

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN MINISTRY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project explores the experiential learning processes of a small number of seasoned pastoral ministers to assess how this learning has affected their vocational identity and their perception of ministry itself.

The theoretical foundation for the study is in adult education and examines concepts of experiential and transformative learning, processes of meaning-making and the social construction of the self, as well as the centrality of narrative and autobiography in personal learning. Theological reflections focus on the social and historical conditions of learning in the Christian community, the narrative structure of faith, and the contributions of both narrative and biographical theology to an understanding of Christian identity and change.

The research methodology used is qualitative case study guided by Mishler's narrative approach to research interviewing. Five participants were interviewed with an attempt at gender equity and variety in denominational attachment.

Results reveal the intense relationship between personal change, vocational identity, and ministerial practice. The study demonstrates the extent to which lifelong themes were translated into ministerial practice, how trauma impacted the learning process, and the contribution of faith to learning. A depth of reflectivity is demonstrated throughout pastoral ministry producing changes in self-understanding and the understanding of ministry.

dedicated to

my lovely mother, Clare (Grant) Hicks

courageous survivor of diabetes for more than 71 years

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Focus for this Study

The focus of this project has been to explore how and what some Christian ministers have learned about themselves and their vocation through their experience in ministry. Christian ministry is marked by its reflective nature. From morning until night, ministers, in all areas of their pastoral function, have performed interpretive tasks related often to issues of the meaning of life and death, and to the interpretation of events in individual, community and universal contexts. Reflecting, interpreting, making sense, bringing order out of chaos in the intellectual, emotional and psychical realms, has always been a function of the practice of ministry. All of this activity has affected not only those ministered to, but also consciously and unconsciously, the meanings which the minister has attributed to herself and her work. This project will attempt to explore the personal and vocational learning which has occurred with some ministers through their ongoing experience in ministry. In many cases, the reflective nature of their vocation has fostered in pastoral clergy, a high level of consciousness of self and the development of meaning, which makes them appropriate subjects for an exploration in experiential learning.

B. The Research Question

The question which guides this research may be stated as follows: What have been the experiential learning processes which have led to changes in the way some ministers have understood themselves and the practice of their vocation? Ministry may be understood in two ways: first, in terms of the minister's own self-understanding, and second, the minister's understanding of the nature and practice of ministry itself. The focus of the research is on the "learning processes" responsible for changes in thinking.

C. The Rationale for this Project

This project was undertaken for both personal and professional reasons. Personally, the researcher has studied and been employed in wide areas of adult education for more than thirty years in such venues as church work and programs, community and social development, career and transition services, community college student services, and teaching in the area of human services. Adult education is by its very nature a study of the reflective process persons engage in, as they move through the various developments and transitions of their adult lives. It is a discipline which offers one avenue to capture the importance and significance of the changes we experience as individuals and as communities. My own career has taken many twists and turns which to others present somewhat of a mystery, but to me, hold a thread of meaning and consistency. It may be that today these meanings are disparate, and perhaps, more in need of construction, expression and sharing.

During the last decade I have been involved in processes of career counselling,

direct service to and counselling of students, and teaching in areas of counselling and human service. In the first place, I have found these activities similar to, and reminiscent of, various emphases earlier in my career including my specific training for ministry, pastoral experience, and training and work in the field of social work. Indeed, all of these various strains of career have found an integration and inspiration in the conduct of this particular study and project.

Specifically, in terms of the theoretical interest, the emphasis on narrative has crossed several disciplines to a significant practical degree. For instance, the work of Vance Peavy¹ in the field of career counselling has fostered a constructivist foundation for career counselling built upon the theorists referred to in this study, Bruner, Kegan, Carlsen, Polkinghorne and others. All of their work stems from an interest in narrative as the fundamental structure for the communication of meaning in human life. Also in the field of counselling, study in narrative has helped to produce a major theoretical and practical literature.² Carlsen has penned an eloquent statement of what the emphasis on narrative has meant in therapy:

The story of a developmental meaning-making therapy is the story of how the individual emerges from the wood to a place on the mountain. In this therapeutic process are the movements from crisis to resolution; from endings to new beginnings; from the unnamed to the named; from limbo to finding one's way; from the experience of being within the problem to standing outside the problem

¹R. Vance Peavy, "A Constructivist Model of Training for Career Counselors," *Journal of Career Development* 18(3) (Spring, 1992).

²See such works as: Stephen S. Pearce, *Flash of Insight: Metaphor and Narrative in Therapy* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996) and, Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996).

with new perspectives and understandings. This is the story, therefore, of the movement from meaninglessness to meaning.³

It may be the height of presumption to hope that this project aspires to achieve one step toward the vision just stated.

As I have pointed out, the other major thread of experience in my own career has been that of adult education. This has been true from the very beginnings of my work in Christian ministry including, youth work, community work in a large inner city church setting, and the many varied adult educative functions performed while in ministry in a mid-sized congregation in the Maritimes. These adult education roles continued in my social development work in a city social planning environment, both at the community level, and in the development of services to social assistance recipients. During the latter part of my career adult education was a primary function as I developed career planning programs for youth, mid-career changers, and many other groups in the community. These services were further developed in the context of the student services within a community college setting. Studies in adult education have made me more aware of the contribution of this field to the meaning of reflective practice in all areas of human experience, focussing not only upon the health and development of the individual, but also upon “the centrality of emancipatory adult learning theory to social transformation and human freedom.”⁴

³Mary Baird Carlsen, *Meaning-making: Therapeutic Processes in Adult Development* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 4.

⁴Michael Welton, *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning* (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995)1.

From my own experience, and from a professional perspective, I perceive Christian ministry as a vocation well-positioned to be described as a reflective vocation. Ministry has a singular responsibility to interpret the meaning of life from a Christian perspective. This responsibility compels the minister to work with many layers of experience and understanding, beginning with his/her own life, moving outwards towards the experience and understanding of the congregation, and beyond, to and with, the wider community. It is a responsibility to interpret the faith in many communities, in many contexts, and in many times. It is a vocation of intense training in reflective capacity.

Other vocations have been the focus for study on reflective action. Donald Schon, in his *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, explored the structures of 'reflection-in-action' as engaged upon in such practices as architecture, engineering, planning and management.⁵ More recently, Patricia Cranton explored the concepts of experiential and transformative learning related to the profession of adult education itself.⁶ This project has made an initial effort to appreciate the role of reflective practice in ministry by examining the experience of a small sample of Christian ministers. The aim has been to assess their processes of experiential learning and to capture some of the learnings arising from reflection-in-action. The study itself holds promise for further exploration of the reflective potential in ministry, and for a greater understanding of the learning processes in which ministers engage, as they practice often for decades,

⁵Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1983).

⁶Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996).

their spiritual tasks and pastoral responsibilities.

D. The Outline of this Study

The study has been organized on the basis of a theoretical and practical structure. The first part of the study laid out the theoretical basis for the project, while the second part of the study focussed on the practical project and case study component. The third and final part of the study was a reflection on the results and conclusions of the project including recommendations which may be seen to be suggested based on results of the project.

The **first chapter** of the study provided an introduction to the study and the rationale for engaging in this work.

The **second chapter** comprised the theoretical bases for the project. This included in the first part, a study of the contributions of adult education and psychology to an understanding of experiential learning, the nature of the self, processes by which human beings make meaning, and the use of narrative to understand the dynamics of change.

In the **third chapter** the researcher reviewed sources of theological insight to illumine the nature and purpose of the project, and as a response to the theoretical discussion in chapter two.

The **fourth chapter** has outlined the methodology used for this project both from a theoretical and a practical perspective. The methodology has been guided by the qualitative model of research which is both explained and utilized to describe the process

of the project.

The **fifth chapter** has comprised the reports of the case studies of the five participants in the project structured according to a narrative of their life experience, and a summarizing of that experience according to specific descriptions of experiential learning appropriate to the narrative of each participant.

The **sixth chapter** identified the learning experienced by each participant and clustered these through a series of learning themes which tended to be both common to, and idiosyncratic of, each participant.

The **seventh chapter** examined and reviewed the sources of learning used by the five participants including processes of unlearning, the types of learning experiences, and sources of Christian faith, upon which participants drew, for their learning.

The **eighth chapter** provided a discussion of conclusions based on a review of the theoretical bases for the project and how the conclusions of the project reflect upon the theoretical construct.

The **ninth and concluding chapter** addressed specifically the research question and subsidiary questions to summarize findings and suggest recommendations for further exploratory work.

E. Definition of Key Terms

The following are definitions of some of the key terms used in this study.

Experiential learning: Experiential learning as described by Kolb, describes a process which links learning to processes of concrete experience, reflection,

conceptualization, and action.⁷ It is further described as a holistic process of adaptation, grounded in experience, the purpose of which is the creation of knowledge.

This study has promoted a broader interpretation of experiential learning , as a general concept in adult education. It is a concept not conscribed in a final sense by Kolb's construct, but built on an understanding of experiential learning which embraced processes of meaning-making, autobiographical learning, and transformative learning processes. It is an interpretation of experiential learning which acknowledges the social, cultural and historical determinants of learning.

Ministry: a calling of spiritual leadership within the Christian church, the primary responsibilities of which are the preaching of the Gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the provision of pastoral care, most often carried out in the context of a local congregation.

Transformative learning: a theory developed by Mezirow which "seeks to explain the way adult learning is structured and to determine by what processes the frames of reference through which we view and interpret our experience, meaning perspectives, are changed or transformed."⁸ Transformative learning refers to the domain of learning called communicative, and to the reflectivity required to change fundamental socially and culturally coded assumptions and premises of understanding.⁹

Meaning-making: a cognitive process associated with a philosophy of

⁷David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 21.

⁸Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, viii.

⁹Ibid. 97.

constructivism, a way of conceptualizing human nature, knowledge, reality and human change processes. Constructivism involves a growing awareness that any so-called reality is, in the most immediate and concrete sense, the construction of those who believe they have discovered it.¹⁰ In other words, people are not passive recipients of knowledge; instead they actively shape and construct their knowledges.

Narrative: a kind of organizational scheme expressed in story form.¹¹ The narrative organizational scheme is of particular importance for understanding human activity. It is the scheme that displays purpose and direction in human affairs, and makes individual human lives comprehensible as wholes.¹²

Narrative Theology: a recent theological genre which “seeks to utilize the concept of story and the human person as a storyteller as the central motif for theological reflection . . . It entails the joining of our personal stories with the transcendent/immanent story of a religious community and ultimately with the grand narrative of the divine action in the world.”¹³

Biographical Theology: a theological investigation by James McClendon, to explore how archetypal images of faith inform and guide the lives of individuals, and

¹⁰Vance Peavy, *Constructivist Counselling: A Participant Guide* (Pacific Institute for Counsellor Development: University of Victoria) 7,8.

¹¹Donald E. Polkinghorne. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* 13.

¹²Ibid. 18.

¹³Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 271.

provide a clue to understanding their motivations and accomplishments.¹⁴

¹⁴James Wm. McClendon Jr. *Biography as Theology* 75.

CHAPTER II

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR THIS STUDY

A. An Outline of the Theoretical Structure for this Report

In this first part of the report, the purpose will be to provide an overview of the theoretical underpinning for the project. The focus of the project is on experiential learning, a special area of investigation by both David Kolb and Jack Mezirow, theorists in the field of adult education. Their work will show how learning occurs through experience and how this learning affects the very contents of self-awareness and personal perspective. Kolb focuses on the psychological components of experiential learning while Mezirow, upon the social and cultural determinants of learning. These theoretical orientations in adult education provide the basis for a discussion of the nature of experiential learning.

A major portion of the study focuses on how meaning is created, and how this affects our notions of who we are, our self-identity. The assumption here is that the reflective learning process affects, in an on-going way, our understanding of our self and the relationship of our self to the world around us. Narrative becomes a core concept here because of the notion that meaning, in a personal sense, is grasped only through the construction of story or narrative. The theorists Polkinghorne, Randall, Hillman, Bruner, and Crites, offer rich insights into the way in which human beings are continually re-inventing themselves, and finding new meaning in and through the vast myriad of life

experience. Because the learning process is intimately related to the development of self, reference to the work in autobiographical learning is also seen as useful and instructive. These areas of study provide a kind of theoretical umbrella to the purpose of the project, the focus of which is the narratives of the participants in the project. These are the narratives which reveal the experiential learning process and the nature of the learning which has occurred.

This theoretical orientation also recognizes that the research itself is part of the ongoing learning process for all involved; the research enters into the very meaning-making process it is attempting to describe. The research has transformative potential for each participant who forms the conversational community of the researcher and participant.

Processes in adult education are then set in the context of concomitant theological reflections described in chapter three. The theological perspectives have two purposes: to illustrate how closely the adult educative endeavour and directions in theology mirror one another. Secondly, this perspective also confirms even more fundamentally the deep personal, social and cultural orientation that theology has always had with respect to educative process. Educative issues in the Church have always begun with fundamental issues of life experience, human formation, and the development of Christian identity or spiritual formation.

McClendon¹⁵ in particular, focuses on the development of the self over time, in

¹⁵ McClendon's ethical orientation is precursor to more recent emphases in theological ethics which focus less on 'situationalism' or 'decisionism' than 'on the actual shape of a man's life'. See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*,

his recognition that faith is a lived entity, that experience is the conveyor of religious meaning, and that the living tradition of the community is the essential means by which faith meaning structures are appropriated by each individual in the development of Christian formation. A theorist in adult education, Michael Welton, shows the fruitful perspective which results from a rich intertwining of Biblical, theological and adult education themes related to the Christian concept of conversion.¹⁶ Transformative learning, autobiographical learning, and an emphasis on the learning potential of “trigger events,” all relate as concepts to various understandings of conversion in Christian tradition, and to an understanding of fundamental change in personal existence.

These perspectives provide a theoretical base for the project. The interview process itself will proceed as an open-ended conversation about the life-experience and life-learning of the respondents. While the theory lends a perspective on the project, the results of the interviews will provide information which will be interpreted in a kind of dialogical fashion using the theoretical perspectives described above and below. No one perspective will provide a kind of rigid framework for the interview process, or for interpretation of the data collected. In every case, the integrity of the participant’s own sharing will be adhered to.

(Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1974) and his *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986). The same emphasis in the study of ethics is demonstrated in the works of Stanley Hauerwas: eg. Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Michael Welton, “Seeing the Light-Christian Conversion and Conscientisation,” *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations* eds. Peter Jarvis and Nicholas Walters, (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993), 105.

The aims of this thesis project are exploratory and qualitative. The focus takes two forms; the first is to understand the personal experience and history of the participant as recalled and reported to the interviewer. The second, is to elicit the participant's reflective capacity as he/she comments upon the meanings that have arisen through the experience, and how this meaning has brought about change in their life, and their vocation. The theoretical base will provide the framework through which to understand this reflective process.

A further area of outcome explored in this project will be to review learning themes reported generally by participants and to assess the nature of the experiential learning processes which have been described by participants.

B. Experience as the Source of Learning

During recent decades there has been significant interest and development in the field of the education of adults. In this exploration of the characteristics of the education of adults, or andragogy, the role of experience has been seen as central in the learning process. John Dewey, one of the founders of this twentieth century orientation believed "in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education."¹⁷ It is this fundamental idea which has supported an exploration of the adult experience of some ministers, to discern the impact of experiential learning on their view of themselves and their vocation.

¹⁷John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York N.Y.:Simon and Schuster Publishers, 1938) , 20.

1. Kolb, Popularizer of Experiential Learning

David A. Kolb has been responsible for a highly successful popularizing of the concept of experiential learning, particularly through his 1984 work *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, and through the use of the results of his work in the popularizing of the Learning Style Inventory. In his work he attempts to provide the philosophical and psychological roots of experiential learning. He relies upon his own interpretation of three contributory traditions to explain experiential learning, the educational philosophy of John Dewey, the group dynamics and training theory of Kurt Lewin and the cognitive-developmental work of Jean Piaget.¹⁸

Kolb refers to John Dewey's new approach to education formulated in the 1930's as having profound impact on the educational orientation in North America. Dewey's focus was on the growth of the individual in free interplay with his/her environment, and upon the intimate relation between actual direct experience and learning. Kolb interprets this to mean that learning is a process which integrates experience and concept, observation and action, a construct he believes supports his own work in the development of the Learning Style Inventory.¹⁹

Kolb then refers to Kurt Lewin's contribution from the tradition of American social psychology, based on Lewin's discovery that learning is best facilitated through conflict generated by the tension between concrete experience and analytic detachment.

¹⁸David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as The Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall PTR Publishers, 1984) 4.

¹⁹Ibid., 22.

Lewin's pioneer work with group dynamics illustrated how the subjective and the here-and-now factors of experience were critical to the learning process. Here, Kolb found greater support for his model of experiential learning which was based on a four stage learning cycle he claimed was inherent in Lewin. This model identified concrete experience as the basis for observation and reflection. Observation became the basis for theoretical construction, which, in turn, served as an hypothesis for action.²⁰

Kolb found in his third source, the work of Piaget, a model of learning and cognitive development which further supported his own model of experiential learning. Human development, according to Piaget, involved a progression from a concrete phenomenal view of the world in infancy, to an abstract constructionist view in adulthood.²¹ The process by which this development took place was through the learning which occurs as the individual continually interacts with the environment. The development was understood to occur in four stages. These were the stages of cognitive growth; the sensory motor stage, the representational stage, and stage of concrete operations and the stage of formal operations. These were seen by Kolb, to build upon one another and to be "those basic developmental processes that shape the learning processes of adults."²²

Kolb then proceeded to identify through the conjunction of his three theoretical

²⁰Ibid., 8.

²¹Ibid., 23.

²²Ibid., 25.

sources, five characteristics of experiential learning.²³ These were described as follows:

The **first** characteristic suggested that learning was best conceived as a process rather than a matter of outcomes. Interaction with the environment, understood by the term experience, is an on-going process, and since this interaction is foundational to learning, learning itself is an on-going ever changing process.

Second, learning was understood to be grounded in experience. Learning is dependent upon the interplay of consciousness and environment, each affecting the other in a creative tension, and through that tension, producing learning.

Third, learning is seen to have resulted from the resolution of opposing ways of dealing with the world. Learning requires both reflection and action, and in these two lies a fundamentally conflicted relationship, which leads to creativity and growth, in learning.

Fourth, learning was seen to be a holistic process of adaptation to the world. Adaptive processes referred to such issues as tolerance for ambiguity, decision-making, and attitude change. Indeed, experiential learning may be understood as a lifelong experience of adaptation in all areas of activity and experience.

Fifth, learning was seen to be a process of creating knowledge, a result of the transaction between social and personal processes. Knowledge depends upon the interaction of both subjective and objective processes, between an individual's subjective experience, and the accumulated social cultural data. Kolb's summary statement was that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created by the transformation of

²³Ibid., 25.

experience.”²⁴

Having summarized the work of this popularizer of experiential learning, it must now be acknowledged that Kolb’s particular interpretation of experiential learning has come under trenchant critique. Reijo Miettinen, of the University of Helsinki, has recently penned an article entitled, *The Concept of Experiential Learning and John Dewey’s Theory of Reflective Thought and Action* which critically examines the way in which Kolb has interpreted his sources in order, it is said, to support or substantiate the basis and use of his Learning Style Inventory. Miettinen’s critique is that Kolb’s method,

can be called eclectic. Kolb unites terms and concepts, extracting them from their idea-historical contexts and purposes and puts them to serve the motives of his own presentation. As a result, theoreticians with quite different backgrounds, motives, and incompatible conceptions, can be used as founders and ‘supporters’ of experiential learning.²⁵

For instance, Miettinen reports that Lewin’s work in group dynamics was intended to provide an “analysis and solution of the racial prejudices and conflicts in the State of Connecticut.”²⁶ Kolb selectively uses the work of Lewin to confine attention to the direct and immediate feedback of the “here-and-now experience” in group dynamics.²⁷

Miettinen’s main concern is Kolb’s development of a particular epistemology of knowledge. His objection relates to “the theoretical and epistemological inadequacy of

²⁴Ibid., 38.

²⁵Reijo Miettinen, “The Concept of Experiential Learning and John Dewey’s Theory of Reflective Thought and Action,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* Vol. 19, No.1 (January-February 2000) 56.

²⁶Ibid., 57.

²⁷Ibid., 58.

the concept of immediate personal experience which is meant to form the basis of reflection and of the whole model."²⁸ More specifically, Miettinen believes that Kolb ties the work of his sources to an empiricist philosophy whereby "the experiential model replaces the naive epistemological realism of empiricism with an individualist and subjectivist stance."²⁹ It is the resultant individualism of Kolb's project, which alienates Miettinen. The following is his summary critique.

It appears to me that the concept of experiential learning, in the form used by Kolb and the adult education tradition, represents the kind of psychological reductionism that Dewey considered a misinterpretation of his antidualist conception of experience. This conception is based in Kolb's book on the model of a very particular historical incident - or habit: the immediate feedback in human relations training. Although this procedure has developed into one of the tenets of T-group training, it is epistemologically highly problematic and cannot be generalized as a way in which people learn and gain understanding of the world and of their own possibilities in it. When the romantic, biological and therapeutic ideas of humanistic psychology are combined with it, a thoroughly individualistic conception of learning emerges.³⁰

This focus on the individual says Miettinen, "leads us away from the analysis of cultural and social conditions of learning that are essential to any serious enterprise of fostering change and learning in real life."³¹

According to Miettinen, then, what is at work in Kolb is "psychological reductionism."³²

²⁸Ibid., 61.

²⁹Ibid., 62.

³⁰Ibid., 70.

³¹Ibid., 71.

³²Ibid., 70.

To reduce learning to individual cognitive processes, is to distort Dewey's commitment to an understanding of learning based on experience interpreted in the broadest sense according to cultural and historical realities. Miettinen's concern is echoed by Usher, Bryant and Johnston in their text on adult education.

There is a need to stop seeing experiential learning in purely logocentric terms, as a natural characteristic of the individual learner or as a pedagogical technique, and more in terms of the contexts, socio-cultural and institutional, in which it functions and from which it derives its significations.³³

Miettinen's critique weakens the integrity of Kolb's work. Nevertheless Kolb remains the primary exponent of experiential learning. The five characteristics of experiential learning which he outlined, may well still hold value, and because of their almost generic quality, will be referred to later in this study.

In conclusion, Kolb's touted deficiencies and individualism are counterbalanced in this study, by the central emphasis on the concept of "narrative" for an understanding of learning and the nature of the self. Each theorist consulted in the remainder of the study has posited from one perspective or another, the social, cultural and historical embeddedness of learning. The theoretical foundations for the understanding of meaning, the construction of the self, the nature of experience, the determinants of personal change and transformation, the perspectives on theology and Christian education - all rely upon basics which support the social and cultural roots of human experience and meaning-making. The critique of Kolb only enhances the perspective central to this project, that

³³Robin Usher, Ian Bryant and Rennie Johnston, *Adult Education and the Postmodern Challenge: Learning Beyond the Limits* (London: Routledge Press, 1997), 105.

the socially, culturally and historically rich personal narratives provided by participants have been the proper sources for identifying the particular learning which participants experienced and reported.

2. Adult Education: Mezirow

Jack Mezirow, a leading thinker in adult education, has written extensively about the theory of transformative learning,³⁴ a specific construct related to experiential learning. Transformative learning builds upon the constructivist notion that all mental processes are creations of individuals; that reality in the most immediate and concrete sense is the construction of those who claim to discover or invent it. In other words, we are the authors of our own meaning; we are the determiners of the meaning of our own experience.³⁵

Robert Kegan, as a leading psycho-social investigator and constructivist confirms this emphasis on the meaning-making nature of human experience; that there is no activity, no feeling, no experience which is not embedded in a meaning-making context. "Thus it is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making."³⁶ To explore further the concept of meaning-making in human development, M.B. Carlsen in her *Meaning-Making; Therapeutic Processes in*

³⁴Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991).

³⁵ Ibid., xiii.

³⁶Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) , 11.

Adult Development begins by stating that the search for meaning is at the heart of therapy because living itself is meaning-making.³⁷ She then explores the various constructions of adult development in such theorists as Kegan, Erikson, and Piaget to show how these theories are based upon the idea that each individual is confronted with increasing complexity in the organizing of experience. These stages of adult development become metaphorical images or guideposts for reconfiguring meaning in the face of new experience.³⁸

One significant concept in human development, which has been emphasized during recent decades, is the idea that “life is a story.”³⁹ Carlsen notes that the idea of life as story is rooted deep in our culture; the idea that everyone’s life is structured like a story and the way we interpret our experience is as a narrative with beginning, plot, character, success, defeat, goal and fulfilment, all meanings attributed by the individual to his/her experience.⁴⁰ Adult developmental theories provide frameworks for the process of understanding or attributing meaning to life experience. Kegan’s particular contribution has been to emphasize the embeddedness in the meaning-making process, that human development is a cultural process, and that meaning-making is always contextual in nature.

³⁷M.B. Carlsen, *Meaning-Making: Therapeutic Processes in Adult Development* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988) , 4.

³⁸Ibid., 36.

³⁹Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Adult development theory is premised upon the notion that throughout life, individuals are continually undergoing processes of adaptation and change. Those called to ministry are not exempt. Far from being arrested in development or protected from change, the minister is continually confronted by individual and community change and growth. This certainly provides a dynamic context for his/her own personal growth as he/she is charged to respond within a constantly changing environment. As an individual, the minister also participates in the process of adult development, but he/she does so in the context of simultaneously attempting to elicit and promote meaning-making among those to whom he/she ministers. In other words the context of meaning-making is rich here as the minister engages in interpretive action, mediating several streams of meaning-making, among them; the Biblical story, his/her own story, the story of his/her ministry, and finally the story of his/her wider community. This mediation is rich in narrative and visionary potential.

To reiterate, the focus of this study is the learning process inherent in experience. Meaning-making is the constructivist assumption of learning. Mezirow begins his explanation of the transformation theory of learning by focussing on the constructivist meaning-making process; "Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience; in other words, to give it coherence."⁴¹ Learning becomes possible because we interpret meaning by projecting images, values and symbolic meanings upon experience. We interpret our experiences in our own way, and what we make of the world is a result of our perceptions of our experience. Says Patricia

⁴¹Mezirow, 4.

Cranton in her text *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, “Transformative learning is, then, a process of examining, questioning, validating and revising these perceptions,”⁴² or as Mezirow states it, “Transformative learning involves reflective assessment of premises.”⁴³

Early in our life experience we develop “meaning perspectives” or familiar sets of assumptions and patterns of expectation which inform us and facilitate processes of adaptation and interpretation. Meaning perspectives become frames of reference by which we make sense of experience.⁴⁴ These meaning perspectives are also culturally based as we assimilate uncritically common ways of knowing, believing and feeling. Thus through our cultural embeddedness, we assimilate uncritically the prejudices and distortions of our social environment. This uncritical adaptation assures a distorted learning process which transformative learning is intended to redress.⁴⁵

Mezirow identifies three types of meaning perspectives; epistemic meaning perspectives which relate to the content of knowledge and the way we use knowledge; sociolinguistic meaning perspectives which are based on people’s social norms, cultural expectations, socialization, and belief systems; and psychological meaning perspectives

⁴²Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 26.

⁴³Mezirow, 5.

⁴⁴Ibid., 61.

⁴⁵Ibid., 62.

which refer to individuals, their self-concepts, needs, and personalities.⁴⁶ Each meaning perspective is made up of sets of meaning schemes, values, beliefs, assumptions, knowledges.⁴⁷ These meaning perspectives become the source of distortion. A distorted assumption or premise, says Mezirow,

is one that leads the learner to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, impedes differentiation, lacks permeability or openness to other ways of seeing, or does not facilitate an integration of experience.⁴⁸

Because most perspectives have never been examined critically by us, they, by their nature, contain all manner of distortion. Distorted assumptions cause us to be non-inclusive and resistant to the integration of new experience. In other words, an unexamined assumption limits the learner's openness to change, growth, and personal development. These distortions vary according to the type of meaning perspective. For example, distorted assumptions in the epistemic realm relate to beliefs about knowledge which do not have foundation, i.e. the assumption that a phenomenon such as the Law, or the Government, is immutable and beyond human control. Distortions in sociolinguistic meaning perspectives include all the methods by which society and language shape and limit perception and understanding such as cultural codes and roles, social norms, common practices and simply ways of seeing the world. In the work of one leading European philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, these sociolinguistic practices may be perceived as a "system world," systems which inform cultural activity, institutions and realms of

⁴⁶Ibid., 43.

⁴⁷Cranton, 29.

⁴⁸Mezirow, 118.

experience.⁴⁹ This area of distortion includes such assumptions as language-based distortions, labelling and stereotyping, selective perception, levels of consciousness, values, social and cultural norms.⁵⁰ Distortions in the psychological realm include personality variables, childhood trauma, self- perspective and generally past experience.⁵¹

Mezirow proceeds to describe the process of transformation, a learning process, by which the areas of distortion are confronted leading to new more integrated perspectives. He relates this process to adult development by which we may move through a series of successive transformations developing perspectives increasingly removed and “decentred”⁵² upon original assumed and distorted meaning perspectives. New meaning perspectives have dimensions of feeling, thought and will, and are new ways of perceiving our world by which we organize our “self,” and according to which we enter into new behaviour. Mezirow described perspective transformation as,

the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new

⁴⁹Mezirow acknowledges the central place of the thought of Jurgen Habermas, leading European philosopher in the Critical Theory or Frankfurt School of social theory for his own development of the theory of transformative learning: *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 7.

⁵⁰Mezirow, 131

⁵¹Mezirow, 138.

⁵²Ibid., 147.

understandings.⁵³

The process of altering meaning perspectives is often painful, involving a range of threat and tension. The more encompassing the perspective change, the more fundamental a critique of distorted perspective, the greater the resistance to change, and the more traumatic the experience. The total resources of a society may indeed be mustered to reinforce the myths and perspectives of the entrenched structures of society, and to prevent transformative learning.⁵⁴

The learning process used to precipitate perspective transformation, Mezirow calls critical reflection. Three types of reflection identify the type and level of change involved. We may use the example of a fictitious person, Jane, to depict the difference between the types of reflection. Content reflection is critical reflection on the content or description of a problem; for example, looking for clues about whether Jane is telling the truth about her age, by observing the lines in her face. Process reflection is critical reflection on the process of learning, how the process was used and what were its weaknesses; for example, reflection on the adequacy of our methods to determine Jane's

⁵³Jack Mezirow, "A Critical Theory of Adult learning and Education", *Adult Education* 32 (Fall, 1981), 6.

⁵⁴Jack Mezirow, "Transformation Theory of Adult Learning," *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning* ed. Michael Welton, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 57. These ideas represent adult education's appropriation of theories of 'communicative discourse' put forward by Habermas in his writings represented by such texts as *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Vol. 1,2), 1984,1987. For an excellent introduction to the influence of Habermas see Michael Welton, "In Defense of the Lifeworld: A Habermasian Approach to Adult Learning" in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Education* ed. Michael Welton, (Albany New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) 127.

age. And finally, premise reflection, which is more fundamental, involving reflection on the premises of the learning process, the dynamics of the meaning schemes; for example, critical reflection on the value of the category of age to determine by itself, anything of major significance about Jane. In summary, Mezirow states:

. . . content and process reflection are the dynamics by which our beliefs-meaning schemes-are changed, that is, become reinforced, elaborated, created, negated, confirmed, or identified as problems and transformed. Premise reflection is the dynamic by which our belief systems-meaning perspectives-become transformed. Premise reflection leads to more fully developed meaning perspectives, that is, meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable (open), and integrative of experience.⁵⁵

Premise reflection is primarily responsible for perspective transformation because of its reflective process upon the fundamental learning dynamics involved. Critical reflection at levels precipitating perspective transformation are most often the result of a series of dilemmas or a major disorienting dilemma related to such events as death, illness, divorce, career crash, retirement or other such personally disorienting experiences.⁵⁶

Disorienting dilemmas as motivators for perspective transformation, have also been described as trigger events.⁵⁷ These are events which may be life-shattering either in a situational or psychological way. Out of the dilemma posed by the trigger event comes

⁵⁵Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 111.

⁵⁶Jack Mezirow, "How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning," in *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* eds. Jack Mezirow & Associates, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 13,

⁵⁷P. Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994) 77.

an effort to appropriate a new perspective which becomes powerful enough to consciously supplant the old perspective. The process of supplanting may be either sudden or gradual. In his study and research Mezirow found that the phases of transformation included the following steps: 1. A disorienting dilemma; 2. Self-examination; 3. Critical assessment of assumptions; 4. Recognition of problem, acceptance that this is a tried and true process; 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, actions; 6. Planning course of action; 7. Acquisition of new knowledge and skills; 8. Trying on of new roles; 9. Building competence and self-confidence; 10. Reintegration into life based on the new perspective.⁵⁸ It is clear from this description of the process of change, that while is it transformative, it is not seen as sudden or immediate, but as a process of personal learning directed towards longer term integration.

For Mezirow, transformative learning is transformative in the sense that it alludes to the fundamental assumptions upon which an individual understands self, and the world the self experiences. It affects the individual in a total way in the sense that one's own identity is set into a new course which is understood and confirmed differently. This process is also understood to be emancipatory. Empowerment and emancipation come from the process itself insofar as the individual engages in risk taking and faces challenges every bit as demanding as feats of physical accomplishment.⁵⁹ The transformative process is truly a courageous act of the individual and is, in this sense,

⁵⁸Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 168.

⁵⁹Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Theory of Adult Learning" in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning* 48.

empowering and liberating. Mezirow, in a recent statement, emphasizes more strongly this in-depth impact.

Transformative learning, which may involve a reassessment of one's self-concept, as is often the case in perspective transformation, is threatening, emotionally charged, and extremely difficult. It is not enough that such transformations effect a cognitive insight; they require a cognitive and emotional commitment to act upon a new perspective as well. Transformative learning involves movement from alienation to agency and "centering," movement from a lack of authenticity, being true to oneself, to authenticity.⁶⁰

The transformative process is also empowering in the sense that critical reflection in the transformative learning process sets one free of these assumptions, brings to awareness elements of understanding and experience long hidden, and exposes limitations which have prevented a renewed and integrated functioning in the world. With a new perspective the individual is free to enter into a new path, and a new way of relating to the world which is far more intentional and therefore fulfilling.

Transformative learning provides a framework from which to explore the nature of ministerial experience and to document change in self-understanding in the practice of ministry. The early development of ministerial identity will have been formed out of many sources and coalesced into meaning perspectives of a profound nature.

Ministry, as vocation, molds personal identity as much if not more, than most professions. Roles and functions become part of who the minister is, determine day to day patterns of behaviour, and enter deeply into both primary and community relationships. Because of the nature of this calling, and the personal and spiritual nature of the formation process, the individual is drawn strongly into sets of beliefs, values,

⁶⁰Ibid., 48.

rituals and historical interpretations which, in keeping with their purposes, provide powerful meaning structures and orientations within the consciousness of the minister. It is a formative process. Religious traditions have contributed in the same way as other cultural processes or institutions, to the formation of meaning perspectives. While a formative pattern of faith system is of fundamental value to the individual, this system, in any process of adult development, must also become affected, undergo challenge and change, to incorporate new events, experience, and meaning. The engaged minister will not remain unaffected, and in many cases, may undergo transformation in his/her own perspective to face life with renewed vigour and understanding. This study has proposed to explore these areas to obtain a greater appreciation of how ministers, through their varied experience in ministry, learn and grow in the understanding of their vocation.

C. Experience and Meaning

How we give meaning to our experience is the subject of the following discussion. In the conduct of this project, ministers will be asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Theorists such as Polkinghorne, Bruner, Randall, Hillman, Carlsen and Crites all have pertinent insights on the processes human beings use to understand their experience. Such meaning-making processes are also intimately tied to the way we think about our selves, our sense of who we are as individual persons. The following discussion shows how the processes we tap into when we talk about our experience relate to fundamental aspects of our personal existence.

The understanding of the term experience is not so straightforward as it might at

first seem. In the first place, experience is a function of the individual. It is a matter of the individual's experience of him/herself and of their world. William Lowell Randall, in his comprehensive volume *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation*, identifies four levels of association when thinking of the self, of which only the second is that of experience. The first is called the level of existence, referring to the outside story, understood as "the sum total of everything I have ever done, said, thought or felt in all the different dimensions of my life."⁶¹ This level, however, is so vast and all encompassing that we have no hope of ever accessing it fully. This everything cannot be apprehended in itself, but only partially through our senses, imagination and memory. Experience is exactly that portion of existence which does become accessible through my perception, which Randall calls "my inside story." It is my existence as I have appropriated it and interpreted it. "The inside story is my creation. . . It is the product of my imagination which reconstitutes the raw events of my life as remembered experiences."⁶² Experience then, is interpreted existence. The fact that there can be no experience without an act of interpretation raises fundamental issues with respect to language and meaning in human existence.

Donald Polkinghorne, at the beginning of his text on narrative knowing writes, "Experience is meaningful and human behaviour is generated from and informed by this

⁶¹William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We are: An Essay on Self-Creation* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995) 48.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 50.

meaningfulness.”⁶³ Polkinghorne states that while there are three structures in human reality, the material, the organic and the meaning, only the realm of meaning is unique to human existence.⁶⁴ The realm of meaning is identified in the emergence of human beings as linguistic and self-reflective entities. Of “meaning,” Polkinghorne says first that it is an activity, not a substance, described in verb form rather than noun. As such its temporal characteristic is fundamental since all action has a temporal dimension. Second, meaning is dependent upon the identification of relationships and connections between perceptions. The perception of having one thing stand for another as one activity of meaning-making, is the basis of all language and symbolic usage. Says Polkinghorne, “Language is commensurate with meaning.”⁶⁵ “Meaning itself,” says Bruner, “is a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbol system.”⁶⁶ Bruner’s idea of the folk psychology is a psychology of culture which suggests that the notion of self arises not independently of the social world, but in the words of Michelle Rosaldo, “from experience in a world of meanings, images, and social bonds, in which all persons are inevitably involved.”⁶⁷

⁶³Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988) 1

⁶⁴Ibid., 3.

⁶⁵Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, 7.

⁶⁶Ibid., 69.

⁶⁷Michelle Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,” in Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine, eds., *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 139, cited in Jerome Bruner *Acts of Meaning* 42.

From the foregoing we may conclude that experience is not a kind of *carte blanche*, but is constructed, and dependent upon the meaning attributed to it, a meaning which is already culturally conscribed. Experience and meaning are inseparable realities each thoroughly affecting and defining the other. Randall believes that experience is more specifically dependent upon events in our lives, those things which happen to us, but that the experiencing of these events is the measure of our self-consciousness, a psychological process of recollection and reflection.⁶⁸ James Hillman's apt description of this human activity states that this is the process of making events into soul.⁶⁹

Hillman studies this issue from his analysis of the contrast between case history and soul history. Traditionally these have been seen as distinct and unrelated, one detailing outer events and the other, an unrelated inner experience of imagination, emotions, dreams and fantasies. Hillman proposes that these two realms are not unrelated; case history is also imaginative and neither category has more facticity or reality because each is a mode of experience or interpretation.⁷⁰ Hillman suggests that what makes experience into soul is an in-depth psychological process which in working on all experience, whether dependent upon outer events or flights of fancy, sifts, weighs, lovingly reflects, internally digests slowly, opens for insight, and through this process

⁶⁸William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation* 64.

⁶⁹James Hillman, "The Fiction of Case History: A Round" in J.B. Wiggins (Ed.), *Religion As Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 150.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 149.

enters into soul.⁷¹ In reappropriating case history, Hillman reinforces the concept that our experiences of events become the source of meaning in our lives as they are ingested and used as therapeutic sources of insight. Such a view enriches our understanding of the nature of case study as it is used and given central place in this particular project.

The primary points we wish to emphasize in this section of the study are that experience is inherently meaningful, and that the realm of experience becomes the focus for the ongoing building of meaning in human existence. This development of meaning is dependent upon many things, our individual past, our familial and cultural associations, our own changing social contexts, our inner experiences and imaginative projections and envisioned possibilities, as well as the limitations of genes and specific events which make our experience unique and non-replicable. Meaning is the stuff of self-growth and personal development, processes which are never ending. It is the pre-requisite for learning throughout life and is the same as interpreted experience whether this be from external or internal events. It is Randall who equates this meaning-making process with learning. "Learning is that entire active process whereby consciously or otherwise, we are forever trying to 'make meaning' out of our existence and 'make something' out of our lives."⁷²

We might end this discussion by reiterating that in interviewing ministers who are experienced in their vocation, we are attempting to capture both their meaning-making processes, or how they make sense of their experience, as well as, the particular learnings

⁷¹Ibid., 150.

⁷²William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation* 8.

which they have developed through years of reflection on their experience.

D. Narrative and the Self

We now wish to focus attention on the form which meaning takes in our lives, namely that of narrative, and to explore how intimately related are notions of narrative and self. When we speak of meaning-making processes in narrative form we are speaking, according to our group of theorists, of the way in which we experience our very self. These notions help us to understand the nature of the interview process we wish to use in our project, and to see how this process is really one of an exploration in self-understanding.

According to Polkinghorne, personal experience becomes meaningful to the individual primarily through the cognitive organizing structure which is best described as a mode of narrative. Taking his cue from Jerome Bruner, Polkinghorne describes two basic modes of cognitive functioning. One is the “logico-scientific” which is derivatory, conceptual and formal in its reasoning, as well as universal in its application. The other, called “narrative,” is less well known, temporal in its mode, particular in the way it connects events in life, and specifically appropriate for conveying the meaning of human experience. Narrative is the cognitive mode which grants meaning to individual events by tying them together in a comprehensible whole, and providing for the logic of human intention, purpose and goal.⁷³ He suggests that each of us makes sense of our own and other’s experience through the construction of narrative or story. This becomes the

⁷³Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, 18.

method by which significance is understood and communicated. Narrative is the appropriate vehicle to convey meaning in human events because of its temporal structure, sequencing the apparently discrete or disconnected events of existence, and attributing meaning to that existence.

Stephen Crites developed the thesis in 1971 that experience is essentially narrative in form. His focus is on the nature of all consciousness both communal and individual. He begins by comparing the temporality of music which he calls pure style, with the temporality of stories. Story, he suggests, is the second (the first being music) cultural mode which has coherence through time, and it is the very form which consciousness takes.⁷⁴

It is Crites' contention that the narrative form is not a product of consciousness, but its essence. Indeed he goes so far to say that narrative or story forms consciousness. All cultures are formed by their narratives, and these are the narratives which inform our own individual stories as we live them out in our own lives. At its most fundamental level these cultural narratives are considered sacred by Crites, "because men's sense of self and world is created through them."⁷⁵

Further, stories are shared experience. From the sacred stories which shape our consciousness to the stories we hear through all our social and cultural experience, all

⁷⁴Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1989) 69.

⁷⁵Ibid., 70.

these stories “shape in the most profound way, the inner story of experience.”⁷⁶ We do not begin with our own story. From our beginning, we relate to the storied experience around us, and through that experience, structure our own. Says Crites, “People awaken to consciousness in a society, with the inner story of experience and its enveloping musicality already infused with cultural forms.”⁷⁷ In this way, all experience, social, cultural and individual, is related and enmeshed in the narrative form, a continuum of story, giving meaning to life experience, to community and to fundamental existence. Crites, in this regard, reinforces Jerome Bruner’s notion of the socially constructed self. Bruner explores an understanding of self within the context of developments in the fields of psychology and social psychology. The same process of meaning-making applied to the organizing of experience through narrative, applies as well to the concept of the self. In the same sense that the interpretation of all personal experience is seen to have narrative form, so also does the experience of self rely upon interpretation in narrative form. Bruner contrasts the traditional essentialist notion of the self, a self which somehow exists intra-psychically, independent of experience, with a self which is socially constructed.⁷⁸ Bruner suggests that the self is dependent upon the experience of relationship, and that the way we frame our consciousness, position, and identity is in relation to an other. In this concept, self is socially and historically constructed. It is the result of an ongoing process of retrospection, and the selective ordering of past

⁷⁶Ibid., 79.

⁷⁷Ibid., 80.

⁷⁸Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 101.

experience into a self-narrative to serve the current need for coherence, justification and meaning. Says Crites, “The self is a kind of aesthetic construct, recollected in and with the life of experience in narrative fashion.”⁷⁹ Polkinghorne, building on this definition suggests “One’s personal story or personal identity is a recollected self in which the more complete the story that is formed, the more integrated the self will be.”⁸⁰ Further to the cultural component in the concept of self-identity, Schriebe writes in Sarbin’s *Narrative Psychology*,

Human identities are considered to be evolving constructions; they emerge out of continual social interactions in the course of life. Self-narratives are developed stories that must be told in specific historical terms, using a particular language, reference to a particular stock of working historical conventions and a particular pattern of dominant beliefs and values.⁸¹

William Randall explores the complexity of the creation of the ‘self’ within a Christian context. His is a view which affirms the conviction that reality itself, or at least human reality, is inherently storied.⁸² Each life is a story within the larger storied structure of the universe; storied, because we cannot conceptualize human existence outside of the experience of meaning and purpose, and these characteristics are temporal and historical in form. Within this structure we “create ourselves through the way we

⁷⁹Stephen Crites, “Storytime: Recollecting the Past and Projecting the Future” in *Narrative Psychology: The Stories Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1986) 162.

⁸⁰Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* 106.

⁸¹Karl E Schriebe, “Self-Narratives and Adventure,” in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* ed. Theodore R. Sarbin (New York: Praeger, 1986) 131.

⁸²William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: an Essay on Self-Creation* 15.

story our lives.”⁸³

Randall sees the roots of storied selfhood in Christianity. He essentially expands Crites’ notion of the “sacred story” to suggest that all stories have an ethical purpose worked out through a conflictual plot. Randall does not posit one master story but he does suggest that the authorship of each life and of history points to a divine metaphor of the uncompleted ongoing authorship of creation in which we all participate. Our responsibility is to become aware of the narratives by which our lives are authored, and to engage them in the ongoing fabrication of our selfhood.⁸⁴

E. Autobiography: A Narrative of Learning and Change

This project relies centrally upon the value of the act of autobiographical construction. That is, through our discourse with participants, we are inviting them into a process of creating their own autobiography. We are inviting them into an act of self meaning-making. This is the way by which the participants may reflect upon the meaning of their experience. What we wish to explore now is how our theorists interpret the meaning and value of autobiography.

Bruner suggests that in the construction of the self, two universal human capacities come into play; our human reflexivity enables us to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in the face of this reflexivity. The second, is our capacity to

⁸³Ibid., 16.

⁸⁴Ibid., 233.

envision alternatives, to conceive of other ways of being, of acting, of striving. These two capacities enable the self to construct the self.⁸⁵

Polkinghorne says we make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story.

We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end. We are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing or substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been, but also anticipations of what one will be.⁸⁶

Bruner further describes the self as an entity in action. Human contexts change continuously. To get a notion of a particular self we must sample its uses in a variety of contexts, with all the specificity which that requires. Bruner then suggests that the methodology to accomplish this is best exemplified in autobiography, the retrospective account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons. In helping people to tell their story, “we were listening to people in the act of constructing a longitudinal version of Self.”⁸⁷

Further to the construction of the self in autobiography, Bruner suggests that the form of the narrative is as critical to self-identity as is the content of the narrative. Our personal stories as they contribute to our self-invention, at the same time, participate in the construction of literary conventions. These conventions attribute significance to the story or plot through such genres as antihero, victim, black comedy. Through

⁸⁵Ibid., 109,110.

⁸⁶Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* 150.

⁸⁷Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 120.

autobiography, we act out our self on a larger stage with a larger significance. Bruner relates this to the justifying requirement in autobiography. We paint our self on a larger stage using rhetorical device, in order not only to recount, but to justify, to show how the story fits, how it makes sense. In the present telling, we make of the past what works for the present and the future. To this end, says Bruner, “the presuppositions that we lace into the telling of our lives are deep and virtually limitless.”⁸⁸

Randall adds to this discussion in his suggestion that we are “profluenced by the future.”⁸⁹ In living a life, as in reading a story, we are constantly leaning into the future, hoping on some level, that when we arrive, we shall be able to look back with understanding on the past. It is this anticipation of retrospection which is our chief tool for making sense of our story and our life. The past, he says, is never simply there. It is constructed and composed by being plotted in the present, and it is this plot we devise, which is in itself, the principle of selection.⁹⁰ Plot, he says, is what gives meaning to our lives, and it does so in fine fashion, because it is the medium of meaning, morality and metaphysics. For these reasons, Randall calls plot a theological category. He posits autobiography as the most intensive mode of plotting or perhaps the most ordered mode of making meaning for our lives.⁹¹

For Randall autobiography becomes the primary mode of meaning-making for our

⁸⁸Ibid., 122.

⁸⁹William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation* 128.

⁹⁰Ibid. 132.

⁹¹Ibid., 138.

lives. This act of constructing autobiography however, is ongoing throughout our lives. Indeed, he says, as we move through our lives, our view of our lives is constantly changing.

Each moment is a moment of self-transcendence in which I advance from one story to another. Thus the story of my life is one I am continually outgrowing, as I am ever moving, automatically, to a larger and more inclusive story still.⁹²

The hermeneutical process at the heart of constructing autobiography is never ending in its interpretive task of defining our self.⁹³ But not only does our self change, we are also several selves at the same time. Echoing Bruner, the self is not a kernel, it is a contextualized construct, and as such maintains itself in several versions depending upon form, content, context, medium, motivation, audience, mood, even institutional or ideological versions of the self.⁹⁴ These versions interact and load together in unique ways, to achieve current purposes and intentions. The self structures itself according to these purposes and intentions. Finally, says Randall, our story is unfinished, our self, a work in progress.⁹⁵

Randall makes one other critical point. Our knowledge of one another is always a filtered knowledge. This filtering process is similar to the way our self-knowledge is filtered through our current perception lens and current intention. We know another only through story, but this story is filtered in many ways: the person's self report to me is

⁹²Ibid., 175.

⁹³Ibid., 176.

⁹⁴Ibid., 186.

⁹⁵Ibid., 205.

filtered simply by being a communication about self; her report is also filtered by her interpretation of what I wish to know and what she wishes to reveal. All reports of her by others are filtered by their own biased impressions and agendas. Finally any report to me of herself by herself is filtered through my own story and perceptions. Through these multiple filters, an influencing process is going on by which my own story or self-creation is being affected through the filtering of another story, and the same process of story-influencing is happening with the other.⁹⁶ Every intertwining of human story participates in, and affects, the ongoing processes of self-creation in the one and the other.

Brady, Nelson and Randall in their discussions of autobiography and the self, focus on the learning process inherent in autobiography. Autobiography is the particular learning process involved in the construction of the self. This process is more than just an activity, it is itself, a learning process. As Brady states, "It is my thesis that autobiography, the act of drawing a self-portrait with words, is a vitally important method of facilitating and enhancing the process of adult learning."⁹⁷

According to Nelson the use of autobiographical accounts, telling the story of stability and change, is a promising source of research into adult learning.⁹⁸

Brady refers primarily to three processes of memory which enable

⁹⁶Ibid., 103,104.

⁹⁷E. Michael Brady, "Redeemed From Time: Learning Through Autobiography," *Adult Education Quarterly* Vol. 41, Num.1 (Fall, 1990, 43-52), 44.

