

WHY ARE THESE YOUNG CANADIANS CATHOLIC?

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## **Abstract**

Over the centuries the island of Newfoundland has been regarded as a bastion of Catholicism in English North America. Despite its rich Catholic history, there are evident signs of apostasy among the local population. Many studies regarding the rise of the “nones”, or the religiously unaffiliated, and the reasons why Catholic young adults abandon the faith have been carried out worldwide, but there is little research focusing on the reasons why young adults living in Newfoundland remain Catholic. This study intended to add insights to the current literature on the topic. The results of this research show the importance of parental involvement, particularly that of the father, in the religious formation of their children, as well as the precedence of the community over the individual for the successful passing of the faith. The study also sheds light on the presence of an inexplicable element kindling the thirst for the transcendent in the believer’s heart which in this study is referred to as ‘God’s grace’. The religious life stories of 8 Catholic young adults living in Newfoundland before the COVID-19 pandemic were presented, compared, and contrasted. The discussion and conclusions extracted from the analysis draw implications for the future of catechetical programs of the Catholic Church at the local, diocesan, and international levels.

## **General Summary**

For centuries, the island of Newfoundland has been seen as a stronghold of Catholicism in English North America. Despite this rich history, there are signs that some locals are leaving the faith. While there have been many studies on why young adults around the world are leaving the Catholic Church, there has not been much research on why young adults in Newfoundland stay Catholic. This study aimed to add new information to what is already known. The results show that the involvement of parents, especially fathers, is important in passing on the faith to their children as well as the strengthening of faith communities. It also highlighted an unexplainable element that sparks a desire for something greater in the hearts of believers which in this study was called 'God's grace'. The study looked at the experiences of 8 young Catholic adults in Newfoundland before the COVID-19 pandemic and drew conclusions on what this means for the future of Catholic teaching programs.

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“¡Dios Primero!”

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

On August 23, 2017 I arrived in St. John's (NL) after living in Ecuador for nearly 2 years and Florida, USA just before that. These are places in which faith is still considered an important part of people's lives ([Gallup, 2014](#)), a social aspect confirmed especially by the number of people that attend religious services regularly ([Lipka, 2013](#); [Pew Research Center \[PRC\], 2014](#)). This was my first time in Canada and, as I was settling in my new home and learning more about "The Rock", I could recall the reasons why I had decided to embark on this new life adventure: to reach my educational goal of getting a Master's degree from a Canadian University, to achieve my professional goal of becoming a teacher in Canada, as well as to keep growing spiritually and have the chance to go to daily mass, at least until the rest of my growing family joined me on the island.

Everything changed after my first Sunday Mass: Even though it was Sunday morning, the Church did not appear to be full but perhaps close to half-capacity. There was nothing unusual with the priest, the choir, or the music: they all shared similar characteristics found in many parishes around Southern Florida that had a distinctive Irish heritage ([Davis, 2014](#)). The weather could not have been a factor either despite being drizzly and about 10 deg. Celsius for it was typical Newfoundland weather as I would come to learn. I was visiting a parish of a well-established, world-renowned congregation with a long time presence in the country ([Mason, 2013](#)) conveniently located within a minutes-drive distance from a major shopping district and from the city

centre ([Powerinfotech, 2011](#)) and whose architectural design and interior were impressively appealing to the eye: it radiated a very "Canadian" atmosphere ([MacDonald, 2011](#)). I introduced myself to the priest at the end of the mass who very politely welcomed me to the country and the community. As I rode back home, an eerie feeling would permeate my thoughts as I pondered my first impressions of a Catholic community in Canada. In a matter of weeks, I would get in contact with members of the Catholic community at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Catholic Chaplain, the Jesuits in Canada, and learn about the situation of the Catholic Church in the province, the demise of the Denominational school system, accusations of clericalism, sex abuse scandals, and the disaffiliation phenomenon. It had only been a few weeks after my arrival, but I was already decided to get to the core of the problem and find out why all this had happened.

### **1.1 Newfoundland's declining Catholicism over the years.**

A place in which ecclesiastical celebrations would be attended by thousands ([Lambert, 2010](#)), the island of Newfoundland, and especially its capital, St John's, has seen its history being shaped by Christianity from its early days ([Fitzgerald, 2001](#)), to the point of being considered a bastion of Catholicism in English North America ([Piper, 2000](#)). This condition continued throughout the years and would be confirmed during (St.) Pope John Paul II's 1984 papal visit to Canada ([Piper, 2000](#)) and reasserted in 2018 on the occasion of the 150th Canadian anniversary year ([Dillon, 2018](#)). Nonetheless, the religious landscape in Canada has changed from what it had been a

few generations before with a declining share of Canadians identifying as Christians, and an increasing portion stating they have no religion ([Lipka, 2019](#)).

