspects of spiritual growth on my own, which gave me a certain knowledge prior to working with other people to develop as a child of God.

One of the key aspects of Celtic spirituality is the sense of community, which is also expressed in the idea of hospitality. John O'Donohue is a modern writer who has had much to say about this sense of community, this desire of people to belong. As stated in Chapter 4, he wrote: "In post-modern culture, there is a deep hunger to belong. An increasing number of people feel isolated and marginalised. . . Society is losing the art of fostering community" (1999, xxiv).

I have found community in surprising places during the past three years. First of all, I found it in my cohort, as we quickly became a mutually supportive group, recognizing the importance of working together and playing together. Most of us had not known each other before starting the DMin, but we found that being together during the intensive parts of the programme created an intimacy that is difficult to duplicate in other study situations. We not only studied together; we lived together during this time; we worshipped together; we commiserated with each other; we shared each other's joys. In a sense, we became a family, which is one of the things of which Celtic spirituality would approve.

This year, I was privileged to take part in a Celtic Study Tour, which turned into another kind of community. We traveled together to some of the holy places in Ireland, Scotland, and England, where we were able to visit ancient monasteries, convents, and churches/cathedrals. Some of them are still being used today, while others have fallen into ruin over the centuries. But wherever we went, we were together, and we were welcomed by the people who were there. When we visited Lindisfarne, we were introduced to Ray Simpson, who is the founding Guardian of the International Community of Aiden and Hilda. We

learned that people from all over the world belong to this “community,” which is a far cry from the early monastic communities, but is still a community.

While we were there, I was reminded of a similar community to which I already belong. This is known as the Monastery of the Heart, and is under the direction of a Benedictine nun—Sister Joan Chittister. I became a member of this community before I started the DMin, and it has been invaluable to me many times. Living in Québec City can be very isolating for an Anglophone, even though I have a strong network here, and the Monastery of the Heart has provided spiritual sustenance many times since I became involved with it.

The final place I find community is within my church. This exists on several levels, starting with the congregation which I serve. One unique thing about this congregation is that, every Sunday after worship, we have a time of fellowship. During this time, we share our news from the previous week, as well as discuss our plans for the next while. The other thing which makes this a true community is that, whenever a member of the congregation is unable to come to worship, they tend to let me know in advance because they know that the others will miss them. This caring for others is crucial to community, and not something which I have often seen in other church groups.

Prayer is another key element of Celtic spirituality, in that prayer was and is a part of daily life. During the first year of the DMin programme, Dr. Evan Howard introduced us to the idea of praying before every activity, starting with the words *Here I stand and say a prayer*. This has the purpose of focusing the individual on God throughout the day, as well as of making work into a prayer. In

my own childhood, I recited the Morning Offering every day before getting out of bed. This prayer offered to God every thought, word, and deed of the day, and we were encouraged to pray it, just in case we got too busy to pray later in the day.

Many people pray when they think of it, but fewer follow what is known as Fixed Hour Prayer. We did a version of this during our intensive weeks throughout this programme, meeting in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Some of my Anglican and Roman Catholic friends read the Daily Office regularly, but this practice, which would have been common for Celtic monks and nuns, is not well-known among Protestants. However, I discovered *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Enuma Okoro, and have found this useful when I needed daily, fixed prayer. I have learned that, even though it is often difficult to make the time to use it, when I am able to pray at set times, my day goes more smoothly.

There are many different types of pilgrimages. The most used one these days seems to be along the lines of the Celtic Study Tour, which I took earlier this year. When one is doing a study tour, learning is the most important part. However, such tours often also include a prayer component, and this was true of ours. During our time in Ireland, we worshipped together on the bus at the beginning of every day. On Iona and in Lindisfarne, we were free to worship with the communities there, but when we did the pilgrimage in those places, we prayed together at the beginning of the trek, and we also stopped at specific places while we were walking, so that we could offer prayers.

Prior to learning about Celtic Spirituality, I had previously been involved

in Ignatian Spirituality, which, as it turns out, has much in common with the first. For instance, when I was attending seminary in Montreal, I realized that I needed a spiritual director. I found one through the Ignatian Centre, and worked with her for the remainder of my time studying. This can be compared in a small way to the Celtic idea of *anam cara*, or soul friend. The concept of spiritual direction was crucial throughout my studies at Tyndale, since it is a crucial part of spiritual formation.