⁹⁸Alex Nelson, "Researching Adult Transformation as Autobiography," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* Vol. 13, No. 5 (September-October 1994) 389.

autobiographical learning to occur. These three memory processes are the remembered self, the ordered self, and the imagined self.⁹⁹

The remembered self is memory in recollection. Brady suggests this recollection is of the bios or the course of life, and that this process possesses a certain shape held together by a thread which is the thread of memory. Through recollection the individual discovers this thread which has shaped the person's experience.

It brings together one's prior selves and images of significant others in a way which demonstrates a purposive and significant unification, different from the passive, continuous, fragmentary flickerings of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of consciousness.¹⁰⁰

Memory also serves to connect the past with the present, maintaining the thread of meaning through the multifarious images of the past into the events of the present. "Memories and present reality exist in a continuing, reciprocal relationship, constantly influencing and determining one another."¹⁰¹ Thus autobiography is not simply the recording of past events, it is a new representation of identity, and a drawing together of self in light of current purpose and meaning.

The memory process suggested by ordered memory serves the purpose of rationality in human existence, that our experience "cries out for understanding and interpretation."¹⁰² Ordered memory makes sense of the past in such a way as to construct

⁹⁹E. Michael Brady 44.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 45.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 45.

¹⁰²Ibid., 46.

meaning and order for both our present and our future. Our future is ordered by the structure of meaning we give our past. According to Brady, this ordered process is an inner process of continual development. Yet at the same time it establishes an integrity and harmony, an order within the chaos. “There is an essential oneness to the self, an integrity and internal harmony that holds together the multiplicity and continual transformations of being.”¹⁰³ What is sacrificed in simplified experience, is gained in moral and aesthetic purpose. Autobiography is the metaphor for this task with which every individual is burdened, to reconstruct the unity of self across time, to interpret a fundamental meaning, and to experience one’s life in integrity and wholeness.¹⁰⁴

The memory process called “the imagined self” is the self as constructed, the self reflected upon in depth, the self imaginatively embraced. Writes Brady:

Through imagination, the autobiographer creates the past by infusing facts and events with interpretation, direction, suggestiveness, and ultimately, human meaning’ exercising imagination, creating images and metaphors in the development of the narrative, and in so doing, adding myself to myself.¹⁰⁵

Brady characterizes the processes which occur in the autobiographical act, as adult learning. Autobiographical learning is the way we learn about ourselves, and therefore also the way we learn about others. “Autobiography is an important means to learning and self-knowledge because it enables the person to recompose and interpret his or her

¹⁰³Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 49.

life into a kind of whole.”¹⁰⁶ The past reconsidered may trigger a transformative learning experience and the capturing of a new perspective on the self. This is what Brady calls autobiographical learning. “Through imagination,” says Brady, “the autobiographer creates the past by infusing facts and events with interpretation, direction, suggestiveness, and ultimately, human meaning.”¹⁰⁷

Alex Nelson uses his own life experience (his struggle to understand his vocation in priesthood from which he resigned) to show how change was possible through the narrativizing of his life story, and the concomitant processes of “constructing and reconstructing of my autobiography.”¹⁰⁸ Autobiography, for Nelson, is the metaphor for the directedness with which an individual may approach his/her life. He identifies four characteristics to autobiographical learning:

1. In autobiographical learning, the person develops a sense of personal autonomy and authority in their life, a result of awareness of both the possibilities and limits within which a person may determine his/her own direction in life.
2. Through the development of the imaginative capacity to envision alternative directions for one’s life, the learner gains a sense of being able to effect change, and to have control over life direction.
3. The learning is augmented by the imaginative expressions which are part of story telling, and which participate in symbolic and mythic structures of human knowing.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 48.

¹⁰⁷Ibid. 49.

¹⁰⁸Alex Nelson, 391.

4. As a reflective process, autobiographical learning through imaginative distancing, is both critical and constructive, leading to transformation in a person's perspective and practice.¹⁰⁹

Nelson is concerned to explore how the telling of life stories enables a learning process in individuals which promotes change and personal transformation. In these stories there are continuities, turning points, times of stagnation, and moments of transformation; these are the narratives, says Nelson, which "appear to offer considerable promise for elucidating the learning processes by which adults make new life-choices."¹¹⁰

Nelson contrasts the developmental paradigm of life choice with the autobiographical. He reports that research into adult reflective learning, points to some inner discomfort which triggers reflection leading to the learner's need to make some sort of choice to manage the discomfort.¹¹¹ Autobiography chronicles these experiences of life choice within the broad cultural contexts of one's life and interprets them in a process of adult reflective learning. Based on this understanding of adult development, Nelson raises a central question, a question which may indeed point in the direction of a spiritual response:

What is it that enables the person to traverse, sometimes very gradually, from a position of stuckness or of major inner discomfort to a new position of major satisfaction, when that path appears to lead into exacting processes of examination of self and one's experience, some costly choices and the difficulty of enacting new behaviour in an environment which generally does not welcome the

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 391.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 392.

¹¹¹Ibid., 393.

substantial change of behaviour?¹¹²

Factors involved in this movement to change include, says Nelson, both our cognitive and affective capacities but even more especially our imaginative capacity. While the cognitive requirements have been explored by many adult learning theorists, especially Mezirow, new insight into non-rational processes have also been put forward. Boyd and Myers¹¹³ draw on Jungian theory to suggest that processes of discernment are integral to personal transformation, including activities of receptivity, recognition and grieving. Nelson builds on these ideas to suggest that,

By approaching learning from experience through the metaphor of autobiography, as the imaginative construction of the life story by the learner, researchers will find a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of learning in times of significant personal change.¹¹⁴

Imagination adds to experience; it is the means by which new meaning leads to new understanding. Imagination leads to new perception and even to new insight. According to Ricoeur, it is narrative, as the vehicle for the imagination, “which questions and challenges the established personal and cultural constructions of what their life means.”¹¹⁵

Imagination so understood, is the source of change in a person’s life. Narration is a text of ever newly constructed interpretation of experience. It is life’s hermeneutical

¹¹²Ibid., 394.

¹¹³Robert D. Boyd and J. Gordon Myers, “Transformative Education,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* Vol.7, No.4 (October-December 1988) 261-284.

¹¹⁴Alex Nelson, 395.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 396.

device “to charter the unexplored resources of the to-be-said on the basis of the already said.”¹¹⁶ Imagination as the realm of image, symbol, and metaphor, supplies the logic in autobiographical accounts of transformation, of the movement from old to new uncharted life perspectives. It is imagination, says Nelson, which is the critical but often unacknowledged element in human learning allowing adult learners “imaginatively to make sense of disconfirming experience” and thus reshaping the life narrative in the formation of new meaning perspectives.¹¹⁷

Randall discusses aspects of personal change and the project of autobiographical construction through his concepts of re-authoring and re-storying. Randall notes that our story is never the same; we are editing it on a continual basis.¹¹⁸ In our desire to make sense of the whole of our experience, we continually see ourselves in a new way as one event after another piles upon our ongoing experience and the revision of the meaning of our life plot never ends. Our self story is always in revision, always in change. Autobiography, he says, is the way in which we plot this on-going change in our experience.¹¹⁹ In summary fashion Randall states: “I create myself through the continual reworking of the story of my life the self is always a narrative construction, biographic

¹¹⁶P. Ricoeur, “The Creativity of Language,” in R. Kearney *Dialogue with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 17-46) 25 cited in Alex Nelson 396.

¹¹⁷Alex Nelson, 397.

¹¹⁸William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation* 137.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 146.

not biological, in nature.”¹²⁰

Randall makes the distinction that while we do not author our lives in the sense that events are given; we do author our stories. We reconstruct the events in our lives through memory, imagination and language.¹²¹ And while society gives us the range of story boundaries, we continually self-reflect on these boundaries and construct our uniqueness within them.

Randall suggests a categorizing by which we re-story our lives. The re-storying process may range from lowest thresholds of change to the highly dramatic. In the first case, re-storying our lives through natural processes may be either gradual or dramatic. An example of the gradual natural process may be the forming of our independent identity through growth in the family, or the way our career and job experience may impinge itself on our self-story in an ongoing natural way.¹²² A dramatic natural process of re-storying could be the move from singleness to intimacy with another in our life story, or disruption caused by job loss, or major illness; unsettling changes which cause us to reflect more deeply upon the plot of our lives, and to re-story at fundamental levels.¹²³

In the second case, major re-storying of our lives is due to processes which are intentional. This re-storying occurs at our own behest in response to our own sense of

¹²⁰Ibid., 210.

¹²¹Ibid., 227.

¹²²Ibid., 234.

¹²³Ibid., 236.

troubling question marks in our own story, or our own efforts to overcome contradictions in our storying processes leading to greater integration and wholeness.¹²⁴ Intentional re-storying too, may be either gradual or dramatic. An example of the gradual intentional re-storying might be our decision to enter a new and different career, or the decision to forego old friends for the establishment of a new group of relationships in which we may play a more satisfying character within our newly constructed story.¹²⁵ Dramatic intentional re-storying implies a re-writing of our whole story, a radically new perspective; a new dominant genre for the interpreting of our story.¹²⁶ This dramatic re-storying will be, of necessity, an inner process, which may or may not issue in dramatic outer evidence. It will mean, nevertheless, a radically altered sense of self, and will evidence new choices to fit the new perspective. Says Randall,

The re-storying I am concerned with here involves a change not in the events of our lives themselves, but in the genre, the fictional mode, the dominant version, the master story, the life plot, by which we interpret them, transform them into experiences . . . it is a re-form-ation of our lives, for it changes less the content of our life-stories than their form, less the crystals themselves, than the pattern that connects.¹²⁷

Randall's answer to the issues of the unity of the self, is that of integrity.¹²⁸ If the self and its story is always in flux, where is stability, where is connectedness, where is

¹²⁴Ibid., 238.

¹²⁵Ibid., 240.

¹²⁶Ibid., 241.

¹²⁷Ibid., 242.

¹²⁸Ibid., 265.

consistency? Randall, looking at personal life as a novel with chapters and subplots, stories within stories, uses the terminology of balance, direction and integrity to suggest the way in which individuals cope with the issue of continuity in their lives. He quotes Michael Novak to make his point: “To bring integration out of wildly disparate tendencies is the mark of a great soul.”¹²⁹ Making meaning of wider and wider horizons of experience is the ongoing challenge to each person in his/her search for selfhood. This striving is the mark of what Frankl calls “man’s search for meaning,”¹³⁰ or as Randall quotes Alice Munroe: “Until you die, you try to make a comprehensible story of your life.”¹³¹

F. Summary

Using the theoretical resources of adult education, psychology and social psychology, we have described processes of experiential learning and related these to ways of thinking about the development of self-identity through processes of narrative and autobiographical construction. We have seen that change can be usefully conceived as a process of re-storying based on learnings about who we have been, and who we wish

¹²⁹Michael Novak, *Ascent of the Mountain , Flight of the Dove* , (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 49, cited in William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: an Essay on Self-Creation* 267.

¹³⁰Victor Frankl, *Man 's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), cited in William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: an Essay on Self-Creation* 269.

¹³¹Alice Munro quoted in P Marchand, “Telling Stories” in *Saturday Magazine: Toronto Star*, (April 21, 1991) 2, cited in William Lowell Randall, *The Stories We Are: an Essay on Self-Creation* 269.

to be. We have also seen that fundamental to the possibility of change in our lives, is the act of making new sense through the imaginative construction of new narratives, a process of reflective learning.

This is the process into which we have invited the participants for this project. Only through a process of reflective learning can each participant point to changes in the way he/she understands the vocation of ministry and his/her role in it.

We have sought, in setting this theoretical groundwork for the study, to provide a framework for understanding the purpose and value of the project itself. We have used the concept of experiential learning in a broad sense, to suggest processes of life learning which may be applied in any particular area of life experience. We have explored the work of adult education theorists, and other writers in psychology and social psychology, to provide an in-depth introduction to concepts of education and learning based on life experience. We have stretched the compass of experiential learning to embrace narrative and autobiographical learning because we have seen that experience is meaning-laden, and the only way that experience can be grasped is through the structure of narrative. The discussion of autobiography provided insight into personal learning, how and what we learn about ourselves in the various settings and contexts in which we find ourselves. It was our contention that in the vocation of ministry, personal learning and learning about ministry most likely could not be separated; one reflected immediately upon the other. Therefore, we directed our study towards autobiographical learning as the specific process which would give insight into what and how ministers have learned about themselves and their vocation, in their practice of it.

In this way, the theoretical foundation has prepared an understanding of the specific approach, of autobiographical construction, taken with participants in the project. The approach has served to illustrate the particular learning process which has led these ministers to construct narratives of personal learning about themselves and their understanding and practice of their vocation. This project has intended to record and explore these narratives.

CHAPTER III
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Both in the realms of education and psychology experience has been shown to have an essential narrative form. It has also been suggested that notions of the self are dependent upon categories of narrative, and that the narrative of autobiography as an act of self-reflection, is a form of personal learning. In the total context of these explorations similar theological themes and methods may be identified.

A. Experience and Christian Education

The emphasis in this report has focussed to some extent on notions of the self and learning. It is useful to note the emphasis in Christian Education upon the category of human experience as the source of learning about what it means to be Christian. Michael Lawler in his early 70's article *Let's Take a Look - Again - At Experience*, suggests that revelation is a matter of attention to the deed and the word in human experience. In other words, revelation is a matter of interpreted experience. The Jewish people at the Red Sea experienced an event which they interpreted "as the place where Yahweh, their God, acted in their lives."¹³² He concludes "They came to know their God experientially by their reflection upon their real human experience."¹³³ Lawler's point culminates in his

¹³²Michael G. Lawler, "Let's Take A Look-Again-At Experience," *Religious Education* Vol. LXVI No.5 (Sept-Oct. 1971) 342.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 342.

incarnational comment:

The process of man's in-depth reflection upon his real experience to articulate religious truth about God reached its culmination in Jesus of Nazareth. In this man God lived a human life and constantly interpreted it in depth.¹³⁴

In 1992 Trond Enger, a Norwegian, reiterated this emphasis on experience tied to the long tradition in church history, of story-telling.

Experience is that dimension in religion without which no other dimensions would have existed. The scarlet thread through the whole of the history of the church is nothing but a continuous process of experience and a continuous process of story-telling; a continuous narrative of a person's experience with God.¹³⁵

In a summary way, Thomas Groome, who writes about Christian Education based upon a model of time and of praxis, focuses on experience as the basic datum of Christian education when he says:

In the biblical understanding the people come to know the Lord in the midst of historical experience, by reflecting on the activity of God there, by entering a relationship with God and God's people, and by their lived response to that relationship . . . Christian religious education should be grounded in a relational/experiential/reflective way of knowing that which is informed by the Story of faith from Christians before us, and by the Vision toward which that Story points.¹³⁶

Experience then, is not only a concept utilized in the general educative realm, but also, in Christian context, experience is the basis for learning in faith. Our interest in this report, is how experience has illuminated what ministers have learned about themselves

¹³⁴Ibid., 342.

¹³⁵Trond Enger, "Religious Education Between Psychology and Theology," *Religious Education* Vol. 87 No.3 (Summer, 1992), 436.

¹³⁶Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1980), 145.

and their vocational identities. Experience is the domain of personal learning; living the faith for Christians, whether lay or clergy, is a learning experience.

B. Christian Education: Context and Critical Reflection

A premise for all discussion about experience as the source of learning, is the significance of contextualization, both social and cultural. Already identified in the work of Bruner and those in the constructivist movement, has been the point of view which supports the social construction of the self, and the impact of socialization and culture on the ongoing development of self-identity. These ideas have also resonated in the area of Christian Education embracing an historical tradition concerning Christian nurture, with representation ranging from the 19th Century Horace Bushnell to 20th century reinterpretation by such writers as C. Ellis Nelson and John Westerhoff.¹³⁷

In his chapter entitled “On Becoming Christian Together,”¹³⁸ Thomas Groome outlines the socialization process involved in the development of the Christian identity. Groome discusses the tension between a determinative and non-determinative understanding of the development of self-identity, and the extent to which our social context determines our selfhood. He speaks alternatively about a “dialectic” between a person and his/her environment.

Thus to name the relationship between a person and the social environment as

¹³⁷Ibid., 115-120. See Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967). C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins*, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1971). John H. Westerhoff, and Gwen K. Neville, *Generation to Generation*, (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974).

¹³⁸Ibid., 109.

dialectical means that the person accepts and affirms some of the social influence and refuses and rejects some, and from this comes a movement beyond those two moments, for both the person and the social reality.¹³⁹

Given the above concepts, it is clear that Christian education may usefully be thought of as a process of socialization into the Christian tradition and community:

It is within a Christian social/cultural environment that people come to appropriate the symbols which carry forward the tradition. It is there that they encounter role models, a world view, and a value system that can be interiorized as their own Christian self-identity.¹⁴⁰

In a significant refinement of the socialization tradition Groome poses the concept of “shared Christian praxis.” His point here is that not only is Christian identity formed within community, but that there is a necessary intentional focus on the process. Christian individuals in community develop a critical consciousness which acts, through continual reform, to approximate God’s will in response to the Kingdom in Jesus Christ.¹⁴¹ “Far from socializing our students more effectively, our educational task will often require that we call in question and counteract much of the socialization that is already taking place.”¹⁴² Within a pluralistic society Groome believes it is especially incumbent within the Christian community that a critical consciousness be fostered; “a critical capacity for discerning the mixed influences of socialization on our lives.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹Ibid., 113.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 115.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 122.

¹⁴²Ibid., 122.

¹⁴³Ibid., 123.

This critical capacity in reflection is central to Groome's appreciation of the Christian educative process. His definition of Christian religious education is "a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith."¹⁴⁴

By "present action," Groome means the comprehensive reality of the present at all levels, and by critical reason he means the educative task to "discover the interest in present action, critique the ideology that maintains it, and recognize the assumptions upon which it is based."¹⁴⁵ In this respect Groome has proposed in Christian terms, an educative task essentially similar to that of Mezirow's. In this task, Groome's concept of critical reflection includes not only an evaluation of the present, but a critical reflection on our past and a critical approach to an envisioning of the future. Critical reflection on the past is an uncovering and naming of our own self-histories, our own stories. Critical reflection using imagination to envision the future is the positive creative activity involved in creating and transforming towards a future more closely attuned to the will of God. This realm of the use of the imagination for critical reflection is also the realm of the movement of the Spirit:

. . . critical reflection the source of discernment, as always, is not solely our own reason, memory, and imagination. It is only by the Spirit's grace of discernment working within our own human efforts that we can come to know reality in light of God's activity and contribute to its transformation according to God's will.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 185.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 185.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 188.

It is worthwhile to note here, that much of the theoretical consideration described above is not uniquely Christian. What makes it so is when the “reflective activity described above is in response to the Christian Story and Vision.”¹⁴⁷ So says Groome, “When the Story and its Vision are retold and our own stories and visions critiqued in their light, then our educating can be called Christian.”¹⁴⁸ By Christian Story, Groome means the history of dialogical relationship of God and His People as demonstrated through,

particular roles and expected life-styles, written Scriptures, interpretations, pious practices, sacraments, symbols, rituals, feast days, communal structures, artifacts, “holy” places, and so on . . . the term Story is intended as a metaphor for all such expressions of our faith tradition as they are all part of our Christian Story.¹⁴⁹

A final comment from Groome’s perspective is the way in which critical reflexivity embraces not only our own story as individuals, but also the Story as received through its many traditions and manifestations. The Story, he reports, is not yet completed and will not be so until the coming of the Kingdom. In other words, God’s plan unfolds in response to the uniqueness of each new historical situation. The Vision is appropriated newly and creatively in response to each present. “The Vision indeed is a critique of our present praxis and a measure of our faithfulness. But ours is also an open future, and its shape is being influenced by present praxis.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 191.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 191.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 192.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 195.

Clearly, ministers experienced in their vocation, are situated well for the development of a particular sensitivity to the needs and concerns of the Christian community. They have a responsibility to facilitate their critical or creative response to enable the Vision of faith to impact these concerns, indeed to enable these concerns to speak to the Vision itself, and thus to mediate God's will for *this* time. This project may be seen as a recording of such reflection in specific instances.

C. Christian Narrative

We have discussed the relation of narrative and experience, and how narrative is the interpreted form of experience. Narrative is a central category for Christian experience. Johann Baptist Metz sees the centrality of narrative and experience for theology:

Theology is above all concerned with direct experiences, expressed in narrative language. This is clear through Scripture, from the beginning, the story of creation, to the end, where a vision of the new heaven and the new earth is revealed. All this is disclosed in narrative. The world created from nothing, man made from the dust, the new kingdom proclaimed by Jesus, himself the new man, resurrection as a passage through death to life, the end as a new beginning, the life of future glory - all these show that reasoning is not the original form of theological expression, which is above all that of narrative.¹⁵¹

This last point has been made strongly by H. Richard Niebuhr in his book *The Meaning of Revelation*. He states that,

. . . despite many efforts to set forth Christian faith in metaphysical and ethical terms of great generality, the only creed which has been able to maintain itself in the church with any approach to universality consists for the most part of

¹⁵¹Johann Baptist Metz, "A Short Apology of Narrative," *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 252.

statements about events.¹⁵²

Biblical narratives, in the form of the history of the Jews and later, the history of Jesus, as the telling of the critical events, become the sources of meaning in the ongoing life of the Christian community through its regular recitation and confession. The life of the Church is not signalled by its own effort at self-preservation says Niebuhr. Rather, “The church’s compulsion arises out of its need - since it is a living church - to say truly what it stands for, and out of its inability to do so otherwise than by telling the story of its life.”¹⁵³

Confession for Christians, says Niebuhr, is none other than the story of their lives. This he says, is no simple illustration or analogy. Rather the faith in story cannot be replaced; “it was irreplaceable and untranslatable.”¹⁵⁴ In the Story is the fundamental datum of faith upon which all confession and theology stands. Niebuhr’s primary point is that revelation itself cannot be divorced from the narrative of history. “We are in history as the fish is in water and what we mean by the revelation of God can be indicated only as we point through the medium in which we live.”¹⁵⁵

Niebuhr’s discussion parallels many of the later ideas of Jerome Bruner about the socially constructed self, when he links the history which is revelation, with our own personal histories, and finally with the history of the faith community. It is the history of

¹⁵²H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Story of Our Life,” *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* 22.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 24.

the faith community which both forms the consciousness of its members, and is formed by the revelation according to which it lives. Revelation, in other words, cannot be divorced from the cultural and historical forms which determine the identity of human beings. However, history as such, is not the bearer of revelation. Revelation, for Niebuhr, is rather, the inner apprehension of this history. "When we speak of revelation in the Christian Church we refer to our history, to the history of selves or to history as it is lived and apprehended from within."¹⁵⁶ Revelation is, in the realm of the personal, the subjective, understood not individualistically, but rather through an experience which is "common and verifiable in a community of selves."¹⁵⁷ This internal history is defined by quality rather than quantity of experience. It is characterized by valuing rather than objectifying, by a flow of feeling, a stream of consciousness within in a community of selves as opposed to a separateness of individuality.

In internal history, on the other hand, society is a community of selves. Here we do not only live among our selves but they live in us and we in them. Relations here are not external but internal so that we are our relations and cannot be selves save as we are members of each other.¹⁵⁸

Lastly, Niebuhr's reflection on revelation links the valuing of both the history of the individual and the history of the community. In the Christian community both histories are intertwined and reflect one another. Autobiography is the reflection of the community in the self, the narrative of each dependent upon the other. Further,

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 30.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 32.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 35.

autobiography is an external history of the internal reflection, a narrative which is originally formed from the person's internal experience of his/her life in community.

In the undertaking of this project we are attempting to capture this inner history, the particular ways in which ministers have understood their lives as lives reflecting the faith of the community. If such a task is not revelatory in itself, at least in Niebuhr's terms, it may have faith revealing potential, signalling the real value of the reflective task for an adult perspective on Christian learning.

D. Narrative Theology

George Stroup, a prominent theologian in the more recent stream of narrative theology builds significantly on the work of H. Richard Niebuhr. In discussing the category of narrative, Stroup suggests that the lines between the first-order faith language, narrative, and the second-order faith language, analysis and criticism, are not so fixed as it might appear. If narrative is central to the formation of individual identity, and to the articulation of faith, then it must play a significant role in theological categories and construction.

Narrative is an important theological category because it is essential for understanding human identity and what happens to the identity of persons in that process Christians describe by means of the doctrine of revelation.¹⁵⁹

For Stroup "narrative" is both "a literary genre and a hermeneutical process or mode of understanding that takes places in Christian faith."¹⁶⁰ Its purpose in the Christian

¹⁵⁹George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipe and Stock Publishers, 1997) 88.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 90.

faith is found in the genre of confession.

The narrative of Christian confession or autobiography emerges from the collision between individuals and their personal identity narratives and the Christian community and its narratives.¹⁶¹

Christian narrative in the sense of community, is a confession or recitation of the particular history of the community, but more than that, it is the interpretation of that history in light of current history and experience, and of the future envisioned by those living and hoping in the present. Conversely, this is the narrative of the identity of the individual, his/her perception of past, present and future, as constructed in interactive responsiveness to the perspective of Christian faith in community.

Stroup values the term 'collision' in his discussion of these issues of identity because the word lends itself to the strength of the impact of Christian revelation upon the individual's identity the "encounter through which a person's identity is illumined and transformed by the Christian faith."¹⁶² Through this process, significant disorientation and reinterpretation may take place which leads to the reconstruction of personal identity. The confessions of such seminal figures in Christian tradition as St. Paul and St. Augustine point to the impact of this collision and to the impact of this reconstruction of identity in the resulting narratives of confession. Says Stroup, "This appropriation and reconstruction finally assumes the literary form of autobiography or confession."¹⁶³

Stroup uses the example of St. Augustine to illustrate the links between

¹⁶¹Ibid. 91.

¹⁶²Ibid., 95.

¹⁶³Ibid., 96.

confession, personal identity and the narrative structure of the Christian faith. In his *Confessions*, Augustine reinterprets his life history in light of the revelation he has experienced, and in the context of interpretation provided by the tradition of the Christian Church which has contributed to his reconstructed identity. The community is the necessary context through which the person reinterprets his life meaning and confesses a personal faith. These are two subjectivities, namely those of the individual and the community, living through the same inspiration and enlivening one another through a living history of memory and hope.

Stroup maintains that it is the reconstructed narrative of personal identity which is the final act of conversion. In other words, the narrative of conversion forms the basis for reconstructed Christian identity. He says, referring to St. Augustine,

His conversion is best understood as the act of writing the *Confessions*. It is only as Augustine engages in the process of reinterpreting his personal history and reconstructing his personal identity that the pilgrimage of Christian faith actually begins.¹⁶⁴

The act of conversion refers to the way in which the narrative of personal identity is reconstructed by means of what is acknowledged and recognized to be the truth in Jesus Christ, a reconstruction which is dependent upon the public and interpretive history of the Christian community. Stroup's primary point is that narrative is an essential category for understanding the nature of faith in the individual and in the Christian Church. To put the same point in another way, Stroup is maintaining that only in the *lived* faith of the individual is it truly possible to acknowledge the reality of God.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 185.

The relation between knowledge of self and knowledge of God constitutes the fundamental dynamic for Christian identity and for the doctrine of revelation. Knowledge of self and knowledge of God are intrinsically related in the Christian faith.¹⁶⁵

Thus knowledge of God is only possible “when personal history is reconstructed in the larger context of Christian narrative.”¹⁶⁶

The impact of this perspective for this project is the great value of understanding the personal narratives of Christians, as these narratives, metaphorically not unlike the narratives in Scripture, continue to shed light on the narrative of God’s will and way within the Christian community today. These particular confessions offer a route to a knowledge of self and of God. They are a witness to the work of God through the long and sometimes tortuous process of the integration or collision, of personal identity narratives and the Christian narrative in its various manifestations.¹⁶⁷

E. The Theology of Biography

We turn now to look theologically at the notion of that particularly personal narrative, biography. This project as we have outlined it, emphasizes the construction of autobiographical narrative as a process of experiential learning. But in the act of facilitating the telling of another’s story, we have a kind of distancing or weaving of two consciousnesses, those of the researcher and the participant, in an interpretative process which approaches the genre of biography. We are concerned here with life history. How

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 247.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 247.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 170.

can we interpret life history theologically?

Biography is narrative removed or distanced from the act of “autobiography.” Nevertheless biography preserves the form of narrative and has as its subject the lived life of another individual. The theology of biography as a theological construct was introduced by James McClendon Jr. in the 1970's. Narrative, according to Stroup, is the language of faith. It is also the language which identifies the self. James McClendon has brought these two ideas together in what he calls “Biography as Theology.”¹⁶⁸ McClendon’s turning to the form of biography, came from his own experience of autobiographical valuing. Through exploring and valuing his own life experience, he came to consider this kind of exploration to be the proper arena for theological investigation. He valued less, his schooling in philosophy and theology, which he termed unengaged and unresponsive to the questions he brought to them. Instead, he said, “the greater part of my theological education was on-the-job training, gained as I set out to care for a church.”¹⁶⁹ For him, theological education was primarily a result of intensely personal experience. As opposed to common stereotyping of theology as dogmatic or delusionary, theology became for him “more often a trial by ordeal, the very arena of conscientiousness.”¹⁷⁰ Faith was explained most clearly, by attention to the difference it made in the lived life of the person of faith. McClendon explored how faith informs the

¹⁶⁸James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1974).

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 68.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 68.

individual, and how theological constructs worked themselves out in the lived lives of individuals. In exploring how faith expressed itself in the process of living, McClendon believed that he was getting at the “very substance of religion.”¹⁷¹ McClendon’s living examples were Dag Hammarskjold, Martin Luther King Jr., Clarence Leonard Jordan and Charles Edward Ives. In each case he identified an archetypal image of faith,¹⁷² which informed and guided the lives of these individuals, and which provided the clue to understanding their motivations and their accomplishments. By image, McClendon reported that he means:

metaphors whose content has been enriched by a previous, prototypical employment so that their application causes the object to which they are applied to be seen in multiply-reflected light; they are the traditional or canonical metaphors, and as such they bear the content of faith itself.¹⁷³

The origin of these images are Scriptural and refer to the dominant motifs and “salvation events” as recorded in Scripture and as maintained in the traditions of the Christian Church. This activity of living out the dominant motifs of faith, for McClendon, is also an experience of community. Just as the dominant images are imported into consciousness through the life and tradition of the community, so their expression in individual lives is a “multiply-reflected” revisioning of these motifs which originally inspired the People of Israel and the early Christian Church. Such motifs or images would include doctrines such as The Kingdom of God; the Son of Man; the Atonement;

¹⁷¹Ibid., 72.

¹⁷²Ibid., 75.

¹⁷³Ibid., 75.

the Great Deliverance; and the myriad of others.

McClendon is aware that his theological approach depends highly on interpretations of the meaning of “image,” and “metaphor.” He is anxious to avoid the reductionism which might imply that all religious belief is “simply a metaphor,” an unreal representation. His response, “The answer, briefly, is this: to speak truly and faithfully of God is indeed to speak in models, images, analogies - we have no other way.”¹⁷⁴

Fundamentally, McClendon’s project is to suggest the necessary grounding of theology in lived experience. If we are to understand the great doctrines of the Church, we cannot truly do so in the abstract. We must turn to the lived lives of the faithful.

If we turn seeking an answer (with respect to the validity of the ‘atonement’), to the lives of Hammarskjold and King, we find no evident interest in the formal statement of the doctrine of atonement. What we do find are dominant images - Caesarea Philippi, sacrifice, the cross, the single garment of destiny - images which can be truly understood only in the light of this ancient doctrine; they are images whose point is the point of the doctrine, images, therefore, which are the theological doctrine in the only form in which it can give substance to the religion of those who ‘live by’ that doctrine.¹⁷⁵

And what is meant by the concept “live by” is articulated to be,

The precise claim that they accepted, believed, were convinced by this Christian doctrine, that it was a controlling motif of their lives, as evidenced by what they said and did, and principally by their application of these controlling images to the events of their lives.¹⁷⁶

It is not the intention of this project to replicate the work of McClendon. We refer to his text to reinforce the emphasis in this project on the lived experience of Christians,

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 79.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 79.

in this case, ministers, as a way to illuminate the meaning of Christian faith and vocation. His theological perspective confirms the value of the documentation of faith lived. The personal narrative of the Christian becomes the closest evidence of the meaning of the larger Christian narrative as a contemporary and particular witness of faith.

F. Christian Conversion: A Special Instance of Learning

In this last section of theoretical and theological inquiry we focus on the narrative of conversion to examine how two of our theorists view that experience from a transformational and learning point of reference. We have maintained that personal change is profoundly, a learning experience. It affects our perspective on life with ramifications for our personal, social and cultural understanding. Both Stephen Crites and Michael Welton bring together streams of thought in psychology, adult education and theology to shed light on the meaning of this particular doctrine.

We have already noted Crites' concept that the narrative quality of experience has three dimensions, the sacred story, mundane stories, and the narrative temporal form. There are times in our experience when these three dimensions intersect. Crites writes,

And sometimes the tracks cross, causing a burst of light like a comet entering our atmosphere. Such a luminous moment, in which sacred, mundane, and personal are inseparably conjoined, we call symbolic in a special sense.¹⁷⁷

While such symbols are powerful in the way in which they affect our lives, Crites is at pains to point out that symbols still do not take us beyond the realm of the narrative, the symbols make sense only within a context of meaning.

¹⁷⁷Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience" *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* 81.

Conversion for Crites, is the kind of transforming of consciousness which requires a fundamental change in the story through which we find our self identity.

Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness. His style must change steps, he must dance to a new rhythm. Not only his past and future, but the very cosmos in which he lives is strung in a new way.¹⁷⁸

Welton ruminates more directly on the concept of conversion within an adult education model, linking conversion to culture, and to Paulo Freire's educative process of conscientization. Welton reflects on the links between the nature of experience, transformative learning, and Christian conversion. He describes the centrality of the experience of conversion in Christian tradition suggesting that "conversion narratives- metaphors of journey from darkness into the light -have organized central dimensions of Western experience for thousands of years."¹⁷⁹ He quotes several definitions of conversion, but his focus is on the cognitive process; conversion designates "a profound self-conscious existential change from one set of beliefs, habits and orientation to a new structure of belief and action."¹⁸⁰ Speaking from a psychological perspective, and again echoing Bruner's preoccupation with the cultural basis for self-identity Welton notes,

Cultures provide narrative frames within which persons fashion their selves, and the conversion narrative, set within the meta-narrative frame of creation, fall and redemption, retains its power (in sacral and secular forms) into the present

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 83.

¹⁷⁹Michael Welton, "Seeing the Light - Christian Conversion and Conscientisation," *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations* eds. Peter Jarvis and Nicholas Walters, (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993) 106.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 106.

distraught moment.¹⁸¹

Through this cultural interpretation Welton reiterates a major theme that conversion cannot be conceived as an individualistic event but rather one which occurs in the context of community and which of necessity involves a new order of human and divine relationship. Conversion creates “new world.” It is an experience of “conscientization,” a pedagogical praxis related to a new way of seeing and acting, the content of which is “service.” “Christian conversion is a radical depth turn from sin and darkness, historically mediated, through entry into a transformative learning community sharing a common life and attuned to the least of God’s creatures.”

Conversion is seen here as a profound spiritual process the consequences of which are closely allied to experiential learning. The transformation of the human being, implies a new way of perceiving, an ongoing process of transformative learning towards the fulfilment of the fruits of the Spirit. Conversion is about transformation, but it is also about learning, learning a new way of life, an experiential learning about self, community and cosmos.

G. Conclusion

In conclusion, referring again to the work of George Stroup, we have a summing up of the valuing of narrative, suggesting the theological basis for the project being undertaken here:

In Christian narrative a specific process of understanding and interpretation takes place which makes possible the appropriation of Christian faith and the

¹⁸¹Ibid., 107.

reconstruction of personal identity. This appropriation and reinterpretation finally assumes the literary form of autobiography or confession.¹⁸²

As already noted, personal narrative is a fundamental expression of the nature of the Christian faith in its alive or lived form. Narrative captures the importance of memory and reflection for the formulation and interpretation of one's life in Christian perspective. As these individual and communal narratives evolve and intersect, new interpretations of identity and faith emerge. The purpose of this project is to capture a snapshot of these evolving narratives, and to reflect with these narratives on experiential learning about the meaning of faith and ministry in the lives of those whose task, in part, is to make such reflection a function of their vocation.

One final note may be made about the theological import for this project. While the psychological and educative theorists provide a reasoned framework for understanding the impact of experience on learning processes, it is the actual content of the life and tradition of the Christian community as this relates to the life narrative of each person in the community, which provides meaning and purpose to the processes we have described above. It is the Christian faith handed down which, I would claim, gives us the outstanding structure of meaning, to understand learning processes of the most fundamental kind. Christian ministers in their communal setting are ideally situated to engage in these learning processes, having at their disposal, one of the richest resources of meaning available, the ancient and modern narratives associated with the Christian faith.

¹⁸²George Stroup, 96.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction and Theory

1. Introduction

This project has followed the methodological presuppositions associated with qualitative research. In the first part of this discussion a theoretical framework has been established to address both the characteristics of qualitative research, the nature of the interviewing process which has been used, and why this project has been most appropriately carried out using this method.

In this context, the issues of ethics have been addressed, the role of the researcher, and the trustworthiness of the research. Addressed also have been the limitations of the study, underlying assumptions, and the research question. The particular techniques used to respond to the research question have been described, including the research process, selection of participants, interview process and data collection, and data analysis.

2. Qualitative Research

Michael Quinn Patton has identified seven themes for qualitative methods. Each of these have been seen to apply to this project.

a. Qualitative methods are “naturalistic” in approach: they are research into naturally occurring human processes which “are not planned and manipulated by the

evaluator.”¹⁸³ In this project we have examined the experiential learning processes of experienced ministers, as naturally occurring experiences. While participants have been introduced to the purpose of the project, and its focus on their learning, they have been asked to reflect naturally and according to their own perceptions upon their life and ministerial experience.

b. “Qualitative methods are particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic.”¹⁸⁴ A presupposed clearly defined result is not in the nature of this research. Our effort has been to collect information with respect to one aspect of respondent’s experience, and to form conclusions based on the information received. We have not imposed a philosophical framework upon participants as they recollect and interpret. Rather, we have used the general concept of experiential learning as the lens to interpret the narrative provided by participants. The results of information collected worked not so much to confirm predetermined hypotheses, as to provide opportunity to further understand and explore.

c. “Fieldwork . . . means having direct and personal contact with people.”¹⁸⁵ It has been expected that through the processes of interview and interaction, the participants in this project will have developed a comfortable personal relation with the researcher in the process of personal exploration. It is critical to come to know the particular

¹⁸³Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, (Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications, 1987.) 13.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 16.

circumstances and experience of respondents and in order to do so, a level of trust and cooperation will need to have been maintained.

d. A Holistic approach: The research effort is motivated by a desire to come to as full an understanding as possible of the experience of respondents. The direction of the interview is much more in the hands of respondents than researcher, and includes the particular understanding which respondents bring to each area of exploration. The holistic approach also recognizes the wider socio-cultural contexts within which respondents articulate their experience. While these contexts have not be the focus of the interview, it will have been recognized as participants themselves included it in their narratives.

e. Case-Study approach: the purpose of the project has been to explore the experience of a small group of individuals in order to thoroughly understand and learn from their experience. That experience, and the interpretation of it, has not been intended to be generalized. The purpose again, has been to explore the meaning communicated by participants, and to utilize the framework of ‘experiential learning as a way to interpret and understand that experience. While generalization is inadmissible from a research standpoint, the project may have provided a paradigm for further exploration of experience in ministry.

f. Lastly, Patton suggests that “The philosophical roots of qualitative methods emphasize the importance of understanding the *meanings* of human behaviour and the social-cultural context of social interaction.”¹⁸⁶ This process has roots both in

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 20.

phenomenology and in ethnomethodology.¹⁸⁷

The fundamental assumption of ethnomethodology, says Feldman, is that people within a culture have procedures for making sense. These procedures are ‘ethnomethods,’ or culturally based methods. Many of these procedures are verbal. They include telling stories and giving explanations.¹⁸⁸

The focus of this project has been indeed on the stories which the respondents reported with respect to their life experience. Further, Feldman reports that:

Meaning is created through our actions and our interpretations of our own and each other’s actions. Particular actions do not have set meanings. Virtually any meaning is possible. The only absolute in ethnomethodology is that meaning will be made and that the meaning will depend upon how we connect the actions and the context.¹⁸⁹

With respect to the phenomenological perspective, Crites claims that all experience is essentially narrative, a movement in time, as we have already noted, not dissimilar to “the rhythms and melodic lines of music.” “Narrative is the cultural form capable of expressing coherence through time,” a similar but slightly less pure form of “musicality.”¹⁹⁰ This form of research focuses on this narrative characteristic and participates in this musicality; it adapts to the phenomenology of experience. This is a philosophical approach which allows for a direct attention to the consciousness of another. As adult educator Michael Collins puts it:

. . . the central concern of phenomenology is about meaning. Understanding the

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 20.

¹⁸⁸Martha S. Feldman, *Strategies for Interpreting Qualitative Data* (Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 1995) 8.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁰Stephen Crites, 66-67.

apprehension of meaning in any context - requires a readiness to suspend taken-for-granted beliefs (attitudes) in favour of a critical stance towards everyday experiences.¹⁹¹

This project has focussed on the experience of respondents as they reflected on and evaluated their own experience, and as it has been reported directly to the researcher.

3. The Interview in Qualitative Research

Elliot Mishler writes about research from a contextual and narrative position. His belief is that the theoretical assumptions and presuppositions of the standard interview are inappropriate to the task of discovering meaning. Standardization, he maintains, as the core value of traditional quantitative research, mitigates against the complexity of communication or human discourse, and against the centrality of meaning in human behaviour. He proposes four propositions for the proper understanding of the interview process used for qualitative research. These are:

- a. Interviews are speech events or events laden with many layers of meaning.
- b. The discourse of interviews is constructed jointly by interviewers and respondents.
- c. Analysis and interpretation are based on a theory of discourse and meaning.
- d. The meanings of questions and answers are contextually grounded.¹⁹²

Given these propositions, the standard interview is understood not only to be

¹⁹¹Michael Collins, "Phenomenological Perspectives: Some Implications for Adult Education," *Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education*, ed Sharan B. Meriam, (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Co., 1995) 259.

¹⁹²Elliot G. Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986) Preface, ix.

inappropriate but harmful for the exploration of meaning since it does not focus on the act of communication, nor does it pay attention to how meaning is actually constructed.

Mishler, in describing how meaning is constructed, acknowledges that this is always a shared experience. In qualitative research “interview questions and responses are formulated in, developed through, and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents,” and upon how “interviewers reformulate questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understandings as meanings emerge during the course of an interview.”¹⁹³ This being the case, the interview process in this project must take the form of a guided discussion rather than that of a predetermined schedule of questions and specified responses. The interviewer’s role is akin to that of a facilitator or enabler who assists the respondent, through discussion, to explain his or her meaning and interpretation.

According to Mishler, what is produced in the mutual discourse of interviewer and respondent is a kind of shared story.¹⁹⁴ As we have seen, meaning is constructed through story or narrative. Cohler calls personal narrative “the most internally consistent interpretation of presently understood past, experienced present, and anticipated future.”¹⁹⁵ Narrative is the most appropriate vehicle for understanding another, because

¹⁹³Ibid., 52.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 82.

¹⁹⁵Bertram J. Cohler, “Personal Narrative and Life Course,” *Life-Span Development and Behaviour* eds. Paul B. Baltes and Orville G. Brim, Jr., (New York: Academic Press, 1982) 207, cited in Elliot G. Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*, 68.

this is the way each of us constructs meaning in our lives.

Mishler describes ways to understand narrative. One of the most useful from the point of view of the needs of this project is the approach taken by Agar and Hobbs who focus on the “coherence” of a narrative understood through attention to “themes” and their relation to interpretation. Coherence is a matter of the relations between elements of discourse, and these Agar and Hobbs define in terms of: a. Global coherence, or “how a particular utterance is related to a speaker’s overall plan, intent, or goal for the conversation;” b. Local coherence, which refers more narrowly to relations between utterances and parts of the text; and c. Thematic coherence, or how utterances express a speaker’s recurrent assumptions, beliefs, and goals.¹⁹⁶ This framework provides a methodology to identify the components of narrative, and issues of interpretation.

Lastly, it is worth noting that Mishler believes that assisting respondents to create their own narrative acts is an “empowering” of the respondent. It is a process which encourages respondents to find “their own voice.”¹⁹⁷ Through an interview process which recognizes the contextual and shared nature of meaning making, a methodology which encourages a kind of “transparency” or mutuality of interchange, a process which redistributes power traditionally invested in the interviewer, to enable the respondent to “speak for him/herself,” and which sees the respondent as a “collaborator,” a full participant in the development of the study itself; this process is identified as having the purpose of benefiting the respondent as much as the researcher, a process which is

¹⁹⁶Elliot G. Mishler, 89.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 118.

basically empowering in the life of the respondent.

B. Research Issues for this Project

1. Researcher as Participant

The researcher brings his background, his particular existence, and his projects in life, to the conduct and the purpose of this project. As a Baptist minister who is now an instructor in a community college, he has developed an interest in ways to perceive and reflect upon his own life experience as it has taken many turns in career and professional directions. For many years he worked as a career counsellor developing programs to enable youth and adults to reflect on their life experience, and to make decisions about the appropriate directions for their future. He learned the importance of reflection as a process to evaluate experience, and to cultivate a level of self-awareness which could contribute to the ability to move positively forward in one's life and career. It became clear that this process was never ending for the individual, as well as being a process which was critical for the development of each person as they move through their years. The researcher further developed an understanding of this life long learning process through studies in the area of adult education. It seemed as he reflected on his own earlier experience in ministry, that this was a profession strongly positioned to be a continuing reflective practice on life and its meaning. Not that all are successful at doing so, but ministry by its very nature calls the minister to struggle with processes of reflection whether on personal belief, the impact of faith on the ongoing life of congregants, or the meaning of God's Word for persons here and now. The adult education experience, for

the researcher, focussed more and more on the importance of the internal processes of meaning-making as the locus for how to understand the progress of individual life. It seemed that a project to explore this learning process with ministers was one way to further an understanding of how reflection and experiential learning become ways to explore and understand life experience.

It is important to be clear that the researcher is a participant-observer in this particular research project. He brings his age (mid-fifties), gender (male), educational and denominational background (trained in ministry, social work, adult education, and Baptist affiliation) to bear upon the project. It is useful to reiterate here that the whole process of this research project is premised on what Mishler has called, the joint construction of meaning,¹⁹⁸ and that a primary objective of the interviews was to develop clarity on the meanings which were being communicated, whether this meant correction for the purpose of a truer understanding, or a specific feedback and reflection to clarify and illuminate the experience of the participant. The acknowledgement of the unique cultural placement of researcher and participant helped to establish an interview which was open, reflective, and an occasion for mutual learning.

2. Underlying Assumptions

Certain basic assumptions underlie this project. These provided the basis for a consideration of the possibilities of the project.

- that Christian ministry is a highly reflective practice, and therefore an

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 52.

appropriate focus for the exploration of continuous and life-long learning experience.

- that learning is a fundamental component of life experience, and that personal learning, as an historical and contextual process, has a direct impact for ministers, on their understanding and practice of ministry.

- that one of the ways the presence of God is experienced in our world, is through the interaction of the narratives of faith and community, with personal narratives and the experience of individuals.

- that individuals are always in the process of constructing and re-constructing their self-identity through the process of building their life story.

-that attending to the learning experience of Christian ministers in their practice will advance an understanding of the vocation of ministry.

-that experiential learning processes in an individual are life-long, and cannot be confined to one set period of a person's life.

3. Limitations of the Research

This project has explored the nature of the experiential learning processes of Christian ministers which have led to changes in their understanding of themselves as ministers and their understanding of the nature and practice of ministry. The focus was on personal learning processes rather than formal educational training. The exploration of personal learning was not confined however, to the period of formal ministry, because this learning process was not perceived to be able to be so confined.

It was clear that the learnings identified, could be attributed solely to the

participants in the project. Conclusions could not be generalized other than to suggest directions for further exploration.

It was not intended that this project provide a critique of its theoretical base. The study may not be perceived as a study about experiential learning, either to prove or disprove its validity, or the validity of any other of the theoretical bases of the project. The project may have helped illuminate however, the extent to which the theoretical framework was useful for interpreting the experience of participants.

Centrally, the project has explored how and what experiential learning processes have impacted the vocational self-understanding of a small group of ministers, and their understanding of the nature and practice of ministry.

4. Ethical Issues

The project posed specific ethical issues which needed to be addressed. The first major one was that of preserving confidentiality. A discussion about confidentiality was conducted with each client before the beginning of the interview process. Each was asked to sign a consent form acknowledging their consent to participate in the project, describing an appropriate level of confidentiality, and providing for an ongoing review during the conduct of the project, of these issues.

The specific problem of anonymity was also addressed. It was acknowledged that while anonymity could not be guaranteed, it would be protected as strongly as possible through the auspices of the project; that is to say, the only repositories of the identities of the participants were the researcher and his immediate supervisor.

The risks associated with participation in the project were discussed with participants, in full recognition that others might surmise the identity of the participant upon reading the project report. Recognizing that participant narratives have referred to other persons and institutions it has been noted in the text that the narratives upon which the project is built are entirely the reports of the subjective perceptions of each participant. They have not been intended to meet any criteria of verisimilitude other than faithfulness to the participant's own understanding.

5. Trustworthiness

The issues of "reliability" and "validity" posed different questions for qualitative research. In quantitative research these are the methods used to constrain bias and promote objectivity. While these issues are viewed differently in qualitative research, the fundamental issue of the 'trustworthiness' of the project is still an important component.¹⁹⁹

To promote trustworthiness in this project, it was determined to include an appropriate variety in the small sample, thus ensuring a certain range of variety in experience in pastoral ministry. This variety was identified according to gender and denominational attachment.

The most important factor promoting trustworthiness was the methodology used in interviewing and obtaining further information from the participants. The researcher

¹⁹⁹Larry VandeCreek, Hilary E. Bender and Merle R. Jordan, *Research in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (Journal of Pastoral Care Publications Inc., 1994.) 44.

made every effort during the interview “conversation” to check interpretation and to question appropriately, in order to assist the participant to explain him/herself as completely as possible. The “two week critical reflection” was a significant effort to obtain information directly from the participant without researcher intrusion other than the nature of the “guide” itself. The second interview with each participant was based on input provided in the reflection.

Participants were consulted regularly about the accuracy of information and the appropriateness of the interpretation presented. The trustworthiness of the project relies upon the process used to obtain information from each participant. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. Tapes and transcriptions have remained in the possession of the researcher.

The project relies, nevertheless, upon the “shared story” process described by Mishler. There remains the significant impact of the researcher in structuring the project, in his participation in the eliciting of meaning through interviewing, and in his development and interpretation of learning themes and conclusions throughout the remainder of the thesis.