## **1.2 Secularism replacing Catholicism.**

Secular ideologies are pointed to as part of the reasons for this change since they have pervaded most of western society engulfing the Church and the people committed to it, too ([Paul VI, 1964](#)). Concomitantly, accusations of deplorable acts perpetrated by members of the clergy or laypeople close to the Church ([Fine, 2019](#)) are assumed to have seriously affected the faithful's attitudes towards the Catholic Church and their religious lives ([Gecewicz, 2019](#)).

These events and present ideological conditions in society draw serious implications for the future of the Catholic Church. However, there is little literature available on whether and how these events and aspects of Post-Christian Canada have affected the Catholic population, especially young Catholics in Newfoundland ([Seifert, 2016](#)). Likewise, there is little textual evidence on how young churchgoers in Canada experienced faith instruction during their developmental years, nor if this instruction or educational experience counteracted the effects of the spirit of the times, the tainted reputation of the Church, or helped them building a strong foundation for their faith.

## **1.3 Research problem.**

This study is a sub-project of a larger research work I participated in titled *Young Catholic adults and the Catholic faith: Attitudes and beliefs towards religion, Church and God*. This research project was led by Dr. Tim Seifert, professor in the Faculty of

Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and focused on exploring what young people think about religion, Church, and God, and the role that religion plays in their lives as young adults. It was composed of two studies: the first one being a survey collecting information on the attitudes and beliefs of young Catholic adults raised in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the second one in the form of a qualitative investigation of the thoughts and experiences of the same target population through unstructured interviews. These two studies posed participants questions regarding their satisfaction with life, gratitude, happiness and inner peace, compassionate love, spiritual beliefs, religious practices as a child and as a young adult, and the conception of good, approaching questions from the standpoint that belief in God and practicing Catholicism is valuable for well-being and with the ultimate goal of yielding information for the greater good of humanity.

Springing from Dr. Seifert's exploratory research, this sub-project aims to explore the impact of participants' faith education during their developmental years on their Church affiliation in early adulthood, Mass service attendance, parish life involvement, and Catholic identity, filling a gap in the current literature and identifying key reasons for their continued religious practices and beliefs.

The sub-project seeks participant's experiences, understandings, and beliefs in the following areas:

- Shared life experiences among the participants that may suggest a reason to belong to the Church in their adulthood.

- Faith formation received during childhood as a future indicator of church affiliation.
- The religious practices of the participants during their formation years.
- Topics in which the participants feel at odds with church teaching.

The study has been conducted within the Catholic community of St. John's (NL) and nearby areas. It also includes the points of view of out-of-province Catholic Canadian young adults who were living in St. John's at the time of the study, who took the interview, but whose participation was discarded from the analysis for not meeting specific criteria.

This study aims to uncover, if any, the shared characteristics of the participants which may be key to comprehending their level of attachment to the faith using interviews as the primary method of inquiry. The findings of conducting qualitative research on Catholic Canadian young adults can help in the re-evaluation, adjustment, or restructuring of catechetical plans at the parish or diocesan levels, the development of future initiatives for attraction, formation, and retention of new members, and building solid, vigorous faith communities.

This thesis comprises six parts: the literature review and corresponding theoretical framework are found in Chapter 2. The methodology section is thoroughly presented in Chapter 3. The findings from the one-on-one interviews are shown in Chapter 4, whose meaning and relevance are explored and analyzed in Chapter 5. Finally, the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study are laid out in Chapter 6, which closes with the researcher's personal reflection of his work.



## Chapter 2 - Review of the literature

"Religious belief has a history that's tens of thousands of years old. The capacity for religious experience, perhaps even the need for it, it's coded in us biologically" ([Peterson, 2021](#)).

### 2.1 Religion in the world today.

Most people in the world, roughly 84% of the 2010 world population of 6.9 billion, identify with a religion ([PRC, 2012](#)) and the majority regards it as playing an important role in their lives ([Crabtree, 2010](#); [Diener et al., 2011](#)).