Ignatian Spirituality also introduced me to something which I was later to use for my major project as described in Chapter 4. I chose to introduce the Ignatian daily *examen*, which I hoped would be a way of encouraging people to deepen their relationship with God. I was familiar with it, of course, but had only done it sporadically as an adult. And as a child, I had done more of an examination of conscience, as explained in Chapter 2. While doing different courses in seminary, and at certain needy times in my life, I had done the *examen*, as Ignatius had taught it. Since it helped me, I was hopeful that it would help others.

The proposal was accepted, and I worked with seven directees. Chapter 4 described the details of the project, so there is no need to go into them here. Suffice it to say that not all of the directees found it beneficial, but they all gave it a serious try. Some of them found it extremely helpful, and have indicated their plans to continue with it in the future. I also plan to continue using it regularly—possibly not every day, but at least several times a week. If I were to do this project at another time, I would definitely include journaling as part of it. I had

originally added it as a way of having my directees keeping track for our meetings, but it became an integral part of their discipline. I would also encourage them to do the morning *examen* periodically, so that they would start their day by anticipating God's presence. However, I would be more attentive to the reactions of my directees, especially those who found the *examen* more of a burden than a help.

I have also used Gospel Contemplation in spiritual direction, both individual and group. It has proved to be a very effective way of connecting people with Scripture in a deeply personal way. Considering that the Celtic Christians also stressed the importance of Scripture in daily life, it is easy to see yet another connection between the two. Gospel Contemplation involves placing the individual right in the story, almost to the extent of role playing. This was a practice which one of my spiritual directors used regularly, and I plan to do more of it in the future, as it is one way of reading Scripture differently.

There was one thing which surprised me about almost everything I worked on during the past three years, and that is the similarity to the Twelve-Step programmes which are in use almost everywhere in the world. In order to grow in a Twelve-Step programme, one needs first of all to accept that one is powerless, so that one can remove the power of the addiction. In order to grow spiritually, one needs first of all to empty oneself, just as Jesus did, so that there will be room for God.

Over the past three years, I have found myself bringing together different threads, each one of which has contributed to my own spiritual development.

Because I have experienced these myself, I have been better able to share them with others. Because I was able to share them with others, my own experience has been enhanced, and I have worked at another level than I had before. When I was doing my first degree, one of the things we were told was that, in order to understand something, the best thing to do was to teach it. This has certainly proved true over the course of this degree. Every course that I took has given me something to use, either in congregational ministry or in spiritual direction. As well, and this was to be expected, each course helped me personally in some way—some more than others.

In reading over the papers which make up this portfolio, I found that there were echoes of similarity in all of them. As well, the other papers I wrote also had threads running through them, almost as though they were meant to be read together. These included, among other things, the role of other people in spiritual transformation; the power of being called by God to the point of not being able to resist; and consciously listening for God's voice whether awake or asleep. This was not something which I intended, so again, I think that I was being guided by the Spirit towards a logical end, which was to learn more about myself while deepening my relationship with God. It is possible that the overall topic of Spiritual Formation called for a certain thematic link, but even allowing for that, it seems to me that the connections were too obvious to be coincidental. Whatever I wrote for one course influenced what I wrote for the others. Lectures in one course provided material which could be used in later courses, whether in discussion or in assignments. As well, the readings in one course were often of

assistance in writing the papers for another.

This whole idea of interconnectedness ran through this programme, from beginning to end. The courses were all connected in some way, other than just being part of the programme. I wondered, many times, about the role of the Holy Spirit in this, since it seemed to me that this did not happen by accident, but through some kind of divine intervention. Each one of them caused me to look more deeply into myself, and to explore my own spiritual formation and development more closely. This programme of studies helped me to crystalize some of my own thoughts about the importance of certain things—doing the daily *examen*, working with a spiritual director, and practicing the presence, to name just a few. As a result of this, I am better equipped to help other people explore their spiritual formation, and to assist them in their spiritual development. Some of the books which I discovered as a result of my coursework have become part of my continuing library. Some have taken up a place on a shelf, and will likely not be used very much, while others will be used for research and personal study for years to come. Looking back over the last three years, I see them as a tapestry, with all of the disparate threads coming together to form a beautiful picture.