6. The Research Question

We have noted earlier, that the research question for this project has been “What have been the experiential learning processes which have led to changes in the way some ministers have understood Christian ministry?” It has been suggested that this question has two components which may or may not be distinguishable in practice: the way in

which these experiential learning processes have led to changes in the self-understanding of the minister, and/or how they have led to changes in the minister's own understanding of the practice and nature of ministry.

Subsidiary questions may also have been addressed in the exploration of the primary question. These may have included:

How useful is the experiential learning theory to understanding or illuminating experience in ministry?

Do the experiential learning processes of ministers contribute in some way to a greater knowledge of the nature of experiential learning?

What kinds of experience in ministry have been most conducive to the experiential learning process?

How has experiential learning in ministry related to this learning process throughout the minister's life?

Can the experiential learning processes of one participant be compared in any meaningful way, to the experiential learning processes of another participant?

Does an examination of the experiential learning processes of ministers contribute in some way to a better understanding of the meaning of the vocation?

These questions will inform the concluding discussions of the project.

7. The Process of the Research

The process established to respond to the research question was first, to determine the theoretical context and limits of the project. The primary theoretical areas addressed

for the purposes of the project were: experiential and transformative learning, meaning making in human experience, narrative as the structure for understanding human experience and of the self, and finally autobiographical construction and change in human experience. These theoretical bases were drawn from the disciplines primarily of psychology and adult education. For the theological perspective on the project reflections were drawn from areas of study in Christian education, narrative theology and a theology of biography.

The methodology for the project was developed and described on the basis of its qualitative character of the research question. From a research point of view, the research question did not include the proof of a particular hypothesis. The purpose of the project was to explore a particular phenomenon, the experience of ministers using a particular framework, experiential learning, to identify how and what had been learned. An underlying question and dynamic in the project was the extent to which it was shown how the constructs of experiential learning may or may not have illuminated the experience of the ministers, and alternatively, how the experience of the ministers may or may not have illuminated the constructs of experiential learning.

The selection of participants, strategies for data collection and interviews and data analysis were conducted on the basis of procedures indicated by the research methodology as outlined below.

Conclusions of the project included interpretation of how the results of the interviews enabled both a better understanding of the experiential learning processes of ministers, the impact of that learning on their own self-understanding as ministers,

changes in their understanding of the practice and nature of ministry, and finally reflection on how the experience of ministers illumined an understanding of the nature of experiential learning.

8. Selection of Participants

The qualitative research model required that those participating in the project meet the criteria for participation in the project. The criteria identified for participation were:

1. Persons who had been ordained or participated in the practice of ministry for a significant period of time. Participants must have been able to express commitment to continuing in the vocation for the foreseeable future.

2. Ministers whose primary form of ministry was pastoral or congregational; this provided some element of commonality in the practice of ministry among participants. It also was assumed, as a commonly held notion about the structure of Christian ministry, that pastoral ministry remains a central model for the practice of that ministry.

3. Ministers, who self-identified and were able to report that they had undergone experience in their ministry which had, in some way, changed their own self-understanding and/or their understanding of their ministry.

4. Ministers who, in their own opinion, or in the opinion of key referees, had developed a reflective view of their experience, and were willing to share their reflections openly with the researcher.

5. Ministers who indicated a willingness to provide the time and work necessary

to contribute fully to the project.

In searching for appropriate participants the researcher also identified other general criteria. Because of the significant growth of the number of women in ministry it was decided to attempt to maintain a balance in gender for the sample. For the purposes of broadening the range of experience in pastoral ministry it was decided to include a range of denominational attachment. These two criteria were intended to provide a range of experience to allow for some reflection on differentiation and comparison.

A process of networking was used to find appropriate participants. Contacts were made with a variety of referees to help in the identification of potential participants. These included colleagues both in and out of ministry, the project supervisor, continuing education leaders within denominations and at two theological schools, and suggestions from proposed participants who were unable, for various reasons, to participate. A letter explaining the purpose of the project was sent to some referees in order to guide their thoughts about appropriate participants. (APPENDIX ONE) Approximately twenty persons were contacted to request their participation. A letter was sent to potential participants to explain the project and the nature of their participation. (APPENDIX TWO) Follow-up was completed by telephone with six individuals agreeing to participate in the project.

The participant group was originally comprised of six individuals. One withdrew late in the implementation of the project because of perceived identification issues. The participant group represented in the final study was composed of three men and two women. All were in their 40's or 50's. Two were members of the United Church, one

Anglican, one Catholic and one Baptist. All had attained at least fifteen years experience in pastoral ministry, and together comprised approximately one hundred and six years of service.

9. Interview Process and Data Collection

The interview process was based upon the methodology outlined earlier by Mishler, with a focus on the eliciting of the participant's story or narrative in a non intrusive way. Questioning by the researcher focussed on exploring the particular meaning which the participant gave to their experience, and the way in which the participant related the various episodes or periods of their life experience. In keeping with this understanding of the nature of the interview, we may describe it as unstructured and conversational in style. The primary form of questioning was to ask at critical junctures, how the participant understood their experience, and what they learned from it about themselves and their ministry.

The interview process with the six original participants was conducted over a three month period. This process included at least two in-depth interviews and the completion between interviews of a written critical reflection.

Each participant was contacted for an initial interview. At the beginning of the interview, discussion took place to explain the project further, to respond to questions or concerns, and to obtain final agreement of participation. Issues of confidentiality were also discussed and addressed, and the form for participant confidentiality was signed.

(APPENDIX THREE) Participants were then invited to talk discursively about their life

experience and experience in ministry keeping in mind the basic purpose of the project, to identify what and how they learned through their experience. With permission from each participant, this portion of the interview was taped.

At the end of the first interview the researcher introduced the Guide to a Two Week Critical Reflection (APPENDIX FOUR) which provided a process for the participant to record in writing, a comprehensive reflection upon their life and ministerial experience focussing upon their articulation of what and how they learned about themselves and ministry through their life experience. The Guide invited each participant to keep in mind a range of ten questions, for each period of their life they were reflecting upon. Each participant was asked to record their reflections upon both, a. remembered and, b. reflected, sections of the Guide for each period of their life identified as: 1. Early Life Experience; 2. Youth; 3. Post-High School, Pre-Theological; 4. Theological Training Experience; and, 5. Experience in Pastoral Ministry.

After each participant had completed their written reflection the researcher reviewed both the initial tape and the written reflection. Based on these sources the researcher identified events, experiences and themes to be explored in-depth in a second interview. This second set of interviews was completed and in the case of three participants, because the interview exploration was not sufficient, the second interview was extended into a third. All interviews were taped and transcribed for the purposes of the research.

10. Data Analysis

Using the transcribed materials of the interviews, and the reports of critical reflection provided by each participant, the researcher began a process of the review of materials, construction of participant profiles and interpretation of the reported experiential learning. In consultation with the participant, specific efforts were made to ensure official confidentiality particularly through assigned names. At the same time the researcher wished to retain the narrative quality of the reports, and included these profiles within the structure of the study. The profiles, as much as possible, were composed with the direct speech of the participant. Each profile was headed with a short statement of years of ministerial experience, marital status, and approximate age. This was followed by the narrative organized in each case according to: a. Early Life Experience; b. Young Adult Life Experience; and, c. Experience in Ministry. The profile concluded with an analysis of the “learnings” reported by the participants. In this latter section of the profile, the researcher reviewed again, the transcripts, and based on these, identified in title and description the areas of learning which seemed to be most evident in the material. This process involved the careful identification of learning themes through review of participant reports, and the clustering of these themes into specific descriptions using the actual reportage of participants to name and identify the particular learning and experience which supported it. The completed profile was then shared in its entirety with each participant to verify the accuracy of the profile, and to obtain agreement with the summarized learning descriptions. Each participant was invited to suggest changes in text, and to alter interpretations with which they were uncomfortable. It was at this

juncture that one participant withdrew from the project primarily from fear of identification and exposure. This decision of the participant was accepted without question by the researcher.

At this stage in the analysis the researcher reviewed the learning and learning categories as identified by participants and grouped these according to learning themes which were reported across all six participants. It was recognized that this clustering was an interpretive work of the researcher, and that each participant would have related to the identified learning theme through their own history and context. For this reason the learning themes contained reports of experience from each participant.

Although the explication of the various learnings involved full description of the learning process experienced by each participant, participants often referred to this process as one of discarding older understandings. The researcher felt it was important to address the way in which this learning process was also, for participants, a process of “unlearning”. Unlearning was meant as a process whereby formerly held assumptions and perspectives were identified as inadequate to explain current experience, and were substantially changed or replaced.

The last section of analysis of the data itself was to identify and group the kinds and nature of experiences which participants reported had resulted in learning. The emphasis here was on the “how” rather than the “what” of the learning process.

The concluding area of investigation in the project was to relate and interpret the learnings and learning processes reported by the participants in light of the theoretical framework of experiential learning and theological perspective as outlined in the study.

A final chapter has provided a response to the research question and recommendations for further exploration.

CHAPTER V

REPORT OF PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

A. Introduction

This chapter comprises a summary report of the narratives presented to the researcher by each of five final participants. These reports are structured in two parts, the Participant Profile and the Learning. The profiles represent the information communicated to the researcher, while the learning is a distillation of the profile with respect to identified specific learning themes.

The profile is organized in three parts, early life experience, early adult experience, and ministerial experience. The learning section is structured according to identified learning themes and the information from the participant narrative which specifically supports the learning theme.

All names used in these reports have been disguised. However, since the project depends centrally on the narratives provided by participants, anonymity has not been guaranteed.

All reporting of narratives represents the comments and opinion of the participant. In this sense, it must be acknowledged that the information provided is not intended to be evaluated for accuracy, facticity, or validity. It is entirely the perception of the participant. It is that perception which is germane to the nature of the project, to discover how each participant has understood his/her experience, and what they have learned from

it.

One last point to be made is that these reports were constructed by the researcher with every effort to be faithful to the narratives provided by the participants. It must be acknowledged that in developing these reports, the researcher has affected the narratives by the very act of structuring them.

B. Report of Participant Narratives: Profiles and Learnings

1. Doreen

Ministry: Peace, at the Centre of the Whirlwind

Doreen has had approximately fifteen years experience in pastoral ministry. She is in her early fifties, married, with two young adult children.

A. PROFILE

1. Early Life Experience

Doreen describes her early life experience as very church oriented. Her father accepted a call to ministry when Doreen was young, and the church became a second home. “Church was the place I went, when I wasn’t home.” She reflects on this reality of her early life experience in the following comment. “It was not peculiar that I eventually ended up in ministry because the church was such a powerful influence in my life.”

As a child, Doreen’s health was not good, affecting her early experience in

school, and isolating her somewhat from friends. “I was ill a lot of the time and couldn’t overextend myself. I didn’t enjoy school for the first two or three years, because I had been very protected at home because of my illness.” This illness was one of the more personal challenges in Doreen’s life, the overcoming of which played a part in Doreen’s later perception of herself, fulfilling a vocation of service.

One of the main influences in her home was the presence of her grandmother, who often cared for her while her parents were busy in their work. During her years as a youth, her grandmother had a significant impact on Doreen’s spiritual life. They often said prayers and read Scripture together. She was Doreen’s “closest confidante.” Doreen attributes this relationship with her grandmother as enabling her to look beyond her health problems, to strive to “live life to the fullest.”

Other than the impact of illness and these earlier difficulties adjusting in school, Doreen describes a very vibrant social involvement with youth organizations both in and outside the Church. Through the church, she enjoyed many involvements including sports, youth groups, other social activities, and in many of these, she took leadership roles. This strong involvement continued into her university years where she shone in sports and continued to take leadership responsibilities in regional church-related youth activities.

During her most formative years, Doreen’s father had a great influence on her, as he practiced his ministry. It was a very positive influence. She developed a strong respect for her father, and she felt encouraged towards the envisioning of her own possibilities. But the modeling was also conflictual. She describes her father as a kind of

“take charge” minister who was well-liked, but also quite conscious of the authority of his position. He seemed to Doreen in retrospect to focus more on the preaching, teaching role than on the relational functions of ministry. In later years, he seemed to her to develop a cynicism about people, which Doreen found difficult to accept. “When I saw that cynicism, I didn’t want it to become part of who I was.” Part of Doreen’s own story were her efforts in her own ministry to manage this issue of “cynicism,” the recognition of human failure in the church.

Doreen sees her early life as having prepared her for and directed her to, the vocation of ministry. “It was as though my whole life up to this point had been an apprenticeship for ministry.” The church community, as an intimate part of Doreen’s early life experience, provided her with high values and ideals about the nature of Christian life and practice. This impact was all the more significant because of her feelings of isolation in school due to her illness. Later, there were more problems in school because of the impact on her of rivalry between the majority Catholic and minority Protestant expressions of faith practiced in the small maritime community in which she lived. She attributes her own eagerness to “be seen as an open-minded minister” and an ecumenically oriented clergy person as stemming in part from these early difficulties in feeling accepted in the community, as the daughter of the Protestant minister.

2. Young Adult Life Experience

Originally, Doreen considered teaching as her career direction, completing a degree in education. She taught in a variety of communities, as both a full time and

substitute teacher. At the same time, Doreen continued to fully participate in local church programs and activities, working at a Christian centre and carrying out a variety of part-time positions in churches.

During this early career period, the most significant event was her courtship and marriage to her husband of twenty-six years. She attributes much to this relationship.

He made a great deal of difference in the direction my life took and has been a great source of strength for me when the going got rough. He was always supportive and encouraging of my desire to go into ministry. I strongly doubt that I would have done so well in ministry, or even been able to go into ministry, without his support.

Also at this time, Doreen underwent a major and difficult operation to correct the problems of her childhood illness.

It was a massive injury to my body to have the operation and recuperation was very painful and difficult. There were complications which were worrying, but within six months I was feeling like a new person. I remember feeling that God had been very good to me and that I must have lived this long because God had something planned for me.

During the next few years, Doreen began to consider ministry as a vocation for herself. Thoughts about going into ministry were difficult. The incidence of women going into ministry was still small, and, for Doreen, the impact of ministry within the dual career family was a major uncertainty. The decision was not easy, and she doubted herself. In the end, Doreen said, "I turned the whole thing over to God in prayer, and once I made the decision to leave it to God, everything began to lead me toward ministry."

Doreen now began to explore theological education by taking courses at the regional seminary. She reports, "I felt a renewed spiritual yearning to do more with my

life. I wrestled with this feeling for about a year and then made the final decision to become an ordained minister.” After having completed attending the seminary full time, Doreen said it was her field placement which was most confirming of her call. She notes that the years in theological study were not easy because she was also a full time wife and mother. She also notes that theological training was not the same challenge to her as it may have been for younger candidates, since she had had significant experience already in areas of church leadership, not least being raised in a clergy person’s family. In a summary reflection, Doreen concluded that, “My understanding of ministry did not come from my theological training. It came from the main people who influenced me, my father, and a few other ministers whom I grew particularly, to admire.” After graduation, Doreen took up work in a rural four point charge.

Doreen’s choice about ministry at this time immediately raised the issue of being a woman in ministry. While few had chosen the vocation by this time, many more women were to be drawn to ministry in the years to come. Ministry, for Doreen, was more a statement of her own confidence in her calling, than a statement about “women and ordination.” Others, however, saw her as “pioneering” in this respect.

In the period prior to her ordination, Doreen endured the personal tragedy of the death of her second child. “I gave birth to our second child, a little boy we named Shawn, whom we immediately learned was born with only one half of a heart. He was taken to the hospital where doctors did all they could to save his life, but he was weak and died after four days.” This was a devastation to her and her husband. She says,

Our strong faith helped us get through this, as well as the prayers and support of

many friends at our church. The loss of Shawn, although difficult, helped me to put my trust in God even more. I learned from this loss, how to be much more empathic with people who had suffered loss, and I emerged stronger as a person.

When a newborn child arrived a year later, Doreen “felt blessed by God, and even more ready for ministry.”

3. Experience in Ministry

Doreen reports that her first years in pastoral ministry were very positive. She learned to say “no,” to make room for her family, and to balance the requirements of family and dual career. After three years, she accepted a call as an associate minister to an urban congregation.

This ministry turned out to be the most significant, and the most trying of her total pastoral experience. Her first year was highly productive, as she developed a very positive working relationship and friendship with the senior minister. In the course of her many responsibilities, she established a Bible Study group which has continued to this day and which served as “a great support to me over the years,” particularly through the early crisis in this congregation.

The crisis which she faced was the impact on this congregation of the decision of the denomination to permit the ordination of practicing homosexual persons. This decision created great dissension in the ranks of the congregation with the majority opposing the decision of the denomination. Shortly thereafter, probably as a result of the dissension, the senior minister resigned to accept another call. Doreen was left alone to handle the problem. “All of this resulted in much pain at this church, not only for the

families but also for ministers.”

Doreen reports that initially she attempted simply to be a mouthpiece for the official church stance, but with the developing strains in the congregation, she realized she had to come to grips with her own personal beliefs. “I became much more intentional about studying and reading all I could on the issue, as well as spending a great deal of time thinking about what the Bible had to say about justice, and praying for direction.”

For eighteen difficult months, Doreen attempted to deal with congregational fractiousness. There were a number of well attended congregational meetings. “These meetings were terrible experiences. People stood up and yelled at each other. People stomped out. The behaviours were irrational.” As Doreen came to the realization that her own understanding differed from the majority in the congregation, she decided that she should best focus on bridge-building between the two opposing groups. She attempted to bring the two groups together. This resulted in “the worst meeting of my life. They were like loaded guns aimed at one another. Most people left crying.” The issue died down for a time. Several families had left the church and more continued to leave. Further dissension developed over the issue of whether the congregation should associate with a dissenting church organization. At this point the congregation took a definite and strong stance against the denomination. It also made a decision to oppose, in a very personal way, Doreen’s belief that the two groups could co-exist in the same congregation. Within a short time, the congregation called a new senior minister who, it seemed, supported the congregation. Doreen was no longer centre stage.

Throughout the ordeal, Doreen experienced a strong sense of isolation. Not only

was she alone in trying to “build bridges,” but she perceived a singular lack of support from higher levels in the denomination. She had the feeling that, “The church that you are serving is not really there for you. You are out on a limb.” Doreen also voiced the impact of this experience on herself.

I think I said the word ‘sadness.’ I felt a terrible sadness, and also, great disappointment with people. The people seemed to be wearing blinders. I felt great disappointment with the denomination, not because of its stance, but because they had given no assistance to ministers to know how to deal with all this anger.

Doreen expressed her own sentiment about the impact of this experience on her sense of ministry. She said, “I am more accepting of whatever happens and while some days I long for this path in ministry to be over, other days I know I can stand at the centre of the whirlwind, and know peace.”

The advent of the new minister brought a further challenge to Doreen’s ministry. Within a short time she came to the conclusion that the new minister was not carrying out the tasks of his job in a responsible manner. He seemed to want the attention of the congregation without the corresponding diligence to duty. She laid a complaint to the courts of the Church. After initial attempts to resolve issues at a regional level, Doreen felt that the congregation would only be hurt by carrying the issue further. She discontinued her complaint. This was, for Doreen, a further instance of feeling unsupported by the denomination, leaving her feeling isolated again.

Since leaving Stoneybrook, Doreen has worked in two pastoral charges, a part-time rural ministry and an urban ministry with a church in transition. She has become aware, she reports, of her need to break the “glass ceiling” for women in ministry and to

take on challenging ministerial roles. She has succeeded in these goals. She has also become more aware of what she offers as a woman in ministry. For women in ministry, there seems to be a stronger emphasis on the act of caring, a ministry which focusses more on heart than head, and a recognition of the suffering element of ministry relative to the teaching. She believes fundamentally that, "Through suffering, you grow, you learn, you mature."

A further area of learning for Doreen during the past ten years has been a new understanding of the meaning of "family." She believes, in light of the variety of alliances and affiliations persons may have, the word family needs to be broadened from its traditional definition to include, single parents, homosexual unions and perhaps even other relationships. Family is now approximating more closely the meaning of community.

The word 'community' may better reflect an understanding of the kinds of changes that are happening in the 'family,' and the thinking adjustment required for working with families in congregations. Family, I guess, comes down to wherever there are people who care a great deal about each other. In light of these kinds of changes, even pastoral work must adapt.

One of the learnings is the importance of boundaries, how caring is expressed in our time, and the sensitivity involved in exploring how to communicate lovingly to others. Also sometimes, one person cannot do it all. Doreen believes that if caring is going to be expressed fully, more members of the congregational community need to take up this calling and to share in this pastoral ministry. Differences between people, expectations and commitments, values and life-styles, all imply a far more complex environment of care than in the past. They require a heightened sensitivity, an intelligent

social awareness and a personal strength to be able to concretely express God's care, within that complexity.

Doreen reports that her latest pastoral responsibility has resulted in certain new accents in her ministry. With age, she says, have come both health problems and new perspectives on her work. She values more than ever, her family life, her relationship with her husband, and the growth and successes of her own children. She has also gained distance and perspective in her work. She sees ministry more like a job; not that she values it less, but that ministry as a vocation no longer commands the totality of her commitment and energy. She shares the work of ministry with commitments and responsibilities to family, friends, and important personal pursuits. She has no desire to overwork, no temptation to be a workaholic, but she does have a real interest in benefitting from, and enjoying a more varied and whole existence. She likes taking time for herself, as well as for others, and she no longer feels she is stealing time away from her responsibilities. "I know that my priorities are changing from being entirely of service to other people, to trying to think more of my family's needs and my own needs." Self-care is a new and treasured responsibility.

With this distancing has come, for Doreen, a certain renewed commitment to the core of pastoral practice, the discipline of listening and counseling, a focus and even "real excitement" about teaching in the church and training new ministerial students for pastoral service. She has less patience for the administrative structure of church work.

Fundamentally, Doreen is searching for revitalization in her ministry. There has been, over the years, a tiring and draining aspect of experience. She bemoans, "Maybe

the reason I'm finding myself tiring, is because I know that basically, I'm spinning my wheels, and far too often, doing useless things." She asks for herself, and perhaps for others similarly affected, "How do I get excited about my work again? What really is ministry anyway, or is this just middle-age talking?" There is an almost audible sigh, which we detect in Doreen's current feelings about ministry.

B. LEARNING

1. Ministry: The Test of the Self: Endurance and Determination

The first area of learning for Doreen, was the experience in her ministry handling the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexual persons. In one summary statement of her learning, she states,

I once believed, that in Jesus Christ and His Church, people were better than others and capable of better actions. I guess I'd heard my dad grumble about people, but I was more apt to think that he was judging the person too harshly, than to think the person deserved censoring. However, that all began to change, when I began to see what actual hatred was directed toward gays and lesbians by people who believed them to be dangerous and evil and something to be feared. I watched in amazement as a learned psychologist named them as deviants and sexual predators. I listened to a mother as she cried out in fear for her children over these people. I was warned by grown men not to defend homosexuals in that church nor to speak in anyway favourably toward them. I knew then, that I had to accept that hatred and prejudice do exist, and that people were making no effort to learn anything about those they hated.

She says of this experience, "Stoneybrook was a wonderful experience in the beginning. That's why it was like a crash into a wall when things went wrong."

For Doreen, the event and experience around the ordination of homosexuals as played out at Stoneybrook, was the event which conveyed the greatest impact on her

ministry. Ministry could never be the same after this experience. As she says, “First of all, there was the feeling that here I was just getting started in ministry, and wham, I’m hit with this. Now, what am I going to do?”

The experience affected Doreen to the core of her being. “I was not the same person who had come to Stoneybrook.” It was a defining moment. Interestingly, she says that the low point in her ministry was, “the choice I made to leave Stoneybrook.” Not her personal pain, but having to discontinue her care of her congregation was what hurt her most. This experience has spoken to her in many ways, and in a continuing way.

Doreen makes the following observations concerning the affect this experience has had on her understanding of self and ministry.

I had feelings of terrible sadness and great disappointment. I had feelings of guilt because I felt I had let down those who were forced to leave. I had feelings of anger which flowed in many directions; feelings of anger towards the denomination for failing to support, anger at Stoneybrook for the failure to care, and anger at myself for not speaking up sooner. I became less trusting of people and less trusting of the church.

These feelings brought Doreen face to face with her own vulnerability.

Doreen discovered through the experience that if she were to survive in ministry, she had to rely on herself. She had to know who she was and what she stood for. “I had to know who I was and where I wanted to be going in ministry.” Interestingly enough, she says she learned these things through the methods taught her by her grandmother, through quiet meditation, Bible reading, prayer, and study. For Doreen, the experience was one of suffering. She reflected back on the model of strengthening provided by her grandmother who also had suffered. Her grandmother had been a single mother in a time

where this was frowned upon, and she suffered a leg injury which left her in constant pain, but she never complained. Doreen relied on the model set by her grandmother to sustain herself.

In reflection, Doreen noted how this learning about the breaking of trust was at the same time, an enlarging of her awareness and a strengthening of her ability. She says, with respect to human perfidiousness, “I faced it in myself and I faced it in other people. I can see in myself a much improved ability to handle difficult situations because of that experience.” It was a harsh and unforgiving learning. It threw Doreen back on herself, where she had to draw on her own resources and renew her trust in herself. For her, it was a matter of endurance, but the endurance issued in a strong, personal determination. This, for Doreen, was the belief that, “I could go forward despite what I had seen.” It was a gritty determination of faith, that “This couldn’t be all, and that somehow God was in this mix.” Doreen says that it was this determination of faith which made her stronger. It strengthened her with a power she feels still, eight years later.

2. Ministry: Beyond the Ideal

The experience at Stoneybrook affected Doreen’s model of faith and the faith community, developed in her early years. “I was growing up in this wonderful environment with wonderful leadership and people who seemed to be so generous and kind all the way through. I was too idealistic.”

For Doreen, the faith was associated with the strength of caring relationships. She had also developed a fundamental model of ministry based on a “relational” concept of

faith, in part, as a balance to her father's expression of ministry. With time, her father had become increasingly cynical about people and communicated less about the loving themes in Christian faith. "Ministry," Doreen says, "is touching people not just giving them something out of your wisdom."

Doreen committed herself to a different style.

I wanted my ministry to be one that gets close to people. They need to know I care about them and that I want to listen to what they have to say. In listening, I can give something back because I have listened. I like the word 'bridge.' I wanted to be a bridge or to help the person to make that bridge between themselves and God.

The Stoneybrook experience acted as a shock to Doreen's original model of ministry, built upon an emphasis on the caring relationship and "bridge-building."

"For me, ministry is a giving of the Spirit. I want to be open to the experience of the Spirit, in order, hopefully, to become a bridge for others to experience the power of the Spirit."

It was the bridge-building model which provided Doreen with a learned response to the crisis of Stoneybrook, the response to leave. "It was a choice I made to leave. Because I loved the church so much, I did not want to hurt it and the people. I couldn't hurt that Church and cause a split. Leaving was a low point. It was hard to go."

The experience at Stoneybrook was revealing to Doreen. She talks about how it took the "rose-coloured glasses" off ministry. She became realistic about herself, people and the Church. "It was at Stoneybrook that I first experienced what I really called prejudice and hatred toward a group of people." But out of this experience and growing awareness of the darker side of people, including Christians, Doreen "learned to be very

sure of what I believed before speaking. I learned that people can be irrational and unreasonable when they're afraid. I learned that education doesn't necessarily make people more open." On the other side, Doreen,

began to trust myself more, to trust that after I had prayed and thought about something for a while, I could make good decisions and hold my own. All of this has led me to try to see people as they really are and to try to get to know more about them. In doing so, I can better understand what makes them act and think the way they do.

The experience did not destroy Doreen's view of ministry, but grounded it on a more realistic perspective about the motivations, needs and fears of persons. Interestingly enough, she can begin to see connections with her father's experience of ministry, a view of Christians which does not hide from the darker side of humanity, yet at the same time encouraging transformation. Ministry is still a "giving," a relational caring involvement with persons, but now, those persons are no longer the primary source of confirmation and fulfillment. Ministry is no longer the sole source of personal fulfillment. For Doreen, ministry became normalized. It became one of several sources of fulfillment. There is a turning to the family for deeper fulfillment. Doreen reported that interestingly, this learning heralded a revaluing of her mother's lifestyle, the homemaker, as she herself, renewed her commitment to her family, the sources of loving support and hope.

In conclusion, "I think I'm a better minister for having gone through the experience. I've developed a sense of humour about people and issues, and myself as well. I have less tolerance for hostility and foolishness in the church."

Doreen, through this experience, explored and renewed her own inner strength, and at the same time, in her strength and determination, experienced a renewed sense of

her own leadership and power in ministry.

3. Ministry: a Supported and Shared Vocation

Doreen learned the importance of a supported ministry through her experience in Stoneybrook. A supported ministry is also a concept that builds on her ‘relational’ understanding of ministry.

The first issue of the importance of support in ministry was the role her marriage played in her life choice. Doreen’s husband provided a high level of emotional support to Doreen as she made her decision to enter ministry and as a daily support throughout her ministry. Because of this support she was able to balance family responsibilities with full cognizance of the variability of her pastoral duties.

Throughout the crisis at Stoneybrook, Doreen felt both isolated and betrayed. She notes, “Other than my husband, it seemed no one was there for me when I needed it.” She experienced disillusionment. Doreen relates this to Jesus’ experience of his disciples not understanding His road to the cross. They experienced disillusionment with Him, but He loved them nevertheless. “Despite my own disillusionment, I was still determined to maintain a loving attitude no matter what happened.” This isolation moved Doreen to embrace more directly, a “supported” concept of ministry.

Ministers tend to be lone rangers, and you can’t do ministry as a lone ranger. I don’t think I could have done ministry without knowing that there was someone there who strongly loved me and was helping to keep for me an environment of love. Jesus very much needed the disciples. He needed that support. You can’t do ministry without somewhere having a strong support.

When she was going through the experience in Stoneybrook, she received needed support

from her husband. She also received caring support from a colleague in chaplaincy. “I cried on her shoulder.” Lastly, it was the support of the Bible Study group at Stoneybrook which helped carry her through her darkest moments in that church. This group became more than a study group, it was a deep caring, source of Christian friendship which remained a source of support for many years. Ministry, Doreen has learned, must be a supported vocation. For her it cannot be done in isolated independence.

This understanding of a supported ministry includes Doreen’s belief that ministry must be a shared activity. “I cannot do the healing always myself. I have to rely on the assistance of others.” With the complexity of need in congregations and with the recognition of her own needs for personal strengthening, Doreen came to believe strongly in a supported ministry where others are partners in the vocation and where Doreen could focus more on the duties of pastoral care. A supported ministry is the ministry which has allowed Doreen to remove herself from the centre where she grew tired of the “constant drain,” and to look “for wisdom in places where I never used to look; in older people, in children, in friendship and family, in myself, and in simply being.” For Doreen this supported ministry is a ministry which balances, distributes and de-centres the role, so that there is time and energy for the real mission of caring and love.

4. Ministry : A Test of Integrity and Love

Doreen experienced Stoneybrook as a test of integrity. With respect to the ordination issue, she says she tried to “speak the party line” because that was what was

expected. In that was a certain protection.

That took its toll on me, and eventually forced me to realize that I had to come to grips with what I actually believed. I became much more intentional about studying and reading all I could on the issue, turning to the Bible for direction. After several months, I felt confident enough in my own beliefs to speak for myself. I began to try to listen more intently to each side's concerns and to let people know that I could accept ordination for openly gay persons. It meant I had to face the wrath of many fearful and prejudiced people, but it also meant I was at least speaking my own truth.

This tragic experience in this church was an occasion of Doreen's learning to speak her own truth.

The second major difficulty for Doreen at Stoneybrook was her experience with the newly appointed senior minister at Stoneybrook where she learned about both the cost of care and the cost of integrity. In the end, she felt she could not allow the conflict between herself and the other minister to be the cause for splitting the church. The experience itself was devastating for her: "I felt crushed under the weight of falsehood, I felt crushed under the weight of people who betrayed me." But she felt to carry this issue further, "was not going to accomplish anything. It would hurt the church, and the last thing I wanted to do was hurt this church."

From the experience, Doreen reflected on her learning about "being faithful to what you have always believed, being faithful to yourself, and learning the knowledge that suffering will not let you down. You will endure." These two experiences at Stoneybrook, for Doreen, were sources for the development of personal strength, for renewed recognition in what she believed and where she stood, and the meaning and cost of both care and integrity.

The experience also raised the question for Doreen, of how to love.

I have discovered that people are not so easy to love. The question becomes, “How do you love people who are difficult to love, including yourself?” I am beginning to understand more about what Jesus wanted of those who followed Him. He didn’t want them to look at people and see only their faults and sins. He wanted his followers to love them despite who and what they were.

Experience in ministry has brought Doreen to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the human heart. She moved through her feelings of betrayal, to explore out of her own experience, a core admonition of the Christian faith, to love the unlovable. A “rose-coloured” dream gave way to a dark, sobering reality where the deeper challenge of faith was met. “My faith has been stretched and challenged in many ways, but it is still strong and trusting.”

5. Ministry: the Recognition of Complexity and Diversity

In the last few years, Doreen has focussed ministry on church-in-transition. She works with a changing congregation ministering to a changing urban environment. She reports that her greatest concern in ministry now is, “How do I help?” She immediately stops to reassess that the “I” should be “we.” With the tremendous diversity within congregations today, it cannot be assumed that one voice, namely the pastor’s voice, can reach every individual. Some are white, some black, some gay, some lesbian, some single parents, some are on the street, some are poor, some well-off. “How,” Doreen asks, “how do we draw (connect with) each other? What is preaching in the midst of this diversity?”

Doreen uses an example to illustrate how this diversity can lead to other issues

which require careful consideration. A lesbian member of a congregation looks to the female pastor for support and affirmation but the support which is requested strays over into an expression of the communicant's needs for affection. In this complexity, fine issues of boundaries are raised, as well as issues of the particular quality and sensitivity of care. What one might like to offer, in terms of care, may well depend quite specifically, on how it is received and interpreted. In a diverse congregational community, these sensitivities multiply and sometimes require unique responses.

These responses may also require a broader range of resources than those the pastor possesses. It is not that pastoral care has been oblivious to these complexities. Rather, Doreen believes, the diversity and the speed of change in the complexion of congregations has required, more than ever, a high level of cultural awareness.

This complexity, as Doreen understands it, has required a broadening of the concept of family. Not only does this apply to the variety of committed relationships within congregations, but it also applies to congregations themselves. Says Doreen, "Families are not what they used to be. I am very careful about using the word 'family'. I use the word 'community' more often than 'family'." The church described as a complex and diverse community is a more embracing designation.

Doreen notes further that this ministry in complexity and diversity also affects the act of preaching. "Story," she believes, is a more direct and culturally attuned communication. Preaching can benefit from a return to narrative, as a form which "touches the heart" more directly than other traditional styles. Story begins with the actual experience of persons, allowing for true contact with individuals, based on the

concreteness of their own experience. She believes that preaching, to be effective, must address the condition of the hearer. If the condition of the hearer is misunderstood, preaching will fail. More than ever, the pastor must preach out of the specifics, particularities and diversities of each personal circumstance. Knowledge and awareness of each member of the congregation must be the starting point for the act of proclamation.

6. Ministry: A Lifelong Integration

In conclusion we comment upon the lifelong influences and themes which affected Doreen in her ministry. Already mentioned, has been the conflicted impact of her father's style of ministry. At the mature end of her ministry Doreen too faced issues of disillusionment, anger, and the loss of ideals. These experiences challenged her beliefs about ministry, focussing on care of persons, giving of Spirit, and building of bridges. This model was a lifelong inspiration and commitment towards an understanding of Christian ministry. This life conversation around the nature of ministry was at the centre of her experience at Stoneybrook. One of the spiritual learnings which resulted was not really an integration of her father's model of ministry and her own, but a renewed appreciation of his struggle. Doreen's own model of ministry remained a primary commitment on her part. Her experiences in ministry presented a growth and development of that model, a maturing and deepening of the commitment, through a wisdom born of pain and personal uprooting.

Through her experience, Doreen made a rediscovery of the strengths of her mother's homemaking role or calling. On the other side of Stoneybrook, Doreen has

sought solace and strength from more primary sources of fulfillment, through commitment to those who care deeply for her, her husband and her family. These commitments can be demeaned in a driven society, but for Doreen they are now central wells of being.

In terms of lifelong learning too, it was her grandmother who taught her the kind of spirituality which faced suffering, a spirituality which held Doreen in good stead during her darkest hours.

Lastly, Doreen experienced the tested learning, of the highest values and ideals she embraced early in her upbringing and her socialization within the church community. The values of honesty, integrity, and standing for ethical behaviour; these, she learned through her primary experience in the Church, and these are the ideals she fought for, at great personal cost, through her pastoral experience. These were values and ideals she never abandoned, though they contributed to the thread of suffering throughout her vocational life.

2. Rufus

Ministry: A Journey Beyond Anger

Rufus is in his early 40's, has been ordained for approximately seventeen years, is married and the father of two children.

A. PROFILE

1. Early Life Experience

Rufus was born in Atlantic Canada, the second of four children, the first two

about seven years ahead of the third and fourth. The family lived in a rural, religiously traditional community.

A particular recollection is of the family struggling financially when his father lost his job. Rufus was eight or nine years of age. This was a significantly anxious time he recollects, to having made him sensitive to feelings of insecurity and anxiety in homelife. Rufus recalls once at a later date, when his father started out for work, but returned home because of storm conditions, he was terrified that this meant a further period of unemployment and fear. Indeed his father did find a good job and times improved for all concerned, but not without having left a certain legacy.

One of his earliest recollections of significance was the death of his grandmother when he was about fifteen years of age. She lived in the house with the family, but Rufus remembers how her presence seemed to impose stress in the home. Space was at a premium, and the particular needs of members of the family seemed to counter one another. He remembers responding to the situation in anger, "Why don't you go home?" He felt guilty over this outburst when she died.

The death of his grandmother was important for another reason. Rufus and his brother were feeling distraught with grief, guilt and even remorse. She was an Anglican, and when the Anglican priest arrived, he spoke to the younger boy and offered comfort in his words, "She is in heaven at peace with God." These words comforted both Rufus and his young brother in a way that was, for Rufus, almost miraculous.

Now whether that was true or not, who knows, but, what I knew as a sixteen year old, was that those were the words that my brother and I needed to hear. They were the words of life. That Anglican priest helped me and everyone else with

those healing words.

Rufus felt the power of these words, and “resolved then and there, that (ministry) was what I wanted to do with my life.” It was a kind of epiphany for him, “a burst of light,” an image of what life was about and the role he could play in it. It was a kind of conversion, based on the power of the words, which were at the same time, a seminal vocational call. “Everything springs from that,” says Rufus.

This experience occurred in the context of his family’s particular orientation to faith and the church. While a nominal church member, his father, nevertheless, was involved in church activities. What Rufus remembers primarily, however, is his father’s sense of anger, an anger which coloured his orientation to the Christian faith. It was a faith in an angry God, a God who was the creator of heaven, but also much more vividly, the creator of hell, the place reserved for those who were bad. Rufus remembers being frightened by the idea, a notion which has in some ways, continued to haunt his consciousness. Even when his father was dying, many years later, Rufus confirmed again, while in reflective conversation with his father, that his father lived with an angry God, a God of vengeance. It was a real and profound influence.

Rufus expressed a vivid consciousness of the type of small community in which he was raised. Everyone, no matter what other role or function they might assume in the community, seemed to be part of one church. Church was a dominating influence, both personally and communally, and Rufus seemed to develop a fear of that influence. He even muses that one underlying motivation he may have had to enter ministry, was to break that domination. He felt his father, in losing his job, was somehow a victim of

dominating forces in the community. To this day Rufus is not comfortable with the power structures of the institutionalized church.

Rufus also remembers as a youth, the feeling he had that the minister of the church was a sort of non-person, a person whom everyone kept at arms length, who was used for appropriate functions and appointed activities.

“So we have this object, alive, but none-the-less, an object of community speculation, scrutiny and appraisal, ultimately disposable, who in my consciousness was merely a sheep dog in this nebulous terrain called church.”

Rufus too felt unvalued, or a sort of non-person, defined by the family cluster (“Oh, you’re a Davison.”), belittled by a belittling community, and demeaned as a local in the midst of an immigrant cosmopolitan community (the community was made up of other nationalities), a feeling of being indistinguishable from the background. This background was responsible for ongoing issues of identity and purpose in Rufus’ life.

Rufus describes how as a young school child, at a Halloween party in the darkness of a room, he fell and broke his tooth. It remained broken for many years as there was no remedial care. Somehow the broken tooth symbolized his feeling of self. It became a kind of life metaphor for Rufus, who experienced a certain oppressiveness in this early community life. Rufus eventually found education to be the potential “ticket out of town,” the way to escape this subtle but real oppression. He says this experience proved a motivating factor throughout his life.

2. Young Adult Life Experience

Rufus' sense of his move towards the vocation of ministry continued even at his young age. Once having decided this was his calling, he pursued the given route, going at it in the same way that others might look in Eaton's catalogues, where all things seemed to be attainable. That cleared up, he entered university and pursued his studies. While overtly pursuing the correct route to ordination, Rufus, inside, was unclear, unsure, indeed at the conclusion of his university studies, "more befuddled than ever." He went to an official in the church who offered a five point charge for one year as a possible route to clear things up. But at that end of that one year, things were no clearer. Indeed, this first charge was Rufus' first exposure in a pastoral role, to ongoing conflict and bitterness in the congregation.

Rufus describes two occasions of significance during his appointment to student charges. The first was his meeting of a man who completely controlled everything in the church. He was "like a tyrant, an angry old man, the boss, the caretaker of the church." This man fit every conception from his childhood of the attributes of God. Rufus felt paralyzed by this man. He feared him, and even felt a kind of escape once he entered theological school. Years later, when the man died, the family called on several pastors for burial services. No one but Rufus accepted: "I remember going to the funeral home and saying to the family, 'Mr. so-and-so taught me an awful lot about ministry' and he did. He taught me a lot about myself. He taught me not to be afraid so much."

A second occasion was his encounter with a supervisor, out West. The dictates of Rufus' religious and cultural background frowned upon the use of alcohol.

I came out of a strict angry God kind of background where people went into the closet and drank on Christmas Eve. They didn't sort of sit down and drink together. They didn't acknowledge that they drank, but they drank privately. This supervisor invited myself and my wife to go to a Sunday afternoon picnic in the park. We went to this little barbecue and we made hamburgers and stuff, and he brought his beer with him. I remember being shocked at my supervisor, a minister who was also in the process of being divorced from his wife. This just threw me. I thought, wow, this guy wouldn't survive back home. It was bad enough that we were having a barbecue on a Sunday, but this guy is drinking beer and he was offering beer to me, and what's worse, here I am drinking it with him, you know. But, he's my supervisor, so I have to do what's required.

Rufus asks him, why is he in the ministry? The reply, "I am in the ministry for the sheer fun of it." Rufus was amazed. This response was also given in the context of the assessment the supervisor offered Rufus: "I've met two students from your college now, and they're both very, very angry." So, says Rufus, "He named my anger right at that point." The supervisor's response exposed in a different light, Rufus' primary issue.

Rufus entered theological school and was married. His marks significantly improved. But, for Rufus, theological school was a continuation of his struggle to understand faith and ministry, and his place in it. He reports,

All through those years, carrying a heavy load of doubts and questions, "My God, I must be crazy to be doing this, because it is so senseless," with my presumption that I would go out into the world and speak healing words, that I was going out to an appreciative gathering, and that the world is waiting. Well, I found that the world is not only not waiting, the world doesn't care, and the world will spit in your eye, if you know what I mean.

These doubts and questions continued in Rufus' ongoing reflection about himself in ministry, doubts which were part of the picture for him, from the beginning.

Rufus makes a startling confession about the role of his doubts and disillusionment in ministry.

I went with my assumption that I wanted to do something that really makes a difference, really helps people. The difference in what I have found over the past eighteen years is that I doubt how much difference I have made in other people's lives. The biggest change in anyone's life has been in me, in my journey.

This statement is not so much an issue of self-deprecation, though that too; rather it is a strong personal statement of Rufus' reflection on his assumptions about ministry and his own struggle to rework these in a new way.

In reflection on his years in theological study, Rufus pointed to one incident which was symbolic to him of the nature of ministry. The custodian/landlord (because Rufus paid rent to him) was having difficulty getting workers to repair bricks and mortar high up on a swinging scaffold. Said the custodian, "It is one thing to get a man to go up on a rope scaffold. It is quite another thing to get him to do anything while he's up there." This was a "bell ringing" comment for Rufus. Ministry is not an ivory tower activity; it is grounded in the life and concrete experience of people. It also illustrated for Rufus a fundamental belief of his, that ministry is not about giving a prescribed "truth" to others, but rather it is a validating of their own truth. As he inimitably puts it, "Since then, I have tried to squeeze one profound truth out of each person."

3. Experience in Ministry

Ironically, one of the most miraculous experiences for Rufus took place during the most difficult year of his life, the birth of his first child. The difficulty that year was due to problems in his first charge after ordination. This was a church composed of factions and beset with conflict. The community surrounding the church was itself, fractious, with ethnic groupings; First Nations People, Western Europeans, Canadians and Americans.

The fractiousness was reflected in the church: “It was just conflict and fighting non-stop, all the time.” The church was made up of three congregations with three staff, two ministers and a social worker. When the denomination decided to reduce the number of paid positions to two, each staff member and each congregation were set against one another. Rufus was caught in the middle.

I was in the middle of all this turmoil. It was very, very stressful. I got to the point, that I didn't want . . . I thought, if this is what ministry is, then I have had a serious misreading of God's calling. If this is what it is, I have made a horrible mistake.

The business of the church ground to a halt as church members, committees, and boards undermined each other and their work. Rufus reported, “It became all my fault because I had the training, but I couldn't make it work. But, nobody in the walls of the world could have prepared me for that.” The crisis began to affect Rufus very personally. As the congregation polarized, “I just became very frightened.” He found no respite. His home was bombarded with angry phone calls which were duplicated during the day in the church office. He became run down, and on urging from a church member, admitted himself to hospital for rest. He stayed for a week and returned to work. On the first day back, the chairperson of the board accused him of having a nervous breakdown and announced, “You are no longer fit to be our minister or anyone else's.” In the midst of all this, Rufus' child is born, a “flower” in a the midst of a battlefield, an event Rufus says he still draws strength from today.

The experience in the church had been so devastating, Rufus reports that prior to going to the hospital he found himself contemplating suicide.

What caused me to go to the hospital in the first place to ask for help, was that one morning, I went to the bathroom, that awful bathroom. I sat on the edge of the bathtub, and I thought, there is no way out of this mess.

He knew he needed help and support, non-judgmental support, from outside the church.

The experience was a death for Rufus, “the death of what I thought ministry was, or what I thought my place was in it.”

During one of the more fractious meetings in the church, there were present an opposing staff member and others who were in conflict with one another. One of the leaders in the church called Rufus a liar at which point Rufus’ wife, who at the time was pregnant, jumped up, left the meeting, and went home. The meeting was effectively over. A quiet woman who had been at the meeting left the church and came to Rufus’ house where:

She wept with us. Some went home and some stayed. I don’t know where they went, but this one person came to our home. She was a person who talked about Jesus being with her in her car, and with her all the time. She was a fundamentalist kind of person, but when the chips were down, she came and put her arms around us and wept with us. She said, “You know, I don’t know why this is happening.” And that was a moment of grace right there. I think that the angry God died there.

Over the years Rufus has struggled with the meaning of ministry and his place in it. His experience in his first charge was a kind of “lightning bolt,” affecting his thoughts on this issue throughout his life. The following comment shows the struggle he has had in understanding both himself in ministry and those with whom he ministers.

Over the years, I have had to keep re-focussing my thoughts about what ministry is and who I am in it. I have come to think that ministry, as I see it, is about people who have more past than they have future. I have had to readjust my erroneous assumption that because these people love God, they also love each other. Not so.

Early in Rufus' career, he decided, guided partly by a dream, to commit himself to working in the pastorate. As the dream and his experience unraveled, he has spent eleven years in ministry in one province and eight in another. For Rufus, the transition between the provinces also chronicled the transition from an angry component in faith, to a compassionate one.

For eleven years, an angry people willingly received a message from an angry person about an angry God. That was chapter one. Chapter two, we moved here, and the fit was different. The angry God no longer fit, the angry God didn't work anymore, or lost its power. And it seems, as I moved towards the experience of, and the preaching of, a compassionate God, I myself became more compassionate.

This is also a story of Rufus in the context of his communities, and the power of the moulding influences, or one might say, the workings of his growth in understanding about God, and the role of culture in that process. This is part of the story of Rufus in ministry, but also, part of Rufus' life-long story.

Rufus has been in his last charge for eight years.

When I first came here, somebody asked me how long I would stay. We're in our eighth year, which is the longest we've been anywhere. But someone asked, "How long do you think you will stay in this church because it's a struggling church and you're still young and you'll have an opportunity to go on to wealthier churches and bigger churches and so on?" And I remember saying, "This is my last church." And they say, "What do you mean your last church?" When I think about what I said now, maybe I said that because this is really the first church that I have ever found the kind of humanity that I'm looking for.

Ministry for Rufus has been:

a search for that sense of place where I have said things, and whether they hear it, or like it, or agree with it, or not, they've been gracious and allowed me to be me. It is the first time, it is the only time, that I have found in ministry, so far, that I can be who I am, and not have had to try and be someone else.

Rufus has described the significance of his Doctor of Ministry studies, as that

reflective experience which helped resolve the conflict about remaining in, or leaving ministry. What is ministry for Rufus? He described a cartoon proffered by a colleague taking the same program of study.

He told a story of a cartoon which showed a cat that was relaxing by the fire in an easy chair. Over the mantle was a human hand mounted on a plaque like you would mount the antlers of a deer. Someone asks the cat, "What's the significance of this hand?" And the cat says, "The hand, that's the hand that used to feed me. I've bit it off and I've had it mounted."

This cartoon carries weight for Rufus. Ministry for him, cannot be a profession secured by dependence on the institution, dependence on the cultural milieu, or dependence on a secure ideology. It must be a place of choice, a place of freedom. Ministry is not a controlling vocation, it also is "but another step in my life journey." Reflecting further, Rufus says,

One assumption is, that in the scheme of things, ministry is the top rung on the ladder toward God or whatever. One doesn't step off the rung called ministry and step onto anything higher. The presupposition was that in your journeying through life, once you tumbled into ministry or walked into it or crawled into it, or however you got into it, that was the penultimate state.

The rejection of this picture is again part of Rufus' journey to understand ministry in a non-dominant, non-powerful, non-haloed, and non-controlling structure of meaning. The "feeding" image is also reflected in a comment Rufus makes about preaching the angry God in his earliest pastoral charges. "I began in an angry situation. I preached an angry God to an angry congregation. And they were happy because that was the kind of God who fed them."

Rufus has felt a much better fit in his current charge, and coupled with his

traditional restlessness, not quite sure if he should consider a move or not. But there is here, a fundamental feeling of mutual acceptance, a joy and a satisfaction.