Religion can be thought of as "a way of life organized around experiences and convictions concerning ultimate power" ([Johnson, 2003, p.3](#)). It involves beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the transcendent and rules about conduct within a social group ([Koenig et al., 2012](#)) and its practice has been linked to well-being ([Regnerus et al., 2003](#)), increased longevity ([McCullough et al., 2009](#)), and improved mental health ([Ellison et al., 2013](#)). It is argued that religions "have attributes that make them well suited to reduce feelings of self-uncertainty" ([Hogg et al., 2010, p. 72](#)) and provide believers with a "sense of security in an uncertain and perilous world" (Kay et al., 2010, in [Ellison et al., 2013](#), p. 226). Even though in favourable circumstances non-religious individuals have higher life evaluations and lower negative affect than religious individuals, religious individuals living in difficult circumstances show higher positive affect and lower negative affect ([Diener et al., 2011](#)).

In younger cohorts, religious participation can serve as a vehicle to mingle with others, a guide for sense-making, as well as a means for raising awareness of the transcendent ([King et al., 2013](#)), for decreasing anxiety levels ([Wong et al., 2006](#)), and as a working model of virtue ([Smith & Denton, 2005](#)). Its preeminence in their lives is related to a reduction in chemical dependency ([Milot & Ludden, 2009](#)) and student misconduct ([Smith & Faris, 2002](#)); it is instead associated with increased educational enthusiasm ([Milot & Ludden, 2009](#)), with a firmer indication of purposefulness ([Robbins & Francis, 2005](#)) and resiliency in devout youth ([Rew et al., 2004](#)), and with contentment ([Francis et al., 2003](#)) and beneficent social action ([Schneider et al., 2004](#)) in those showing an optimistic mental outlook with regard to it.

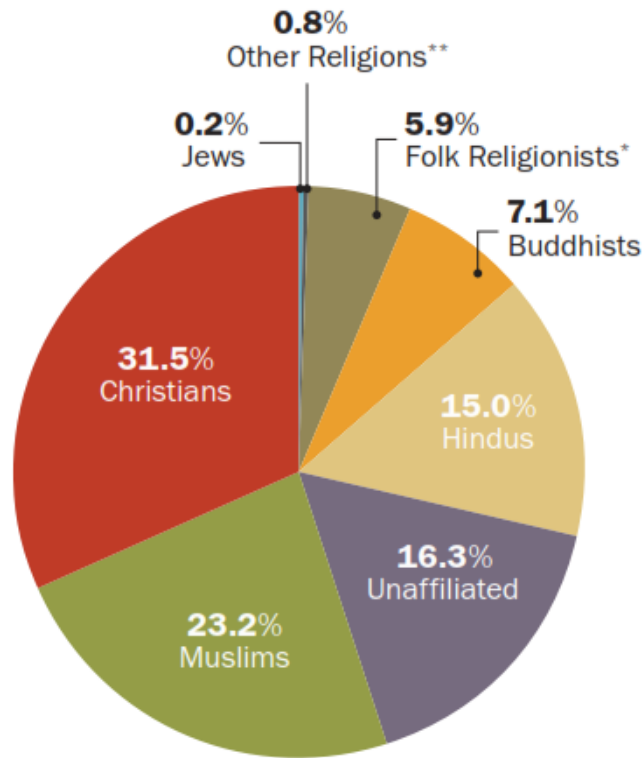
The faithful around the world are usually adherents of a world religion such as Christianity (32%), Islam (23%), Hinduism (15%), Buddhism (7%), or practitioners of folk or traditional religions as Chinese folk religions, African traditional religions, Native American or Australian aboriginal religions, which together represent 6% ([PRC, 2012](#)) ([See Figure 1](#)).

Religious groups can be found variably dispersed throughout the world with some concentrating in the Asia-Pacific region, as is the case with Buddhists and Hindus who represent 99% of its adherents, respectively; or in the Middle East and North Africa which account for 36% of Muslims; while others are more evenly distributed as it stands for Christians in Europe (26%), Latin America and the Caribbean (24%), and sub-Saharan Africa (24%) ([PRC, 2012](#)) ([See Figure 2](#)).

