The Education of Lay Volunteer Ministers
as a means of Renewal for the
Roman Catholic Church in Ireland

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry Studies

University of Divinity
Melbourne
2015
**Abstract**

This study explores one possible avenue towards a renewal and reinvigoration of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, at local parish level, through the education and training of lay volunteer ministers. The underlying philosophy of this project is one that understands change as emerging organically rather than structurally ‘from the top down’. This research concentrates on the renewal of the Church at parish level, using education of the laity as the primary tool. The research question explored is thus, *How can the education of lay volunteer ministers contribute to the future reinvigoration of the Catholic Church?* The thesis is framed around three areas: the context of the Church in Ireland, the understanding of ministry in Roman Catholic tradition, and finally, the ways in which education contributes to forming and transforming individuals and communities. The thesis is embedded in the context of a Church in Ireland which is in the midst of a major crisis as a result of internal and external factors. Internally, such factors as the credibility of the Church as institution – in particular, the hierarchy – has been severely damaged following the revelation of the child abuse scandals, and the diminishing numbers of clergy is placing strain on local parishes. Externally, the increasingly complex nature of Irish society has meant that the influence of the Catholic Church is diminished, and with an increasingly educated laity, the hierarchy no longer enjoys the uncritical support given by previous generations. As a result of these changes, the Catholic Church in Ireland is in danger of becoming largely irrelevant in the lives of ordinary people. The education of laity, in particular lay volunteers, is proposed in this thesis as vital for the Church in Ireland into the future.

The methodology employed in the research was qualitative and library-based. Qualitative research is the source of the primary data generated by this research. The data was collected by means of interviews and focus groups. Participants were people with responsibility for adult faith development at national, diocesan and parish level in the Catholic Church in Ireland. The interviews were framed around three areas: the context of local Catholic communities in Ireland, lay ministry in these communities, and finally, the ways
in which education contributes to forming and transforming individuals and communities. Some of the conclusions of the research are as follows:

- there is a chasm between the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the local, and in places very vibrant, parish Church;
- significant numbers of people are involved in ministry in local parishes, on a volunteer basis;
- education for volunteer ministry is scarce at a parish level, but where even a small amount of faith development is in place, it is transformative for those people who are given the opportunity;
- adult faith development is not a high priority for the leadership of the Church, but a small but significant group demonstrate by their practice that its development has the potential to transform parishes and dioceses, were a more strategic approach taken to the task.

In sum, this research project concludes that a national strategy is needed to implement the faith development of those who participate in lay volunteer ministry. This would form a significant means of reinvigorating the Catholic Church in Ireland.
Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Marie Siobhan Larkin

March 2015
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have supported me in the writing of this thesis. All those who work in official roles in the Catholic Church in Ireland have experienced great stress in recent years and so, in the midst of this situation, the dedication of the people who agreed to be interviewed for this research was a constant inspiration to me. I believe that the interviewees for this project have experience which will contribute to the development of the Church of the future and hence when I felt like abandoning this project, their courage has kept me from doing so.

I would like to thank my religious congregation, Sisters of the Holy Faith, including the regional teams under the leadership of Evelyn Greene and Rosaleen Cunniffe, as well as the members of the local communities in the Coombe, Finglas and Clontarf. Each sister in these communities, as well as my other Holy Faith friends, has been a great support along the way. I am grateful to Cáitlin Mulligan, Rosemary Duffy and Dr Jacinta Prunty who have read drafts and corrected some of my wayward grammar and syntax. Family and friends (both in Ireland, United States and New Zealand) have provided encouragement.

My colleagues in the Milltown Institute and All Hallows College, Dublin, especially the ALBA team, provided welcome insight and support along the way. I also acknowledge the patient support of Dr Eoin O’Mahony, social researcher with the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. Eoin has provided me with statistical research data.

I have been blessed by the supervisors who have worked with me on this project. My thanks to Dr Donal Harrington who supported me in the early stages of the thesis and Dr Thomas Grenham who has supported me throughout the writing process. My special thanks to Dr Charles Sherlock who, apart from providing wonderful academic support, has shown remarkable patience and kindness.

I think I am the most ‘long distant’ student in the University of Divinity. So thank you to Dr Mark Lindsay and Dr Paul Beirne for making the whole project possible.
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Adult Faith Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESS</td>
<td>European Social Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRI</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVM</td>
<td>Lay Volunteer Ministers / Lay Volunteer Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>Parish Pastoral Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCIA</td>
<td>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</td>
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## Church Documents

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCC</td>
<td>Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Apostolicam Actuositatem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Catechism of the Catholic Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Catechesi Tradendae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EG</td>
<td>Evangelii Gaudium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Evangelii Nuntiandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCD</td>
<td>General Catechetical Directory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDC</td>
<td>General Directory for Catechesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Gaudium et Spes</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lumen Gentium</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCIA</td>
<td>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Sacrosanctum Concilium</td>
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Chapter One

Research Question and Methodology

1.1 Background of the Study

The origins of this thesis are to be found in my involvement as a member of faculty in the Higher Diploma in Adult Religious Education, Milltown Institute, Dublin. I was responsible for the research, development and implementation of this one-year programme from 2005 to 2009. It was the first, and only, university programme in Ireland in the field. The programme was designed to train adult religious educators who would work in parishes as facilitators of faith development programmes for the adult members of the community. In time I came to recognise that such programmes could have a profound effect on those who participated, and in consequence on the life of the parish. The groups in the parish who benefited most directly from this work were people involved in lay volunteer ministry. This Higher Diploma was discontinued after four years, and resulted in a period of personal reflection.¹

The project will propose that education for voluntary lay ministers, within the Church community, is a vital component in the reinvigoration of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Education, and its potential effects, is the primary lens though which this project is viewed. The study will examine the significance and importance attributed to education for lay volunteer ministry by those with leadership roles in the Church. It will also examine, using local examples, how lay ministry more broadly is understood, appreciated and exercised at parish level. Finally, and most significantly, the project will propose ways in which the education of volunteer lay ministers can contribute to the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland, particularly in a time of crisis.

¹ The Higher Diploma in Adult Religious Education (National University of Ireland) was discontinued partly because it struggled to recruit sufficient numbers to make it viable. Furthermore, it was evident that Milltown Institute, where it was taught, would shortly close.
Within the parameters of this thesis it is not possible to report in detail on what was or is being done in other countries in this field.\textsuperscript{2} Wide reading in the subject area, alongside the 2008 research noted above, has not uncovered any specific project that has explored education for lay volunteer ministers using a qualitative methodology.\textsuperscript{3} Within Ireland, insofar as this researcher has ascertained, this is the first academic research undertaken into the education of lay volunteer ministers; it is also the first to identify the potential of this group in driving forward the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church.

1.2 The Research Question

This research project focuses on how lay volunteers with designated roles within the Catholic community in Ireland may be prepared to exercise ministry effectively. It is limited to Ireland in order to allow a full exploration of key issues, and to do justice to the specific Irish cultural context. The testing of an existing hypothesis or theory was never the intent of this research, but rather the exploration of recent and current educational opportunities provided for lay volunteers, and how the expansion of such opportunities might reinvigorate the local church in a way that is grounded in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.

The first point of departure then is a description of what is actually happening in the Irish Catholic Church at this time, how lay volunteers within the local community are perceived, the extent to which adult religious education is considered to be fundamental to life within the Church community, and how – if at all – lay volunteers may be educated for authorised ministry roles, especially in that of adult faith development.

\textsuperscript{2} A study of initiatives in English-speaking countries was carried out in 2008 on behalf of the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The office for the Council undertook a survey of the provisions made, in English-speaking countries, by national offices with responsibility for adult faith education. The major resources developed are listed in Appendix 1.

\textsuperscript{3} In the United States a number of pieces of research were done on ‘lay ecclesial ministers’ but focusing primarily on lay ministers in full-time paid employment in parishes or dioceses. While some of the underlying questions are similar, the US study was therefore difficult to use as a basis for comparison, and the cultural context of the Catholic Church in the United States is quite different from that in Ireland. See Zeni Fox, ‘Ecclesial Lay Ministers: An Overview’ in Together in God’s Service: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry: Papers from a Colloquium, Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Subcommittee on Lay Ministry, Committee on the Laity, 1998.
1.3 Terminology

Before outlining the research methodology, some explanation of terminology is essential. Each of the terms in the phrase ‘lay volunteer ministry’ has difficulties associated with it which could lead to misunderstanding of the precise dimensions of the project. It is therefore important to begin by examining the meaning of each term and defining exactly how it is being used. In addition, a rationale for the use of the term ‘adult faith development’ throughout this thesis is given.

1.3.1 Lay

The term ‘lay’ can have unfortunate connotations. In general usage, ‘lay’ is used to denote non-experts, for example, in the legal profession it sets apart those who are lawyers from those who are not members of that profession. Edward Hahnenberg, commenting on a 1969 essay by Richard McBrien, makes the point that ‘the category of lay person itself is basically negative. It is a reminder concept, a left-over term. It names something over against something else: the “laity” are not clergy.’ M. Yves Congar, the great theologian of the Second Vatican Council, makes the point succinctly when he writes, ‘there is no distinction between ‘laypeople’ and ‘clerics’ in the vocabulary of the New Testament’. In the Church today, however, and within the Catholic Church in particular, the common usage of ‘laity’ (and the ‘lay ministry’) refers to those who are non-ordained. Despite the theological and ecclesial issues surrounding the place of ‘the laity’, and the word ‘laity’, the term ‘lay ministry’ will be used in this thesis since there is no other succinct way of speaking of the ministry of Christians who are not ordained to the ministerial priesthood.

In this research lay people will be placed within the context of the whole ‘people of God’, a term which comes from the Second Vatican Council and is intended to show their rightful place. As the document on the Church says,

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Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.\(^6\)

1.3.2 Ministry

The literature in the area of ministry acknowledges that the use of the term for those who are not ordained has been problematic from earliest times. For many centuries in the tradition of the Church, ‘minister’ has been used only for those who have been ordained to the diaconate and priesthood. In recent popular usage, at local level, lay people who undertake key roles, such as lectors and the distribution of communion within the liturgy and to the sick, have come to be called ‘ministers’. The United States Catholic bishops use the phrase, ‘lay ecclesial ministry’.\(^7\) Despite its wide usage the term ‘lay minister’ remains problematic: it is noticeably absent from the recently-published Irish National Catechetical Directory.\(^8\) Its use in this research is solely because it includes the idea of people who have become an established and recognised part of parish life since they are authorised and mandated to undertake public roles previously reserved to the ordained. Furthermore, it is difficult to find another term that embraces the same concept.

1.3.3 Volunteer

The term ‘volunteer’ in the phrase ‘lay volunteer minister’ has a clearer meaning: it excludes lay people who are in paid employment within the Church. Some research has examined this group,\(^9\) and while many issues for paid and unpaid lay Christians are the same, this research project is deliberately designed to explore the role of ordinary Catholics who wish to serve their communities

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\(^6\) Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents, Austin Flannery ed. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), paragraph 10. Reference to Council documents will be from the Flannery Edition unless otherwise noted.


\(^9\) An important example is Zeni Fox, New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church, Revised and expanded ed. (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2002).
without the expectation of salary or wage. ‘Volunteer’ in this thesis thus designates people who put themselves forward, or who are invited and ultimately mandated to minister to the community in a public role.

1.3.4 Adult Faith Development

‘Adult faith development’ is the preferred term in this thesis, but it presents challenges to people familiar with the work of James Fowler, who uses it in relation to development theory within psychology. It is employed in this thesis since it has become the accepted term for education for adult religious educators in Ireland. This is especially so since the establishment of the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development, and the publication of Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis (2010) under the umbrella of the Irish Episcopal Conference. Implications for the use of this term are explored in Chapter Four. Also it should be noted that in this context, the term ‘education’ can include three different elements: personal faith development of the individual, which is critical in enabling transformation which can lead to dynamic leadership; skills training for the tasks of ministry which are to be undertaken; and a sound understanding of the doctrine and dogma of the Church.

1.4 Methodology: How will the Research Question be explored?

This research will use a qualitative research approach. As Garrison asserts, ‘the selection of a methodology is a pragmatic concern, whose appropriateness is dependent upon its functionality in addressing the problem at hand.’\(^\text{10}\) In this case, qualitative research methods seem to provide the necessary tools, for this is a ‘type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification.’\(^\text{11}\)

The starting point of most qualitative research is phenomenological, that is, to focus on a ‘phenomenon’ derived from the experience of a particular group of people. Such research looks at what is going on in this situation, rather than

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starting with a presumption of what is happening. The inquiry seeks to elicit from key people, in this case adult religious educators, their understanding of the situation. Phenomenology is a philosophical perception, principally propounded by those for whom ‘the most basic philosophical assumption was that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness.’\textsuperscript{12} Quantitative research, on the other hand, starts with an assumption of what is happening and then tests that assumption. The presentation of statistical analysis of the adult religious education in parishes, as provided by quantitative methods, can present an interesting picture of the current situation.\textsuperscript{13} But in order for that data to become the basis for any future direction, it needs to be placed within a context that describes the situation and the experience of those involved.

Sometimes a false dichotomy is set up between qualitative and quantitative research methodology: in particular, is qualitative data too ‘subjective’ to be considered academic or objective? Consequently, researchers who use phenomenological approaches need to be

rigorous in their analysis of the experience, so that the basic elements of the experience that are common to members of a specific society, or all human beings can be identified. ... A phenomenologist assumes a commonality in those human experiences and must use the method of bracketing to search for those commonalities.\textsuperscript{14}

Within the context of this research on the phenomenon of education for lay volunteer ministers, it seems both timely and appropriate to employ a qualitative methodology from which certain areas might emerge to provide the basis for a quantitative survey.

The theoretical paradigm on which this research project is designed is primarily interpretive, drawing in particular on the research of Sharon Merriam.\textsuperscript{15} This paradigm is based on the proposition that knowledge always arises from

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Ann Hanley, ‘Faith for Life: Adult Religious Education in Ireland: A Survey’ (Dublin: Council for Research and Development, 1999), chapter VII.
\end{flushleft}
interpretations of reality, and that reality is constructed by interconnectedness of realities of persons. 'Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular time and in a particular context.'\textsuperscript{16}

Underpinning this hermeneutical perspective is the belief that understanding is produced in the dialogue, rather than being reproduced by the researcher in the analysis of the findings.\textsuperscript{17}

The characteristics of interpretive qualitative research as named by Merriam include the following:

- Researchers strive to understand the meaning that people construct concerning the phenomenon under study;
- The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection;
- The process of the research is inductive, and thus ‘qualitative researchers build towards observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from the field’ rather than beginning with a particular hypothesis; and
- In interpretive qualitative research, richly descriptive words and images, rather than numbers, are used to convey what has been garnered from the research.\textsuperscript{18}

Merriam maintains that the key to good qualitative research is ‘to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspective, not the researcher’.\textsuperscript{19} This issue of the hermeneutic of the researcher is crucial: researchers who begin with the realisation of their own perspective, and indeed bias, ‘are much clearer about the fact that they are constructing the “reality” on the basis of their interpretations of data with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study.’\textsuperscript{20}

A number of qualitative research designs or strategies have been considered for this project. However, given the nature of the topic, the design strategy adopted

\textsuperscript{18} Merriam, \textit{Qualitative Research in Practice}, 4-6.
\textsuperscript{19} Merriam, \textit{Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications}, 6.
\textsuperscript{20} Eichelberger, \textit{Discipline Inquiry}, 9.
was an interpretative qualitative study. The advantages of this design strategy are that it focuses on how participants make sense of particular situations or phenomena. To quote Merriam, ‘this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive.’

The conclusions about the nature of education for lay volunteer ministers for a future Church therefore will be constructed both from the literature cited, the interviews and focus groups, and the interaction between the researcher and participants.

1.5 Organisation of Field Research

1.5.1 Types of Field Research

Data was collected primarily through interviews, focus groups, observation and document analysis. The conclusions that have emerged are reflective of the area of faith development in the Irish Catholic Church in the beginning of the second millennium, although they do not claim to be exhaustive. The decision was made at an early stage to concentrate on the gathering of data from people who are working, broadly speaking, within the area of adult faith development at national, diocesan and parish levels, but are not lay volunteer ministers themselves (see below). People who hold official positions at these levels, be they lay, religious or priests, have broad experience of the extent and depth of education of lay people in ministry, as well as insights into issues affecting the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The perspective of those who are themselves volunteers is a very important one but needs to be the subject of a different piece of research. Regrettably, the Council for Research and Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, which has responsibility for compiling parish statistics, does not collect data on numbers volunteering in church or parish activities, and there is no other source of information of this kind for Ireland. In the absence of a reliable

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22 In response to a question about the nature and extent of education for lay volunteer ministers, the research officer of the Council for Research and Development, Eoin O’Mahony, in an email to Siobhan Larkin, 18 December. 2014 wrote: ‘To my knowledge the only systematic survey of people’s volunteering activity on various geographic scales
database from which to draw a comprehensive group, it seemed more productive to draw on the experience of persons involved on a daily basis with lay volunteer ministers. Also, research conducted with volunteers themselves would not meet one of the goals of this project, namely, to produce findings that could help shape possible ways forward for adult faith development at parish, diocesan and national levels. As Patton notes, ‘the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings. The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings.’

The qualitative methodologies used in this research project were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The semi-structured interview assumes that individual respondents define their world in individual ways. A set of questions and topics were sent to respondents prior to the interview: these were flexibly worded so that the researcher ‘could respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.’ The interviews were held in a place of each respondent’s choosing.

A focus group involves several people being interviewed simultaneously for up to one to one and half hours. Patton makes clear that they are interviews and not problem-solving groups. There is no expectation that members of the group will agree with one another, and for maximum benefit to be derived from the range of experience in the group, disagreement can be very fruitful. One of the benefits is that participants are able to consider their own views while hearing what others think about the same topic. For Patton, the focus group has many advantages:

It is a highly efficient qualitative data collection technique. In one hour the evaluator can gather information from eight people instead of one person. Thus the sample size can be increased significantly in

and on a national basis was conducted by Census 2006, following the Taoiseach’s interest in active citizenship shortly before that. While Volunteering Ireland does carry out periodic surveys on activity on a sample basis, this does not include any category to do with volunteering in Church or parish activity. To my knowledge, there is no other source of this kind of information for Ireland.’

23 Patton, Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 371.
24 Merriam, Qualitative Research in Practice, 90.
25 The schedule of questions and topics is included in Appendix 3
26 Merriam, Qualitative Research in Practice, 90.
27 Patton, Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, 334.
an evaluation using qualitative methods through focus group interviewing.\textsuperscript{28}

1.5.2 Choice of interviewees

The basis for the selection of individuals for the interviews and focus groups was the extent of their direct participation in adult faith development. Former students of the researcher were deliberately excluded as there could be some conflict of interest.

The total number of people who are designated adult religious educators in Ireland is relatively few. Most of the twenty-six dioceses have a designated person or department with responsibility for adult faith development and/or a diocesan office for liturgy. However, in some dioceses one person may hold this role in conjunction with other diocesan roles. In parishes, the parish priest, in conjunction with the pastoral worker (if there is one), and the parish pastoral council, have overall responsibility for adult faith development. However, this role is one among many, so the priority it receives is dependent on the importance that the parish priest places on faith education for adults in his community.

The researcher, in choosing people to be interviewed, therefore approached the office of the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development at the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and was given access to people who identified themselves primarily in the role of adult religious educator. This method ensured that the people to be interviewed had explicit interest in the education of lay volunteers and had worked to further such education. From among this group a cross section of people was chosen to be interviewed who were representative of priests, lay people and religious. The group also consisted of people from urban, rural and suburban parishes and dioceses. In total, fourteen of the twenty-six dioceses were represented. All the people approached expressed their willingness to participate in a focus group or to be interviewed; their eventual inclusion or otherwise was based on logistics. The data collection was done in three phases, at national, diocesan and parish level.

\textsuperscript{28} Patton, \textit{Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods}, 335.
1.5.3 Data Collection at National Level

Interviews were conducted with two key people, Dr Gareth Byrne and Dr Anne Codd, who have a broad perspective on adult faith development in the Irish Catholic Church. Dr Byrne was commissioned by the Irish Conference of Bishops to write *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis*, which includes a chapter on adult religious development in the Irish Catholic Church. This document is highly significant, as it the first time that the Irish Catholic Church has had its own Catechetical Directory, and gives a foundation for charting the way forward for faith development in the Church. The document provides this research with a fundamental text that has the recognition of both the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Holy See. In the Preface, the four archbishops of Ireland write,

> This National Directory provides the Irish Church with a framework indicating principles and guidelines for evangelisation, catechesis and religious education today, and motivating us to study and research all the means available to bring the Gospel to life anew every day.

Prior to the production of the Directory, Dr Byrne and his advisory group undertook consultation in all the dioceses, as a result of which he is exceptionally well informed on the current position and possible future direction for faith development in the Irish Church. In the opening chapter of the Directory, the section *Sharing the Good News*, is devoted to adult faith development. That adults are to be the primary focus of catechesis is a point reiterated throughout the document: this forms a significant movement away from the traditional focus on children.

The second person interviewed at a national level was Dr Anne Codd, Resource Person for the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development at the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. In this role, Dr Codd acts a catalyst for bringing together individuals and groups involved in faith development at diocesan and parish levels. She is in ongoing communication with those who are

29 Dr Gareth Byrne and Dr Anne Codd kindly agreed to have their names included in this research as their roles would be difficult to disguise.
working to promote adult faith development in many and varied capacities within the Irish Church. Dr Codd was the first director of the council; in the ten years since its establishment she has enhanced the profile of adult faith development in the Irish Catholic Church and established networks that bring together people who appreciate and work for its development. Dr Codd and Dr Byrne took part twice in semi-structured interviews, at the beginning and towards the end of the research process. The first interview enabled an overview to be gained of adult religious education for lay ministry at national, diocesan and local levels. The second interview was conducted towards the end of the research phase as it was important to explore the impact of a number of developments in the Irish Church over the intervening period. The purpose of these interviews was:

- To gain a picture of adult religious education in Ireland; in particular,
- To discover how adult religious education is perceived by key figures in the national Church;
- To explore a sense of the level of commitment to theological education for lay people, especially volunteers, who exercise ministry in local parish communities;
- To ascertain the priority (both at national and diocesan levels) that is being given to emerging developments in these areas.

The roles which Drs Codd and Byrne hold within the Irish Catholic Church are hard to overstate. In particular, the National Directory for Catechesis will play a fundamental role in setting the direction for adult faith development into the future. **Note:** Following the publication of the Ryan and Murphy Reports\(^\text{32}\) into Child Abuse in the Irish Catholic Church, it was difficult to continue with this research. The shock and horror that reverberated throughout Ireland; the unremitting coverage in the print media, on TV, radio and online; and the subsequent backlash against the Church meant that the people who worked within the Church, particularly at diocesan level, had a great deal to cope with. It

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was deemed wise to postpone the interview process for about 18 months until the crisis had abated somewhat. The researcher, with the supervisors’ agreement, was given permission by the University of Divinity to take leave from the project from March 2010 to April 2011.

1.5.4 Data Collection at Diocesan Level

The second phase of the field research was with people who have a specific responsibility for adult religious development at diocesan level. It involved interviews with five diocesan personnel, two lay women, one woman religious and two priests, each of whom have direct responsibility for adult religious development in a diocese. They also have close connections with the parishes in their area and hence could bring that perspective to the process.

In addition, two focus groups were held, one attended by seven and the other by three diocesan personnel. These diocesan personnel were able to contribute to the larger picture of faith development in their diocese, and in the parishes for which they have responsibility. The members of the groups comprised, four lay women, two lay men, two women religious and two priests.

1.5.5 Data Collection at Parish Level

The final phase of the field research was a series of interviews with priests and pastoral workers in parishes in which there is a significant commitment to adult faith formation. This phase built upon insights gained in the earlier interviews and focus groups regarding what is happening in parishes. It also brought quite different perspectives, since the interviewee’s primary focus was his/her own parish. Four semi-structured were conducted, with two lay women and two priests from four different parishes.

1.5.6 Invitation to Participate

Participants were invited to participate through a letter outlining the research, enclosing the Participant Informed Consent Form. In accordance with the research ethics of what the University of Divinity, it was made clear in writing that participation was voluntary, and that participants had the right to: not

33 A copy of the Form of Consent is included in Appendix 4.
answer a question, terminate the interview or withdraw from the process at any time. Participants were assured of confidentiality, apart from Drs Codd and Byrne who agreed to waive anonymity. Every effort has been made to ensure that none of the participants can be identified as having taken part in the study. This sensitivity was essential for a number of reasons. It allowed participants to explore freely difficulties experienced in their work, and to offer insights into some of the issues facing the Catholic Church in Ireland. Also, as the number of people holding these roles in Ireland is relatively few, it was necessary to omit any identifying material.

The interviews and focus groups built upon the picture that had emerged from literature research, and brought the specific Irish Catholic situation into sharp relief. As noted already, 14 of the 26 dioceses in Ireland were represented, both rural and urban, bringing together a broad range of experience of the Irish Catholic Church.

1.5.7 Sorting and Naming the Categories

Following the interviews the qualitative researcher’s task is to ensure that the unique perspective of each is respected. Some of the material will confirm what has emerged from the literature but this is only one aspect of this phase of qualitative research. The much more important task is to allow the perspectives from the interviewees to emerge. As Bryman writes, ‘the most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its express commitment to viewing events, action, norms and values etc. from the perspective of the people who are being studied.’

The data collected from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed, and this collection of documents forms the basis of the findings of this research. As Merriam asserts, data collected through qualitative methodology is ‘inductive and comparative in the service of developing common themes or patterns or categories that cut across data.’ The data analysis was begun as soon as possible after each interview. Notes were kept of general impressions of the interviews and any outstanding issues that emerged. Because interviews were

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35 Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 269.
conducted in a short time, in-depth analysis effectively, began once the interviews and transcriptions were complete.

Merriam writes that ‘making sense out of data analysis involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of meaning making.’ Given the large amount of data that resulted from the interviews and focus groups, the analysis went through a number of stages. Each interview and focus group transcript was read at least three times, and each time comments and tentative connections were made between the insights that emerged. This continued until data segments began to emerge that were in some way responsive to the research question of this project. A data segment in this context is:

the smallest amount piece of information about something that can stand by itself – that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out.

For example, one theme in the section on context concerns the difficulties being faced by the Church in Ireland. Some of the data segments elicited by the interviews were: the child abuse scandals; the shortage of priests; the effects of the recession and the relevance of the Church for different categories of people. In another theme there were segments of data about the age and gender profiles of volunteers.

The segments of data were assigned to emerging categories or themes. As the process continued it became clearer as to why a segment of data might be assigned to one category rather than another, though in the beginning the process was more intuitive. The various segments were gradually assigned to the emerging themes. This process is known as coding: in this case the coding was open, allowing for revisiting in the light of material that emerged in subsequent transcripts. Coding was done by means of colour coding of the transcript text.

36 Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 176.
The inductive nature of this research process demands some verifying criteria for the assigning of the ultimate themes or categories. Those suggested by Merriam were used: 38

‘Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research.’ In this case, how far can the education of lay volunteer ministers be a factor in the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland?

‘Categories should be exhaustive’. That is, all data is included and assigned to a theme that is important or relevant to the study.

‘Categories should be mutually exclusive.’ In the assigning of categories in this research, one category, the profile of lay volunteers, was minor in comparison to the others. Yet it seemed important to identify it in order to show the extent and background of the people on whom the research is based.

‘Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as sensitive as possible to what is in the data.’ In thinking about this category, the researcher asked herself whether this category would be understood and speak to people, such as those who had been interviewed for the research. Ultimately these are the people who are likely to use the conclusions of this research in their positions at national, diocesan and parish level, and thereby advance the priority given to the education of lay volunteer ministers in their areas.

‘Categories should be conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should characterise all categories at the same level.’ In the example cited above regarding the profile of lay volunteer ministers, this category is very ‘concrete’, and on one level may seem to have little to do with abstraction. However, in the analysis of the ‘concrete data’ certain inferences can be drawn: for example, the existence of differences and similarities among volunteers may have implications about the shape of the Catholic Church in the future.

The number of categories is another key question in the design process: there is no set answer to the question of how many categories will suffice. Merriam asserts ‘that the fewer the categories, the greater the level of abstraction, and

38 Merriam, Qualitative Research in Practice, 185.
the greater ease with which you will communicate your findings to others. This stricture was helpful in refining the categories along with the suggestion of four guidelines for developing categories by Guba and Lincoln:

- The number of people who mention something or the frequency with which it emerges in the data;
- What will make sense to the people reading the research;
- The uniqueness of a perspective which may emerge in many of the transcripts and of something that stands out as being of particular importance; and some insight that presents a new way forward.

The categories derived from identifying and allocating the data segments are tested in Chapters Five to Seven.

This step of moving from the data to some sort of theorizing is imperative, according to Merriam, but is fraught with difficulty. It is the step of bringing clarity to the insights gained and providing links which will make the research a significant piece of work. This researcher was conscious of ‘The riskiness of going beyond the data into the never-never of inference’; ultimately, however, the value of the research will be judged on this criteria.

### 1.5.8 Validity and Reliability

Merriam names several ways of testing the validity of the findings. One which has particular relevance to this project is the extent to which the research findings match reality. Merriam asks the following questions of the researcher:

> How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings really capture what is really there? Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring?

Validity hinges on the meaning of reality. The data assembled during the interviews will be interpreted by the researcher, so the importance of following ethical processes in the collection is imperative. Triangulation, that is, checking

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41 Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 189.
42 Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 201.
on the validity of the findings using some independent source, proved a valuable
to this study. The second interview conducted with Dr Codd and with Dr Byrne,
because of their national perspectives on the Catholic Church in Ireland, was
used as a way of testing the validity of emerging categories.

A second major factor for testing validity is the reliability of the findings.
Merriam, using Lincoln and Guba, suggests:

A researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data
collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and
dependable. The question then is not whether findings will be found
again but whether the results are consistent with the data
collected.43

Making clear the basis for the selection of participants and the reasons behind
this selection, and the naming by the researcher of the theory and assumptions
on which the study is based, contribute to the consistency and validity of the
results.

1.6 Researcher bias

The researcher was made aware by her supervisors of the importance of
acknowledging her own (Church-based) world view, and the potential for
personal bias to hinder the study. At the beginning of this chapter the writer
explained that she had helped to establish and run a Higher Diploma in Adult
Religious Education. From this it can be inferred that she believes that
education is a vital tool in the reinvigoration of local parishes, and by extension
the whole Church in Ireland. The research project set out to verify whether
others shared this belief and the extent to which this model is currently found in
the Irish Church. While the writer is passionate about the importance of
education for lay volunteer ministers, she was open to the fact that this ideal
may not be shared by others. A conscious effort was made to include a wide
range of perspectives in the interview process.

The overview of the research methodology and its underlying assumptions in
this chapter is intended to help the reader ascertain the validity of this research.

43 Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 206. This insight is based on
Finally, this researcher adhered to the conditions of the Human Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Divinity, which was obtained before any qualitative aspect of this study commenced.44

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the project, outlining the purpose of the research and the processes undertaken during its conduct. It names the underlying theoretical perspectives and explains the choice of qualitative research as the methodology employed. It outlines some of the reasons why a phenomenological approach is particularly appropriate for a study of the education of lay volunteer ministers as a constructive way of approaching the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland during a time of crisis. It explained how the data in the research was collected and how the reliability of the findings was tested, and explored the assumptions and perspective of the researcher.

The chapter which follows gives an overview of current research on the Catholic Church in Ireland today, identifying some of the challenges that it faces. It is the first of three chapters which examine the theoretical underpinning of this research about education for lay volunteer ministers.

44 Human Research and Ethics Committee approval was given on 27 August, 2007.
Chapter Two

Culture, Religion and the Catholic Church in Ireland Today

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the education of lay volunteer ministers within the context and culture of Ireland,¹ and the Catholic Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century.² Placing the research questions within the cultural context is essential to the development of a relevant education theory to underpin the thesis. All Church documents since the Second Vatican Council have recognised the impact of cultural factors on the way the Church is evolving. Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation writes, ‘I do exhort all the communities to an ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times. This is in fact a grave responsibility, since present realities, unless effectively dealt with, are capable of setting off processes of dehumanisation which would be hard to reverse.’³

This chapter will examine the factors in society which have impacted on the Church at national and local level in order to provide a framework in which strategies for reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland may be proposed.

The seismic change in culture that Ireland has experienced in the last thirty years mirrors to a certain extent the cultural shifts that have occurred in the western world in the latter part of the twentieth century. It is important, however, to recognise that the present Irish context is grounded in an historical

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¹ The Catholic Church in Ireland is in two jurisdictions, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The six counties that make up the North Eastern part of the island of Ireland are part of the United Kingdom. As Church structures cross the boundaries of both jurisdictions the research, for the most part, makes no distinction between North and South. There are some significant differences between the experiences of Church for Catholics in the North because of the turmoil of the last thirty years. However, it is not possible within the scope of this project to examine the differences in perspective for Catholics North and South of the border.

² The increasing number of lay ministry volunteers in Catholic parishes was evident from my experience of supervising students undertaking the Higher Diploma in Adult Religious Education. However it is difficult to find statistical data about the number of these volunteers. Currently, the Council for Research and Development for the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference is exploring ways to compile this data, see note 22 in Chapter One.

reality that makes Ireland, as a predominantly Catholic country, significantly different from other countries and nations in the developed world. The historian Louise Fuller in a paper titled ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’\textsuperscript{5}, traces some of the factors that impacted on the central place that Catholicism had in the development of the Ireland of today. Religion had, and continues to have, an important role in Irish society, albeit a very different role today than in the past: ‘Ireland was and still is the only predominantly Catholic country in the English-speaking world’.\textsuperscript{6} An exploration of the Irish context aims to ensure that this research project is grounded in the reality of the present situation. Conclusions drawn in this research on the faith development of lay volunteers in parish ministry will thus be based in Ireland as it currently exists rather than in an idealised reality remembered from the past.

This chapter is structured around three major themes:

- The importance of the relationship between religion and culture;
- The ways in which culture and religion intersect in modern Ireland, and in particular, how this intersection is impacting on the Catholic Church; and
- How the Irish Catholic hierarchy is responding to the ever-changing context.

\section*{2.2 Culture, Religion and the Good News}

Religion and culture exist in dynamic intersection. Catholicism in Ireland, as with other religions, exists in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex

\textsuperscript{4} The emergence of a more multi-cultural and diverse religious cultural life is acknowledged, and will be discussed.


world. No aspect of the existence of the Church is untouched by the impact of culture, and conversely, society is also impacted by religion, not alone in dimensions of mystery and symbol in people’s lives but in its link to ‘underlying social patterns and structures’.  

The fusion of religion and culture was taken for granted in theological writing prior to the Enlightenment which began in the mid-1700s, but since then religion is increasingly understood as being distinct and separate from wider culture. The Enlightenment saw the rise of agnosticism and atheism, and as these world views gradually spread, the close connection between religion and civil and political life was no longer seen as the norm. Writing of the relationship between faith and culture, T. S. Eliot in his 1948 essay, *Notes towards the definition of culture* says

for the purposes of this essay, I am obliged to maintain two contradictory propositions: that religion and culture are aspects of one unity, and that they are different and contrasting things.

This quotation is also found in an article by Bishop Donal Murray, who goes on to stress the importance of the close bond between religion and culture, while tacitly acknowledging Eliot’s contention that religion and culture can also be viewed as totally distinct realities. Murray explores the relationship between faith and culture as different sides of the same coin.

Robert Schreiter contends that culture has three important dimensions.  
Firstly, culture is concerned with systems of meaning – beliefs, values, attitudes and rules for behaviour. These systems serve people in interpreting their world. The second dimension is the rituals of life which bind people together through the enactment of their histories and values. Thirdly, culture has a material element which is a source of identity through such things as a common language, food or clothing. In coming to an understanding of modern Ireland, each of these dimensions helps illustrate how the culture is changing. This

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7 Perry Share, Mary P. Corcoran, and Brian Conway, *A Sociology of Ireland*, 4th ed. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2012), 325. This chapter reviews, from a sociological point of view, the major transition that the Catholic Church has experienced in Ireland in modern times.
chapter concentrates on the first of these dimensions, namely, the meaning-making element, although the other dimensions certainly play their role. The ritual dimension in particular, and the common artefacts of religion have an important place in the interaction between Catholic faith and culture in Ireland.