Some of the papers I wrote are finished—done and dusted. But there are others which I will continue to revisit, for various reasons. For example, my spiritual autobiography will never be finished, so I will be revising that over time, as things change. The Rule of Life which I personalized is another paper that is subject to change, as I decide to add or delete parts, depending on where I am on my spiritual journey.

It is my hope that, as I complete this portfolio, I will continue to see things a little differently. I will continue to grow in my spiritual life and to share my growth with others. As a spiritual director, I already do this, but lately, I have begun to think of myself as more of an *anam cara*, since I find myself benefiting from sessions with my directees just as they do. Finally, I hope that each of the people with whom I worked during this time, and with whom I will continue to work, will, in some way, benefit from what I have learned. I anticipate a future that will hold change but also consistency, as I move further along the path towards my own spiritual transformation. This will be done in several ways, both as an individual through practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Scripture reading, other reading, and the *examen*, and as a member of the various communities discussed in Chapter 2. My own spiritual growth over the years could not have happened without these communities. Equally, it could not have happened without my own practicing of the disciplines listed above. As noted several times in this document, one needs both individual and community work for transformation to happen.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter to Participants

Date: _____

Dear _____,

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in a research study being undertaken by Katherine Burgess, under the supervision of Dr. Mark Chapman, as part of her DMin programme of studies at Tyndale University College and Seminary.

Title: Using the Ignatian Examen as a Way of Deepening One's Relationship with God.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Review Ethics Board.

The duration of the study will be approximately three months.

The logistics of the study are outlined in the consent form which is included with this letter.

If you have any questions, please contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,

Katherine Burgess
106 Rue Ste-Anne
Quebec, QC
G1R 3X8
418-704-2278
burgesskath@mytyndale.ca

Appendix B

Consent Form

(Adapted from Appendix 1—Sample Consent Form for Interview)
Qualitative Research—Tim Sensing

Consent Form for a Research Project on using the *Examen* to Deepen One's Relationship with God

I understand that this project is part of Katherine Burgess' Doctor of Ministry programme at Tyndale University College and Seminary.

I understand that this will require me to learn and practice the Ignatian *Examen*, and to discuss it with the researcher. Reports from this research may be used to improve Spiritual Formation education programmes at Tyndale or elsewhere.

I understand that there will be before and after interviews; the first to establish a base line, and the second to assess the difference, if any.

I understand that there are no known risks in participating in this project. However, I understand that my participation in this research and action collaboration is completely voluntary and I may withdraw from this process at any time without consequence for any reason by notifying the researcher.

I understand that only the researcher will know my name. Any identifying information collected during this research will be confidential, and will be kept under lock and key, if on paper, or password protected on the researcher's personal laptop.

Material gathered during this research may be published, again without any identifying features.

I understand that providing permission to the researcher to analyze and report on these data does not waive any legal rights.

Please direct any questions related to this project to Dr. Mark Chapman, Research Coordinator (416-226-6620, mchapman@tyndale.ca).

Please direct any questions related to the researcher to Mme. Gina Farnell, Clerk of Session, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (418-932-7090, Gina.Farnell@cqsbc.ca)

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions and Journal Guidelines

Interview Questions

Pre-Project

1. How would you describe your relationship with God?
2. Are you familiar with the Ignatian *examen*?
3. Do you have the time to dedicate to doing this regularly?
4. What do you think you will learn by doing this? About yourself? About your relationship with God?

During the Project

Each time we meet, I would ask these questions:

1. Have you been able to practice the *examen* regularly?
2. Can you describe to me precisely what you do?
3. What parts of it do you find challenging?
4. Have you found it beneficial? How?

Conclusion

1. Have you learned anything about yourself? What?
2. Has your relationship with God changed? How?
3. Do you think you will continue? Why?

Journal Guidelines

The purpose of the journal is to help you trace your journey as you practice the *examen*. It is important to be honest in this journal, because that is the way it will help you most. While your journal is meant to be private, if there is anything you wish to share with me, we will do that during our regular sessions.