**Figure 1**

***Size of Major Religious Groups 2010***

*Percentage of the world's population*



Note: \*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. \*\*Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths. Copyright 2012 by Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

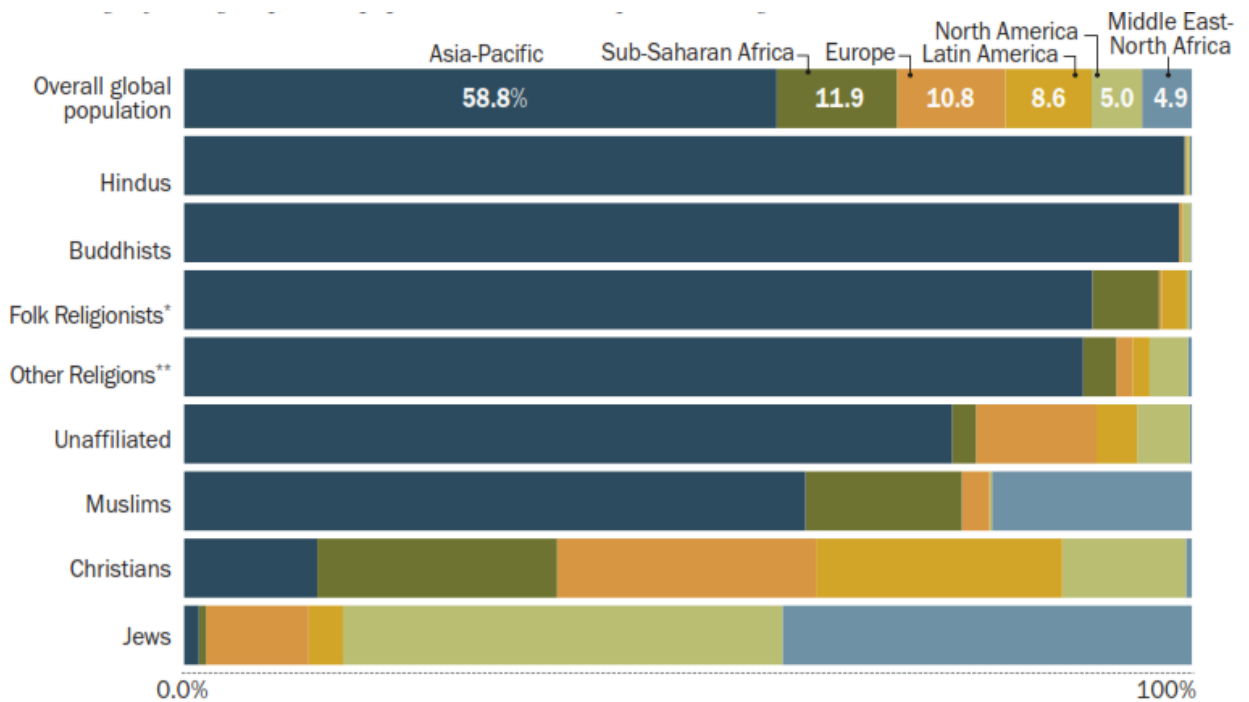
Of the Christian population in the world, about 32% of the 2010 population, or 2.2 billion, 37% follow the Protestant tradition, 12% are Christian Orthodox, and 1% belong to other faith traditions, including Mormon and Jehova's Witnesses, that view

themselves as Christian (1%), whereas the remaining 50% identified with the Catholic faith, the branch of Christianity with the most adherents ([PRC, 2011, 2013](#)) ([See Table 1](#)).

**Figure 2**

***Geographic Distribution of Religious Groups***

*Percentage of each group's total population that lives in particular regions*



Note: \*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions. \*\*Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths. Copyright 2012 by Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

**Table 1**

***Estimated Size of Christian Traditions***

<i>Traditions</i>	<b>ESTIMATED 2010 CHRISTIAN POPULATION</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF WORLD POPULATION</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF WORLD CHRISTIAN POPULATION</b>
Catholic	1,094,610,000	15.9%	50.1%
Protestant	800,640,000	11.6	36.7
Orthodox	260,380,000	3.8	11.9
Other Christian	28,430,000	0.4	1.3
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>2,184,060,000</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding. Copyright 2011 by Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

In summary, this study is situated within the broader context of religion in the world today, where roughly 84% of the global population identifies with a religion and consider it as significant in their lives. Religion is defined as a way of life organized around experiences and convictions concerning ultimate power, involving beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the transcendent, with implications for conduct within social groups. The faithful belong to various world religions, with Christianity being the largest, followed by Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Within Christianity, the Catholic faith represents the largest branch, comprising 50% of Christians worldwide. Also, religious participation, specifically in younger cohorts, serves multiple functions,

including social interaction, sense-making, awareness of the transcendent, and anxiety reduction. It is associated with various positive outcomes such as decreased chemical dependency and misconduct, increased educational enthusiasm, purposefulness, resiliency, contentment, and beneficent social action.