2.2.1 The Church and Culture from the Second Vatican Council Onwards

In the years since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Roman Catholic Magisterium has gradually come to recognize the importance of culture. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) devotes a chapter to the issue of culture. This epitomises the shift in perspective which occurred during the Council, a shift from an understanding that the Catholic Church exists apart from the world, to an understanding that the Church and Christianity exist in the world and thus within specific cultures.11 As stated in *Gaudium et Spes*, ‘One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their lives.’12 Commenting on this dichotomy, Charles Murray writes, ‘*Gaudium et Spes* was the Council’s valiant effort to overcome this alienation, identifying the Church’s mission as not only “to” the world but precisely “in” it.’13 Later, Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* wrote that ‘the split between the gospel and culture is

11 Philip Day, writing shortly after the Council concluded, characterises the theology of the Church as follows:
The Constitution *De Ecclesia* has defined the Church in terms of Sacrament, sign and instrument of Christ’s redeeming work in the world. He uses her to minister salvation to the world, to unite all men [sic] with God and with each other. She [sic] stands at the heart of humanity and society, as a leaven diffusing the power of the Resurrection which is gradually restoring all things in Christ.

Day goes on to say,

There is no suggestion here of the Church being an ark to which Christians flee for safety, or a wall behind which they find protection from their worldly adversaries. Rather there is warning against aloofness from salvation history being lived out in all the misery and suffering, in all the progress and achievement, of a world over which Christ is reigning and drawing all things to Himself.


12 GS, paragraph 43.

without doubt the drama of our era, just as it was of other times.' In *Gaudium et Spes*, the identification of the Church as being in the world and not apart from the world is signalled:

> It is one of the properties of the human person that he [sic] can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture, that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Whenever, therefore, there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together.\(^{15}\)

While the official Catholic Church position on the importance of culture in understanding the place of religion in society was a major development, the issues surrounding this are complex. It is not possible to analyse these issues within the confines of this research, but it is impossible to understand Catholicism in Ireland today without seeing it in conjunction with the culture of which it is part. Bishop Murray defines culture as,

> the ways by which human creativity and human freedom give shape and meaning to the world. The core of it lies in the relationship between the world which is given, which is there, which operates according to the unchanging laws of nature, and the human ability freely and creatively to cultivate that world.\(^{16}\)

One characteristic of culture that is increasingly recognised is that it is not static:

> [Culture] holds people together over a span of time. It is received from the past, but not by any process of natural inheritance. It has to be learned afresh by each generation. This takes place broadly by a process of absorption from the social environment, especially in the home. Cultures are never static; there is a continuous process of change. This should be so gradual as to take place within the accepted norms; otherwise the culture is disrupted.\(^{17}\)

An understanding of the nature and meaning of culture is thus pivotal to an understanding of the present changing Irish context and the interrelationship between faith and culture in Irish society. Where culture has changed, people have changed with it: Church members are embedded in the culture and are

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\(^{15}\) *GS*, paragraph 53.

\(^{16}\) *Faith and Culture in the Irish Context*, 17.

changing with it. In differentiating between gospel and culture it is difficult to argue against the impact that culture has on religion. Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, written exactly ten years after the Second Vatican Council, argues that the task of the Church is the evangelisation of culture:

> Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelisation are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating all of them without becoming subject to any one of them,

And bringing the Good News involves affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the gospel, mankind’s [sic] criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration, and models of life, which are in contrast to the Word of God and the plan of salvation.18

Subsequently Pope John Paul II explored culture from many different perspectives, demonstrating an increasing understanding of the complexity of culture and the place of religion vis-à-vis culture.19 One of the most significant phrases that have emerged in recent years is that of ‘Christian culture’.20 But this phrase cannot imply a nostalgic regression to some ‘medieval theocracy’. What is being proposed is a transformation of the culture by means of the gospel, while recognising the plurality of cultures that characterises most countries today. ‘Evangelisation of culture means precisely that cultural life – in all its dimensions – can be inspired and transformed by the gospel.’21 In an address to the Council for Culture, John Paul II argues that the synthesis between faith and culture is not only a requirement of culture but a demand also of faith. He goes on to say, ‘a faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out.’22

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18 *EN*, paragraph 19.
19 Some aspects of this exploration can be found in Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist, 1998), 46-55.
20 This phrase was used by John Paul II in various settings, for example, ‘Discourse to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture’, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_10011992_address-to-pc-culture_en.html. Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 54.
This brief discussion has traced the growing acceptance by the Catholic Church of the importance of the inextricable link between religion and culture, heralded by the opening paragraph of *Gaudium et Spes*: ‘the human person ‘can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture’. Subsequent Church documents have explored other issues, such as the constantly changing nature of culture and its pivotal role in holding communities together. However, these documents also identified the role of the Church in challenging culture and working towards its transformation. The proclamation of the gospel is always the primary task of the Church, and this can only be achieved by understanding the culture in which it is embedded. While the Catholic Church has come to recognise the importance of culture and the intimate link between religion and culture, it has also recognised that they are not the same thing. Religion is separate from culture, and the process of evangelisation remains a priority.

### 2.3 The Intersection of Religion and Culture in Ireland

This section gives an overview of the changing face of religion in Ireland today, albeit in summary form, for this is a field with an extensive literature. Ireland today is changing rapidly; what was the reality ten years ago may be already out-dated and the Church has to respond to people as they are in the 'here and now'. As Dermot Lane has written, 'probably the single, most significant difference between the present and the past concerning faith and culture is the pace of change.' Historically, it was difficult to separate religion from culture in Irish society. In particular, from the nineteenth century onwards religion

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23 *GS*, paragraph 1.
became a vehicle for the promotion of nationalism, and being Irish was almost synonymous with being Catholic. Cassidy argues that the historic need for homogeneity was the impetus for the melding of nationalism and religion, particularly as the use of the common language of Gaelic in Ireland was gradually being extinguished.\textsuperscript{26}

Understanding the relationship between faith and culture in Ireland is essential to an appreciation of the changing nature of Catholic life and practice. The struggle to make meaning, one of the defining characteristics of culture as named by Schreiter, is increasingly difficult in rapidly-changing Ireland.\textsuperscript{27} If explicit religion is no longer embedded in our cultural milieu, as in the past, then all aspects of Catholic life have to be re-examined.\textsuperscript{28} The census figures for 2011 present some argument against the thesis that religion is no longer embedded in the culture, that it is no longer informing the meaning-making systems of modern Irish people.

In the census of 2006, 3.68m people in Ireland defined themselves as Roman Catholic. This accounted for just under 87\% of the population of the Republic. By 2011, 3.86m people (or 84.2\%) stated that they are Roman Catholic. While the proportion of people stating that they are Catholic has declined somewhat, the number of Catholics in the Republic has increased. This is principally as a result of migrants coming from the rest of the EU (except the UK). We know that almost 60,000 more people from Poland live in Ireland today compared with 2006 and until further data is released, we can assume that most of the increase in the number of Catholics in Ireland comes from the greater number of this nationality.\textsuperscript{29}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Eoin G. Cassidy, ‘Religion and Culture: The Freedom to Be Individual’ in \textit{Faith and Culture in the Irish Context}, 57.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Schreiter, \textit{The New Catholicity}, 29.
\item \textsuperscript{28} One example of this is the theology that underpins pastoral practice. Writing in \textit{Doctrine and Life}, Joe Egan explores how ‘operative theologies’ impact on Church life and practice. He suggests that ‘the gap between the theological vision and lived reality have begun to get progressively wider.’ Joe Egan, ‘The Impact of Recent Shifts in Irish Culture’, \textit{Doctrine and Life}, 57, No. 1 (2007).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Eoin O’Mahony, ‘Practice and Belief among Catholics in the Republic of Ireland: A Summary of Data from the European Social Survey Round 4 (2009/10) and the International Social Science Programme Religion III (2008/9)’, Irish Catholic Bishops’
\end{itemize}
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Although 84% of the population is Roman Catholic, some of the figures demonstrate something of the change that is happening in Ireland. The second most noteworthy grouping is the 6% of the population who indicated that they have no religion (although it is arguable as to whether ‘No Religion’ can be constituted as a religion). This was a 45% increase on the 2006 figure of 83,000 people. Further, almost 4% of the population did not state their religion.\(^\text{30}\)

It is agreed by most commentators that the ‘Catholic’ Ireland of the mid-twentieth century no longer exists.\(^\text{31}\) A series of articles in *Irish and Catholic?: Towards an Understanding of Identity*, charts some of the changes in Ireland and their effect on Irish culture.\(^\text{32}\) Patsy McGarry, religious affairs editor for *The Irish Times*, and a sometimes trenchant critic of the Irish Church hierarchy, in this book writes,

> What we are witnessing is the death of a form of Church. We are not overseeing the obsequies of Catholicism in Ireland, or of the Church in Ireland. What we are witnessing is the death of the old while we await the birth of a new form of Church which, I would wager, is already taking shape.\(^\text{33}\)

Some of the more identifiable characteristics of the changing relationship between religion and society are now examined both from the perspective of the influence of culture on religion and from the perspective of religion on culture.

### 2.3.1 Changing Relationships between Church and State

Louise Fuller is particularly interested in the changing relations between Church and state which have characterised Ireland since the founding of the Irish Republic in 1919. The Catholic Church’s powerful position vis-à-vis the Irish government has been eroded, and the acceptance of the Church’s position

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\(^{30}\) O’Mahony, 2.


\(^{33}\) Patsy McGarry, ‘The Rise and Fall of Roman Catholicism in Ireland’ in *Irish and Catholic?*, 46.
on social issues is no longer taken uncritically. Fuller highlights key moments that illustrate this changing relationship. In the 1950s the then Minister for Health, Noel Browne, introduced a Bill to provide free medical care to women and children up the age of sixteen years. The Catholic hierarchy objected, on the grounds that health care should be the responsibility of the family: there was an underlying fear that the Bill would pave the way for contraceptives and abortion, while its likely impact on lucrative private practice undoubtedly fuelled opposition among doctors. However, it was the moral arguments that dominated national debate. The subsequent uproar caused the Minister to resign, and ultimately brought about the fall of the government. This incident illustrates the power of the Catholic hierarchy. It highlights the subservience expected from, and accepted by, Ireland’s political leaders prior to the 1980s, and the ability of conservative pressure groups to utilise Catholic moral arguments to maintain the status quo.

A later controversial referendum discussed by Fuller epitomises the diminished status of the Catholic hierarchy in modern Ireland. The 2002 referendum on abortion sought to guarantee the existing constitutional barrier to abortion, except in cases where the life of a mother is considered at risk. It was lost despite the forceful opposition of Church leaders. Fuller proposes that this marked the ‘final stage in the dismantling of legislative and constitutional support for the Catholic ethos in Ireland.’ Her position on the influence of the Catholic ethos on governing structures of Ireland today, however, is extreme. It can be argued that a Catholic ethos may well still pervade, at a more subtle level, in the way Irish legislation and law are exercised today. An example of this is the influence of the Catholic Church on social policy. A systematic examination of the Irish Constitution and Law in comparison with other countries would need

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34 Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, 87.
35 Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, 75.
36 Many other issues that have been debated in recent years, such as Gay Rights, civil partnerships and Euthanasia have served to demonstrate that the Catholic hierarchy is one voice among many rather than the preeminent voice.
37 Fuller, ‘New Ireland and the Undoing of the Catholic Legacy’, 87.
to be done in order to demonstrate conclusively that support for the Catholic ethos in Ireland has been ‘dismantled’.

A return to Schreiter’s understanding of culture, as a framework within which people make meaning, is helpful here. At some point in the latter half of the twentieth century the Catholic Church was no longer the dominant culture shaping the meaning-making system of Irish people, but its influence was not eliminated. While church-state relations have greatly changed, their influence on culture is still evident. In this sense Fuller is accurate in suggesting that the Catholic Church is no longer the major defining force within Irish culture as it was in the nineteenth century. As the Church has declined in its influence in the public domain, other factors have emerged, not least the importance of economics in the shaping of Irish people’s lives.

2.3.2 The Celtic Tiger

The period between the late 1980s and the middle of the first decade of the new millennium saw Ireland’s economy transformed, from being at the lower end of economies in the developed world to among the highest. Some, but not all, of this transformation had its origins in the accession of Ireland to the European Union. Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973. Other decisions, such as the emphasis placed on education by successive Irish governments, were also significant in bringing about change. This transformation brought with it many benefits, including wider access to work and greater participation in education and – maybe above all – choice about one’s direction in life. This major economic growth came to be known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’. As with all change, it brought difficulties also.

40 One example of the changing relationship was the closing of the Irish Embassy in the Vatican. The Statement of the Táiniste (Deputy Prime Minister) is revealing: ‘While the Embassy to the Holy See is one of Ireland’s oldest missions, it yields no economic return. The Government believes that Ireland’s interests with the Holy See can be sufficiently represented by a non-resident Ambassador. The Government will be seeking the agreement of the Holy See to the appointment of a senior diplomat to this position.’ The importance of the Catholic Church is here assessed in terms of its financial significance. In January 2014 the Irish government decided to reopen the embassy.
41 It is beyond the scope of this project to analyse the reasons for the ‘Celtic Tiger’, but an unrestrained property boom combined with ease of borrowing under a poorly-regulated banking system are generally recognised as key elements.
2.3.2.1 From Prosperity to Recession

The role of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ in shaping modern Ireland has been widely recognised:

For many people in Ireland today these are the best of times; for some these are the worst of times. For many, contemporary Ireland is an Aladdin’s Cave of wealth and opportunity, attracting hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Immigration flows provide a mirror image of another Ireland, when Irish emigrants were attracted to foreign lands hoping to find streets paved with gold, far from the poverty of their rural villages and urban tenements.42

The increased prosperity of the Celtic Tiger era impacted not only on the standard of living of many people in Ireland but also on their values and aspirations. As Harry Bohan argues,

The values that shaped this change were, for the most part, commercial values that rightly belong to the business world but once they begin to permeate other areas of life such as family, community, health, law then we need to sit up and take notice. Disconnection from inner self, one another and the Creator represents a breakdown in relationships. The challenge to the Church is obvious.43

Bohan goes on to say that the challenge to the Catholic Church is to recognise these ‘signs of the times’.44 It is only in understanding these realities that the gospel message can become relevant in the life of Catholics.45

Many commentators suggest that the effect of the Celtic Tiger on the Irish, particularly the young, has been to make them more materialistic.46 But it is difficult to quantify this, as people in other generations have usually perceived the young generation as less generous, less hardworking, or less enthusiastic than they were at that age. Paul Tansey, a financial consultant and journalist,
argues for the benefits of economic prosperity and the free market philosophy that has underpinned it. He writes,

as a sovereign state, Ireland has suffered long periods of economic failure, most notably in the first forty years of its existence. The social impacts of that failure – mass emigration, population decline, poverty – provide little reason for nostalgia.47

However, even Tansey, with his benign analysis of the Celtic Tiger era, acknowledges that while many people benefited from the new-found prosperity, there remained a significant amount of poverty and there was a large gap between the vastly wealthy and those who struggled to survive. The recession, beginning around 2008, does more than just suggest that some of this new-found prosperity was built on shifting sands. The early months of 2009 uncovered the shaky (ethical as well as financial) foundations of the vast economic growth of the previous twenty years. The global financial crisis, along with local factors in Ireland, contributed to rapid decline in living standards.

During the period of prosperity and the succeeding recession, 'Ireland has seen the single biggest transfer of resources from low and middle income people to the rich and powerful in its history.' An Irish Bishops’ Conference report states,

A 2007 study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) examined the social impact of the Celtic Tiger and addressed the common criticism that it left the poor further behind. The study divided Irish society into three categories: the first is constituted by the 80% who are, in general, free of serious financial problems; approximately 10% of people are placed in the second category of ‘economic vulnerability’ as they struggle to cope with debt and sudden expenses; the third category, about 9% of the population, are classified as ‘consistently poor’. It describes Irish society after the Celtic Tiger as characterized by tiered levels of deprivation – the scale and pattern of which vary depending on whether one focuses on economic vulnerability, consistent poverty or the combination of low income and multiple deprivation.48

However, while the recession has had an enormous negative effect, many Irish people continue to have some of the highest income standards in the world. The

true impact of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath on the fundamentals of culture in Ireland cannot be fully appreciated at present, as only time and distance will allow this to become clear.

### 2.3.2.2 Influence of Demographics and Migration

Apart from economic change, the Celtic Tiger has brought other changes in Irish society. Canon Connor Ryan lists demographic change – both urban and rural – liberalism, individualism, instrumental reasoning and religious belief as significant changes that mark the Ireland of the new millennium.\(^49\) Some of these categories are particularly illuminating. For example, the demographics of Ireland have shifted with a million more people living here than fifty years ago.\(^50\) The increase in population has come about firstly, through the virtual demise of emigration which had characterised Ireland since the Famine; and secondly, an influx of immigrants seeking employment in a more prosperous Ireland.\(^51\) Migrants bring with them different frames of reference as well as different rituals, languages, food, clothing and other cultural artefacts which impact on the culture at large.\(^52\) One of the interesting results of this immigration for the Catholic Church has been an increasing number of people, particularly from predominantly Catholic countries such as Poland and the Philippines, who are now part of parish communities. Throughout Ireland, in both rural and urban centres, there are regular masses for the Polish and other non-Irish ethnic communities. Where these immigrants have integrated into Catholic parishes they bring with them their culture, devotions and spirituality. Over time this will impact on the nature and ethos of Catholic parishes and bring about further profound change.


\(^{50}\) Statistically this represents an increase of one third of the three million people living in Ireland in that time, with the population now at over four million. It is particularly important as population continued to fall in the aftermath of the Great Famine of the 1840s, mostly due to emigration, until 1971; the sustained population increase of the past decades is therefore unprecedented for Ireland.

\(^{51}\) There was a net increase of 186,000 in immigration between 2002-06, the highest figure since the foundation of the State: *The Council for Research and Development: A Commission of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference*, ‘A Report on the Preliminary Results of Census 2006’ (Maynooth, Kildare, 2006).

Another major change is the growing urban population. Ryan suggests that a shift from a rural to an urban lifestyle is not just a question of where you live, but how you interact with others within the community. An analysis of the 2006 census shows significant difference in Mass attendance in rural communities: for example, in farming areas it is 71%, compared to that in commuter belts around the big cities, 37.6%. The demographic within commuter belts shows young families, who, with both parents working and travelling long distances each day, are less likely to become embedded in local parishes as did previous generations when the parish was the centre of community.

These significant shifts in the Irish population are important, because apart from internal factors (discussed later) the Catholic Church has to contend with a rapidly-changing context in which to proclaim the ‘Good News’ of Jesus Christ. These factors impact significantly on the need for lay volunteers in the Church in Ireland. Donal Harrington, in an article written in 1993, wrote of the changing relationship between the official Church and the media.

It would seem more accurate to say that this is a time of transition, that the Church is still coming to grips (as is most everyone else) with what it means to live in a secular, pluralist, post-Christian society, and that it still retains many vestiges of the monolithic world view of the past.

2.3.3 The Media and The Catholic Church

If the Irish media were the lens one used to study the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish society, one would probably reach the conclusion that Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular, is largely a negative force in Ireland, and in terminal decline.

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53 Ryan, ‘The Changing Face of Ireland Today’, 17. The initial data from the 2011 census shows that rural population continues to decline. According to the most recent census this trend continues: ‘This is Ireland – Highlights from Census 2011’, Part 1, states that the urban population has increased by 10.6 per cent while the rural population only grew by 4.6 per cent: Central Statistics office, ‘Census 2011: Profile 1: Rural Urban Divide’, www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011vol1andprofile1/Profile1_Table_of_Contents,Forward_and_Commentary.pdf.


The scandal of clerical child abuse within the Catholic Church was brought to light by the Irish media. Despite the pain and anguish which have resulted, no one could regret the exposure of a cancer that has wrought untold damage to individuals, families and communities. The credibility of the Catholic hierarchy and of religious congregations has been seriously undermined, not least by attempts to cover up abuse. The publication in 2009 of the Ryan Report on industrial schools and orphanages in Ireland provides an in-depth analysis of a culture of abuse perpetrated by some religious orders in these schools and ignored by the State who supervised these schools. This 2,600-page report is an extraordinary catalogue of abuse. As one writer in the Irish Times writes, 'We have to call this kind of abuse by its proper name – torture'. It should be noted however, that physical and emotional abuse was endemic in the broader Irish society at that time, and may still exist in some State reformatory centres. Such reports are not allowed to gather dust as all forms of media in Ireland repeatedly bring them to public awareness.

There had been a backlash against the all-pervasive power of the Church in Irish society even prior to the exposure of these scandals by the media. The publicity surrounding high profile court cases about sexual abuse by priests and members of religious orders and reports such as the Ryan Report ensures that Irish people are constantly made aware that the Catholic Church, as an organisation, is a weak and fragile institution. As long ago as 1996, Margaret Corish wrote,

The media have played a decisive role in undermining the Catholic Church’s authority in Ireland. The general tone of editorials and of most popular programmes is unequivocally [sic] one advocating liberalism and pluralism. We must differentiate between the reporting of events directly linked with the institutional Church, the treatment of socio-political issues, and the staging of soaps on radio and television. It is striking that in a country with such a strong tradition of Catholicism as Ireland, there is so little ‘serious’ discussion about the institutional Church; the media consistently either openly launch attacks on the Church or trivialise religious issues. The fact that the media in Ireland seems to overreact where

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56 Ryan, 'Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse'.
the Church is concerned, is revealing of a society where the weight of the Catholic Church had been excessive.\textsuperscript{58}

Another commentator, Tom Inglis, postulated that ‘the media have driven a stake into the heart of the institutional Church from which it will recover, but never fully.’\textsuperscript{59} However, on another level the Church remains a strong force within Irish society, particularly within local communities, as will be explored below. This is not always evident from the popular Irish media.

The question must also be asked, how does the Church respond officially to and engage with the media? Recent years have seen the establishment of a communication office in most dioceses and by the National Bishops’ Conference. Increasingly, the role of this office has been to act as a buffer between bishops and the media when clerical scandals were published.

This ambiguous and fraught relationship between the Church and the media has not prevented the growing recognition that modern technology is an important vehicle for the proclamation of the gospel in the world of today. Not just the Vatican but local Churches are using the media with increasing sophistication, recognising the importance of mass communication. Moreover, as the Church always must communicate its message in a manner suited to each age and to the cultures of particular nations and peoples, so today it must communicate in and to the emerging media culture. This is a basic condition for responding to a crucial point made by the Second Vatican Council: the emergence of ‘social, technical, and cultural bonds’ linking people ever more closely lends ‘special urgency’ to the Church’s task of bringing all to ‘full union with Christ’\textsuperscript{60}

The Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, dioceses and local parishes have websites which are used for communication rather than publishing in the traditional way. The Bishops’ Conference site also has links to a Facebook page. The evolving technology is being used at all levels of the Church.

2.3.4 Patterns of Religious Practice in Ireland

A further insight can be gained into the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish society by reviewing the patterns of religious practice in Ireland. Ritual is one of the key elements in the understanding of cultural practices and in understanding the cultural context. Patterns of church attendance in Ireland indicate that religion, particularly Catholicism, remains embedded in Irish culture.

In 2006 the ESS [European Social Survey] data showed that weekly or more often Mass attendance in the Republic currently stands at 56.4% of the Catholic population. In ESS 4 (2009/10), the percentage of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland attending Mass weekly or more often stood at 51.6%. While this represents a further decline in the number of weekly Mass attendees, the decline is consistent with recent trends.\(^{61}\)

This figure represents a decline of almost seven percent from the 2002–03 survey which reported a figure of 63%. In the latest survey a further 21% attend church at least once a month. These figures represent a decline from the 1970s and 1980s when Mass attendance was consistently high at about 80 to 90%.\(^{62}\) But Ireland continues to have a large church attendance in comparison to other societies in Europe where weekly church attendance averages below 20%.\(^{63}\)

While the figure of at least weekly attendance at 51% is relatively high, a more in-depth look at the age profile of those who attend church regularly reveals some significant data. Mass attendance in the 25 to 34 year old category is about 23% compared to 69% for the 55 to 64 age group. Other figures for Mass

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\(^{61}\) O’Mahony, ‘Practice and Belief among Catholics in the Republic of Ireland’. The figures presented here are from research by the European Values Survey (EVS) and European Social Survey (ESS) both of which have been investigating religion in Europe over a long period and have tracked changes in areas such as attendance at religious gatherings employing rigorous methodologies, EVS since 1981 and the ESS bi-annually since 2001.


\(^{63}\) Comparison for other countries in Europe are:
  - ‘More than once a week’: 7.8% in Slovakia; 0.6% in Denmark.
  - ‘Once a week’: 44.9% in Poland; 2.0% in Denmark.
  - ‘At least once a month’: 27.0% in Greece; 3.4% in the Czech Republic.
attendance in Ireland appear in the media from time to time but the EVS and ESS figures are employed here as they show patterns which were arrived at using a consistent research methodology. These figures suggest that over the next twenty years Irish people’s weekly attendance at Mass may well decline to the level found in other European countries if the rate of decline continues, that is, from 91% in 1973–74 to 51% in 2011.

2.3.5 An Alternate Perspective on Religious Practice in Ireland

Another perspective on Mass attendance comes from Martin Kennedy, educator and facilitator, working at grassroots with Church and community groups. He proposes that there are a substantial number of people who are not regular church attendees, but who, if one does not take weekly attendance as the norm, continue to have strong connections to local parish communities. Such people attend baptisms, confirmations, weddings, Christmas and Holy Week liturgies and, most frequently of all, funerals. Large attendances at funerals seem to be a distinctively Irish phenomenon which might reflect a strong community affinity rather than religious sensibility.

Kennedy divides Irish Catholics into three groups, the first being those who attend Church weekly, or even daily, and who are actively involved in the local parish. A second group attend Church weekly but do not become involved in parish activities, while the attendance of the third group is more spasmodic. To quote Kennedy, ‘the great majority of [Irish] Catholics are baptised and have connection with some parish – some committed activists, some regular attenders, some irregular attenders.’

The above categories point to a very different view of the place of the local parish within the Catholic Church in the new millennium. Parishes in the past

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66 Eoin O’Mahony, ‘Practice and Belief among Catholics in the Republic of Ireland’.
67 Martin Kennedy, Ministry Now: New Approaches for a Changing Church (Dublin: Veritas, 2006), 47-48. While this proposal is not substantiated by statistical data, it resonates with most people who are connected with the Church in Ireland.
68 Kennedy, Ministry Now, 48.
were territorial, and by and large Catholics who lived within the parish boundaries went to Mass in a parish church every Sunday. Several factors have changed, and are changing this reality. One is the decreasing attendance at Mass by Catholics in Ireland. Another is the greater freedom people exercise in where they choose to go to Church: many ‘shop around’, so that the Church where they worship may not be where they live. Increasingly we have ‘non-resident parishioners’.69

2.3.6 Decline in Clergy Numbers

While the relatively high church attendance figures suggest that religion is still a critical factor in Irish society, the ways in which the Catholic Church is impacting on life in modern Ireland have changed dramatically. For example, the Ireland where the triumvirate of the priest, doctor and teacher was the key influence on local community is a thing of the past. While the influence of the priest in local communities has changed, the priest still has a role in areas such as education and in times of bereavement.

The Catholic priest’s role within local parishes is also changing due in part to the declining number of priests. This decrease is caused both by the smaller numbers of young men coming forward for ordination, and by the large number of priests who have left the priesthood in the years since the Second Vatican Council. The 2007 profile on diocesan priests in Ireland provides a useful picture of priests who work in parishes.70 This survey showed that the ‘age profile of the diocesan priests of Ireland is disproportionately older than the male population as a whole.’ Of all clergy, 45% are aged between 45 and 65 years and another quarter between 65 and 74 (retirement age). It is projected in the survey that ‘in 2015 there will be 23 percent fewer clergy than in 2007.’ These statistics help explain the pressure that is mounting in parishes to adjust to a situation where a non-resident priest may become the norm. Priests are increasingly finding it difficult to attend to the sacramental needs of the Catholic community, which sometimes leaves little time for involvement in the wider

70 Hanley, ‘Faith for Life’.
community. The next chapter will examine the growing number of lay people who are involved in parish ministry, supplementing the work of the priest.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{2.3.7 Clustering Parishes}\textsuperscript{72}

One of the defining characteristics of Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth century was the centrality of the local Catholic parish, especially in rural Ireland, where all major events in life – birth, death and marriage – were marked sacramentally. This is changing and the hierarchy in Ireland can no longer afford to ignore the new face of the parish. Consequently some diocesan bishops are looking at models to respond to this crisis. One such model is the clustering of parishes.\textsuperscript{73} Bishop Seamus Freeman, in the Foreword to a series of reflection papers notes, ‘It is evident, not least in the light of changing demographics, that the grouping of parishes, as a means of sharing faith, mission, personnel and other resources, has to be an essential component of our response [to the challenges facing the Church].\textsuperscript{74} This involves a number of parishes co-operating in a variety of ways. One simple example is the rostering of timetables for Masses across parishes which will be celebrated on weekends and weekdays in a particular area. Meanwhile a more wide-ranging structural approach to clustering is being piloted in other dioceses such as Limerick, Killaloe and Dublin.

The concept and experience of clustering has been met with varying degrees of enthusiasm by clergy and laity alike. For some it is seen as a logical way to ensure that all parishes have access to a priest for the celebration of the Sacraments. For others, clustering seems to herald the dismantling of a community gathered around a leader. In its place will be a centre for the celebration of the sacraments as parishes as they are presently constructed disappear. Such a dichotomy need not be the outcome of clustering. Donal

\textsuperscript{71} In his thesis Noel Hession explored the issue of parishes without a resident priest, which is becoming more prevalent in Ireland. Noel Hession, ‘How Can We Be a Parish without a Priest: The Place of Lay Ministry in the Developing Irish Church’ (National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2012).

\textsuperscript{72} A number of recent works explore this phenomenon in detail, including Hession’s thesis, and Eugene Duffy, \textit{Parishes in Transition} (Dublin: Columba Press, 2010).


Harrington argues in *The Welcoming Parish* that, despite the many changes in Church structures, the individual parish within the larger unit will survive. In justification of this view he quotes John Paul II: the parish is ‘not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit, a familial and welcoming home.’\(^75\) This may be a rather idealised understanding of parish, but it serves as a reminder that a community of people (‘family of God’) is at the heart of every parish and of the Church. As changes accelerate, the parish may become increasingly important in furthering the fundamental characteristic of the local Church, which is a gathering of people who worship and minister together in order to serve the reign of God.

Harrington suggests that the local parish stands [also] as a counter-statement to a trend in contemporary spirituality. ‘People’s deep spirituality’ expresses itself in very varied ways today – many of them a real challenge for the Church to learn from. One of the negative aspects is a privatising tendency, a tendency to spirituality as a private affair between ‘me and God’, with no reference to or need for community.\(^76\)

Harrington makes another vital point about the importance of the parish community:

> Someone once remarked that, in a world that seems to be growing more divided, the parish is one of the few open communities in which rich and poor, educated and uneducated, upwardly mobile and sheer down-and-out can meet and call each other brother and sister.\(^77\)

One category not named by Harrington is that of cultural diversity. As noted earlier, there is an increasing number of ‘non’ Irish Catholics, such as Polish and Filipino people in Ireland. One response by the bishops to this increasing diversity is to appoint chaplains to different ethnic communities in order that the Eucharist can be celebrated for people in their own languages. Ultimately, however, it seems desirable that all ethnic groups should worship together in the local parish, if that is their choice.

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The emerging intercultural dimension of life in Ireland is demanding a change in the fundamental cultural identity of Irish people.\(^78\) The local Catholic parish can be a place where different cultures meet and people can come to understand each other on a deeper level.\(^79\) For Catholic immigrants the local parish is one place where they can, and do, claim ‘belonging’. The intermingling of cultures in the local parish can be an important element in building a new intercultural Ireland.

Clustering of parishes may be an organisational necessity, but the challenge of maintaining the structure of territorial parishes will remain in order that a local gathering which is truly representative of the whole ‘people of God’ can meet, worship and serve the community. The parish can also operate as a cohesive force in local communities, and thus be a sustaining force amidst the maelstrom of change. Parishes or clusters with evolving models of leadership in which lay people participate fully are likely to be at the forefront of new structures. This thesis proposes that adult religious education will be essential in preparing the people of God to take up the challenge of responding to changing models of local communities.

2.3.8 The School System and the Local Catholic Parish

Currently, in Irish Catholic communities it is the parish primary school which is the focus of religious education; it is here among schoolchildren, rather than with adults, that religious education is central to the community. The Catholic Church has long been a very influential force in Irish cultural life through its connections with the school system. In the Republic of Ireland the Catholic Church is the largest provider of primary schools, as, in the main, Church groups

\(^{78}\) Thomas G. Grenham, *The Unknown God: Religious and Theological Interculturation* (Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2005) explores the relationship between inculturation and evangelism. While he discusses these issues within the context of mission, the book raises important questions for education in an increasingly multi-cultural Catholic Church in Ireland.

\(^{79}\) ‘The number of foreign nationals living in Ireland jumped 30% between 2006 and 2011, official figures have revealed. Total numbers increased by 124,624 over the five years to April 2011. The Central Statistics Office also revealed that 544,357 non-Irish nationals were living in Ireland at the time of the census in April of 2011, from 199 different nations. *Breaking News. ‘Arrivals’, www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/number-of-foreign-nationals-living-in-ireland-up-30-in-last-five-years-569329.html*, Accessed 21 August 2013. The statistics for the Catholic Church reflects this reality: ‘While the proportion of people stating that they are Catholic has declined somewhat, the number of Catholics in the Republic has increased.’
provide the patronage of schools.\textsuperscript{80} As a result this patronage ensures that the local parish is at the centre of many local communities, if only through its schools.

With the increasing diversity within Ireland, both culturally and religiously, local parish schools have struggles with their identity. Some parents resent the fact that the only accessible school for their children is one that is under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The alternative for many parents may be the local Church of Ireland school, which also has a religious ethos. There is also an emerging movement in education in Ireland since 1978 called, ‘Educate Together’. This organisation has

\begin{quote}
For over 34 years been working to establish inspirational schools for children in Ireland. Schools that teach to the highest quality academic standards through an ethos that guarantees every child, equality of esteem, regardless of their social, cultural or religious background.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Even with the growth of this movement the Catholic Church remains the single biggest provider of education in the State. In a 2008 address, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, acknowledged that there may be a need for the Church to relinquish its patronage of some schools as an increasing number of parents are demanding more choice in where they send their children to school. He said, ‘I have no ambition to be patron of Catholic primary schools beyond the number required to respond to the desire of parents who wish their children to attend such schools.’\textsuperscript{82}

The close link between parish and school is also somewhat problematic from the perspective of adult faith development, the subject of this research. There is a tendency for formation in faith to be equated with formation of children in faith. The school system remains the priority, making it difficult for adult faith


\textsuperscript{81} Educate Together: www.educatetogether.ie/about/what-is-educate-together.

development to be resourced adequately. This suggests that adult faith development is not considered as vital to the mission of the Church as is the faith formation of children. This question will be addressed further in Chapter Four.

The schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church are also gathering places for new migrants. The Church has a role to play in ensuring that the schools are places where all are welcome to avoid the possibility of effective apartheid, where only native-born Irish are to be found in one school, while new migrants are educated in other schools. The school and the parish are central to the incorporation of new migrants into Irish society. The Church continues to play an important role in the changing culture of Ireland because of its vital function in these areas of life. In turn, the cultural mores of the new migrant groups are affecting and changing Irish culture and the Church.83

2.3.9 Religiosity and Irish People

A 2008 survey on religiosity in Ireland revealed that a large number of people indicated that they consider themselves religious.84 One criterion used to quantify feelings of religiosity was the number of people who prayed regularly. Fifty percent of people surveyed said that they pray each day, while a further 15% pray each week. These figures can be compared with the United Kingdom where ‘17.5% of UK persons pray every day (apart from religious services) against 48.4% who never do so.’85

A further insight into the way religion impacts on Irish society can be gleaned by the prevalence of what is called ‘popular religion’. Evidence of this expression of religion can be observed in devotional practices such as pilgrimages to

83 A note of caution needs to be sounded here, as this drawing together of different cultural traditions within the boundaries of parish and school can just as easily bring about disharmony as harmony. Only in a culture of ‘reflexivity’ where there are serious attempts to understand and appreciate the ‘other’ can the Church become a positive force within Irish society. Schrieter suggests that, ‘The compression of time and space, with the presence of migrants, workers, and refugees, introduces some measure of reflexivity into the lives of those who heretofore have been able to live naively in their own cultures.’ Schreiter, The New Catholicity, 55-56.

84 O’Mahony, ‘The European Social Survey’.

international shrines including Lourdes and Fatima, as well as to national sites such as Croagh Patrick, Knock and Lough Derg. Local sites such as holy wells are visited, particularly on the feast day of the local saint, as people come to pray for all kinds of need. In 2001 the visit of the relics of St Therese of Lisieux attracted huge numbers of people to churches and other centres throughout Ireland.

Another significant cultural event is found on Sundays throughout July and August when families gather from all over Ireland, and sometimes even beyond, to honour and pray for their dead while the Eucharist is celebrated and the graves are blessed. These so-called ‘Cemetery Sundays’ are increasingly popular, and it might be speculated that they tap into a deeply religious vein in Irish society. Novenas also continue to provide occasions for private and communal devotion, and are indicative of the way religion is practised in Ireland today. Each year novenas are conducted in Redemptorist churches in the major cities. Large numbers of people attend, and some are such major events that the traffic chaos that ensues is included in the evening traffic report on radio. Other services such as annual events to commemorate children who died before birth or in infancy have a unique place in Irish society.