I am a minister today for the sheer joy of it; not a joy in the charismatic renewal sense of joy, but just in a sheer sense of satisfaction that I get. I get that satisfaction from the people who faithfully come out and keep this church going. It makes no sense to have a building of this size, two buildings of this size, and just a handful of people who are determined to carry on. It makes no sense. The joy comes from the humanity of these forty, fifty or sixty people, who appreciate me for who I am and whom I appreciate for who they are.

Rufus' journey has reached a certain fulfillment at this stage.

It took me twelve or thirteen years to get to this place, where I found these people. If I were to stand up on the podium of life, and speak to people who are preparing for ministry today, I guess, I would have to say, "Hang in there! We don't find the people who love us necessarily the first time, but there is a place, there is a niche, where there are people who will love us and we will love them. That's what the church is.

Fundamentally, Rufus moved through his anger and Angry God, to an opposing belief, a belief which now, he enjoys, feels and expresses.

But, do you hear the other thing I am saying? That in my conception of what ministry is all about, I thought it was all about God. If only I could plunge into the Scriptures in the right way, and with the right help, I could see more of God and teach me more about God. But in the twenty years since I started, what I have learned about God has been from people, not from what I have seen in the books. I think people are good, deep down. I think about this idea of original sin you know, and I remember again, going back to my first charge, a family having a new baby and the baby being tired, or hungry, or wet, or cold or something and screeching. The baby would become impossible even to hang onto, maybe because it was fussy. Maybe the baby was teething. And, the grandmother saying, "It's true enough what the Bible says, the devil is right in that little child. You can see it." Well, you can see the poor little child, so rangy right? But, I think that deep down, what I found of people, is that for the most part, overwhelmingly, people are good. That was a surprise to me.

For Rufus, ministry has been living with the contradictions of life in the church, about who these people are, and what their motivations are. Earlier on, the model of

ministry was like an old teaching model,

that the minister pours out the juice and the people receive it. I expected people to be waiting to receive. What I found was people were simply living out their lives in their own way. They weren't particularly aware of my entry on the scene, indeed, my presence seemed to make no difference whatsoever.

His assumptions about ministry were forever being undermined.

Well, the assumption that because we're a church, people like or love each other, or because my understanding of my ministry is to bear witness to Christ in a loving and compassionate way, that you're in the congregation for the same motive was simply an unfounded assumption of mine. In fact, you might be there to sell life insurance, or for cosmetics selling, or girlfriends or boyfriends.

But Rufus remains in ministry because "There is such a thing as a person with genuine faith."

Rufus understands the motivations of church people because he has experienced acceptance within himself, leading him to an acceptance of others. Ministry for Rufus, is about his own journey, not making assumptions about others.

I have abandoned my Old Testament God, and I have been graced with a compassionate God. This is God who not only is not angry, but who forgives and who puts up with all kinds of inconsistencies in my behaviour. God has accepted, loved me. And so, the change that has happened to me is that I can now be, compassionate.

This acceptance is reflected in a Doctor of Ministry project of Rufus', which was a survey of church drop-outs. He organized a supper and invited about twenty individuals who had dropped by the way side. They came and discussed what had happened.

There were many reasons given for their waywardness. Busyness was the most common, and such excuses as, "My house is burning down;" "I'm already to come out the door but you know, the roof blew off the house and I didn't get there." or whatever. Shift work was a big one. The church basically says, now,

take it or leave it. We offer one meal on this menu every Sunday, and your choice is take it or leave it. Another said, "I used to come and used to be in the choir and I used to sit and listen to what you had to say." "But," he said, "after awhile, I have to tell you Reverend, after a while, it just became a waste of my time to come. You weren't saying anything that was captivating or intriguing or that would cause me to get up on Sunday morning after driving all day and twelve hours on Saturday. I was tired. I would just have to say it was a waste of time." That was very hard for me to hear, because I put my whole self into this. I took the words of Scripture, and I filtered them through my experience in this congregation, and I came up with something from our visits during the week. I filtered it through like a Brita Water Filter, and I came up with this presentation, and I gave it with all that I had, and I thought God is in this somehow. This man was telling me it was a waste of my time. That was very hard for me to hear. Over the years, you come to the conclusion that nothing that I can say or do is worth their pulling on their boots to come to church.

This latter comment from Rufus, reflects in some way, his belief that his journey in ministry has had more to do with its revolutionary impact on himself, rather than its perceived impact on churchgoers.

Rufus' love/hate relationship with the church as an institution has issued in a certain iconoclasm about the accretions of institutional church life. The church is primarily about persons. Many of the issues in ministry for Rufus, have been over the institutional structures of the church.

I thought that it (ministry), was about bringing about change within relationships, and change within people, yes change within me, and change within others. But I have found, that rather than bringing about change, churches are dedicated and committed to keeping everything as they are. Buildings, property, whatever; we are committed to our last breath, to keep it the way it is. Yet, I see Jesus as a person who brings new life, who overturns the tables, and who makes all things new.

Lastly, Rufus' choices at this stage in his ministry reflect his journey, his choices, his values, and his vision. He has had offers to go to larger, more prestigious congregations. His sensitivity to his own freedom, the honouring of his own authenticity,

and the authenticity of his own understanding of the Christian message - these remain priorities. Basically,

I am not going to go to a congregation and mimic the word you want to hear. I want to keep open. When I come (to a new congregation), and I drink in for a year, the ambiance and the dynamic here, I want to be able to say, "This is where I think God is, in this mix, and this is where I think that we need to be headed." The resistance I sensed in these charges (who offered appointments to him) is that the people wanted to be in control of who they brought in, and what this person said. They wanted to keep everything the same. I don't understand the Gospel about keeping everything the same.

Rufus' own sense of human freedom is tied closely to the freedom of the Gospel, to bring about, through that freedom, transformation.

B. LEARNING

1. Ministry: The Death of An Angry God

Rufus describes for us, the central tension of his ministry, as one in which he battled with the angry God worshiped in his family, and expressed primarily through his father's feelings. But this was also a God taught through church tradition and reinforced through the culture of his community. It was the source, he believes, of an anger instilled in him, built upon fear and a faith more judgmental than forgiving. It produced a fear which tended to support in Rufus, an ambivalence about the vocation of ministry, and which affected his early experiences in pastoral work. It precipitated Rufus' internal crisis in his first charge. It raised the existential question, what to do when fear and anger threaten one's very existence? Rufus made his choice. He took hold of life and grace.

The experiences of grace were mediated through the birth of his first child and by

the women who comforted him and his family after a particularly painful church meeting.

The birth came at the same time as the death of my idealism. I mean, I refer to Rose Bay as my crucifixion. But really, I didn't die. What died was my naive assumption that this is what ministry was about. I had believed I had the goods, and with the right number of courses, I could pour them out, and they would be gratefully received. I think that the birth was powerful because it came at the same time as the death of everything that I had worked for. I thought, "Gosh, this is the end of me. What if I am not fit to be anyone's minister? And, where am I now?"

There was the woman who comforted Rufus and his wife after the difficult meeting in his first charge.

She came, and put her arms around us and wept with us. She said, "You know, I don't know why this is happening." And that was a moment of grace right there. I think that the angry God died there. Right there, the scales tipped away from God, I think, and toward people. Because up until that point, we had all been preoccupied with the evil in others. What I work at now in my ministry is to see the presence of God in others, the good in others, because everybody knows how to find the evil in others. It's easy enough to demonize our neighbours, but it requires a little more concentration to look for the good in somebody with whom you fundamentally disagree.

Rufus was open to the God of compassion from the moment the Anglican minister spoke healing words to him and his brother, upon the death of his grandmother, "She is in heaven." For Rufus these were truly words of life, and these were the words he sought to affirm throughout his ministry.

As noted earlier, Rufus' ministry encompassed a great divide: the earlier years where ministry occurred within a culture which understood, and responded to, "an angry God," and later years where ministry was understood in the context of a "compassionate God." These distinctions were true characterizations of his journey and experience. It was his journey which became the focus of his learning in ministry. "Over the years, I

have abandoned my angry God, and I have been graced with a compassionate (God who) not only is not angry, but who forgives, and who puts up with all kinds of inconsistencies in my behaviour.” In a sense, the angry God fed Rufus’ cultural definition, the requirements of his family and community. It was an image he had to exorcize, an act he associates with the cartoon about cutting off and mounting the “hand that used to feed me.” In summary, Rufus narrates:

I see that as the place where I started, when I began with the angry God. The positive change that’s happened to me in the years of my ministry has been the softening with me, or the softening of God within me. I have gone from a God who is a tyrant, to a God who understands, and who is beside me and within, and who accompanies me on my journey.

2. Ministry: Acceptance - an Ideal Deposed

“If somebody at the Podunct Divinity School could say to people, ‘You know, it ain’t what you think.’ This might be for the best.” For Rufus, ministry was a learning in acceptance, focusing firstly on himself, and then an appreciation of the motivations of people both inside and outside the church. It was a difficult learning. The world was not eagerly awaiting his presence and message. Neither was there a correlation between the love churchgoers professed towards their God, and the love, or lack of it, they professed towards each other, and for that matter, their minister. “I expected people to be waiting to receive the Word, my word, but they weren’t really so interested.”

Rufus speaks too about the way people expressed the best of intentions, especially at funerals. Family members expressed great resolve and commitment, but only in rare cases do persons follow through on their commitments sincerely expressed.

The motivations of people varied greatly. These befuddled Rufus. Well, why did people come to worship? For all sorts of weird and wonderful reasons. It was the same with the reasons they refrained from attendance. The result from his survey of church drop-outs led to his conclusion, "Nothing that I say or do is worth their pulling on their boots to come to church." But Rufus is learning through these experiences and musings, learning a perspective of letting go, focusing expectations elsewhere, and developing more strongly a self-acceptance which can be shared.

He describes a special relationship with an elderly lady in his congregation. The lady continually contributes to the church and bails out the congregation every time it is really needed.

She keeps the cheques coming. But, this same lady who will bail out this congregation every time, this one individual, when you visit her in her home, will say to you, "Do you really believe that we will live again after we die?" And I say, "Yes I really do." And she says, "I don't think so. When I go down in the ground, that's where I'm going to stay. Mr. James. I'm very much afraid that at our church, we're betting on a losing horse."

Says Rufus, "She is an enigma, but we have very good discussions."

Ministry is about acceptance. Much of this acceptance has to do with the death of expectations and assumptions. Ministry, for Rufus, has been a battle of assumptions and presumptions, and finding a way to prevent these from interfering with ministry. This is ministry with a sense of letting people be, of acceptance, and the preclusion of imposition.

Maybe a fruitful exercise might be to find out what all your assumptions are, write them down, journal them, put them on a flip chart, or draw them across the sky behind on an airplane. Find a means to identify assumptions, find them out, because they are often what we do not expect, and they get in the way of ministry.

Central to the process, or the learning with respect to the acceptance of people as they are, is Rufus' acceptance of self. He learned that while he could not necessarily make a difference to others, he could to himself. He learned that the journey of ministry, for him, was in reality, the journey of his self.

Well, the short version of my most positive experience, has been the growth within me. I thought the growth was going to be within you people, out there. But I found that you people are not always in the learning mode, or the growing mode. You people are what you are. I had to come to terms with "You is what you is," and I had to learn to accept. But the positive experience of ministry for me, is that it is life-giving.

His statement about self is also a statement about self-acceptance. "The impact that I have had on anyone else has been negligible, but the impact that the whole experience and the process has had on me has been revolutionary."

This brings us back to Rufus' discovery, during his student charge, and later repeated to a student Rufus was supervising.

The question came up, "Why are you in the ministry?" And I said then, as now, with all sincerity, "that I am a minister today for the sheer joy of it, not in a charismatic renewal sense of joy, but just in the sheer sense of satisfaction that I get." And what is the satisfaction? I get that satisfaction from the people who faithfully keep this church going, and who come out. The joy comes from the humanity of these forty, fifty or sixty people, who appreciate me for who I am and I appreciate them for who they are.

Ministry has become, for Rufus, a kind of celebration of acceptance, a celebration of who he is, and who they are. It is not any preconceived assumption about who the people are, or about their behaviour. Ministry is "experiencing the loving community, not making it or forcing it, but simply being, and celebrating that."

Part of the journey of ministry has been the search for acceptance. Rufus has

found that place, and he speaks about the journey to find it, a journey of his whole ministry, where “There are people who will love us, and we will love them. That’s what the church is.”

3. Ministry: A Journey Towards Authenticity

“Out of all this though, I am on a personal quest for authenticity.” The quest for authenticity is a spiritual journey for Rufus. It is a journey which starts with himself.

I am not interested in maintaining the services of the church. I am on a quest to find what it is that God is about in the world, and where that is leading me. And as I have said several times, this is about my becoming more human; that is to say, not more Godly, but more human. It’s about how I am being helped to accept more of my own humanity.

It is this authenticity which brings Rufus together with his parishioners.

I think that the people that are here, these twenty or so persons that I describe here, respond to authenticity, and they want it for themselves. We’re all looking for this together. We’re on the same frequency here. Authenticity is also the way for us to understand the responses of others. Many people are not responding to a call to authenticity. It is the same in the church. I am surrounded by people who make decisions affecting my life in my church, those as well, in the bureaucracy, who haven’t the foggiest idea of what it is to be on a journey towards authenticity, or transparency or towards becoming more human.

Inauthenticity was a very early experience for Rufus. He identified this as an existence defined by somebody else, or by a larger unit. He saw this in his own life in the small rural community where he felt enclosed in a definition set by the community. He was simply one of Nick and Sharon’s boys. He was simply a “local” amidst a more prominent and cosmopolitan immigrant population. This struggle affected Rufus’ sensitivities in ministry. It accounts somewhat, for his refusal to be defined by a role, or

by other's definition of a role, or himself in it. His earliest recollections of ministers in his life were men in "roles," non-persons, kept at a distance by the community, to perform certain functions and roles, but not to be fully part of the community.

Ministry is the encouragement to be one's authentic self. Rufus has refused offers to new appointments because he has discerned there, a desire to control his free response to a vision of Christian practice, and a preference for preserving the status quo.

They wanted to be in control of who they brought in, and what this person said. They were saying, "Will you come here and maintain what we have built up, and keep it going, and keep it the same, so that we can hold onto the power that we have now?"

This authenticity is the refusal on Rufus' part, to reduce ministry to a role.

A role to me, is a dead thing. Ministry is always a living relationship. It is dynamic, not static. What some churches want is a 'suit.' And a suit is measured down to the quarter of an inch. In fact, at 'St. Haberdashery's,' they have a staff of four ministers. Included in the salary, besides the housing and benefits, is a clothing allowance. It's blatant, "We're telling you who you are and what to wear. We are defining you."

Authentic ministry is about transformation, and for Rufus, that transformation is his transformation.

Ministry without a role for me, is that transformation, however slow, that takes place, when I become my fullest, as to who I can be, in response to the Gospel. I follow along that route of transformation within myself. Ministry too, is following that route towards transformation. It is a journey towards fuller humanity. Those who want to define that transformation outside the response to the Gospel, in some pre-packaged deal, are the trumpeters of inauthenticity. There, the message is control, rather than transformation. It is a renunciation of freedom.

These were the dynamics that were part of Rufus' history of the experience of conflict in the church. Where the battles for control were overt, for Rufus, his own freedom and the

sense of the authenticity of his calling, were quashed and smothered. He needed always, to leave behind the place and space which denied his freedom to be authentic in life and ministry.

For anyone to continue in ministry, for the long haul, unless you are masochistic or something, I think you have to come to terms with who you are, and learn to be up-front with others about this authenticity - "Look, if this is a suit-job . . ."

4. Ministry: The Focus-Human Relationship

Rufus started with an angry God. This God was the point of reference for all things. Everything, and everybody else, was suspect. Indeed, Rufus notes that his tradition seemed to him, to emphasize the depravity of human beings rather than the goodness of humanity. As he moved in his thinking and feeling about God and about humanity, he experienced more of the compassion and the humanity of God. Not that humanity substituted for God, but God was no longer above, but in the mix, of humanity.

The change that has taken place in me for the better over this past twenty years, is a learning that ministry is more about people than I thought it was, and less about God than I thought it was. I learned that it is in the people mix, in the mess of our humanity, that there are glimpses of God. What I have learned about God, has been from people. Throughout that learning, I have also learned that people, for the most part, overwhelmingly, are good, deep down.

Rufus would say, that it was the older model of ministry which led him to the edge of desperation in his first charge, and that is where the change began.

His emphasis here is reminiscent of his encounter with the caretaker at the theological school. The caretaker's words suggested, there cannot be any true reflection without a concrete manifestation. The focus is on human experience. Pastoral work is the work of validating human experience.

For Rufus, the belief that Christian faith is about persons, humanity, relationships, is a belief which spotlights the tension he feels, with the expressions of faith which are not personal, but which focus on structure, institution, and the past. These are dead. The personal faith is living, ever changing, and ever responding towards the future. Says Rufus, "Ministry is not about churches or institutions." He has little patience for the obstacles which to him, block the relationships of faith.

Two weeks ago, I came into church for Thanksgiving. The church had been decorated, so that the pulpit was practically buried in a wall of apples and pumpkins and stuff. I stood behind this wall, as they sat in the back seats, and I said, "I feel like I'm standing behind a wall between us here." And so I came out, and I looked back up at the pulpit, and said, "I don't want to stand behind a wall, I want to come closer to you." And I did that. I realized that it is like this refrigerator here. It is intended to keep food cold. But if it becomes some kind of a sacred object, so that what you can do with it is limited by its sacred nature, then it obscures what it was intended for in the first place. I think we have allowed too many 'sacred' things to stand in the way of our being authentic in ourselves, and with one another.

5. Ministry: Life-giving Freedom

The freedom to be who he is, and faith as a living, future oriented experience, have both been primary life motivations for Rufus. His need for freedom was part of the picture of his escape from the controlling images of life in his original rural community, where the primary perpetrator of control was the Church. He left the community to escape into freedom and "Throughout eighteen years of ministry, I have acted in a way to get away from a situation." He is very sensitive to this experience of control.

Church boards are sometimes, to me, structures of smoke and mirrors, legitimating the abuse of one person's will upon another. Fundamentally, I harbour a mistrust of group decisions, boards and committees. I approach my work from the vantage point of relationships, over and before rules. This too is

difficult and has cost me dearly, in that I have lost many who are not interested in relationships, and kept many who are not interested in rules.

This need for freedom, is freedom for a faith unadulterated by forces of control, whether these be personal, ecclesiastical or cultural. It is Rufus' journey to understand a ministry which is non-dominant, non-power oriented, non-controlling. Here the need for freedom merges, in his understanding of ministry, with his journey for authenticity. In this freedom is the secret to the church's life and vitality. The deadness of the church is a result of this non-freedom.

For Rufus, deadness in church life, was a very real memory about his early church experience.

The religion, the services and the sermons that I was exposed to as a child, if they had had something to do with fear, that would have been better than what they did have to do with. They were sterile. They were sterile discussions, abstract monologues on a stage. They were 'sound and fury, signifying nothing.' A man came out of a door on Sunday morning at eleven o'clock, stood on a platform and at the appointed hour and droned on. It seemed to evoke no purpose and no passion. I don't think that was the point of Jesus' life.

Rufus' sense of this image is one of deadness, but even more, of uselessness.

Rufus rebelled against it. "I rebel against that. It must have been life-draining for those men over the years, who did that sterile preaching." The contrast for Rufus was always in the life-giving words of that minister, spoken at his grandmother's funeral.

Translate Rufus' early experience, to the present moment. Here is a ministry which can endure no contortion strong enough to fill the pews on Sunday. It seems the world doesn't care, it may just as well "spit in your eye." Rufus' reflection is that the experience is made more difficult by the fact that the response of the community is not

hostility, but simply indifference.

Hostility says, you know, “What you’re saying is a crock and I don’t believe what you’re saying.” The Bible is a storytale. At least, we could debate these things. But, what we’re left with is indifference. When the church has so many families and only a fraction appear for services, I feel a kind of rejection. There seems nothing I can do to make it worth my friend putting on his boots and coming to church. It leads to a feeling of futility.

Not doubt, but emptiness, is the demon which plagues Rufus.

The discouragement Rufus feels, and the sense of indifference and the futility in this work, requires, he believes, a radical solution. The solution he believes, is not more of the same. The accretions of the church have prevented a prioritizing of the inner life of faith.

Well, the Christian world is impotent in itself. It has no wheels under itself strong enough just to keep itself going, let alone to go out and swallow up the world. I think for my understanding of it, in order for us to get at authentic relationships, to be put on a path of following Christ, to find that inner light inside of us, we have to make a statement. And the statement will be heretical because that is the way of Jesus, who was killed for this very thing. If you go back to the Old Testament, God says, “I don’t want a temple.” But the temple gets built anyway. It gets torn down two or three times. Is it the end of God? No, God is set free from the temple at the crucifixion, when the cloth is torn in two. Symbolically we don’t need a priest anymore. Christ is accessible to all.

It is this accessibility which Rufus feels is put in jeopardy. His iconoclasm is the strength of his feeling about how much in our time, culture and religion block our access to authenticity. Ministry for him, is that “authentic faith which has to do with the spark between people, and importance of the relationship. So much else is life denying.”

Rufus’ final reflection on the devastation of the first charge, is the reflection on what the little Swiss woman taught him, the one who comforted him and his wife. She proved, at the time when he needed it, “that there is such a thing as a person with faith.”

He says, that proved to him that this faith, that this ministry “can be life-giving.”

3. George

Ministry: from Abandonment to Belonging, an Integration

George has been ordained and in ministry for approximately twenty years. He is in his late fifties, is divorced and remarried, and has two adult children by his first marriage.

A. PROFILE

1. Early Life Experience

George was born during World War II, a middle child with a slightly older sister and a younger brother. His family moved often. His father was a minister and had two rural charges during George’s very early life. George remembers only a few things from this period, that his obstreperousness led to his being spanked for various behaviours, and he remembers the death of his puppy. But otherwise there was a general enjoyment of life.

When he was six years old, his parents felt a call to missions in the Orient. George recalls many details of the ensuing trip. He has vivid memories of London from the top of a double-decker bus, looking at the bombed out shells of buildings, and finding it very exciting. He remembers as well, the trip through the Red Sea, with the ship dead in the water, drifting on the thick oily brine of the tropics, waiting to be rescued.

George's first memories include his father falling quite ill and recovering. His parents attended language school during the first two years of their sojourn. He, himself, was put into a boarding school located approximately two days train ride from the place where his parents resided. He remained at the boarding school for twelve years. The area had been a summer residence for officers and their families located in the foothills of the mountains.

George recalls being left at the school, a memory of what he considers to be the most significant event of his early life. George describes the event,

When I was six years old my father took me to the school high up in the mountains. It was a bright March day. The glory of the mountains was all around us, the sweet smell of wood smoke filled the air, and red rhododendrons poked the hillside with flashes of brilliant fire. But I had no thought for those things. My father took me to the Boys' Residence for the lower school. When my father left, I followed him up the mountain path, away from the residence. He brought me back and gently explained that I must stay. I followed him again, and again, he explained that I must stay, this time leaving me in the care of one of the matrons. That evening, in the little boys' dorm, high up in the rafters, the matron said, "George was a very naughty boy today. He went out of bounds. What should we do with him?" This question was met with a chorus of, "Gate him! Gate him!" which she did. This meant, that I could not go to spend that weekend at the home of one of my father's friends, as had been previously arranged by my father. That single event has marked my life, as I am now more fully aware, more than I can ever say.

This, and the fact that his younger brother remained at home, led George to experience a sense of rejection, which he felt for years.

George has strong feelings and memories of his early church life at the boarding school. It was a "fairly conservative evangelical school," which taught straight forward doctrine and belief. Chapel services were compulsory, and every day began with a Scripture class where vast tracts of the Bible in the King James Version were read, and

where the life world of the Bible seemed particularly real, “since the world I lived in was populated with camels and donkeys, sadhus and small villages, with Bhils carrying swords and arrows.”

The feelings which this early church experience generated in George were ones of “inadequacy, invisibility and unworthiness.” Human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness were preached, taught and emphasized.

I spent long hours dwelling on my shortcomings and insufficiencies, my peccadilloes and my more grievous faults, if it is possible to sin grievously as a child. I thrilled in these early years to hymns of grace and forgiveness, commitment and adoration. Satan was a very real power, and I was never far from his grasp.

One religious event George recalls, was the visit to his boarding school of the famous preacher, Stanley Jones. The whole school attended the service.

At the end of his presentation, he made, as people make, an altar call to us. I have never forgotten this. No one came up, and I was embarrassed for the man, so I went up. I didn't want him to be a complete flop. It was done out of politeness, but it was something that stuck with me for a long time.

Another memory is of an elderly teacher stricken with polio. The whole school prayed for her. While hundreds of others were dying from polio, with the help of an iron lung built from plans in “Popular Mechanics,” the teacher recovered. The school considered this to be an act of God. George's response,

It occurred to me then, and the point still seems absolutely compelling to me, that this revealed more about the harbouring of a narrow conception of God, than about the power of prayer. A God who comes to the aid of one person, because she was prayed for, and not to the aid of others, because no prayers were offered on their behalf, seemed to me, an inadequate God.

George's questioning about these issues, even at his young age, was not, he recalls, well

received. There is the sense here, of George's uncomfortableness, and of his searching for understanding.

While the family did return once, on furlough to North America, this was primarily for study purposes. It was not till the end of his secondary schooling, that George returned home to live in Canada. It did not seem like a homecoming.

That was perhaps the most disturbing kind of experience I have ever had. It was sheer culture shock. To move from a world that was familiar to me, to a world that was completely foreign was very, very difficult. I did not know the term "culture shock," at the time, but the disorientation I went through, and which continued for several years, was clearly a result of being thrown into an unfamiliar world. I still find Canada strange. The thought of being buried in Canada has the power to raise my anxiety level considerably.

The return to Canada strengthened in George, the sense of not belonging. During his first year in Canada, while completing high school, all he could think about was returning to the Orient. His own sense of uprootedness, climaxed around the issue of his relationships. It was at a very young age that he was separated from family. During most of his young life in the Orient, friends, acquaintances were continually coming into and leaving, his life. "One of the things that I learned, I shouldn't say people learned in general, at least I certainly learned, was not to form attachments to people. There was very little sense of permanence in my life."

George reports that the impact of this uprootedness on his own life was highly significant. Earlier on, he had developed one good friend. Shortly thereafter, his friend left, "and I think ever since that happened, I have never had that kind of close relationship again. You learn very quickly, not to form close relationships. They will just be broken."

2. Young Adult Life Experience

George's early adult life was preoccupied with various efforts and moves to work out his vocational calling. It was an unsettled journey. Immediately following completion of high school, George joined the Navy, leaving it, to attend university with the express purpose of preparing for the ministry. "This purpose soon became clouded with doubts and reservations."

The idea of the vocation of ministry was not a new one for George. Although it was not a "Damascus Road experience," there was "the sense of an insistent urge" towards ministry throughout much of his early life. "The idea of entering the ministry of the church grew more and more clear." At the same time George was attempting to define his vocational direction, he was also experiencing the impact of the culture shock stemming from his return to Canada. This was a "sense of disorientation which lasted for several years." This too, was a significant factor playing out its impact on George's consciousness as he worked to decide his future.

Having made this early decision about ministry, George spent a summer as a student minister in western Canada. He was, however, affected negatively by this experience, observing what he considered to be a shallowness of faith, and being exposed to "petty conflict and disagreement in the life of a small parish."

George now entered a period of trying out a range of options for himself. It was also a period of deep uncertainty about his vocational direction in ministry. He drifted away from the idea of ministry while he completed his first degree program, and began

post graduate studies in the area of philosophy. At about this time George was married, and then began a two year teaching career. However his emotional life was being affected. He began to experience problems with depression, the genesis of which he put to delayed effects of the culture shock. Once again, George returned to the idea of ministry. He entered seminary, but left after one term, unhappy with the program. He then completed his Master of Arts in philosophy, writing his thesis in the area of contemporary analytical philosophy, after which he began to study for his doctorate.

During this tumultuous period, partially accounting for the various changes in career direction, George became acutely aware of his own hesitations and doubts with respect to the Christian faith. "I had a lot of intellectual problems with Christian faith along the way. Some of these have never left me. I had some very serious reservations about Christian faith in relationship to the modern world."

George taught for a time, at a university in Ontario. More and more, he seemed to be developing a distinct hostility to religious ideas and the ideas of the Christian faith in particular. "Issues of faith were never far away. I was tormented by thoughts of faith, which I had become very clever at parrying, with witty one-liners and philosophical argument."

A new crisis loomed at this stage in George's life. He started to become very ill, both physically and mentally. He experienced periods of complete mental disorientation. He felt desperate. The doctors finally diagnosed the cause to be in the area of food allergens. He responded to medication, and began to make a recovery. George reports that it was during his illness, when he was feeling most lost, that he began to rethink his

decisions about ministry and to commit himself once again, to study for the ministry.

Referring to this decision during his lowest period physically, and his lowest period of faith commitment, he says,

I am not “religious” in the sense that I think this was God acting to bring me back . I am still not religious in that sense, and I find it unhelpful to understand faith in that way. Yet it was in the midst of my most irreligious period, that I was brought back to reconsider, and to respond to, issues of faith.

One other major area of change for George during his young adult life was his decision to change his denominational affiliation.

When I had left seminary for the first time, I had been reading certain historical theology, and I found, when faith questions began to take on importance once more in my life, it was to these sources that I turned. I prepared for and was confirmed in this new affiliation.

George reports that he had always preferred the worship experience in his new denomination, as he recollected worshiping in that church as a youngster, in the Orient. It was the only congregation where English was spoken. He muses as well, that a more ordered worship fit his more introverted personality structure, far better than less structured worship.

Having made a final decision to enter the Christian ministry, George pursued his studies in theology, and was ordained to the priesthood.

3. Experience in Ministry

When George entered the priesthood, he did not leave his pattern of struggle in the faith behind. Significant, transforming changes in his life were yet to come. George’s theological understanding was dramatically changed during his first ten years in ministry.

Throughout his life, up to and including, the period of his theological training, as well as his first years as a priest, George described himself as “theologically quite conservative.” He became involved with a strongly conservative party within the Church.

I was convinced that the only way forward for the church today was to hold fast to the faith of the past, and I did what was in my power to ensure that this faith was heard by the people in the parishes I served as well as by the church at large. I helped organize theological conferences in which the conservative agenda was thematized, and I was a founding member of a conservative newsletter which is still being published today. This was faith which someone might cling to in a stormy sea, and my sea had been continuously stormy for years.

Gradually, George became aware that this theological stance was not totally satisfying to him. He met many who had found new direction and hope in new ways of worshiping and understanding the faith. He also met many in his own “camp” whom he felt were drowning while still clinging fiercely to tradition. “The vehemence, the anger, and the fear that actuated them seemed a clear indication that something was missing.” He became aware, too, of the lessening of feelings of fear in himself, both theologically and as a person, and of uncomfortability about cultivating fear in others.

The turning point for George, was the breakdown of his marriage, and the subsequent divorce. “I realized that this conservative view of faith, which I had cultivated so assiduously, could not bear me up in the midst of this particular struggle.” While continuing to develop dissatisfaction with his older allegiances, George began to forge a new perspective, a wider more positive orientation. “I began to rebuild the house of faith in a way that, I hoped, could take account of the realities of daily life.” He began to reconceptualize his faith as “an open-ended invitation to life, rather than, as previously, a shrewish confinement and limitation of life.” It was a fundamental change of

orientation since childhood, of what religion had been for him.

The culmination of this change in theological orientation had taken place over many years, and had many ramifications for George's life and ministry. After completing his theological studies he had worked in a small rural church. From that appointment, he went to the West Indies where he became so unhappily immersed in local church politics, that he requested a return. For the next sixteen years, George was a pastor in the Atlantic Provinces, the longest period of which has been in his last appointment.

George reports that the most fundamental change resulting from his reorientation was the way in which his faith and theology now "began to have a very personal reference." More profoundly than ever before, his life and experience were becoming integrated with his faith and belief. "I now had to face the fact that what I had thought and what I had taught up until that time, was at odds with what was happening in my own life." He also began to relate to ministry differently. "The things I said in my homilies had changed. More significantly, my relationships with people changed." These changes became so apparent that George found it necessary to leave his parish, in order to avoid the kinds of conflict which might have been stirred through the impact of his new orientation upon the congregation. Not only had his own thinking and feeling changed, but his approach to the Eucharist altered, and his reflections about the Christian faith from the pulpit, changed.

George's changes in theological and ministerial orientation came to fruition in his current parish, Georgetown, where he has found a fundamental "sharing of the quest," a journeying together with the congregation. In response, the congregation opened its arms

to him, bringing a sense of belonging he has rarely felt in his life. In summary, “Having gone through separation and divorce, moved onto another parish, and been remarried, one of the things that I began to realize, was that priests are really just people.”

The changes in George’s life and the changes he experienced in the parish brought him closer to his parishioners, highlighted the sense of his own humanity in his priesthood, and included the sense of mutuality in what ministry is all about. He remained a priest to the parish, but the parish also ministered, in a very real sense, to him. This was the core of a renewed sense of community, as the focus for ministry, a growing sense of shared life and shared values, or, as George prefers to describe it, a shared quest. George’s own journey in faith and ministry has issued in a new way of experiencing, expressing, and sharing ministry, a new understanding which was profound in its affect on his life and ministry, but also on his own perception of his life story.

B. LEARNING

1. Ministry: A Personal Journey from Abandonment to Belonging

Ministry, for George, has been a personal journey. It has been his struggle to pull together the threads of his own life, to find a faith which integrates his life experience, and a faith which enables George to build supportive and caring relationships.

What we begin with, is a profound sense of abandonment. This is the existential moment of truth for George, at age six. It is a moment which colours his experience for life, because he struggles with it throughout his life. He is profoundly aware of its

impact.

That single event has marked my life, as I am now aware, more than I can ever say. It has affected my religious consciousness, invaded my relationships, and determined the feeling tone of my whole life. It has contributed to my sense of justice (or lack of it). It has determined my sense of self (or not-self). It has, in many ways, given me my life's task. My life may well be seen as a drive to resolve the puzzle, of the meaning of that single event.

This original feeling soon coupled itself with a sensitivity to the harsher side of evangelical faith expression. From his experience with the Christian faith through his twelve long years in residential school in the Orient, he developed deep feelings of self-rejection, "inadequacy, invisibility and unworthiness." He responded to ideas of human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness, based on the frail shortcomings of one's humanity, and on the temptations of a very real Satan, at a very young age. Such feelings only added to his already established sense of unworthiness. Here we have a quality of extremeness in faith experience which served as a kind of haunting in George, for years to come.

Added to this, was an experience of rootlessness, a feeling of "not belonging" either in the Orient or in Canada, a growing hostility resulting from the culture shock of returning to a strange land. This rootlessness was added to his complex of feelings, just at a time when he was required to make long term vocational decisions for himself.

The sense of abandonment and not belonging affected George's process of attachment. He notes,

One of the things I learned, was not to form attachments to people. At one point I had a friend, my first term in the Orient, and then of course, he left. I have never had that kind of close relationship again. You learn very quickly, not to form close relationships, because they will just be broken.

This sense of isolation with persons carried forward in many aspects of George's adult life, affecting not least, the form of his religious experience and expression.

This was also the background for the kind of ambivalence which characterized George throughout his early adult life, particularly in the area of vocational decision making. It led to the multiplicity of efforts to complete theological training and commit to ministry, the periods of loss of faith and intellectual doubt, and the tensions he felt between theology and philosophy, between teaching and ministry.

“A real sense of isolation , a sense of not belonging, resulted in difficulties with decision-making. Every stab I made at going into the ministry seemed to fail.”

This ambivalence, George links, to the layers of emotional and religious patterning formed through his early experiences of loss and abandonment, and his intellectual appropriation of an uncompromising evangelical faith.

“That's why the ambivalence was there; because on the one hand, I was aware of alternatives and options, but emotionally and spiritually, these weren't available to me.” The ambivalence led to insecurity with respect to vocational decision-making, as well as insecurity about faith and theology. It is at this point, George acknowledges, that his early grasp on an evangelical faith was in some sense, a way to resolve the senses of abandonment and worthlessness. The problem was, “I don't think it ever did that for me.”

It is significant that it was at a very low time in his life, during his desperate struggle with his unnamed illness, and when he felt his faith most challenged, that he turned to commit himself finally, to the call to priesthood. He committed to the

priesthood, but also to a faith which still isolated him as a person, a faith which acted as a kind of “refuge” or protection for his abandoned self. His ambivalence was resolved by reverting to a secure faith, which contained within it, his self-rejection, his own non-acceptance, a faith which “reflected rather badly on my relationships and my attitude towards other people.”

The final abandonment of the whole complex of his “unhealthy self” was, for George, a conversion. The result of that conversion was a new sense of self, a self-acceptance and a movement towards belonging, which expressed itself in his ministry and in his worship.

What was taking place in my own personal life, was an answer to the question, about the sense of being alone, and resolving that in terms of the importance of the worshiping community, gathered together as brothers and sisters.

It was symbolized by his fundamental decision in the liturgy, to celebrate the Eucharist facing the people, rather than with his back to them.

It is a very curious experience to celebrate the Eucharist with your back to the people. You could be quite self-absorbed. It is a strange detached experience, a feeling of a lack of connection with the people in the congregation.

With this change, came an acknowledgment of the centrality of the community of faith. In a personal way, this was a self-affirming experience for George. It was felt as a kind of “welcoming,” an experience of “open hands” of love and friendship stretched out towards him from the congregation. Of his last number of years in ministry, he concludes, “I don’t know if I was looking for it, but whether I was looking for it or not, I found it. It was that sense of actually belonging here and being welcomed into the community.” He chronicles the change,

I don't know, it's something that just grew as time went on. It occurred gradually, as the congregation here began to grow and gel as a community. When I first came, I don't think there was a community here in one respect. There wasn't that real closeness and excitement about being together. So, as that grew, it grew in me as well. It was only within the welcoming community of this parish that I have found the freedom, for the very first time, to explore the possibilities of the fulness of life that Jesus came to bring.

As George turned to the community, and the community to him, he experienced for the first time, a sense of freedom and joy in his faith and in himself. "Certainly I could have joy in faith, that I could never have had before."

Out of this experience, George came to a belief about the nature and function of ministry, namely, the fostering of community.

Encouraging community here has worked wonderfully. I think it has been a very conscious thing that I have done while here. But, once it started, it really took care of itself, and that's rather interesting. I become simply one other member of that community, and not necessarily the most important member. It was a real change in my understanding of ministry.

George noted one interesting behavioural change in himself resulting from his new sense of ministry. In the past he had had great difficulty remembering names - "I often drew a blank when I saw people. But, a curious change, I don't so much anymore." The community is now a gathering of people he feels freer to acknowledge, name, and care for.

In a final comment George reiterated that he sees his function in ministry as fostering community, not for himself, but for "the sake of the spirituality and the faith of others. I can understand and be with a person much more fully, than I could before. I am a much better priest than I was before."

2. Ministry: an Integration of Faith and Life

The movement of George's faith, through his conversion in ministry, was the movement towards personalizing faith, integrating his faith and his life experience. It was a movement which occurred during his ministry, and which, as noted earlier, had its critical point in George's divorce. As he says now about his faith, "Faith to me now, is something one lives and experiences in one's own life. It is an ongoing component of one's life. It's part of one's life experience."

This integration of life and faith, as a new mode of ministry, was brought into focus for George, in the very real crisis of his divorce. It became a crisis of his identity as a priest.

I suppose the most difficult experience in ministry was going through separation and divorce. I think that was the most difficult of all the experiences I have ever had. It was that which really made me look at priesthood in a very, very different way. If there was a certain sense of abandonment and rootlessness in my life, it was that for which I sought a refuge. That is exactly what I found in a fairly conservative, and hierarchical sense, of church and faith. But, when I went through the experience of separation and divorce, that sense of refuge quickly dissipated. At one point during the whole process, it seemed to me that I was going to have to abandon the whole idea of priesthood entirely. I'm going to have to find something else to do. I certainly don't fit within this!

This was George's central crisis and challenge, both for his faith and his ministry. The crisis was based on the fact that there was now no refuge for him, no protection that worked. With the divorce he was thrust into a void where he had the existential choice to let go his past, and to embrace a future which compelled a recognition of his life experience as an integrated component of faith. "It was an extremely confusing time."

George puts the challenge of this "void" and "integration" this way,

I couldn't square my understanding of faith and priesthood, with what was happening in my personal life. I wrestled with that spiritually, in the context of worship and prayer, and intellectually, and in the context of a renewed or changed theological understanding. Could I see the possibility that someone who had experienced what I had experienced, would be able to act and function as a priest?

His new thinking meant that George had a new way of conceiving church and ministry.

My conception of priesthood and ministry tended to be, somewhat hierarchical. I don't think I ever separated myself off completely from people, but certainly there was a distance between myself and others, always a comfortable distance. It was reinforced by a very clear, definite, and crisp understanding of faith. It was an objectified faith the distance of which was reflected in my own life and my relationship with others. It took the form of a sacramental outlook. There was no place for me in that conception of church and faith.

The theological impact followed.

I guess what I really started to do at that point, and something I had not done, was to read theology personally, giving it a personal reference. Before that, it was not entirely an intellectual thing, but it was certainly not grounded in my personal life. That's what I mean by calling it a refuge. It was somewhere I could steal away, as it were, into another world. I am a very thinking person, I have a friend who calls me a "talking head." It was easy and comfortable to withdraw into a pure theology. I could play endlessly with philosophical and theological ideas. But at this point, theology and faith began to have a very personal reference. I realized that theology wasn't some place that I could escape to any longer. I had to face the fact that what I had thought and taught up until that time, was at odds with what was happening in my own life.

This fundamental change in orientation has had ramifications in many areas of George's life and ministry. These took notes of both sadness and joy. The sadness of the experience was the recognition of a kind of loss, that so much of his earlier life experience was caught up in a joyless tension. But George also felt a true joy, where he "found the freedom, for the very first time, to explore the possibilities of the fulness of life that Jesus came to bring," the joy of a "journey of discovery, a very exciting but risky

journey in which the frail selfhood I have been gifted with, is able to reach out into the darkness still unexplored.”

What had been was let go. In more recent years George has depicted a growing awareness of the nature of his earlier faith pattern. “It is only subsequent to that experience, that I have become aware how much the whole idea of faith, my whole expression of faith was almost a defense mechanism for myself. It was a way of protecting myself.”

Through the period of the reorientation of his faith, George moved beyond the experience of protection to one of openness and risk. The concepts of God and faith were broadened, enlarged, and opened.

As I lived through the experience, I realized that the house of faith had to be much larger than I had been willing to admit. It was not simply expedience, in order to justify the divorce. I had narrowed faith down to such a small area that no one who really lived and breathed, could live in it.

The larger God of George’s faith was now a God, welcoming of the human journey of struggle and doubt. This was a God, faith in whom, acknowledged, explored and challenged the depths of human experience. This was a faith which supported the search for truth, and the freedom of the human spirit. It was a faith that embraced humanity in both its weaknesses and strengths. It was a faith that provided George with a sense of joy in his life, and a settledness despite his searching doubts and questions. It was a faith which was “an open-ended invitation to life, not a shrewish confinement and limitation of life; a faith free to move to places which challenge and call it into question, and a faith which was not a limiting condition on human freedom.”

Pastorally, this new found faith, for George, meant a process of inviting other Christians into his journey, and being open to involve himself in the faith journey of others. It also meant a reworking of the responses of faith in light of both his own, and other's experience, and the jettising of pre-conceived and pre-packaged responses and answers.

George explains that in his earlier theological formation, he was only able to function in priesthood "by keeping questions of faith and questions of philosophy separate from each other." This separation, or lack of integration, George maintains, was endemic in his theological training.

I observed in the case of many people in seminary, that the experience of the school had very little impact on the faith of the students. People came to the school with a certain mindset about faith. They invariably left with this mindset deepened and confirmed, precisely because we tend to keep our faith and our reflection upon faith, separate from each other.

George now sees faith and ministry as an integral entity. Ministry supports faith, because each is grounded in human experience. In this respect he makes the following point,

I came to a new understanding of who God might be, for me. I can say now, to people who are having doubts or struggling with questions of faith, "Well, surely to heavens, if God is God, then He will accept and celebrate your struggles of faith, rather than reject you on account of them." Faith embraces the struggles. That's a part of what it means to be human. And I guess, that's what I find so wrong about what I was taught as a child, the idea that in order to have faith, you had to be sure, and in order to be sure, you couldn't ask any questions. This seems to me a distortion of what any reasonable faith could be. Human life is not like that.

George uses the doctrine of the incarnation as illustrative of his new form of ministry, built upon the integration of life and faith.

If we are going to take the incarnation seriously, at least we have got to say, that in some sense, the locus is internal in our humanity, and it's in and through our humanity that we encounter God. If that's the way we encounter God, then we encounter God in each other and through meeting as human beings.

The incarnation becomes the doctrinal point of reference, for a ministry which fully acknowledges and embraces human experience.

3. Ministry: The Humanizing of Priesthood: A Shared Quest

One more slowly developed learning, stemming from his new orientation in faith, was the learning which emphasized the humanity of the priesthood, and an understanding of ministry which focused on "shared quest."

"This occurred gradually. What was affirming here for me, was that some were willing to go on a new journey of faith with me. They began to join in undertaking their own authentic path, and this was a very positive thing for me." It was not so much that people were compelled to accept George's journey, or to somehow make his their own. It was much more that his story was their cue, or permission for them, to explore and risk for themselves. George found this to be intensely satisfying as a new function of ministry for him. The process itself fostered a growing sense of community amongst members of the congregation, a growing sense of shared life and shared values. It became a shared quest, whereby a bond was established based on a mutual caring about one another's path and learning.

Part of this shared quest for George, was a modeling of permission, an invitation to faith as an open rather than closed, quest. He describes an encounter with an elderly parishioner who, having read from a rather radical theologian, comments,

“You know, at least, he gives me permission to think the things I have been thinking for a long time.” To a certain degree that’s what I did. I gave people permission to think through their faith in new ways and in ways in which they were already half thinking about it. They welcomed that, just as, in a sense, they welcomed me.

The shared quest has meant, for George, a re-affirming of himself as a person, and a refocusing of the role of priest, upon the humanity of the priesthood. As noted, he reports that the highlight of his ministry, in his current parish, has been the experience of shared quest. This has been felt, among other areas, in the area of worship.

“When I am preaching the homily, for example, people are nodding their heads. You can tell there’s a special rapport between myself and the congregation when I speak. This has been extremely affirming for me, and not something I was used to.”

This has also affected the perception of the priest by the congregation.

One of the things that I began to realize, was that priests, perhaps I sound trite here, I don’t mean to be, but priests are people. Very often, certainly in the church, priests are not treated as people. As I moved in my journey, after my divorce, I was beginning to feel a sense of closeness to people that I hadn’t really felt before. I felt I was taking some steps towards seeing ministry as a relation of a person among persons, rather than a priest above the people.

This concept of ministry has lead to a specific function which George believes now is central to his vocation.

The priesthood for me, now, is much more of an enabling process for a person to explore faith, rather than, a telling to another person, what the faith is, or what he or she ought to believe. As I talk to people about faith issues, the more I recognize there is a great hunger today, for a faith that can be held by adults who have explored, and will go on exploring in the most strenuous ways, questions of faith in relation to their own experience of the world they live in. I believe this out of the experience of spiritual desolation that I went through, as my marriage broke down and I moved from separation to divorce and remarriage. Now, although I am less clear about what I believe than I have ever been, I am more settled and happy in my faith. I am an exile from the Christianity of my past, but

I am happy in my exile, and much more content to sit lightly upon the things that other people think are of the greatest importance.

4. Ministry: A Healthy Faith, a Rejection of Spiritual Abuse

As reported, George's early response to faith was associated with a sense of abandonment and unworthiness. His conservative schooling seemed to reinforce a negative self-image, which, as he grew into adulthood, issued in turbulence and ambiguity about the Christian faith, and about his calling into ministry. He chronicles his rejection of this early form of faith.

I have spent a lifetime trying to discern the meaning of my life in the face of a deep sense of worthlessness. I have, in the course of this discernment, come to reject a religion that speaks endlessly of our worthlessness and failure, and seeks to imprison us within the duality, of God's plenitude and goodness, and of man's frailty, insignificance and sinfulness. Although I was aware of this experience of abandonment and injustice as somehow central to my life, it is only in the last few years, that I have been able to see how central it has been to my spiritual journey.

George's deep sense of the inadequacy of his early exposure to the Christian faith, has formed in him, a strong sensitivity to the dynamics of religious indoctrination in childhood.

The journey, which I began as a child, is beginning, I believe, to bear fruit, after much confusion and misdirection. I have often said that I think of my life path as the effort to deal with the programming that I experienced as a child. I think that I was spiritually abused as a child.

This sensitivity extends itself into a strong pastoral concern.

I think as I grow older, that a lot of what passes for religious education, both at home and in the church, is abusive. I have met too many damaged people, psychologically scarred, by what they have been told and what they have been required to do. Someday, I hope this kind of abuse will be considered as seriously misguided as physical and sexual abuse are considered today.

George refers to this early religious experience as a harsh experience. When issues of sexuality and sin are brought up with other clergy, George immediately experiences a kind of flashback to the fear and harshness of his early exposure to the faith. It was this early experience that led him to cling to a religious conservatism for such a long period into his adult life.

“I was a notorious conservative.” he says. “I resisted all learning which was outside the box of a kind of theological security. In order to still the storm within, you had to have secured the faith, without.” This external point of reference for faith, was to him, the source of harshness and control in his faith.

“I think I was abused because something was imposed upon me that didn’t belong to me. I was almost made, you might say, to take ownership of something which wasn’t mine.”

This state he sees in contrast to his present orientation to faith where,

It is an ongoing, growing part of one’s life experience, and therefore, it is not something that one person or even one institution, can impose upon another person. If you try to impose your faith, and say, “You must believe these things,” and require that of somebody, then you are exerting your power over that person, and abusing that person.

It is here that George depicts how his new found orientation in faith, is fundamentally different from the old.

It is not a reorientation, a moving from one point of certainty to another point of certainty, but a whole reorientation, a new understanding, of how faith is expressed and lived. It is not a closed system anymore. It is a part of one’s life experience, and therefore, it is not something that one person or one institution can impose upon another person.

This, for George, is the fundamental starting point for a healthy, non-abusive faith. It is

the foundation for a faith which is psychologically and religiously healthy.

5. Ministry: A Fundamental Reorientation to Joy

In summary, George has gone through a fundamental reorientation in his ministry. His own life experience and the challenge of integrating the events of his life with his ministry, have meant a conversion in him. It was a conversion towards the abandonment of a faith characterized by isolation, harshness and rigidity, to an embracing of a faith characterized by openness, mutuality and authenticity. This change fundamentally altered him, and his ministry. It made him available as he had never been, to the experience of joy in himself, and joy in his response to the message, “to explore the possibilities of the fulness of life that Jesus came to bring.”

4. Sheila

Ministry: The Determination to Value and Affirm

Sheila has had approximately twenty-four years in pastoral ministry. She is in her late forties, married for twenty-five years, and the mother of two teenage children.