It is not necessary to journal every day, but it would be good to set aside a specific time at least once a week to write about your experience with the *examen*.

Your journal will provide a personal reflection of what is happening during the *examen*. It will also be a place for you to share your feelings about the *examen*.

Your writing will place you at the centre of the process, as it will discuss what is happening to you.

This is reflective writing. There is no need for footnotes or references. You will reflect critically on the process and your journey.

Appendix D

Template for an *Examen*

(Adapted from various sources, including Sherbino's *re;connect*, Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Fryling's *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* and my personal practice)

Prayer of Examen

1. Set aside ten minutes each day to do this.
2. Choose a time that works for you, when you will not be interrupted.
3. Avoid doing this when you are sleepy or tired.
4. Sit comfortably in a chair. Take a couple of deep breaths to help you focus.
5. Ask God for light; I want to look at things with God's eyes rather than my own.
6. Give thanks; the day just ended was a gift from God.
7. Review the day; look back, using the starters below, being guided by the Holy Spirit.

Today I am grateful for: *a.*

b.

c.

d.

e.

Today I saw God in my life/felt God's presence when . . .

I felt disconnected from God when . . .

8. Face my shortcomings; recognize what is wrong in my life and in me.

I need to accept that . . .

9. Look forward to tomorrow; ask God for help in those places I know I will need it.

Tomorrow I want to . . .

My prayer to God today is . . .

You may ask questions like:

- For what/whom am I most grateful?
- For what/whom was I least grateful?
- Where did I show God's love and heart to others?
- Where did I fail to show God's love and heart to others?
- What do I need to be thankful for?
- What do I need to repent of?
- What action, mindset, or rhythm should I try to repeat with intention?
- Is there anything, or a relationship with anyone, where I need to take a step toward restoration tomorrow?
- Are there patterns (or habits) that made me more like Christ today?
- Are there patterns (or habits) that made me less like Christ today?
- Is there anything God is asking me to:
 - (1) start doing
 - (2) stop doing
 - (3) start believing or thinking
 - (4) stop believing or thinking
 - (5) commit to
 - (6) stop committing to?

Take time to review your heart and motives. Respond to God in joy for his presence and love for you. Respond in repentance where you have not lived in step with his Spirit.

Appendix E

Annual *Examen*

(As developed by me to use myself)

Looking back over the year, with God.

If you have time today, why not do an annual *examen* St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, encouraged us to do a daily *examen* where we look back over the day to see where God has been active. It's a way to help us notice, be grateful and experience the desire for change.

You can do it for a whole year too, and Dec. 31 is the perfect time. Here's how. Give yourself some time, maybe 30 minutes or so. Or longer if it's been an eventful year.

- 1.) Remember that you're in God's presence. That's essential for any prayer. It's not just you running through a list or talking to yourself. You're doing it with God. Ignatius used to recommend actually looking at the physical place where you'll be praying (a chair, on the floor, in a pew) and imagine God looking at you. It helps you to remember God is with you. Or you could simply invite God to be with you. God's always with us, but it's good to remind ourselves of that, especially when we pray.
- 2.) Call to mind what you're grateful for. Think of all the wonderful things that happened to you this year. Take your time to do this. Savor them, like you'd savor a good meal. And give thanks to God for them. Even if you've had a bad year, call to mind what you're grateful for. You may be surprised by how many wonderful events you've forgotten about. Know that these are God's gifts to you.
- 3.) Review the year. Of course you can't do this day by day, but perhaps go month by month. Or just do it by topic--family, friends, work, and so on. Cast your mind back over the year. Notice where God was present, where you said yes to God's invitation to greater love. Where God loved you. Notice.
- 4.) Express your sorrow. Surely in the space of 365 days you've done some things you regret. Tell God you're sorry. If you've really harmed someone, the last day of the year is a good time to seek forgiveness. But don't wallow in your sins: remember you're human and we all make mistakes.
- 5.) Ask God for the grace to live 2017 as a good person. All of us have things that we'll need God's grace to face: health problems, financial problems, family problems, work problems. So ask God for help. Be specific about what you need. St. Ignatius often encouraged people to pray for what they want and need. Finally, ask for the grace to see God's presence in the new year.

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All Scripture comes from the NIV Bible.

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