The extent to which such occasions represent a measure of religious sensibility in Irish Catholics has not been researched in great depth, but they seem to have a particular rhythm that appeals to many people in Ireland today. The importance of Schreiter’s second category of ritual as a dimension of culture is highlighted here. Perhaps it is in this area, rather than in the areas of beliefs and values, that the Catholic Church is most culturally significant today. As Mass attendance diminishes, such events seem to be growing in importance, responding to the human need for communal rituals practices.

86 These are scheduled to enable people on holidays to attend from different parts of Ireland and abroad. In a moving article in the Irish Times some of the meaning that these occasions represent for people who attend is explored by Rosita Boland, ‘A Day That Is Alive with Meaning’: www.irishtimes.com/search/archive.html?rm=listresults&filter=dateasc&keywords=cemetery, (Accessed 20 February 2009).

87 Other religious orders offer similar novenas throughout Ireland and such events are attended by people who are not necessarily regular Church attenders.

88 Schreiter, The New Catholicity, 29.
2.4 The Official Church Response to a Changing Ireland

Reviewing official Church responses to the multiple issues which are facing Irish society is challenging. A survey of the statements and publications from the Irish Bishops’ Conference in the last five years can be taken as indicative of the issues that the bishops believed were important within the Church and Irish society at large. Examples are statements on: violence against woman; norms for developing parish councils; issues around human reproduction; and the development of youth ministry. These statements illustrate something of how the Irish bishops interpret and respond to the changing face of Ireland and the internal challenges that the Church itself faces.

Much of the response to the changing situation arises out of immediate, pressing needs rather than from a consistent, coherent position. The leadership of the Church, as with the leadership of most institutions, tends to react rather than be proactive in its responses. The ethical stands taken on issues such as abortion, contraception, homosexuality and sexual abuse evoke strong public reactions (cf the rejection of the Catholic bishops’ position in a referendum on abortion, noted earlier). While the bishops generally make public statements in response to important aspects of Irish life, there is no guarantee that their voice will be attended to by the majority of the Irish population. The diminishing influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland means that a statement from a bishop, unless it is concerned with child sex abuse, is unlikely to receive much media attention,

This eclectic mix of statements and publications demonstrates the wide range of issues considered by the Catholic Bishops. It would take serious study of these documents to discern patterns across them and the research in hand does not attempt to draw any conclusions.
perhaps confirming a public perception that these issues are of greatest concern to the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{90}

In a thoughtful statement during the Easter Ceremonies in his diocese of Clogher, Bishop Joseph Duffy addressed some of the problems that are emerging as a result of the current recession:

Some years ago in the full heat of the Celtic Tiger, the Irish bishops in a statement, expressing gratitude for our prosperity, warned of the dangers of greed, of rampant materialism, of forgetfulness of God. The media commentators at the time dismissed the idea of caution and self-discipline; they wrote off the bishops, as they like to do, as out-dated spoilsports. The warning fell on deaf ears. I am not for a moment claiming the bishops always get it right; they certainly got that one right.\textsuperscript{91}

While the bishop may be in danger of being accused of saying, ‘I told you so’, in fact he pointed out signs of hope and the potential danger in the present climate. His thought-provoking analysis of the current situation is unlikely to be available to all but a few people, as it did not receive widespread coverage in the media. Bishops’ statements during the Celtic Tiger years endeavoured to steer a course between being condemnatory of the excesses of the new-found wealth and ensuring that the voices of the most needy in society were heard.\textsuperscript{92}

It is hard to discern an overall strategy in official Church responses to the cultural context of Ireland today. The culture which is Ireland today no longer recognises the moral authority of the Church, so the hierarchy has to move towards a relationship which seeks to persuade rather than enforce. Raphael


Gallagher argues that the hierarchy needs to find a new kind of voice on (sexual) morality, one which does not seek to ‘impose a particular moral view, but to contribute towards the construction of a new social consensus on key issues that affect family structures’.93 This highlights something of the dilemma of the Irish hierarchy as it struggles to emerge from a deeply embedded assumption that the Catholic Church is the moral guardian of Irish society. Gallagher goes on to argue,

religions such as Catholicism which take an optimistic view of human realities which centres its moral teaching on natural law with its notions of reasoned discourse, human well-being and common good, and which expects its adherents to exercise the virtues that contribute to such good, will anticipate a ready dialogue partner in the State. It will not shrink from comment on matters moral but such comment will be offered as a contribution to the search for the good of society. It will equally recognise that the common good which it advocates requires also a sensitive listening to an increasing number of viewpoints, each with its own peculiarly wrought moral system.94

There is little to suggest that the Catholic hierarchy is anywhere near the position for which Gallagher argues. Traditionally, the voice of the Catholic hierarchy was ‘the voice’ in most areas of Irish life, and a shift towards a ‘sensitive listening to an increasing number of viewpoints’, is very demanding of a hierarchy whose members were trained in a system which regarded ‘the voice’ of the bishop as beyond question.

The rapidly-changing face of Ireland is difficult to grapple with and the changing perspectives will take time to be assimilated. However, for the sub-culture which is the Irish hierarchy, deeply imbued with a belief that its moral authority still informs Irish culture, a shift in perspective which recognises that the Church is only one voice among many, will not happen either quickly or easily.

94 Raphael Gallagher, 102.
2.5 Conclusion

The reality, or perhaps more accurately, the realities of the Catholic Church in Ireland, is complex, reflecting the culture of the times. Nevertheless, the Church continues to be a strong, identifiable force in Irish life even if, at times, it is not seen as a positive force. What the local, diocesan and national Church has to work towards is determining how this identifiable force can be harnessed in order that ‘the kingdom of God be proclaimed and renewed’. There are many Irish people who identify themselves as Catholic, but whose connection with the Church is tenuous at best. It is the contention of this research that the renewal of the Church in Ireland is most likely to begin at grass roots level, and that it is in the renewal of parish life that the sense of belonging to the community of the Church will be revived.

Grace Davie, writing about the Church of England, uses the phrase ‘Believing without Belonging’ as the subtitle of her book, Religion in Britain since 1945. For increasing numbers of Irish Catholics this seems to be a fair representation of their faith commitment. Davie does not want to make too sharp a distinction between the two positions. She writes,

The terms ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ are not to be considered too rigidly. The disjunction between them is intended to capture a mood, to suggest an area of enquiry, a way of looking at a problem, not to describe a detailed set of characteristics.

A growing number of Catholics in Ireland today have a minimal connection to the local community. However, trying to sustain a Christian faith without connection to the worshipping community seems neither desirable nor possible in the long term. The figures in the 2008 European Social Survey show that, among the sub-sample of Catholics in Ireland, ‘a large proportion feel themselves to be religious or very religious [84 percent]’. It would seem as though the connection between culture and faith is not lost. This presents the

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95 Ad Gentes, Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity.
97 Davie, Religion in Britain since 1945, 93.
98 O’Mahony, ‘The European Social Survey’.
possibility of rebuilding a connection to the local community of Catholics, one which might be instrumental in helping to sustain people in the living out of their Christian lives.

The Church, at national, diocesan and parish levels, is confronted with the task of transforming the deep religious sensibilities of Irish people. The rapidity of change in Irish society and in the Church has made for such a challenging environment that it is difficult for the leadership of the Church to strategize for the future. Factors such as the decline in the number of clergy and in church attendance, clerical scandals and the changing demographic, militate against Church leaders focusing on developing Christian communities. Much of the hierarchy's energy is devoted to the struggle to maintain the status quo while holding out against unremittingly negative perceptions of the Church and its role in the Ireland of the past.

Throughout Ireland, the vibrancy of some local Catholic parishes is one positive element in enabling people to explore their religious roots in a meaningful way. It is in the local area that connections are made and sustained. The contention of this research project is that education, especially at the grass-roots, is a key strategy in bringing about a renewed understanding of and connection to a living, community-based Christian faith. The cultural conditions outlined in this chapter point to a Church in decline, although not to the degree or at the pace that some would suggest. The increasing number of damaging revelations such as those contained in the Ryan report will continue to diminish the Church's credibility in the eyes of Irish people.

The reinvigoration of the Catholic Church will be dependent on many things. However, with a post-Celtic Tiger population who are highly educated in a secular sense yet often lack a systematic understanding of their Christian roots at an appropriately adult level, the need for religious education seems to be imperative. The issue for the Church is not just its renewal, but building on the strong vein of connection between faith and culture in Irish society. The Church's mission needs also to be to educate towards a Christian community that is committed to being a positive force in the building up of a more just and more humane society in Ireland and beyond, as a sign of God's new creation.
This chapter has explored the connection between faith and culture in Irish society. It has identified key cultural factors that have brought Ireland from a situation where the Catholic Church enjoyed pre-eminent status among the cultural pillars of Irish society to a situation where the Church is the least respected Irish public institution.\(^9\) It has highlighted also areas in which there are reasons for hope, in particular the high proportion of people who still identify themselves as Catholic, believe in God and pray regularly. This suggests that religion which is embedded and manifested in a spirituality nourished by a Catholic anthropology continues to be an important element in Irish culture.

For such a religion to flourish in Ireland, this thesis proposes that adult faith development at local levels is a key strategy, in which a crucial element is fostering the emergence and training of lay volunteer ministers in providing a critical service to the Church in these changing times. However, this proposal will get nowhere without it being properly grounded in a post-Vatican II ecclesiology. The chapter following takes up that challenge.

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\(^9\) International Social Survey Programme 1991-2008, Table 13.3.
Chapter Three

Ministry: Origins and Emerging Trends

It is easier to describe ministry than it is to define it. Yves Congar, who wrote the first substantial theological examination of lay people in the Church, explains ministry as a form of participation in the priesthood of Christ. Even so, his understanding of ministry does not include the participation of non-ordained people in ministry but rather as something communicated only to the few.\(^1\) So the evolution of participation in ministry by lay people is a fairly recent phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, the fundamental understanding of ministry resides in the priesthood of Christ, in which all Christians participate as a result of their Baptism.

In the previous chapter the proposal for lay volunteer ministry was placed in the context of modern Ireland. This chapter explores the extraordinary development of lay ministry in the Catholic Church in Ireland during the last fifty years. Some major aspects of the ecclesiology of Vatican II will be identified as providing the foundations of a theology of ministry in the years since the Council. The focus on the emergence of lay ministry is a consequence of the Council, a development probably not foreseen by the Council Fathers. Service (diakonia), which was at the heart of the ministry of Jesus, will be identified as the key to understanding the development of the ministry, whether lay or ordained. As noted in Chapter One, there are significant issues around the terminology involved. Osborne, analysing key terms from their Greek origins, writes,

The primary reason why these particular words, laikos, kleros, ordained and non-ordained, present a negative methodology problem lies, as we have just mentioned, in the fact that laikos is not a scriptural term at all, and kleros, which is used but only in the briefest way, has a very limited meaning. Because of this, it becomes difficult to indicate those precise areas or those specific people or those specific functions in the scriptures to which these later

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ecclesiastical terminology of cleric/lay, ordained/non ordained, might refer.\(^2\)

Issues will be identified which impede the development of lay ministry, including the inter-relationship between the ministry of the laity and the ministry of the ordained. The proliferation of lay involvement in local communities will be acknowledged, while stressing the lack of official Church endorsement of such ministry, and how this lack of endorsement impacts on ministry in local parish communities. In the light of how lay ministry, particularly volunteer ministry, is evolving, some of the outstanding theological questions that need to be resolved in order that such ministry can continue to flourish will be identified. It is argued that the involvement of lay volunteers in official ministry roles is a necessary and legitimate part of the Catholic Church into the future.

It is important at the outset to make explicit that ministry is examined within the broader framework of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. This is to ensure that what this thesis is proposing is grounded in Jesus’ own ministry as revealed in the gospels, and on insights garnered from, in particular, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church issued by Vatican II. It is also necessary to state what is not going to be included. A project of this scope potentially draws on many other theological disciplines: scripture, theology (including sub disciplines such as Revelation, Christology and Ecclesiology), epistemology and philosophy as well as spirituality. In the area of education itself, the thesis draws on educational psychology, philosophy, sociology and andragogy, to name some in order to support the claim that education needs to be holistic. While several of these disciplines are drawn upon in this chapter, the researcher recognises that a full analysis is not possible across all of these important areas. The choice for inclusion or otherwise was based upon retaining the education of lay volunteers as the central focus of the project. In addition, no attempt is made to discuss a syllabus for the education of lay volunteers themselves. The framework for such an educational syllabus is to be

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found in official Church documents, subsequently developed within each specific cultural context.³

This chapter thus explores a theology of Vatican II, based on the gospels, with the intention of identifying the foundation for the subsequent development of lay ministry in the Church, as it has emerged in the following fifty years.

3.1 The Development of Lay Ministry within the Local Parish

For the average Catholic who attends Church weekly, the most visible change in the Church since Vatican II is the presence of lay ministers, particularly liturgical ministers. There are now few Catholic Churches in Ireland which do not take for granted the presence of lay people as Readers of the Word or Ministers of Communion and other ministries. This alone is an extraordinary development given the prohibition on lay people (except altar boys and sacristans) from the sanctuary in the Catholic Church prior to Vatican II. Lumen Gentium paved the way for these developments by statements such as,

Pastors also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church towards the world. On the contrary, they understand that it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and to recognise their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.⁴

Servers, readers, commentator, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function.⁵

However, while this recognition enabled pastors to involve lay people, the subsequent expansion of roles for lay people was not anticipated in the Council documents. Many of the liturgical developments of recent years have enabled the inclusion of lay ministries in the liturgy. The Council’s assertion that the

³ The two key documents in the Irish context are Irish Episcopal Conference, Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (Dublin: Veritas, 2010); and Irish Episcopal Conference, Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults (Dublin: Veritas, 2014).
⁴ LG, paragraph 30.
Eucharist is the ‘source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the gospel’ helps to place the role of lay liturgical ministers at the very heart of the local Church. As Donal Harrington writes,

Imagine parish liturgies without choirs, music groups and cantors; without the creativity of liturgy groups; without those behind the scenes in Church.

An example of the growing importance of lay leadership is ‘Services of The Word and Communion’, led by lay people in the absence of a priest. While these services can never be perceived as adequate substitutes for Eucharist, they have a function in nurturing the local community. Thus lay ministries are not adjunct or peripheral but have become fundamental to ensuring that the liturgical life of the Church is vibrant and that the whole Christian community is nourished.

The ministries offered by lay people are not solely concerned with liturgy. Increasingly, parishes may have ministers to the sick in their homes; catechists who lead the RCIA process and catechesis for other sacraments; care and justice ministries, and bereavement ministries. Other people may offer leadership to the community through their involvement in parish pastoral councils. So in all areas of parish life people are contributing to the ministerial life of the Church, yet there is little acknowledgement of this ministry in the official documentation of the universal Church. For example, the Roman Missal still places almost total emphasis on ordained roles in liturgical celebrations. Special roles for deacons are included in all liturgical celebrations, while lay ministers are still viewed (when mentioned at all) as being there by exception rather than by right. All this flies in the face of the reality. Lay ministers are now part of all liturgical celebrations (even in Rome). Lay ministry is a vital element in the vibrancy of

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7 Donal Harrington, The Welcoming Parish (Dublin: Columba, 2005), 83.
8 John Paul II wrote, ‘the various ministries, offices and roles that lay faithful can legitimately fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of the faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church, ought to be exercised in conformity to their specific lay vocation, which is different from that of sacred ministry’ (emphasis in original). John Paul II, Christifideles Laici: The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Washington DC: United States Bishops’ Conference, 1988), paragraph 23.
the Catholic Church, but officially it remains in the shadows of its official ministry. A glance at the index of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives an insight into the ambiguity with which lay ministry is viewed. Article 903 says,

> Lay persons who possess the required qualities can be admitted to the ministries of lector and acolyte. When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply for certain of their offices, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion in accord with the prescription of law.  

In Ireland, the contribution of lay people to local Catholic communities is substantial. Recent research from the Irish Central Statistics Office points to a high level of participation in the life of the Church and wider community by Catholics and other Christians. In the census survey of 2006, 113,000 people stated that they volunteered in the Catholic Church. This question did not establish in what roles they were involved, ministerial or other, but it is fair to assume that many of the respondents are involved in the liturgy, serve on parish councils and contribute to other areas of Church life. All too often these people, while involved in a parish ministry, view their role as necessary to the maintenance of parish life in view of the growing shortage of clergy. Some people, although they find taking a ministry role personally fulfilling, tend to regard it as ‘just helping Father’.

Major theological questions emerge about the nature and role of the ministerial service offered by lay people in the Church. Given the extent of the involvement of Catholics in ministry, particularly in a volunteer capacity, it is imperative to consider how this involvement can be understood from a theological standpoint. It is demeaning of the ministries and of the ministers if they are considered to be merely ‘helping out’ in the parish. In the light of this ambiguity regarding the place of laity within the official ministry of the Church it is

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10 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Dublin: Veritas, 1994), paragraph 903.

11 The Irish population has expanded to over four million. Over 500,000 of the population are involved in voluntary work, and 25% of those involved work with a religious group or Church: Central Statistics Office, ‘Press Release: 2006 Census of Population - Volume 13 – Religion’: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie), (29 January 2009). This question was not asked in subsequent censuses, so comparisons are not possible.
important to establish the authority by which laity are involved in such ministry, its Scriptural, dogmatic and theological foundations.\textsuperscript{12}

Traditionally the call to ministry was inextricably linked to the notion of ‘vocation’, which itself tended to be something that was reserved to those in ordained ministry or religious life.\textsuperscript{13} Lay people are more conscious today, in all states of life – married, single, ordained or religious life – that they too have a vocation or a call by God through baptism. However the inextricable link between ministry and baptism is not so evident in the call of the laity. This is largely because of the nascent state of the theology of lay ministry. Those lay people who exercise a function on behalf of the community are also in ministry. Catholics need to come to recognise that participation in ministry is part of the Royal Priesthood of all the baptised, and part of their call or vocation to participate in the building up of the reign of God. If those who are in lay ministry recognise the importance of their role as ministers to their community, this then, it can be argued, will give them a deeper recognition of the importance of their function. Ultimately the role of the Catholic laity has emerged from the ecclesiology of Vatican II and it is within this ecclesiology that it gains its legitimacy.

The recently-published \textit{Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults} includes an official recognition of a place for lay ministers within the Church:

\begin{quote}
The laity are in the unique position of being able directly to infuse culture and society with the Gospel. They also contribute to the vitality of the life of the Church through ministry as catechists and many other ministries. Most are volunteers, but some have been called to serve as salaried ministers. Working with their pastors, they
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} No attempt is made in this section to differentiate between lay people who participate in full time, part time or volunteer roles. The undertaking of ministry roles, whether in a paid or volunteer capacity, presents the challenge to ascertain the legitimacy of such roles as defined by the Magisterium. Most research in the area tends to focus on those in paid employment but the fundamental questions about legitimacy remain the same for all laity who undertake ministry roles.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{13} Paul Bernier, \textit{Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach} (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1992), 212-13 outlines how the under of vocation has changed since Vatican II.
\end{flushleft}
enable the Church to witness to Christian faith and love before the world.\textsuperscript{14}

3.2 Ecclesiology and \textit{Lumen Gentium} in Vatican II

The ways in which Church is defined is intrinsic to any exploration of ministry, and of lay ministry in particular, in this third millennium of the Christian community. The validity of this research project, therefore, requires that it clearly articulates the ecclesiology on which ministry is based. Ecclesiology has evolved during the centuries and rather than attempting to summarise this evolution, this chapter will concentrate on the ecclesiology of Vatican II and its subsequent development.\textsuperscript{15}

The foundational ecclesiological document of Vatican II, \textit{Lumen Gentium}, outlines how the Church can respond to the call of God to renew itself, so that, as the opening message of the Council says, ‘we may be found increasingly faithful to the Gospel of Christ.’\textsuperscript{16} The title of the document signals the enormous shift in perspective that it represents: \textit{Lumen Gentium}, ‘Light of the Nations’ refers not to the Church, but to Christ. As Bernier says, ‘Vatican II relativizes our understanding of Church. Only when the Church reflects Jesus is it truly the Church.’\textsuperscript{17} The Council understood the Church primarily as sacrament: ‘The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of community with God and of unity among all men [sic]’.\textsuperscript{18} This emphasis on the Church as sacrament, and thus a reflection of Jesus, is found in the first article of \textit{Lumen Gentium}, and represented a new emphasis on the Church’s mandate to be an instrument in furthering the reign of God in the world. This perspective places Christ firmly at the heart of the Church and of ministry, and

\textsuperscript{14} Irish Episcopal Conference, \textit{Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults}, 145.

\textsuperscript{15} It is outside the scope of this research project to review and evaluate all that has been written on ministry since Vatican II; what follows provides a general framework for the discussion of \textit{Lay Volunteer Ministry} in the Catholic Church. Many notable theologians who have written in the area are absent from this work but those whose work is used have drawn on the work of Rahner, Metz, Lane, Boff, to name but some. Congar, Schillebeeckx, Lakeland, Radamecher, Bernier are used, amongst others, because they make direct connections to lay ministry and education.


\textsuperscript{17} Bernier, \textit{Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach}, 203.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{LG}, paragraph 1.
signals that the focus of the Church is now towards the world, rather than a retreat from the world, which had been the dominant perspective since the Council of Trent (1545–63).\textsuperscript{19}

The period between the Council of Trent and Vatican II strongly emphasised the Church as ‘mystery’ (sacramentum): \textit{Lumen Gentium} marks a major transition from this position. Although its first chapter is entitled, \textit{The Mystery of the Church}, its primary focus is on the Church as the sacrament of Christ, heralding a new way forward for the Roman Catholic Church. As Kenan Osborne observes,

\begin{quote}
Without this mission and ministry of Jesus, there would be no mission and ministry in the Church; there would be no mission and ministry by individuals in the Church. Jesus is the fundamental or primordial infrastructure. All other missions and ministries in the Christian Community are sacraments of his mission and ministry.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

The second chapter of \textit{Lumen Gentium} confirms this change of perspective on Church. Rather than being a chapter on the hierarchy of the Church, as had been proposed in its first and second drafts, it is devoted to the ‘People of God’. Walter Abbot in his earliest (1966) edition of the Vatican II documents says in a note to this chapter,

\begin{quote}
This title, solidly founded in Scripture [1 Peter 2:10ff], met a profound desire of the Council to put greater emphasis on the human and communal side of the Church, rather than on the institutional and hierarchical aspects which had sometimes been overly emphasised for polemical reasons. While everything said about the People of God, as a whole is applicable to the laity, it should not be ... forgotten that the term “People of God” refers to the total community of the Church, including the pastors as well as other faithful.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} During the centuries between Trent and Vatican II the outer world was evaluated as being ‘secular’ and seen as a place of darkness, dominated by Calvinism or the Enlightenment. It was evil and the realm of Satan. Bernier, \textit{Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach}, 179. Several documents of Vatican II demonstrate a new direction for the Catholic Church which brought about more engagement with the world, not only SC and LG, but \textit{Unitatis Redintegratio}, Decree on Ecumenism, ‘a new departure, it is the first time an Ecumenical Council had expressed such an open approach to the other great faiths of the world.’

\textsuperscript{20} Osborne, \textit{Ministry}, 32.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{LG}, paragraph 1.
As Abbott implies in this note, it is not an accurate portrayal of the intentions of the Church Fathers to suggest that four hundred years of a theology that emphasised Church authority, with the sacred power of bishops and priests at its heart, had been abandoned.\textsuperscript{22} Another image used in the document, ‘Ecclesia peregrinans’ or ‘People on Pilgrimage’\textsuperscript{23} is a reminder of the final ‘consummation of the Christian journey when all shall be reconciled in Christ.’\textsuperscript{24} Rembert Weakland suggests that John XXIII was instrumental in having this image included in \textit{Lumen Gentium}, in recognition of the ultimate goal of the Christian journey.

The documents of Vatican II are essentially compromise documents. Among the Church Fathers there were many bishops who had responded to the call of John XXIII for ‘aggiornamento’. This phrase, literally meaning ‘bringing up to date’, captured the popular imagination as it was in tune with the openness and newness which was characteristic of 1960s Western culture. These bishops recognised that ‘more of the same’ would not serve the Church well, as a new millennium approached. Also among the Church Fathers, however, were bishops who were much more cautious about setting the Church on a radical new path which might have been seen to some as a betrayal of the many polemical battles fought since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The documents which emerged from Vatican II are the products of the many points of view of those bishops who attended. There is no one ‘theology of Vatican II’ but there is evidence of a seismic shift which, to continue the earthquake metaphor, is still delivering aftershocks more than fifty years later. \textit{Lumen Gentium} paved the way for theologians to explore new ways of conceiving the Church. In particular the concept of the ‘people of God’ generated new perceptions of how lay people are understood within the Church.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] \textit{LG}, Chapter VII.
\end{footnotes}
3.2.1 Dulles and the ‘community of discipleship’

Avery Dulles, in his seminal work written after the Council, outlined five models of Church, as institution, communion, herald, sacrament and servant.\(^{25}\) Building on *Lumen Gentium*, his work helped to broaden the perspective of the Church’s mission and organisation. In a later edition, published in 1991, Dulles added a sixth model, ‘community of disciples’.\(^{26}\) It is from this latter model that we get a sense of a theology of Vatican II which informs many of the changes which are experienced by Catholics in local parishes. ‘Community of disciples’ puts the spotlight on the Church’s mission and moves away from the institutional model which had been so prevalent. It also gives a sense that members of the Church are called to an involvement with the world, as were the disciples of Jesus. William Rademacher summarises some vital aspects of discipleship. He writes,

> Discipleship antecedes ministry and forms it; there are many kinds of discipleships, such as prophets, evangelizers, teachers, leaders. Discipleship is one thing; its outward form is another. There is no Christian Ministry apart from some form of discipleship. Discipleship is permanent. We can be dispensed from a specific form of discipleship such as episcopacy, priesthood, sisterhood or brotherhood. As long as we have faith in Jesus, we cannot be dispensed from discipleship itself.\(^{27}\)

This image of community lays a foundation for the ministry of the laity, as well as for the ministry of the ordained.

The liturgy today is the prime example of the shift of models of Church, from ‘institution’ to ‘community of disciples’ that impacts on most lay Catholics. Vatican II called expressly for ‘full, conscious and active participation’ in the liturgy.\(^ {28}\) The pre-Vatican Catholic experienced a Church where the priest ‘said Mass’, in Latin, without the active participation of the congregation, apart from altar boys. The use of the vernacular was the first experience of participation for many Catholics. This was not just a change of language: it enabled the laity to

\(^{28}\) *SC*, paragraph 14.
move from being observers to being real participants. Subsequent revision of
the Roman Missal brought about increasing lay involvement in the liturgy. The
visibility of lay people in the liturgy helps to give lay participants a sense of
community and involvement. Thus the ecclesiology of Vatican II can be real and
immediate to the average Catholic and it can encourage them to become actively
involved.

Since Vatican II the implications of a foundational ecclesiology that emphasises
that all ministry is derived from the mission of Jesus has been critical in
establishing a new direction for a theology of ministry. Any understanding of
the value of ministry within the Church today is based on its relation to the
mission and ministry of Jesus. It also highlights the participation of all Catholics
in that mission and ministry. In the Introduction to Lumen Gentium, Dulles
comments on the changed understanding of Church and ministry that this
document represents. He says that the Church is understood as having the
task of continuing the three-fold office of Christ, as priest, prophet and king. He
goes on to say, ‘and the Church as a whole, including the laity, has the total task
which may suitably be summarised under the three captions of witness,
ministry, and fellowship.’

The relationship between the ministry of the clergy and that of the laity is a
contentious one, but what is agreed is that all Christians, lay and clerical, are
called to common discipleship in the three-fold mission (tria Munera) of Christ,
as priest, prophet and king. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei
Verbum spells out that Christ gave to all the baptised a ‘share in his priestly

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29 Paul VI, Missale Romanum: Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Missal (1969), in Vatican
Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, The Vatican
Collection (Northport, New York: Costello, 1996). The 2010 revision of the Roman Missal
concentrated on issues of translation: it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the
ecclesial issues involved.

30 Avery Dulles, ‘Introduction: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium’ in The
Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter Abbott (Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), paragraph
12.
office of offering worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of humanity.\textsuperscript{31}

The source then of all discipleship is the call that each Christian receives at baptism to participate in the mission of God in Christ, through the Spirit. ‘All Christians are equal in this foundational and most sacred level of discipleship’.\textsuperscript{32}

The ecclesiology which emerged from Vatican II returned to Christ and the New Testament as the source for the understanding of ministry:

\begin{quote}
Now there are variety of gifts, but the same Spirit ... To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit. ... All these are activated by one and the same spirit, who allocates to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Corinthians 12: 4, 8, 11, NRSV)
\end{quote}

3.3 Ministry as Service in the New Testament

While the ecclesiology of Vatican II provides a framework, and in a sense the justification, for the development of lay ministry in the Church today, it is in the New Testament that we find the roots of ministry, whether lay or ordained. Paul Bernier, in his seminal book, \textit{Ministry in the Church: A historical and pastoral approach} begins his exploration in the New Testament period and writes,

\begin{quote}
Thus knowledge of [Christ’s] ministry is determinative for any true understanding of Christian ministry, whether it be the ministry of the community as a whole or any individual within it. Knowing what Christ did and what he is still doing lies at the heart of what the Church is about.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Thomas O’Meara writes, ‘The New Testament bestows ministry, describes the characteristics of ministry, but it does not define ministry nor proffer lists of job descriptions’.\textsuperscript{34} What we do find in the New Testament is the development of the idea of ministry as service. Jesus challenged those whom he called to a life of humble service because Jesus’ own defining characteristic of self-identification

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{DeiVerbum} \textit{Dei Verbum}, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, in \textit{Vatican Council II}, paragraph 34.
\bibitem{Osborne} Osborne, \textit{Ministry}, 541.
\bibitem{Bernier} Bernier, \textit{Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach}, 12.
\bibitem{O'Meara} Thomas F. O’Meara, \textit{Theology of Ministry}, Revised ed. (New York: Paulist, 1999), 16.
\end{thebibliography}
was ‘servant’. One passage in the gospels of both Matthew and Mark is the encounter of Jesus with the brothers James and John as they argue about the place they would have in the new kingdom (Mt 20:20-28; Mk 10:35-44). Jesus admonishes them, and reminds them that as his followers they are called to serve and not to vie for positions where they can Lord it over others. The English word used here has its origins in the Greek word *diakonia*, often translated ‘service’: it carries the sense of skilled support rather than being lower-class ‘servants’.

Jesus frequently used the word *diakonia*, in the context of calling to minister those whom he designates for a particular form of service, and also in the washing of the disciples’ feet in John 13:1-20. Thomas Rausch argues that Jesus also uses the word when speaking of someone that he designates for the service of leadership to the community. So there is a clear link between service and leadership. A considerable body of scholarship teases out the meaning and use of the word *diakonia* and much of it is concerned with arguments about how leadership was designated in the gospels and in the early Christian Communities.

Zeni Fox suggests that the use of the word *diakonia* was distinctive in its New Testament usage, and that it has its origins in serving at table (cf Acts 6:2). She suggests that this kind of service was, in New Testament times, a lowly occupation and seen as demeaning especially in the eyes of the Greeks. But Jesus places service at the heart of his proclamation of the reign of God and it is service that is a defining characteristic of ministry. John Collins, on the other hand, argues that the current interchangeable use of the words, *diakonia*, ministry, and service belies the etymology of the word as used in the New Testament. He challenges the view that ‘service’ in the context of the New

37 Rausch, ‘Ministry and Ministries’, 53.
38 John Collins summarises many of these arguments in *Deacons and the Church: Making Connections between Old and New* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2002), chapter 2.
Testament has the same meaning as the English word and he argues (based on textual evidence) that *diakonia* in New Testament times carried the sense of 'having a sacred mission'. He sees 'serving at table' as not being a correct translation: the text should be read as to serve in the 'vicinity of table'. In his exegesis of the text, Acts 6:1ff (the choice of seven men of good repute to 'serve'), he argues that what they are being called to, is to act as sacred agents of Christ, to preach the good news (as Stephen goes on to do). He argues that 'diakonia' is about preaching rather than just about 'serving at table' (in the way that Fox understands it) which has been the traditional exegesis of this passage. He concludes,

Lay ministry is the work of proclaiming the word to unbelievers and of nurturing the word among believers; it is the responsibility of certain individuals who have been selected for their suitability by the community but who have been inducted into their responsibilities with prayer and ritual by the incumbents of ministry.40

Vatican II directed the focus of the Church out into the world and so lay ministry will not be faithful to the gospel imperative of service if it does not challenge every single member of the community to follow Jesus in the mission he articulated in Luke 4:

> Jesus stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.' (Luke 4:1-6)

This articulation by Jesus of his own mission includes both the dimension of serving the needs of the marginalised and the proclamation of the Good News. No discussion of ministry, whether ordained or otherwise, is faithful to Jesus' vision if it is not firmly rooted in the concept of service. Fox summarises this vision:

> Therefore, those with a special role in building up the community, its ministers, are called upon to imitate his humble, self-effacing, other-

directed service to all. Even the exercise of authority is to be modelled on the one who girded himself and washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper.\footnote{Fox, \textit{New Ecclesial Ministry}, 213.}

In emphasising service as being the heart of ministry, Fox's intention is not focusing on \textit{what} is done in ministry but an interior stance from which all ministry is to be carried out. In the above quotation, Fox is writing of those who are in leadership but in fact all Christians are called to imitate Jesus' 'humble, self-effacing, other-directed service to all.' O'Meara writes about the position taken by Congar in the wake of Vatican II,

Congar sketched a model which would replace the bipolar division of clergy and laity: a circle with Christ and the Spirit as ground or power animating ministries in community. He continued: It is necessary to substitute for the linear scheme a scheme where the community appears as the enveloping reality \textit{within which} [italic in text] the ministries, eventually the institutional sacramental ministries, are placed as modes of service of what the community is called to be and to do.\footnote{Thomas O'Meara, 'The Ministry of Presbyters and the Many Ministries in the Church' in \textit{The Theology of Priesthood}, ed. Donald Goergen, Ann Garrido, and Benedict M. Ashley (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 10.}

In summary then, this short exploration of ecclesiology of the Council, in particular in relation to ministry, with its roots in the New Testament, lays the foundation for the following key characteristics of ministry:

- all disciples of Christ are called to share in the three-fold ministry of Christ of priest, prophet and king (Community Leader);
- ministry is about service (in the English sense of the word), and consequently those in ministry should minister from an interior stance of humility;
- ministers need the public endorsement of the present incumbents of the ministry.

\section*{3.4 The Role of the Laity in Ministry since Vatican II}

In the years since Vatican II, the Church has struggled to implement the key understandings of the Council. The translation from 'policy' to 'implementation'
is one every organisation struggles to achieve. As noted above, the Council did not lay out a blueprint, or even anything approaching it, for the development of lay ministry. The local Church experienced great change in the light of the Council but the legitimation of these changes is still debated. For the average parishioner, however, the expansion of the role of the laity in ministry within the Church community has been one of the effects of Vatican II that is most notable. The era when the priest did everything is rapidly disappearing, and people are no longer surprised to find that their spiritual, pastoral and liturgical needs are being met by a lay person. For example, on any given Sunday in Catholic Churches anywhere in the world, lay people will be involved in leading parts of the liturgy in a variety of different ways. The obvious source of all this change is Vatican II. Yet the development of lay liturgical ministries is not quite that simple.

The term ‘lay ministry’ is not found in Vatican II documents. In the appendices of both the Flannery and Abbott editions of the documents of Vatican II, under the word ‘ministers’ one is directed to headings under clergy, priests, etc. The distinctive role assigned to lay people by the Council is that of renewing the ‘temporal order’. Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, ‘is effusive in describing concrete tasks open to the lay people working in the secular sphere’. As outlined in Apostolicam Actuositatem, the tasks required of laity are related to works of care, education and social involvement in areas outside the direct ministries of the institutional Church. Put succinctly, the work of the ordained is considered ‘ministry’ while the work of lay people is termed ‘the apostolate’. It is puzzling therefore to understand how lay ministry within the Church has become so prevalent since the Council.

The development of lay ministry roles may have been influenced by the emphasis of the Council on the call of baptism, which as noted above is at the

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44 AA, paragraph 7.
heart of all ministry. As Hahnenberg writes, the overall vision of the Council ‘recalled the unity and equality of everyone in the Church and claimed that the basis of Christian service lies in Baptism’. He describes a model for the Church’s role in the world as concentric circles, ‘in which various ministries serve within a Church community that as a whole ministers to the world.’