A. PROFILE

1. Early Life Experience

Sheila was born in a rural village in Atlantic Canada, the oldest of five girls. Her father was a manager in a local food production and processing plant, and carried on

family responsibilities in the home. Central to Sheila's existence from the beginning, was that, "I grew up always knowing God's presence. I cannot remember a time in which God was not of greatest importance in the life of my parents, and in my life."

The church was an important part of her life from the beginning. Her grandfather was a leader in the church, her father, a Sunday School Superintendent, and both parents were Sunday School teachers. Her family participated fully, in the life of both the local church, and the local community. While not well off financially, the family was wealthy in the quality of its relationships.

The missionary culture was strong early in Sheila's experience. She remembers missionaries returning from other lands. They often spoke in her church, and one even gave her the personal gift of a snake skin. The church brought the world to her doorstep, and her to the doorstep of faith. At age ten, "I made a commitment to Christ." It was a very powerful experience, confirmed by the minister's message, "you may be ten, you may be just very little children, but we believe that there is something powerful happening in your life." For Sheila it was "very much of an affirmation, and I took it very seriously."

Sheila's young religious life was devout. She talks about her father's prayers, and how sometimes he would fall asleep while praying, kneeling at the side of the bed with his children. At the same time it was a religious life open to, and very much a part of, the wholeness of community life. She became aware of another sort of Christian piety when she went to another province, and discovered that these Christians did "not go to drive-ins, did not play cards, even Crazy Eights, did not go to movies, and did not dance." For

her, these activities were part of growing up. Neither her faith, or the faith of her family, was focused on restriction.

One important part of Sheila's early life experience, was her awareness of the emotional struggles of her mother. Because of this emotional turmoil, Sheila's mother felt it necessary to seek professional help. Sheila became aware of negative attitudes in the church, as she heard disparaging remarks made about her mother's decision to seek help outside the church. This initially caused her confusion, but as time went on the experience was pivotal in helping Sheila understand the importance of mental and emotional health in every person, and the need for many kinds of community support. Her understanding of these issues, influenced her faith and her ministry, throughout her life. At the time, due to the specific circumstances in the home, Sheila, at this young age, took on more responsibilities particularly in the care of the younger children.

A strong characteristic of Sheila's experience throughout her early schooling, was involvement in a range of social activities and organized programs. She was immersed in the programs of the church, Sunday school, C.G.I.T., church camps, and later, with regional and national Christian youth organizations. She developed a vibrant social life, but her religious life continued to foster her growth in awareness about the needs of people, and about those who were less fortunate. This concern was nurtured by her family's conviction to be open and caring towards those both inside and outside, the church, particularly towards those experiencing difficulty.

In grade eleven Sheila went through a significant learning experience. She and a friend discovered they had a teacher who was grading them inappropriately. They would

receive different scores for the same answers. They investigated on their own, and discovered the teacher was not marking their tests according to their answers, but according to scores on IQ tests which had been conducted years earlier. The discovery was devastating. She learned at some point, that the instructor had been experiencing emotional difficulties, and responded to the stress of his work in this way. He was relieved of his duties. The downside was Sheila's discovery that she had scored lower than expected on the I.Q. tests, a result due to an illness she was experiencing at the time of testing. Since she was feeling dispirited, especially because of plans to attend university, Sheila's mother persuaded her to take I.Q. testing to relieve her anxiety and to prove herself. The result was positive, and relieved, Sheila felt empowered to continue with her educational goals. The effect of this experience was far-reaching. "It was a really powerful issue and it really helped me be aware of labeling, and what it can do to a person. My experience taught me how destructive and non-creative labeling is." Sheila acknowledges the whole experience led her and her friend to feel anger about the issue of fairness and justice implied in the situation. It also alerted her to the fragility of self-esteem when an individual is devalued, even when the devaluing is spurious.

At the same time, for Sheila, this was a further experience, illustrating the need to provide help, and show compassion towards persons experiencing mental and emotional difficulties. She also recalls in grade school, making a special effort to help a young man who was being labeled and bullied by others. All of this was contributed to a growing sense in her, of the fragility of emotional health, and the importance of a sense of fairness and justice in life, especially for those who may have suffered in some form or another.

2. Young Adult Life Experience

Sheila had a very active and truly enjoyable experience throughout much of her college experience. Her first real proposal of marriage occurred in high school, and when she moved on to college, her social life continued to be fulfilling. She was president of the regional church youth organization, and she took on leadership responsibilities to speak in churches in the Atlantic Provinces. She participated in the chapel choir, and to broaden her experience, attended Catholic mass, and because she was needed, drove the Catholic students to their retreat. In the process, she completed her undergraduate program in psychology.

The chapel was a centre of spiritual growth for Sheila during her time at the college. The chaplain was a real mentor, “a quiet man who had a deep appreciation for worship, and who was able to relate the Bible to what was going on at the university.”

Sheila also met a young man who was a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist, and living an alternative lifestyle. She was fascinated by him. The relationship ended when Sheila made a decision that, instead of staying out West with her friend, she would explore further, her religious and spiritual interests by taking courses back home at the seminary.

Her decision to take courses at the seminary was based on Sheila’s interest just to “do a year of training.” She reports as well, that her parents’ ongoing interest in their own educational experience in the seminary was an influence. She says of her decision and her experience, “I went there, and felt right at home. It was a wonderful learning, in

terms of Scripture, and of the clinical training which really appealed to me.” She found that the emphasis on clinical training, and the way it was taught, provided her with a way to apply her undergraduate education in psychology, to the spiritual and religious impetus of her life. It was a fundamentally positive experience because Sheila’s intellectual, familial and spiritual aspirations were able to achieve a real measure of integration during this year of study. It was a time when she began to entertain seriously, the possibility of a calling to the vocation of ministry.

Sheila encountered some issues in her decision-making processes towards ministry. She was aware that the calling to the Church’s pastoral ministry was still not the norm for women. Her mother had expressed some uncertainty about the appropriateness of women in ministry. Uncertainty about this direction was a general perspective. Women had gone into ministry, it is true, but most often towards specialized ministries, in the form of missions or chaplaincy. Rarely had they clearly directed themselves towards ordained, pastoral ministry. There was no clear path, no clear message of support, from the world around her. She struggled with the direction, and made a promise to herself that if she felt a sign, some external confirmation that her own personal aspirations were on the right track, she would continue to follow her aspiration. She experienced this confirmation in the form of her accessing scarce living accommodations near the seminary, thus paving the way for her to undertake training for ministry. The door had been opened.

During her second year at the seminary, Sheila began to experience certain problems related to personal circumstances. She had developed a close relationship with

a seminarian, Tim, who was one year her junior in the program. During this second year, however, they broke off their relationship. Tim considered leaving the seminary, a decision which caused consternation among faculty and administration because he was seen to be an outstanding student. It was suggested to Sheila that she leave the seminary instead, attend another seminary, and thus solve this particular problem. Sheila experienced these suggestions as demeaning to herself. It depressed her that those for whom she had great respect, would look to solve this issue in this way. She felt devalued.

A second instance of concern during her seminary experience, was when the time came to take a church following graduation, it seemed that her name was not put forward for available placements. It was suggested she consider an alternative ministry. Later, when she did find a placement, it was suggested that Tim, to whom she was now engaged, might assume, when he had graduated, the pastoral leadership responsibilities.

Sheila was deeply hurt by these seeming inconsiderate comments. She felt they showed a lack of respect for her, and a lack of awareness about the value of her contributions. They seemed as well, to be motivated by inadequate views of gender issues in the church. She acknowledges this was a time when awareness of these issues was just beginning to bring about substantial change with respect to the place of women in the church. Nevertheless, the comments left her feeling disappointed that fairness in gender issues, even in her theological training, seemed not to be upheld. Generally, however, Sheila had a very positive experience in her theological training. One specifically positive instance she recalls, was when she feared failing a course because personal circumstances prevented her from completing assignments. Unexpectedly, she

was given a full extension to complete her work, a sign she felt, of God's grace.

Sheila continued her primary interest in clinical training, taking various courses and clinical pastoral education programs within psychiatric and criminal justice institutions. The interest in mental and psychological health which had been part of her earlier life, was, in this period, expanded and advanced. Chaplaincy was, at least during her theological training, always an option.

Sheila continued her interest in missions, spending a six week short term mission in South America. She notes, "From this South American summer mission, I had another experience of both the diversity of this world, and also, of our oneness in Christ."

3. Experience in Ministry

After her graduation, Sheila was invited to be the pastor of a rural, three point charge. While her husband completed his theological studies, she worked as pastor of these churches for approximately two and a half years. She found the experience highly fulfilling and affirming. "I was energized by the mosaic of ministry opportunities - birth, funerals, youth groups, visitation, preaching, counseling, weddings and so on." Because of this experience, her direction in ministry began a more significant shift from the idea of chaplaincy, to pastoral ministry.

Sheila also experienced the onset of her first pregnancy with great joy and excitement. But it was a molar pregnancy and there would be no baby. Added to this, was the call she received to undergo chemotherapy for pre-cancerous cells in her uterus. "I was angry at God that I didn't have a baby, and even my thesis work on grief and

death, did not lessen my pain and loss.”

After her first two and half years of ministry, Sheila’s husband received a call to a church. Sheila found the change very difficult. “It was an emotionally very difficult time for me. I was depressed, because I really missed the joys of pastoral work, preaching, visiting, and counseling. I grieved over the loss of pastoral responsibility.” It did not make it easier, that Tim, because of his own personality, and the intensity with which he approached responsibilities, found the pastoral functions emotionally draining. Their differing reactions to the requirements of pastoral ministry were further cause for Sheila’s feelings of loss. At the same time, these differences provided a significant exposure to, and personal learning, about the way in which personality affects expectations about career, life fulfillment, and decision making. Comments which were sometimes made to Sheila at this stage, that she should be satisfied in the role of “pastor’s wife,” were especially unwelcome and grating.

About this time, Sheila was asked to take an interim chaplaincy position in a psychiatric hospital, a term which lasted about one year. Here she became aware of hospital politics, and the extent to which role and circumstances, can determine how one is perceived. It was not always easy. She found she was able to use her knowledge from clinical pastoral education to help process the experience.

During the following year, Sheila worked on her Masters program, and continued to study in the area of clinical pastoral education. She also found affirmation working in a small rural church. “I felt like I was doing ministry again. There was a great sense of family in that church. We skated after church, ate meals together, celebrated birthdays,

had youth groups etc.” There were some leadership issues within the church, but,

As I met with people in their homes, and helped them see that their gifts were needed, it made a real difference. We met with the families and looked at areas of ministry where we could delegate to others, and enhance participation. We were able to find a place for everyone in the Church. It was a kind of miracle we were witnessing.

As well, Sheila began to work as a clerk in a Christian bookstore. She found it curious, the extent to which she was treated in a patronizing fashion by some customers. Where she did find fulfillment, was in how often she was called upon to counsel those among the staff who were in need. She varied her work by visiting and teaching in local hospitals. One specific involvement was the counseling of several ministers who were working in team ministries, and who were having difficulty with the issues of parity in their relationships with their senior ministers. “While trying to help them work through some of their pain and dynamics, I also privately thanked God that I had never been called to team ministry.”

Concurrently, Sheila completed a six month chaplaincy program at a children’s hospital, working primarily with terminally ill children. She had hoped that this would provide the basis for a Masters thesis. However, there were unforeseen “turf type” complications. She abandoned her first idea, and completed a thesis on pastoral care by denominational women clergy in Canada.

Shortly thereafter, Sheila was approached by a friend among her pastoral colleagues, who was looking for an associate to work with him in his large, town- based, congregation. Sheila hesitated, knowing what she did, through her counseling of associate ministers. With much reluctance, she agreed to an interview. “I cried all the

way there.” She was successful, her name was put forward, and she spent five years in ministry with this congregation.

While the ministry itself was satisfying to Sheila, the time there was not without major problems. Firstly, there were personal issues. She wanted to have a child, but this seemingly, was not to be. After beginning adoption procedures however, she became pregnant. The church was surprised because they had been told she could not have children. As soon as the first child was born, Sheila’s husband, Tim, made the decision to leave the post-graduate studies he had been pursuing, and to stay at home to raise the child. Two years after the first child, a second was born. Sheila acknowledges that through those early years there was increasing stress, as she attempted to fulfil the demanding roles of both pastor and young mother.

The team ministry was satisfactory, though not without the kinds of strains she had been exposed to in her counseling. The senior minister, after four years in team ministry, resigned to take on further challenges elsewhere. His leaving became the occasion for confusion, miscommunication and disappointment in Sheila’s pastoral life. An interim minister seemed not to appreciate her role, and “downplayed my ministry.” He resigned for health reasons, and a female minister was asked to replace him. Sheila found this relationship surprisingly supportive. She had assumed that a male/female balance in ministry was preferable. Her experience now disproved the assumption. “It was an extremely enriching time. There didn’t seem to be the power struggles, and we felt mutually supportive of each other’s ideas and ministry.”

A further source of dismay awaited. Sheila was called to a special meeting of the

pulpit committee, but was disappointed to find that they had devised a new job description for the second pastoral role, one which limited the pastoral work to Christian education. This was a job description which excluded ministry in Sunday worship, visitation, weddings, funerals and service on many of the committees of the Church. The position was made responsible to the senior minister, rather than to the board of the Church. This job description had been created while she was on vacation ostensibly because the church was anxious to secure as quickly as possible, the services of a senior minister. Those responsible for accepting the new job description, had been led to believe that Sheila was supportive of it. Sheila also feels that since she had been asked to fill in as acting senior minister until one was appointed, there may have been those who feared she was taking on too much of the role herself.

Sheila reports that there were some signs that a few were becoming disenchanted. There seemed to be a few who felt it was time that she move to take a church of her own. She also encountered what she felt to be the manipulation of the will of one individual, who made it clear to her, that he did not want her to continue, and would not support her. She resigned. It was a difficult time, and a hard learning. She says, "I am more aware of how we hurt each other in the Church. I hope that I am wiser in the ways of manipulation, but not bitter."

Sheila, at this point, contemplated a chaplaincy, but within two weeks received a call to a large suburban congregation as an associate. She has been in this position now, for over ten years. It has contained both the joys and struggles of team ministry, but nothing which could not be resolved. Team ministry has been the focus of experiential

learning for Sheila. She reflects on the meaning of this for herself. In some ways, there is support available in this practice of ministry that does not exist in the solo process. But at the same time the processes of sharing ministry are in some ways, more demanding, because they involve the weaving of two intimate experiences of the vocation.

Sheila has developed her role and function to fit the needs and interests of herself, the congregation and the senior minister. Her family has grown up in this congregation, a particularly rewarding experience, as she has watched the spiritual growth of her own children, and of other families in the Church. She completed a Doctor of Ministry program writing a thesis which focussed on issues of personality difference in the context of worship. She has expanded her pastorate into the community, working in areas of mental health, and more recently, with chaplaincy service in the police force. She has continued her interest in missions, leading a group of members of the church in a commissioned mission to South America.

This experience of missions, but also the intense learning which Sheila has experienced with team ministry, have led her to a new appreciation of the flexibility of ministry. She harkens back to the concept of “tent-making” ministry, as a symbol of ministry which is not prescribed. This is a role which grows to meet the circumstance, and a ministry which does not follow an expected route.

I think it is that sense of the unexpected, that has surprised me in ministry. When I have laid out where I think God is taking me, a door opens, and it leads to something completely different from what I have expected. This experience of leading has deepened me.

As she says, “I’m excited to see where God will lead in the coming years.”

B. LEARNING

1. Ministry: Facing Obstacles to Valuation, Affirmation, Validation

Sheila's ministerial experience cannot be divorced from her personal experiences of being valued and affirmed as an individual. This affirmation finds its most articulate expression in the issues around her calling to Christian ministry. These same issues colour the form of the expression of her ministry throughout her career.

She refers to her baptism as a particular experience of personal affirmation. She remembers the minister at the time, saying, "You may be just very little children, but we believe that there is something happening in your life." Sheila adds, "It was very much an open time of wanting to learn what the Bible had to say, and what it meant to be a Christian. I took it very seriously."

This sense of personal affirmation was reinforced during a trying experience in High School when a teacher was giving unfair marks, and when Sheila and her friend exposed the injustice and unfairness of his marking. This situation produced in her, an anxiety about her abilities. Through further exploration and testing, Sheila felt able to let go her fears and to trust her own strengths to achieve what she wanted in life. The experience had been a painful one, but Sheila showed tenacity in exposing, at peril to herself, this injustice. In the end, she was able to satisfy herself about her strengths and her abilities. The experience made her particularly sensitive to processes of labeling in society, and in the church, and how such processes can devastate the self-esteem of the individual, particularly at a young age.

Towards the period of her decision making about ordination, Sheila felt a lack of sources of support for her considerations about a future in ordained ministry. She had felt hesitation on the part of many who were close to her, about her chosen route and calling. While women had been ordained, many had chosen placements of chaplaincy, missions, or Christian education. There seemed to be more support for men in seminary training, than for women. Sheila, in considering her alternatives, looked for some sign of confirmation that this direction was the right one for her. It was a matter for her, of saying, "God, this will not be an easy road, because I need to have some assurance that you are calling me to ministry because there are certainly a lot of people around here who would not want me in this." Sheila looked for such a sign, a "Gideon's fleece." She found it, as the way was unexpectedly paved for her, to continue in her theological studies.

A further struggle which threatened the sense of her own self-esteem and value, occurred in the seminary. Her association with, and experience of training in, the school were extremely positive. But she experienced certain actions as highly threatening to herself and her calling. The first, we recall from the profile, related to the breakup of her relationship with her classmate and the suggestions from those in authority, that she attend a different school to enable Tim to remain. The second, was the occasion of finding a church placement after graduation, and the seeming obstacles put in her way to do this. These experiences have stayed with Sheila, and become experiential points of reference for her commitment to a ministry of support, affirmation, self-esteem building, and of mental health. These experiences also instilled in Sheila a high sense of personal

fairness and justice, and the desire to defend these within, and without the church. These challenges, as they focussed both on gender issues, and on the issue of vocational identity, led Sheila to understand the vulnerability surrounding discrimination, and the extent to which persons are dependent for their growth and development, upon the way they are perceived by their communities. Sheila felt that these difficulties only served to strengthen her, to help her establish an independence of thought of action, and to enable her to fulfil the requirements of her calling without fear. "Later, when I encountered other people who felt that it was wrong for me, as a woman, to be in ministry, I had the assurance within, that I could carry on. I had to be true to my path regardless of what others decided."

Sheila's first ministry after graduation from seminary, was highly confirming. She found that she was 'energized by the mosaic of ministry opportunities: births, funerals, youth groups, visitation, preaching, counseling, weddings etc. She found the mix of involvement and the range of pastoral opportunities to be exactly her forum for expression of ministry. When her husband was called to another church, and she left her own, "It was a very emotionally difficult time for me. I was depressed. I grieved over the loss of my pastoral work." She was highly uncomfortable with the role which some wanted to cast her in, of "pastor's wife." Sheila had felt the true and practical sense of her calling in the joy she experienced in what had been her first full time pastorate. The loss of it was devastating. She points out a critical learning from this.

This loss was a vocational loss. I was no longer a pastor. The experience was very helpful to me because I had not, up to this point, had any understanding of how much of one's meaning and purpose, one's sense of identity can be tied up in

one's job or vocation.

Her depression also led her to a deeper understanding of this area of mental health, and its place in pastoral care.

The issue of women in ministry, was in the background of much of Sheila's experience with the struggle of vocational identity. She experienced what seemed to be the Church's confusion in social and theological learning, about the place of women. The issue was raised as well, at her ordination hearing. The ordination committee spoke with two of her congregational leaders, asking them questions about Sheila, one of which was, "And , how do you find Sheila as a woman, ministering among you?" Their answer, "What kind of a question is that? That's not a relevant question, nor one we feel good about answering."

Of her experience of being a woman in ministry, Sheila reports that there was no "clear pattern for women in ministry." She adds,

I could minister in ways that some men may have felt uncomfortable. I could hug people more often. I could do things differently. It may seem strange, but I was a woman minister, and they didn't quite know what to expect from a woman minister. So, there was some freedom, but it was both a struggle and a time of suffering. It was also a time of that sense of openness or potential.

The greatest challenge to her sense of calling was her experience in the Middle St. Church. This was her first experience ministering in a large town church. She was the associate minister, and maintained a good working relationship with the senior pastor. When he left, however, there seemed to develop a certain confusion in the church, about her role and expectations. Interim ministers were brought in, one of whom made disparaging remarks about her ministry. The pulpit committee called her in, and to her

surprise, produced a job description for her position which reduced her role, eliminating many pastoral duties. The committee had been led incorrectly, to believe that this new model was her preference. The job was going to be very much a position for a director of Christian education. She responded to the committee, "There is nothing wrong with the job description as such. It is a good job description, but not the position for me. That is not what I was called to do."

At the same time, while many in the church fully supported Sheila, there were a few who seemed to feel differently, possibly desiring to leave a clean slate for a new ministry in the Church. She confronted one member of the Church who privately told her that he could not support her further in the church's ministry. "What have I done?" she asked. "I just don't want you here." was the answer. Sheila resigned. For Sheila, this again was a challenge to her vocational identity. Her need to have her calling recognized had become a crisis point for her. It was the issue of her validation as a person, who is called to ministry, which was at stake. She experienced the change in her job description as a diminution of her calling, and a devaluing of her personhood, training and ordination. Experientially, it was not different from some earlier experiences she had had. Sheila was unsure about team ministry. She considers it evidence of the humour of God, that having counseled clergy who were having significant problems in their relationships with senior ministers, she should be called into team ministry. Two thirds of her ministry has been performed using this model. The challenge of her ministry has been to honour her ordination and vocational identity within a team approach capable of doing this. It has been an experiential learning because there are few guideposts traditionally, for

establishing the meaning of this form of ministry. A shared ministry has both strengths and weaknesses. In light of the Middle St. experience, Sheila sought to establish processes of mutual respect and open communication. This meant a sharing of ministry first, to be able to support one another in their work, second, to be able to differentiate roles and functions based on complementary skills and strengths, and third, to commit consciously, to the working out of a ministry in relationship, equally and respectfully. This was not an easy task. From her experience, Sheila identified more specific roles which began to predominate. The minister was no longer the sole leader. Much more so, the minister became an enabler,

an encourager. These are roles with which I am most comfortable. The servant role, or servant/leader, facilitator, enabler, encourager; these would be the concepts that characterize my ministry for the last twenty-four years. This is the way I have been called to ministry. These may not be roles for everybody, but from my understanding about who I am, my personality, and my understanding of scripture, these are roles to which I am called. In a real sense, it was an enabling that Jesus performed as he taught his disciples to carry on his ministry.

Again for Sheila, the nature of the calling is important. She is sensitive to the terminology about ministry. “I don’t see myself as a staff person. I dislike the words, ‘You are a staff person.’ No, I am a minister and a pastor.”

Some have had difficulty with Sheila’s sense of her calling. She notes that she has not been as forceful as some women who have gone into ministry, who have been more public in their request for recognition of their calling. But Sheila, in waging her own battle, has reached her own resolution. She has been true to her struggle to integrate her life concerns and her ministry, to see her own ordination as a signal of the worth and value of persons, and through this, the meaning, for her, of ministry. As she says, “My

ministry has been more oblique that way, and I would say my ministry is living out my call in terms of who I am , and some will be able to live with it, others are never reconciled to it.”

2. Ministry: Difference and Marginality: Valuing, Appreciating, and Empowering

One of the main themes of Sheila’s ministry has been the valuing and empowering of those within and without the church, who have struggled because of challenges in their lives. The effect of these challenges has been seen to stigmatize, and, in some cases, to marginalize their lives. These persons may then lack the emotional, psychological, or economic resources to cope well with their circumstances.

Her sensitivity to this element in ministry stems in part from her early experiences in her family and in her schooling. The first areas of sensitization was through her mother’s emotional issues. Sheila learned at a young age, the impact of these problems on the individual and the family. She learned to understand these issues, and to respect the needs represented by them. She also learned the importance of the range of community supports needed to address emotional issues. “I learned the true meaning of empathy.”

Sheila also learned how stigma compounded the difficulties experienced by the individual. She observed the element of subtle disapproval from church members who believed that, “If Mum loved Jesus, that should be enough.” There should be need for no other support. The disapproval was a shock to Sheila as she considered its source. It identified a failure in tolerance in the church, which she would experience again in her

life journey.

Sheila's family always showed a specific care towards those less fortunate in the community. She remembers,

My parents wanted to help those that were finding it difficult in life, and so we would have different people come and visit all the time. One night a drunk man knocked on the door, and my parents were out. He wanted to know if we had any vanilla. I said "I don't think so." I learned even at an early age, that there were certain things about people that needed to be addressed in a careful and considerate way.

When in grade seven, she remembers:

watching this young guy who was very much of a social misfit, and being made fun of. I was so angry about the way he was treated. A couple of us, I don't know that we handled it all that well, spent time with him, walked beside him and made sure that the others weren't acting spitefully towards him. We didn't want others to get away with their cruel behaviour.

Sheila, from a very early time, was conscious of the debilitating effects of "labeling."

The negative power of labeling has informed the advocacy, which is characteristic of her understanding of ministry.

The impact of labeling hit home personally, when she encountered it through the strange marking techniques of her high school teacher. He was using old IQ scores to determine current marks in his subject. Sheila felt doubly labeled, first, for the poor marks she was receiving, and second, for the low IQ score which had been recorded several years earlier. Only with the special efforts of her mother, was Sheila able to assure herself of the inaccuracy of the scores, and to begin the process of rebuilding her self-esteem. It was an issue of personal injustice which would stay with her, and which would inform her understanding of Christian ministry. Her own vulnerability to the

power of external messages, helped her to appreciate that power in other labeling messages, communicated by church or community to those who had not the resources she had, to assess them properly.

Sheila's special interest and care for those suffering the pain of emotional illness continued and grew as part of her life and ongoing ministry. She studied psychology in her undergraduate years. She did volunteer work in a nearby hospital for those with mental illness. She became committed to the clinical pastoral education program within the seminary structure, and completed many twelve week programs in a range of institutional settings, prisons, mental health institutions, and a children's hospital. She researched the issues of terminal illness in children. At the back of her mind, she always considered a chaplaincy as an alternative to pastoral ministry. She believes strongly in the concept of the "fellowship of pain."

The concepts of pain and suffering are part of what Christ did and who He was, as the suffering servant. Christ uses this. I think, that in our weakness, He is able to give strength. It is through our pain and suffering that often times we are most connected with people. I think everybody has their own pain and suffering, if they live in this world. Their pain and suffering can be used by persons to enable them to be like Christ, the Suffering Servant. If we are truly going to minister to people, we have to have some idea or understanding of their woundedness.

She points out, for instance, that her experience of the loss of her own child, her experience with chemotherapy, and her experience of the events mentioned above, have enabled her to have more direct access to the suffering experience of others. Sheila values those aspects of her own experience, for her ministry.

People allowed me to have fellowship with them at a deeper level because I had experienced the questioning that comes with cancer and the rotten experience of chemotherapy. I thank God that I had that experience.

Her perspective has also helped her integrate her learning processes around these issues.

She learned to appreciate the value of the many sources she brought together, counseling, psychiatry, and pastoral care, to enrich ministry. She learned through the experience with the high school teacher, that often victimization begets victimization. His act of labeling had occurred out of his own mental health problems.

Sheila crossed barriers to enrich her experience and ministry. She was open to truth from whatever its source. She learned to perceive with the eyes of the other. She saw opportunities for the valuing of persons particularly where they were being devalued. She accepted the risks attached to carrying out this ministry.

I think that if God says he wants us to have abundant life, then he wants us to work through our fears and doubts, our experiences of being labeled. He is saying, we are precious, we are important. The Scripture says, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

Sheila identifies that in order to carry out this ministry, what is required is a fundamental trust in God. It was this trust, communicated by her family of origin, that enabled her to confront successfully, the challenges she experienced early in her pastoral ministry.

Sheila speaks specifically, about the valuing of the undervalued, championing the underdog. She talks about her current day's activity.

This morning I was with a gentleman who had worked as a volunteer in another church for the last year, helping the caretaker, just making the church a nicer place to be. He talked about the hurt he felt because he didn't get any recognition for his work, and because he was seen as "just, well somebody who was on disability anyhow."

This illustrates, for Sheila, the problem of justice and fairness in life. What happens when one person is valued over another? “I say to my children, ‘Life is not fair,’ and it’s not. But as Christians or ministers, we are called to be just, in a world that isn’t always just.”

Sheila thinks theologically about what it means to champion the underdog, and she understands this from her past experience. “It is that understanding which has made me sensitive to the needs to call forth justice for those people who don’t have a voice of their own.” She relates it to her experience with the high school teacher. “I experienced a range of feelings about this situation. I was both the person with no voice, and then I discovered my voice.” She is grateful to her mother who affirmed her at this crucial time, despite the fact that her mother had also suffered. In spite of her own low self-esteem, “Mum was very affirming of my self-esteem and my value.”

Sheila’s sensitivity to the issue of difference has several sources in her experience. Difference, in her mind, embraces both the idea of personality difference, and of power differential in the social realm. Difference in personality was the focus of her doctor of ministry thesis on worship. Personality difference was a critical component to Sheila’s experiences at the beginning of her ministry. Her early relationship with her husband faced her with the importance of recognizing differences in gifts, talents, orientations. Ministry, she discovered early, was very different, based on the individual’s personality and preferences. The working out of the recognition and valuing of these differences, was integral to the growth and development of her marriage relationship with Tim.

It was also at the centre of the model of ministry which she developed and

fostered throughout her career, that of team ministry. Learning to recognize weaknesses and strengths, to consciously build a shared ministry based on these differences was challenging and rewarding. Referring to her consecutive team ministries, she shares,

George and Duke are very different personalities. George was more confrontational. Duke doesn't do that as much. He states where he is and stops at that. My husband, Tim, is very different than I am. I think how I understand that in terms of my concept of the nature of ministry, is that it's not a cookie cutter situation. We have very unique ministries depending on our personality types.

Sheila has found the concept of personality type particularly useful in identifying difference in the gifts each person brings to ministry. The concept also helped her in her marriage to Tim. "It helped me to understand early in my marriage, that Tim and I did not think the same way about our world." And about her current team ministry relationship, she says, "As Duke and I co-pastor, people watch our relationship, for they see that God has called our differing gifts and personalities into a partnership of ministry."

For Sheila, a ministry which recognizes difference, also recognizes the power which belongs to each person, the power of their own identity. Sheila's struggles over the recognition of her ministry, were, in part, a power struggle, to have the power of her own vocational identity recognized. This is the power of personhood and of self-recognition which may be vulnerable to contrary forces in church or society.

"There are people within the church and outside the church who want to take not only their own space, but somebody else's. Whether it is with myself, or somebody else, if you allow them to, they will take that power from you."

She recalls an individual in the seminary who talked about being a martyr for

Christ. He claimed that if you were not a martyr, you were not fulfilling the requirement of faith. Sheila felt he was attempting to impose his own understanding, and in the process take away the power of others, to live their own vision of faith. In the present, Sheila talks about empowering an individual who has come to find a specific service in the Church. He has been separated from his wife for ten or twelve years, cannot afford a divorce, and wants to make a covenant with his current partner. Sheila is aware the request poses difficulties in what is seen to be acceptable. But, "This man has lung cancer, both lungs, and the doctors give him a year to live. He wants in some way to say to this woman, 'I love you,' and she needs to hear that. They want to have some blessing by God in the midst of it all." Providing the service of the church to celebrate this love, and empowering the spirits of these two people is a mandate for Sheila. This is the kind of valuing and empowering Sheila supports in her ministry.

4. Ministry: Wholeness, an Embracing of God's World

Sheila's early life was an experience in wholeness. She embraced the world she lived in. The church was an integral part of her community. Her family, her church, her community were an integrated supportive and trustworthy environment. "Coming from a small community, the church and school were very much an extension of my home and family." This integration of her world is summed up in her comment about her early spirituality.

As a pre-elementary child, I was instilled with a sense of God's presence. I never knew the absence of God. Praying to God was part of the fabric of my existence. I think that Dad's falling asleep, and then us waking him up in a non-threatening way, gave me a sense that spirituality was not something separate from day-to-day

living, but an integral part of the “woven cloth” of my life.

Missions too, was part of her consciousness very early. She felt singled out when, in grade five, a missionary returning from half way round the world, gave her as a gift, a five-foot cobra snake skin. “I was so glad I was the only kid that had gone to this missionary thing. He picked me out then, as somebody special, and gave it to me. I think that was an influence for me in terms of love for missions.” This love has continued throughout her career with various short term commitments to missions primarily in South America. But it is more than simply a commitment to missions, it is a view of God’s relationship with the world. She has, in recent months, taken on a chaplaincy role with the police. She relates it to missions in a kind of summary statement. “Having the South American and police experience allows me to reaffirm, ‘This is my Father’s world,’ and that ministry should embrace both the home, community and world community.”

Referring back to her early experience, Sheila acknowledges she was not raised in a restricting environment. Indeed, she and her family embraced enjoyment in their lives. “There was a lot of freedom. We started going to dances, I think probably when I was in grade five.” Sheila was fully involved in activities both in her church and her school. Once attending university she used every opportunity to explore difference in life, and at the same time, affirming her own values and commitments.

There was a positive recognition that God’s world did not begin and end with her or her church. Other messages from other sources might well be worth listening to. Her mother’s legacy was to legitimize human support whatever its source, and the wisdom to

appreciate that. “God uses these instruments.” Sheila summed up this openness to understanding, to sources of help, and to a view of the wholeness of life, in the following way:

I believe that God uses the heart, soul, mind and strength. If truth is from God, then that truth has been communicated in many different ways. From the faith point of view, I learn truth from the Bible. I also believe that truth comes from experience. My ministry is holistic. What my exposure to psychology and clinical did, was, hopefully, to make my ministry more whole. God calls us to minister to the whole person. I don't have to be a psychologist or sociologist, but if those truths are available to me, then I want to use them to be the best minister that I can be.

Sheila identifies another area of her sense of the integration of life. This is with her own family. The family, too, is a source of learning and truth.

My children also helped me to understand more clearly my relationship with God, my heavenly Parent. Tim was supportive of my ministry, and together we tried to weave the fabric of our lives with our children, each of us sharing our parenting in different ways. The concept of integrating the sacred and the secular in ministry, is important to me. All of life is to be lived in the presence of God.

The wholeness which is so much a part of Sheila's sense of herself in the world, also informs her understanding of ministry. When she talks about ministry as embracing the 'mosaic' of life, it is this totality of life experience which is the focus of ministry, the range of experience in individual, family, community and global dimensions. It is an integration and wholeness understood in terms of God's relationship with creation.

5. Ministry: an Openness to the Unexpected: Grace

Sheila has experienced the unexpected in her ministry. It has been the bearer of grace for her. She recalls an incident which occurred in one of the small churches she

served. A single mom shared information she had gleaned from her daughter, which cast the son of another single mom, in a very poor light. The daughter had told her mom, that this youth was involved with drugs. Fearful, the daughter's mother passed the word, and made enquiries. The mother of the young man was deeply offended. In time the whole community became polarized around the ensuing dispute. Both mothers were adherents in the church, but reconciliation became an increasingly distant hope. Sheila tried hard to bring resolution. "I talked to one and then I talked to the other and we didn't seem to be getting anywhere." Sheila's perception was that both were struggling, both wanting to do their best by their children, and both feeling devalued. Sheila did not know what to do. She prayed about it, and arranged for the two mothers to come together. The result,

I just sort of sat there, and said, "Could you two take a little bit of time, and just share some of your pain." They started talking and I just sat in their presence, for what became, for me, a miracle. They talked, they cried, they both talked about their struggles of being a single parent, one saying this, the other that. What it taught me is that God is indeed, in the business of miracles, and sometimes, if you can just sort of set things up, then the process will let God do the work. What it taught me about ministry, is that we are to be present, and we are to be prayerful and that we don't have to be in charge. We just have to do our little part, and often God carries on from there.

The experience taught Sheila that ministry was often simply paving the way for God's grace, by providing the loving space.

Sheila experienced the unexpectedness of God in several ways. In her seminary training, whatever struggles she experienced, she felt she came through affirmed and strengthened. "I don't have to push myself in ministry. God can open doors, even when the doors seem closed." Her comment on the pain she experienced in the loss of her unborn child, and the suffering involved in the chemotherapy, is that these experiences

strengthened the power of her pastoral ministry. Her sense of loss early in her ministry when she had to leave a church she loved, to follow her husband in his calling, led to depression. This too deepened her ministry in the area of emotional pain. These were experiences which Sheila understood as unexpected moments, of grace.

One of the phrases Sheila uses to describe the style of her ministry is, “To bloom where you are planted.” Not all dreams, not all expectations, not all plans, come to fruition. When she started working in the Christian bookstore, she had no inkling that some of her most significant pastoral counseling to that point, might take place in this venue. The venue for ministry, she says, is not the point.

I think that in some way, we are very cloistered in our Churches. Even more so is this true of clergy. Being a minister doesn't always have to fit a certain mould, or a particular model of ministry. The concept of the 'tent-making' ministry, is useful, I think. This model sets you down in the middle of the world, rather than having a sense of being set apart, or cloistered.

About her stint in the bookstore,

The experience impressed upon me that my ministry is not confined to a Church, to a geographical location. God could use me in my tent-making ministry. I was to bloom where I was planted. The manager of the bookstore encouraged my ministry. I would want to be an encourager for others, in their ministry, whether inside church walls, or in the community.

This is a concept of openness both to the leading of God, and to responding to need, when and where the call comes.

When Sheila was called to her first major team ministry it was unexpected. It was, to her, a bit of a joke, God's joke perhaps. Following His lead taught “me the joys and struggles of working in team ministry,” and at the same time, helped her grow in wisdom and knowledge about the nature of this form of ministry. The openness to God's

unexpectedness, was also the willingness to risk response, to explore, and to be free for being led. “I am on a journey and I want to explore what God has given me in that journey.”

Being open for the unexpected, for Sheila, has also meant the development of a sense of acceptance of limitation, a willingness to compromise her own expectations.

People, institutions, churches will not always be what one expects.

God is fair, but life is not fair. Work with what you’ve got rather than what you haven’t got. You can acknowledge your pain and work with your pain. You can know how your pain has wounded you, but don’t have to let it overwhelm or control you.

And again, “for me, it’s how can I live most creatively with my world and in the midst of some of the obstacles.”

Learning this holy compromise has been difficult for Sheila, but it has released her to live out her ministry with optimism, a sense of celebration, and a fundamental commitment to the valuing of each person’s experience, along with an openness to God’s humour.

5. Peter

Ministry: Acompanando: A Ministry of Being With

Peter has been ordained in the priesthood for approximately thirty years. He was the middle child in a family of seven; one older and one younger brother, two older and two younger sisters. His older brother died suddenly when Peter was in high school.

A. PROFILE

1. Early Life Experience

Peter was born in a rural fishing village in the Atlantic Provinces. As he says :

Our family life was simple and we were poor, economically. Dad worked at a number of jobs, as a fisher, labourer, fish plant worker, and for the last 27 years of his life, a worker in a plastics factory. Mom did not work outside the home but saw her vocation as full time wife and mother.

Peter's earliest memories are of his father leaving home on his 28 foot Tancook schooner, to spend the week on the fishing banks. In childhood Peter experienced both parents as hardworking and dedicated entirely to their children and their faith. "We kept a cow, hens and a pig in the early years. We burned wood and carried water from the well near the house. A potato and mixed vegetable garden was a yearly ritual."

It was a warm and happy family life, and very church connected from the start. Family, community and school were closely tied, and even the school, which was a public school, composed mainly of Catholics and Anglicans, was never far from a Christian orientation. Says Peter, "I think I had the best of all worlds." Still, the family was poor by modern standards. His father, for instance, had to make a choice between fixing up the house or buying a car. He chose the former, and never knew how to drive a car.

Peter, at age seven or eight, became an altar server. Because no one was around to do it, one day the priest enlisted him into service. He continued as an altar server till the end of high school. The family was heavily involved in church activities. His father

rang the bell and took collection, his brothers became altar servers, and at parish fair time, the whole family was involved in all kinds of ways. Catechism was every Sunday at 2:00 p.m., and Peter would attend week after week learning the Baltimore Catechism as it was known. He reports:

I can only remember the first few questions of the Catechism now, but I do remember the experience. I also remember the dedication of this man who did this very thoroughly week after week, and if you didn't say the answer quick enough, he said it for you, because everybody had to be covered. Somehow it all happened, and it worked.

About his ongoing responsibilities as an altar server Peter reports:

I became very familiar with the preparations for liturgy and enjoyed being there. Fasting from midnight, I more than once grew faint and had to leave for fresh air. Yet I took the work seriously, and soon found myself in a kind of leadership role of teaching the younger members the details of the Tridentine mass. Working at the fair, performing in the Saint Patrick's Day concert or helping clean the cemetery, the 'McBrides' were there. The parish priests always seemed dedicated and prayerful, and in their own kind of world.

One area of growing consciousness was a sense of the lower economic status of his family and community, especially through junior high and senior high school years as he mixed with young people from a much wider geographic area: "getting the feeling that they lived in nicer houses and, you know, were dressed a bit better, and kind of wrestling with that."

Another growing area of consciousness, although Peter says he was a "late bloomer," was his interest in the girls among his coterie of friends. He acknowledges the influence of the values of his parents in enabling him to move through adolescence without major difficulty.

One event which stands out is the sudden death of a cousin and friend when Peter

was ten or eleven years of age. He had just finished speaking with his friend on the way home from mass, and shortly after heard a gun shot. "I waited for it all to change and not be real." The whole community grieved the loss of this young boy.

Also at this time, Peter had a paper route for six or seven years. He remembers the impact of this as he came to know many of the adults of the community, and as many of them also began to confide in him. He recalls his caring response to one destitute family who asked him for a short term loan to help tide them over the weekend. "But more importantly, I came to realize that people build up a trust with one another over a period of time. They would often share aspects of their lives that were important and even intimate at times."

During his high school years Peter remembers enjoying his group of friends, attending dances, meeting girls, successfully socializing, "I loved that time and continue to romanticize about it." At the same time, he continued to be aware of having less, thinking it a bit unfair, but not considering it a matter of injustice. Peter reports that in terms of personality, he was kind of shy and quiet, with a touch of low self image. He continued active in the church, had the usual questions, and, in a kind of natural way, did consider the possibility of becoming a priest, speaking once to his parish priest who replied calmly, "Oh, consider it, think about it and pray about it."

While aware of the strength of his and his family's commitment to their church, Peter was benignly aware of the other major denomination, the Anglicans. His best friend was an Anglican, and through that friendship he became aware of the similarity of service and of dedication. What developed was a loyalty to his own, awareness of

difference, but no real feelings of discrimination against others. In high school, there was a much larger catchment area incorporating a significant Black community. He was aware of prejudice, and of the long term adjustment involved in changing this: “It took some work to recognize equality. I am not saying I always recognized it, but it was another one of those adjustments.” Getting used to the city folk, as well as the forty minute ride to school every morning too was an adjustment: “My way of handling those things was to keep quiet and make it look like I knew what I was doing, even if I didn’t. I learned that early on, and I still use it.”

Two events were of major impact. The first was the death of his older brother. “The world came crashing down when my older brother, after three days illness, died. The whole family was devastated, and my mother grieved deeply.” Peter found it difficult handling his own grief, and because his sisters were away, it was even more difficult trying to cope with his mother’s inconsolable feelings. “I don’t think I did it very well. As I recall, all I wanted to do is get back with my friends and away from the house.”

A few weeks after his brother’s death, Peter was in a car accident with a friend, spending a week in hospital. His mother was distraught. It was not an easy time:

The deaths of friends and brother caused me to think about life, its fragility and meaning. I came to no profound conclusions, but belief in God, life after death and similar concepts, became very important. I maintained a regular prayer life, and asked for the grace to know where I was called to go. I steadily reflected on the possibility of ministry.

One further influence, Peter notes, was that of a priest of the parish who was unique particularly in the way in which he was especially interested in the youth, starting

youth groups, bringing in music and other such initiatives. He had some weaknesses, and eventually had to leave the parish. But for Peter, “He had a profound affect on me, in his ability to preach and his depth of knowledge of the faith. He was ahead of his time, and would have loved the Second Vatican Council, but he didn’t live to see it.” Something was out of place, and the priest was assigned elsewhere. Peter reports that he and a friend helped the priest to move. “It was a difficult time,” perhaps for Peter as well as the priest.

2. Young Adult Life Experience

Ironically, a small insurance policy on his brother paved the way for Peter to enter university. “Was this the mysterious hand of God? I have thought of that over the years without ever seeing it as a sadistic thing, but perhaps as something good coming from a tragic event. There is a bigger plan here and I will never understand it fully.”

Peter still had the idea at the back of his mind of the possibility of seminary, and an undergraduate background was required in this region. He considered social work in terms of keeping options open, but saw the priest in charge of vocations for the diocese. Peter wasn’t sure about his calling, but the priest wisely responded: “You don’t need to know definitively, but if you’re interested, we’ll support you.”

This support continued to be strong. The diocese opened a residence for men going to university and underwrote the cost of the lodging for those considering the priesthood. Peter lived there for two years, and found the community to be extremely positive. “There were thirty-two of us, and we became a very close knit community. It was run like a little minor seminary with regular weekday mass together, morning prayer

together, and the guidance of a spiritual director.” If Peter still entertained doubts about the major step he was considering for his life, “This was a diocesan program that allowed me to move in that direction with a bit more ease, financially, communally and spiritually.” The impact of this special residential experience was of such significance that Peter gives it credit for his continued commitment towards priesthood. Friendships have remained even in later years.

Questions remained for Peter. “Could I live the celibate life? Did I want to?” He didn’t want to, but the draw of priesthood remained strong. “I never burned any bridges, but I knew that deep inside, I felt a genuine calling. I remember being a little upset with God for doing this. The call was slow and not so steady.” At the conclusion of his undergraduate studies Peter entered seminary still without his degree, an exceptional situation because he needed special permission to move forward. Peter remembers the trip to the seminary, his first day, when his Mother took the trip part way with him, and wept, when she got out of the car.

Peter entered seminary right after the Second Vatican Council. He reports:

Seminary, with twelve first year students, getting to know the ropes, wearing cassocks, ritual prayer, programs to acquaint us with life in there; it seemed unreal. The remnants of pre-Vatican II thought and style still pervaded. But it was a time of change. Every month, we could see things changing. By the second year the cassock had gone. We could wear a suit, and by the end of the time there, we dressed casually all the time. Some guys remembered being taught in Latin, but by the time I arrived, it was all English, with the possibility of some French. Also we went from having sixty seminarians at the beginning of my first year, to twenty-two at the end of my fourth year. Some of the priests who taught, were struggling with their vocation and unsure where they wanted to be. Some young priests of the diocese left the priesthood. The numbers are fewer in the seminary and generally there was a sense of upheaval after the council. The small group of us, now six before graduation, discussed these issues and joked

about having a ticket on the Titanic. Yet, within the Church there was vitality and life. I went through struggles, and questioned where I really wanted to be. At times, a feeling of loneliness came over me, a kind of “dark night of the soul.”

Peter speaks about the impact of the Papal encyclicals: “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” about evangelism in the modern world; “*Populorum Progressio*,” about the progress of the people on issues of justice and dignity; and “*Humanai Vitae*,” about the traditional teaching on the sacredness of life, contraception and such issues. Peter remembers a meeting with the well known priest Father Bernard Haring, who was a friend to the Pope. In reference to some of these issues, Haring said to the Pope, “This is not right, you know, I disagree with you on that,” evidence thought Peter, of a new style for the Church.

The years in seminary were not easy, and the final decisions about ordination even more difficult.

I became aware that the call to ministry was a grace and blessing, which carried with it, great responsibilities and a way of life that was not easy, but fulfilling. I was growing in awareness of the church as the people of God, as a community of faith. I was called through the community. God was not working in a vacuum but through this people, even with all our sins and faults.

Peter credits the Bishop with having the kind of vision of the church at that time, which motivated and supported those fewer men who were moving towards priesthood. Towards the end of his theological training he became a sub-deacon and shortly thereafter, ordained a deacon. As sub-deacon he took his vow of celibacy. He recalls coming out of the church and chapel, and turning to classmates saying, “My God, what have we done.” It was with a bit of humour, but at the same time, quite serious. Peter notes that his attraction to women never waned. Some years before, while in Toronto, he had fallen in love. It would always be an area of struggle and reconsecration for him.

Peter also recalls his summer ministry in the Cathedral Church. It was an experience which typifies his early ministry, with emphases on youth work, baptisms and marriages. These were positive experiences and signs “that I do belong here. I preach for the first time and though it is not great, it is a start,” and there’s lots of support from the young priests around, and also friendships of couples and youth.

The theological training was particularly invigorating during his last years at seminary. “There were new people coming in who were: tough, but relevant and current.” He remembers also the newness of Clinical Pastoral Education; “Reg Craig, who helped us to do some interpersonal stuff, and I can recall some of those powerful moments; and Earl McKnight, a wonderful man, so supportive and helpful to us.”

From his class, four were ordained in his diocese. “We were ordained in our home parish, overcrowded as it was, on a beautiful May day. It was a gala event and we celebrated it well. It was a celebration for family, parish and the Diocese, with a real spirit of hope and enthusiasm.”

3. Experience in Ministry

Peter’s first major appointment was to a downtown church, “a lively new church” where he functioned as assistant priest..

My first years I loved. I got to know many families with whom I am friends yet. There was the feeling of belonging to a community, and a beginning to my own awareness that I did have gifts for ministry. It was also a time of adjusting to the role and function, coming to feel more strongly that I didn’t need to be a “priest by dress,” every moment of my life.

He remembers lots of growing pains, and “striving to keep in the right

relationship with people. There were lots of young women there in that parish who were just so delightful and I remember saying to myself, ‘Now, Peter, know your boundaries there.’”

Peter recalls also tragic moments resulting in funerals. He remembers one where a woman he knew was murdered in her little store, “It was one of those things that impacted on me, not just the tragedy, but being with the family through that.” And another, “going to a home one night to tell the family of the death of the husband at work; being with people in their most difficult and tragic time. I think I have developed my way of being present in those moments in certain ways.”

On the other hand, Peter recalls his joy in working with youth. “We had all kinds of fun. We started a youth group and I recall borrowing a van, and getting this pool table from the police and setting it up, and running around organizing and doing all these great things which I loved.” He reports it was the creativity of the ministry which was so enlivening.

The next pastoral experience “changed my life completely.” At this stage in his ministry, Peter wondered what to do next, sensing that he needed something new, adventurous. He had thought in the past of joining the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, but had been persuaded of the need in the diocesan ministry. Now there was an opportunity to apply to go to Latin America. In doing so, Peter had no idea that the opportunity to go would be provided so promptly. Before he knew it, he was off to a five year ministry. “I would say that in my whole twenty-nine plus years in ministry, that my opportunity to go to Latin America certainly was one of the most outstanding events, and

it has coloured my life in a most positive way ever since.”