## **2.2 The decline of organized church attendance.**

Notwithstanding the benefits that religion can provide, its natural or instinctive origins ([Barrett, 2011](#)), its historical presence worldwide, or its billions of current adherents, "organized church attendance in some countries is radically declining" ([Peterson, 2021](#)): numerous publications in recent years have cited growing absenteeism in the pews as well as increased disaffiliation, specifically in the Catholic Church ([Saad, 2009, 2015, 2018](#); [PRC, 2009, 2013, 2015](#); [McCarty & Vitek, 2017](#)). The reasons for growing disaffiliation from organized religion tend to point, among many others, to secularization, or "the process of decrease of religion's influence in many spheres of social and individual life" ([Simmons, 2018](#)). With the exception of a handful of nations, including the United States, "modernity and religion appear to be mutually exclusive in the rest of the West" ([Simmons, 2018](#)).

## **2.3 Christianity, the Catholic Church, and the Vatican.**

Christianity began "as a sect of Judaism in an obscure province of the Roman Empire" ([Johnson, 2003, p. 1](#)) around 2,000 years ago. Despite its rather peripheral origins, it eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire and dominated the cultural life of Europe for much of its history ([Johnson, 2003](#)). Its message is one of hope, peace and unity, proclaimed as the "good news", and it is centered on the life,

teachings, death, resurrection, and revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth ([Johnson, 2003](#)).

The Catholic Church is part of the three great families in Christianity together with the Orthodox and the Protestant traditions which arose from specific disputes between the XI and XVI centuries. Despite sharing exceedingly similar Scriptural texts and morals, their differences are mostly of a theological, demonstrational, and organizational nature, apart from the Catholic Church's essential claim of a "continuous tradition reaching back to the Apostle Peter" ([Johnson, 2003, p.29](#)) that differentiates it from the other two.

Today, the Catholic Church is represented on the international stage by the State of the Vatican City, or The Holy See, a nation-state located in the Italian Peninsula of which the Pope is its ecclesiastical monarch ([Britannica, 2021](#)). This microstate has been recognized by the international community, admitted as a Non-Member State at the United Nations ([UN, 2020](#)), and is regarded as having a diplomatic history and influence broader than that of most modern nation-states, playing an international role disproportionate to its small geographical size ([Hehir, 2019](#)). Even though the Catholic Church had been present in Canada since the early colonization of New France ([Library and Archives Canada, 2016](#)), diplomatic relations between Canada and the Holy See were only established in 1969, in which the Holy See was acknowledged as a sovereign body governing the Catholic Church ([Canada's International Gateway, 2022](#)).

## **2.4 The Situation of the Catholic Church in the world, in Canada, and in the island of Newfoundland.**

### **2.4.1 The Catholic Church in the world.**

Looking at the world at large, the prospects of the Catholic faith do not appear to be in jeopardy: The number of Catholics in the world has increased nearly threefold in the past 100 years, from approximately 291 million in 1910 to almost 1.1 billion in 2010 ([PRC, 2013, 2017](#)). Interestingly, the Catholic Church has managed to retain a considerable portion of religious affiliation preferences around the globe just as the world's overall population has continued growing. This phenomenon has been brought to light after comparing data from 2010 with historical records from 1910, a year in which Catholics constituted about 48% of all Christians and 1% of the world's total population ([Johnson & Grim, 2010](#)). After 100 years, they maintain about 50% of Christian affiliation worldwide, which translates into roughly 16% of the total human population ([PRC, 2013](#)).

The Central Statistics Office at the Vatican Secretariat of State collects data gathered by the Church's mission representatives and delegates distributed throughout the world and conducts a series of statistical analysis for the Roman Curia during the year. From the information, an annual compilation presenting statistical Church trends at the international and local level is collated in a 500-page long document. This analytical product is called the Statistical Yearbook of the Church ([Wooden, 2021](#)), most commonly known as the "Annuario Pontificio".