The role of lay people is now embedded in the life of the Church, but still presents many dilemmas that remain to be addressed. For example, Osborne argues persuasively that false distinctions which characterise lay ministry as only analogically or spiritually aspects of the mission and ministry of Jesus, are at odds with *Lumen Gentium*. He goes on to say ‘these kinds of arguments, however, fly in the face of the theological position that Jesus’ mission and ministry are the root, primordial ground etc. of all Christian mission and ministry.’ *Lumen Gentium* has laid the foundations for the development of lay ministries within the Church. Nevertheless, the relative positions of lay and ordained ministries in the Church remain an area of huge debate. This argument and others present real problems to the future development of ministry.

It is not the intention of this chapter to try to summarize all the outstanding theological debates in the theology of ministry, but certain questions need to be explored in order to make explicit the theology underpinning the questions that lie at the heart of this research. Are lay people permitted to take ministry roles in the Church community only because of the increasing shortage of priests? Or, as is often suggested, is ordained ministry the norm, and lay peoples’ participation in ministry accepted merely for pragmatic reasons? Schillebeeckx crystallises the issue as follows:

The present theological disagreement and obscurity lies in the fact that on the one hand the supreme leadership of the ‘universal Church’ has made it clear beyond all doubt that it refuses to recognise male and female pastoral workers as ministers of the Church, while on the other hand in local communities the believing people with its presbyters who are already there in practice

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48 In the following quotation Schillebeeckx is writing specifically of full time pastoral workers but the issues have relevance for all who participate in ministry.
recognise these pastores as de facto ministers (which used to be the essential feature of ordinatio). Thus from the point of view of the Church’s theology the situation is very obscure, though in terms of Church order it is extremely clear.49

The issue as outlined by Schillebeeckz is even more complex when related to volunteer ministers, as distinct from professional lay ministers. Because the lay person who reads at Mass is not seen by many as exercising ministry, they often understand their ministry as derivative from the ordained ministry rather than an expression of their own baptismal calling. This understanding is not reflective of the understanding of ministry which is found in Lumen Gentium.

The primary role of the ordained is the proclamation of the Word, ‘For since nobody can be saved who has not first believed, it is the first task of the priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all men [sic].’50 It is clear, as Schillebeeckz says, that this primary function of the ordained is being carried out by the non-ordained so the problem of the place of lay ministry goes to the very heart of the priesthood.

O’Meara views the expansion of lay ministry as a consequence of Vatican II that saw a change of expectation by Catholics of ‘what a Church and its ministry and liturgy should be’.51 These expectations include a vibrant local parish community where many people, clergy and lay, assume roles that bring about the building up of the community which in turn enables the Church’s mission to the world.

Church, as the people of God, is to continue to implement the Vatican Council’s mandate to all Catholics to live out their baptismal calling, then there is need for the recognition that, as Osborne puts so well, ‘Jesus himself is neither cleric nor lay. Jesus’ mission is itself neither clerical nor lay. Jesus’ ministry is itself neither clerical nor lay.’52

In order for ministry, as properly exercised by the laity, to become an accepted form of the life of the Church, the theology of ministry that recognises the ministry of the laity needs to become a recognised part of Church teaching.

50 Presbyterorum Ordinis, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, paragraph 4.
51 O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 141.
52 Osborne, Ministry, 32.
The continuing lack of clarity around the role of laity as official ministers within the Church can be found in recent documents from Rome. In the 1997 *Instruction: Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests’ Sacred Ministry*, promulgated by the Congregation for the Clergy, it is clear that the ordained ministry is considered the only official ministry of the Catholic Church.\(^53\) The Instruction consistently makes the distinction between the role of ordained as sacred and pastoral while the realm of the laity is in the world and remains ‘secular’.\(^54\) It would be naive to suggest that this distinction between the vocation of the ordained minister and the ordinary layperson is not found in the documents of Vatican II. Paragraph 31 of *Lumen Gentium* states, ‘By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will’.\(^55\) There is a clear distinction between laity and those in Holy Orders who are principally involved in ‘sacred ministry’. This position has been reiterated several times, but it leaves an enormous chasm between clergy and lay people, at least at a theoretical level. Paul Lakeland (basing his work on the theology of Congar and Schillebeeckx) suggests that a new starting point for the discussion may be a way forward out of this current impasse: ‘it is the clergy relative to the laity, not the laity relative to the clergy that is in need of explanation.’\(^56\)

It is clear that there remains in the official Church position a sharp distinction between the ministry of the laity and the ministry of the ordained. While this may be technically correct it does not end discussion about the relation of clergy and other faithful. This difficulty needs to be acknowledged because it is such a fundamental issue in the development of ministry. Pope Francis, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel, goes to the heart of the issue when he writes,

Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the People of God, the minority ordained ministers are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the

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\(^{54}\) See Rausch, “Ministry and Ministries”.

\(^{55}\) *LG*, paragraph 31.

\(^{56}\) Lakeland, *Liberation of the Laity*, 130.
Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision making. Even if many are now involved in lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors.57

This lengthy quotation is significant under many headings, but with respect to the core concern of this thesis, its primary significance lies in the fact that Francis sees lay ministry as grounded in baptism and confirmation and at the service of the community and the proclamation of the gospel beyond the confines of the Church. These fundamental aspects of lay ministry underpin the following analysis of the characteristics of ministry. This quotation also is significant as the term ‘lay ministry’ is used in a Vatican document.

### 3.5 Definition and the Characteristics of Ministry

Lay ministry has deep rooted origins in the tradition of the Church, and while Vatican II did not establish lay ministries within the Church, it did lay some foundation for the development of ministry. In view of this, this section examines what constitutes lay ministry in the Church today. It would be helpful to begin with a definition of lay ministry, or even ministry, but this presents difficulties, as has been seen. Useful in this context is the quotation from Collins given above and repeated here as it brings together many of the dimensions of ministry that are pertinent to this thesis:

Lay ministry is the work of proclaiming the word to unbelievers and of nurturing the word among believers; it is the responsibility of certain individuals who have been selected for their suitability by the community but who have been inducted into their responsibilities with prayer and ritual by the incumbents of ministry.58

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57 *EG*, paragraph 102.
58 Collins, *Are All Christians Ministers?*, 40.
That lay ministry is directed towards the proclamation of the word (in both word and deed) is clear in Collins’ definition. It also recognises the importance of mandating by the community and the official incumbents of ministry, since it has a public dimension. A further description helps to clarify some specific issues at the heart of an evolving lay ministry:

As non-ordained persons ministering in a formal leadership role in the Church, ecclesial lay ministers may be paid, or volunteers; they may possess an academic qualification from a university or college or have some kind of certification from a formation programme; they are serving in a ministerial area ... which is recognised and supported by the parish community; they are serving in a committed and stable manner which may be specified by a contract or agreement and/or some type of commissioning by the community.59

O’Meara’s definition, which follows below, contains many of the same elements, but he omits any mention of formal mandating (although it could be seen as implied within the public element) which both Collins and Fox see as essential. He writes,

Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus flowing from the Spirit’s charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to proclaim, serve and realise the kingdom of God.60

O’Meara names six characteristics of ministry in the development of the early Christian community as being at the heart of ministry. These characteristics, while not definitive, help to tease out some of the main characteristics of lay ministry as it has evolved. Ministry is: (1) doing something; (2) for the advent and presence of the kingdom of God; (3) in public; (4) on behalf of a Christian community; (5) as a gift received in faith at baptism and ordination; and (6) ‘as an activity with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial actions’.61

59 This quote was used in a Focus description paper written by Zeni Fox in preparation for a theology colloquium on lay ecclesial ministry: see Zoila D. Diaz, ‘Baptism and Baptised in Church Leadership’ in Together in God’s Service: Toward a Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry: Papers from a Colloquium (Washington, DC; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on the Laity, Subcommittee on Lay Ministry, 1998), 52.
60 O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 150 (italics in original).
61 O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 141.
O’Meara suggests that the emphasis within the early Church was very focused on action and on the ordinary, rather than any sacral language of being set apart.62 The emphasis on ‘doing’ is significant when we consider the way ministry has expanded since Vatican II. Lay people who have become involved in ministry today are usually responding to a need for some specific service within the community. Many of those who volunteer to be, for example, a Minister of the Word or Eucharistic minister, often do not recognise themselves as ministers, but as people who see a job that needs to be done and do it.63 In many ways this ‘doing’ orientation of ministry is ‘the’ defining characteristic of those who offer themselves for lay ministry today.

O’Meara is clear that it would not be correct, however, to define all service by members of the Christian community, as ministry: ‘when everything is ministry, nothing is ministry’.64 Hence the importance of O’Meara’s third characteristic, that ministry has some kind of public quality and is recognised by the community as being done on its behalf. Having a public recognition of ministry has traditionally been an important part of the ministry of the ordained. Ordination ceremonies are public events, presided over by the bishop who mandates the newly-ordained to exercise ministry on behalf of the community. Osborne argues for the importance of some form of ‘credentialing’ or public recognition for those who undertake lay ministry within the Christian community:

The reason for this credentialing lies in a vocation as communio. The community has a say in the accepting of a given member into a specific mission and ministry, and after the community’s discernment process, this is celebrated in a ritual of institution. Lay status, as a result is not a private issue, but rather a choice made, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by an individual, but also a choice made, under the guidance of the same Spirit, by that community in which the lay person will serve. Like priestly vocation,

62 O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 142.
63 One of the issues parishes face is that the common practice is for people to be asked to volunteer for certain ministries rather than to be called forth which is more theologically correct. The mandate may follow in a formal ceremony.
64 O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 142 (italics in original).
lay vocation is a two-way street, requiring both the individual’s assent and the assent of the community.\textsuperscript{65}

The Christian call to ministry is rooted in baptism but it is in the public acceptance by the community that the individual Christian acts on its behalf in carrying out a specific role that would define it as ministry.

\subsection*{3.5.1 The essence of priesthood}

The final characteristic of ministry, as named by O’Meara, ‘as an activity with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial actions’,\textsuperscript{66} is critical to the development of an understanding of the way that ministry is evolving. Often the limits put on lay ministry, as opposed to ordained ministry, may come from the belief that ordination confers an ontological character upon the ordained that fundamentally sets the ordained man apart. This notion of ordination places the emphasis on a way of ‘being’ rather than a way of ‘doing’ which is at odd with O’Meara’s first characteristic of ministry which emphasises its functional character rather than ontological ‘being’.

Rademacher outlines the historical development of the idea of the ontological nature of priesthood and by extension, of ministry. He suggests that this idea gradually evolved from the New Testament period when ministry was conceived as functional rather than ontological, to the time of the Council of Trent where the function was no longer central to ministry. However, as he writes, ‘the Church has often ordained ministers, who, in practice (function), could not preach or teach or minister to the sick or reconcile with pastoral skill. ... Because of this emphasis on ontology, priests were ordained even if they were soon going to die’.\textsuperscript{67} While arguing against a strictly ontological view of ordained ministry, Rademacher also advocates in favour of some ontological language. He states that, for example, consciously being a Christian is more important than just doing Christian acts. He relates the state of being Christian

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{65} Osborne, \textit{Ministry}, 598.
\textsuperscript{66} O’Meara, \textit{Theology of Ministry}, 141.
\end{footnotesize}
to the necessity of striving for union with God and thus a way of life, a way of being and consequently an ontological category.

Discussion of the ontological nature of the ordained ministry is one of the foremost issues in the development of lay ministry within the Church. In the local situation, comparisons inevitably are made between the lay pastoral worker and the priest who work side-by-side in a parish. While the ordained priest exercises some sacramental functions of the ministry, he and the pastoral worker may serve the community in many diverse ways that enables building up of the reign of God. For the ordinary parishioner, the ontological distinctions between them may be moot, as he or she will have their pastoral needs met by either the priest or the pastoral worker, depending on the circumstances. The important changes in the understanding of ministry since Vatican II have been summarised by McBrien:

> The Second Vatican Council corrected much of the trend towards separating service and spiritual authority by equating the Church with the whole people of God, by insisting that all the baptised participate somehow in the one priesthood of Christ and by emphasising service rather than status in ordained ministry.\(^68\)

The above discussion highlights some of the issues related to the development of lay ministry in the years since Vatican II; it does not attempt to resolve the outstanding questions. The continuous stream of books and articles being written about ministry and ordained priesthood are testimony to the ongoing nature of the discussion.\(^69\) Any attempt to say a final word on these issues would

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be presumptuous, but the words of Karl Rahner, written forty years ago, remind us of the essential truth that as Christians we are first and foremost children of God:

The power of being the child of God and the right to receive grace is greater even if also more general than the power of making this grace present with the ministerial guarantee of authenticity.⁷⁰

In all discussions on ministry one must always return to the centrality of seeing it as serving the community and the gospel. For all who undertake a ministry role, the fundamental impetus needs to be one of diakonia. The vision of Jesus who said ‘I come among you as one who serves’ (Luke 22:27) is paramount.

3.6 Lay Ministry – Who is Called to Minister?

On a practical level the answer to this question is clear. No matter what country or local Catholic Community one visits, lay people are to be found exercising roles which help to maintain and develop the Christian community. As O’Meara writes, ‘The entry of those who not ordained to the priesthood into public ministry is a remarkable phenomenon and has largely escaped the analysis of religious sociologists.’⁷¹ Some of these developments emerged as result of the liturgical renewal, in particular the introduction of the vernacular, which was mandated by the Council. However, the proliferation of lay ministry roles has been so spontaneous and all-embracing that it is better seen to be the work of the Spirit.

Hahnenberg, in the conclusion to his book, A New Vision for New Ministries, writing out of North American context, says


⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, cited in Bernier, Ministry in the Church, 288.
⁷¹ O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 9.
The changing shape of parish ministry in the United States is just one highly visible element in a dynamic, worldwide expansion in which more and more baptised believers are taking more and more responsibility for furthering the mission of Jesus in the world. It is unclear where this expansion will lead. A new form of ministry is emerging, a new ordering of Christian service and ecclesial relationships is taking shape, growth, change, and new life are the promise of the Church's future, just as they are the goal of ministry. Hahnerberg sums up comprehensively the present situation of ministry within his context. This research project gives an indication as to whether the same hopeful outlook prevails in an Irish context. Despite many questions and much uncertainty, lay ministry has become a reality within the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. It is at the level of local parish communities that the reality of lay ministry is most evident. Given the hierarchical nature of the Church, local communities will not resolve many of the theological questions of order but the local Church is being shaped by a new presence of lay people who are at the heart of the pastoral reality of these communities.

Osborne, in commenting on the *Instruction: Some questions regarding collaboration of non-ordained faithful in priests’ sacred ministry*, writes that this document gives an inadequate response to the many theological difficulties which emerge from the current development of lay ministries within the Church. He continues,

> The Bishops during Vatican II and the canonists in their formulation of the new Code engaged in intensive discussions on these same issues. In both sets of discussions, no resolution was attained. The theological resolution of this issue of the common priesthood of all believers and its relationship to the ministerial priesthood was left to future investigation.

The theological issues vis-à-vis the ministry of lay and ordained, such as the understanding of ordination as bringing about an ontological change, remain unanswered. It is likely however, that the concrete reality of lay ministry within the Church will ultimately force such theological questions, and the legal

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questions left hanging by the present code of canon law, to be answered in new ways.

3.7 The Local Church

If theological questions remain to be answered by the universal Church, the development of ministry within and for the local Church will continue. It is evident that in the day-to-day life of the parish, the ministry of the laity is intrinsic to the continuation of the mission of Jesus. Much of what is happening at present in the area of ministry may have evolved in an ad hoc way but it is pervasive and it is difficult to imagine that it will disappear. William Rademacher writes that it is helpful to concentrate on the Church ‘from below’ rather than the Church ‘from above’ because it is here that the Church of the future will be enfleshed.74 He goes on to argue that Lumen Gentium allows for an understanding of Church that is rooted in the local community, and quotes from the document:

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful ... united with their pastors, are themselves called Churches in the New Testament ... In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, ‘that by the flesh and blood of the Lord’s Body the whole brotherhood may be joined together,’ ... In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living far from one another, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church gathers together.75

The significance placed on the local Church by Vatican II is important against the background of some efforts that have subsequently been made to re-emphasise the regnum et sacerdotium rather than the ecclesia or people of God.76 The centralisation of authority and power in the hierarchical Church sometimes militates against the development of lay ministry at a local level. However, if, as previously suggested, the development of lay ministry is the

74 Rademacher, Lay Ministry, 92.
75 LG, paragraph 50 (quoted in Rademacher, Lay Ministry, 92).
76 Osborne, Ministry, 608.
work of the Spirit, than it will indeed thrive and develop and shape the Church of the future.

As people become involved in lay ministry, it is not dogmatic questions that emerge but also spiritual. There is a need for an underlying spirituality that will nourish the many lay people who undertake ministry. In writing of the emerging spiritualities of ministry, O’Meara suggests that people in different ministries may have diverse spiritualities and he goes on to challenge the idea of a general lay spirituality:

There can be no spirituality of baptised ministers that is primarily and mainly ‘lay’ and only secondarily and condescendingly ministerial. One cannot imply that reading at the Eucharist is a secular activity because one is married and works for a living; any exclusion of the baptised from a sacral realm or rites and vessels is anti-Christian. The baptised can read, organise the liturgy, and distribute the Eucharist, while the Eucharistic prayer in its words is clearly the work of the entire community through its ordained leader.⁷⁷

O’Meara writes with great passion in this piece and he clearly demonstrates the essential nature of the ministries carried out by lay people in their communities. He recognises that lay ministry and ordained ministry are related. As he understands it, it is more important that ministry is offered to the community than concentrating on the ordained (or otherwise) status of the person who exercises the ministry.

Throughout this chapter, the importance of ministry being anchored in a sense of service was argued. It bears reiteration in writing of the ministry of those involved in volunteer ministry in their parish community. To be a minister in one’s parish is not a badge of honour, but a call to humble, commissioned service in promotion of the reign of God. Humility is important for all those who are in ministry because it involves ‘divine power’, and all power can be abused. Bernier suggests that the extension of ministry to lay people after the Council ‘was (and is) due not primarily to the shortage of priests, but to a deeper

⁷⁷ O’Meara, Theology of Ministry, 237.
understanding of the dignity of all the baptised’. It is this dignity that should inform the spirituality of all those who undertake ministry.

3.7.1 Spirituality and Lay Ministry

Robert Wicks’ *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers: perspectives for the 21st Century*, alongside the first volume in this series, provides a comprehensive overview of the central role of spirituality in the exercise of ministry. These volumes, along with works of other authors who deal specifically with spirituality in relation to adult education, help to illustrate how extensive this topic is and the challenge it presents for a thesis such as this. The limited discussion of the subject is not due to any lack of appreciation of its importance on the part of this researcher, but because it is outside the central focus of the thesis question.

3.8 Conclusion

The nature and place of lay ministry in the Church is a difficult and complex issue, and this chapter has not attempted to resolve the many issues which surround it. The importance of the role of lay people has been stressed. The chapter has considered some aspects of ecclesiology and the nature of ministry that have direct bearing on lay ministry, particularly in the light of Vatican II. Key issues that face lay ministry in the Church are, in particular, the challenge presented by a theology which sees the ordained minister as set apart because of the ontological nature of ordination. A developing ecclesiology gives some

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direction, at least potentially, particularly the sense of Church which recognises both the hierarchal and community dimensions.

That lay ministry will continue to be a vital part of Church life into the future is taken for granted in this chapter. There is a need, however, to move from a tacit form of acceptance for lay ministry, towards a model that is both structured and mandated is seen as essential for the future of the Church. All ministry, whether lay or ordained, needs to be carried out from a desire to serve the believing community; this disposition will ensure that all ministers will be reflecting the ministry of Jesus, who came as ‘one who serves’.

For lay people to become committed and competent in ministry, education is essential. For lay ministers need to recognise the dignity of their ministry, as sharing in the building up of the community and as a participation in the mission of the Church which is to carry on the mission of God, in Christ and in the Spirit. Most lay volunteer ministers have had little or no theological training since their school days and no access to what would help them develop a mature understanding of their role. This results in a diminution of their understanding of their ministry.

In the proliferation of writing on ministry in the last forty years, there is a new and exciting understanding of the theology and spirituality of ministry. The place of education, however, in this development has been largely ignored: this is the issue taken up in the next chapter. What kind of education is needed to ensure that lay ministry does not become a mere convenience in this time of diminishing numbers of clergy, but a real and vital contribution ensuring the Church continues to share in the mission and ministry of Jesus to all peoples?
Chapter Four

The Centrality of Adult Faith Development
for the Future of The Catholic Church in Ireland

In the light of the exceptional circumstances facing the Catholic Church in Ireland, as outlined in the first chapter, there is no longer the possibility of assuming that things can go on as before. The Church at present could be described as being under siege. There is a sense of paralysis, as one revelation after another regarding abuse perpetrated in the past has left the hierarchy and other religious leaders coping with an unprecedented situation. Understandably, leaders are constantly focused on dealing with the latest immediate crisis, and thus there is little focus on the long term view, which requires critical reflective and actively-involved Catholics.

This chapter proposes that, while immediate issues cannot be ignored, the nurturing of ordinary Catholics in their faith is a pressing and urgent need. The gospel imperative of living and preaching the good news remains a challenge, even as people struggle to come to terms with the horrendous crimes that have been laid at the Church’s door. This chapter will examine religious education for adults, in particular those who in a voluntary capacity are contributing to maintain and develop structures within parish communities. As noted earlier, the major hypothesis underpinning this thesis is that the faith development of adults is fundamental to a renewed hope and dedication of members of the Church community, and has the potential to enable growth in people’s own lives, and in their understanding of their mission as baptised Christians. The Second Vatican Council was the catalyst for a seismic shift in the way lay people contribute to parish life, as discussed in the previous chapter. While this is now accepted as standard, the necessary educational background required for such involvement has not been put in place, despite many Church documents stressing the importance of such education.\(^1\) The *General Directory for\

\(^1\) For example, Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Dublin: Veritas, 1998); International Council for Catechesis, *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines* (Slough: St Paul, 1990); Irish Episcopal
Catechesis names one of the particular tasks of adult catechesis as encouraging adults ‘to assume responsibility of the Church’s mission and to be able to give Christian witness in society.’

This chapter is structured around two major issues undergirding education, the philosophical and psychological perspectives involved.

First, it explores how philosophical questions influence and direct the kind of education that is, or could be, offered to lay volunteer ministers, that is, those lay people who are involved in public, credentialed ministries in their local community. An examination of the terminology used to describe faith education within a Church context will help to illuminate the philosophical position from which this education is offered, and illustrate the importance of adult educational methodologies.

Secondly, research in the area of developmental psychology will be identified as a key influencing factor on education and especially within this context, adult faith development. Emphasis will be placed on theories concerning the development of the self and faith development. This section will also ask how developmental theory can be of benefit in the light of the current crisis in the Irish Catholic Church, and thus provide some insight into the ways in which appropriate adult faith development can be offered to lay volunteers in ministry.

4.1 Philosophy and Theory in Adult Faith Development (AFD)

Why educate? This question, which is so fundamental to what happens in the educational process, is rarely asked, except by theorists in the sometimes rarefied atmosphere of educational institutions. However, if true educators, including those in the Church, do not explore why they do what they do, then...
they are in danger of betraying the very job they seek to fulfil. Teaching has been described as an action whose ‘intention [is] to bring about learning’, or ‘the intentional facilitation of learning’. These are neat definitions of what education might mean from the perspective of a teacher, but they beg many questions, including why one believes learning is a worthwhile activity, or what the learner believes about learning.

Further questions then emerge about the nature and content of learning itself. In an important book, *The Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education*, Elias and Merriam ‘systematically present a number of philosophical positions and their spokespersons that shape adult education practice today’. This exposition helps to illustrate the ‘why’ of education for adults, and in the process uncovers presuppositions that are taken for granted when education is proposed as essential for the future of society or Church. Elias and Merriam identify six distinct schools of adult education, each of which sees the nature and purpose of education differently. In their explication of these schools of thought, they make clear that each of them is appropriate within a given context. A number of these schools of thought can be easily identified in adult faith education. Prominently,

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3 Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom* (New York: Random House, 1970). explores this question in relation to school education, but it can equally be asked of education in any sphere.


7 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore each of these schools of thought but even the titles help to illustrate the complexity of the starting point for the education of adults: liberal adult education; progressive adult education; behaviourist adult education; humanist adult education; radical and critical adult education; and analytic philosophy of adult education. Faith educators often began using other starting points.

8 Jeff Astley, in *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education*, examines some of the particular concerns in the philosophy of education when religious or faith education is being discussed. Some educationalists such as Hirst believe that any religious education, whose aim is the nurture people in the Christian community, is not education because ‘the presentation of particular commitments as if they were radically disputable on rational grounds is seen as anti-intellectual.’ Paul H. Hirst, ‘Education, Catechesis and the Church School’, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 3, No. 3 (1981), 87. Hirst’s assertion can be challenged within the context of children, of whom he writes here, but the education of adults normally includes mature people who are eager to challenge any Church teacher with what they are presented. A ‘shared praxis’ model of adult faith development, proposed below, is essential dialogical.
the emphasis on the pursuit of learning is understood as essentially being about
developing an intellectual understanding of the faith (liberal adult education, as
defined by Elias and Merriam). There is a primacy given to the intellectual
element in faith, ‘I believe’, since ‘understanding comes by the power of the
intellect guided by revelation and the Church’s teaching’. As Aquinas wrote,
‘Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth at
the command of the will moved by the grace of God.’

This emphasis on reason as a central element of faith is particularly important
for adult Christians, at they strive to answer to the questions posed by living the
Christian life.

Within the Catholic Church, adults have become the focus of faith education in
recent decades. Thus the General Catechetical Directory (1971) states that,

Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of
an adherence that is fully responsible, must be the chief form of
catechesis. All other forms, which are indeed necessary, are in some
way related to it.

This statement marks a significant shift in direction for the Catholic Church post
Vatican II, from a predominantly child-centred education to a greater balance
between the religious education of adults and the religious education of
children. (Prior to this period, the Church always had some adult education,
but primarily focused on education for ordained ministry.) The Church has
gradually come to recognise, along with society in general, that education is
pivotal to the on-going development of the individual and of the community.
This trend is particularly discernible from the 1970s onwards.

9 Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision, 2nd ed.
(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 58.
10 St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Q.6, Art.2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican
11 GCD, paragraph 20.
12 In the Vatican Council itself the beginnings of an appreciation of the importance of
religious education for adults can be identified, see Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration
on Christian Education, articles 10-12 which stresses the importance of higher education
for lay people.
13 The GCD statement does not mark the beginning of adult education in the Catholic
Church, but from the early 1970s onwards the average Catholic parish began to devote
some of its energies to adults in a systematic way not seen before.
became imperative in the years after Vatican II, as the various Council documents requiring change were issued, in turn, and clergy and laity alike endeavoured to both understand and implement them.

The General Catechetical Directory issued a strong mandate for adult faith development in its 1971 statement, and since then the catechesis of adults has moved into the main stream of the Catholic Church’s educational endeavours. In 1999, the Council for Research and Development conducted a survey of the nature and extent of adult religious in Ireland. This research concluded that,

Adult religious education in Ireland today is vibrant enough to profit from a degree of change. This is a vigorous, rapidly growing sector with roots all around the country.  

This conclusion was reached in 1999, but many of the initiatives reviewed in that research are now defunct. The current situation of adult education faith development, while there has been expansion in some areas, would suggest that this conclusion did not bring about the change that was envisaged, despite a number of very important developments. Notable among these was the establishment of the office of a resource person for the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development at the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and publication of Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland.

4.1.1 Terminology and Adult Faith Development

Before proceeding further in considering philosophical questions underpinning adult faith development, some terminology needs to be explored. It is important to trace some of the terms used in the official documents of the Church as the way something is named reflects beliefs about the underlying task involved. Vatican II documents tend to use ‘catechesis’ as the general term for handing on the faith to the next generation within the Christian community. It is defined in Catechesi Tradendae: Catechesis in Our Time as,

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the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name,[(3)] and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ.\textsuperscript{15}

However, a further distinction needs to be made between evangelisation, catechesis and religious instruction (religious education). One Vatican document clarifies this as follows:

There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message. ... The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school.\textsuperscript{16}

This quotation is referring to the particular context of the Catholic school, but it recognises that in some educational settings one cannot make the assumption that all participants are receiving the teaching of the Church in the same way. Where adults are concerned this distinction is even more important, since adults are capable of making their own decisions about the level at which they wish to participate in an education process.

The conversation about terminology is complex, and in Vatican documents there is a notable preference for terminology which assumes that adherence to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church is the desired outcome for the educational process. Groome makes an interesting point about the term ‘catechesis’ which helps highlight some of the difficulty of using the term when working with adults:

The word \textit{catechesis} is such a ‘Church word’ that the tendency will be (and often is) to draw upon only the ‘sacred sciences’ and especially theology and scripture studies only.\textsuperscript{17}

In order to employ an inclusive understanding of what is involved in the enabling adult to come to an adult faith, the term ‘adult faith development’ is

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{CT}, paragraph 1.
\textsuperscript{17} Groome, \textit{Christian Religious Education}, 27.
used in *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* as follows:

‘faith development’ as an all-inclusive term, allows us to treat together, under one heading, when appropriate, all the necessary and nuanced meanings that terms such as initial proclamation, initiation and catechesis, for example, suggest but cannot individually contain. Those who are charged with faith development, therefore, within a particular Christian community whether at parish or inter-parish level, at deanery, diocesan, regional or national level, will need … to be adequately educated and trained in discerning roles, what forms of faith development are necessary, appropriate and of value for particular individuals, groups and communities.18

This term draws attention to the fact that faith has to continue to grow and that for adults to constantly ‘develop’ their faith, as, ‘Adults cannot be content with primary school religious knowledge. Doubts and difficulties about faith nearly always come from misunderstanding or lack of adult knowledge about our religion.’19 To help adults to have a robust faith to deal with the challenges of life, adult faith development needs to draw upon a wide range of sources, including the life experience of the adults in the group such as human sciences including psychology, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.20

Pope Francis advocates this breadth of sources for evangelisation (and by extension for adult faith development) when he writes,

> A theology – and not simply a pastoral theology – which in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups.21

The term ‘faith development’ is used by developmental theorists, in particular, James Fowler, to denote the changes and consequently the faith stages that

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18 Irish Episcopal Conference, *Share the Good News*, paragraph 64.
19 Irish Episcopal Conference, *Sharing the Good News*, paragraph 68.
20 Adult education as a discipline strongly emphasizes the importance of recognizing the experience of adults as they come to education. This is one of the fundamental tenets of the discipline since the seminal work by such people as Malcolm Shepherd Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*, Revised and updated ed. (New York: Cambridge, 1980), and Stephen D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986).
21 *EG*, paragraph 133.
adults can go through during their lives as they try to come to terms with the challenges they face. The insights of theorists like Fowler are important in the training of adult educators, as they can help people in navigating their own faith journey, while recognising that Fowler’s theory is about the structures of all faith as distinct from religious faith. (Later in this chapter, a fuller explanation of faith development in this context will be explored.)

There are occasions when the use of the word *catechesis* is entirely appropriate. Adults who decide to become members of the Catholic Church are initiated through a process known as *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). The intention is to socialise people into the tradition and rituals of the Catholic community. In this situation it can be taken for granted that the adults involved are freely submitting themselves to becoming members of the Church. In the process known at the ‘catechumenate’, future Church members are given ‘that specific formation by which the adult, converted to the faith, is brought to the confession of baptismal faith during the Easter Vigil’.

In this thesis the term ‘adult faith development’ is used to denote the education of adults within the local Catholic community, in preference to ‘catechesis’, ‘religious education’ or ‘religious formation’. Adult faith development is chosen since it denotes a dynamic process which is reflective of the ongoing development which continues in adults throughout their lives. This choice is cognate with the presumption that adults are not empty vessels to be filled, but active participants in any education experience. To be effective, the educational process should meet adults in their life situation and encourage reflection and action in light of this process. As Groome asserts,

> Assuming that the whole Church teaches and learns together, then, graced by presence of the Holy Spirit, there are three sources of such teaching and learning (or what Raymond Brown calls “organs of teaching and belief”24) within the Christian Church. These are the teaching of the official Magisterium, the research of theologians and

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22 The RCIA has a major educational focus within local communities, but as an initiatory rather than ongoing programme it falls outside the scope of this research.
23 *GCD*, paragraph 256.
scripture scholars, and the discernment of the people (which has officially been called the \textit{sensus fidelium}), or the sense of the people.\textsuperscript{25}

An educational process therefore that encourages a conversation between all three sources of teaching is one that has the potential to be truly ‘developmental’ of the life of faith of the Christian. This attitude understands adult education to be the task of facilitating adults in reflecting on and understanding their own religious faith, so that they can freely choose to follow the Christian way of life within the Catholic community. An underlying assumption is that participation will be freely chosen. Vatican II affirmed the right of all people to religious freedom, holding that everyone ‘has a duty, and therefore a right to seek the truth in matters religious’, and ‘as the truth is discovered, it is by personal assent that men [sic] are to adhere to it.’\textsuperscript{26} The term ‘adult faith development’ affirms this freely-chosen environment.

\textbf{NB:} The proposal for this research project, and the initial stages of the field research, came at a time when the term was coming into common usage. The information sent to interviewees employed the term ‘faith formation’, however. A decision had to be made to standardise terminology in order to avoid confusion: interviews therefore began with a conversation on terminology, so that there was clarity about what was being discussed.

The importance of freedom in adult faith development cannot be overestimated. Elizabeth Johnson explains the importance of freedom in the Christian belief system as follows:

\begin{quote}
Humanly speaking, a genuine gift is given freely, out of love and not out of necessity; its reception is occasion for gratitude and joy. In the divine freedom to be present to all creatures, empowering them to birth and rebirth in the antagonistic structures of reality, the Spirit is intelligible as the first gift, freely given and giving.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Johnson’s summary of the importance of freedom in God’s dealing with human beings is a challenge to all educators to educate in a way that it consistent with

\textsuperscript{25} Groome, \textit{Christian Religious Education}, 200.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Dignitatis Humanae}, Declaration on Religious Liberty, paragraph 3.
this ideal, empowering people, ‘to birth and rebirth in the antagonistic structures of reality’.

When the framework of faith development theory is being introduced, the use of the term ‘adult faith development’ does present a challenge. As it has become the accepted term within the Irish context in the light of its use in the National Directory for Catechesis: Share the Good News, it is employed throughout this research to denote the education of adults within the local Catholic community. The nuances of the term, as Fowler uses it, will be addressed in the discussion on faith development theory below. There is really no terminology that adequately describes the task of enabling Christian adults to explore their faith in manner that is appropriate to their status as mature people. However, the discussion here is important because it helps to illustrate the complexity and importance of the task. The term ‘adult faith development’ takes into consideration the content and processes consistent with a particular attitude to education.

4.1.2 The Role of Content in Adult Faith Development

In keeping with the heritage of Thomas Aquinas, one major focus of this new orientation of the faith development of adults is directed towards religious literacy, to ensure that Catholics have a comprehensive knowledge of the teaching of the Church. As Elias puts it,

Religions place great emphasis on the truths and values contained in the writing of their traditions. Study of the Bible, commentaries on the Bible, classical writings of theologians, and contemporary efforts to relate religious traditions to present culture and experience form the basis of liberal religious education and are found in adult religious education.28

The General Directory for Catechesis made the following significant statement:

Who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith (fides quae) is required by adherence to the faith (fides qua). Even in the human order the love which one person

has for another causes that person to wish to know the other all the more. Catechesis, must, therefore, lead to “the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan”, by introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture, which is ‘the sublime science of Christ’.29

The Catholic Church from the 1980s onwards has had a particularly strong focus on religious orthodoxy: the Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1994 to counter a perceived lack of understanding of Church teachings. In the Introduction, John Paul II declares the Catechism to be,

a statement of the Church’s faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium. I declare it to be a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion.30

In the wake of the publication of the Catechism a raft of programmes and written material was produced.31 As Dolores Leckey writes,

Laywomen and laymen need to know the current foundational, reliable teachings about their Church, and their role in it. They need to know the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the highest level of teaching authority in the Roman Catholic Church in our time, and to discover therein their rights, their responsibilities, their roles, as articulated in this great ecclesial event of the twentieth century.32

29 GCD, paragraph 85.
30 CCC, paragraph 3.
Knowledge of the tradition is and will remain of fundamental importance for Catholics, but a relationship with God and service to other human beings is inextricably bound up with this knowing.\textsuperscript{33}

### 4.1.3 The Place of Process in the Education of Adults

The Church also recognised the importance of process as well as content in adult religious education, however. There is a growing understanding that the culture and experience of people is foundational to a growing adult faith. The 1990 document, \textit{Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines}, states that

\begin{quote}
The consciousness of just how complex the world is in which we live requires humility and realism on the part of pastoral workers and leads them to be ever attentive, in the proclamation of the Christian message, to the real conditions in which people live. This sensitivity helps to overcome the distance between Church and society, between faith and culture, which is an important issue in dealing with adults.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

This statement signals the move away from a philosophical position that understands education as the transmission of the Church’s tradition in an unchanging world to people who are receptacles of this tradition. It is important to acknowledge that Church documents reflect a number of philosophical or theoretical positions on faith development of adults. However, these documents do, at times, as illustrated by the quotation above, demonstrate elements reflective of a more progressive understanding of the requirements of adult faith development.\textsuperscript{35} This progressive philosophy of education is based on the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Authors such as Stephen R. Prothero, \textit{Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn’t}, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 2007) have explored the area of religious literacy. Determining what is essential for Catholics to know about their faith been a central issue in recent documents, with a concern that ignorance of Church teaching impacts on the adherence of Catholics to their faith.
\item[34] International Council for Catechesis, \textit{Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community: Some Principles and Guidelines}, paragraph 3.
\end{footnotes}
belief that the previous experience of the person plays a key role in their learning. In this view, for education to be fruitful there is need for

Attention to environmental and social factors that shape individual growth...: a focus on human growth through a range of human experiences...: and attention to the possibilities of achieving social and political change though educational processes.