He remembers arriving in the area of the mission:

I recall I learned enough to celebrate Mass in Spanish, but I couldn't preach yet. It was on Palm Sunday when we read both the gospel and the psalms, and then had a procession with the palm and olive branches. Well, in Latin America, it takes on a whole different note. It takes on an authenticity that you would never feel here. We walked around the park that was outside the church, with kids walking with us and around us. They would just sort of join in, and some would leave. The dogs were there, some barking, other people were on bicycles, and we all sang simple songs as we walked. The people seemed unconcerned about whatever they were waving in the procession. It was simple and basic, but beautiful in its way, and I thought, “This is it. I think I have arrived.”

This mission was where the authenticity of the Gospel became most alive for Peter. The mission moved into a small house which was just one more of the same row of houses where the people lived. There were wall to wall houses, ten metres wide and fifty metres deep, made of adobe and mud bricks, a generator for electricity, oil lamps and candles, water by pumping, with mice and cockroaches, dogs barking everywhere, and dust blowing.

It meant so much, just getting to know the people, people who had such a depth of belief and faith. Often their concept of God was a very vindictive God, because they suffered so much, and yet, where else could they go? Their church connection was close but that varied too. But it was just being with them and working with the youth and just accompanying them, that was just the thing. It became more and more simply a matter of being with them. Baptisms were a very special time and celebrating marriages as well. But again, for me, it was the impact of the tragic funerals, and being with the people in their most difficult times: I became very close to the life there.

Another major activity was in the building of the church.

They had started out to build a simple little chapel. They didn't have the money, so we worked a deal with them of 50/50, but part of their 50 could be labour. I'm not sure how fine that line got, but often it was more like 40/60 or 25/75 depending upon their ability, but they felt that they were doing everything that

they could. We worked closely with them. I remember doing these work bees with them on Sunday afternoons, plastering church walls, covering over the adobe and the women bringing the food and drinking chicha which is a corn beer, and just being part of all that. These were wonderful celebrations!

This was a ministry in the context of a special effort based on Pope John XXIII's statement that Latin America was a continent that was "baptized," but not yet "evangelized". The Pope requested that every diocese in North America and Europe make some kind of missionary effort to Latin America. For Peter, it was a matter of the rightness of where he was and what he was doing.

I know that the council had said that the first ministry of the priesthood is the proclamation of the Good News. The sacramental ministry, that's second, but first of all, we must proclaim the Good News. And I think that we do that in our very formal preaching moments, but I sometimes think that it happens when we say very little, when we are just being there, being part of a community of people who are struggling for everything that they get.

Theologically, Peter had been exposed to the new Liberation Theology before he left for Latin America. It had raised questions in his mind,

Are things really that bad? Is there that much oppression? I had to work that through, but I caught something of it, and that's one of the reasons I thought more seriously about making the move to go. Once in Latin America I met Gustavo Gutierrez, the leader of this theological thought, and also other Latin American priests who were very involved. They led me along, but I was still very much immersed in this North American culture and life, and I probably still had some of the idea that I was going to be such a wonderful help to these people.

Speaking more broadly about his experience with missions, Peter muses that,

Missionaries often went with the idea they were going there to give the message, and that is all that would be needed. "We have Christ and we're taking Him to you." We went with a bit of that attitude ourselves at the beginning, but how slowly we learned that we just go there, to be with them, and the gift that comes from that. If I grasp that just a little bit, I thank God for that, because it was a wonderful thing for me. It changed my life.

Says Peter, it really wasn't the point to change the people, it was he, himself who was changed.

One other aspect of his ministry in Latin America needs noting. It was always a team ministry, with priests coming and going. The simplicity of living conditions, and the striving to meet the needs of the people, required a true sharing among priests and sisters at a very fundamental level. Peter notes that currently, there are lay missionaries who have assumed primary responsibilities.

As a final comment Peter reports,

They taught me about faith in a new way. As I reflect upon it, it was my understanding of the Church which was most affected; the sense of the church as a community of faith, the sense of the presence of Christ in the gathered community. It was also experiencing that community among the poor where I really understood the basic identification of Christ with the poor, and what that might mean for me. All of this kind of wove itself through my consciousness.

Peter returned home five years after he had left, just before Christmas. The return to Canada was difficult, a reverse culture shock.

I came home at Christmas and everything was just going crazy. I didn't go into the mall and start acting like John the Baptist or anything. After all, I love Christmas, and I love a party, but still I was overwhelmed with the amount of everything.

He had asked the Bishop if he could go on a study leave. This experience and study enabled him to manage much more evenly, the shock of returning to Canada. He attended a study program in Ontario, staying with a priest who had also been in Latin America. The group was very mixed internationally, with Africans, Americans, South Americans and Australians.

It was a study of Scripture and social analysis of different aspects of the

relationship of the third world to our local conditions. The Scripture came alive in that study more than it ever did in the seminary. It was really one of those very direct kind of learning processes, a 'seeing', 'judging' and 'acting' approach similar to the method used in the Young Christian Student Worker Movement. Coming back from Latin America, and doing Scripture in that way that helped us to make sense of our experience in a deeper way. The teacher, now a Bishop, had great insights especially into issues of justice and the Gospel. By the time I left there, I had gone through a process of re-entering and was anxious to get into parish life.

Peter's next major parish responsibility was in a team ministry in a large town in Atlantic Canada, Coldlake. The major change worked through in this parish, was the process whereby two parishes which had been independently served, were now ministered to in a shared way. There was also the challenge of developing a stronger shared ministry with sisters who were assigned to the parish, and also developing a lay ministry within the parish itself. "We began working with non-ordained very closely as part of the pastoral team and beginning to understand what all of that meant." The maintenance of team ministry also had challenges in terms of the differing personalities of priests, but working on the awareness of those differences enabled the team to work. "It was tough at times, working with the other priest. We were so completely different in our personalities, an experiential type versus conceptual, myself a P (perceptive) off the scale, and he, a high J (judging)."²⁰⁰

One other area of development in this church was the increased emphasis on the Christian initiation of adults. Peter suggests the emphasis was a result of the church's experience in Africa. "We formed these small communities of people who welcomed in

²⁰⁰Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1980) 69.

new members. This was a powerful experience, to see that adult faith alive.”

About this time Peter had the good fortune of participating in a trip to Israel with friends and family. Again it was an experience with which he credits a heightened understanding of Scripture. “I now had this seven years of pastoral experience, and seeing the places of the Holy Land made the issues of justice and poverty in the Scripture come alive again, just as I had experienced in my earlier study at the Study Centre in Ontario.”

Peter reports that at Coldlake, he started to implement in a real way, the model of practice based on the Young Christian Student Worker model of “Act, See, Judge and Act.” It was a model based on immersion into the life of the community.

One experiences what is going on, seeing what is happening and reflecting upon it, as a kind of judging process, and based on the learning, developing a new form of action. It was similar to the “praxis” model we used in Latin American and which we experimented with in Atlantic Canada.

It had become Peter’s normal way of working in pastoral ministry.

After six years of work in the parish, Peter requested a sabbatical and was granted a year of study at a well-known American Catholic university. His studies focussed in an area which had long interested him, liturgy.

The more I studied in this topic area, the more I loved it, and, while not considering myself an academic, entered into the program as best I could. The freedom of living a more casual lifestyle with the break from pastoral responsibilities was refreshing. I loved what I was doing partly because I had been presiding at mass for seventeen years, performing all manner of liturgies for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other rituals, all of which were very symbolic and traditional. But this learning gave me the opportunity to really understand what worship and liturgy was all about. The studies brought all of it together in an enlightening way for me, and I think renewed my confidence about what I was being called to do in ministry.

Peter then returned to work in a small parish in a fishing village. As well, he took on leadership duties in the area of liturgy for the diocese. He continued to be committed to the fundamentals of pastoral ministry. "I wanted to be with the people, that didn't change," but he also became involved in the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, reviewing projects for funding in the third world. He recalls especially planning for a 'Meeting Place' worship service based on the concept of solidarity with the third world. The focus was fisheries, both locally and in the third world.

It was a wonderful celebration, I interviewed a local fisherman and it was like a prophetic statement: He was saying, "They don't realize this, but those big draggers are out there, they are destroying the stocks," and he named the things that did ruin the fishery. This was a man who has this simple way about him, not a complicated character, but a good man and a man who discerned well.

For Peter, there were similarities he was discovering more and more, between the issues of the people of Latin America, and the people who made up these small Atlantic parishes.

About this time, Peter's mother died. "It was probably the most traumatic thing that happened to me during my time in Little Bay." His nephew had died of cancer two years earlier and then his mother also died of cancer.

Of all the funerals I had, literally hundreds, this was by far the most difficult. It was an experience unlike any other. Mum was the matriarch, she had a way of knowing and directing us and we knew it as clear as can be. I know that I saw things in a slightly different way after that.

After three years Peter was appointed pastor to St. Judes, a very large parish of over one thousand families in a suburban area. The strongest impression was the

busyness, and the wide range of activities and responsibilities; “The place was so big, with a lot of coming and going. One of the challenges was trying to get a handle on things, and bring it together. At times I wondered, where am I, and what am I supposed to be doing?”

Two elements of work stand out here: building a pastoral team and supporting a lay ministry. Peter helped develop the team ministry, hiring, as required, in the areas of pastoral support and Christian education. He also supported the development of lay ministry, particularly as he felt the overwhelming requirements in attempting to minister to such a huge congregation. There had been an active lay ministry, but Peter saw its value and encouraged its growth. Others reported when he left, “During your time here, we have come to know what it means to give pastoral care, to be effective in hospital visits and visits to the home.” Peter reports it was a large group of both women and men who performed this service and developed it in a way that really answered an important need at this time in the parish.

In the past, it would have been seen very much as the priest’s role to take communion to the sick, and to make the first Friday visits and get them all in there and done. And, now there was this whole network of people, these faithful people from the community, who at Sunday mass come forward to prepare to make their visits to the sick. I encouraged them and they worked out. In this way, people’s lives were being touched sacramentally, as well as pastorally and spiritually.

Speaking more directly about his model of ministry in this church he reports, “Because of its size, that was the only way ministry could happen, through collaboration.” Peter speaks not only about the extent of sharing in pastoral ministry, and lay service, but also about his awe with respect to the quality of pastoral service

being performed by those in this lay ministry.

I have never wanted to give the impression I believe that if lay people can perform a service, then it's not something I should do. If it needs to be done, let all of us do it. And so often it was the women who brought something special to this ministry, who in certain moments, brought a gift. I remember one who performed such saintly service to an ill parishioner, and when I was there, she said somehow that the value of the service was because of me. Not at all. All I could see was how well she did, so much so, I learned from her. She made me feel more comfortable in this particular pastoral setting because of her own strengths.

B. LEARNING

1. Ministry: A Fundamental Pastoral Service: Acompañando

Peter, from beginning to end, expressed his ministry in a basic, clear, response of love for the people, through a non-judgemental process of accompanying the people on their spiritual journey, a fellow-traveler one might say. He expresses this thought in terms of his own development as a minister over many years, and in reflection on his various ministries.

To say the least, my concept of ministry as an ordained priest has changed very much over these twenty-nine years. While I always had the idea that it was a call to loving service, to pastoral care in a wide sense, and a call to preach the Good News, the way that I may do this in different situations, has changed. From an insecure young man who felt that I needed to have answers for everyone, I gradually changed, to recognize that accompanying people on their journey of faith would bring me and others into a deeper knowledge of God's presence in our lives.

There are various connections here. The first is his sense of belonging in the community in which he was raised, and as he talks about his paper route when a youngster, we sense his growing awareness of the needs of the people poignantly illustrated in his response to a request for a loan from a destitute family in the

community. He learned early what caring was about. He also learned within his own family, the duties and responsibilities of family life. Understandably, the death of his brother stands out. He showed a vulnerable sensitivity through these moments of tragedy in life, associated to some extent with his relationship with his mother. These experiences helped form a sensitivity which expressed itself later in the development of pastoral skills in family and funeral ministry. “The deaths of friends and brother caused me to think about life, its fragility, and its meaning.” The death of his mother later in his pastoral experience left a pivotal mark, “I know I looked at things in a different way after that.”

It is important to clarify that Peter does not have a ministry which revolves around grief, far from it, but these experiences were fundamental to his sense of being a pastor. “It touches on the whole aspect of the sacredness of life which I believe in deeply, that every life is sacred and it’s that belief deep within me that life continues on at death, somehow, in another way.” We can see the strong links here between how Peter has experienced these issues in his own family life, and how they extend to his sense of ministry. “So, I think I have developed my way of being present in those moments in certain ways.”

Again and again Peter uses the language of “accompanying” or “being with” to express the style and substance of his ministry. Referring to the style of his work in Latin America he says: “It was just being with them, working with the youth and accompanying them. That was the thing. It was journeying with the people that meant so much to me, and that allowed me to become so very close to the life there.”

Peter describes what it was like at funerals there and the language people used.

I would arrive at the home, and see some of the people from the parish there. I would say "It's good to see you here, what brings you to this place?" And they would reply "Acompañando Padre." "We are where we should be now, accompanying the grieving family here." And I thought, this really means something. It was an expression they used, and it touched me. Somehow it meant something for the whole of my ministry.

Peter contrasts this sense of ministry with the pre-Vatican II clericism, its language and its methods.

"It was a kind of pushing clericalism aside, saying, 'I'm not ordained to be a cleric, I'm ordained to be a minister.' And that has a very different tone to it."

From Latin America, he learned again a simple belief about ministry, that,

Ultimately relationships and love, to use the word, are what really count, and knowing what it means to be a people who are called by God. It just helped me to deepen that and to know it in a new way. It was a recognition that legalistic details are secondary, that people count first.

This basic belief now lives in a tension for Peter, as a priest in his church. He finds more and more that the hierarchy is posing barriers to the expression of basic pastoral care, barriers which are symbolized in the prohibition of ordination for women or married persons: "Ministry is for me, living in tension: between the injustice of our world and the justice of the Gospel; between the heavy handedness of Church authoritarianism (when that happens); and the real needs of the people."

Even Peter's strong interest in liturgy is an interest fundamentally tied to pastoral concern. Liturgy was not a form prescribed by the hierarchy rather, "I think the liturgy truly was a reflection of that journey that people were taking, the journey of the people celebrating the presence of Christ in the many different areas of their lives." And again,

“At Sunday Mass I try to use language there that I think speaks relationally. It’s not a matter of stating dogma, but talking about God as a God of relationship and love.”

When young people or others come to prepare for their marriage, or when Peter is interacting with others,

who are going through times of great struggle. They come with their situation and their need. If I can strive to be with them in that need, even just to hear their story and to attempt to respond, then maybe I may help them to move on. I try to exercise that ministry of meeting people where they are.

Peter feels it is not his place ‘to judge,’ but to urge them, to invite them, into “an active participation in the life of the parish.”

Lastly there is the note of the importance of vulnerability in Peter’s understanding of ministry. One of the most significant learnings in his Latin American experience was the sense of:

coming to know God through the peoples’ experience; knowing God through the experience of the vulnerability of their lives, to be able to let go of my first world securities and structures and to be there with them in their vulnerability before authorities, before the church, and ultimately before God.

This is a ministry which lives by the faith of the people and learns from that faith.

Ministry for Peter is finally, a personal relationship to the calling; a personal consecration which becomes the core of ministry. “Within myself I experience the calling of Jesus to compassion, justice and integrity, and at the same time, I experience the tension which is created because of my own humanity, my sinfulness, laziness and lack of lived commitment.”

2. Ministry: A Celebration in Community: Belonging, Change, Openness

Peter's life experience and his ministry are both powerfully connected within the sense of the priority and meaning of community. This sense began early in his family and church experience. "Our lives centered around three institutions, the family, the parish church and the school. Sunday mass was the family ritual." Becoming an altar server at age seven or eight meant spending vast amounts of time weekly in church functions. Relations with the church and with the priests of the church were always positive. The influence of the church community was powerful for Peter, and had him considering the possibilities of priesthood early. Being able to move into an even closer church community during university days helped to sustain his spiritual direction. It was a structure which supported his social, financial and spiritual needs, and which fostered his growth and belief in his vocational direction. The relationships formed then, live on today.

The "belongingness" of Peter's experience in the church remains a constant source of support. Whether it be the university residence experience, the close, supportive relationships developed with fellow ordinands, or the ongoing team ministries structured in every parish he has ever served, ministry is a communion of fellow travelers. For Peter, it included the development of wider bonds through mission work, ongoing educational pursuits, intensive group scriptural study, and through the years, the development of a formidable network of relationships, a strong community of personal

support. It is a belonging which has meant much to a quiet, or as he says, a “shy” person from a small fishing village in the Atlantic Canada.

Celebration was an important and regular aspect of ministry for Peter. The sense of this celebratory aspect of life in the church is caught as we reflect on his remembering of church fairs growing up, his enjoyment of early work with youth, his description of his ordination in his home church, the joy of celebratory experiences with parishioners in Latin America, and his enjoyment of the communities of faith he has worked with over the years. To further emphasize the point, in every venue of ministry, Peter’s focus was to put the sense of community first, such that in some sense, it was not his ministry to the church community, so much as it was his supporting the mutual ministry of the people that captured his understanding.

From the beginning Peter has seen ministry as a changing, learning experience. “I mean, every experience for me has been a time of change and deepening.” One of his first experiences of change in the church was the experience in seminary.

I entered the seminary right after the Second Vatican Council. Every month saw significant changes. We were moving into a new time. We weren’t sure what was going on. It was a time of great upheaval in the life of the church and the seminary.

Yet for Peter, it really was a time of freedom and growth; he thrived on the sense of new opportunities. In some way, the changes which were happening led him and his fellow sojourners to build stronger bonds of friendship and support.

Ministry for Peter has never been a pre-determined activity. It springs from the needs of the people in the specific context of their lives and their Christian community.

“I am very conscious and careful not to say, ‘Well back in the last place, we did it this way.’ The question has been, ‘How can we do things here?’ and to know already it’s going to be a very different way of going about pastoral service.” Ministry for him, has been open-ended not pre-packaged. It has had an experiential base. Peter often referred to his experience with the Young Christian Student Worker model of action based on the four steps of “experiencing, seeing, judging, and acting,” a learning process tied to concrete experience. It was a model he learned through seminary studies and reading in Liberation Theology, and a model he practiced in all of his parish work. Peter, throughout the practice of his ministry, looked for the creative path, and remained open to new ways of experimenting with ministry and service. In Latin American it was experimentation with cultural sensitivity and justice, in Coldlake it was experimentation with team ministry, in the large congregation of St. Judes, it was experimentation with lay ministry. Every experience became the opportunity for new understanding and new structure. It was this openness to change which enabled Peter to meet challenges which “changed my life completely.”

Peter’s struggle with celibacy may also be put in the context of the centrality of community. As the importance of community is advanced, and pastoral care becomes more and more personal, the issue of celibacy became a greater challenge. So he reports, “Some friendships with parishioners were highly supportive and genuine. I continued to struggle with celibacy as some of those friends were women to whom I was very attracted and it was often mutual.” Celibacy led him in two directions, back towards the healthy supports from colleagues in ministry and towards a stronger prayer life, but also,

ironically, forward towards a stronger understanding of the importance of personal and sexual boundaries in pastoral work. “It was painful, and a struggle, but there was never any judgementalism on the part of others.”

Further to the same issue, we note the collegiality of the priesthood experienced by Peter, and at the same time the emphasis on the community of faith as the primary focus of ministry. It is in this context that he talks about the experience of abuse in the Catholic community, and his sense of betrayal of all that his colleagues had worked for in the years since Vatican II. “We felt so pained with the abuse things that happened, but at the same time, it also took some of the hallowed halo away.”

Lastly we want to note Peter’s dedication to the study and upholding of the worship of the Church. His decision to study liturgy mid-career, was based on his need to understand the history and dynamic of the central act of the Christian community as community. His work in heading up and developing the diocesan Liturgical Commission was an emphasis on helping to sustain and grow the worship of the church. “It also increased my confidence in how ministry comes to full expression in the Eucharist, and it helped me to understand that the point of it all is the gathered community, the sense of God’s people as a community of life, joy and love.”

In summary, Peter’s experience in ministry has deepened his commitment to the Christian community. It has been a cumulative experience of countless celebrations and a deepening over many years, of experiences of belonging, change and openness.

3. Ministry: A Matter of Cultural Connections-The Third World, Poverty, Justice

Peter's experience in Latin America, coming as it did, early in his ministry, and for such an extended period of time, has informed and inspired his whole ministry. Many times in context of conversation about his ministry he has reiterated how his experience in Latin America changed his life. Much has already been reported about the impact of this experience.

Again, about his experience,

It taught me about faith in a new way. . . it was the sense of church and the sense of that community of faith, and seeing the faith there among the poor. It led me to a profound understanding of how Christ is the fundamental option (the source of real hope) for the poor.

For Peter it was not an ideology which steered his interest and commitment. It was the experience which led him to attempt to make sense of it, and it was his own experience which he brought to the Scriptures for study and enlightenment in both Latin American and in Canada. He wasn't sure that "oppression" was the right word. He attempted to interpret it in terms of the "poverty" experienced by his family in Atlantic Canada, but it didn't fit quite right. The deepening of experience in Latin America "helped me to reflect on this." It was the model of "praxis" as used in liberation theology and his own sense of the model taught by the Young Christian Student Worker Movement which helped him to analyze the social relationships, to examine poverty from a social policy perspective, and to recognize the forces at work which impoverish those who do not will poverty upon themselves. "And I saw that as a direct connection with the Gospel. That the Gospel is Good News to the poor, came alive to me in a way that it had

never before, and in a way that I could apply it here, in Canada.”

The impact of this “deepening” informed his worship, work and learning for the rest of his ministry.

Being in pastoral ministry places one in contact with people in all different economic levels. I don’t see my role as continually criticizing the rich, but as an ordained priest in the ministry of the Gospel, I believe there is always a call to be on the side of the poor. I don’t say that I always do it or know how to do it, but I believe that the Church has that fundamental call to recognize the poor and to work on the side of the poor, whether that be downtown Atlantic Canada or In Latin America, or wherever exploitation occurs.

When Peter returned from his experience in Latin America, he experienced a real culture shock. Not long after returning he was sitting in a car belonging to a friend, and he felt low; he taped a message: “Graham, I really don’t know if I can hang in here or not.” Peter found it very difficult to handle the heightened awareness of disparity. It was his intensive study in Scriptures in Ontario which released him from his resulting depression, allowed him to reconnect to his homeland, and gave him a new perspective from which to exercise his ministry here.

One of the ways Peter has had of keeping the third world experience alive has been continual involvement in the Catholic Development and Peace organization which has helped him to keep abreast of other international justice issues.

As a Catholic priest right here, I can no longer pretend that world wide problems and issues are simply due to fanatics or mislead persons. This is a global village. I belong to the people here, but just as much to others worldwide, who are in need. I may not be able to do much about the problems right here, but I can help to build awareness that this is not God’s will, that exploitation of humans is wrong wherever it occurs, and that as a society we can’t sit idly by.

The sense of justice, the honouring of the individual person, has also affected

Peter's understanding of his current experience within the Church. He fears a return to an authoritarianism in the Church, an emphasis which downplays the role of the laity, a retreat from the hard won battles of the Second Vatican Council.

“Ministry is for me, a living in tension, between the injustice of our world and the justice of the gospel; and also, between the sometime insensitivity of church authorities, and the needs of the people.”

His experiences in Latin America, and his growth in faith, have taught Peter that “There is no one way which is the right way. There are many expressions of faith, and many which represent the experience of the people themselves.” Peter has rejected an older model of missions which tended to make the giving one sided, and tended to deny the validity of the experience of the people with whom he now journeyed. “When you consider language, culture, skin colour, geography and whatever else, and you look at these things in the context of faith, you have to recognize the universality of the Gospel and the infinite forms of its expression.”

Lastly, we reiterate Peter's experience in Latin America as a learning about a new way of perceiving God, to put it dramatically. It was a locating of himself in a new cultural space and perspective, the perspective of the poor in Latin America, and a perceiving of the Gospel out of that vulnerability. He brings that perspective to the whole of his ministry.

4. Ministry: A Shared Vocation; Valuing Lay Ministry: Inclusiveness

Peter's ministry from the beginning, was always in the context of a team, firstly,

of ordained clergy but quickly branching out to embrace lay ministry. His first experiences were most often as an assistant in several parishes before and immediately after ordination. His “highlight” as he puts it, in his work in Latin America was the “parish work with a team of priests and sisters.” Coldlake, his first major parish leadership responsibility following Latin America, was itself, an experimentation in shared ministry, the working out of tensions between pastoral leaders, and the sharing equitably, of pastoral responsibilities. A major development in Coldlake was how “We began working with non-ordained very closely as part of pastoral team and knowing what all of that meant: specifically working closely with two ‘religious’ and non-ordained persons, a married deacon and others, and having them part of the community.” So, over time, Peter developed the skills of working in a team, “I work fairly well with other people, sharing, team ministry, and making things happen that way.”

A major development in this practice of ministry took place as he worked as parish priest in the large parish of St. Judes. We have noted the development of a lay ministry particularly to the ill and hospitalized. Peter fostered and encouraged the network of lay visitors, whom he believed from his experience, provided genuine and high level ministerial support to members of the congregation. It became for him, a true collaborative model of ministry. He articulates in this way: “I think the most important thing was the breakdown of barriers between the ordained and the lay services.” For Peter it was never a matter of losing any authority or sense of his calling; it was, rather, an embracing of others into his ministry.

As work with the lay ministry developed so did his sense of the honouring of the

ministry of women. He saw what he felt were special gifts, gifts which also instructed him in aspects of pastoral work. Those participating in the lay ministry at St. Judes were grateful for Peter's support and encouragement. His own perception was that some were just blossoming in the work. In light of this perception, Peter supported an "inclusiveness" and welcomed women "in all aspects of ministry."

The one area which Peter identified as being a major difficulty for him, has been what he considers to be a resurgence of a more conservative retrenchment in the Church. His primary concern is what he feels to be a focus on "ordained priesthood" at the expense of an enabling and nurturing of lay leadership and ministry so that it might become a stronger part of the pastoral structure. "It seems that we are taking a step back now, limiting ministry rather than opening it up, and generally becoming more protectionist." The trend has seemed to counter the formative spiritual orientation which empowered Peter early in his ministry, and which was so empowering of the community of the people of God.

We end with an "in spite of" note confirming Peter's basic orientation to ministry.

While living my ministry in a very structured church where the hierarchy so often seems at times, to be far removed from the life of people, I have come to know what really counts is close supportive friends and family, people in the parish who accept and love me, and especially being with people in times of great difficulty where I can best serve the Gospel.

CHAPTER VI

A DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEMES
OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTSA. Introduction

Many commonalities of experiential learning in ministry seemed to reveal themselves during interviews with the five final participants. This may not be surprising considering the fact that all participants have spent many years in the same vocation, pastoral ministry. At the same time, each participant entered into the vocation of ministry out of unique and personal circumstances, and each learning was experienced in a different context. A perspective on the subtle differences in the learning process of each participant, will always portray a uniqueness in the learning, which cannot be erased through efforts of integration and synthesis. As these similarities and differences are explored it will be important to relate the ideas to the original experience of each participant.

In working toward identifying similarities there is always an interpretive license for which the author takes responsibility. Others may read the experiences differently, and may engage in their own processes of interpretation. The narratives of the participants are provided enabling the interpreter to do so. However, every effort will be made by this author to interpret the experience of the participants as fully and faithfully as possible.

One point must be made with respect to the nature of the learnings identified by participants in their experience. These learnings have been seen to be highly personal in nature. They have been learnings which have relied on personal experience, and immersion in day to day life in the pastoral ministry. Out of that experiential basis came the reflective process which resulted in the learnings which have been identified.

No effort has been made to identify, in a quantitative way, priorities with respect to the identification and summation of learnings. However in the explication of these themes, those which seemed to be represented most in the narratives of the participants, are identified first.

It should be noted that in this process of summation and synthesis, we are focussing on what might be called “learning themes.” In a sense, these are the result of learning processes, not the learning processes themselves. These learning processes will be addressed in the next chapter. In summarizing the learning identified through the interviews and narratives of participants, we also acknowledge that these learnings are not stated in the words of the participants. They are, rather, a synthesizing of these reports of learning. As such they represent the interpretive process of the author.

As each learning theme is outlined, it is not assumed that each participant’s experiential learning applies to the theme in the same way. Each participant has more or less directly supported the concept of the particular learning theme. Each has provided his or her own angle of perception, and thus enriched the understanding of the breadth and depth of the learning which has taken place.

B. Learning: Reports of Fundamental Change

All participants pointed to significant events or experiences in their lives and ministry which changed fundamentally, their thinking about themselves and their ministry. All, except one, reported some incident of trauma which was a devastation in some way, affecting all of their human processes emotionally, psychologically, cognitively and spiritually. These were incidents which undermined their formative socialization, and required a new perspective, a new way of understanding themselves, in order to integrate the trauma.

These experiences, though challenging to the personal foundations of the individual, nevertheless, in the case of the participants in this project, led to learning and change. Each participant drew on the resources of their Christian faith and tradition, to help restructure their response to a new personal environment. Although the trauma was immediately devastating, in each case, the participants, over a longer time period, worked at integrating the experience, and applying the learning they had achieved, to all areas of their lives.

At this point, we must note that one of our conclusions, with respect to the data obtained from each participant, is that the threads of personal experience and experience in ministry may not be able to be considered distinctly or separately. The vocational choice was intimately related to their earlier life experience, as was their practice in ministry. The impact of personal learning through their personal lives had immediate impact on their vocational perception and practice. This worked obversely as well. New experiences in ministry led to fundamental personal changes, affecting how they

understood themselves and their environment. The intimate interaction of personal and vocational lives was highly significant.

We have seen as well, that the experiences which participants described, were integrated through the application of life-long themes of experiential learning. The traumas experienced, interacted with the issues of early formation, family life, cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, and produced an integration which encompassed these life-long processes. Fundamental change was not seen to be interpreted in isolation. Participants did not have one identity at one point in their lives, and a completely different identity at another. They did experience fundamental change in their understanding, perspective, and action, but always in the context of their life-long issues and experience.

Lastly, we note that while the events experienced by participants often immobilized them and often were very painful, eventually, in all cases, these experiences led to new ways of thinking and acting, which altered their view of themselves, and their understanding and practice of ministry. They were indeed, learning experiences.

Brief descriptions of reports of fundamental change are provided here.

1. Doreen

Dealing with the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexual persons, within one church, challenged Doreen to the deepest level of her being. It was like “a crash into a wall.” She says of the impact of the experience on herself, “I am not the same person I was.” The experience changed her fundamentally. The learning impact of this

experience for Doreen is still taking place. The particular experience itself, was felt directly as a highly negative experience. For that reason, it has taken longer, and required intense reflection, to identify the learning which has occurred. Nevertheless, Doreen has articulated well, new perspectives on herself and her work, as a result of the trauma of her ministry at Stoneybrook.

2. Rufus

For Rufus, it was the devastating experience in his first church, which almost drove him to self-annihilation. His life vocation had for years involved a strong commitment to ministry. It had become a significant part of his self-identity. The fundamental threat to that identity left him bereft. The experience was a kind of vocational trauma which was processed for most of the following years in his ministerial experience. The trauma was acute, while the cognitive impact of the trauma was formulated over a much longer time. He describes the impact as “the death of what I thought ministry was.” His ministry from that point, has been a working out of an understanding of ministry, in light of the “thunderbolt” to its meaning, in his first pastoral charge.

3. George

For George, it was a change in a marital relationship which provided the psychological setting for a profound conversion, an about-face, psychologically, and a new integration of faith and life. Divorce plummeted him into a situation and context which left him without traditional supports, and which pushed him to seek a new source

of psychological stability. This resulted in a new theological perspective and perspective on ministry, which has now provided for many years of reflection and change in practice. With George, issues of faith and the nature of ministry were very integral to the traumatic event itself, so that the trauma was bound up with a change in thinking about faith and ministry. The trauma was resolved by the development of an orientation which effectively integrated George's experience of both life and faith.

4. Sheila

The experience which most challenged Sheila, was the disorientation which occurred at the Middle St. Church. Here, Sheila experienced a rejection which struck at her sense of her calling, a calling which had been undermined in other past circumstances. It was the culmination of challenge to her identity in pastoral ministry, and it provided a thematic pattern to describe the nature of her ongoing ministry. This was a symbol of ministry which acted, first, to affirm and validate herself in her chosen vocation, and second, to use this experience as a direction for ministry with others. Again, the learning related to this experience, was reflected in earlier life experiences. It was a learning which took different forms throughout the remainder of her ministry.

5. Peter

Peter did not experience as traumatic a challenge to his ministry as the other participants. The Latin American experience however, was just as critical an experience, an intense moment, sending out shock waves into all future moments in his ministry. It was the strongest influence in his ministry, as he worked over the years to rationalize its

impact in the North American context, and at the same time, in parts of economically marginalized society in Nova Scotia. The experience “changed my life completely.” Attempting to realize that change within the context of pastoral service in the local Catholic church became Peter’s challenge, worked through over many years in ministry.

C. Learning: Deeper Empathic Insights

Empathic learning, as understood here, is learning which explicitly draws upon the personal experience of the participant, to improve ministry to others. This improvement is based on a fuller, more accurate understanding of the experience of the person being ministered to. All participants, in one way or another, clearly implied that their experience had greatly improved their empathic ability to understand, and to provide, quality pastoral care. Although specific examples of experience may be extrapolated to illustrate this fact, it is undeniable that all participants believed, that the vast range of their experience before and after ordination, was responsible for significant enhancement of their empathic abilities.

1. Doreen

Doreen noted with respect to the loss of her second child, “I learned from this loss how to be much more empathetic with people who have suffered loss.” Her understanding of ministry was formed through the conflict over the ideals about models of ministry. She embraced the model of ministry ‘from the heart’, which to her, was a model based on responding to the deepest needs of others, clearly an empathic model of ministry. Doreen’s acceptance of her church’s stand on the ordination of homosexuals

was less an academic point of view, as it was a basic stand against the rejection of persons, an empathic orientation. Empathy, in a more complex sense, was also a learning, for Doreen, based on her lesson in human motivation from Stoneybrook. Her difficult experiences in the church forced her to look more deeply into the meaning and actions of others. “All of this has led me to try to see people as they really are, and to try to get to know more about them. In doing this, I can better understand what makes them act and think the way they do.” Empathic learning embraced not just the “light side,” but also the “darker side,” of humanity, recognizing the mixed motivations and purposes of human thought and behaviour.

2. Rufus

Rufus’ empathic strength came out of his rejection of the angry God of his childhood, and his commitment to a ministry of compassion. It was his experience with the death of his grandmother, and the empathetic words of the Anglican minister, which impressed him, and drew him into the vocational path of ministry. As to the nature of ministry, Rufus acknowledges the journey is firstly his own, a kind of self-validation, and that ministry itself, is most honestly, the validating of each person’s journey. This too, is an empathic model of ministry. Clearly, Rufus’ own personal suffering in the struggle to minister, informs his appreciation of the struggles of others. His learned acceptance of himself, has informed his acceptance of others.

3. George

With George, the establishment of an empathic ministry came with his turn from

the domination of a rigid, pre-packaged belief system, to an emotionally freeing, integration of his life and faith. This integration opened him to the people with whom he pastored, and issued in a fundamental acceptance of his self, and the selves of others. While, previously, he was closed off to others, and certainly unaccepting of the failures of others, his new found faith embraced humanity in both its weaknesses, and strengths. It was a faith which supported an acceptance of his own journey, and functioned as a kind of welcoming sign for others to join his “journey”, and he, theirs. This mutuality, and George’s own awareness of his personal journey, have been the sources of an empathic ministry.

4. Sheila

Sheila’s ministry of valuing and affirming, came directly from her struggles with these issues early in life, and during her seminary training. The requirement for her model of team ministry, and for that matter, her marriage relationship, has meant strong learning in the ability to understand and distinguish the gifts and strengths of others, as well as of herself. Her early exposure to issues of mental health in her family, has informed all of her ministry, with a sensitivity to the emotional health and needs of others. This awareness, heightened by the struggles she experienced in and outside the church, for recognition of her vocational self, have made an empathic ministry foundational for Sheila.

5. Peter

Peter’s experience, particularly in Latin America, taught him to perceive

“difference” in the human condition. Most dramatically stated, in terms of the change in his perception of God, was his determination to see God the way in which the poor of Latin America perceived God. This was a kind of fundamental empathic challenge, to perceive from the eyes of “the other,” to identify with people whose experience was unlike and indeed, opposed to, that of North American, and yet whose humanity was the same. This empathic challenge stayed with Peter throughout his ministry. It lent a model of ministry which rejected a concept of ministry “over” or “to” the people, in favour of “being with” the people. It was a model which received a ready audience in Peter, because of his own emotional caring for his own family and community, and a certain socio-cultural awareness through growing up in a rural, economically disadvantaged area of Atlantic Canada. The cultural conflict, as the context for empathy, might be seen as an experience which posed a special, and enlightening, challenge.

D. Learning: Reworking an Ideal

In several of the narratives the participants reported that they began their ministry with an ideal “picture” of what ministry would be, or was meant to be. Through their experience in ministry, that ideal was changed, altered, and, in some cases, replaced. This process was always reported as a learning process, leading to new interpretations of ministry. These interpretations inevitably included a heightened awareness of human limitation and recognition of personal needs.

1. Doreen

Doreen chronicled a battering of her own ideal of ministry through her ordeal at

Stoneybrook. With a strong church background, and her father, a minister, Doreen had much opportunity to develop her own strongly held vision of the nature of ministry, a ministry of the heart, a ministry of bridge-making, and a ministry of the Spirit. From her experience in ministry, she found the ideal was not enough. It could not explain what she encountered. It did not prepare her for the crises and conflict within the church body. Yet it is clear, Doreen has never really jettisoned her ideal. Rather, she has adjusted it to the realities she encountered. She has lowered her expectations, and refocused her ministry to encompass self-care. She has integrated the vocation into a larger framework of multiple commitments and areas of fulfillment, more personally than institutionally structured, and balanced in favour of the recognition of her own needs. In light of her experience, she has also built greater self-reliance and directiveness in her ministry, taking ownership of her needs, beliefs, and pastoral agenda. This learning has enriched her own passionately held relational model of ministry.

2. Rufus

Rufus, in his first pastoral charge, was left with a vocational identity in tatters. His model of the caring community was seen to be inadequate, and his sense of what he was meant to be and do came under direct threat. Out of this breakdown of his own vision, Rufus rebuilt, based upon a recognition of his own needs, and of the realities of human functioning within congregational settings. He readjusted and humanized expectations, still focusing however, on the spiritual dynamic inherent in the relationships between people. He has pulled back from an understanding of ministry as a directing or

leading role, to one focusing on the spiritual movement within his own journey as minister, and a pastoral accompaniment to the journey of those with whom he ministers. This might be seen as a decentering of the ministerial role, allowing the personality of the minister to be accepted and understood. Rufus has wanted to humanize the role, indeed to discard it, and to acknowledge the basic need to find a fit between minister and congregation, such that the Spirit is free to come to fruition. He would still like to “tear down the walls,” but his focus has been on ministry wherever people are, and however they are.

3. George

George’s experience was a reworking of an inadequate ideal of ministry, an ideal which continued to isolate, rationalize, and objectify him. It was a concept of ministry which served to protect him from himself, his feelings of lostness and abandonment. It was a false refuge. His conversion resulted in an integrated, personal, and relational model of ministry which has provided a true stability and at the same time, a freedom, for him to be himself, and to minister to others. His, now, is an ideal integrated into a practice which has integrity and reality for him.

4. Sheila

Sheila grew up with her ideal of ministry developed within a caring family, church and community. It was an ideal encouraged throughout her younger life, as she involved herself in a wide range of church related activities and leadership roles. It was an ideal which became clouded under the disappointments in seminary and in her

significant early pastoral experience. The attacks on her ideal pushed her to responses which served as the basis for her developing strengths in ministry, concerning support for mental health, self-esteem, and fulfillment for the human spirit, wherever it may have been demeaned. More specifically, however, the attack on Sheila's ideal, pushed her to her own self-affirmation, and beyond that, to a sense of acceptance and compromise about her own expectations, and expectations of others. She became no longer dependent upon others' affirmation of her calling, as she internalized her own strengths and spiritual gifts. She reworked the meaning of "team ministry," to create a more powerful and effective form of ministry in her congregations. She was able to refocus her ministry, to be able to "bloom wherever she were planted," and to turn each new experience into an opportunity to carry out a new, but complete form, of Christian ministry.

5. Peter

Peter's reworking of the ideal had less to do with changing his beginning patterns of ministry, and more to do with maintaining his commitment to accompany his parishioners. The Second Vatican Council revised ministry at the very time Peter began ministry. He embraced these changes whole-heartedly. They became the 'bread and butter' of his pastoral work. They formed, however, a new ideal, one, which at this time, seems to be coming under attack. The ideals and changes which were Peter's inspiration in ministry, are under threat. The challenge to the ideal comes later in Peter's ministry. His coping skills are well developed. The threatened changes face Peter from the strengths of his confirmed and established ministry. He is not overwhelmed by the

situation, but he is aware of the personal and spiritual drain which can come from fighting uphill battles.

In one sense, Peter has had to rework a major ideal in his ministry, the ideal which came from his passionate involvement in Latin America at the beginning of his ministry. At this particular stage, he works hard, not to lose touch with the passion of the cultural learning which sprung to life in his mission work, and which is always in danger of being lost, in the difficult effort to apply it to ongoing ministry in North America.

E. Learning: Self-affirmation, Self-limitation, Self-care

All participants developed learnings which affected their own sense of confidence in their calling. This confidence was not a confidence associated with a strengthening of traditional roles and functions. Rather, it was a confidence borne of acceptance of self, in being able to function competently in areas of pastoral care, in being able to accept personal limitations in coping with expectations, and learning to manage the ambivalences and uncertainties of the ministerial role in today's church and society. It was a confidence borne of learning to provide for measures of self-care, the nourishment of personal and family life, and spiritual strengthening. It was the result of having spent sufficient years in practice, to be able, comfortably, to distinguish proper priorities, and to establish clear boundaries.

1. Doreen

Doreen, through her struggles in the early part of her ministry, learned over time, to explore notions of ministry which downplayed idealized notions of the vocation. She

began to place the vocation in a larger context of a range of commitments to self-growth, and the needs and fulfillment of her family. It was Doreen's recognition of a wholeness in life, which has led her to change priorities, and to decide that, if her responsibilities as a minister are to be adequately performed, her own needs must be addressed. As has been reported, she has no desire to overwork, no temptation to be a workaholic, but a real interest in benefitting from, and enjoying a more varied, balanced, and whole existence. With respect to her self-confidence in ministry, she reports that as a result of the struggles she experienced, "I think I'm a better minister for having gone through the experience." She also notes that she has been strengthened through these experiences, and feels she would cope with problem areas, more directly and firmly, at this stage in her ministry. Whereas she has always believed that ministry is a shared and mutually supportive vocation, Doreen no longer lives with blinders to what she might expect from others. There is an acceptance of where people are coming from. There is also a fought for independence on her own part, an earned trust in herself, a "gritty determination," and "a sense of humour about people, issues and myself."

2. Rufus

Rufus' learning in this area might be related to his surprise about his student supervisor's comment about being in the ministry "for the fun of it," a phrase which he now claims for himself. He has found the company of God's people who appreciate him, as he appreciates them. They minister to one another, and in that ministry there is a basic acceptance. "I can be who I am and not have to try to be someone else." Rufus has

acknowledged his limitations. He has experienced the way his “angry God” has wreaked a thread of pain through his ministry, and he now sees ministry in terms of a mutual caring, the building of relationships within a community. Rufus recognizes limitations as well, with respect to the potential to “fit” with a congregation. Ministry is not a symbolic vocation, making him as a minister to all. Rather, the particular personality, vision, and understanding which is Rufus, fits where there is a response to these. Rufus is more comfortable with his uniqueness, and his freedom now is in inviting others, to embrace his uniqueness, as he embraces theirs. Lastly, ministry is no longer measured by levels of accomplishment or the accumulation of pastoral duties. It is, rather, the act of sharing with, and being with the people, providing the joy of mutual appreciation and care.

3. George

Ministry for George, provided the context for him to integrate his faith and life experience. It enabled him to find an integrated way of living. He found a security in faith which was not based on rigidity, or theological certainties. It has brought to him a new perspective on ministry. It is a ministry built upon self-acceptance, and on an open acknowledgment of his own, somewhat tortuous journey. The welcoming he mentions, of the congregation towards himself, and the shared quest of ministry, are ways for George to speak about ministry in terms of his acceptance of self, and of others. The concept of “shared quest” in itself, is a freeing concept in ministry, removing a model of authority which fosters a lack of acceptance for the failings in oneself, and others.

George's conversion, as he describes it, was an ultimate act of self-care, for him, and for his ministry.

4. Sheila

Sheila has lived through her struggles for affirmation and acceptance, into a practice which is no longer threatened or undermined. She has turned these experiences into directions for her own ministry to persons. She has turned her experience and struggles with team ministry, into confirmed knowledge of her own strengths, and into affirmations of her calling. She also has developed a perspective on her experience, "God is fair, but life is not fair," which is her way of expressing acceptance of the limitations which are part of living and ministry, but which do not devalue the contribution she has to make. Her concept of ministry to "bloom where she is planted," reveals a freedom from expectations and demands in ministry, a flexibility which is non-threatening to her. She says, "Being a minister doesn't always have to fit a mould," and at this point in her ministry, she has developed her own mould with which she is most comfortable. If others are not so sure, or do not understand her ministry fully, Sheila responds, "I am who I am," and she is no longer concerned about the attitude of others.

5. Peter

Experience has led Peter to the point, where he easily acknowledges his strengths in ministry, his pastoral abilities, 'the gifts I have to offer,' and the breadth and depth of his liturgical understanding. He also acknowledges the important role of supportive friends and family in his journey in ministry. He is at the point now, of being able to

constructively criticize his hierarchy, out of the breadth and depth of his own ministry. Even in the area of his struggle with celibacy, he has found the resources to strengthen him for his work within this model of pastoral service. Perhaps the most telling indication of his confidence, as well as his knowledge of limitation, is the way in which during these last years, he has fostered a shared lay ministry inviting men and women to pick up caring responsibilities so that ministry is no longer perceived as the sole realm of the ordained priest. One other area of coping has been the way in which, over the years, Peter has found a way to promote his learning about third world oppression, without feelings of guilt and frustration overwhelming him, and without rejecting the context in which he must work in Atlantic Canada. Lastly, Peter throughout his ministry, actively sought to be refreshed through various personally satisfying activities, trips to places of importance to him, reunions with friends and colleagues, study opportunities in university and study centres. He has maintained a strong balance of meeting the needs of others, and finding fulfillment for himself.

F. Learning: Ministry as a Mutual Journey: A Shared and Supported Vocation

All participants moved in their learning to a model of ministry which had two functions, first, to reduce the level of isolation the participant experienced in their role, and second, to reduce the concentration of pastoral responsibility in one individual.

The level of isolation revealed in the narratives of these participants was significant. In most cases, the isolation was partially a result of specific conflict of leadership in the congregation, or a combination of personal long term issues and

functions in ministry. The isolation pushed participants to find alternative models of ministry, or different conceptions of ministry which provided for emotional support and personal strengthening.

For some, the isolation was tied to issues of role, and traditional or symbolic structures of the understanding of ministry. The narratives reveal how these roles functioned to isolate and scapegoat the minister. Traditional authority structures tended to make the minister vulnerable to more hidden power activities, and also tended to reinforce idealistic expectations which could not be fulfilled. Finally, the narratives reveal participant experiences which engendered new perceptions of the nature of ministry, rejecting the structures of dominance and power.

In the first case, participants found routes to build emotional supports for themselves, and to make these routes central to their functioning as ministers. In the second case, participants discarded conceptions of roles, and worked to establish newer forms which clearly and publicly established ministry as a shared responsibility, either through the development of team ministry, or the formal establishment of structures for lay ministry.

Each narrative revealed the personal and historical circumstances of each participant, and the unique path they took, in their transformation towards a shared and supported ministry.

1. Doreen

Doreen reacted strongly to the role in ministry as demonstrated by her father's

style. She understood how the role to which she reacted tended towards isolation rather than relationship. Her own developed model of ministry was, from the beginning, a model to overcome the distancing tendency of the older model.

For Doreen, the issue of isolation and an understanding of the role of the minister, were entirely linked. She reports with respect both to the role, and the isolation, “Ministers tend to be lone rangers and you can’t do ministry as a lone ranger. You can’t do ministry without somewhere, having a strong support.” Both her husband and a small, closely knit study group which Doreen founded, were essential supports to her during her trial and test at Stoneybrook.

She is also direct about her limitations to be able to be the sole pastoral care giver within the social and cultural complexity of today’s congregation. In her recognition of the complexity and diversity within the congregation she concludes, “I cannot do the healing always myself, I have to go to other people.” While her specific struggle demanded she find sources of support for herself, she also experienced the isolation in which the traditional role placed her. Doreen discovered that even with her newer “relational” model of ministry, there was a tendency to believe that the minister could do the work of developing the congregation as a caring community. The crisis at Stoneybrook broke through this idyllic picture, and pushed Doreen to work equally hard at establishing emotional support networks for herself, as well as developing stronger structures for shared ministry.

Doreen reports she no longer feels the need to be “the director of everything.” She no longer sees herself at the centre where she grew tired “of the constant drain.” She

no longer sees herself as “belonging” in a possessive sense, to the congregation. Her new appreciation of the many roles she plays in life, only one of which is “minister,” has been a major breakthrough for her, in reducing her isolation, and vulnerability to threat in the practice of the vocation.

2. Rufus

Rufus too, struggled with the experience of isolation, and the weaving of that with traditional models of ministry. The model broke down early, in his first pastoral charge. The traditional concept, that as he provided pastoral care to the people, they would naturally respond to that care, was built upon a safe, static, and comfortable minister/congregation model of relationship. It was destroyed in the intra church conflict he experienced. He reached out for personal support, at a time when he felt both his personal and vocational world falling around him. The traditional model failed and with that failure came intense isolation. In the end, Rufus came to the belief that he could not do ministry without the fundamental support and acceptance of the congregation. So long as that was in question, ministry would be unfulfilled. This was not a matter of dependence, but of mutuality, a recognition that he needed them, as much as they needed him. The model of ministry again had to forego the tradition, and base itself on an experiential mutuality, a role of accompaniment rather than overt leadership. In this model, there was a stronger recognition of the minister as a human being, with his/her own personality, weaknesses and strengths. There was a discarding of role, or as Rufus says, the “suit,” in exchange for the individual as he is, and with his needs, as important

as his gifts. With this individualizing, ministry for Rufus, has become a caring for his own personal spiritual journey, and through this caring, a caring for the spiritual journey of others. There is also a recognition that there is a lack of reception for the Gospel and ministry in the kind of world in which we live, and in light of that, support for one another becomes a significant function for nourishment and growth as Christians.