According to a series of recent editions of this text, the increase in the number of Catholics in Africa (4.3%) and Asia (2%) greatly surpassed their regions' population growth, which was 2.3% and 1.2%, correspondingly ([Anuario Pontificio, 2015, 2016, 2017](#)). Relatively, the size of the Catholic community in Europe and the Americas grew at the same pace as that of their regional population growth, which was about 0.3% for each continent.

Drawing on particulars and figures included in the aforementioned publication, a global landscape of Catholicism can be laid out, locating most of the world's Catholics (48.8%) distributed all through the Americas, including Canada and the USA. Europe follows up in the ranking with 23.5%, whereas Africa, Asia, and Oceania found themselves with 16%, 10.9%, and 0.8%, respectively, of the Catholic world population by the end of 2011 ([Anuario Pontificio, 2015, 2016, 2017](#)).

Besides information regarding the faithful, the annuary also provides data regarding the clergy: Over the past ten years, the number of supervisors of the faith around the world, also known as bishops, increased from 5,104 to 5,132. Concurrently, the total number of ministers of the faith worldwide, i.e. priests, both at the diocesan (district) and religious order level, grew from 412,236 to 413,418, showing an ubiquitous increase except for the Americas, where numbers remained nearly identical, and Europe, a region of the world once considered the center of Christianity ("[Christianity in Western Europe](#)", 2022), but in which numbers of priests dropped more than 9%.

Apart from information on higher rank ministers, figures related to ministers below the rank of priest, or permanent deacons, are also reported, yielding textual evidence that the vast majority of these ordained ministers - 97.4 %- live in the

Americas or in Europe, with numbers reporting an increase of more than 1,400 over the previous year and a 40% increase over the past ten years. The number of men joining a religious order also shows a substantial growth in Asia and Africa since 2001, up 44.9 % and 18.5 %, respectively. These numbers are to be contrasted by falling figures in Oceania (21.9 % over the past 10 years), Europe (18 %) and the Americas (3.6 %) over the same time period ([Anuario Pontificio, 2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#)).

Concomitantly, the number of seminarians -candidates for the priesthood- at the diocesan and religious order level exhibited a constant growing tendency worldwide, from 118,990 at the end of 2010 to 120,616 at the end of 2011, with the number of men preparing for the priesthood ordination rising more than 30.9 % in Africa and 29.4 % in Asia in the last decade. Europe, though, displays a contrasting disparity with other regions, with a 21.7 % decrease in priesthood candidates between 2001 and 2011.

#### **2.4.2 The Catholic Church in Canada.**

In the West, Canada, The United States, and predominantly Western European countries are listed as nations where the number of priests who died in 2015 was greater than the number of new priests ordained within the same year ([Anuario Pontificio, 2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#)). These figures come apace with multiple US surveys indicating that only about two-thirds of those raised Catholic continue to identify with Catholicism as adults ([PRC, 2015](#)).

"Canada is characterized by a religious situation in which a significant number of people continue to embrace religion, a growing number of people reject it, and a large number lie somewhere in the middle" ([Bibby, 2017, p. 5](#)). In Canada, 76% of the population identified with a religious group in 2011 compared to 84% in the year 2003

([Statistics Canada, 2003, 2011](#)). Of all the religious groups included in the study, the connection between Canada and the Catholic faith is one having deep historical roots. These links date back to the early colonization of New France ([Voisine et al., 2020](#)), with nearly 45% of the nation's population of 1861, equivalent to 1.4 million people, declaring themselves Catholic in the Canadian Census, thus becoming the religious group of most numerical importance of any other denomination in the country ([Statistics Canada, 2010](#)), followed by The Church of England, another Christian denomination, at 15%. Nearly a century and a half later, approximately 13 million Canadians, or 39% of the country's population, would self-identify as Catholics ([Statistics Canada, 2011](#)). This fact points out a noteworthy numerical increase in membership through the years despite signaling a reduction of its share of the population as a whole. It also confirms the prevalence of the Catholic Church as the largest religious group in Canada.

In 2013, a Pew Research Center analysis using data extracted from the Canadian Census and Survey concluded that more Canadians have joined minority faiths compared to previous years, up to 11% by the year 2011 compared to 4% in 1981 ([PRC, 2013](#)). These "other religions" category includes world religions like Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity which, although representing the smallest share of religious membership at the national level on aggregate, each of them can claim to have followers worldwide in the millions, sometimes even billions of affiliates ([PRC, 2012](#)). This same analysis also underscored the rise in the number of Canadians without religious affiliation, the "Nones" ([PRC, 2021](#)), which in many cases consists of people that have developed a negative view of organized religion ([Hout and Fischer, 2002](#), in [Sepulvado et al., 2015](#)), increasing from

4% in 1971 to 24% in 2011, and showing an inversely proportional relationship with the levels of attendance at religious services which have suffered a substantial decline ([Clark, 2000](#)).