4.1.4 Evangelisation and the Renewal of Humanity

Content and process are two ways that manifest the philosophical orientation in education, but the ‘why question’ is primary, and the one that gives direction to all that happens in the educational arena. The Vatican II document on evangelisation, Evangelii Nuntiandi, sums up the fundamental thrust of educational endeavours within the Church as ‘bringing the good news into all the strata of society, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new’. This broad vision of Church as the agency for renewing humanity was a long way from the inward-looking focus of the Catholic Church in the pre-Vatican II era.

The focus on the importance of adults in the Church was a sign of this new outward-looking vision. Evangelii Nuntiandi states, ‘for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian Life.’ It goes on to say,

Modern man [sic] listens more willingly to witnesses than it does to teachers and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.

So the Catholic Church is challenging all its members to become people who proclaim the ‘Good News’ by their lives, and it seeks to resource them for this task by a rounded educational process. For those involved in lay ministry this challenge is an imperative. Loretta Girzaitis summarises some of the educational

36 Pivotal figures in educational developments of the twentieth century, such as John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: MacMillan, 1952), Knowles, The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy, and Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergam Ramos (London: Penguin, 1972) have all contributed towards a recognition of the way that adults learn.
38 EN, paragraph 18.
39 EN, paragraph 41.
tasks that are necessary if the Church’s aim of proclaiming the good news is to be carried by on by adult Catholics. She says that adults need help

(1) To discover and develop their potential as persons created according to the image of God; (2) to recognise the meaning of life and to respect it in all its dimensions; (3) to incorporate the message of Jesus into one’s personal life; (4) to articulate and share the teachings of Jesus with others; (5) to understand and reflect the signs of the times so as to give direction to change in order to shape the future; (6) to provide opportunities for on-going learning at all periods of life; (7) to participate in and celebrate in the Church, the community of believers; (8) to aid committed Christians to serve the needy, the poor, the lonely, the outcast, the discriminated against, and the segregated.40

These tasks for the building up of lay people within the Church largely omit the focus on content noted earlier, and deemed central by the hierarchy for adult faith development. The list demonstrates Girzaitis’s own philosophical leaning towards a more humanistic theoretical approach, such as that advanced by the educator Thomas Groome.

4.1.5 Groome’s Shared Praxis Methodology

Thomas Groome has sought to resolve the sometimes opposing positions between focusing on the transmission of content and a more process-orientated education.41 This methodology is described by Groome:

The praxis way of knowing for Christian religious education ... involves a critical reflection within a community context on lived experience. The reflection is informed by one’s own past and future and by the Story and Vision of the Christian community.42

Praxis is a Greek word that has no exact English equivalent. It is used to designate a process designed to ‘offset the dichotomy between theory and practice’. Groome’s methodology was heavily influenced by Paolo Freire, who

highlighted the importance of the education process as either liberating or enslaving the learner. If learners are not encouraged to bring their own life experience and knowledge into the learning situation then they become passive recipients.

Freire believed that ‘education must not allow people to settle for what is already, but lead them instead to build a better world.’ The importance of education as a liberating activity is fundamental to Freire’s thinking, and while he would seem not to have used the phrase ‘education is never neutral’, it is found in the Richard Shaull’s Foreword to Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire’s concept of education as essentially being about liberation of the mind is one that poses an immense challenge to the official Church. If educated lay people are not simply vessels for the reception of the Church’s teaching, but people who will challenge that practice and teaching, then the potential for conflict is obvious.

The concept of education as liberating has enormous implications for Groome. Using insights from Freire and adult education theory, he designed his methodology in a way that enables learners both to participate in their own learning and also to imbibe and respect the tradition within which they learn. Praxis methodology has strands that are recognisable from several different philosophical educational traditions, from liberal to progressive/humanistic, but is particularly appropriate in adult religious education, as bringing together the concerns of the learner as well as the concerns of the Church for religious literacy.

Groome’s praxis methodology responds to the ‘why’ of Christian religious education as illustrated in this quotation:

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44 Shaull writes, ‘There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’ by which men and women deal creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world.’ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
45 As defined by Elias, ‘The emphasis in this theory is upon liberal learning, the organisation of bodies or disciplines of knowledge, and the development of the rational powers of the mind.’ Elias, The Foundations and Practice of Adult Religious Education, 157.
46 That is, student-centred learning that focuses on a student’s own knowledge and experience.
Religious education activity is a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression.47

Groome here names the ultimate purpose of religious education, as he understands it, but the definition tends to camouflage his concern for the ‘kingdom of God’ in the here and now. Christian involvement in the world, as well as concern for the life hereafter, has always been a significant emphasis in Church life, but especially so since Vatican II. In particular, education for justice has become a prominent feature within the Catholic Church in the last forty years. The 1998 General Directory for Catechesis makes this point with clarity:

Jesus, in announcing the Kingdom, proclaims the justice of God: he proclaims God’s judgement and our responsibility. The proclamation of this judgement, with its power to form consciences, is a central element in the Gospel, and Good News for the world: for those who suffer the denial of justice and for those who struggle to re-instate it; for those who have known love and existence in solidarity, because penance and forgiveness are possible, since in the cross of Christ we all receive redemption from sin. The call to conversion and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom – a kingdom of justice, love and peace, and in whose light we shall be judged – is fundamental for catechesis.48

So the ‘why’ question of adult faith development needs a response that recognises that all catechesis is fundamentally directed towards educating people in a way that encourages an active involvement in transforming the world, and leads the Church towards a closer approximation of the reign of God.

Pope Francis, since his election in 2013, has again highlighted this demand for ‘All Christians, their pastors included, to show concern for the building of a better world.’49 The Catholic Church in Latin America, from which Francis comes, embraced a transformational approach to faith development which focused on the education of adults.

47 Groome, Christian Religious Education, 22.
48 GCD, paragraph 102.
49 In this quotation, as in others in this work, an ecumenical catechesis is implied.
4.1.6 Faith development in the Latin American Church

The faith development of adults was a central focus of the Church in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. This focus incorporated what was designated as 'Liberation theology' embracing a *praxis* methodology.

Robert O’Gorman, who lived and worked in Mexico, has written of his experience and the potential for transformation of the educational process. He highlights a number of important differences between the Latin American experience of adult faith development and the experience of the Church in the West. First, he names the importance of the ultimate aim of adult faith development as the transformation of society and Church rather than a more inward-looking Church-only focus. He writes,

> Its [adult faith development] aim is to evangelise – to recreate society according to the model of the reign of God. Evangelism, in its best meaning, is education for action, public action – the transformation of society.

A second point that O’Gorman makes in relation to the Latin American experience is the fundamental importance of education in the life of the Church:

> Education is central to the activity of the Church. It is not a by-product or only one of the many Church ministries. The goals and vision of education itself must become the goals and mission of the Church. In other words, education cannot be a program. The Church, at the national level, must deliberately attempt to translate the renewal of the Church and furthermore, contextualise this translation by incorporating the instrumentalities that arise from the people. We must take seriously the declaration ‘we are the Church.’

O’Gorman thus firmly places education at the heart of the Church’s endeavours. He demonstrates the influence that education can have on transforming the individual Christian, the ecclesial community and wider society. In many ways O’Gorman articulates a way forward for education for volunteer ministers, because it encapsulated the fundamental features of an education that prepares them for the task of public ministry within the Church and in society. O’Gorman

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uses the word ‘education’ for the task of enabling in the development of their faith. The use of ‘education’ rather than the more traditional ‘catechism’ suggests a different, more exploratory and adult approach to the task of introducing people to, or developing people in, the faith.

The following description of what is involved in adult faith development is taken from *Serving Life and Faith*, from the United States Bishops’ Conference. It highlights the importance of adults becoming more fully human through the educational mission of the Church:

> Adult religious education programmes are intentional learning experiences that deepen, expand and make explicit the learning in faith that is, hopefully, already part of the participative life of the believing community. They are an essential expression of the Church’s educational mission that enables adults to become more fully human, more faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus. 51

The Christian community forms its members in many different ways, such as participation in the liturgy and in the life of the community, and in the example of the members of the community. It is the ‘intentional’ efforts of the community to form its members through education that is the present concern.

The local parish is at the heart of much adult faith development in the Catholic Church today, as a grass roots movement led by pastoral assistants and volunteers, as well as by local clergy. A look at the typical Irish parish newsletter illustrates the range of adult education being offered at local level. Many are for parents whose children are being prepared for the sacraments, as well as programmes for adults preparing to enter the Church. Many parishes have a variety of small groups who gather for discussion, centred on bible study or topics of interest to the specific group – bereavement, environment, peace, for example: the list is endless. Some dioceses sponsor programmes of renewal run at local level, in which a wide range of people from different cultural and social backgrounds attend, with varying commitments to the life of the Church. All this

activity forms part of the fabric of the local parish in the Catholic Church in Ireland today.

One hypothesis of this thesis is that the education of the lay leaders in these educational processes is of critical importance. One of the greatest sources of stress for those people chosen to lead such groups is their being open to the different perspectives of the people who attend. Elias stresses the importance of understanding the complexity of human behaviour:

Though religious faiths provide for their members clear meaning making systems and coherent codes of values, there is much that remains unclear and unresolvable in religious faiths and ethical systems dependent upon them. Religious bodies that attempt to provide simple answers to all problems of meaning and behaviour do an injustice to the complexity of human life and provide false hope for their adherents.\(^5\)

The complexity of the task of bringing adults to a mature understanding leads to the proposal in this thesis that a process such as Groome's shared praxis model is appropriate. This enables adults to examine their faith (or lack of faith) in an environment open to their questions, while recognising that the presentation of the Church’s teaching is vital. The dialogue that ensues is an essential part in the process of maturing faith.

### 4.2 Psychology and Adult Faith Development

The discipline of psychology provides another layer of insight into the educational task, by uncovering and clarifying some of the major life tasks and changes experienced by adults.\(^5\) These insights can enable educators to

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understand adults in the group and provide educational experiences that have the potential to enable growth in faith. As Elias states,

The journey of faith is a dimension of the human journey. Faith development and psychosocial development are not separate and opposed concepts. Also, they are not to be seen as identical. How faith is related to other dimensions of human life is a theological problem to which many solutions have been given. Attempts are made to build syntheses between faith and ordinary human life. A more appealing approach is to see the relationship between the two as a tension-bearing and paradoxical relationship. In this view, faith at times makes demands that go counter to what persons naturally desire. Another way to see the relationship is to see faith as a power that transforms or changes ordinary human life by accepting what is good in it and bringing it to fuller development by adding the dimension of depth and the holy to what is considered to be common and ordinary.54

An understanding of these developments in psychology has great potential to enable the educator to design, plan and facilitate adult faith development programmes that are appropriate to the age and stage of the participants. The field of psychology is immense: just one area in developmental psychology is considered here, as illustrative of the potential psychology has to enhance adult faith development within the parish context. Two general approaches have been made to the developmental possibilities of the human being in recent years – the psychosocial and constructive developmental models. These are considered in turn.

4.2.1 Erikson and the Life Cycle

The former school was developed mainly through the work of Erik Erikson, who postulated a psychosocial theory to explain the changing patterns in the life cycle of the developing adult.55 This theory is a phasic or age-related approach to the development of the human person. Erikson recognised that at different points in their lives people are confronted by tasks and challenges which are demanded of a person at a particular age.

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The importance of Erikson’s theory for the development of adult faith development lies in its potential to ensure that parishes are aware of one particular motivating factor that encourages adults to address issues of religion and spirituality in their lives. The post-school aged young adult is confronted by a ‘crisis’ between intimacy and isolation. This is a time of struggle to consolidate the sense of identity forming in preceding life stages. Sharon Parks writes that the development of the young adult is characterised by ‘ambivalence, wariness, exploration and tentativeness’. For parishes and other Church organisations, the challenges posed by adult faith development for this group are evident. Elias makes the point that many young people move outside the Church context to other groups, sometimes other religious groups, because they offer the emotional and religious support that they are seeking as they endeavour to resolve the intimacy versus isolation crisis. If the life stage of young people demands that they are drawn into community with peers, rather than into a more isolated or self-focused lifestyle, then the local parish can provide opportunities for them to socialise, and be involved with its study and service groups. In the process, they can be helped to embrace a deeper and more adult understanding of their Christian faith. Such involvement will also support them in the resolution of the isolation versus intimacy crisis by bringing them into a community where they are acknowledged and welcomed.

The ‘intimacy versus isolation’ crisis overlaps somewhat with Erikson’s next adult stage, which he calls the psychological crisis of ‘generativity versus stagnation’. Adults in this stage are typically forming families or gaining more responsibility for the younger generation. Adult faith development in the local parish reaches out to people in this stage when it offers faith development opportunities to explore issues that are challenging parents of young families.

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56 This section examines only the later stages of Erikson’s theory, as these are the stages that confront the adult. The earlier stages are: trust v mistrust, autonomy v shame and doubt, initiative v guilt, and industry v inferiority. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Revised ed. (St Albans: Triad, 1977), 75-90.

57 In the understanding of Erikson, ‘crisis’ is understood as, the psychological challenges which confront people when they are various stages of their lives.


For example, the sacramental milestones of children are key motivation factors in encouraging parents to come to adult faith formation. As Harrington says, ‘the parish of the future is family-focused. It realises that the vitality of the parish is intimately bound up with the family context in which people live their day-to-day lives.’60 The Church has long acknowledged the principal role of parents in the education of their children, saying they ‘must therefore be recognised as being primarily and principally responsible for their education’.61 So Erikson’s life task of generativity versus stagnation, confronted by people in the parenting years, can be supported and challenged by parish communities through creatively organised educational opportunities. These opportunities can offer support in what is, at times, the difficult task of parenting.

In the second half of this ‘generativity versus stagnation’ stage, many Irish parents are becoming grandparents, and are now able to be mentors, not only to their children and grandchildren, but to other people within the community. People in this age group are often actively involved in their local communities. As one participant in a survey on Active Citizenship said, there is deep desire to ‘change things and get involved in their area’.62 In the average Irish Catholic parish, people in the middle years are the most active members of the community, and bring the wisdom of their lives in many formal and informal ways. This group is by far the largest among those undertaking ministry roles, and their contribution to parishes is incalculable (as later chapters will show). Education offered to this group has the potential to enable growth in all aspects of parish life.

Erikson’s final stage, developed in the latter stages of his own life, is the crisis of ‘integrity versus despair’. Elias writes that the successful aging is characterised by continued activities (where possible):

In later life persons have many opportunities for activities that express the charity and love preached within all [?] religious bodies.

60 Harrington, The Welcoming Parish, 121.
61 GDC, paragraph 226
One of the dangers that older persons face is the disgust with life that Erikson contrasts with integrity. Advanced age is filled with small opportunities to show the courage and the love that dispel disgust and produce integrity. It is with courage and love that people are able to accept both the suffering and joys of old age.\(^{63}\)

Many parish communities are sustained by a faith rooted in integrity, as understood by Erikson, and this older group are often supportive of the educational endeavours of the parish community. Erikson’s approach explores the development of the person in relation to central life tasks, which are universal.

### 4.2.2 Constructive Development Theory

A second major approach to development in psychology is constructive development or stage theory.\(^{64}\) ‘Constructive’ in this context is understood as the ability of people to construct reality, and ‘development’ as the ability to evolve in response to the needs of the environment.\(^{65}\) Elizabeth Liebert explains that ‘a stage is simply an abstract conception which denotes the most complex meaning system which a person uses consistently in ordinary circumstances.’\(^{66}\)

For example, children will look towards adults in the early stages of their life to determine what is important or not, whereas one expects that adults are able to internalise this and make their own decision about what is important. Kegan and other developmental theorists, however, believe that many young adults remain in these earlier stages, not because they continue to look to parents but form their views based on the views of other significant adults or groups.\(^{67}\)

Several common elements are found in writing based on stage developmental theory:

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\(^{58}\) Elizabeth Liebert, Changing Life Patterns: Adult Development in Spiritual Direction, 2nd ed. (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 38.

First, such theory is based on the contention that stages follow an unalterable pattern in people’s lives. As Walter Conn characterizes these, ‘structural stages are invariantly sequential, hierarchical, integrated, holistic, and universal’.68

A second insight of developmental theory is that, as people proceed through the stages, there is increasing capacity for flexibility, complexity, and the ability to perceive and understand a variety of viewpoints. There is also a greater coherence in the view of life in all its complexity. Structural theorists contend that the more developed stages are a more adequate way of dealing with the demands of life.69

A third factor which has implications for adult faith development is that, while the various stages of development are invariant, they are not necessarily age related. The earlier stages (one and two) are associated with childhood and stage three with adolescence. Adults do not necessarily proceed beyond stage two or three.70

A fourth important element in this theory is that development is understood as the result of an interactive process. When the individual interacts with his or her environment, there is a constant demand for new ways of knowing and new ways of interacting with the world: it is through this process that development occurs. The person who lives her or his life in a much protected environment with little demand for change is unlikely to develop to the later stages.

The above categories are not exhaustive. However, the list contains significant and fundamental issues relating to the education of adults in faith because they help to highlight some of the motivations of people who are the most active members of parish communities.

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70 Kegan, In Over Our Heads, 189-96.
4.2.3 James Fowler – Stages of Faith

James Fowler, building on the work of developmental theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg, and using the analytic tools of constructive developmental theory, devised a theory of faith development. His theory is based on the premise that all people have a meaning-making system which can be characterized as ‘faith’.71 Faith in this sense is an integral set of personal beliefs, values and meanings that give coherence and direction to a person’s life, and defines what constitutes ‘ultimacy or transcendence for them’.72

Faith development is seen by Fowler as a gradual movement from ego-centric faith to self-transcending faith.73 However, while Fowler is careful to define faith in a general way, his theory resonates with the overtones of religious faith, and his ‘stages’ describe one way of articulating the journey of faith. This project is concerned with the growth in development of adult faith, and so the stages outlined below describe the characteristics of stages three to five, as most adults in the community, according to Fowler, operate predominantly within these stages.

4.2.3.1 Synthetic-Conventional Faith: Stage Three74

In this stage, believing adult members of a community have already been socialised beyond intuitive-projective faith and mythic literal faith ability to ‘take perspective’75 and so can integrate the stories of the community into a complete whole. There is an emerging need for greater belonging and a growing

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71 Fowler acknowledges the work of Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr and in particular the thought of William Cantwell Smith as foundational to his understanding of human faith: Fowler, Stages of Faith, 9-15.
72 James Fowler, notes given at a seminar in Sydney in 1994.
73 Palmer Parker gives a helpful description of transcendence: ‘We must resist the popular tendency to think of transcendence as an upward and outward escape from the realities of self and world. Instead, transcendence is a breaking-in, a literal in-spiration that allows us to regard ourselves and our world with more trust and hope than ever.’ Cited in Fowler, Stages of Faith, 13.
74 This section explores only stages three to five of Fowler’s theory, as these are the most commonly found in the adult population. Stages one and two (intuitive-projective and mythic literal faith) are sometimes present in adults, a challenge to the adult educator but beyond the scope of this research.
adherence to the story of the group with whom the person identifies. People are, at this stage, loyal and committed members of their chosen communities, religious or otherwise. Beliefs are acquired without reflection and are taken on an ‘all or nothing’ basis. From the parish perspective, people in stage three are those most likely to be loyal, committed members who will contribute abundantly to the daily life of the community. However,

One decisive limit of the Synthetic-Conventional stage is its lack of third-person perspective taking. This means that in its dependence upon significant others for confirmation and clarity about its identity and meaning to them, the self does not yet have a transcendental perspective from which it can see and evaluate self-other relations.

In a time of rapid change, such as the Irish Catholic Church is experiencing today, faithful Catholics in stage three can find their faith severely tested. For some, the response to the radical discontinuity between what the Catholic Church officially espouses, and the way that authority figures have acted, may result in rejecting the Church and their religious faith.

It is at this juncture that the value of faith development becomes most critical. Providing a forum that allows people to explore their own faith and their issues with the Church is urgent. Because of Fowler’s focus on the processes of faith rather than the content of faith, learning at this stage can engage people in a personal journey which brings to the fore the contradictions and difficulties of living as a Catholic in the Ireland of today. Fowler himself suggests that educators need to ‘avoid trying to provide comprehensive answers for questions [people are] not yet asking.’ However, once people do start to question, as many are in the present situation, there is a need to allow people to struggle with the difficult questions without providing them with ready-made answers. At this point, well-designed adult development programmes for lay ministers can be the setting for positive faith development rather than

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76 Fowler, Stages of Faith, chapter 3.
disillusionment and abandonment of a faith which has been central to people's lives.

Fowler writes that, as people begin to doubt the creditability of the authority of groups or individuals they have long relied upon, they can turn to a ‘nihilistic despair about a personal principle of ultimate being’. For some, the process of rejecting the authority of the Church and its leaders may lead to adherence to other authorities, while for others there can be a new opening to reliance on one's own authority. This movement to reliance on one's own authority is characterised in developmental theory as ‘stage change’. For those in stage three, the transition to stage four can be traumatic, but as noted above, the provision of structured educational experiences can help people navigate this new stage in their lives.

4.2.3.2 Individuative-Reflective Faith: Stage Four

In stage four there is an emergence of capacity of self-reflection. Meaning and belief are now chosen out of the many possibilities that have become evident. Self-chosen meaning is possible because of an emerging internalized self-authority. There is a new autonomy which allows for the possibility of choice regardless of external pressures which may demand alternative choices. At this stage, the decision to belong to a group is made from a coherent world view.

People in parish communities who are in stage four are now choosing to belong in the face of the contradictions within the faith community of which they are part. Parishioners in this stage can be a very important part of the community, since they can offer the critical voice that helps the community deal with the past. They can take on a ‘new quality of responsibility’ for themselves and others. People in stage four who volunteer for ministry can be a major part of reconstructing a parish as it comes to terms with new realities. They will value

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79 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 173.
81 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 174-83.
82 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 179.
83 Fowler, Faithful Change, 63.
education as a part of understanding the Church’s history and tradition, but will not assimilate this new knowledge uncritically.

One characteristic of people in stage four can be an over confidence in their own judgement, and they will sometimes lack tolerance especially towards other people who are not in their stage of development. For some,

Disillusionment with one’s compromises and recognition that life is more complex than stage four’s logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts can comprehend, press one towards a more dialectical and multileveled approach to life’s truth.\textsuperscript{84}

In education settings for people in lay ministry there will be some at stage three and some at stage four, and tensions are an inevitable result. Those in stage four will sometimes be very dismissive of all those in Church authority while people in stage three are very loyal to authority.\textsuperscript{85} Leaders of a group have to be prepared to meet the challenge of these differences.

4.2.3.3 Conjunctive Faith: Stage Five (The Inter-Individual Self)

In stage five, there emerges the possibility of embracing the polarities of life and there is, for the first time, recognition of the value of paradox. At stage five there is an acceptance of the values and beliefs of others, with a true recognition of the possibility of multiple value systems which have their own validity. Fowler says of stage five:

Conjunctive faith exhibits a combination of committed belief in and through particularities of a tradition, while insisting upon the humility that knows that the grasp of ultimate truth that any of the traditions can offer needs continual correction and challenge. This is to help overcome blind spots (blind sides) as well as the tendencies to idolatry (the over identification of our symbolisations of transcending truth with the reality of truth), to which all our traditions are prone.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} Fowler, \textit{Stages of Faith}, 183. Kegan, another developmental theorist, suggests that only 3-10\% of any given population reach a stage beyond four: Kegan, \textit{In Over Our Heads}, 91-96.

\textsuperscript{85} Young people in stage three may chose to reject some authorities, for example the authority of parents (which may include loyalty to Church authorities) while giving loyalty to their peers.

\textsuperscript{86} Fowler, \textit{Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian}, 65.
Such people in Church communities, who continue to belong, can offer the community real leadership, as the tolerance they exhibit is reassuring to people in times of crisis. They themselves are unthreatened by the polarities within the community, and are able to hold the tensions in a way that encourages and reassures people within the community. Members of a community who are in stage five are capable of offering much needed critique to the Church community, without the stridency of those in stage four.

The value to Christian communities of people in stage five of faith development is paramount. If people at this stage are willing and prepared to lead educational processes within the community, they are able to hold together the multiple positions of people in the other stages without undermining participants’ faith. In such education, people can be both comforted and challenged in their faith journey. For those who are in volunteer ministry, they can be led to a deeper understanding of the ministry they offer, and consequently become part of the transforming ministry of the Church community.

4.2.3.4 Fowler’s Stages of Faith in Review

Fowler has another stage in his theoretical framework, which he calls ‘universalising faith’. He suggests that those people who are in the stage of conjunctive faith recognise the imperative of making all things new, but they have attachments and commitments that make it difficult to confront the systemic injustice that they recognise within their own communities. Because of the inherent contradictions in stage five, Fowler postulates a further stage, which he understands as a moving beyond the,

finite centres of value and power that bid to offer us meaning and security. An identification with or participation in the Ultimate brings a transformation in which we begins to love and value from a centring location in the Ultimate.

This stage is not one that Fowler actually confirmed through his research with people, and he demonstrates its existence through naming people whom he believes exemplify this stage such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mother

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87 Fowler, Stages of Faith, 68.
Teresa. It is difficult to find connections between this stage and lay volunteer ministers. Fowler’s stage theory is a useful tool for developing programmes and for recognising some of the tensions that emerge in educational gatherings.

Fowler’s work is critiqued by a number of people. One of the concerns that arise is his very wide definition of faith to include all faith not just religious faith. In fact, Fowler did his research primarily with people for whom religious faith was important, so his findings can be substantiated as applicable to people of religious faith. A further critique of Fowler’s work is that for Christians who believe that faith is a gift, the idea of faith developing is unacceptable. Fowler himself has made the point that he is theorising about the structures of faith rather than the content of faith. ‘Faith is made up of the processes or operations of human believing, valuing, understanding and relating. These constitute how faith is held.’

While, in common with all theories, there are areas in Fowler’s work that can be and are critiqued, his ‘stages of faith’ has proven to be a very useful tool for adult religious educators. This theory helps to shape educational opportunities in ways that recognise that people’s faith evolves and the faith questions in any group vary considerably and need to be addressed with a real sensitivity to the different stages that people are at.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored some key issues that should inform sound adult faith educational development in the parish context of the Irish Catholic Church. It has argued that theorists such as Groome, Erikson, Elias and Fowler have much to contribute to understanding how adult faith development can become effective education. Groome’s ‘shared praxis’ approach to adult faith

91 James W. Fowler, ‘Faith and the Structuring of Meaning’.
development suggests an educative process that is grounded in both content and theory. Erikson's overview of the stages of the development of human beings points to the importance of education that draws on the key questions that confront people at different stages of life. Elias identifies the importance of a professional approach to the education of adults. Finally, Fowler gives insight into the various stages of faith of people in any parish context and the ways in which this can inform the practice of the educator.

Faith development that is transformative needs to be underpinned by the best theoretical frameworks available, which can form the essential building bricks for sound education practice.

This primary concern of this thesis is the renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland through the education of lay volunteer ministers. Each chapter thus far has provided some of the methodology, sociological, theological and educational foundations confronting the research project, presenting perspectives that underpin the theoretical structures which informed the researcher in writing this thesis. The aim of presenting these theoretical frameworks was to lay foundations for the primary research outcomes emerging in the following four chapters. The field work undertaken sought to review the current state of education for lay volunteers in Ireland, and assess its potential for development, by interviewing key groups of people immersed in the work of adult faith development.
Chapter Five

Reflections on the Catholic Church in Ireland Today

The principle focus of this research project is the exploration and extent of adult faith development for laity, in particular those who are volunteers, within the context of the Irish Catholic Church today. As part of this research, questions relating to this purpose were put to people working within the Church in positions where they can influence the direction of adult faith development. As was explained in Chapter One, each of those who were part of the interview process have significant experience in the field of adult faith development and are committed to developing education in their own situation. They have the educational background in adult faith development that made them good subjects for in-depth conversation about what is happening currently in parishes and dioceses, and are well placed to offer insights on how the education of lay volunteers might be a tool for the enhancement of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The field research endeavoured to find out whether those in leadership at national, diocesan and parish levels believe in and have plans to offer such structured education to support adult faith development. In the current climate of the Catholic Church in Ireland, long term processes such as education require a high level of commitment on the part of parish and diocesan personnel. The initial question in the previous chapter on the philosophy of education, the ‘why’ question, is one that demands deep reflection on the part of bishops and their staff in this time of transition. Through a process of interviews and focus groups with leaders at various levels, the extent and nature of such education in dioceses and parishes was explored: the results are presented in this and the next two chapters.

As noted in Chapter Two, the interviews were conducted at the time when the scandal which resulted from child abuse within the Catholic Church in Ireland was most acute. Because of their roles, those interviewed for the research were personally very affected by the impact of the publication of the different reports: this context accounts for the ways this issue influenced the field research. The
issue at this time was acute but the effect of these scandals is one that the Catholic Church in Ireland will deal with for a very long time.

This chapter explores the perceptions of the research participants about issues that are currently affecting the Catholic Church in Ireland, in order to gain an overview of the context which is affecting the conduct of adult faith development at ground level. The exploration will be conducted in dialogue with the issues identified in Chapter Two from current literature. The interviewees, who were working within the Catholic Church in Ireland, in national, diocesan, or parish roles, bring unique insights because of their immediate, daily contact with ordinary Catholics who struggle to live their faith in diverse but challenging circumstances. Common themes emerged out of the diverse contexts from which the participants were drawn, but some differences were also discernible, for example, from parish-related as opposed to diocesan contexts. Because of the volatile and controversial state of the Catholic Church in Ireland at present, the conclusions drawn are tentative. Nonetheless, the insights gleaned from the participants are important because their influential roles mean that they will be part of building the Church of the future, whatever form it may eventually take. The interviews and focus groups each began with a discussion on the terminology used for education in a faith context (see Chapter 4.1.1 above). The objective of this discussion was to ensure a common starting point, and to help participants focus on the topic in a conversational way. The impetus for this research was explained, in particular the recognition on the part of this researcher that a significant number of people were involved in lay volunteer ministry (approximately 113,000: see Chapter Six). The interviews generally followed the guide as set out in Appendix 3; as the interviews were semi-structured the interviewees had the freedom to explore topics as they occurred but all topics were covered in each situation.93

93 In setting up the research, anonymity was guaranteed to participants, so in most cases interviewees are not identified as laymen, laywomen or priests, though in a few cases the category was germane to the response. In all, 21 people were involved in an interview or focus group – two laymen, eight laywomen, seven priests and four women religious – with Dr Codd and Dr Byrne being interviewed twice. These proportions reflect reasonably well the categories of people working as adult religious educators in the Irish Catholic Church.
5.1 Theme One: The Scandal of the Abuse of Children and its Impact on the Irish Catholic Church

As noted in Chapter Two, the abuse of children by some priests, and the ways in which abuse allegations were handled, has received widespread coverage in the media and is discussed in local communities and families all over Ireland and beyond. During the interviews there was general agreement that the abuse scandal had impacted on people’s involvement in Church and that it had undermined the trust of people in the leadership of the Church. Interviewees were less sure, however, that (for example) the drop in Mass attendance was a direct result of the scandals. One interviewee (a priest) said that, in his experience, the impact in a particular parish was in proportion to the relationships between clergy and people:

I’ve gone into places where there have been extraordinarily bad relationships between the priests and the local community. That would have more of a profound effect than what would be coming across. What would be going along in the media would actually endorse what they are feeling towards their local clergy anyway so you know likewise I can say to you that the opposite can also be very true. You can come in and it’s just extraordinary with the way they welcome you and, if you have ‘any way with them’, if I can use that phrase, they’re fine.94

This insight was reflected in most interviews in some way. The outrage generated by the child abuse scandals is mediated somewhat through other issues in a parish. It was interesting to note that the only time the abuse scandal was the first thing mentioned in response to the question, ‘what are the issues that affecting the local Church at present?’, was in a focus group held on the day following the publication of the Ryan Report. Comments such as, the ‘child abuse crisis has been iconic’95 reflect a belief that this issue is central to everything but, as Dr Byrne noted, ‘it’s there in the background, it has caused so many reflections on what it means, in society and in Church, whilst telling us how we need to react’.96 The child abuse scandal has profoundly affected the local Church but, perhaps because it is so raw and recent, articulating the effect

94 Interview 6.
95 Focus Groups 1, 2.
96 Byrne Interviews.
is not easy for people to talk about at present. Interviewees spoke of the effect of the abuse crisis on themselves but as this was not the subject of the research, and as the conversations were confidential these reflections are not included here.

Some consequences of the abuse scandals were named by participants. These range from ‘people don’t want to bring it up in case they are perceived as disloyal’,\(^{97}\) to others who were aware that some older parishioners are shattered in their faith.\(^{98}\) Other interviewees reflected on whether the issue had affected Mass attendance, but surprisingly few believed that it had affected attendance to any great extent. One interviewee said, however, ‘I don’t suppose you can judge the impact (of child abuse) on Mass attendance but .... it hasn’t affected the essence of what Church is for people’.\(^{99}\) This person was aware also of the effect of child abuse on an individual level and said that, as someone who was involved in many educational gatherings for people, she was very aware of the possibility of there being at least one person present who had a personal experience of abuse. Sensitivity on the issue is very important for all who are involved in faith development programmes for adults.

It was difficult to draw definite conclusions about the effect of the abuse scandals on local parishes, and the interviews served to confirm the results of the 2010 European Social Survey. This showed that the effect of the most recent revelations about abuse on Mass attendance had not been as great as commonly perceived.\(^{100}\) However, among the interviewees it was evident that priests had felt the impact most. Each priest, both in individual interviews and in the focus groups, spoke of their experience of the reaction of people towards them. One priest spoke of ‘an undermining of the trust and faith in the personnel who worked within the Church particularly clergy’. The other response, mentioned by every priest who was interviewed, was the support they had received from people on an individual basis. As one said, ‘people respect you for holding in

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\(^{97}\) Interview 4.
\(^{98}\) Focus Group 1.
\(^{99}\) Interview 6.
\(^{100}\) This showed that Mass attendance had not dropped significantly (about 2% overall) in the wake of the Murphy and Ryan Reports.
there’. A very moving account was given by a priest in a parish of an incident following the release of the Murphy Report into Child abuse in the Dublin Archdiocese:

[The report had been] all over the media for a week and I got up on the Sunday morning [at Mass] and said look, can I just say to you, I can only say I have not ever done anything like that nor would I just sit idly by if I ever discovered anything like that. I genuinely would do something. This elderly lady interrupted me in a packed Church and said, Father, can I say something? And I said certainly and she said can I just say and I’m sure I’m speaking on behalf of everybody here we know you and we know you wouldn’t do that. That was a very moving moment because in the midst of all this bullets firing and bombs going off you suddenly get this endorsement from your community.

This account was reflective of other stories told by the priests. Many of them, as well as other interviewees, spoke of the importance of the personal relationship between leaders and people in both diocese and parish. One priest expressed it in this way:

I think it is going back to that thing about having to work harder at developing relationships with people, they just don’t accept you because you are a priest and you’re representing the institutional Church whatever the little faith in the institutional Church so you have to, whatever you are doing with any group of people, you have to kind of develop that sort of personal relationship with them first.

However, the impact of institutional abuse on the personal morale of clergy was clear, and was noted by some of the lay people. As one said,

I think it has affected the priests that we are working with big time because most of them are older than me and they’re trained and lived in a particular model of priesthood that has fallen apart around them you know and [and there are] severe issues of morale at the moment and everything is being knocked.

The morale of priests is affected by more than just the abuse scandals. The diminishing number of priests, along with the increasing age profile, affects the

101 Interview 2.
102 Interview 6.
103 Interview 2.
104 Interview 2.
whole parish and diocese but has a particular effect on priests themselves. One priest summarised the reaction of priests at deanery meetings:

It has been such a wild lashing out at everything, every diocesan conference or deanery meeting, everything gets a lash, you know and when you actually deal with them or ... when you get together it all comes to the surface, you know, and there’s five or six that lead the way and everyone falls in line with them.105

Some participants were aware of the stresses on priests; people were concerned about the lack of acknowledgement of this stress.