3. George

With George, as well, a life-long struggle with isolation was closely intertwined with what happened to George in his conversion, and the theological and spiritual underpinnings of his conceptions of ministry before and after those events. George's ministry has grown out of his conversion, focussing on his personal integration, and the turn towards a building of a personal relationship with the people of his congregations. He too, uses the symbol of mutual journey, to describe the nature of ministry. The symbol acts as an invitation to the congregation to join the spiritual journey of the minister, and he, to join theirs. George was grounded in the traditional role, which functioned to meet his needs to "hide" from the congregation, to maintain a personal protectionism, and to avoid emotional attachment. His fundamental change involved an acceptance of himself, a turning to others for support, and a reaching out in a caring process towards the people of the congregation. Here too was a recognition of personal need, and a new model of ministry which embraced mutual caring. This was his experience of the welcoming community, and in the mutuality of the relationship, "I become one other member of that community and not necessarily, the most important

member. It was a real change in my understanding of ministry.” The new model adopted by George, of shared journey, met the need inherent in his conversion, “from abandonment to belonging.”

4. Sheila

Sheila recognized her needs for personal support in ministry out of her experiences in seminary and Middle St. Church. She brought her experiences of defending her self, of recognizing needs for self-esteem and personal support into ministry, and made them hallmarks of her ongoing work. She forged the meaning, as well, of “team ministry,” working out, through this model, the multiple needs, personality structures and gifts in the performance of credible and integrated pastoral ministry. Ministry for her, has focussed on meeting mental health needs, and on understanding what it means to “share” ministry. In an even more intimate sense, this learning about sharing and ministry, for Sheila, took place also in the context of her marriage relationship.

Sheila’s earlier needs with respect to validation of her calling, related in some way to traditional structures within the church. These were the structures which communicated messages of acceptance, value, and validation around ministerial functions, and their perception by the church. These communications were not so forthcoming in Sheila’s case. As she integrated in herself, the valuing and honouring of her ministry, Sheila became more free to make her own definition of ministerial role in terms of the needs and requirements of the moment. In Sheila, the complexity and unique

demands of shared and supported ministry have been highlighted and worked out, through her own opening to the creativity required to reconstruct ministry.

5. Peter

A narrative of isolation is not pronounced in Peter. From the beginning he was able to establish lay and peer communities of personal support which have acted to provide emotional support, and to help limit any negative impacts of the commitment to celibacy.

The narrative of shared and supported ministry has been central in Peter's ministry. The core of Peter's ministry, forged primarily out of his experience in Latin America, was a spiritual commitment to accompany the journey of the members of his congregations. The centre of the Eucharist, was no longer the priest acting alone, it was the worshipping life of the congregation, the community. This relational model of ministry, arising from the history of the Second Vatican Council, was the model which became integrated and inspired in Peter's practice and belief. Fundamental in all of his ministry, has been a model of ministry which immerses itself in the life of the people, and walks with them on their journey. It was a model experientially implemented and learned, in the ministry in Latin America. Peter has never ministered without acknowledging, working through and supporting, team ministry. Ministry is by its nature, a shared activity not only with the ordained, but also with lay pastoral functions. A primary goal of Peter's ministry has been the support, encouragement and growth of lay ministry, as a legitimate sharing ideally, of all functions of ministry in a whole and

complete way.

G. Learning: The Impact of Marginality, A Route to Openness

Ministry for these participants, has been an experience through which exposure to particular needs or marginalized communities, became the means by which a new perspective on life and ministry was forged. A focus on marginality or difference, became a window to understand the nature of ministry.

Among the participants, marginality was experienced differently. For some, it related to their own personal experience and struggle, and for others, it was more a focus of ministerial experience. In some, it was both. Marginality was the sense of an experience, in some way, of oppression. The oppression may have taken the form of social, cultural, psychological or economic, or any combination of these. With our participants, what they experienced about marginality, greatly affected their sense of ministry, and their view of what ministry, at its core, means.

1. Doreen

Doreen's early life experience gave her an experiential glimpse into feelings of marginality. Her illness established her as an outsider, at a time when children need their peers to feel worthwhile. Her status in the community, as daughter of the Protestant minister within a Catholic majority, introduced her to feelings of being discriminated against, and again, of being an outsider. These experiences early in life accounted, in part, for her ability to understand cultural and social issues of discrimination and marginality.

Doreen was plunged into the dynamic of difference and marginality by the requirement of her circumstance, to manage the conflict arising from her denomination's recognition of practicing homosexual persons for ordained ministry. It was an immersion into faith conflict over the status of a marginalized and feared group in society. She was compelled to work out her own understanding, and to sustain her own spirit, within a hostile congregational environment, as she upheld the unpopular stance of her denomination. Her involvement in this experience has left her a legacy of the appreciation of issues of diversity, within congregational life. She has developed a recognition, borne of struggle, of the differing values and commitments of people who comprise not only the community, but also the church. Her ministry has been opened to explore uncharted elements of appropriate pastoral care, for a community characterized more by difference than by commonality. The struggle which Doreen carried on to define her own position, required an openness to consider social and cultural issues already infusing the larger society, and a willingness to engage these considerations with understanding, courage, and affirmation.

2. Rufus

Rufus' perspective in this area comes more directly from his own personal "escape to freedom," and from his disenchantment with institution. In leaving his home province, Rufus had a sense of escaping from a "provincialism," a feeling of the entrenched domination of harsh and traditional ways of seeing the world. This was an early and persistent pattern of experience for him. He felt marginalized within his own

community. A further sense of marginality came through his traumatic experience in his first pastoral charge. Rufus felt a form of banishment from his own congregation. These experiences have meant, that in his ministry, Rufus has been particularly sensitive to the presence of power in relationships, whether this be through a church pulpit committee, his own denominational structures, or subtle dictates of church boards. It has also meant a sensitivity to methods of approaching people, whether inside, or outside the church, to ensure spiritual freedom, openness and acceptance, rather than any form of imposition. The impact on ministry is that Rufus believes his mandate is to attend to his own spiritual journey, not to attempt to “do” ministry to others, but to offer respect to the path of others, as he lives and shares, his.

3. George

George’s journey, despite his first hand experience with other cultures and communities, was one of homelessness and isolation. He truly felt he belonged to neither culture, and this homelessness led him to seek security in a rigid faith. When this finally did not work for him or his experience, he was compelled to seek for stability in a new way. The result was a personal integration which allowed him first, to find security in himself, freedom and joy in faith and relationships, and an openness to the world around him without defensiveness or fear. His marginality was his own cultural lostness, and in resolving that lostness, he became grounded in a faith which enabled him to open himself. His openness has taken the form of a reflective journey, a journey which has enabled him to embrace the journey of others, both inside, and outside the church. The

barriers have been broken.

4. Sheila

Sheila's early experience with the emotional difficulties of her mother, and her involvement at an early age with volunteering at an institution for the mentally challenged, helped to develop her sensitivity and understanding of those who were misunderstood and marginalized in society. Her family's openness to those in the community who were having difficulty, and Sheila's early experiences in school helped to strengthen her desire to defend and assist those who were labeled or ostracized. Her educational studies in psychology, and her commitment to clinical pastoral training furthered her training in understanding those who were often misunderstood, helped her to integrate insights and learnings from a range of sources, and encouraged her to establish a faith open to difference in life and experience. Sheila's faith from the beginning, encouraged her to explore these differences, different lifestyles, different values and choices, and difference in personality. The acceptance of difference, was a recognition that the reality of others, was a source of spiritual learning.

Her felt marginalization in seminary and in Middle St. Church, provided her with a direct sense of her own dehumanization. It was that experience which directed her ministry of valuing and affirmation, both for herself, and those in danger of being treated unjustly. Her focus has been always on the valuing of persons in their distinctive reality. In her own experience, she suffered a prejudice to her own "difference," as a woman aspiring to be a Christian minister. Out of that experience, she was willing to embrace

the struggles of others who faced the misuse of power, preventing them from fulfilling their human potential. Her approach to missions is similar, in her desire to understand and appreciate difference; a sense of a faith in a God large enough to celebrate the differences of people everywhere, their cultures, their places of living, and their struggles.

5. Peter

Peter's sensitivity to marginalization may have developed slowly, when as a youngster, he became more aware of the social and economic disparity, between the rural environment of his home and upbringing, and the culture of more urban and prosperous communities. This was a subtle consciousness which prepared him for the intense spiritual learning he experienced in Latin America.

Peter's commitment to the third world, and his understanding of the special relation of the Gospel to the poor, resolved itself into an understanding of ministry aligned inevitably, with the marginalized of the community. He has acknowledged that this is an ongoing challenge, since the church itself is often a community of persons who are not marginalized. He believes that his role as priest, means that the place from which he speaks spiritually, must be a place fundamentally aligned with, and committed to the poor of society, the word "poor" being rich with a multiplicity of meanings. Peter's experience in Latin America gave him experientially, a powerful sense of this form of ministry. As indicated earlier, the remainder of his ministry has been, in a sense, the working out, of this sensibility. This centering of ministry on a sense of the marginalized is also the source of Peter's commitment to a global perspective. Insofar as ministry

aligns with the marginalized in this society, it is so aligned throughout the world, and the cause of the poor becomes a cause both at home, and globally. Peter's ministry from this perspective, has involved ongoing theological, scriptural and socio-economic study, to continually deepen the understanding of these issues.

Peter's concept of ministry is an immersion in the life of the people. Ministry in Latin America was a striving to be with, to honour, to understand the truly marginalized people. He found spiritual renewal in that identification, and continued to do so throughout his ministry.

H. Learning: Surviving Gender Inequality

Through much of their life experience both Doreen and Sheila consciously and unconsciously confronted the norm of male domination within the life and courts of the church. Doreen acknowledged that other women, coming into ministry after her, saw her as a pioneer female moving successfully into traditional male roles. Sheila's experience was harsher, when she encountered, early in her career, male preferred norms during her seminary training. Both women experienced the uncomfortability of forging new roles for women in the Church at a time when these roles were not secured, and when significant bastions of opposition remained.

1. Doreen

Doreen grew up feeling not only accepted, but fulfilled in the Church. Her decision to accept a call to ministry was not a foreign thought for her, or for her family. She was supported by her family of origin, and by her husband, and she had a strong

model of support in her father. Her own difficulties with gender issues became more significant later in her life and ministry, as she felt isolated by a male dominated church bureaucracy. The bureaucracy did not exhibit the care or nurture which would have supported a ministry under attack; a ministry itself, built upon a model of relational and interpersonal support. Doreen became more determined to make her own way, to break what she perceived to be a “glass ceiling” within church structures, and to make her own contribution despite the unspoken barriers. The learning for her, was to not discard her particular model of faith and ministry, but to defend it, and to make it part of the fabric of the ongoing culture of the church’s ministry.

2. Sheila

Sheila felt the impact of a male dominated church structure early in her ministry. It was one of the major areas of her own development and growth as a minister. She too felt the support of church and family in her earlier experiences of growth in Christian faith. In her decision to enter ordained ministry however, she felt in many ways, the uncertainty, uncomfortability, and at times, hostility of her network inside the church. The issue of equality in the church has been an ongoing theme and challenge in Sheila’s ministry. She determined early on, to affirm herself in ministry, and to define her own role to fit her calling. Sheila, in building an acute awareness of the church’s weakness in supporting gender equality, has contributed this awareness to her own denomination’s efforts to work through the implications of gender equality. For Sheila, this issue was never simply about gender equality. It was a matter of her affirmation as a child of God.

CHAPTER VII
SOURCES OF LEARNING

A. Introduction

This chapter identifies the characteristics of the learning processes which participants experienced. In the majority of cases, specific intense events or experiences were instrumental for the experiential learning which occurred. These intense experiences, however, cannot be divorced from the life contexts, or unique narratives of each participant. The learning processes, as reported by these participants were life-long.

These learning processes ranged in kind and impact. In every case formative or early experience was considered highly significant for understanding the impact of events and issues of adulthood. Events in childhood were vividly recalled, and indeed, often set the stage for all else to come. These early experiences did range, however, in traumatic impact, and the extent to which later learning, moved in the direction of transformation or confirmation of that early experience.

In each case the learning process may not be identified solely with the intense event itself. The learning process may be considered post event. The learning resulted from the reflective act upon the experience, and occurred over a longer period. The learning also interacted with the continuing experience of the individual, so that each new "historical" context of the individual life story, brought new insight and change which could still be attributed in part, to earlier intense experience.

Many factors contributed to the depth of learning which occurred. Not all learning was transformative or related to the fundamental life assumptions of the individual. For some, it was transformative. For others, it was a more steady or developmental process of life learning, which built upon various threads of experience throughout the person's life. In every case, however, experiential learning affected both the development of the self, and the development of vocational identity and practice.

One way of interpreting this process, was to explore processes of "unlearning." This examined the extent to which each individual, through their adult experience, was challenged to change earlier formed perceptions, and to alter, in some cases, fundamental assumptions. Processes of unlearning were identified because this seemed a predominant process in the experiential learning reported by participants.

It is clear, from the narratives we have reported, that fundamental learning processes occurred with each of our participants, which affected their sense of themselves, and their understanding of ministry. We here examine, the quality or characteristic of these processes, and provide examples from participant narratives.

B. Unlearning as a Source of Learning

Unlearning is another way to look at the learning process itself. The content of unlearning will have been addressed in the body of this report because it is often simply the other side of what has been learned. It is useful, however, to suggest that much of the learning process in experiential learning is a process of "unlearning," replacing earlier perceptions and conceptions with more adequate ones. Mezirow focused much of his

work, examining processes of unlearning which, when it embraced fundamental change in perception or meaning perspective, through premise reflection, was called, transformative learning. Each participant experienced processes of unlearning which were at the same time, important aspects of the learning process

Doreen had to rework her concept or ideal of Christian ministry. Under the impact of her experience at Stoneybrook, Doreen's perception of herself, and her ministry, were undermined. As she reflected, long term, on the experience, she examined her assumptions about herself and ministry, and reworked these as a way to integrate what had happened to her.

She also was required to rethink her Christian and cultural heritage with respect to a specific marginal group, the gay and lesbian community, and to assess all issues with respect to inclusion in the Christian community, specifically for the issue of ordination. These were fundamental relearning processes, and transformative in their power because of the impact on her personal and vocational life.

Rufus' vocational experience itself, has been an process of unlearning, namely the reworking in his personal and vocational life, of the hold on him, of an angry God. This has been a learning struggle which early in his ministry almost destroyed him, but which he has worked to overcome. The unlearning related to anger and vocational identity, and issued in a transformative process of redefining ministry, and the nature of his relationships with others, and the church.

George's experience was as close to conversion within ministry as one might conceive. His early life was fraught with psychological struggle, feelings of lostness,

identity issues, and conflicted relationship with church and his world. His divorce precipitated a fundamental change in perspective and personal orientation. It acted as a catalyst for an integration of faith and life which breathed life into his ministry, changing it radically, in favour of relatedness, openness and acceptance. It was a transformative learning experience because it fundamentally challenged his assumptions about himself and ministry, and brought him into a new starting place for his relationship with himself and his world. In this process he was enabled to experience healing.

Sheila's unlearning focussed on that, ironically, which also gave power to her ministry. Her struggle for the recognition of her calling, was at the same time a struggle for personal affirmation and acceptance. The recognition had not always been there for her. The unlearning was the integration by which she became far less dependent on the power of other's recognition, to affect her. As a result, she developed a firm and powerful sense of her ministry, her calling, and her effectiveness. Her struggle to achieve this lent understanding, perception and power to her ministry of support for those who suffer attacks to their self-esteem, demeaning of their struggles, or loss of their personal power. Her own struggle with her own issues, has been the source of the transformative power of her ministry, which was only strengthened as she effectively integrated her own challenges.

Peter's unlearning has been the effort on his part to cope with the challenge of his experience in Latin America to his formative cultural reference point in Atlantic Canada. The depth of his ministerial experience in Latin America readjusted in a total way, his perception of ministry and the issues of ministry. Although not as catastrophic an issue

for Peter today, he has never let go of the challenge to incorporate his learning about the nature of ministry in Latin America, into his native experience in North America. This challenge was most devastating upon his initial return to North America, but having overcome the culture shock, Peter developed many avenues of ministry in his various pastorates and diocesan responsibilities, to work out the impact of that initial experience through enriching the church in Atlantic Canada with his cultural learning and transformed perspective.

C. Specific Personal Traumatic or Intensive Experience Prior to Ordination

All of the participants were able to identify specific experiences prior to ordination, which were important to their sense of their vocational identity, and to the issues of that identity. It was clear that events and experiences prior to ordination played significantly in their personal learning, and in the dynamics of how they understood themselves in ministry.

Doreen's specific experiences focussed on issues of her health. Her illness as a child, and the major operation she had as a young adult, led her to a sense that God was calling her into ministry. Later, Doreen underwent the personal tragedy of losing her new born infant boy. These experiences did not impact immediately on her vocational choice. Rather, they contributed to her sense that God was active in her life, and that her experience of grace, called for a response. That response, for her, was ministry.

Rufus reported that the experience of the death of his grandmother, and the response of the Anglican minister were responsible for his initial contemplation and

inspiration towards ministry. He also interpreted the experience in highly positive terms as a kind of “bright light,” an unexpected faith expression of comfort and understanding, the strength of which deeply affected him. It was an experience of grace and forgiveness, in the midst of a perceived harsh theological environment focussing on sin and guilt. The experience helped him to formulate his initial compassionate model of ministry, the model which drew himself so powerfully to the vocation.

George claimed that the experience of being left by his father at the age of six, on the steps of a strange boarding school in the Orient, affected the core of his identity for life, “That single event has marked my life, a fact of which I am now more fully aware, more than I can ever say.” It destroyed his sense of belonging, and made it difficult for him to trust human relationship. His deep, traumatic struggle with this sense of abandonment was a fundamental dynamic in his conversion at the time of his divorce during his early ministry. The legacy of his experience of spiritual abuse in his early life, also affected the particular content of his conversion later in ministry, and the emphasis in his ministry today.

Sheila’s experience of personal threat over her teacher’s marking, captured the vulnerable components of her past and future. This experience for Sheila, became a source of understanding who she was, and once in ministry, the framework for understanding ministry itself. The threat exemplified in the experience with her teacher, was the basis for her early struggle in ministry, and for the integration which led to her power in pastoral service.

Peter’s coping with the death of his brother, and his mother’s grief, had a major

impact on him as a person, influencing him strongly in the direction of priesthood. This was an experience which also influenced the pattern of his strengths in pastoral service, dealing with grief, and with relationships.

D. Specific Personal Trauma or Intensive Experience after Ordination

Each participant was able to identify experiences during ministry which had significant impact on the development of the nature of their ministry. Indeed, in reviewing the experiences of the participants, it is clear that intensive experiences within their tenure of active ministry, were responsible for the transformative learning process which affected fundamentally, their view of themselves and their ministries. It should be acknowledged that these experiences were, for the most part, painful. They left their mark on the individual. The legacy of suffering, contributed too, to personal development and to experiential understanding of the Christian Gospel. Without the suffering which was an undeniable part of the experience, the learning could not have occurred.

Doreen's experience at Stoneybrook was a crisis which affected her in a total way. It was a painful experience, affecting her throughout her ministry, leading to reassessment of her understanding of her vocational identity, and the meaning of ministry. It was the kind of emotionally charged experience filled with the sense of personal attack, that has made the identification of learning also slow and painful. This was a highly conflicted experience, affecting Doreen emotionally and psychologically. There is always the danger that such experiences might overwhelm the individual, and

prevent, for a time, growth and strengthening. Doreen drew on her spiritual resources and worked through the experience. Her learning from the experience has been ongoing, sobering, and instructive.

Rufus' first pastoral charge was an experience that threatened the core of his vocational identity. It left him having to rework his understanding of ministry and vocational identity, at a time when he should more likely have been being affirmed in his chosen calling. The instability and anxiety resulting from the experience, affected him in many ways, and made the project of discovering what effective ministry would be for him, a long term learning process. As a painful experience, part of Rufus' learning was that of learning to cope with adversity. Fortunately, Rufus did reach out for help when it was needed. This experience contributed in the long run, to Rufus' understanding of himself and the world around him, a learning which led to new perspectives on ministry, and on expectations in relationships.

George's experience with the break-up of his marriage during his early ministry precipitated a profound change for him, of self and calling, such that his life assumptions were altered, and a personal strengthening occurred leading to a very different understanding of self, others, and ministry. Although traumatic, the experience led to the most positive life learning he had ever experienced.

Sheila's experience at Middle St. Church, challenged her, in her sense of calling, a challenge which, through personal struggle, she overcame. This experience was particularly difficult because it was the culmination of other experiences of challenge to "calling." In a sense, having dealt with these earlier challenges, she overcame this one

with strength. At the same time it confirmed this particular struggle as a long term process of personal learning, having major impact on Sheila's ministry and understanding of herself in ministry.

Peter's most intense experience was in Latin America, which, although five years in length, was a total and specific experience, which has informed and influenced the remainder of his ministry. It is clear that the impact of the experience could not have been anticipated even while the experience was in progress. Its impact has been highly significant and dependent upon the particular way in which Peter has continued to draw upon that experience for inspiration, and for various specific contributions in his ongoing ministry, for instance, his involvement in the Peace and Development program of his church. Interestingly, the experience itself was highly energizing, a peak experience, while the impact of culture shock when he returned to Canada, led to internal conflict and struggle. The resolution of that struggle over several years, was the source of the experiential learning for Peter.

E. Early Family Dynamics

Early family dynamics provided the particular complex of conditions out of which each participant grew and developed. These dynamics contributed a complex of conditions, values, relationships, difficulties, strengths and weaknesses, which set a pattern for later reflection, adjustment and transformation in adult life. The early dynamics varied of course, in terms of their impact in each participant, but in several cases, set out the fundamental struggle of their lives.

Doreen's early family life was generally supportive and caring. Her experience of illness, a sense of non-acceptance in the school at a sensitive time in her life, and the particularly sensitive status of the family within a largely Roman Catholic community left her, she feels, with some problems in the area of self-esteem, but then, with a sensitivity to the dynamics of marginalization and prejudice. The modeling of her father in ministerial vocation was critical to Doreen's perception of ministry as a potential calling for herself. His practice in ministry left a legacy of a conflicted model for Doreen with which she struggled throughout her own ministry.

Rufus' experience of an angry God espoused particularly by his father, and the oppressive tone, he recollects, about the way the church and community affected his family life, affected his sense of self, the self which he brought into ministry. These, and his feelings of being unacknowledged and unappreciated in his community, left Rufus with an anger which, for a long time, affected his struggle with his vocation and himself. The particular impact of his grandmother's death, left the legacy of tension in his ministry, the tension of anger, and solace.

George's sense of abandonment early in his life, as he notes, "marked my life." Clearly the sense of abandonment from being left at the steps of the boarding school, was the symbol of a sense of "lostness" which was part of the nature of his upbringing within the missionary pattern of family existence. His pattern of his current ministry is a result of the resolution of the struggle which occupied him from his earliest years.

Sheila's ministry was affected by her sensitivity to emotional health, and the impact of that issue early in her family life. While the family life was highly supportive

and caring, Sheila's ongoing struggle with issues of self-esteem became part of her experiences of struggle and threat to her calling.

Peter experienced an early awareness of the socio-economic status of his family, and his sense of the comparative economic status of nearby communities. The ongoing strong and effective support of family and church provided him with personal strength as he moved into ongoing ministry. His sense of the relative lower economic status of family and community may have helped him to understand, and to "be with" the poor of Latin America, in a way that another might not have been able. That 'being with' was the source of learning throughout his ministry. Also, early experiences with the death of a friend and the death of his brother, were emotional learnings which lent strength to this facet of his later ministry.

F. Highly Affirming Experiences

The participants have referred also, to very positive elements in their experiences, which contributed to their particular journey of life learning. In some cases these positive experiences were also part of the mix of unlearning which occurred later, but it was the positive emotional impact of these experiences which provided the foundation for participants to effectively work through their struggles.

Doreen's strong, supportive and caring family life, supported through her father's faithful ministry, provided a strong emotional foundation for her, as well as the integration of her family and church life. The impact of her grandmother's spirituality and caring provided her with an important later model of spiritual direction. This life experience left

her with high ideals, strong values, and strong emotional abilities, all of which supported her through ministry, and of course, enriched the form of her own ministry. Also her strong relationship with her husband has been a source of support throughout her ministry, a mainstay, to permit her to engage in the difficult learning processes of her ministry. Her strong experience with family, church groups and individuals who have supported her, has also given her strength to find the proper balance in her current ministry to sustain her own spirit, and to share ministry with others.

Rufus' experience with the response of the Anglican minister at the death of his grandmother, provided a strong symbol of caring ministry. Ministry must be a word of comfort when most needed. It was an experience which inspired him about the healing potential of ministry, and his potential in it. Following the devastating meeting in his first charge, he experienced grace, when the Swiss woman came to his home. The birth of his first child, was especially an experience of grace in a time of suffering. His family has been a source of strong support in his life. These experiences empowered Rufus' ministry, and affirmed his own sense of "reason for being" in the vocation. The early ideal of comfort and healing in ministry, has been experienced in his most recent ministry, a ministry which has been molded from his early inspiration, and integrated with the difficult learnings resulting from the crisis at the beginning of his career. It is a ministry of self-acceptance and acceptance of others, of mutual care and forgiveness.

George's strengthening experience was a result of the angst in which the separation from his first wife situated him. It enabled a highly integrative process to occur which breathed life into his experience of himself, others, and ministry. It opened him to

experience the faith in a new way, to experience joy in Jesus, and to embrace his existence in an open, caring, and trusting way. This stance has been responded to particularly in the setting of his current ministry, and resulted in a mutual acceptance and sharing, which provides him with joy in the practice of his vocation.

Sheila's early family experience was highly loving and supportive. Family life, church life and community life, together in an integrated way, provided a basic experience of trust and love in her approach to life. The strength of that care became the measure of the care and support which have been hallmarks of her own ministry. As the threat to her vocational identity disappeared, especially in her current ministry, her family became a more central source of her caring, strength and joy. Her earlier educational experience in the seminary was a highly positive and integrating process. Her interests in psychology, issues of mental illness and health, and pastoral care as well as the mentoring she received, were brought together and confirmed her in her call to ministry. Her first experiences in pastoral ministry were also highly affirming, and led her to embrace pastoral ministry as the calling most appropriate to her interests and skills. These interests in missions, the mental health of persons and families, and community involvements, have continued to be strong themes in her ministry, giving her ongoing inspiration for fulfillment in her ministry.

Peter's experiences of support from family and church throughout his early life provided him with necessary direction and self-confidence to respond to his vocation in priesthood. They also informed his basic abilities to care deeply for people in their sorrows and joys. His experience in Latin America provided the inspiration for ministry

wherever he was placed. His studies in the area of liturgics provided him with a renewed sense of his own leadership capabilities within the wider church. The multitude of renewed friendships among the lay people in his various pastorates and among the ordained, over a long period of time, have sustained him in ministry, and not least, enabled him to handle effectively, the ongoing challenges of celibacy.

G. Life-long Learning

The result of the interviews with participants revealed the fact that their ministry was directly and clearly patterned on a relationship with their whole experience in life. Themes developed in the ministries of these participants, related clearly to themes identified by them, as early experiential issues. In all cases, the issues they faced in their ministry, were issues interpreted by reference to their early life experience. While early life issues may not have precipitated later crises, the later crises themselves, created the need for resolution, which was always understood in terms of life long issues, the genesis of which were reported to be early childhood experience.

It is useful to state here, that when referring to life long themes or learning, inevitably, early experience was understood and reflected upon from the current circumstance. As participants reviewed the processes of resolution in their lives, the reflective process proved how the past became present, and indeed, was determined by the present. The sense made of the past, was dependent on the issue being addressed in the present.

Doreen's learning process was one of the reworking of the ideals with which she

came into ministry. These ideals resulted from her intimate experience with family, church and ministry early in life. Her experiences in ministry put these ideals and herself, to the test. These ideals related to basic experiences of trust and love. Her major crisis in ministry put to the test, these basic ideals and experiences, as well as her vocational identity. The shock or “whirlwind” of the crisis, has continued to inform her work, and to instruct the various accommodations she has made to integrate that experience.

Rufus experienced the major crisis to his vocational identity at the beginning of his ministry. In reflection, Rufus has learned to perceive this crisis through the particular lenses of his earlier conflicts in church and community, as well as the model of idealized model of ministry with which he entered the vocation. He has learned to work out accommodations for himself, through understanding the sources of anger in his life. As he became more compassionate towards himself, he also found a new relationship with the congregation, a mutuality, with which he has always struggled, but to which he has learned to give himself. In doing so, he has recaptured the inspiration of his experience of ministry at the time of the death of his grandmother.

George perceived the disintegrating forces of his earlier life, having been overcome in his spiritual conversion during ministry, the crisis to sustain faith in light of the breakup of his marriage. This experience shed an entirely new light on his past, and gave him a new foundation for self-identity, and self-expression in ministry. His move from abandonment, to trust and relationship, at the same time, completely remoulded his faith and his ministry.

Sheila's sense of ministry as defending and sustaining the emotional health of

persons has been a theme throughout her life, only strengthened by the threats to her own sense of self. Her own thematic struggle, interpreted by her, from earliest life experience, for validation, valuing and acknowledging of personhood, became the theme of her ministry. As the issue resolved itself in her own life, the focus became less the validation of her own gifts, as the showing of her gifts in support of the gifts of others.

Peter's story has been one where his originally quiet, sometimes hesitant, sense of calling has been inspired and elevated through the particular experiences he has had. Latin America confirmed his sense of vocation more directly than any earlier experience, and gave his ministry its challenge. He has sought for that intensity of vocation in every parish he has served, and it continues to be a beacon for him of the essential nature of ministry. His earlier life in a small fishing village, one of seven children in a struggling family, prepared him to experience the depth of impact of his ministry in Latin America. It also provided the basis for his particular sense of a ministry of accompaniment, in reaction to the inappropriate use of power in ministry. The strength of his early family and community life, helped to confirm his ministry, as a ministry which put the community of the faithful, first. Lastly, it was the impact of his experiences with death in his youth, which enabled him to develop a strong ministry around grief, death and dying.

H. Spiritual Resources for Experiential Learning

All participants in the project experienced significant crises in their lives and ministries. Some were more traumatic than others. What made it possible for each participant to work through the crisis, and to benefit through learning, from the crisis, were

the Christian spiritual resources the participant was able to bring to bear on the situation. All participants had an intimate experience of growing up in the Christian church, and developed, as part of their growing, a life of faith, hope and trust. In some, the specifics of the experience were more conflicted than others. But these conflicts themselves grew out of the life of faith, and the struggle to finding meaning in that faith. It is clear from the narratives reported by participants, that these early resources of faith and love, developed in the close relationships of family and church, were instrumental in ensuring that later crisis were experienced as learning processes rather than events leading to processes of self destruction. Each participant had their own unique way of expressing this reality for themselves.

Doreen's early childhood was immersed in a family which was surrounded by the church, and by the continual exercise of faith and love. To her, the church was a second home, partly because of her illness, as well as, some difficulties in early schooling and experience in the community. Doreen developed a strong Christian faith, value and ideal through her growth in this environment. It was an ideal which came under direct attack at Stoneybrook, but one which survived in more full and integrated form. Doreen drew also upon the spiritual resources of the model of her grandmother to help her make it "through the night." Lastly, Doreen drew upon her own study of Scripture and prayer, and used the model of Jesus' relationship with his disciples to help her understand the experiences of betrayal, suffering, and loving the unlovable. Her close relationships in family and church in early life, served as models for sources of support during her crises in ministry. She learned to rely on family and friends because she already knew these were the sources of

strength and love. These were the Christian resources which enabled her to grow and learn from her experiences in ministry.

Rufus too grew up in the Christian church and community. It provided the foundation for him to experience the inspiration he felt when his grandmother died, and the minister was able to communicate real comfort and forgiveness to Rufus. This experience remained an inspirational model for him throughout his own ministry. The power of this experience of comfort and forgiveness happened during crisis in his early family life. He would experience it again, during the first major crisis in his ministry, where the word and action of the Swiss woman, granted him comfort and forgiveness. For Rufus, the power of the faith seemed to come to fullest expression in the darkest or most desolate moments of life experience. He encountered the fundamental resource of the faith, when he needed it most. He noted that the birth of his first child, which was a miraculous experience of God's grace in his life, took place during the worst year of his life and ministry. The sometimes, conflicted relationship with church and various expression of Christianity, always evaporated in the face of God's grace when, in his life, he had nothing else to rely on.

George was the son of missionaries. The Christian faith was part of his life from the beginning. Conflicts with the faith arose early, because of his experiences of loss and abandonment. He struggled intellectually with the faith for many years, into his adulthood, and, as he would still say, a struggle which will never end for him. But the earlier struggle was tied to his personal conflicts and fears. When he moved through an integration of life and faith, following his divorce, it was other resources within the Christian faith, which he

drew on, to make sense of his new condition. He suggests that he always knew that these resources of openness, relationship, and trust, existed in the faith, but he could not access them. His crisis in ministry enabled him to do so. He was able to live through his divorce because he grasped a faith which gave him an integrated rather than a false, security. Again, these resources of the Christian faith were what enabled George to live through his personal crises, and to learn from his experience.

Sheila experienced a safe, secure, loving and trusting Christian environment in her early life. As she says, she has never known a time or life, without faith. She experienced, and was surrounded by, a personal, positive and natural faith, infused in her life from the beginning. Family, church and community provided a strong, integrated base for growth in faith and love. It was this life of faith which enabled her to meet the obstacles to validation she experienced in school, and to develop her special gift of care for those with emotional or mental health difficulties. Her background strengthened her to tackle failure of care towards herself or others in seminary, in church, and in community. It enabled her to embrace the challenge of becoming a woman in ministry, and to endure the problems which that decision inevitably brought with it. Sheila speaks about the grace of God in her life, enabling her to deal with difficulties, and to find uncharted routes to fulfil her ministries. It is her fundamental Christian faith which has made it possible for Sheila to “bloom where she is planted,” and so to grow flowers where none had grown before.

Peter too, lived in an environment of faith in his early life. Family, church, community were an integrated community of love, support, trust and faith. His

experience, taking responsibility and leadership in the church from childhood on, made this environment a second home, and the primary one of activity and learning. The church was a powerful and positive influence in his life, such that he grew into it as his proper vocation and place of fulfillment. Patterns of prayer and study in Scripture also helped him deal with crises. He found, upon returning from Latin America, that these spiritual processes are what enabled him to work through his experience, and to learn from it. This learning, in the faith and practice of the church, was a pattern which carried Peter through the various obstacles he encountered in his ministry, including celibacy. His special sense of the community of the faith was also critical, as he was able to draw upon those close and caring relationships throughout his ministry, to help him meet the challenges he encountered.

CHAPTER VIII
REFLECTIONS ON THE APPLICATION OF
THE THEORY OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING TO PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

A. Introduction

We have reflected on the learnings and sources of learning experienced by the project participants. We have also introduced this study with a theoretical foundation addressing concepts of experiential learning, transformative learning, the construction of meaning, narrative as the communicative structure of the self, and autobiography as the narrative of human life, experience and change. We have also discussed theological perspectives on these processes including the meaning of Christian experience and learning, theology as dependent upon narrative, and issues of Christian identity and spiritual transformation.

In this chapter, referring back to the theoretical foundations of the study, we reflect on the way in which the theory illuminates and helps in the understanding of the narratives. Obversely, we also reflect how the narratives of participants refine, illuminate or critique the theory as outlined. This reflection is structured by referring to the sections outlined originally in the explication of the theory.

B. Reflection-Experience as a Source of Learning

1. Experiential Learning as Personal

Generally participants did not use the language of learning to refer to their experience. They did however, refer to the impact of their experience, often in very dramatic ways: “I am not the same person I was,” “It was the death of what I thought ministry was,” “That single event marked my life more than I can ever say,” “To say the least, my concept of ministry as an ordained priest has changed very much over these twenty-nine years.” In most cases, the learning was through the impact of significant events experienced either singly as crisis, or cumulatively. The learning itself was based on the teasing out of the specific cognitive content of the learning as a much longer, more evolutionary process. For instance, the learning impact of the Latin American experience on Peter is one that has not yet run its course. The learning from that one significant experience has also worked itself out differently, through the variety of contexts of ministry he has since experienced, whether that context be in the area of liturgy, or whether it be specific applications of ministry in varying parishes. The learning impact has been continuous, and unique to the setting. This contextual nature of the learning, is one major component of the theory of experiential learning. Participant narratives have shown clearly the extent to which significant experiences whether of a crisis nature or not, have been major sources of learning for ministry.

A further characteristic of the experiential learning which can be deduced from the above stated quotations, is the intensely personal impact of the learning. In several cases

participants identified a fundamental shift in their experience of themselves, their selfhood, and their relation to the world. George in particular, is an example of this fundamental personal conversion, but Doreen and Rufus also point to such experiences in a highly direct fashion. The learning meant a profound reinterpretation of their sense of personal identity. It was not always clear, exactly how identity had changed, but a review of learnings, such as the reworking of ideals, show significant changes in meaning perspectives and ways of seeing themselves in their vocation.

Another significant observation has been made, that these learning processes or experiences could not be separated in terms of their impact, whether that impact was on self-identity and personal change, or on vocational self understanding, or finally upon an understanding of the nature of ministry itself. Personal identity was intimately intertwined with vocational identity, and vocational identity with actual experience in the practice of ministry. In every case, the issue of vocational identity was a component of early life experience in family, church, and community. In terms of change which occurred within ministry, the greater the personal impact, the greater the impact on the understanding of ministry. We have seen this most clearly in George's narrative, but also in that of each of the other participants.

2. Five Characteristics of Experiential Learning

Kolb's five characteristics descriptive of experiential learning remain useful as general benchmarks to identify certain aspects of the phenomenon. They continue to serve to distinguish experiential learning from other concepts. Without reference to the refuted

theoretical base, they may be identified more generically in the field of adult education, as having some general applicability.

The **first** suggested that learning was best conceived as a process rather than in terms of outcomes. Clearly, in the case of each participant, the learning was a process of actual experience rather than a preconceived plan. It was a product of lived experience, rather than a the result of a set of defined learning goals and objectives. The learning was entirely idiosyncratic, unique to the context of each individual, and even, serendipitous, not a cognitively constructed learning plan.

The **second** characteristic has referred to learning as a result of the interplay of consciousness and environment. For instance, in George's case, the complex of his conflicted calling and faith perspective was challenged through his divorce, and it was the interplay of his consciousness and this event which produced the conditions for experiential learning. Each participant's narrative described a particular consciousness developed in early life, as a kind of basic form of consciousness which was brought to bear on the events which challenged them later in their lives.

The **third** characteristic described learning which resulted from the resolution of opposing ways of dealing with the world. In a general sense, we have seen in many of our participants, the learning benefit of the intense conflicts which assailed them in their ministry. Doreen's experience at Stoneybrook challenged fundamental assumptions of the way she perceived her life, her world, and her ministry. It was a cauldron of experience with which she intensely interacted, and which left her with a legacy of learned adaptation which she carried with her into later stages of her ministry. These struggles could be

identified in the experience of all participants.

Fourth, learning was seen as an holistic process of adaptation to the world issuing in such characteristics as tolerance for ambiguity, decision-making skills, and attitude change. With each of our participants major processes of adaptation occurred. Ministry, it might be said, was for all participants, an adaptation of the perceptions and models developed early in their lives, which were moderated through the challenges which ministry presented. Ministry was a particular vocational journey, each step of the way of which, involved adaptation, change and development of life long experiential themes beginning most profoundly, with early formed impressions and experiences.

The **fifth** characteristic referred to that of the creation of knowledge through experience. Clearly, the experiences of the participants taught them much about themselves and the nature of ministry. Some of these areas of knowledge have been identified in the learnings noted for each participant. A more general conclusion of knowledge gained about ministry, must be stated in very tentative terms. For instance, there is some indication that the ideal models of ministry which these participants brought to their practice, were inadequate to help resolve the challenges they faced in their practice. This learning, and others, could benefit from further exploration, research and application.

3. Contextualized Learning

The critique of Kolb was based on the individualized and psychologized interpretation of the learning process which seemed to guide his interpretation of sources,

and his motive to support the experiential learning model. This directed a view of learning away from that which appreciated the social and cultural components of learning, which identified the learner within the context of his/her historical and cultural formation. The decision to work with participants on the basis of their view of their world, their understanding of themselves in the total context of their lives, ranging from the circumstances of their childhood, to the complex of interrelationships in their ministries, to their institutional commitments and relationships of power, were all part of understanding the individual in context. The learning was seen to be a product of the particular forms of enmeshment of the person in their environment throughout the history of their experience. The particular view of experiential learning espoused in this study was developed in response to the critique of individualism, and the format of the use of narrative, was made central in order to accommodate this view. The resultant narratives and conclusions have been seen to substantiate these decisions.

4. Meaning-making Themes

Through the interviews with participants it was also clear that the learning process was in fact, a meaning-making process. In each case, experience was woven into a narrative structure with a beginning, a middle, and a striving towards resolution. Themes were evident in each narrative, and most often had their genesis in reflection on childhood experience. The theme of personal validation dominated the narrative of Sheila. George's theme revolved around the overcoming of his sense of abandonment. Doreen's theme was the upholding of a relational model of ministry. Rufus' theme was that of moving beyond

the angry God in him. Peter's theme was one of acknowledging the mutuality of ministry within a paradigm of third world justice.

In reviewing these themes, it is possible to identify elements which stem from the early life of each participant. Rufus' early experience of the death of his grandmother provided the life long tension which played itself out in his ministry. Doreen's narrative most clearly develops itself out of the conflict over the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexual persons, but the conflict cannot be understood for her, outside the challenge to her model of ministry developed in personal dialogue with her father's legacy. George's ministry is, in itself, the result of the resolution of conflicts experienced in his childhood.

There were many layers of meaning-making which take place in this process; meanings which had been attributed to earlier experience, meanings which were transformed in light of later experience, and meanings which were created in the very process of developing their life narratives. Doreen established early, her understandings of the nature of ministry. These understandings changed in light of her experience. Even through the interview process she developed new insights. One instance, was her discovery during the narrative construction process that it was the model of her grandmother's spirituality which sustained her in many of the most difficult times at Stoneybrook. It was clear throughout the interview processes with each participant, that meaning-making was integral to the process of the construction of their autobiography.

We noted in the fifth chapter the different streams of meaning-making which overlapped in the vocation of the minister. Beginning with the personal journey, the meaning-making of one's own identity there was as well, meaning-making construction

about the nature of ministry, meaning-making in the context of the community of the faithful, meaning-making in reference to the Biblical narrative, and meaning-making with respect to life in the larger community. These overlapping meaning-making processes, as conscious activities within the vocation of ministry, provided a rich learning environment for the minister. It was obvious with each participant, how these levels of meaning-making overlapped in their narratives. For instance, in Peter's narrative, it is possible to observe his own personal meaning-making journey and how it was affected by his experiences with his own family, church and local community. It was the experience of Latin American which posed a fundamental tension for Peter and his formative perspective. That experience was the basis for ongoing meaning-making through reflection on Scripture, liturgical expression and theological exploration. Later in his ministry, we have seen a kind of reversal of the process. His own understanding and perspective has acted as interpreter and evaluator of the world around him, including the actions and trends of the church. This proactive meaning-making process was pronounced in each of the narratives of the participants, as they tackled their world with strength out of the crises they had endured.

A further comment relates to the discussion in this study, of the positioning of the vocation of the minister. This positioning has been characterized as interpreter, whereby the minister functions as an interpreter central to many layers of experiential meaning - self, culture, faith, Scripture, faith community, wider community, past and future identities, vision. The example of Doreen illustrates the power of this function. She was caught at the centre of conflictual meanings and visions, having to establish her own view

in light of her reflection on her own journey, and on her growing understanding of the journey of the church. She also illustrated the meaning of the strength of the self, as she, through her reflection, affirmed the meaning of her self amidst the many other competing meanings demanding power over her.

5. Transformative Learning

Mezirow based his understanding of transformative learning upon processes of adaptation whereby distorted assumptions, arising from early socialization into cultural meaning perspectives, were fundamentally challenged. The uncritical assimilation of these perspectives lead in later life, to conflict and disorientation. Out of the disorienting dilemma came the process of transformative potential, the acquiring of radically new perspectives which resolved the underlying dilemma of a person's current experience. This process may be seen most clearly in the experience of George. His early appropriation of the Christian faith came up short in many ways in his early ministry, as he sought a more integrated life experience, less isolation, and finally a way to assess and incorporate the event of his divorce. Clearly he engaged in a process of transformative learning which has led to a fulfilled and open life and ministry. Only slightly less in degree, were the experiences of Rufus, Sheila, and Doreen. Fundamental assumptions about life, community, and ministry were reassessed, changed, issuing in new strength and purpose. Clearly as well, the impact of these specific challenges to each of our participants, has had long term repercussion, and continuing transformation in the new and varied contexts of their lives and ministries. For instance, Peter's experimentation with

lay ministry in all of his subsequent parish work, offered very specific contexts for him to work out his stark conceptualization of ministry as accompaniment, which was secured in him through his experience in Latin America.

It is important here, to recognize the extent to which emotional and psychological trauma were involved in the transformative process of several participants. While Mezirow acknowledges the emotional difficulties often associated with transformative learning, he does not describe or acknowledge these, at least to the extent that we have observed them in the experience of participants in this project. These were deeply personal experiences of great spiritual import to those involved. They were transformative learning processes, but more than Mezirow suggests, they involved complex meaning-making processes drawing on meaning resources in creative and powerful ways.

6. Transformative Learning in Cultural and Social Context

We may now consider the role of culture in the experience of our participants. Mezirow has identified culture as integral to that part of early socialization from which, through the process of transformative learning, one is potentially liberated. Critical reflection is the cognitive lever enabling the individual to identify those cultural components in one's life which perpetuate false assumptions and inadequate meaning perspectives. It can be seen that several participants developed new cultural and social perspectives as a result of their transformative learning experiences. Doreen's experience at Stoneybrook challenged her deeply. She struggled with the defining of her own perspective through prayer and study. Her upbringing and much of her learning in the

church up till that time would not have provided direct guidance on a proper perspective on this issue. For Doreen, this was a transformative experience, as she discovered that the value of social justice and human care required of her, a new perspective on this issue. She forged this perspective for herself, and she endured the challenges which confronted her. The perspective she forged then became a force in her life and ministry, to understand in an ever expanding complexity, the issues of human diversity in ministry. Her learning had definite social and cultural consequences for herself and her ministry. George's experience illustrated the importance of the sense of belonging and identity which comes with a cultural heritage, and the personal dislocation resulting from its absence. His transformative learning led to a completely new perspective on his relationship with people, the church, and the wider community. His openness to these, is also a valuing of them, and a deep respect for their experience. George's transformative learning has also led to a deep sensitivity to the presence of what he calls, "spiritual abuse." This freedom of the Spirit, has, for him, become a social and cultural rallying cry for examining the ways in which this abuse occurs, and ways to confront it. This is not dissimilar to the experience of Rufus, who, having reacted to the theme of anger in his early home, church and community life, established a mode of ministry, particularly sensitive to the way in which social and cultural power are used to oppress. Peter's experience showed the impact of exposure to a very different culture as a kind of critical perspective on his own cultural formation, and more importantly, an ongoing critical perspective towards his lived life in North America. With respect to the culture of the church, both George and Peter identified and implemented changes in liturgy resulting from critical reflection on the

nature of the church. Sheila and Doreen both experienced aspects of the church which, in replacing some of their earlier ideals about church community, gave them a stronger critical perspective on the politico-cultural characteristics of church life. Sheila's experience with the issues of validation and valuation have guided her social and cultural mission to support justice and equality for those who are challenged in any way, or who have experienced prejudice and discrimination, whether inside or outside, the church. The impact of culture can be seen to be an important ingredient in the transformative learning process for participants, but this impact must be characterized as complex and multi-layered.

C. Reflection - Experience and Meaning

1. Cultural Embeddedness

Carlsen, Randall and Polkinghorne are theorists who focus on the meaning-making nature of human existence. All agree that there can be no experience without an act of interpretation. If this is the case, experience cannot be accessed except through cultural categories. The way in which we interpret who we are and what our experience means is tied to the symbolic worlds of language and interpretation we inherit.

The investigation of the cultural embeddedness of the narratives reported by our participants is beyond the scope of this paper. What can be pointed out, is the way in which each participant interpreted his/her experience in light of the self-understandings and practices of their family of origin and the communities in which the families existed. In each case participants spoke very specifically about their early family life, and their

early relationships with church and wider community. Each reference to these earlier experiences was tied to and integrated with an overall interpretation of their life experience and life long patterns. Rufus' experience of the oppressiveness of early church and community life lent a meaning umbrella to his adult focus on the freedom to be, and perception of the dysfunctionality of institutions and structures. Sheila's exposure early to issues of mental and emotional health were part of her overall narrative of the meaning of her life and ministry. In other words, the selective process of portraying life experience was always in relation to a currently perceived meaning about self-identity and the purpose of life in the present.

2. Reflectiveness

Hillman refers to "soul" history as an indepth psychological process of developing insight into life meaning. This is similar to Randall's belief that the process of "experiencing" our lives is the measure of our self-consciousness through acts of recollection and reflection. It seemed to the researcher, that the level of experiencing was optimal with the participants, as they easily engaged in a reflective process about themselves and their vocation of ministry. With very little prompting, participants began their reflection beginning with their earliest impressions in childhood. Throughout their discussion of their life histories, without exception, they freely exposed highly sensitive information in a direct and insightful manner. It was clear that, as ministers, they saw reflection on their life experience as part of their vocational identity, and as a function of the meaning-making nature of their vocation. In retrospect, it has been clear through these

interviews, that ministry, as vocation, lent itself well, to the assumptions of this project.

3. Continual Reinterpretation

Kegan's contribution to this discussion was the way in which he described how meaning is derived from a coherence within a total organizing system. Kegan, Carlsen and Randall posited meaning as an organizing process, to make sense of experience in an ongoing way. Randall in particular referred to the continual restructuring of our world and ourselves through routine reinterpretation of experience. The participants were able to describe with more or less detail, the early framework of how they interpreted their world. What was most instructive, was the way in which that early framework was continually affected and adapted by cumulative experience and changes in understanding. This sometimes came to full circle, in terms of a rejection of early perception, to later renewed insight into the value of the perception. Doreen saw herself as forging a new role for herself, less limiting than her mother's homemaking function. In later new reinterpretation she recaptured the centrality of family, and domestic relationships as liberating forces, forces which make up what Welton called, the "life-world." Rufus re-evaluated the experience of his father, to see in it some of the same struggles he himself endured, the struggle to find a sense of personal freedom in a prescribed social environment. The "reworking of the ideal" in several of the participant narratives, was a process of new understanding and new perspective, a process seen as never-ending. A tentative resolution of early life conflict may be reached, and can be seen in the narrative reports of the participants, perhaps most notably in George's narrative. It would be false,

however, to conclude that there is any final resolution. George has continued and will continue to work with the theme of abandonment in his life, but, of course, from a new perspective. New experiences bring new perspectives, but the ingredients always relate to themes already articulated. These themes remain the meaning structures used for perceiving an open and free future.