I think the whole issue of how we address the trauma I suppose that has happened in our Church, I think that’s a huge issue but I think we don’t know how to do it. I think we haven’t really come to terms with it. I think it is kind of there but we are working away and not really addressing the issue.106

This section on abuse of children within the Catholic Church reflects the centrality of the issue in Ireland at present. Many interviewees noted that the implementation of the Child Protection Procedures had been well organised and widely accepted. While the main focus of this research is on the education of lay volunteers, this issue has grown in importance since the research was approved. Nonetheless, this research cannot but give superficial treatment to what is a very serious and difficult subject. The interviews brought a personal dimension to the issue of child abuse in the Church in Ireland.

5.1.1 Analysis

The child abuse scandals were widely discussed during the interviews, and while each person in the process spoke of them, it is difficult to draw conclusions. It was clear, however, that every dimension of diocesan and parish life had been affected to some extent. In particular, the official Catholic Church has suffered a loss of credibility.

105 Interview 2.
106 Interview 9.
The area in which the experience of these adult educators differed from media writing on the subject was that they were less convinced that the scandal directly affected Mass attendance by Catholics.

Overall, it was clear that the precise effect of this issue will merit a research project of its own after more time has elapsed, and people are able to judge the impact with a degree of objectivity. The need for a healing and reconciliation process may also be necessary for people to be able to move forward, as the experience in the North of Ireland since the Troubles has shown – it is hard to shape a future without dealing with the past.

5.2 Theme Two: Discontent Being Experienced by Lay Catholics

Besides the issues around the abuse scandals, interviewees raised a number of other difficulties being experienced by lay Catholics at present. The overriding concern was the perception in Irish society of the Catholic Church, and in particular of the bishops. The traditional place of the hierarchy has been under scrutiny; there was a sense across the interviews that there is a chasm between the hierarchy and the local communities. As one person put it, ‘the perception of Church as not yet having relinquished roles of, what will I say, controlling and directing the course of civil society. All of the perceptions of these are all there.’ The cynicism about institutions which pervades Ireland at present is affecting attitudes towards the hierarchy, especially in relationship to the cover up of abuse.

Participants believed that there is underlying discontent which is crystallised in the response to two current initiatives from the hierarchy, namely, the Eucharistic Congress, and the introduction of the new English translation of the missal. The strong reaction to the latter is summed up in one contribution.

107 Codd Interviews.
108 Interview 2.
109 The Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin in June 2012. It is hard to ascertain its impact, as most media coverage seems to be biased towards either of two schools of thought. On the one hand, the general media concentrated on a lack of numbers at events when compared to the last Congress held in Ireland in 1932 when one million people attended the concluding Eucharist. On the other hand, the religious media were much more enthusiastic. It would probably be fair to say that those who attended events found
you see we talk about the Church and after all the scandals, you know, and the apostolic visitation and all of that there was a general sense of the hierarchical Church being removed from the local Church or a national Church and there was a sense that, you know, Rome are really dictating they’re laying down everything so then there was, that was sort of, those ripples by and large they tried to, you know, iron out those ripples but at the end of the day, it’s still an edict, they still feel they are being dictated to and that they have no say, and nationally our bishops are sort of saying you’re taking it and whereas the German bishops, have said no, we will leave it aside for five years, we’ll look at it a little, in five years’ time. [in Ireland] it’s being imposed I suppose is the word that I’m looking for.110

In nearly all the interviews this negative reaction was expressed. There was not one positive comment. Generally, participants believed that the angry reaction in the local Church was directed towards the hierarchy. One said, ‘people feel they are being taken for granted. I have heard more anger directed towards this [the new translation of the missal] than towards child abuse’.111 The strong emotion generated by this issue is evident in this response and it would be fairly typical of the response of others.

The reaction toward the Eucharistic Congress was different. Overall, interviewees believed that it was not impacting on people in the parishes, as they are generally unaware of it. As one person said, ‘I don’t get the enthusiasm’.112 Many participants felt that the reaction depended on the age profile of people. One person expressed it as follows.

I want to refer back to the preparation for the Eucharistic Congress and that whole area of having a holy hour. The people that are coming to that and getting involved in that whole area are, I would call them, over the top devotional and from middle aged to very elderly and virtually very few under the age of forty unless they are belonging to a group that has an ultra-right wing focus which is very bad.113

On the other hand, some participants believed that the Congress presented an opportunity for formation and hoped that it would bring about a greater它 an enriching experience. Large numbers of Catholics did not participate in any way and were largely unaffected by the event.

110 Interview 7.
111 Interview 4.
112 Focus Group 2.
113 Focus Group 2.
appreciation of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic Congress Bell is the symbol of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress, and it is being brought to pastoral areas and dioceses throughout Ireland: this project brings the Eucharistic Congress closer to the local Church.

5.2.1 Analysis

The negative reaction of people towards the hierarchy, which was one result of the child abuse scandals, is being seen in reaction to initiatives coming from the hierarchy. Participants in diocesan positions are aware of this, as they try to develop adult faith development programmes: the sense of discouragement was at times palpable from this group.

Promoting adult faith development is never easy, but it seems to be particularly difficult at present. Literature in the area, as explored in Chapter Two, picks up some of the difficulties of the present state of the Church in Ireland, but these conversations gave more insight into the effect on a local level. They show the real challenges there are to using adult faith development as a way of renewing the Church.

5.3 Theme Three: The Economic Crisis

While events within the Church have impacted significantly on Catholics, other factors in wider society cannot be ignored. The effect of the current economic crisis emerged strongly. The beginning of the economic recession in 2008 brought about enormous change in a very short space of time. Dr Byrne spoke of this in the second interview.

When I wrote the first draft [of the Catechetical Directory], it was very positive about society and economics and how we use the gifts that we have and then had to be addressed in the final text as being, not a full picture, not a relevant picture.

Some interviewees suggested that people who, as a result of the recession, have unfortunately more time to get involved in parish life because they are unemployed. Other people thought that there was less involvement, since

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114 Interview 4.
parishioners were very busy trying to earn a living and care for their families. As one person put it,

They are afraid not to work hard because one or other may not have a job so they are afraid of that and then that leads to the time at the weekend, what happens to it and in the past a lot of activities that were voluntary activities happened at nights because families were home earlier and so on. Everything is now packed in, whether it is work, all the different things the children do and whatever, everything is packed into the weekend. So I think faith and family life in a real sense has lost out at one level.115

On a practical level, parishes and diocesan services are suffering as a result of diminishing finance from the effects of the recession.

5.3.1 Analysis

The recession is a relatively new phenomenon, and time and distance will bring greater insight. There was a disparity in the assessment of the implications of the recession from participants, so it is difficult to draw specific conclusions. It was clear that geographical area was a contributing factor to people’s perceptions. On a human level, participants were aware of the human cost of the recession on people’s lives.

Two major things have emerged from this period. Firstly, there is the availability of people to volunteer because they have more time or less money for socialising. Secondly, the reduction of income for parishes and dioceses and parishes means that the limited resources for adult faith development are being cut even further, with potential job losses in the area and limited possibilities for expansion.

5.4 Theme Four: Ways in Which the Catholic Church is Influencing the Lives of People

The interviewees were all aware that the Church at local level continues to have a positive effect on people’s lives. ‘All politics is local’ is commonly used of political life in the United States, and this attitude reflects the way participants

115 Focus Group 2.
in this survey understood the changes in the Church in Ireland. It is local issues that generated the greatest response.

While there is an overall belief that people are connected to the Church locally, there is a growing sense of a developing chasm between the local Church and the hierarchy. On the other hand, one priest noted that some bishops presided at the sacrament of confirmation at different ceremonies in his parish that year, and they were welcomed. Parents were very keen to have their children photographed with the bishop.\footnote{Interview 8.}

Participants grappled with the question regarding the place of the Church in people’s lives. Naturally, the experience varies considerably from parish to parish and from diocese to diocese. One issue that surfaced was the age profile of people who are connecting with Church. As one person said, ‘The other reality is that people who are dealing with Church mainly are ageing a lot, that it’s an older Church.’\footnote{Focus Group 1.} One person said that they believed one of the reasons people connect with the local parish is for friendship:

I think that there is something in that there is an ageing Church. There is something about people looking for friendship or community... I think that people are looking for like-minded people ... whatever like-mindedness means but ... I’m going to use the term ‘comfort.’\footnote{Focus Group 1.}

Many people suggested that the reception of the sacraments by children was a time when people connect again with the Church, and this is reflected in the following comment.

I think there’s something about invitation and that people need to be invited and it’s back to something ... in connection with their own human experience. I suppose I am speaking and coming at it very much from my experience, which is within sacramental preparation. They’re key moments and they’re times when people are thinking that bit more about the relevance of religion. There is disconnect before that perhaps, and we can connect in again, but what strikes me all the time is, once people are invited there is a huge openness and willingness to participate. So there’s something there that we
can learn from, that connection that we can make when there is a relevance, and I think we possibly have to create more opportunities for relevance than we have been doing.\textsuperscript{119}

The local parish’s connection with parents whose children are being prepared for sacraments was discussed by many interviewees. The influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland was seen to be still pervasive in many aspects of life. There is a rich inheritance of faith, but this is no longer accepted without question. There is a questioning attitude regarding the meaning of faith. As Codd noted,

\begin{quote}
I have no doubt but that [the faith] it’s there. You mix socially where people are relaxed. The kind of conversations that go on around [you are] the deep questions, the deep search for meaning and the openness to rediscover the riches of the Christian faith is there. It’s there, and is there in all the generations but they misconstrue what Catholicism is.
\end{quote}

There was a sense in the interviews that people are coming to a more adult reflection on faith. People are making a choice about their own faith rather than accepting it without question. Byrne stated,

\begin{quote}
People are very adult now about their faith, in the sense that they make a choice about how they participate and when they participate and why they participate. They may not have thought all that through, and they might not have theological responses, but certainly people are making choices in the last five and ten years around how their religion is part of their life and what that means to them. I heard somebody on the radio this morning, a woman, talking about what her faith meant to her. It was wonderful that she was, and it just came out of a very natural part of her (She was a well-known singer) and what she wanted to say. Other people have sort of distanced themselves from that.
\end{quote}

Local parish communities are beginning to reflect on the need to reach out to people who are not connected with the Church any longer. One priest in particular believed that it was important to convey to people that it was better to have faith than not to have faith.

\begin{quote}
I think that always a challenge is the reaching out to others, the people who may not be there all the time. How do you reach out to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{119} This area is explored further in Chapter Seven.
them? How do you show them, I suppose, a relevance for Church and a relevance for God in their lives? As well that may be, dare we suggest that life would be better if you had faith? The perspective that we are coming from obviously is that you are better to have faith than not have faith, and you are better again to have and practice it then to have faith and not practice it.¹²⁰

There was also a sense of a growing secularism pervading Ireland, and a reaction against the presumption of the right of the Catholic Church to influence public life in Ireland.¹²¹

The issues that dominated the interviews were local rather than national, and it was evident that the experience of participants was influenced by whether they came from rural, urban or suburban contexts. A much stronger connection to community was evident in rural communities, or those which were a mixture of rural and urban. Discussion around Mass attendance was greatly influenced by these contexts: interviewees often had diametrically opposed views on whether people were more or less connected to the community through Mass attendance and willingness to become involved in parish activities. Comments from interviewees with a very positive response were:

On any weekend at our Masses we would have easily two thousand people. Anytime we’ve counted them even on like relatively small weekends we’ve come to two thousand. Very healthy.¹²²

There are very well attended Masses in lots of places and I always thought the towns excelled themselves but I heard some priest saying that you can’t beat the parishes in the country for going to their parishes. There are some very good parishes in the country as well, you know.¹²³

Here in [parish on the outskirts of a city], I think we are very lucky because we have got the best of urban but we have still retained enough of the rural to actually have some sense of community, and so we still have people who go, all ages. Also there is a sense of community because you can geographically see where your community is, so it is urban in that sense but it is rural in terms of still how some people think. Where you have the rural/urban mix,
there’s actually something good about that in terms of how people are community and I think it helps, you know.\textsuperscript{124}

Some interviewees were less sanguine about participation both at Mass and in other community activities, for example one interviewee from a large urban centre remarked,

There is a large drop in Mass attendance – people come because of children. [Diocese] mentioned they’re down ten percent in the [name omitted] diocese. That just gives me an idea what I’m talking about in my local parish.\textsuperscript{125}

Another was even less positive: ‘Sunday Mass is gone ... The monthly, the occasional, that’s still there. Christmas, Easter, monthly’.\textsuperscript{126} Other interviewees struggled with the issue of participation and commented on the difficulty of statistics which vary widely depending on the source, given the way population trends have fluctuated in Ireland in the recent years.\textsuperscript{127}

Mass attendance ... difficult to work out – rise and drop in population in particular areas. I wonder too, is it about full Churches in terms of, if you say for instance, given that a particular Church might have good attendance but that might be because the population in the area has grown, you know you still have a full Church but it doesn’t say anything? Dublin diocese did a few surveys over a particular Sunday, we’ll say two or three years apart to see how many people were attending. However, if you take that it wouldn’t tell you anything because the population in a particular area might have grown and in another area it might have decreased.\textsuperscript{128}

The response to the discussion around Mass attendance was thus very dependent on whether the person responding was coming from a rural or urban setting. However overall, there was a sense that communities were strong in particular where there was positive leadership. One interviewee said,

Where there is leadership people come alive. I see it the way my experience tells me that [it is] the only way to bring a place up ... I’ve

\textsuperscript{124} Focus Group 2.
\textsuperscript{125} Focus Group 2.
\textsuperscript{126} Focus Group2.
\textsuperscript{127} The researcher introduced the figures from the European Values Survey and the International Social Science Programme Religion reviewed in Chapter Two. Interviewees were generally surprised by these figures because of the alternative figures that they had read in the print media.
\textsuperscript{128} Focus Group 2.
been in places that were already waiting to be closed. That was the next step and my job was to go in and do it with ease and instead the opposite has happened. They have become very alive and extraordinarily good.\textsuperscript{129}

Another lay person remarked,

People still want to be involved with Church – I think there is a great sense of those that are involved in Church wanting to continue to be involved in Church, those that are active. When I say active I don’t mean that they go to Mass every day or go to Mass every Sunday, but they have a sense of Church. There is a great positivity out there and the diocese has just finished a listening process. We’re actually reviewing it tomorrow night. We just finished it before Easter and by and large those that came out want to talk about the Church of today, not to hone in on the past but where we can go forward. The demographic was sixty plus but for those under sixty, their main concerns were how they can hand faith on to their children and how that faith can be sustained as they get older.

The variety of responses reflects the personal experience of individuals and the particular context in which they experience Church. All of the responses reflect a struggle to understand changing contexts both nationally and locally and tension between communal and private spiritualities.

\textbf{5.4.1 Analysis}

This theme was one in which the variety of perspectives among the participants was most evident. Much seemed to depend on the leadership in and the viability of the particular context, whether local, diocesan or national. All of the participants were aware of positive factors in the current situation, and could see that people involved in the Church now are doing so in the face of scepticism and even extreme negativity from others in the wider community.

In the eyes of the participants, sacramental programmes brought positive interaction with younger families in the community and the willingness of people to volunteer was appreciated. The varied insights of this group of interviewees was especially valuable to the research as it highlighted positive aspects of the Church in Ireland today, such as the vitality of some parishes and

\textsuperscript{129} Interview 6.
dioceses, which is absent from a lot of academic or media coverage of what is happening in the Church today.

5.5 Theme Five: Communal versus Private Spirituality

Another underlying theme evident in many of the interviews was awareness that a private spirituality was a growing trend among people. There was a perceptible tension between an individual-orientated spirituality and a more community-orientated spirituality. One interviewee expressed this tension when she said,

A line that spoke very vividly to me was a young woman who said to me on one occasion when I asked her what nurtured her own faith journey, (this is the quote exactly) 'In matters spiritual I am a sole trader'.

Another contributor expressed something of the same idea in the following way:

I think you’ll hear a lot of people saying I’m not religious today but I have my own spirituality, like almost a password or a pass phrase which makes me think that deep down people still have a communication with God but that they are shunning or disowning or getting away from the structures of the Church as such.

There was a concern that this private spirituality reflected a growing individualism. This was seen by one person as a philosophical position that sees everything in terms of the self and that as a result sees community as secondary. This contribution was notably more stark that that of the other

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130 The term ‘spirituality’ holds a variety of meanings, and this varies from an understanding of a relationship with God that may not imply any connection to a religious community, to one which is almost wholly ‘horizontal’ and has little or no reference to the Divine. The first meaning would be more common in an Irish context. Rademacher defines spirituality in Christian terms: ‘True spirituality begins with God, who loves and consecrates a holy people as God’s own, fashioning this people into a community. Then that love touches the individual member of the community, which becomes the sacrament for the individual’s growth in holiness.’ Rademacher, Lay Ministry, 190. This definition is in contrast to many more recent ideas of spiritualities which are much more individualised. ‘Many sociologists of religion point out that the abandonment of organised religion when it occurs does not generally signify a move to irreligion, but rather to informal privatised religion, and its transfer from the public realm to the realm of private feeling and belief.’ Irish Episcopal Conference, Sharing the Good News, 32-33.

131 Focus group 1.
132 Focus group 1.
133 Interview 5.
contributors. For some people an individual spirituality was seen as a positive development in the belief that it reflected a more adult response to faith.

Another point was made that perhaps even traditional faith among Catholics in Ireland tended to be quite individual, ‘God and I’,

I wonder do people associate that sense of community with the Church? I think they associate it with the GAA [Gaelic Athletic Association] and that creates the sense of parish or community or a community centre and we have community days like that. I think we have had an individual approach to spirituality. For so long it was God and I, I and God, and this sense of being part of a Christian Church, a Christian community, wasn’t our way for many years and people don’t see that by being part of this vibrant Christian community it can enrich my life, and my journey to God and that there is something I want to be part of. I also want to support it because I see a value in it. It is not there, I think.134

This reading of how people perceive the connection between faith in God and community was not mirrored in most of the interviews. The following quote is more representative of the contributions.

I think energising for me is I think that there is a genuine interest out there in spirituality, that there is a ‘questioning within’ mentality here among people, which leaves them open for us to, in a sense tap into to some degree you know, now there is very little attachment anymore to institutions, Church or state or badge or whatever it might be.135

5.5.1 Analysis

The theme of a communal versus a private spirituality emerged in many of the interviews. Participants were aware of people searching for ways of exploring their own spirituality and but did not necessarily see the Church as the place where this could happen. However, a number of initiatives in some parishes, such as lectio divina and different prayer forms, are well supported. As noted in Chapter Two, there is a revival of many older traditions such as pilgrimages, community prayer at holy wells and Mass rocks, as well as Cemetery Sundays. These traditions encourage a sense of community as well as development of

134 Focus Group 2.
135 Interview 2.
personal spirituality. Benediction and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, which were once common, seem to appeal to an older cohort. Retreats and spiritual reflection days, where a variety of prayer forms are explored, in time help people to see connections between their personal spirituality and the local community or parish.

The question of spirituality is a major issue for the Church, as it means that a growing number of people look in different places to explore an innate sense of spirituality, and do not see the connection between spirituality and community. Spirituality is an essential part of being Church, as Rademacher notes:

The movement towards holiness [spirituality] is a movement towards wholeness. It is a movement towards the integration of body and soul, of matter and spirit, of the secular and the sacred, of humankind and the world, of the immanent and the transcendent, of the self and the other. God is simplicity, not complexity; a unity not a duality.136

5.6 Theme Six: Structural Challenges Facing the Church

The importance of changing the way the Catholic Church is organised and orientated was a constant theme during the interviews. Interviewees recognised that there is need for a complete transformation of the Irish Church, though different people examined this question from different perspectives. For some, the greatest change is needed at local level, while for others the international, national and structural issues were fundamental. What was clear was that no one who was interviewed believed that things can stay the same. All believed that structural change is needed.

There is a perceived lack of leadership and there is too much emphasis on the ‘top down’ Church. One person expressed it as follows: ‘what people speak about is this lack of leadership in the Church in Ireland’.137 Another spoke of things being imposed from above, that is, from the bishops or from Rome. This person expressed the frustration of people who believed that the bishops didn’t

136 Rademacher, Lay Ministry, 199.
137 Focus group 2.
seem to ‘realise that they have to listen to the ground as much as they listen to above [Rome]’.\textsuperscript{138}

Another person said,

> The problem is that Rome put their model [of Church] over and above whether or not people get to celebrate Eucharist. I suppose [the problem] is the centralisation of our Churches so that even though we [at local level] can see clearly ... however our hands are tied.\textsuperscript{139}

There was some frustration regarding the disconnection in Ireland between the bishops along with the Roman Curia, and the local parish Churches. The changes that have happened in Ireland within and outside the Church have led many priests and people to recognise the need to hold fast to the tradition, while reinterpreting it. As Codd expressed it,

> I think one of the major challenges is not to disregard what people have held fast to, but to invite them to re-interpret, to re-imagine, with relevance to life.\textsuperscript{140}

Byrne also reflected on this issue when he spoke of

> not letting go of what is important for us in our faith and the richness of people coming to Ireland and what they can bring to the discussion if we get into that conversation with them. I’m just talking about the faith element now that’s through it in all sorts of levels in Irish.\textsuperscript{141}

While interviewees were mostly paralysed about finding ways to bring about change at the national and universal levels of the Church, there was a lot more momentum in evidence about ways to implement change at parish level. Many participants were aware that recent changes in Irish society, and the way in which the Catholic Church is now perceived, are bringing change to the structure and organisation of local parishes. As one person said,

> [There is] is an understanding that society has changed and not trying to go back. So we could say, globalisation, secularization, all of

\textsuperscript{138} Interview 9.  
\textsuperscript{139} Interview 4.  
\textsuperscript{140} Codd Interviews.  
\textsuperscript{141} Byrne Interviews.
these things are part of our culture today and again without being defensive about that. I mean some people in Church would spend a lot of energy wishing it was some other way, battening down the hatches, whereas I suppose what I’m suggesting is we need the conversation, we need to be able to deal with those conversations.142

Some of the change that people recognised in the local parish was positive, and some was negative, as the comments above demonstrate. Another person suggested that there is a tentativeness of the part of parish leadership to make demands on people:

We have got to the stage where we can’t put any demand … [There is a] fear of turning people off I think because we are so fearful now because of all that’s going on in the Church that they [the priests] are fearful of being challenging in any way because there [are people] walking away.143

Some people believed that there is still a perception that the Catholic faith is just about going to the sacraments, and Mass in particular. One person said that he believed that far too much of the effort of the parish went into the administration of and preparation for the sacraments.144 One person suggested that there is a need to find a whole new way of talking about Church: ‘as Christians [Catholics] we are clear about the need to see the face of Christ in others but not at proclaiming the Christian message’.145 In some places change is being forced to happen because of diminishing numbers of clergy, lower Mass attendance and reduced financial resources.

5.6.1 Analysis

The necessity of structural changes in the Church emerged as a theme in many of the interviews, but there was also a tentativeness about these conversations. Participants were aware that structural change was necessary, but there was little agreement otherwise. This theme was thus exploratory, as interviewees struggled to articulate something of the need for a new model of Church and a new structure which was reflective of the reality of the current situation.

142 Byrne Interviews.
143 Interview 4.
144 Interview 6.
145 Byrne Interviews.
5.7 Theme Seven: Ways of Building the Church of the Future

This theme moved the conversation from the bigger structural changes to the immediate changes that are happening. Three discrete areas emerged as important components of the Church of the future: clustering; changing relationships between priests and people; and a reversal of the ‘top down’ model of Church.

5.7.1 Clustering of Parishes

One way of building the Church of the future that received a lot of attention in the interviews was through the structural changes that are happening in parishes. Many dioceses are creating pastoral areas with a number of parishes being clustered together, a restructuring that is driven mostly by the fall in the number of clergy. There is a variety of responses to these initiatives and some people fear a loss of individual parish identity. The responses of the interviewees were also varied but generally positive.

One person said that her diocese was using the clustering model as a direct result of the lack of clergy: ‘the job of clustering of parishes come out of necessity.’ Dioceses have different models of clustering, but a common way is to have three parishes as a cluster, with a priest in one parish and perhaps two retired priests in the other two parishes. In a small number of cases there is no resident priest but the parish has a lay pastoral worker who is responsible for the pastoral and educational work of the parish. In these cases a priest comes from another parish to celebrate Mass.

Among the interviewees there was a strong consensus that clustering resulted in more lay involvement and a greater sense of ownership of the parish. One diocesan worker said that she noticed a growing recognition among parishioners and that the future of the local Church would be,

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\text{in a few years’ time, Father John [example] won’t be the parish priest of [a specific parish], Father John will be the priest in charge of his pastoral area, with responsibility for the pastoral area backed up by the pastoral council of the pastoral area and then he will have a team}
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146 Interview 9.
of about four priests and those four priests manage the liturgies and the rest should be done by the lay people.\textsuperscript{147}

Another contributor said that,

Clustering is making clear to people that Church will survive if people get involved so it’s becoming very clear to people in the community on the ground if there’s going to be a future Church it will only prevail if they get involved. So I think in those parishes there is beginning to be more, certainly an impetus, for people to get involved because there is a fear if they don’t get involved that their whole parish identity will go. So I think people are more motivated to get involved in a sense that they realise that it depends on them now.\textsuperscript{148}

It was interesting to note that most of the reflection on clustering came from lay people, in particular lay women. This may reflect the fact that lay women who are employed either in a parish or in a diocese are in these positions as a direct result of the changing models of Church, and hence are very conscious of the impact of clustering and its potential for bringing about change in the Church in particular for women.\textsuperscript{149}

5.7.2 Changing Relationships between Priests and People

This theme emerged from the perspective of priests, and was framed in terms of trying to grapple with how a new Church might evolve. The need to change the relationship between priests and people was highlighted, with one priest noting the importance of,

developing relationships instead of relying on [the] collar. The challenge is personally to develop relationships with people outside of the fact that I wear a collar or am a priest of the Church or whatever. That itself doesn’t wash, you know that doesn’t have any influence on people themselves. So the challenge is there to try and develop relationship personally between individuals or groups of individuals in the diocese so that they can, in a sense, trust you.\textsuperscript{150}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Interview 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} Interview 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{149} In the interview process, larger issues such as the ordination of women, married male priests and ecumenical developments were surprisingly absent.
  \item \textsuperscript{150} Interview 2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Another priest recognised that the parish was not just the priest and that people needed to be consulted about the decisions that affected them. He cited the example of changing the times of Mass and the positive effect on the parish when everyone had a chance to contribute to the decision.\textsuperscript{151}

Another priest was conscious of the fact that it is no longer possible (or perhaps desirable) to impose things on people.

People don’t like stuff to be imposed on them now, they want to rationalise it for themselves and to see does it mean anything first before they will accept it, so that is in one sense a blessing and in other ways a challenge. I mean it was so easy I suppose in the older model to present stuff to people and just say well that’s it now, you accept that, that’s the way it is. Now you have to really develop the relationship first, and then sort of rationalise something for people. Whatever you’re trying to present to people has to connect with where they are at in their life and that’s the biggest challenge of all in the work.\textsuperscript{152}

Finally, some of this theme emerged in a desire for a less ‘top down’ model in developing a Church of the future The underlying tension generated by a perceived autocratic model of Church was evident at all levels, and as one person said,

People don’t understand why there’s no consultation, why there is no recognition that the Church that comes from the ground has different issues than when it comes from above.\textsuperscript{153}

Across the focus groups and interviews, the contribution of priests – 7 out of 21 interviewees, which reflected the greater number of priests in diocesan adult education roles – did not stand out as substantially different than other contributors’ with two notable exceptions, the child abuse scandals, and this theme of changing relationships between priests and lay people. During the interviews some priests spoke personally about the impact of the changes of the last few years on themselves as individuals and on the way they interacted with lay people.

\textsuperscript{151} Interview 6.  
\textsuperscript{152} Interview 2.  
\textsuperscript{153} Interview 9.
5.7.2 Analysis

The interviews did not suggest coherent strategies for building the Church of the future, but certain elements which have a direct bearing on this research were evident. Firstly, the participation of lay people in all areas of the community. Secondly, the model of local Church which brings groups of parishes together in pastoral areas of clusters. This developing model seeks to ensure that priests are available for Eucharist and there are lay people involved in both the administration and pastoral care of the parishes. Thirdly, a future Church needs to be far less centralised with more people participating in decision making.

5.8 Conclusion

Several key themes emerged from the interviews, each of which poses ecclesial questions. The recurring concern that there is a widespread sense of disconnection between the Irish bishops and the local Church is one such example. While people have positive experiences of local parish life, there was little positivity about the role of the hierarchy. This was an unexpected result of the process, but one which is significant for the renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Several initiatives from the Episcopal Conference were praised very highly, two being the *Directory for Catechesis*, and the establishment of the office for pastoral renewal and adult faith formation. However, the connection between the Bishops’ Conference and these initiatives went unnoticed.

There is need for a deeper understanding of the ecclesiology of the Church, and this requires education for members of the Church at all levels. It is insufficient for members of the Magisterium to teach in a didactic fashion, instead of exploring collegial ways of reflecting on the tradition. While being respectful of the ultimate authority of the Magisterium, the hierarchy and the laity can search together for answers that are faithful to the past and speak to the present and
the future. Paul Lakeland in a book with the subtitle, *How the Laity can save the Church*\(^{154}\) writes,

> what we need at this moment in our history but we are not getting is teaching authority that recognises the extraordinary complexity of persuasive communication of essentials, the importance of respecting a plurality of points of view in those areas where there is really no need for consensus, and – as they say – the wisdom to know the difference.\(^{155}\)

A reason for hope in this area is the recent call by Pope Francis for a survey of Catholics on matters relating to the family, in preparation for the Synod on the Family, the first session of which was held in 2014. The recognition that lay people have a contribution to make to the discussion is unprecedented. Previous synods provided an opportunity for parish councils to reflect on the preparatory document for synods, but recognising the input of laity at an earlier stage of the process indicates an intention to give more weight to the reflections that are received.

There was a surprising amount of agreement in the interviews about the major issues facing the Church. However, the researcher also noticed that, even with the many difficulties they faced, participants retained great enthusiasm and optimism about the future of the Church in Ireland.

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\(^{155}\) Lakeland, 129.
Chapter Six

The Role of Lay Volunteer Ministry in Catholic Parishes

In the previous chapter the current state of the Catholic Church in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century was analysed from the perspective of a group of people who are working in adult faith development at parish and diocesan level. This chapter provides a lens for the hypothesis at the heart of this research project, namely, *Education for Voluntary Lay Ministry – A challenge for the development of the Catholic Church in Ireland into the future*. It explores how lay volunteer ministry is exercised in parishes at present, and the extent of such ministry. Five themes emerged from the analysis, but attention needs to be given firstly to the question of terminology.

6.1 Working Definition of Lay Volunteer Ministry (LVM)

As noted earlier, the question of terminology was discussed at the commencement of each interview as the importance of having a shared understanding of the terms used was vital. The discussion in the interviews about terminology was rich, and this was helpful in setting the context of the interviews. After reflection on the issues, I had decided to use the terms ‘lay ministry’ and ‘lay ministers’ because they are now in common currency. Older terms such as ‘lay apostolate’ are not precise enough to identify the specific area of this research. The word ‘apostolate’ has traditionally been used in the Church to designate the work of all baptised Christians.

The question of the place of lay people in ministry roles was analysed in Chapter Three, and some of the pitfalls of using the term ‘ministry’ for people who are not ordained were identified. Definitions of ‘lay ministry’ by Collins, Fox and O’Meara were explored there, but in this chapter an alternate version, as outlined by Dr Codd in her first interview, will be used as it covered areas which interviewees raised. Codd’s definition, or perhaps description of elements in lay ministry, was:
called Ministry with a capital M for the kind of public service which is
done and which is built upon on the basis of personal giftedness,
discerning of call, formation for the ministry, acceptance of
credentials appropriate to the level of ministry, commissioning to
that ministry, the celebration of that ministry. The reviewing and
accountability for that ministry does place people in a position to
some degree, of leadership within the parish community. So I think
‘public’ is the term that might capture all of that. Publicly mandated,
fully exercised in the name of the faith community and accountable
to that faith community, but also recognised and celebrated and
acknowledged publicly in the faith community as well.¹

Codd’s comprehensive description of lay ministry is useful to this research as it
arises from her practical experience of working in parish contexts as well as
having a theoretical base closely aligned to the work of Collins. The public
function exercised by laity in the parish is increasingly recognised, as will be
outlined in this chapter. Caution needs to be exercised in assuming that all of the
characteristics named by Codd are to be found in every parish where people are
involved in public ministry on behalf of the community. The accountability and
mandating of volunteers can be haphazard at times, so in reading this chapter it
cannot be assumed that an organised and systematic approach is employed in
parishes that have some form of lay volunteer ministry. A full definition of such
ministry is difficult but in the context of this research key characteristics can be
summarised as follows:

‘Lay’ ministers are those members of the community who are not
ordained but who exercise ministry on behalf of the community.

‘Ministry’ denotes an authorised public service, rooted in baptism
and confirmation, offered by a member of the local community, on its
behalf.

‘Volunteer’ ministers in this context are people who exercise a public
ministry, for example are ‘lay ministers of the Eucharist, or
undertake a leadership role in adult religious development on behalf
of the community. It does not include those who work in the
community on a full time or part time paid capacity.²

¹ Codd, interview 1.
² Those in paid employment may be covered by most of these characteristics but as they
are outside the scope of this thesis they are excluded from the discussion which follows.
6.2 Theme One: Numbers of People Involved in Lay Volunteer Ministry

The genesis of this project was the recognition that in most, if not all parishes in Ireland, there are appreciably large numbers of people contributing to the life of the community by exercising public ministry on a regular basis. Using the Sunday liturgy as an example, some of the roles that can be observed are readers, communion ministers and cantors, and many parishes would have people involved in other public roles on any given Sunday.

In the 2006 census of population, there was a category related to 'helping or voluntary work in a charity or religious organisation' alongside questions about involvement in other areas of the voluntary sector. In that census, 2,889,573 people (over 15 years) claimed to be Catholic. One question asked people about their volunteering and specifically in which areas they volunteered including the category of 'Church'. Using these figures, 113,925 Catholics reported that they volunteered in the Catholic Church.\(^3\) The questions on volunteering\(^4\) were not repeated in the 2012 census, but given that more people actually nominated themselves as Catholic in this census, it is unlikely that the number has decreased to any large extent in that time.\(^5\) It is impossible to assess what kinds of ministry these Catholics are engaged in by extrapolating from the census data. The most that can be said with any confidence is that a significant number of lay Catholics are involved in their local community on a regular basis.

One of the annual tasks of the Research and Development Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference is to conduct an audit of Church personnel: vocations, ordinations, deaths and departures. These figures are based on what is effectively a census return filled out by every diocese and religious order in Ireland. However, 'Church Personnel' has not traditionally included those who

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\(^4\) The nature of census questions is such that they tend to be broad and non-specific so what respondents meant by 'volunteering' is impossible to determine, but it does indicate that the person's involvement is more that attendance at the Sunday liturgy.

\(^5\) 3.86m people (84.2%) of people living in Ireland defined themselves as Roman Catholic in April 2011, a decrease on the 87% who did so in 2006. Due to general population increase, however, just less than 180,000 more people defined themselves as Catholic in 2011 than in 2006.
are lay volunteer ministers. While the census figures suggest that significant numbers are actively involved in Church life, no questions are asked in the Bishops’ Conference audit about lay volunteers in ministry so as to assess the nature and extent of such involvement. This fact may reflect how much significance such ministry has for Church authorities. However, as Dr Byrne said in the interview, one of the results of the changing Church in Ireland is that more attention is being given to lay volunteer ministries:

Work is in motion as an extension of that survey [the audit of personnel] and from it we will get a very different picture of Church, rather than a Church which is in contraction because of the declining numbers of ordained and professed. What we will get will be expansion because of the huge growth in numbers of people that are in fact taking ministerial roles not just as paid posts but also as volunteers.\(^6\)

At the time of writing this data is not available. With well over 100,000 Catholics actively involved in their parish, some hard data could ensure that due recognition would be given to these people. The data would also help to ensure a statistical profile of the ministries in which they are involved.

The direct experience of most of those who were interviewed in this research reflected the evidence of the census. There is a wide variation in the number of people involved in ministry from parish to parish and from diocese to diocese. One person in a focus group said,

There are huge numbers involved across all sorts of family [ministry] confirmation, first communion preparation. The number of parents who volunteer to lead those programmes is just growing all the time.\(^7\)

And another person reflected,

We have approximately coming up on 15,000 people living in our parish. We have eight primary schools, three secondary schools, third level institute of technology and a college for further education and we have three special schools. So we have a huge buzzing parish. I remember a couple of years ago I put all the statistics together required by the diocese and we had in the region of 850 people

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\(^6\) Byrne Interviews, and see footnote 25 in Chapter One.

\(^7\) Focus Group 2.
involved from servers to choirs right throughout our [parish], which is a huge amount of people.\textsuperscript{8}

The numbers suggested by different people in the interviews varied widely. Codd’s national perspective is interesting.

Yes, I definitely think that there would be participation. Participation in ministry by lay people is growing and what’s more the awareness is growing that it’s part and parcel of our Church as it goes into the future. Interestingly enough there is a realism about the fact that it probably wouldn’t even be happening yet if it wasn’t for the reduction in the number of priests available for active ministry but as soon as you say that everybody seems to also understand the fact this is not the basis, that it should be a characteristic of Church anyway.\textsuperscript{9}

One of the diocesan advisers summed up by reflecting,

There might be maybe ten percent of the Church involved in some way, say about ten to fifteen percent.

\textbf{6.2.1 Analysis}

Each of the interviewees spoke of the number of people in each parish who were involved in lay volunteer ministry, while questions about the ministry that lay people undertake did not generate much response. This seems to suggest that the involvement of lay people in ministry is such an obvious part of parish life that it does not need elaboration. It has become so embedded in Catholic parishes that it is hardly noticed anymore. This in itself suggests a major change in perspective, and that the transition required to generate a Church of the future is already underway in part at least.

A question about the ways in which lay volunteers viewed their role within the parish was explored in some depth in the interviews. This question has major implications for the development of the role into the future. The thesis underpinning this report is that lay volunteer ministry has the potential to reinvigorate the Catholic Church in the future. Why people undertake and continue in such ministry is fundamental to any strategy that will make lay

\textsuperscript{8} Interview 8.

\textsuperscript{9} Byrne Interviews.
volunteer ministry a force for change, when the huge numbers involved are considered. Another research project which asks lay volunteers themselves to reflect on how they understand their role would be beneficial.

6.3 Theme Two: Recruitment of Lay Volunteer Ministers

An allied question discussed during the interviews was the willingness of people to volunteer for ministry. There were widely divergent responses to the question, with one person saying, 'I have been surprised actually at how willing parents are to get involved with a bit of encouragement, in some places [it is] more difficult than others'.\(^{10}\) On the other hand, a diocesan adviser remarked that

> people are less likely to get involved in Church than they are in other areas of the community, maybe because of their lack of practice or connection with parish is not hitting on their radar as something they can be involved in.\(^{11}\)

Whether it was easy or difficult to get volunteers is largely dependent on the way people are approached. The personal approach was regarded as most effective, and if the approach was made by the priest the likelihood of a positive response was higher. One interviewee remarked on people lacking the confidence to take on ministry. Such divergence of opinion about parishioners’ willingness makes it hard to assess the situation.

One priest, reflecting on his time in the priesthood, gave an overview which was mirrored in other contributions:

> I think there is a growth since, if you look at, I’m thirty years a priest and lay involvement in the early eighties almost didn’t exist in rural parishes and you look now at the numbers involved and put together all the parish pastoral councils, Eucharistic ministers, readers, safeguarding children, the involvement of servers, even boards of management in schools, very active chair persons and boards and choirs. You could go on, and lots of parishes have celebrations and they could have two, three hundred people in some places at those

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\(^{10}\) Interview 9.

\(^{11}\) Interview 5.
gatherings. So if you look at it over a time span that’s a big shift I think.\footnote{Focus Group 2.}

A recurring theme in the interviews was the length of time people spent in a particular ministry. It was rare to find anyone suggesting that there should be a defined period of time for people to be in a ministry in their area. As one person said, ‘they sign up for life’\footnote{Interview 6.}. In some places there is a recommitment ceremony every three years,\footnote{Focus Group 2.} and while people may take on the ministry again it is a definite choice rather than being seen as a ‘life commitment’. Parents who take on the role of leadership in the sacramental programmes tend to do so while their own children are involved. A number of people said that a major deterrent to taking on ministry is this sense that once one starts that it will be forever (as with ordination). Another significant factor was the number of people who are involved in multiple ministries in the same parish, and this can deter others from taking on the ministry.

The recruitment of people into lay volunteer ministry is less often by people volunteering themselves but by personal contact: ‘people like to be asked’.\footnote{Interview 8.} All the people interviewed had reflected deeply on ways to introduce people to ministry. They had a particular concern about young people being included, as the teenage years are the time when the young tend to drift away from the Church. Various examples were cited regarding ways of inviting people into ministry.

The discussion about how people came to undertake lay volunteer ministry did not generate any unexpected answers, and is a reflection of the experience of people generally in volunteer organisations.

### 6.4 Theme Three: The Range of Ministries Undertaken by Lay Volunteer Ministers

A fundamental question is what constitutes a ministry, as distinct from someone volunteering in their parish for a task. Most of those who were interviewed for
this research did not differentiate between ministering and volunteering. The criteria for ministry, as described by Codd, are helpful in providing some parameters: being publicly mandated, fully exercised in the name of the faith community and accountable to that faith community. The discussion that follows will use these criteria to distinguish people who are in ministry, rather than including everyone who volunteers. The interviewees did not make such a clear distinction, however, and some overlap between the two groups will be apparent.

Liturgy is a clearly defined area where laity is very involved. Byrne articulated this when he said,

After Vatican II we had the opening of liturgical ministries to the lay people. It was such a novel thing, that even still, it has dominated the thinking when we say lay ministry. So straight away it’s Ministers of the Word, Ministers of the Eucharist, and other related ministries of music and so on. The lay liturgical ministries are thought of very easily when we say lay ministry.\textsuperscript{16}

Using the criterion of being officially mandated, these liturgical ministries are associated most often with some sort of official commissioning service. Under this umbrella falls Ministers of the Eucharist, including those who bring communion to the sick; Readers; Cantors and the Welcoming ministry. Funeral team ministry is developing whereby lay ministers welcome the remains of the deceased into the church, or preside at the burial. A growing numbers of parishes will have the Distribution of the Ashes on Ash Wednesday presided over by a lay person.\textsuperscript{17}

6.4.1 Analysis

As noted above, questions in the interviews about the range of ministries that lay people undertake did not generate much response, perhaps because such ministry is now a ‘normal’ part of parish life. The liturgical ministries have the greatest number of people involved, followed by lay ministers who lead

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{16} Gareth Byrne. He also reflected on the importance of social services ministries, which are not always directly offered within the faith community.
\item\textsuperscript{17} It is difficult to find a single document which validates the existence of such roles, but they are implied in such documents as Irish Episcopal Conference, \textit{Share the Good News}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
programmes for the preparation for sacraments. A few ministries were mentioned specifically, such as RCIA and faith formation.

This area of the interviews led to reflections on the ways in which lay volunteers viewed their role within the parish and so warranted a theme of its own, that is: Perceptions of Lay Volunteer Ministry. This theme answers, to a degree, why lay people undertake lay volunteer ministry.\(^{18}\)

### 6.5 Theme Four: Perceptions of Lay Volunteer Ministry

Most of the people interviewed believed that the most common reason lay people take on a ministry role is ‘to help Father’. The majority of interviewees both from parish and diocese unhesitatingly said things like,

> There’s a huge core of people and they are the best people in the world who are doing it to help out the poor parish priest. You can chat with them all day with stories about baptism. They’ll smile politely at me but they won’t buy it.\(^{19}\)

There was remarkable unanimity about this issue. People had thought deeply about it and many recognised that education was the only way people’s attitudes would change in order for them to become more appreciative of their baptismal calling. One person said,

> They are starting to move beyond I’m helping Father, and I am doing it because I am baptised. This is why, and that started because of formation and gatherings helped them to move on a little bit.\(^{20}\)

The wider issue regarding the perception of these roles by clergy and others in the parish was also explored. For example, the acknowledgement within liturgy of the role lay people play in the celebration speaks of the importance of such ministry. Codd reflected on this when she said,

> In my own work of training people in ministry, all the years when I worked in parish I used to see people having to make a mental transition when they moved into that area, to perhaps be a Minister of the Eucharist, or read the Word, or do some other things to retain

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\(^{18}\) This researcher recognises that the complete answer to this question can only be ascertained by research with lay volunteers themselves.

\(^{19}\) Interview 4.

\(^{20}\) Focus Group 2.
their sense that they were there in a space which was properly theirs.

This is what I’d be saying about what has to happen in order for the transition to be made. It’s an awful lot more than communicating knowledge, it is also generating experience. If as a person training ministers and inviting them to take up those positions [I explain that] I believe that we are in place that is properly ours, and I behave in that way. So down to the detail, where do you ask the Eucharistic Ministers to stand? Is there some kind of continuity between the ordained minister, the presiding priest and the Ministers of the Eucharist or do they take the furthest possible space that they can on the edge of that so-called sanctuary area? These things teach people who they are.21

The ministry of parish councillor elicited different responses on interviewees’ perception of the role of lay ministers. This role is often seen by the priest, the community and the person themselves as a leadership role. There is a sense, at least in some parishes, that the parish pastoral council (PPC) has a role in guiding the parish rather than just existing to support the priest. However, there was also a concern that the council can become a power block. One interviewee put it very strongly when he said of PPCs,

I think the sad thing in parishes is that there are women and a few men that are doing the thing for so long they object to anyone new coming in. Don’t ask me what it is they are hanging on to but as long as they hold on there won’t be new blood coming up. I don’t know what it is ... it’s sad and I don’t know how you overcome it, but then the priests are glad that there is somebody doing this.22

The role of parish pastoral councils within the Catholic Church is fundamentally a consultative one and this tends to create tension, which was evident in the interviews.23 A number of people said that some priests still had problems around the PPC. One diocesan worker said,

21 Codd Interviews.
22 Codd Interviews.
23 The Guidelines for PPCs published on behalf of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference defines their role as follows: ‘The Parish Pastoral Council is a faith-filled leadership group through which priests and people work together as co-responsible partners in furthering the mission of Christ in their own parish.’ Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Formation: Irish Episcopal Conference, Living Communion: Vision and Practice for Parish Pastoral Councils in Ireland Today (Dublin: Veritas, 2011), 29. This definition suggests more than a consultative role but later in the same document it is made clear as it quotes from John Paul II: ‘While the structures of participation are
There was an awful struggle for a long time to get priests to see the need for having a pastoral council, you know. A lot of them still would not enjoy pastoral council meetings. They would attend finance committee meetings before they’d go to a parish pastoral council, but they do realise now that they do need them even to keep the basic things going in a parish, you are going to need that assistance, you know, they just resist the whole thing of meetings. Meetings are a big issue and they say that the lay people are complaining about them as well but I think it’s more themselves really.\(^\text{24}\)

Some interviewees mentioned that in order for a new perception of the role of lay people in ministry to evolve it will take a change in culture. Codd, reflecting on the way ministry was regarded in the past, said,

Some ministered and some were ministered to. We had a terminology which said certain members of the family were ‘going for the Church’; the rest of us would be the ones who would therefore be ministered to, by them. Now, we’re in an entirely different situation and we are expecting that because it has dawned on us, in Church circles, in Church leadership, we think people will catch it immediately, that [they will recognise] they are no longer just the passive recipients, they are actually Church in mission, and that actually requires not only education, but participation, not only in practice but in ministry.\(^\text{25}\)

### 6.5.1 Analysis

The overriding belief of the interviewees was that the vast majority of people in lay volunteer ministry are involved because of the pragmatic need to ensure that the needs of the community are being met. These volunteer ministers may feel very honoured to be involved in the ministry of the Church, but few have a sense that their role arises from their baptismal calling. As Lakeland says,

Lay ministry involves an ecclesial responsibility within the community, and an apostolic responsibility without, in the secular sphere, which is properly the domain of the laity.\(^\text{26}\)

consultative rather than deliberative, this does not mean they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between pastors and the faithful; on the one hand uniting them [from the outset] in all that is essential, and on the other hand leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion.’ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio*, 45.

\(^{24}\) Interview 2.

\(^{25}\) Codd interviews.

\(^{26}\) Lakeland, *Liberation of the Laity*, 82.
The often limited view among lay ministers of their role in ministry is one area where education for lay volunteer ministers has the potential to make an impact.

6.6 Theme Five: Profile of Lay Volunteer Ministers

The characteristics of people involved in lay volunteer ministry presents an interesting insight into the Catholic Church in Ireland. While some interviewees indicated that most of those involved were over sixty years of age, others believed that the age profile was far more varied. One person said, 'For some reason there is quite a broad spectrum of ages involved', while someone else suggested the age profile was people in their 50s. Another person expressed concern that it was only elderly people who were volunteering.

The age profile of a particular parish, along with the leadership by parish councils or priests, affected the response to this question. As one person reflected,

There is a wide variation in participation by lay volunteers in parishes. It seems to depend on the parish priest; some priests like a wide range of people involved and others seem to prefer their 'chosen few'.

Overall it can be said that there is potential for people of any age to volunteer if there is a deliberate strategy in the parish to invite people to contribute to parish life in this way.

The issue of the gender of volunteers was much more definitive in the interviews. Women, rather than men, seem to make up the larger proportion of volunteers in parishes, as reflected in this comment: 'they’d be a cross section but mostly women.' A national report, on the 2006 census data on volunteering, highlights the difference between the gender profiles of those who

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27 Focus Group 2.
28 Interview 2.
29 Interview 5.
30 Interview 1.
31 Interview 3.
volunteer in a Church context when compared to volunteering in other areas of the community. This states,

Census 2006 highlights that there is not much difference in the percentage of people who are involved in volunteering by gender. According to Census 2006, there are 275,013 male volunteers in Ireland. This represents 16% of the male population. In addition, there are 278,242 female volunteers in Ireland, representing 16% of the female population. [In contrast] Females made up 61% of volunteers involved with a religious group or Church and 59% of voluntary social and charitable workers, while males accounted for 69% of those involved in voluntary sporting activities and 58% of political volunteers.  

The perception in the interviews that women more than men (61% versus 39% of volunteers) are more actively involved in Church life is borne out by the figures. Many of the interviewees commented that men are drawn to more practical tasks within the Church rather than areas such as the liturgy, and thus may not be considered in the category of lay volunteer minister.  

One person said, ‘it is hard to get men involved in the liturgy’. Another diocesan worker reported a predominance of men on the finance committees. The discussion on gender in one focus group centred on what was termed a ‘femaled Church’, with one person saying,

I think there is a danger that we are not enabling enough participation for men and I think unfortunately sometimes the only place you see them is in the finance committee which would be predominantly male and I think that sends out a huge message to men around power.

Another person said ‘the aspect of community draws women more than men’. The question of the place of men within the Church has many implications and will be furthered discussed below.

Another distinguishing characteristic of people in lay volunteer ministry was that people who volunteered in Church were also likely to volunteer in other areas.

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33 In recent years both girls and boys are involved in serving at Eucharist.
34 Interview 9.
35 Focus Group 2.
36 Focus group 1.
37 Interview 9.
areas of their local community. One person said ‘volunteers are already involved in community groups like the GAA or the local drama group, etc’.38

6.6.1 Analysis

It is difficult to generalise about the characteristics of lay people in ministry, as the particular area or parish has a large impact on the scale of such involvement. In terms of numbers, when compared to fifty years ago before Vatican II commenced –given that then ministry for lay people was limited to altar boys – the number of lay people in ministry is enormous.

From the interviews, a general profile of lay volunteer ministers can be summed up fairly accurate as predominantly female, in the fifty-plus age group, and with wider community involvement. A major quantitative survey would be the only way to determine this with any certainty.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the extent of lay volunteer ministry in Ireland, and how lay ministry has become embedded in Irish parishes. The interviews showed that a great range of people choose to become actively involved in their parish, and it would be impossible to enumerate various roles undertaken by lay people. There is a large spectrum of people from different age groups, while there is a preponderance of people from fifty upwards. Both women and men take up ministry in the parish but overall it would be about two-thirds women to one-third men. Women are more involved in the liturgical ministries while men take up roles on parish pastoral councils and finance committees. Both lay people and priests still tend to see the lay ministry as being ancillary to the ordained ministries, rather than as existing in its own right.

From the interviews it would appear that most Catholics are unaware of the theological questions around the role of lay people in ministry, but most seem to be accepting of the way that ministry has developed. This does not imply that

38 Interview 9.
the situation can continue as it is. There was a widespread belief during the interviews that there is need for a strategy for change far more comprehensive and theologically grounded than at present. The pragmatism that underpins the present reality is less than ideal. For example, the current situation of people taking on roles because of the needs of the community without a proper mandating should not continue, because it means that the training and organisation of ministries is haphazard. At present, the education and development of lay ministers is dependent on the leadership in the particular parish rather than because of a diocesan or national policy. More importantly, the roles of lay ministry need to be formalised because such roles belong within the ecclesial structures of the Church. In the words of Pope Francis,

We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this [the] responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities.³⁹

These questions are beginning to surface in many parishes. The membership of parish pastoral councils in particular is causing people to ask these bigger questions. The need for dialogue and education is urgent as this could bring about change. Education is a key factor in enabling lay people to understand their ministry roles, according to the hypothesis of this thesis. Thus the next chapter explores questions relating to education that arose in the interview process.

³⁹ *EG*, paragraph 102.
Chapter Seven

Education and Lay Volunteer Ministers

This chapter considers in detail the findings of the research in regard to the nature of education for lay volunteer ministers in the Catholic Church in Ireland, and the extent to which it is or is not an established part of its life. (The previous chapter identified the extent to which such ministry has become an intrinsic part of parish life.) Once the current situation has been identified, a platform for reflection will be in place for determining the ways in which lay volunteer ministry could become a catalyst for change in the Church into the future.

One of the primary objectives in *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis* states,

A system and programme will be in place within the Catholic Church, in association with other providers, for the education and training of experienced lay persons, enabling them to become available to the parish and diocese to help others to grow deeply into their Christian Faith.

The indicator of achievement relating to this objective is directed to volunteers:

Volunteers will be trained at diocesan and regional levels to work within their parish as members of the Parish Pastoral Council, and within initiatives deemed appropriate to the particular parish, such as Baptism Teams, Liturgy and Music Teams, Family Mass Teams, Justice Groups, Bereavement Teams etc., helping to engage with and grow in their faith.¹

*The Directory* has begun the work of recognising adult faith development as a fundamentally important to such ministries in the future. During the interview process it was clear that all who took part were aware of the importance of this volunteer body of lay people in maintaining the structures of the Church. However, it also emerged from the interviews that this work was largely undervalued, or sometimes unacknowledged by many in Church leadership. Trying to understand the extent and depth of education for laity currently within the Church is a fundamental first step in understanding why the

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¹ Irish Episcopal Conference, *Share the Good News*, No. 156.
education of lay people for ministry is not being harnessed to the extent that it can and should be if it is to become a catalyst for change.

One of the challenges of interviewing as a methodology in a qualitative research is the amount of data that it generates and consequently the weighting of each unit of data in relation to the overall patterns that emerge. Patton writes,

> The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings. The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings.²

The interview process for this research generated a large amount of data in relation to adult faith development as it pertains to the central question of the thesis. This data has the potential to lay a foundation in answering the thesis question, ‘how can lay volunteer ministers contribute to the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in the future?’ The thoughtful responses of interviewees point a way forward in many aspects but they also leave many questions unanswered. This made it difficult to eliminate material that emerged in relation to the theme of education for lay ministers. The picture painted by the input of people from across a broad spectrum of the Irish Catholic Church could provide a basis for decision makers about priorities for parishes and dioceses. What follows is some of the major areas which were addressed in the interviews and from which some key recommendations will be proposed.

### 7.1 Agreeing on Terminology regarding Adult Faith Development

A wide diversity in understanding can exist about the task of both forming and training people for ministry within the parish. So, as noted in Chapters Four and Six, the initial part of each interview was devoted to a conversation about terminology. It would take a separate project to analyse these discussions, as a great range of terms was used for the process of education for ministry within the parish. This further exploration of terminology may seem inconsequential, but it helped to uncover the philosophical assumptions of the interviewees.

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Rather than disrupting the flow of the interviews, a broad consensus on the appropriateness of the term ‘adult faith development’, as used in the Directory for Catechesis, was assumed. The Directory says,

‘faith development’ as an all-inclusive term allows us to treat together, under one heading, when appropriate, all the necessary and nuanced meanings that terms such as initial proclamation, initiation and catechesis, for example, suggest but cannot individually contain. Those who are charged with faith development, therefore, within a particular Christian community whether at parish or inter-parish level, at deanery, diocesan, regional or national level, will need … to be adequately educated and trained in discerning roles, what forms of faith development are necessary, appropriate and of value for particular individuals, groups and communities.3

Most of those interviewed were happy with the use of the term ‘adult faith development’ although, as will become clear, many individuals, and presumably their communities, use a different term, ‘adult religious education’, ‘catechesis’ ‘faith formation’ etc.4 In the direct quotations from interviewees, adult faith development can encompass the meanings of any of the above.

7.2 Theme One: Pastoral Renewal as distinct from Adult Faith Development in the Local Context

An issue which underpinned much of the conversations in the interviews was the extent of commitment in parishes and dioceses directed towards pastoral renewal, that is renewal of the current structures as distinct from adult faith development. The focus on ‘renewal’ tends towards ways of maintaining organisational structures, that is, maintenance rather than transformation. Through education, for example, people can come to recognise that they are ministers in their own right rather than undertaking an ancillary role because of the lack of clergy. Many parishes are aware and supportive of initiatives which increase participation within the community, but do not necessarily understand the connection between such initiatives and faith development programmes. Thus Codd spoke of the emphasis on the ‘renewal of parish communities but without recognition of the central importance of faith development for that [to

3 Irish Episcopal Conference, Share the Good News, 64.
4 The implications of these various terminologies for education is explored in section 4.1.1.
Byrne said that he would be aware of parishes gradually becoming alert to the need to get lay people more involved:

But I would think at the moment the focus that I’m aware of is more at the structural level, getting things organised and then bringing lay people to work together on councils on that kind of level and we haven’t yet quite got to the point, where the training and education that would be necessary to help people to take on their responsibility and to enjoy what they’re doing, because that’s part of it too.6

One priest commented that, in the parish to which he had recently arrived as parish priest, there were a large number of people actively involved in parish life. For the most part these lay people had received no formation beyond the practicalities of the roles they had assumed.7 Another diocesan worker’s succinct answer to a question regarding awareness of the need for formation was – ‘no, no, no!’8

This tension between the pastoral development of parish life and the lack of emphasis on faith development to underpin this renewal has particular significance for some interviewees whose role in their diocese or parish has a specific emphasis on formation. It was also interesting to note, however, that many people working in these roles had responsibility for multiple areas in their diocese or parish, and consequently found it hard to devote the necessary time to adult faith development programmes. Few interviewees had adult faith development as their sole responsibility, and this fact in itself indicates the lack of priority given to this in many parishes and dioceses. Most dioceses have full-time Religious Education advisers/consultants with special responsibility for the Catholic Schools, but this could not be said about the advisers/consultants for adult faith development.

All interviewees believed that both pastoral renewal and adult faith development are vital for the development of a renewed Church.

5 Codd interviews.
6 Byrne interviews.
7 Interview 6.
8 Interview 5.
7.2.1 Analysis

This theme uncovered a major tension for people in the role of adult educators, both in parishes and dioceses. They perceived adult faith development as much undervalued, and while they themselves were very passionate about its importance for the Church into the future, most were caught in the dilemma of seeing insufficient resources devoted to it. Pastoral renewal is vital, and developing models to deal with the diminishing number of clergy, for example, is urgent. Yet without the underpinning of faith development for adults assuming new roles, there is the danger that these models will not be based on a solid ecclesiology.

7.3 Theme Two: Issues in Relation to Adult Faith Development in Parishes and Dioceses

As noted several times already, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of adult faith development in parishes and dioceses. Different pictures emerged, depending on the interviewee and the context from which they came. Programmes may have been designed in response to a particular need or according to the interest of one of the people in leadership at the time.

However, the interviews illuminated a number of areas that might fall into three categories as discussed in greater detail below:

(i) the presence of generic programmes for all parishioners to further their faith development as adults, rather than specific programmes for those who undertake a ministry role;

(ii) a tension between programmes that are primarily content focused with little emphasis on process; and

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9 This review of initiatives and programmes gives a snapshot of what is happening in parishes, dioceses and nationally. One value of qualitative research is to provide a starting point for a more comprehensive assessment of a particular area. The office of the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development has the intention of carrying out such a comprehensive assessment but at the time of writing this had not come to fruition.
(iii) a developing trend towards certificate or diploma programmes for lay people.

### 7.3.1 Generic Adult Faith Development Programmes

For many parishes faith development is focused on Lent, Advent or other special occasions when programmes will be offered for the whole parish. Such courses tend to be a series of speakers on appropriate topics. For example, the interviews were conducted during the period leading up to the Eucharistic Congress and consequently there was an emphasis on input on Eucharist. These programmes are well received in some cases, depending on the way they are promoted in the general life of a given parish. As one interviewee reported, the response to a programme on Eucharist which was led by an outside speaker was, ‘outstanding, absolutely fantastic. They [parishioners] never had that before. They never had that kind of input.’

Another person was equally enthusiastic and said,

> We had eighty people come to take that programme. We have never had that [before] but it was obvious that people were just dying to have something different and because we were having speakers from left, right and centre we thought great. We asked [people] again about seven or eight weeks later after Christmas and after that it was a fortnightly thing. We had sixty people come back.

These programmes are not, by and large, targeted at any specific group in the parish but are open to all parishioners, though those with ministry responsibilities may be strongly encouraged to attend. Such programmes are designed to cater for a perceived lack of knowledge of the Catholic faith. As one person put it, ‘you can’t presume any kind of doctrinal knowledge nowadays like you could have done ten years ago even or twenty, certainly twenty years ago’.

The Catholic Church has placed a great deal of emphasis on the religious education of children, but there seems to be a growing awareness that religious education that stops when children finish school is insufficient to support the

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10 Interview 6.
11 Focus Group 1.
12 Interview 7. Also Interview 3, and there was a lengthy discussion on the lack of doctrinal knowledge in Focus Group 1.
faith needs of today’s adult Catholics. Some interviewees raised this as a major concern for them in either their parish or diocese. One person reflected on the spasmodic way faith education is offered, in comparison to the education that people can experience in their professional lives. Codd suggests that,

Because the schools carried the task of faith development almost exclusively for so long, I think there’s not an institutional awareness yet, here in Ireland, of the level of structuring and resourcing which is needed if we’re going to have the kind of faith development which will be at the root of vibrant faith communities. So we're at a real transition time between an inherited faith, a schooled faith and a continually revived and re-visited adult faith.\(^{13}\)

The difficulties in developing this new awareness of the need for adult faith development, both among the clergy and bishops and the general Catholic population, is discussed later in the context of identifying the challenges facing adult faith development generally.

### 7.3.2 Content versus Process

Another concern raised by participants in the research is the tension between a concentration on the content of adult faith development and the processes that are used for it. The Catholic Church has traditionally had a strong emphasis on the didactic. As Codd puts it, ‘[there is an assumption] we teach something and that it is communicated and then it will be put into practice’.\(^{14}\) It is rarely that simple, however, as was noted by other interviewees. For example, ‘we have to allow people to be adult and bring them into the conversation rather than just give them information.’\(^{15}\) The idea that adult faith development includes an element of building on people’s own experience was explored in the interviews as people struggled to agree on a terminology that was appropriate for the task. Many recognised the importance of the prior life experience of Catholics who come to programmes offered by the parish.\(^{16}\)

\(^{13}\) Codd Interviews.

\(^{14}\) Codd Interviews.

\(^{15}\) Byrne interviews.

\(^{16}\) Codd and Byrne Interviews 1, 2; Interviews 7, 1; Focus Groups 1 and 2.
7.3.3 Certificate and Diploma Programmes

A third strand that emerged in the interviews was the growing number of dioceses that are offering Certificate and Diploma in Theology programmes for parishioners, many of whom are involved in ministry. They are found across Ireland in urban and rural settings, and are usually offered over one or two years, requiring a major commitment on the part of participants. The programmes include areas such as understanding community, scripture, liturgy, sacraments, Church etc. In most cases they are aimed at giving people a systematic overview of the Catholic faith, and how this impacts on the Christian life. In some cases the theology course may be part of a third-level qualification. The demanding nature of such programmes means that they are not for everyone. One person reflects,

Kennedy [Martin]\(^{17}\) would talk about [the high level of commitment] to describe the two percent of people. Whether you subscribe to it or not he talks about that two percent of people that are really interested and committed and in this kind of year-long programme what we have done is we have targeted that two percent and then to get their influence to widely spread as much as we can through programmes.\(^{18}\)

This diocesan worker described the programme as 'phenomenally successful', and went on to reflect on the implications of such programmes for the local parishes to which the graduates belonged.

They [the graduates] can’t wait to get back to their parish and get involved, while at the same time being aware of the potential of their roles as lay people within the Church, but yet aware as well of the reality of what parishes are like and how they have to work to create the opportunities to use what they’ve learned so there is a whole spectrum there of involvement.

Another programme involved participants in the course development, and in mentoring other parishioners who enrolled in the programme in subsequent years.\(^{19}\) This seems to have been a very successful model, as it requires

\(^{17}\) This refers to the work of Martin Kennedy, Ministry Now, who suggests that there are about 2% of people who are highly committed within any parish.
\(^{18}\) Interview 5.
\(^{19}\) Interview 9.
participants, when they have completed the Diploma, to help run programmes in their own parish, and in a sense the educational process becomes self-perpetuating. A couple of interviewees talked about the issue of keeping the programme going beyond the first few years: this may relate to the required commitment level and will probably always attract only the few. Overall these long-term programmes are found across Ireland in urban and rural settings.

Several factors are significant in the success of such programmes. The first is location, which has to be reasonably local. A number of third-level colleges offer these programmes in venues that allow a number of parishes or clusters to avail of them. The second item that arose in the interviews is that of cost. In some case the participant pays the whole cost and in others the parish or diocese does so. It seems most successful when the cost is shared by the participant and the diocese or parish.

The involvement of the diocese in setting up such programmes is nearly always essential, and the work of the local parish is to encourage participants to enrol. One person reflected that when someone undertook a theology programme of their own volition, there seemed to be a lack of ownership by the parish, and consequently the person was less likely to be invited to be involved in the parish or in some cases did not want to become involved.²⁰

Theology programmes are developing to meet the need for adult faith development throughout Ireland. The training of people for paid ministry has been deliberately excluded from this review of adult faith development as it is outside the central concentration of this project on people who are volunteers. Theology programmes were recognised by interviewees as vital in faith development in parishes and dioceses: even those whose diocese does not currently offer them were clear that it was an ideal to which they would aspire.

### 7.3.4 Analysis

From the interviews it was clear that there are a number of initiatives aimed at adult faith formation, some within parishes and others which are more long

²⁰ Interview 4.
term and often under the auspices of third level institutes. The initiation of such programmes varies, some being under the umbrella of the parishes, others being diocesan initiatives. The value of such programmes is clear, not only introducing participants to theological education, but in time leading them to take on something more long term. Even so, they are valuable as educational opportunities in their own right.

Certificate and diploma programmes are the building blocks for a theological literate laity who can become leaders in their own parishes. A major limitation on their effectiveness, however, is the willingness or otherwise of priest and/or parish councils to use the participants in parish roles at the conclusion of their training.

Further, the methodology used in the programme, whether within the parish or the diocese, is critical to their effectiveness. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* acknowledges, education with adults ‘must take serious account of their experience, and the challenges they have encountered in life.’\(^\text{21}\) The interviews demonstrated the positive aspects of what is happening in adult faith development but also the unevenness of programme availability and the lack of standardization in what is offered, since these often emerge out a specific context.

### 7.4 Theme Three: Training and Formation for Lay Volunteer Ministry

Merriam, in writing of the qualities necessary for the researcher in qualitative research, puts a tolerance for ambiguity at the head of the list.\(^\text{22}\) It was in this section that this quality was most necessary for this researcher. It was almost impossible to discern any clear patterns in the training offered to lay people when they undertake ministry in their parish. The search for patterns is characteristic of qualitative research, but little coherence was found in the way lay volunteer ministers are trained in Ireland. In some dioceses the expectations are high, while in others there is little or no formal training. In the following

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\(^{21}\) *GDC*, paragraph 172.

\(^{22}\) Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 20.
discussion it needs to be noted that almost all examples cited by interviewees are specific to a given situation, and it is impossible to extrapolate from one context to other situations.

7.4.1 Awareness of the Need for Faith Development for Lay Volunteer Ministers

While there is little coherence about the education offered for lay ministry, there was almost complete agreement that the awareness of the need for such formation is patchy. One diocesan person summed up by saying, ‘I think the reality of people undertaking ministry in the Church is far more widespread than their formation.’ Another parish person said,

The one thing that is very obvious, and I'm part of a team here, is that to all of us is the fact of the lack of input. Even though the groups would sing at Mass, and even though people would read at Mass and be ministers of the Eucharist, little or none of them have had any kind of training or input to give them an understanding of what liturgy is about, about Bible, about Church music, all of those kind of things.

Another, perhaps more disturbing, issue raised was the reluctance of some priests to have people educated in theology at all. Consequently, while people are taking roles in their parishes, no attempt was made to train them for the task. One of the diocesan people explained that he sometimes had to work around the priest in the parish to get people to programmes: ‘I'm trying to sneak people into a course’. He continued by saying that in his experience some priests were very reluctant to accept any help from the diocesan personnel. Other people did not paint such a bleak picture, and believed that there was a growing awareness of the need for faith development for lay ministers. Codd, from her experience at a national level, said, 'I would say that there are places where there is a serious attempt to be systematic about the training and the support and the ongoing reflection of Ministers.' Another interviewee remarked,

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23 Interview 5.  
24 Interview 6.  
25 Interview 6.  
26 Codd Interviews.
Priests would love to have a group of people who they felt were trained and educated and all the rest and yet they are not willing to put the effort or the resources into it to see that, well it is well down the list.27

This ambiguity among clergy was reflected to some extent among the lay people interviewed. There was divided opinion as to whether there was awareness among lay people of the need for training for the ministry roles they undertake. Those involved in lay volunteer ministry were generally more likely to attend faith development than the average parishioner, and there was a positive response to the faith development that was offered. To some extent the response to courses for lay ministers was tempered by the expectation that such training was necessary.28

One person suggested that once people experienced some training they were much more willing to participate in further training.

People come initially [saying] why do I need training? But slowly now you find you are working with very competent people, really competent people in their professional lives and accept that ‘in-service training’ is necessary.29

At the other extreme was one interviewee who said ‘events are poorly attended, and of those who do attend, brevity and practical help seems to be the priority.’30

While there is some formation for people undertaking ministry on a volunteer basis in parishes, the overall sense from the interviews was that such formation is spasmodic, and reliant on the conviction about its importance in the eyes of the diocesan bishop or the parish priest. Overall, what is on offer is dependent on a few key people in dioceses and parishes throughout the country.31

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27 Interview 2.
28 Interview 5.
29 Focus Group 2.
30 Interview 1.
31 Codd Interviews.
7.4.2 Categories of Formation and Training for Lay Volunteer Ministers

Given the caveat that there is an uneven distribution of training for lay ministry throughout the country, this section explores the nature and duration of programmes that do exist. Education for these ministries falls mainly into two areas: firstly, training for people ministering in the area of sacraments and liturgy; and secondly, training for leadership roles, including PPC members. A third area also exists, namely, training for people who work in pastoral roles, for example, bereavement ministry or prayer ministry, but such training appears to be less common and even more ad hoc than the first two kinds.

Most dioceses and parishes offer some formation and training for what are seen as the two principal ministry roles undertaken by lay people in parishes, namely, Eucharistic Ministers and Readers, though this is by no means universal. One perception is that such ministries are visible and have greater numbers and therefore receive more attention. The duration of such courses can be anything from one to four sessions, and they typically include a faith development element and a training element. Smaller parishes rely on the diocese to provide such courses; most dioceses do provide some opportunity for training for people involved in liturgical roles. In some places this is systemic and sustained. One parish worker said, ‘we would continue to form them right through, you know, for every year we do something for our people in ministry, in some make, shape or form.’ There is also faith development for members of choirs, sacristans, and other people who contribute to the enhancement of the liturgical celebrations of the community.

A second major area of adult faith development is the training of volunteer ministers who take a leadership role for programmes within the parish. A major part of the life of most parishes are programmes offered to parents of infants and young children being prepared for reception of the sacraments.

32 Focus Group 2.
33 Interview 8.
34 These include leaders of baptism, confirmation, Eucharist and marriage programmes. Increasingly also lay people are presiding at funerals apart from when Mass is offered.
Many parishes have baptism programmes, again varying considerably in quality and duration. The *Do This in Memory of Me* and *You shall be my Witnesses* programmes are offered widely across dioceses and parishes, and are very popular. They offer a structured process for the catechetical instruction of parents, and give an opportunity for parents to reconnect with their faith. Codd reflected on the impact of *Do This in Memory*:

> It has had an enormous impact, simply among people who never thought that they could participate in a faith development activity vis-à-vis the children. Suddenly they find there is this programme and there is a structure, and it has well processed content and so on. The joy they get out of participating in the preparation at that level with the children is enormous. Everywhere I go, people who have used this particular programme are saying – what a discovery!  