D. Reflection-Narrative and the Self

1. Cultural Reflection

The issue of identity and the self is one of how we construct our own story from the storied experience around us. Crites reported that narrative was not so much the product of our identity as it is the bearer of it. We are our stories. Yet our stories are not solely our own; we are dependent upon the storied experience of our families and our communities. The function of critical reflection is the notion of our own conscious awareness of the stories of which we are made, and our own storied take on these. None of our participants could begin the story of who they were without reference to their reflection on original family and community contexts and narratives. These were fundamental reference points for all of the participants. All participants had developed a strong critical faculty in assessing the impact of cultural and social environment on the formation of their identities. One of the most important of these was their family and community adherence to the Christian faith, and the narratives which flowed from that. George was able to reflect clearly, on his own formative influences, the interplay of religious, family and national identities, their impact on him, and how together, they had

wreaked havoc in his youth and young adulthood. Peter reflected strongly on how his experience in Latin America posed questions of his own cultural assumptions developed in Atlantic Canada. Doreen reflected on the narratives which formed her, and the strengths and weaknesses of these as she faced the challenges of her ministry. Sheila too, engaged in a transformative process which enabled her to move beyond the more comfortable narratives of childhood, to face the complex issues of ministry. Participants were well aware of these influences, had distanced themselves for the most part, and were able to reflect critically on both the weaknesses and strengths of their early experience.

2. The Socially Constructed Self

Bruner suggested that the traditional essentialist notion of the self was opposed to the notion of self as socially constructed. Self is dependent upon the contextualized storied nature of experience. It is interesting how a few participants, Doreen and George in particular, shared their perception that they were not the same persons before and after their critical events, events social and cultural in nature. Doreen, in confronting the crisis at Stoneybrook, experienced change in herself. That change was always in the context of the specific social and cultural issue at hand, namely, the meaning of homosexuality and the Christian faith. Not only did the event change her, but it also brought about a different social perspective which affected dramatically, her future ministry. The traumatic event in Rufus' first charge, eclipsed his sense of himself and his vocation preparing him for an experience of "grace." Experience affected how participants viewed themselves, but also how they viewed the social and cultural components of the event. In several cases, Rufus,

George, Doreen, and Sheila, it had much to do with their revised view of the Christian church and their relation to it. Lastly, although there was restructuring of the self in these processes, it is clear that the old self was never completely discarded. The weaving of the developmental identity went through significant changes, but that weaving of experience embraced who the participants were, from their birth to the present.

3. The Move Towards Resolution

Polkinghorne suggests that the more complete the story which is recollected, the more integrated is the self. Clearly, in the process of interpreting their life story, each participant moved towards resolution of issues, again not in a final sense, but in a sense of finding the level of understanding and future intentionality which took account of the learning they each had experienced in their lives and vocation. Doreen was finding a new and balanced focus in her work and personal fulfillment. George was moving towards a fulfillment of his ministry in a renewed contract with the congregation who had chosen to share their spiritual journey with him and he, theirs. Rufus was discovering how to “be free” within the freedom of the community of shared faith. Sheila was finding fulfillment through giving of herself in a range of ministries within a hard fought compromise of shared ministerial functioning. Ironically, because Peter’s pastoral experience had been perceived as an exciting reflection on global social justice, he is left at this time with challenges to integrate perceived threat to values promulgated at the Second Vatican Council, values which had formed the foundation of his own priestly commitments. Clearly, the level of achieved integration by participants may be attributed to their

reflective ability, the characteristic of which they lent to their vocation.

4. The Self as Sacred Story

Randall suggested that this understanding of the storied nature of the self, and the sense that identity is tied to our constructed narrative, has roots in Christian tradition. Scripture and the Christian story understands God and truth as a sacred history, a sacred narrative, a narrative instilled with value, purpose and meaning. He suggested that these are the characteristics, borrowed from faith, which also instill our own narratives. Each of our participants wrestled in his or her narrative with their own sense of purpose, meaning, and the value on their lives and ministry. For instance, Doreen's narrative revolved around learnings about personal integrity, the meaning of human and church community, the meaning of love, and her own sense of purpose in life. The very structuring of these individual stories reflected the issues posed in spirituality and faith, issues of the meaning and purpose of a person's life.

E. Reflection - Autobiography: A Narrative of Learning and Change

1. Life Stories from Present Perspective

We have commented on the reflective qualities of those we interviewed, and the ways in which the vocation may have encouraged a reflective orientation. We have also discussed the processes of meaning-making and story telling as the mode of understanding who we are as persons. This form of story telling, because personal, is autobiographical in nature. Participants had no difficulty engaging in autobiographical construction as they

responded to the requirements of the project.

Randall explored some of the literary devices which comprised the “plotting” of one’s life. Every story, he maintained, has a plot which is the medium not only of meaning, but morality and metaphysics. One result of this was the way in which the plot was always developed in light of the direction towards which the self projected itself. We are “profluenced by the future.” This direction became the principle of selection for interpretation and understanding of both the present and past. The current contexts of the participants guided their view of the past. For instance, the fact that all participants remained in ministry rather than having left it, meant that they focussed on the meaning of the vocation for themselves at the present time, despite the vicissitudes they had experienced. They had resolved to confirm their ongoing vocational choice, not be rejecting it, but by transforming it, or transforming themselves in it, in order to maintain their vocational commitment. The focus of this study has been on these processes of transformation.

2. Central Life Themes or Plots

Randall referred as well, to the literary devices of the autobiographical story telling, such as antihero, victim, black comedy. We have not focussed here on the literary conventions inherent in the process of narrative construction. However, each participant was very conscious of issues of consistency in meaning-making through the act of autobiographical construction. Interpretation of the past had to relate to an overall integrated and unified understanding of life experience. Early experience was related

which had import for understanding current experience. Out of all the experiences of childhood, Rufus chose to focus on the death of his grandmother because of the way it shed light on the conflict he had experienced throughout his ministry. George focussed on his experience of abandonment at age six, because of the way in which this experience shed light on the critical struggle of his own ministry for a sense of community and belonging. Participants tended to identify “trigger events” and significant experiences to explain their understanding of themselves and their personal journey both in terms of their past, but also their project for the future. Peter’s commitment to lay ministry, discovered significantly in Latin America, but also through his post Second Vatican Council education, has become an ongoing project in ministry partly because of a perceived threat to its development in the church today. The narratives of the participants revealed both a trend towards thematic unity and also, clear chronicles of change and transformation. In the end, the transformation is integrated into the whole thread of the narrative of the individual’s life.

3. Multiple Perspectives

In recording these stories it was important to note the subjective and biased nature of each narrative. These were stories about events in life, which could have been entirely different if written from the perspective of another participant. Autobiographical construction is a filtered process. The participant is not able to recapture the events of their lives, in progress. They first of all, have chosen to remember those details which illuminate their current experience. They have also chosen detail to meet the requirements

of the researcher focussing on experience considered to have learning potential. The particular purposes and understandings of the project would have influenced the reporting, particularly because the emphasis is on experience in vocation. For instance, in several cases, the issues of “calling” were central to the reported narrative. The story was also filtered through the consciousness of the researcher as he asked questions of the participants and proceeded to summarize interviews into cogent narratives. He too would have been guided by the purposes of the project to understand how experiential learning had occurred and how it affected the ministry of participants. The filtering process does not undermine the integrity of the resulting narratives since meaning-making is always a filtering process, and it is this meaning-making process with which the project is interested. This means as well, that the study does not attempt the “journalistic” task of getting at the truth of what happened. Rather, the truth attempted is the description of how the participant understood their experience, and why they understood it in the way they did. No participant assumed that what they reported was the only way to perceive the experience, nor did they reject the fact that other actors, other “viewers,” might well have perceived the same events differently.

4. Learning by Autobiographical Construction

Brady has emphasized the learning component as part of the processes described thus far. The way that persons learn about themselves and their personal world is through the act of autobiographical construction. We establish the shape of our lives, the thread that weaves itself through our experience by reflecting in autobiographical mode, which

may be an oral or written process. The purposive nature of our lives is facilitated by the construction of our personal narrative. It becomes our way to direct our lives, to give order to our existence, to imaginatively project ourselves into the future, and to see ourselves from moral and aesthetic purpose. We have seen this in the life themes articulated by our participants. Peter has focussed on the “accompaniment” or shared ministry theme of his vocation, George, upon the shared and open journey, Sheila, upon the mission to value and validate human personality, Rufus, upon the relational and compassionate mandates of the vocation, Doreen, upon respect for persons, and the caring process between them. These themes became the purposive and moral structures which enabled each participant to make ongoing sense of their lives and their work in ministry. These themes become ways for the participants to move their ministries in new and creative directions. For instance, Sheila has moved some of her ministry into the area of criminal justice, while Peter has moved some of his attention to protecting the gains of the Second Vatican Council in the area of lay ministry. The learning process here has been one of in-depth reflection leading to the identification of the issues of one’s life and ministry, and to the directions one chooses to address them. Sheila has continually sought for ways to integrate her theme of emotional and mental health in ministry. Rufus has sought for ways to ensure that ministry is focussed on acceptance of, and care between, persons and to limit the impact of other peripheral issues on that caring process. Peter has sought to integrate justice issues into the central act of the worshipping community, the liturgy. George has sought to maximize the sense of co-journeying with the congregation, inviting all members to accompany him in an open spiritually free walk, as he also walks

with them. Doreen has moved in her ministry to find balance where personal fulfillment is a priority, so that through her own fulfillment, she can contribute to the fulfillment of others.

In keeping with the work of Boyd and Myers, and Nelson, it is clear that it was through processes of discernment, receptivity and grieving (including suffering), that participants were able to move in an open and receptive manner through their experiences. It was through their reflective and imaginative capacity, that they were able to use those experiences to build creative new self-understanding, and new productive directions for their work in ministry.

F. Critical Comment on the Theoretical Perspective

The framework of experiential learning was seen to be useful for interpreting the experience of participants. Most of the theoretical concepts found resonance in the way in which participants reported and interpreted their experience in life and ministry.

Most participants reported that trauma accounted for much of their most significant experience and learning. Theorists such as Mezirow may have not explored, in a comprehensive way, the impact of this kind of experience on the individual. It is not clear in the literature, if the concept of “disorienting dilemma” comprehends all that is involved in human trauma. For one thing, trauma would seem to have as much potential for personal destruction, as for learning. What is it about human experience that can use trauma as a means to build greater awareness of life’s meaning? If transformative learning involves the most fundamental of cognitive shifts whereby former assumptions of living

and perception, are altered, it would seem to be the case that this also involves significant psychological and emotional impact. The learning theorists do not explore sufficiently what enables the individual to benefit from, rather than be defeated by, these kinds of psychologically profound experiences.

Boyd, Myers, and Nelson have identified processes of discernment, receptivity and grieving as elements contributing to learning. They have attempted to base experiential learning less on the centrality of cognitive process, and more on affective experience. It is clear from the participants, that learning from experience, had to do with the immersion of the total individual in the experience. The events which had the greatest learning impact on participants, were traumatic and all-encompassing. They affected every aspect of human functioning. The experiences of Stoneybrook, Latin America, Middle St. church, Residential School, and First Charge were explosive experiences in the consciousness of participants. These were also the most profound learning events. More needs to be understood about how individuals process these experiences, and learn from them.

It seemed, at times, in the theory, that transformative learning was put forward as a single leap of social and cultural liberation. It has been seen in this study, that transformative learning is indeed liberating. But such learning itself, takes place also within social and cultural context, and is in need of ongoing critical reflection. The participants made major strides in reflecting upon their experience and dilemmas from which they learned much. However, the learning was never divorced from ongoing challenges. The integration process often stretched long into the future. Peter's post Latin American experience did not produce an immediately structured, new meaning

perspective. It was an experience which, as time went on, he was able to draw upon for a wider social and cultural awareness, an awareness he brought to bear in many new contexts of life and ministry. The experiential learning theorists have not reflected sufficiently upon the evolutionary and developmental character of this process.

There is little attention to stage development in experiential learning theory. It has been suggested that stage development theory does not take into proper consideration the complex environmental components which determine learning potential. Particular history and events in life are a critical component of the learning processes in an individual's life. However, it seemed to this researcher, that the participant's extended length of experience in the vocation, and possibly the mature age of participants, had something to do with their ability to reflect, with greater objectivity, upon their lives and careers. There may well be a developmental component about their willingness to reflect critically upon the past.

It is useful to ask what enabled these participants to learn from traumatic experience, rather than to be overcome by it? The transformative learning theorists seem to suggest that the ability to learn from such experiences is found within the experience itself. A change in perspective about the ordination of homosexuals, would come from the processes of cognitive change themselves, in the sense that the disorienting dilemma causes the change. Certainly, it is not suggested by these theorists that anything from earlier meaning perspectives have anything to do with success in achieving a new meaning perspective. The experience in this study suggests, however, that strong meaning structures acquired in socialization were also central to the person's ability to process changes in perspective in adulthood. Doreen's grounding in Christian values and morals

in her early life, were what enabled her to endure the trauma of her experience at Stoneybrook, and gave her models of spiritual strength to learn from that experience. We cannot divorce George's transformation, from his basic Christian orientation gained in childhood. It would seem that the transformative process may be more complex, interrelated, and psychologically profound than the theorists have yet outlined.

G. Reflection - Theological Perspectives

1. Narrative, Reflection and Learning, in Christian Perspective

From a theological perspective, experience has been seen to be an appropriate category for theological reflection, and a focus for learning. Experience understood as the "continuous process of story-telling" is the basic datum for understanding a person's and community's relationship with God.²⁰¹ Experiential learning may be thought of as the reflective content of that relationship. As Groome puts it, "Christian religious education (or learning) should be grounded in a relational/ experiential/reflective way of knowing that is informed by the Story of faith from Christians before us, and by the Vision toward which that Story points."²⁰²

As we have stated, ministers, by their vocational choice, are well positioned to become aware of the interplay between their own personal narratives, and the narrative of the Church. Many stories are here intertwined: the story of their original family and

²⁰¹Trond Enger, "Religious Education Between Psychology and Theology," *Religious Education* 436.

²⁰²Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* 145.

themselves, the story of their own and their family's with the story of their church community, the narrative of Scripture as played out in their church community; the interplay of their family, church and local community narratives. All these narratives played uniquely in the consciousness of the minister whose job it was to articulate these stories in light of the Christian story most specifically told in Scripture. This reflective act provided the critical capacity for the uncovering and naming of self-histories, and for the critical envisioning of the future as the positive creative activity involved in creating and transforming towards a future more closely attuned to the will of God.

In light of our report of the narratives of our participant ministers, we may note the impact of the interplay of individual, family, cultural and church narratives on their lives from their earliest years. In every case early experiences of the impact of family and church life set the stage for lifelong issues and provided the frame of reference for lifelong interpretations of experience. As well, the interplay of these narratives resulted in the living out of many different forms of conflicts and problems, strengths and weaknesses in new and varied contexts, becoming stories not unlike the stories of the myriad of characters as told in Scripture. One example was Sheila's narrative where she relayed the impact of issues in her early life experience, and showed the way in which the resulting themes of self-esteem, emotional wholeness, gender roles, personal justice, social and economic marginality, have all been themes for development throughout her life, and central to her ministry.

2. Critical Reflection in Ministry

How critical reflection has acted as a transformative learning experience for each

participant, is shown within each narrative. It must be restated how familiar the critical reflective act was for these participants. This faculty was identified as a pre-requisite for participation in the project, although the level of reflective ability could not be assessed prior to conducting the project. Each participant provided critical interpretation of their experience from the first moment of telling their story. It was clear, as well, the extent to which Christian perceptions entered into their understanding of their experience. For Doreen, the requirement for critical reflection was tested at Stoneybrook. Here the different strands of her experience were brought together in a reflective process the result of which guided her action at a critical time in her life and ministry. Using the spiritual model of her grandmother, she reflected on the layers of her experience, her early family and church life, her understanding of the communities in which she lived, her Church's current theological reflection, her own understanding of Scripture, the context in which she now provided ministry and, working out for herself the norms of God's will for that moment, she took a stand. The rightness or wrongness of her thinking or action is not the question. What is the issue, was the strength of the reflective process which guided her in such a way that she was able to determine her own understanding, to confront strong opposition, and to live with the consequences. It was also the struggle through which she envisioned the future shape of the Christian community in relating to the challenge of diversity at the third millennium. The transformative nature of the learning which resulted from her reflection was the impact on her and her ministry over time, as she reworked her own sense of self, and her understanding of ministry and the church, and applied it over time in her ongoing ministry.

Thomas Groome speaks often about the impact of the transformative Vision in Christian faith and tradition, and the way in which that vision provides the norm of praxis for the envisioning and implementing of God's path in the world of today. It is a vision which energizes, so that not only are the faithful enlightened, but they are enabled to co-create with God, His Kingdom on earth. Clearly, our participants were so energized and enabled. George, through the appropriation of a new vision of relating to the world, and of the nature of the church, was empowered to make this vision the meaning of his day to day ministry. Sheila had found in her vision, a new freedom to be, and to minister in creative and caring ways. Doreen discovered herself through her trial, and with that her own power to forgive, and a strength to serve, despite the perfidy of human nature. Peter developed a vision of the global church with global responsibility, demonstrated in day to day ministry. Rufus embraced a vision of God's forgiveness, and self-acceptance to guide his work within the differences of the people he served. Each participant noticeably had grown in strength and power in the way in which appropriated the Vision, and served it in their own places.

3. The Narrative of God in Ministry

The presence of God in ministry may be experienced through the narratives of ministries. The sense of God's involvement in the narratives we have been describing, has much to do with doctrines of revelation and inspiration. Working with the theological background of Niebuhr and Stroup, our understanding has lead to a perception that the basic Christian creed historically, has been a telling of sacred events, a sacred storytelling, as seen preeminently in such stories as The Crossing of the Red Sea, or the story of the life

of Christ in the gospels. The telling of the Scriptural narratives has been the critical foundation for understanding the meaning of the Christian faith.

In a parallel understanding of this project, it is suggested that we cannot fully understand the nature of ministry, or the work of God in Christian ministry, without beginning with the narratives of the practice of ministry. As noted previously, Niebuhr suggests that revelation cannot be divorced from the narrative or story of revelation. So it is with ministry. God's working is in the narrative of the practice of ministry. For Niebuhr, it is in the inner story, the inner force in each person's experience which is the bearer of God's will. It is not so much the event itself, as how the event is understood in its formation and intention. But before we can speak of revelation, we must link that inner experience intersubjectively as the whole experience of the People of God. Revelation is apprehended through the internal history of the People of God, and cannot be separated from that history. What to external history, seems the killing, through crucifixion, of a criminal named Jesus, is, for the Christian, a narrative of the salvation of humankind. One instance from our participants is the experience of George. The critical external event was his divorce. But the meaning and resulting transformative learning through this experience was subjective, an internal process not accessible through simple observation. Each participant had their own way of expressing how God was at the centre of their journey, and the Teacher in all that they had learned.

4. Confessional Narrative

The participants were generally cautious to identify in a facile manner, the work of God in their lives. They did so however, through the telling of their narratives, where they

linked their understanding of themselves to the narratives of their Christian experience from childhood to the present. Their reflective process was always assumed in Christian context. The struggle Rufus had had with the angry God, was his internal struggle to understand the meaning of faith for him and his ministry throughout his life. Doreen's whirlwind was the cauldron of experience which pushed her in new directions in apprehending God's will for the local church, and for her own life fulfillment. Sheila, who spoke about how she benefitted from her struggles in apprehending God's will, also spoke directly of God's grace, in enabling her to see life values and directions through her disappointments. George too, was direct in seeing God's work in his "conversion" from abandonment to belonging. It was the despair of divorce which precipitated this new apprehension of God in his life. Peter experienced the will of God through his family and church life. He lived that will consciously throughout his ministry, in light of his experience in Latin America. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the reflective content of the narrative reports is immersed in the faith of the participants, and in their struggle to ascertain the will of God for themselves and their ministries.

As noted, Stroup has taken up the concept of confession to show how autobiography has served as a form to describe God's action in our lives. He used Augustine's *Confessions* as a model to illustrate this function. Christian confession arises in the unique "collision" of the personal identity narrative as it becomes illumined and transformed through the impact of the Christian narrative upon it. The narrative of what it means to be a Christian today, as expressed in the actual living experience of Christians, is the vehicle of confession. As such each participant, in reflecting on their unique struggle

to live out their Christian faith in ministry has provided us with a confessional document. The claim is not that the confession is complete, nor that participants identified their narrative as confession, nor that they were asked to reflect specifically on faith issues. But in the telling of their stories in coping with the vicissitudes of their ministries, they revealed their way of interpreting their experience as Christian persons and ministers. Their confessions, as was Augustine's, were full of the particular joys and sorrows, disappointments and happiness, angers and frustrations, fears and struggles, sufferings and celebrations, visions and prophecies, failures and successes, all that went to the make up of every aspect of human experience. The confession was the way in which participants' submitted to a spiritual "learning" process by which they made specific attempts to examine their experiences in light of their understanding of faith and ministry.

From the study, it may be suggested that the Christian faith, as faith, contributed strongly to the potential for learning. The way in which participants reappropriated their early Christian perspectives, for revisioning under often traumatic conditions, showed a resilience and flexibility of meaning structure, which in itself, helped to promote the learning process. For instance, Sheila's early trust, security and strength in the development of early faith structures, both increased her awareness of the value issues which later came her way, but also gave her the strength to confront and overcome the obstacles to those valuing experiences. Faith had a highly significant role in supporting the experiential learning processes of these participants.

McClendon's contribution seemed partially to reflect the reciprocal role of how Christian ways of understanding life become reflected in lived lives, and how those lived

lives shed light on Christian ways of understanding. So Peter's ministry was both guided by an "incarnational" model of ministry, but at the same time reflected what that model meant for the context of his time. It meant a living awareness of global justice where we accompany those who live in poverty, and act out the implications of that accompaniment in the context of Atlantic Canada. Sheila's grasp on the meaning of the anointing by God in Baptism and Ordination, became her inspiration to defend that anointing before all those who are in danger of living it unrecognized. Doreen's suffering has been a source of learning about how the never ending test of faith is tested in the present time. George's conversion was entirely in the context of experiences which reflected realities in the mid-twentieth century, the twentieth century mission phenomenon, the experience of divorce, and the theological complexion of this period. Rufus' is a journey to reinterpret how the anger of God may justly be translated into a new and different experience of self and ministry. In providing this interpretation of experience, it is not presumed to suggest that the experiences of our participants provided the normative view of Christian faith and life. Rather, it has been shown how in these specific instances, ministers have appropriated the faith for illumined reflection on their own lives and for their reconstructed understanding of the nature of ministry. The tradition has contributed meaning to the lives of participants, and the experiences of participants have affected how the tradition is understood.

This study has focussed on the processes of change which have affected the identity of the self, and identity of the individual engaged in ministry. It has been a unique vantage point from which to perceive the impact of faith on personal change and growth.

we understand who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. When the life story is also a story of ministry, it is a confessional act, a learning of what it means to live the Christian life today, a learning in progress. Clearly, the processes of reflection chronicled and encouraged in this project, have contributed to self-understanding, to clarifying visions of the future, and to learning how faith is demonstrated and interpreted within the multilayered complexity of lived experience.

H. Summary

This chapter has reviewed some of the significant theoretical bases of this study, to examine how the participant narratives reflect the theory or provide perspective on it. We have found that generally the participants have reported their experience in such a way to confirm much in the theory of experiential and transformative learning. This was especially true with respect to the importance of critical incidents in the narratives of participants.

However, these critical incidents, experienced as profound psychological events in the lives of participants, seemed not to be adequately described by the theorists. The processes of learning seemed to be more long term, and complex, than described by the central theorist, Mezirow.

The theorists did not discuss thoroughly, the conditions needed for learning to occur, particularly those conditions of psychological and cognitive strength which were established in formative development. In this respect, it is suggested that issues of trust and faith, namely religiously oriented cognitive meaning gained in childhood, may be a significant contributing factor enabling individuals to manage trauma productively, and to learn from it. This was identified as an area for possible future applied research.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

A. Responses to the Research Question**1. Comments on the Experiential Learning of Participants**

As we have reviewed the narratives of the participants, and the experiences they have described, it is clear that each has had highly significant experiential learning processes, the impacts of which were profound for their ministries.

These experiences affected participants both personally and vocationally. It was seen that the personal identity of each participant was intimately bound up with their vocational identity. In two participant's instances, George and Doreen, their formative years were spent in families immersed in the vocation of ministry. In the case of the three other participants, their early years were spent in families whose lives were intertwined with the life of the church and wider community. In all cases personal and vocational experience was inseparably interrelated.

It was found, then, that the events and experiences in their ministries affected the way participants perceived themselves, their past and future, and their vocation. The narratives were a whole story, which could not be divided without reference to that whole. George's critical experience in ministry had ramification, not only for his current practice of ministry, but for the way he understood every part of his life, his past, his family, and his ministry, as well as his hopes and dreams.

We reviewed the types of experiences that participant had, which they reported had affected their view of ministry. In all but one, the most significant experience seemed to be some form of traumatic or very difficult experience or event. This made the learning processes difficult and complex. Every participant clearly stated the profound impact of these experiences, and their long term learning curve. As reported, Mezirow, a major theorist for this study, had discussed the critical impact of the disorienting dilemma for transformative learning. However, Mezirow has not explored sufficiently, the tentative and problematic processes of integration which are necessary for the transformation of trauma into learning. These processes did not seem to fit neatly or easily, into the linear steps for transformative learning as outlined by Mezirow.

The learning seemed to be more difficult to access than indicated by the theorists. At time, participants, when asked what they had learned from their difficult experience, hesitated, and found it difficult to respond. The reflective activities needed encouragement. Indeed, an area of research arising from this study was an exploration of the reflective processes used by participants to access cognitively their total experience. For some, this cognitive distillation of experience was easier than for others. For most, the reflective process was reported to be a long term process not yet complete. George, for instance, made changes in his life within months of his critical experience, but the ripple effect of that experience has continued to this day, as he has worked to implement his model of the mutual journey within his congregation.

Where we have spoken of experience it has become clear through the process of the research, that this cannot be viewed as “isolated incident.” Experience comprised a

complex of feelings and thoughts with a long interior life in the individual, but which were triggered in a decisive way, by an external complex of events or specific history of an individual, to produce profound change. George's divorce did not produce the change in his life, nor the learning he experienced. Rather, the event acted as a pressure or catalyst in George, to bring to fusion, these feelings and ideas which produced change affecting the whole of George's life.

Early family experience, and early Christian experience, were seen to be highly significant in two ways, in terms of the type of learning which occurred in maturity, and in terms of the provision of resources to support that learning later in life. For instance, George's early religious experience was conflictual, and had a direct impact on the difficult learning experience he went through early in his ministry. But it is also true that the resolution of his conflict was in Christian terms, faithful responses, which he agrees, lay beneath his conflicts, and provided the resources for integration.

Although participants did not, for the most part, separate out the resources of their faith as enabling their learning, the researcher has drawn the conclusion that these resources were indeed critical for learning. These were the highly positive reports of early Christian experience which participants drew upon to meet the challenges of their ministries. Doreen drew upon the spiritual resources of her grandmother; Sheila, upon the Christian faith of her mother, and other members of her family; Rufus, upon his experience of faith at his grandmother's funeral; George, upon his early, less conscious, learning about the meaning of the Christian faith; and Peter, from the resources of his family's faithful adherence, and his early experience in the church. These early

experiences, not without complexity, were sources of spiritual power and strength for participants, as they met the challenges of their ongoing ministries.

We have discussed the value of experiential learning as enabling a process of reflective learning with these participants. We have also discussed the way in which their experiences have helped suggest directions for further exploration of the process of experiential learning itself. It may be affirmed however, that participants easily and energetically responded to the invitation to reflect on their learning in ministry. Their experience in ministry lent itself to this process. One participant reported that results of the project should be submitted to denominational offices. Participants saw clearly, the value of their reflective exercise both for themselves and the development of ministry within their denominations.

2. Summary of Experiential Learning of Participants

To summarize, the experiential learning themes of participants seemed to cluster in certain areas, and were identified as such in chapter six. These clusters included:

First, participants identified learning based on experiences which produced fundamental change. It seemed that all participants had experienced change which affected their fundamental perspectives on themselves and their ministry. They did not find it quite so easy to identify clearly what those changes in perspective were, but they believed they had changed, both personally, and vocationally.

Second, participants identified experiences in their lives and in ministry which enabled them to develop empathically, to be able to enter into the meaning perspective of

others more easily, and to develop a stronger pastoral care through that improved ability.

Third, participants were actively involved in readjusting the lens through which they perceived ministry. They all had entered ministry with certain notions. Through experience in ministry, they discovered their notions did not fit the reality, and that they needed to adjust to a more realistic view of their vocation, its potential and requirement. Earlier conceptions were sometimes seen as counterproductive for their own mental health. For instance, notions of ministry which tended to isolate the participant, the mentality of the “lone ranger,” added to a marginality which was already present in pastoral duties. This reworking of the ideal was often a painful learning experience for participants.

Fourth, participants generally learned to focus on themselves, their own processes, and to learn self-acceptance. They were not as driven in their need to fulfil expectations or live up to unrealistic ideals, and they were less demanding of others at the same time. Self-care became not only acceptable as an objective, but desirable.

Fifth, participants turned to and reinforced, a concept of ministry which set them alongside their congregants, in a model of ‘mutual journeying,’ and this more support oriented view of ministry was reinforced by the experience of some participants who reported they could not have survived vocationally without strong intimate support from family and friends.

Sixth, participants seemed to have related in some way, to marginality in their experience, whether through their own feelings of marginality, or through ministry focussed on pastoral service with marginalized groups or individuals. This alliance in

ministry, to the marginalized, also affected their view of ministry and their perspective on the world in which they ministered.

Seventh, the female participants had experienced issues of gender inequality in their ministries. These experiences led to heightened awareness of the need for self-affirmation, and for the maintenance of vigilance in identifying gaps in the church's understanding and behaviour.

The learnings may have been characterized as learnings about self, ministry and the nature of faith. This last has not been emphasized in the report, but it seems clear that all learnings did relate to issues of the meaning of life, basic human values, justice, and the nature of the social order. Personal, social and cultural learnings were integrated as participants readjusted their view of themselves and their world.

The learnings themselves have been perceived by participants, as ongoing. There has been no finality in the perception of the impact of any particular experience. Every new experience provided a new learning through which all previous experience was strained. This does not, however, limit the impact or value of the specific learning experiences which have been reported by participants.

Lastly, we have noted from a review of the narratives, that all participants, although from different denominations, both genders, differing types of congregational experience, and different family life and cultural experiences, still displayed remarkable similarity of narrative with respect to role issues, fundamental challenges, experiences of isolation, and finally intense impact upon their sense of self and ministry. These were men and women who experienced deeply, and in the reflective process had undergone a new

baptism by fire. The result was a learning process which contributed greatly to each of their ministries.

B. Methodological Comment

The methodology was adequate to the research project as it was conducted. The qualitative research model as described by Patton and the narrative component by Mishler, were seen to have fit well with the purposes and process of this research.

One participant withdrew after providing significant input into the project. The reason for withdrawal was stated as lack of anonymity and concern with potential exposure. No other feedback was given. The researcher accepted the withdrawal without question. Without drawing any specific conclusion with respect to this action, or the participant in question, a few observations may be made. The first is, that the participant who withdrew, had fewer years in ministry by half, than the participant with the next fewest years in ordained ministry. While not referring to the withdrawn participant in particular, it is possible to speculate that there may be significance in the length of time in the practice of ministry, for the psychological distance required to carry out a public reflection of the sort conducted in this project. As well, one might explore what the issues of exposure and personal revelation mean, in the vocation of ministry, especially as these relate to issues of "role."

Methodologically, it was clear as the project proceeded, that life stories with intimate details of life experience were critical to the substance of the project. Future projects of this kind would benefit from being more direct, at the start of the project, about

identifying the extent of personal information which would be a central and public part of the project. Informed consent could then be more explicit about the lack of anonymity which is implicit in the structure of the project.

A larger representation of participants with a sampling based specifically on pre-determined criteria, for comparison purposes, might produce data to differentiate types of participants according to gender, age, denominational affiliation, or theological belief. It was determined that the current sample was too small to provide any quantitative comparisons. One point which may be able to be made here, however, is that the women in the sample both reported gender issues as important in various aspects of their ministry, as compared to the men who reported no gender related issues.

The reflective process engendered by the project itself was seen to be important. However, time limitation, and the specific objectives of the project did not allow for extended review with participants, of the impact of this project on their view of themselves and their ministries. This has been seen as a component to be added to the methodological structure of future research into experiential learning in ministry.

C. Recommendations Arising Out of this Study and Project

This project has been an exercise in reflectivity, with a focus on understanding how reflection takes place in ministry, its affect on the minister and his/her understanding of the vocation. Experiential learning has been seen to be an effective method to encourage a reflective process in ministry. This, however, is not a new perception. For decades now, those being trained for the vocation of leadership in the Christian church

have been exposed to processes of self-reflection, both in terms of life experience, and also in terms of theological exploration from a personal point of reference. Be that as it may, the learning from that recent tradition does not seem to have mitigated some of the effects of idealization and isolation which have continued to plague the practice of ministry. Personal reflective processes cannot be seen to have been completed with the achievement of ordination. There is a need for much stronger extension of these reflective processes throughout the tenure of ministerial practice. The following are observations which have been made arising from the project.

1. There is a need to take a more generational view of reflective processes in ministry. During the formative training of ministers, for instance, there may be seen to be value in having mature ministers reflect about their critical journey with ministerial students, about what they have learned about themselves and ministry through their practice, and what these learnings might imply for those beginning their service. As we have reviewed the narratives of the participants in this project, it was clear that they had many learnings to share, but not so clear, that proper avenues exist to share these learnings.

2. There was exposed in this project, a certain isolation on the part of several participants, in their efforts to meet the challenges of trauma in their ministries. Although formal denominational interventions may have been available to assist ministers, none seemed to have been of effective assistance. There was seen to be a need for more emotional and operational support for ministers who find themselves in difficulty with congregations, but who want confidentiality in seeking assistance.

3. There was seen to be more need to reflect upon the impact of early life experience on understandings and images of ministry which in later years may have become sources of misunderstanding and confusion. Much of this assessing has been taking place in seminaries, but the potential for damage in the practice of ministry may be greater than has been identified. What are the ideals about ministry, which are being taught, and how are students being encouraged to review and assess these? Even more important, what avenues exist to support the reflective process about ideals in ministry during the practice of it. A stronger awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of certain ideals in ministry, may enable individuals to meet the challenges of their ongoing ministries, more adequately.

4. There has been value seen in attempting to introduce more regular and stronger processes of reflection for ministers throughout their ministries. The experiential learning model has offered much potential for ministers to engage, collegially, in personal reflective processes, to share learnings, and to provide support in overcoming challenges in ministry. A recommendation for regularized processes which focus on the self-understanding of the minister in facing challenges would seem to be appropriate. How, some might ask, is this suggestion seen to be different from therapy? As we have seen, the experiential learning of these participants has had therapeutic implications. However, the focus here has been on an educative reflective process, a spiritual learning, and the value of this as a preventative process in the mental and emotional health of ministers. Reflection on experience from a learning perspective offers opportunity for self validation, and for making a useful contribution to the larger ministry of the church.

5. From a research point of view, it has been suggested that there might be further exploration into the role of faith, in enabling an individual to learn from difficult experiences. What is it that translates a traumatic experience into a learning experience, and how does the presence of a stance of faith contribute to that learning? More study is required to understand these processes in depth, in order to appreciate their benefits.

D. Personal Quest

It was personally very humbling to be invited into the personal lives of the persons who participated in this project. These participants openly and trustingly conveyed very private information about themselves, as a natural process of the personal transparency which they had already learned. It may be seen as a strength which belongs to them and to their vocation. For me, as well, it was a lesson in the values and strengths of ministry, a profession about confession and the meaning of life.

It was also amazing the extent to which the vocation of ministry was also described as a personal journey. As I too, had once participated in pastoral ministry, I could see the way in which the vocation itself encouraged its adherents to move in their personal journey where the spirit takes them. Ministry as a spiritual calling, a career of the interior, a personal path, was a perception reinforced through listening to these participants. As I have suggested, the learning potential of ministry as a reflective vocation has been seen to have much to offer in examining the processes of meaning-making in our lives, and the range of issues and concerns which go into that process of making sense of who we are,

from whence we have come, and where we are going.

It was one thing to articulate the concepts of experiential, transformational, narrative, and biographical learning, in the abstract. It was another to start with the real stories of persons. These participants provided grounded perspective on the theory. In the mix of daily life and experience, with its disappointments and successes, it is not always easy to identify the learnings. But it was a work to which these participants gave themselves, with clear willingness to share the learnings from which they had benefitted in their lives and ministries.

It was a learning for me, that while I entered into the lives of other ministers for a moment, and noted that their experiences were not specifically mine, nevertheless, the experiences were humanly common. We could bond immediately on the feeling and understanding level. I wondered if the community of ministry and faith had found ways to encourage or support the healing potential of that bonding.

It is appropriate at this point, to solicit the forbearance of the five final participants, for the myriad of interpretations and possible misinterpretations I have penned here, and which have accompanied their narratives. These interpretations are entirely my own.

The project also reminded me about how much each of us has to teach one another. With the great range of experience today, available to and imposed upon, the individual, there is more and more need to create communicative spaces for persons to share their stories, their lifeworlds, and to learn from one another. With communication predominately occurring in a one way, dominant, impersonal and deceptive format, (ie. talkshows), it is critical that those concerned about human meaning find new methods to

engage it together. It is hoped this study has contributed to the style of communication which has potential for the growth of communicative structures, development of forums for personal learning, and the opening of paths to spiritual freedom.

APPENDIX ONE

LETTER TO NETWORK CONTACTS

'EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN MINISTRY'

Doctor of Ministry project by Rev. W. Bruce Hicks
for Acadia Divinity College
Wolfville, N.S.

This is the topic of a thesis/project for the Doctor of Ministry program at the Acadia Divinity College. The thesis/project will explore the experiential learning of clergy who have occupied congregational leadership positions for significant number of years. A primary focus of the project is how experience in ministry has affected a minister's vocational self-understanding and his/her understanding of the nature and practice of ministry. The focus is on the 'learning process' and the research question may be stated as, "What were the experiential learning processes which have led to changes in your understanding Christian ministry? Think of ministry both in terms of self-understanding, and in terms of the nature of ministry itself."

As the researcher, I am in the process of searching for appropriate respondents for the project. The following are some guidelines for the identification of appropriate respondents:

- a. A clergy person, who in assessing his or her experience in ministry, can report that he or she has undergone significant change or development in his/her self-

understanding as a minister and also in an understanding of the nature of the vocation. The clergy person needs to have a strong desire to explore how these changes in understanding occurred, and how life experience was critical to the process. Critical self-reflection will be a required skill for the process. Just as important will be a willingness to share as personally as possible with the researcher for the sake of the project's purposes.

It is important to note here that a non-judgemental approach will be taken in the interview process. The exploration is to understand how experience as affected understanding, not to evaluate that experience or even the resulting learning.

- b. A clergy person who has spent at least eight years incongregational ministry beyond initial training for ministry understood usually as a Master of Divinity program. The focus of the project is on the learning resulting directly from experience in ministry.
- c. A person who is able to contribute considerable time to the project. Over a three month period, the suggested process will include:
 - 1. Two weeks of guided personal reflection;
 - 2. A first interview of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours to review life experience;
 - 3. A second interview of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours to explore in-depth,

experiential learning processes and the results of these learning processes;

4. A third interview to share and confirm agreed upon interpretations and conclusions.

One might raise the question of the usefulness of this process particularly for the respondents who will be required to 'work so hard' at this. This is not so easily answered. One major benefit is the contribution any respondent makes in helping to foster an understanding of the nature of ministry on the basis of real experience in the performance of it. Does not experience in ministry contribute in some major way to an understanding of what it is, and is not this experience to be valued as providing a profound view of the nature of the vocation? A second benefit is the very reflective process itself. Reflection is the requirement for personal learning. Through reflective processes we learn more about ourselves and our deeper motivations. This project provides a unique opportunity to engage in such a personal self-learning process. In this sense the research process itself is expected to contribute to the learning occurring at the same time.

Ethical Guidelines: the project will follow the extensive ethical guidelines required by the Acadia Divinity College, requiring confidentiality, and reference to guidelines on how case studies are reported in the final thesis report. Also, all documentation will be handled only with consent of respondents. No identities will be revealed.

Accountability: the interpretations of life history material and conclusions with

respect to the purposes of the project will be checked with each respondent to ensure no person is misrepresented. A basic collaborative stance will be taken with each respondent.

If you wish more information or to help by providing information about potential respondents, please contact me at the following numbers:

Rev. W. Bruce Hicks

902-679-7250 (home)

902-825-2943 (work)

APPENDIX TWO

LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

(sample letter to participants)

Dear (_____),

I am writing this letter at the suggestion of (_____). She suggested that you might make a very good candidate as a participant in my Doctor of Ministry thesis-project being conducted under the auspices of Acadia Divinity College.

I have worked during the first decade of my career in pastoral ministry after which I studied in the area of social work. Having completed my studies, I worked for various levels of government before finally engaging to teach a Human Services programme at the Nova Scotia Community College, Annapolis Valley Campus in Middleton. I have been involved with the D.Min. program at Acadia since 1992.

My project is entitled, "Experiential Learning in Ministry" and refers to the experiential learning of ministers who have been in the 'field' for some time, and who would say that this experience has had significant impact on their understanding of themselves as 'ministers' or 'priests,' and on their understanding of the nature of ministry

itself. The research question might be stated as, "What were the experiential learning processes which have led to changes in understanding of Christian ministry, both in terms of self-understanding, and in terms of the nature of ministry?"

I hope this project appeals to you and I have attached material (see Appendix One) to further describe the project. I know that participation would be time consuming, but I would make every effort to make your involvement as convenient to you as possible. I anticipate the interview process would be complete by the end of November, 1999.

I will try to contact you next week to get an idea of your response, and to answer any questions. I look forward to renewing our contact.

Sincerely yours,

Bruce Hicks

APPENDIX THREE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

(sample consent form)

CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROJECT: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN MINISTRY

CONDUCTED BY W. BRUCE HICKS

Part A: Description of the Research Project

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiential learning processes of pastoral ministers who have committed significant time in their career to this vocational role, and who, through their experience, have learned new insights about themselves as ministers and about the nature of ministry itself.

Each respondent will be interviewed at least three times. The first interview, preceded by a period of guided self-reflection, will focus on the chronology of life experience and specifically on experience in ministry. The second interview will be more exploratory focussing on the in-depth reflection on learnings in the practice of ministry. The third interview will discuss and review learnings, interpretations and conclusions with respect to

vocational self-concept and changes in the understanding of ministry. All conclusions will be checked with respondents to ensure verifiability and agreement.

Information will be collected orally, in written form, and in taped interview. The paper and electronic trail will be attached to the research project and will be protected in the possession of the researcher. Every effort will be made to ensure the anonymity of respondents. It must be acknowledged, however, that anonymity in social and case study research cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Respondents must accept this cautionary note about anonymity.

Acadia Divinity College will initially receive the research project and all documentation attached to it. The completed thesis/project will be kept in the University Library through which it may be available to interested researchers, and may at any time in the future provide the basis for journal articles.

Part B: Acknowledgment of Consent by Research Project Participant

I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined above have been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this protocol and am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time during the process of the research to discuss any pertinent issues. I know that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and that appropriate levels of anonymity and

confidentiality will be maintained. I understand too, that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understood these protocols and that I am willing to participate in this research project.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX FOUR

GUIDE TO TWO-WEEK CRITICAL REFLECTION

D.Min. Thesis/Project

'Experiential Learning in Ministry'

Two Week Critical Reflection

TWO WEEK CRITICAL REFLECTION

It is suggested that a two week period of critical reflection be undertaken in preparation for the interview process. The critical reflection process alternates between reflection on actual remembered experience, and critical reflection on that experience. These processes go hand-in-hand.

The critical reflection embraces a total life history approach in order to capture all potential influences in the experiential learning process. For instance, you may remember a particular experience which for the moment has no import, only later to 'realize' that this experience was formative and highly influential for you in ways you had not anticipated. Thus, a broad remembering process is encouraged, even if the meaning is unclear as you record. At the same time, it will be important to remember that the focus is on experience in ministry, and that the period in ministry will need the most attention.

The recording is in two parts: A. The remembered events in as much or as little detail as you wish; B. Reflective comment on the 'learning impact' refers to the impact of the experience in your thinking and feeling processes. This reflective process and recording is especially important for the account of experience in ministry, and some of the reflective questions will fit more appropriately at that point. As you go about the process of 'reflecting,' you might ask yourself such questions as:

- How did this experience immediately affect me?
- How did the experience affect me in the long run?
- Did the experience help to change my ideas about myself or my life?
- Did my thinking and feeling reflective processes out of this experience also affect my thought and feelings about myself in my ministry?
- Did these reflections also help formulate new thoughts about what ministry is?
- What was it about the actual experience which pushed my thoughts and ideas in this direction?
- How fundamentally did this experience change or contribute to changes in my thinking?
- Was it a cluster of experiences which led me to think the way I do, and how did that clustering take place in my mind?
- How was the process of change in thinking or perspective, a 'learning process'?
- What role did my faith play in this learning?

(I have attached a separate page of 'reflective questions')

It is not important that every experience be tackled with this reflective process, but that these questions guide your thinking about your experiences or give you some guidance about how to reflect upon those experiences which you are convinced did affect your thinking in a deep way.

It is suggested that you work through the Guide chronologically the FIRST WEEK, not worrying if it is complete or correct. The SECOND WEEK could be spent thinking and reflecting, focussing perhaps mostly on your experience in ministry, recording new thoughts and remembered experiences as these occur. It is always important to keep in mind that the focus of the project is on the learning processes experienced during the practice of ministry. Allow your mind free reign as you consider your experience, since often allowing your mind freedom allows for fresh ideas and meaning to flow. Remember, there are no 'correct' or 'right' thoughts in this process. I would suggest that you focus on completing the guide by spending about FIVE HOURS PER WEEK thinking and recording. No one thinking and recording time period should be longer than an hour. However, the process is yours - we are all different - choose the process which fits you best.

A Reflection Guide is provided to you in a binder. It provides space for you to record notes. Notes need not be in full sentences or paragraphs, but may simply be reminders for reflection. More pages are provided for the reflective period on Pastoral Ministry, since this is the period of focus for the project. This is the period for which you need to do the most remembering and thinking. You may use the provided binder or your own recording device such as word processor. The process is divided into two processes, A. Remembering, and B. Reflecting. It is suggested that keeping notes separated in this way might be useful. To reiterate, remember that as you go about your 'reflecting' task,

the focus is ultimately on how these experiences altered your understanding of yourself as a minister, and/or altered your understanding of the nature of ministry; and more, HOW these experiences (or what was it about the experience?) altered your understandings.

The recorded notes will be reviewed by the researcher and kept confidentially with the other data of the project.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Questions to keep in mind as you consider your 'experiences' and reflect on their meaning for you.

1. How did this experience/event affect me at the time? Emotionally? My thinking? My social environment?
2. How did this experience/event affect me in the long run? Its repercussions for my thinking or feeling? Its repercussions for other aspects of my life, my directions in life?
3. Did the experience/event contribute to changes in my ideas about myself or my life?
4. Did this experience/event contribute to changes in my vocational self-understanding, how I see myself in ministry? My feelings or thoughts about myself as a 'minister' or 'priest'?
5. Did this experience/event then have an impact on how I think about ministry itself? Ministry - its meaning, its function, my understanding of what ministry is all about? New insight into the nature of Christian ministry?
6. As I reflect on the experience/event, what was it about this experience itself, do I think, was responsible for the development of my feelings and thoughts? What was the particular meaning I gave the event which was most fruitful in directing my feeling and thought, or most fruitful in its contribution to my ongoing understanding.
7. How fundamentally did this experience change or contribute to changes in my feeling/thinking? To what extent was this change dramatic, or gradual, fundamental or partial in its impact on my thought about myself in ministry or my thought about ministry? Was this a major change in direction, or did it contribute to a major 'turn-around' in my thinking?
8. Was this one seminal experience/event, one total impact, or did it contribute to a cluster of experiences which led to change in my thinking and understanding?
9. How would you characterize this change as a 'learning' process for you? What made it a 'learning' process? How was this 'learning' particular to you, or would you characterize the learning process as one which others might experience in a similar way?
10. What role did my faith play in this 'learning'? How did faith contribute to the learning? Was faith challenged or stretched or changed?

D.Min. Thesis/Project

'Experiential Learning in Ministry'

TWO WEEK CRITICAL REFLECTION

GUIDE

**TWO WEEK CRITICAL REFLECTION
GUIDE**

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8. Theological Training Experience - Reflected 9

9. Experience in Pastoral Ministry - Remembered 10

10. Experience in Pastoral Ministry - Reflected 11

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1. Early Life Experience - Remembered Experience

(Birth, pre-school experience - family, community, religious and church)

(Page 3)

2. Early Life Experience - Reflected

(Birth, pre-school experience - family, community, religious and church)

(Page 4)

3. Youth - Remembered

(School, grades 1-12, family life, friendships, religious and/or church experience, adolescence, community and culture; specially remembered events, experience, decisions)

(Page 5)

4. Youth - Reflected

(School, grades 1-12, family life, friendships, religious and/or church experience, adolescence, community and culture; specially remembered events, experience, decisions)

(Page 6)

5. Post High School, Pre-Theological Training Experience - Remembered

(Family, friendships, work, education, personal and spiritual growth, church and community; specially remembered events, experience, decisions)

(Page 7)

6. Post High School, Pre-Theological Training Experience - Reflected

(Family, friendships, work, education, personal and spiritual growth, church and community; specially remembered events, experience, decisions)

(Page 8)

7. Theological Training Experience - Remembered

(Decisions about vocation: experience of the institution, highlights of theological training experience, remembered beliefs about vocation, remembered changes in self-understanding and vocational directions, views about ministry and yourself as a minister; other life experience, etc.)

(Page 9)

8. Theological Training Experience - Reflected

(Decisions about vocation: experience of the institution, highlights of theological training experience, remembered beliefs about vocation, remembered changes in self-understanding and vocational directions, views about ministry and yourself as a minister; other life experience, etc.)

(Page 10)

9. Experience in Pastoral Ministry - Remembered

This is the core section of the reflection since the focus is how experience in actual ministry as affected the ministerial self-understanding, and the understanding of ministry itself. Remembrances may be identified according to natural breaks in chronology, i.e. age, parish transfers or ‘calls,’ or highly significant events. In the remembering process, consider:

- **events and experience in personal life**
- **events and experience in congregational and Church life**
- **events and experience in family life**
- **events and experience in community/cultural**
- **specially remembered or pivotal events/experience**

(Page 11)

10. Experience in Pastoral Ministry - Reflected

(Please refer to the Critical Reflection Guide for reflection questions; remember to focus on the experience as a 'learning' process - What was it about the experience which engendered a change in thought; also, Is it possible to consider any summarizing or concluding considerations?)

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