The impact of this programme was evident in many of the interviews and the two focus groups. It was the item discussed most often, and gives some pointers for the development of programmes in other areas. Recently, *You will be my Witnesses*, has been developed using a similar format to *Do This in Memory*, which is testimony to its success. One diocesan worker commented that this programme is doing a lot for the revitalisation of families. The baptism programmes are less uniform and vary widely in content, length and focus. However, it would appear that some form of preparation is happening on a widespread basis.

Ministry training is also available in many parishes and dioceses for people on PPCs. As one interviewee said, ‘we would put a lot of energy into the formation of parish pastoral councils and that I think has been good formation but it is the functional thing.’ Different people reflected on the importance that PPCs themselves see in having some kind of formation,

> because they are the leaders now in the parish, they see the need for a formation about what is a pastoral council, the various gifts, skills and how they are used and what the real role of that council is, it’s

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35 Codd Interviews.  
36 Interview 3.  
37 Focus Group 1.
not the finances, it’s not the administration etc and how can they make a difference.\textsuperscript{38}

The role of PPCs is becoming increasingly important with fewer clergy, and consequently the mandate of Vatican II for their establishment is being realised in Ireland to a much greater extent than previously. In some parishes and dioceses the training of PPC members is being taken seriously. For those who were interviewed, the leadership role of the PPC will necessitate a strategic approach to faith development of its members.

### 7.4.3 Faith Development and Training for People involved in Pastoral Ministry in the Parish

The third area in parishes and dioceses where training is offered is more broadly in the development of people who volunteer to undertake a pastoral role in the parish. For example, Bethany Groups – which give support to people suffering bereavement – have become popular, and there is a developing programme of training being used in a number of dioceses.

Youth ministry is a major concern for most parishes, and the formation for people who undertake a leadership role is often given a priority. There are a number of youth ministry programmes offered nationally, and this area of ministry was highlighted by quite a few people in the interviews. The importance of outreach to youth and young adults was raised several times, and the concern with the lack of involvement with the Church by young people was obvious. However, as with other areas, training of this group and their leaders tended to be ad hoc.

### 7.4.4 Analysis

Finding data about the kinds and numbers of programmes that are offered across the dioceses is difficult. What is known is garnered from the interviews, and would not necessarily be helpful in this context, as the research endeavoured to uncover what the interviewees knew was available. People in diocesan ministry tend to have a much higher awareness of the need for adult

\textsuperscript{38} Focus Group 1.
faith development. Consequently, they were much more likely to know what provision for adult faith development was made in areas where they work but it is impossible to discern what is happening in places where there are not designated adult faith development personnel.

In summary, the nature and extent of different kinds of adult faith development programmes being offered varies from parish to parish and from diocese to diocese, and it is difficult to discern any pattern. While the individuals who took part in the interviews were involved in leading training and formation programmes, and would be representative of the best of what is happening, the overall impression was a lack of coherence in policy. If adult faith development for lay volunteer ministers were to become a catalyst for change within the Catholic Church, a much more coordinated approach would be essential. That said, the publication of *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis* is a foundational document for this development while not providing a comprehensive solution.

7.5 Theme Four: Problems Facing the Equipping of Lay Volunteers for Ministry

The difficulties facing the training of lay volunteers for ministry tasks and responsibilities fall into two broad categories. First is an attitudinal issue, and second – a direct consequence of this – a lack of resources. The enthusiasm and competence of those who were interviewed was very evident, and their commitment to the task of faith development could not be questioned. As Codd noted,

> there is not an institutional awareness yet here in Ireland of the level of structuring and resourcing of lay ministers (volunteers or otherwise) which is needed if we’re going to have the kind of faith development which will be at the heart of vibrant faith communities.\(^{39}\)

Individuals, whether they be bishops, priests or adult faith development coordinators, can only do so much to bring about change, and as yet there does not seem to be sufficient numbers to force change at an institutional level.

\(^{39}\) Codd Interviews.
The large numbers of people who are volunteering for ministry within the parishes stands in stark contrast to the numbers who are participating in adult faith development on a systematic basis. During the interviews many wonderful initiatives emerged, and though in some cases a great many people were being reached, it was clear that overall only a small proportion of people in lay volunteer ministry received adequate training for the important ministries they undertake on behalf of the community. There was a marked contrast between the attitude to the faith development, formation, and education for ministry for lay volunteers as against similar processes for clergy or religious education teachers in schools. In the latter cases, specific training and formation is seen as essential by those in leadership in the Church.

One way to ascertain the priority given to adult faith development for lay ministers is identifying the proportion of resources allocated to this at national, diocesan or parish level. All of the interviewees believed that adult faith development needed a massive investment of resources if it was to become a catalyst for change. As one diocesan representative expressed it,

I think the biggest concern is finance, money. Paying people. We are not investing financially to train people officially. They have to pay out themselves if they do courses and there are so many of them who are up and down [the country] doing courses and they are paying for it themselves.\textsuperscript{40}

Another person commented on the way that the Child Protection policies had been implemented:

I think there isn’t really a perception [that adult faith development needs resourcing] like the things that need to happen as in the case of child protection, child safeguarding. It’s amazing the amount of resources put into that, and how that has a structure that has been put in place against huge opposition in many ways from clergy, but it is there and you can’t ignore it. The diaconate as well, you know, there has been a fair bit of effort put into that getting off the ground and it happened, but yet you can talk for years about a co-ordinated effort in the country for adult faith development but it doesn’t happen.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Interview 3.
\textsuperscript{41} Interview 2.
In one of the focus groups there was a strong reaction to the resourcing issue:

My answer [to the question of resources] is always that if ten guys showed up in the morning for priesthood the money would be found. We’re told that we are very well stocked up [with adult faith development personnel] and I’m not complaining on some levels, but we could do with at least two more bodies on the ground, but we’re told there is no money for it. I still maintain that if the ten lads showed up tomorrow for Maynooth there would be money for that. It just depends on the context. There’s money there.\(^{42}\)

When exploring the question of resources with participants in the research, the tone of the conversation changed, and the question often generated a level of anger and frustration. These people are passionately committed to their ministry as a way of renewing life within the Church, and yet feel that there is not sufficient commitment from Church leaders to build on what is happening locally.

Another interviewee, in response to the question of resources, was moved to say, ‘the institutional model is dying all around and will be dead within ten years ... there is a lot right but ...’\(^{43}\) Even in the light of these difficulties, however, interviewees were enthusiastic in considering how the structures could be developed to make adult faith development available and even normative for all Catholics, in particular those who were actively involved in lay volunteer ministry.

7.5.1 Analysis

In the eyes of interviewees, the difficulties in developing well-educated and trained personnel for lay volunteer ministry comes down to two major factors. First, the priority it receives from bishops and parish priests, in comparison, for example, with the strategic approach taken to Child Protection policy and training. The second major difficulty is related to the first – money. The Catholic Church, like most institutions in Ireland since the recession, has seen a

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\(^{42}\) Focus Group 1. St Patrick’s College Maynooth is the national seminary and pontifical university.

\(^{43}\) Focus Group 1. It important to note that this Focus Group 1 met on the day following the publication of the Ryan Report on child abuse, which affected the responses of people.
diminishing resources, and putting sufficient personnel and resources into adult faith development would take courage in the present climate.

7.6 Theme Five: Developing Structures and Personnel for Adult Faith Development

Merriam, in writing of the concept of ‘reliability’ in qualitative research, notes,

Because what is studied in education is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting at it, and because the emergent design of qualitative case study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible.44

Merriam’s insight is noteworthy, because it reflects the tentative nature of what is recorded here about the structure and development of adult faith development in parishes and dioceses. The interview subjects used in this research are undoubtably a key group in the development of adult faith development for the future, so their insights form a valuable starting point for the discussion on the structures needed and personnel available for the development of such training in parishes and dioceses. These insights cannot claim to be comprehensive. So what follows shows something of the reality which brings together situations where structures are developing, along with the awareness that there are dioceses and parishes where little or nothing is happening.

Codd reported from her knowledge of the national picture that ‘two thirds of the dioceses in Ireland have designated personnel’45 with specific responsibility for adult faith development. As noted earlier, only a proportion of these people have this area as their sole responsibility, many having a number of other responsibilities. Arising from this situation, many of those interviewed believe that having personnel with qualifications and expertise was the most important starting point for development of adult faith development.

44 Merriam, Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications, 206.
45 Codd Interviews.
At present, all dioceses have designated personnel with responsibility for faith development in primary and secondary schools; but adult faith development needs a dedicated person also. The Directory names, as one of the key objectives, that 'adult faith development will be clearly visible as the chief form of faith development in dioceses'. This stated objective is a long way from the current position, as reported by Codd. However it does provide a goal and strategy for future development.

A number of interviewees believe that the dioceses to which they belong have developed structures for adult faith development, in which training for lay volunteer ministers has become part of the diocesan structure and resources have been invested in personnel. While these situations were not considered perfect, there was a sense of something happening, and energy flowing behind this area. One of the frustrations named by a focus group member – which evoked some sympathy from other members of the group – was that they were expected to do everything. Another said that the way they had confronted this issue was by having a team of lay volunteers to work alongside them. However, this in turn meant that time and resources had to be spent on training and mentoring these people.

In a number of dioceses structures have been devoted to the development of resources for use by people in parishes, for example the Do This in Memory and Be My Witnesses programmes. The National Office of the resource person for the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development did a survey of programmes suitable for use in parishes. These resources are helpful, but interviewees noted that in their dioceses, while there was money for resources and to send people on courses, there was no real investment in personnel to support adult faith development in parishes. A comment made by Byrne in this regard is interesting.

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46 GCD, paragraph 199.
47 Examples of this were Interviews 2 and 4, and Focus Group 2.
48 Focus Group 2.
49 This programme was originally developed by the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin.
50 Focus Group 1.
You also need people who can provide the education, so there's a question there about, is it somebody coming with a lot of information, is that the kind of education we want, or is it somebody who comes to be able to facilitate a conversation? And can that be somebody within the community already who is trained in a sense to do that?\textsuperscript{51}

The situation in parishes is similar in some respects to that in dioceses but there is generally less structure and fewer resources. In some parishes the parish priest(s) has a particular interest in adult faith development and will personally support it by making sure that training is provided for all who minister within the parish. Where there are parish pastoral workers, education for lay ministers is further developed and more likely to reflect the objective from the \textit{National Directory for Catechesis}: ‘Adult Faith Development will be at the centre of parish life, helping the community to grow vigorous in its conversion to Jesus Christ.’\textsuperscript{52}

The situation, as noted earlier, is far from this ideal and the need for personnel and structure is urgent.

In the interviews, the absence of much response to questions about structure for programmes in parishes in itself spoke of a major problem. In some parishes there is a designated person for adult faith development on the PPC (a volunteer role) and in few cases a team of people who take responsibility for the area. The level of expectation is not high, and a long way from what is proposed by \textit{The Directory} which says that, ‘Each parish, or group of parishes should have a qualified member of staff designated as Faith Development Coordinator.’\textsuperscript{53}

Byrne, speaking from the context of the widespread consultation in preparation for the writing of the \textit{National Directory for Catechesis: Share the Good News}, said that there is a need for the centralisation of all faith development agencies in a diocese. This seems to be an important potential strategy for the future.

\textbf{7.6.1 Analysis}

Taken from a systemic point of view, the current position of adult faith development in parishes and dioceses is quite bleak. The development of

\textsuperscript{51} Byrne Interviews.
\textsuperscript{52} Irish Episcopal Conference, \textit{Share the Good News}, 193.
\textsuperscript{53} Irish Episcopal Conference, \textit{Share the Good News}, 104.
structures and policies for the area is happening in pockets across the country. The publication of *Share the Good News* offers some hope for the future, were it to be fully implemented. Many of those interviewed spoke in glowing terms of the potential of this document to bring about change in the way adult faith development is viewed in the Irish Catholic Church and consequently to augment their work. One person expressed it well by saying, 'It is a profound document'.

This document provides a blueprint for structure and policy for adult faith development and sets a benchmark for the future. If the potential for lay volunteer ministry is to become a catalyst for change within the Church urgent implementation of *The Directory* is a priority.

### 7.7 Dreams for the Future

The final question asked in the interviews was about the participant’s dream for the future of adult faith development. In qualitative methodology this kind of question offers interviewees the opportunity to express something of their hopes and ideals. Byrne encapsulated much of the response to the question. He said,

> I think the dream is that education would be much more central to parish and diocese as a normal part of living faith. Schools look after themselves well in that area and there is a system. Parishes and families and youth groups, and whatever the various different elements on the ground, that they would be able to see themselves as a growing, developing emerging faith group, whether it’s the parish itself or various groups within the parish. That there would be a generosity of heart towards education and people would understand and know why this is a good thing and just be a normal part of what we do at some level. If we could achieve that, that would be wonderful.

Underpinning the motivation of each person who was interviewed was this belief that adult faith development needs to move towards the centre of the Catholic Church’s energy if it is to survive into the future. Dr Codd dreamed of a more intentionally committed faith community in Ireland, and that there will be

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54 Interview 3.
55 This question highlighted the fact that while the specific concentration of this research was education for lay volunteer ministers, it was not necessarily the focal point for the participants and as a consequence their responses were broader ranging.
56 Byrne Interviews.
a more socially conscious faith community. Another interviewee dreamed of a greater appreciation of the liturgy and deepening of people’s spirituality. A diocesan worker reflected on the need for consultation making the point that the process of change was as important as the changes themselves.

### 7.7.1 Analysis

Hope for the future of adult faith development was evident in the responses that came under this category. Those who were interviewed, even in the face of the enormous difficulties they face, remained positive and committed to the task. The responses mirrored something of the hope and enthusiasm of Pope Francis,

> Spirit-filled evangelisation is not the same as a set of tasks dutifully carried out despite one’s personal inclinations and wishes. How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for the new chapter of evangelisation full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attractions.

In listening to the responses to the question about their dreams, the researcher heard real resonance with the words of Francis. None had lost hope in the face of difficulties and all were committed to enabling adult faith development become part of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

### 7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the responses to questions about what is happening in the area of adult faith development in the Irish Catholic Church, in particular for lay volunteer ministers. Apart from outlining the kinds of faith development being offered, it identified the ways in which this education is part of dioceses and parishes. More problematically, education for lay volunteer ministry is far from being embedded in the reality of Church life. Among the problems that the interviews highlighted was the sporadic nature of faith development programmes for lay ministers, including the lack of awareness on the part of bishops, priests, PPCs and volunteers themselves. The lack of personnel and resources was a recurring theme, as participants expressed frustration about

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57 Interview 8.  
58 *EG*, paragraph 261.
the amount of attention adult faith development received in the life of the Church. There was also difficulty about the kind of programmes being offered, with some interviewees expressing concern that programmes sometimes did not give participants the opportunity to integrate the knowledge gained with their own life experience.

On the positive side, the development of diploma and certificate programmes in local areas were seen as a means of enabling a wide range of Catholics to gain a theological education. The publication of the *National Directory for Catechesis* was regarded as having great potential to bring about a more unified approach to adult faith development. The implementation of this document was viewed as key to the future of the Church in Ireland.

If lay volunteers are to become central figures in the reinvigoration of the Church in Ireland, then adult faith development will have to become far more widespread and embedded in the life of the Church. Without some faith development the vast army of volunteers will remain mere adjuncts to the clergy, lacking any real potential to effect change. There is need for consistent adult faith development, as envisaged by *Share the Good News*. 
Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Recommendations

The crisis affecting the life of the Catholic Church in Ireland, highlighted in the Ryan and Murphy reports on child abuse, has affected this research project on many levels. As Cassidy writes, ‘to an outside observer there is little to parallel the dramatic changes in the Irish faith profile in recent years’. In each of the interviews conducted in this research it was a central issue, as noted earlier. In the light of this, pointing a way forward may be premature and even foolhardy. What is proposed below is recognised as one only one of the many profound changes that will be needed if the Catholic Church in Ireland is to continue its mission of evangelising and nurturing the faith of Catholics.

The question could be asked, was it wise to attempt to propose a way forward in the midst of a major crisis? This researcher believed that such a situation, not anticipated when the research began, made it even more important to propose a way forward. It emerged from an underlying philosophy that understands change as emerging organically rather than structurally. This research therefore concentrated on the renewal of the Church at parish level, using education as the primary tool.

The on-going proclamation of the gospel remains the central task of the Church, so finding ways to ensure the continuing proclamation is urgent in the face of the fact that,

large numbers of Irish Catholics struggle to find a correlation between their faith and life: knowledge of their faith and religious practice are clearly on the decline among Catholics in the younger

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1 Eoin G. Cassidy and Irish Centre for Faith and Culture, Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs (Dublin: Veritas, 2002), 18. See also a forthcoming publication, David Cochran, Carroll, and John C. Waldmeir., eds. The Catholic Church in Ireland Today (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2015). This book is advertised as an interdisciplinary examination of the contemporary Catholic Church in Ireland by US-based scholars who gathered at Loras College, in Dubuque, Iowa, in March 2014, and from the publisher’s note it appears likely to shed further light on issues addressed in this thesis. Regrettably, the book was not in print at the time of completing this thesis.
generations, particularly the youngest age-groups and the teaching of the Catholic Church is frequently distrusted and thought to be out of touch.\textsuperscript{2}

This project, as with all research, has its limitations. The research does not come from the direct experience of lay volunteer ministers: what is presented derives from the perspective of adult religious educators. The number of people interviewed is limited by the requirements of qualitative research. Valuable insights would be gained by surveying volunteers themselves, but would require a different and more extensive piece of research. The exploration of ecclesiological and ministry questions (especially Chapter Three) was limited by the restrictions on the word count of this dissertation.

A further limitation was that, this study does not attempt to resolve the issues around the terminology ‘lay volunteer ministry’, as this would require a thesis of its own. The need to rely on the common usage of the term ‘lay ministry’, when it is not accepted generally in official documents of the Church, is problematic, though it highlights the gap that is developing between the hierarchy and the local Church.

\textbf{8.1 Overview of the Findings of this Research}

The opening chapters of this thesis laid out the foundations for this research project: methodology (Chapter One), context (Chapter Two), theology of ministry (Chapter Three) and educational philosophy (Chapter Four). Chapters Five to Seven explored the findings of the interview phase, namely the current state of the Catholic Church in Ireland, the nature and extent of lay volunteer work in local parishes, and whether education for those involved in this ministry is a reality.

The findings from the interview process in large part validated the research proposal that education of adult Catholics has the potential to reinvigorate the Catholic Church in Ireland. Not all that emerged from the interviews was positive, however, and the barriers to implementing adult faith development

\textsuperscript{2} Irish Episcopal Conference, \textit{Share the Good News}, No. 8.
were very obvious. Nonetheless, those interviewed retained their enthusiasm for the task which bodes well for the future, and many exciting insights and deep reflections emerged.

The question underpinning this project was, Has education for lay volunteer ministers the potential to reinvigorate the Catholic Church in Ireland? A mixed response to this question has been uncovered.

First, the chapter on the current state of the Catholic Church in Ireland points to a Church in crisis. While the numbers of people who identify themselves as Catholic is still very high, about 84% in the 2011 census, what it means to be Catholic is no longer as clear-cut as it was for previous generations. Some research points to substantial numbers still attending Mass on a regular basis (at least once a month) and the vast majority of people still turn to the Church at key moments in their lives, so the numbers receiving the sacraments remains substantial. Nonetheless, participants in the research believed there are huge problems for the Church to face. While many people identify as Catholic, what this means on a personal level is hard to ascertain. This lack of clarity means that parishes find it hard to know how to reach out to people. The child abuse scandals have rocked people’s faith in the Catholic Church; in particular, a large chasm has grown up between the leadership of the Church (primarily the bishops) and ordinary Catholics.

On the other hand, many interviewees believed that some local parish communities were quite vibrant, having a sense of energy and purpose. The presence of lay ministers, especially volunteers, was central to the life of most communities: many people are willing to be involved in the life of the parish rather than just be passive church attendees. So most interviewees believed that there is much that is positive in the life of local communities, as a direct result of lay ministry and the willingness of people to participate. Education directed towards this group would therefore be a very good strategic starting point to bring about change.

However, their assessment of the present situation in regard to the education underpinning people undertaking ministry roles was less positive. Despite the
enthusiasm of the interviewees for education as a fundamental need for anyone who participates in public ministry, they did not believe that Church leaders, whether in parish or diocese, had any real appreciation of its importance. The lack of commitment to resourcing education for ministry was a disheartening feature in the lives those who hold responsibility for adult faith development in parish or diocese. The training of Catholics for ministry is sporadic, and is not a priority at the national, diocesan, or local levels of the Irish Church. This is despite the commitment of individual bishops, priests or parish pastoral councils, and the small group of people who coordinate and facilitate educational opportunities.

Nonetheless a number of developments point to a more hopeful future. The participants in the research believe that the adult faith development that is already happening brings about a profound change in the lives of those who take part, and is transformative for the life of their parish. The second positive feature is the existence of The National Office of the Resource Person for the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development. It was through this office that research participants were identified. The coordination of diocesan adult faith development personnel means that a mechanism for the development of initiatives happening in local areas is in place, and makes possible a significant expansion of adult faith development for lay volunteer ministry.

The third development that has the potential to bring about change is the publication of Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland. This will provide a framework for the implementation of adult faith development across dioceses and parishes. It is a comprehensive document, both inspirational and practical, and provides policies and strategies for the implementation of adult faith development for lay volunteer ministers.

In summary, this thesis concludes that lay volunteer ministry is a strong and vibrant force within the Catholic Church in Ireland today, but that the faith development of most lay people holding these roles is poor. The structures to sustain the kind of adult faith development that is needed are not currently established in any coherent way. Their provision is essential, if lay volunteer
ministries are to become a catalyst for the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The major factor which impedes the development of lay volunteer ministries is the lack of priority given to adult faith development by those who are leaders in the Catholic Church in Ireland. If any change is to happen, then the mind-set of the Irish bishops will need to be transformed so that they see, understand and resource the critical role that lay volunteer ministry holds in local parishes in Ireland. Further, its potential needs to be appreciated as a key force in helping the Church move from its present state of crisis, and to move towards being a vibrant force in fulfilling its mission of preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Irish people.

8.2 Recommendations

The steps proposed in the recommendations below could help put adult faith development for lay volunteer ministry at the heart of the Irish Church. If implemented, they would immediately help the Catholic Church move beyond its current state of inertia to become a more vibrant force in the Ireland of today. This conviction has been reinforced in the researcher by the effect of education on the local Church in areas where it is established practice. Arising from this conviction there are eight recommendations:

1. That training for people in ministry be given priority by the committee established to implement that National Catechetical Directory.\(^3\)

2. That the National Centre for Liturgy and the Office of the Resource Person for the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development appoint a person to a role with specific responsibility for supporting lay volunteer ministry. This person would be tasked with responsibility for the establishment of standards for people undertaking such ministry, and for

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\(^3\) An implementation committee under the auspices of the Catechetical Council of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference was established in the wake of the publication of Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland.
ensuring they receive the necessary formation and support to meet these standards.4

3. That every diocese establish an office for on-going patterns of training, with a key objective of coordinating and developing lay volunteer ministry. This office needs to be under the auspices of the National Office for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith formation.

4. That minimum standards of formation and training be set for those lay people who undertake ministry roles on behalf of the Catholic Church in Ireland at national level.

5. That parishes, or clusters of parishes, move to appoint suitable persons to the role of Faith Development Coordinators (as outlined in The Directory5).

This project has been hampered by a lack of clarity in official Catholic Church documents about ‘ministry’, and a lack of data. Therefore,

6. That further work be done on the meaning and appropriate terminology for ‘ministry’ which is grounded in a baptismal ecclesiology, and recognises the distinctive responsibilities and symbolic nature of the ordained ministries.

Each year data is collected from dioceses on such things as Mass attendance, Catholic schools, priests, and religious orders, but there is no collection of data regarding lay volunteer ministries and what adult faith development is being offered in parishes and dioceses. There is an urgent need for this to be remedied. Therefore,

7. That a comprehensive survey of lay volunteer ministries in the Irish Catholic Church be instituted, with recommendations for the ongoing collection of data on lay volunteer ministries.

8. That a research project investigate the nature of, and the standards for, lay people in ministry roles in other Catholic communities worldwide.

4 Throughout this work it is assumed that people who undertake full time or part time roles within the diocese or parish will be in paid employment.

5 Irish Episcopal Conference, Share the Good News, No. 71.
In his recent thesis, Hession concludes,

Lay ministry, because of its rootedness in baptism and its consequent prolongation of the mission of Christ, has earned the right to be considered a fully validated and fully recognised ministry in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Its contribution to the future Irish Church is not only enriching, it is also both necessary and desirable.\textsuperscript{6}

If this is true, then this thesis has demonstrated that for lay ministry to flourish it needs to be underpinned by adult faith development. Only then can it be a force for the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

This research concurs with Hession’s finding. It goes further however, in demonstrating that for lay ministry to flourish it needs to be underpinned by adult faith development. Only then can it be a force for the reinvigoration of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

\textsuperscript{6} Hession, 'How Can We Be a Parish without a Priest', 359.
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Appendix 1  Project ‘07-08 Parish-Oriented Adult Faith Development. Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference

Research by Domhnall O’Neill on behalf of the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development.

Cavano, J. F. Catholic Teaching on Mary: Center for Learning, 1999.


Appendix 2: Schedule of interviews

Anne Codd  
Gareth Byrne  
Diocesan Interviewee  
Diocesan Interviewee  
Diocesan Interviewee  
Diocesan Interviewee  
Parish Interviewee  
Parish Interviewee  
Parish Interviewee  
Focus Group 1  
Focus Group 2

Codd Interviews (two)  
Byrne Interviews (two)  
Interview 1  
Interview 2  
Interview 3  
Interview 4  
Interview 5  
Interview 6  
Interview 7  
Interview 8  
Interview 9
Appendix 3: Areas for exploration in the semi-structured interviews

1. **With the writer of the draft National Catechetical Directory, and with the Director of Adult Faith Formation and Pastoral Renewal for the Irish Conference of Bishops.**

   Exploration of the term ‘faith education’ (There may be a need to explore terminology as interviewees may be more comfortable with such terms as ‘catechesis’, ‘religious education’, or ‘faith formation’.)

   Major challenges facing the development of the Church in Ireland.

   The ways in which the ministry of the laity, particularly volunteer lay ministry, is developing in the Catholic Church in Ireland at present.

   A discussion about the level of awareness of adult faith formation in the Church in dioceses and parishes.

   Examples of parishes or dioceses who are making a systematic attempt to educate those taking lay ministry roles in the parish communities. Also identifying resources that currently being used with groups who have ministry roles in parishes.

   An exploration of the development of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) in parishes and dioceses.

   The ways in which the interviewees see adult faith formation developing and the effect that it has or could have on the future Irish Catholic Church.

   A discussion about the relative value of focusing faith formation on lay ministry volunteers rather than a more broad ranging faith formation for parishioners in general.

   Examples of education for lay volunteers making a significant difference in their own lives and in the life of the parish community.

   A discussion on the potential of the National Catechetical directory.

   A discussion around ways in which faith formation for lay volunteers could be developed at local, diocesan and national levels and how this could be resourced.

   Any other areas that will develop from the discussion.

2. **With people having specific responsibility for Adult Faith Education in Irish Catholic dioceses, and priests and pastoral workers in parishes.**

   Exploration of the term ‘faith education’ (There may be a need to explore terminology as interviewees may be more comfortable with such terms as ‘catechesis’, ‘religious education’, or ‘faith formation’.)

   Discussion on some emerging trends and challenges within the Church, particularly at diocesan/parish level.

   Examining the extent and profile of lay volunteer ministers.

   Exploring with interviewees their understanding of the place of lay ministry in the Church and the ways in which it is developing in parish life.
Identifying what, in the experience of interviewees, is happening in adult faith formation, particularly for lay volunteers.

Exploring the issues of personnel, resources and programmes being used for the education of those who are in ministry roles in parishes.

A discussion about the relative value of focusing faith formation on lay ministry volunteers rather than a more broad ranging faith formation for parishioners in general.

Identifying with interviewees how they believe adult faith formation should be offered so that it can be effective.

A discussion around ways in which faith formation for lay volunteers could be developed at local, diocesan and national levels and how this could be resourced.

Identifying the obstacles setting up formation programmes for lay volunteers.

Other areas that will emerge as significant during the interview.

3. **With the two Focus Groups**

Identifying trends and issues in the Irish Catholic Church

Exploration of the term ‘faith education’? (There may be a need to explore terminology as interviewees may be more comfortable with such terms as ‘catechesis’, ‘religious education’, or ‘faith formation’.)

Examining ways in which lay ministry, both professional and volunteer, is developing.

Identifying the nature and extent of lay volunteers in parishes

Exploring adult faith formation and how it is being offered in the dioceses and parishes and the obstacles that impede any developments.

Examining examples of successful adult faith formation and identifying factors that make it effective.

A discussion about the relative value of focusing faith formation on lay ministry volunteers rather than a more broad ranging faith formation for parishioners in general.

Exploring ways in which formation for lay volunteers could be developed locally.

Examining the current situation in regard to personnel and resources for faith formation and how people would like to see this develop.

Any other areas that will emerge from the discussion.
Appendix 4  Interview request - Letter One

The Melbourne College of Divinity

Established by the Melbourne College of Divinity Act 1910
Affiliated with the University of Melbourne 1993

21 Highbury Grove • Kew • Victoria • Australia 3101
Telephone: +61 3 9853 3177 • Fax: +61 3 9853 6695
Email: admin@mcd.edu.au

Education for Voluntary Lay Ministry – a challenge for the development of the Catholic Church in Ireland into the future

Greetings.

My name is Siobhán Larkin chf, Holy Faith Convent, The Coombe, Dublin 8. Phone 01 2776302 or email at slarkin@milltown-institute.ie.

I am currently doing a Doctor of Ministry Studies through the Melbourne College of Divinity. In my research I want to investigate what formation is being offered to Catholic lay volunteer ministers in Ireland.

I have decided to explore this topic because I believe the renewal of the Catholic Church in Ireland is dependent on strong, vibrant parishes where people feel welcomed. If lay volunteer ministers are to offer leadership, alongside priests and pastoral workers, they need an understanding of their faith at adult level. People who volunteer in parishes often have had little formation in their faith since they left school. This research intends to give an overview of what is already happening in Ireland for the education of lay volunteer ministers, and to articulate possible future directions.

I would like to interview you as part of this research project. I am writing to you because of your role in adult faith formation on behalf of the Irish Bishops’ Conference. Your experience, knowledge and wisdom will contribute significantly to the outcome of this research.

If you are willing to participate in the research please sign and return the attached form. Please do not feel that you need to respond positively to this invitation. There may be many reasons why it is not appropriate for you to participate. If you do decide to participate, there will be an opportunity to withdraw up to six weeks after the interview. You are welcome to contact me if you have any questions that would help clarify anything about the research project or your participation in it.

I would like to interview you for approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Once you have returned the acceptance form, I will arrange a time and venue that is convenient for you. The interview will be taped: this tape will be confidential to me and to a
professional person who will type up the interviews. The tapes and any notes that directly concern you will be stored carefully in a safe and will be destroyed once the research is complete I will send you a summary of the interview so that you can confirm that it is an accurate reflection of the interview. If there is any misinterpretation you can let me know. You will have the opportunity to see the full transcript of your interview.

I request your permission to identify you in the research. You have an important role in the Irish Catholic Church and it would be difficult to maintain anonymity. When the research is complete I will send you a summary of the findings. The completed research report will be available in the Jesuit Library at Milltown Institute. Some of the material will be published in journals or other appropriate settings.

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Liaison Officer, MCD Human Resources Ethics Committee at the address above or email hrec@mcd.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely

Siobhan Larkin chf
Appendix 4  Interview request - Letter Two

The Melbourne College of Divinity

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People who volunteer in parishes often have had little formation in their faith
since they left school. This research intends to give an overview of what is
already happening in Ireland for the education of lay volunteer ministers, and to
articulate possible future directions.

I would like to interview you as part of this research project. I am writing to you
because you are actively involved in adult faith formation at national, diocesan
or parish level. People like you have the experience and wisdom to contribute
significantly to the outcome of this research.

If you are willing to participate in the research please sign and return the
attached form. Please do not feel that you need to respond positively to this
invitation. There may be many reasons why it is not appropriate for you to
participate. If you do decide to participate, there will be an opportunity to
withdraw up to six weeks after the interview. You are welcome to contact me if
you have any questions that would help clarify anything about the research
project or your participation in it.

I would like to interview you for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Once you have
returned the acceptance form, I will arrange a time and venue that is convenient
for you. The interview will be taped: this tape will be confidential to me and to a professional person who will type up the interviews. The tapes and any notes that directly concern you will be stored carefully in a safe and will be destroyed once the research is complete I will send you a summary of the interview so that you can confirm that it is an accurate reflection of the interview. If there is any misinterpretation you can let me know. You will have the opportunity to see the full transcript of your interview.

You will not be identifiable in the written research report. I will use designations such as, ‘lay pastoral worker from a rural diocese’ or ‘priest working in diocesan ministry’. When the research is complete I will send you a summary of the findings. The completed research report will be available in the Jesuit Library at Milltown Institute. Some of the material will be published in journals or other appropriate settings.

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Liaison Officer, MCD Human Recourses Ethics Committee at the address above or email hrec@mcd.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely

Siobhan Larkin Chf
Appendix 4  Focus Group request letter

The Melbourne College of Divinity

Established by the Melbourne College of Divinity Act 1910
Affiliated with the University of Melbourne 1993

21 Highbury Grove • Kew • Victoria • Australia 3101
Telephone: +61 3 9853 3177 • Fax: +61 3 9853 6695
Email: admin@mcd.edu.au

Education for Voluntary Lay Ministry – a challenge for the development of
the Catholic Church in Ireland into the future

Greetings

My name is Siobhán Larkin chf, Holy Faith Convent, The Coombe, Dublin 8.
Phone 01 2776302 or email at slarkin@milltown-institute.ie.

I am currently doing a Doctor of Ministry Studies through the Melbourne College of
Divinity. In my research I want to investigate what formation is being offered
to Catholic lay volunteer ministers in Ireland.

I have decided to explore this topic because I believe the renewal of the Catholic
Church in Ireland is dependent on strong, vibrant parishes where people feel
welcomed. If lay volunteer ministers are to offer leadership, alongside priests
and pastoral workers, they need an understanding of their faith at adult level.
People who volunteer in parishes often have had little formation in their faith
since they left school. This research intends to give an overview of what is
already happening in Ireland for the education of lay volunteer ministers, and to
articulate possible future directions.

I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group which will discuss
the issues related to this research project. I am writing to you because you are
actively involved in adult faith formation at national, diocesan or parish level.
People like you have the experience and wisdom to contribute significantly to
the outcome of this research.

If you are willing to participate in the research please sign and return the
attached form. Please do not feel that you need to respond positively to this
invitation. There may be many reasons why it is not appropriate for you to
participate. If you do decide to participate, there will be an opportunity to
withdraw up to six weeks after the interview. You are welcome to contact me if
you have any questions that would help clarify anything about the research
project or your participation in it.

The focus group will take approximately 60 minutes but no more than 90
minutes. Once you have returned the acceptance form, the focus groups will be
timed to coincide with the regional gatherings of people involved in Pastoral
Development and Adult Faith formation. The focus group will be taped: this tape will be confidential to me and to a professional person who will type up the interviews. The tapes and any notes that directly concern you will be stored carefully in a safe and will be destroyed once the research is complete I will send you a summary of the group discussion so that you can confirm that it is an accurate reflection of the discussion. If there is any misinterpretation you can let me know. You will have the opportunity to see the full transcript of your focus group.

You will not be identifiable in the written research report. I will use designations such as, ‘lay pastoral worker from a rural diocese’ or ‘priest working in diocesan ministry’. When the research is complete I will send you a summary of the findings. The completed research report will be available in the Jesuit Library at Milltown Institute. Some of the material will be published in journals or other appropriate settings.

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Liaison Officer, MCD Human Recourses Ethics Committee at the address above or email hrec@mcd.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely

Siobhan Larkin Chf
Appendix 4  Form of Consent

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Form of Consent

I, the participant, have read and understood the information in the enclosed letter and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the research, realising that I may withdraw without prejudice up to six weeks after the interview.

I agree that information provided by me during this research project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals. I agree to be identified in the research.

RESEARCHER’S NAME: SIÓBHÁN LARKIN

Signature: _______________________________ Date: __/__/___

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ______________________________

Signature: _______________________________ Date: __/__/___