An important element for sustaining religious membership over time is generational replacement. In Canada, the gradual substitution of older generations by newer ones shows a pronounced decrease: Canadians born between 1947 and 1966, also known as the *Baby Boom* generation ([PRC, 2013, 2015](#)), that self-identified as having no religious affiliation in 1981 was in the region of 10%, compared to 20% in the year 2011 ([PRC, 2013](#)). This is the same generational cohort who is believed to have initiated a distancing from the practice of their parent's faith, seeking other forms of religion or spirituality ([Smith & Denton, 2005](#)), not raising their children within a religious environment, and producing a "generational gap" ([Putnam, 2000](#)) in religious engagement ([Hout, 2016](#)), where youth are not committed to their faith as in previous times ([Chandler, 2008](#)).

People from all walks of life and origins have been affected by this socioreligious phenomenon to some degree: Men and women, the educated and the illiterate, nationals and immigrants, the young, the middle-aged, and the seniors ([PRC, 2012](#)). Some of these groups show remarkable differences in rates of disaffiliation compared to others: For example, Canadian men tend towards religious disassociation compared to their female counterparts. Likewise, single adults are more prone to experience this phenomenon compared to married Canadians, college-educated compared to less educated individuals, new immigrants compared to immigrants arriving 50 years ago or earlier, and young adults compared to past generations ([PRC, 2012](#)). These numbers

resemble the religious and sociological trends experienced in the US over nearly the same period ([PRC, 2015](#)).

### **2.4.3 The Catholic Church in the island of Newfoundland.**

The island of Newfoundland, especially its capital, St John's, has seen its history being shaped by Christianity from its early days ([Fitzgerald, 2001](#)). Nonetheless, the newest province has not been immune to the absorption of secular ideologies ([Lipka, 2019](#); [PRC, 2013](#)), which are assumed to have seriously affected people's attitudes towards religious institutions ([Gecewicz, 2019](#)).

After examining historical records, it is palpable that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has seen a decrease in the religious commitment of their inhabitants over the years. For instance, while an ecclesiastical celebration during the 1850s would witness thousands of participants ([Lambert, 2010](#)), it would go largely unnoticed in the year 2018.

For comparison, the Catholic population of Newfoundland was around 57,000 in the year 1867, roughly 46% of the island's population ([Statistics Canada, 2010](#)). In actuality, although the number of inhabitants of the island self-identifying as Catholics reaches more than 180,000 people, the number is equivalent to approximately 36% of the total population ([Statistics Canada, 2011](#)). These data highlights a decrease of almost 10% of the share among religious denominations over the years despite a threefold growth in membership numbers in nearly 150 years.

Church attendance and trends have also changed over the years: Newfoundland and Labrador had the reputation, alongside other Atlantic provinces, of having the highest monthly church attendance rates in the country ([Clark, 2003](#)), as well as the

least proportion of individuals declaring no religion: it was even more probable for the average unaffiliated individual to attend church at least once a month in Newfoundland and Labrador than in the rest of the country ([Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015](#)). Nevertheless, by the year 2010, young adults in Atlantic Canada ages 20 to 24 comprise the highest proportion of individuals declaring having no religion at nearly 40% compared to other age cohorts within Atlantic Provinces, only surpassed by their generational counterparts in the Prairie Provinces and B.C. ([Wilkins-Laflamme, 2015](#)).

At the Archdiocese level, the results of the survey of parishioners of the Archdiocese of St. John's shows many respondents expressing concern for the local Catholic youth. According to this study, approximately a quarter of the surveyees commented on the perceived absence of youth and young families in the parishes referring not only to their own children and grandchildren but to young people in general ([Seifert, 2016](#)). Although this absence was considered a serious issue, there was not a clear answer about how to address it. The results of this survey stand in stark contrast with the centuries-long faith tradition in the island of Newfoundland and with reports from other regions of the world in which congregants fill the pews and corridors to participate in Mass, with many of them needing to follow the ecclesiastical celebration standing or even outside the building due to overcrowding ([Guayaquileños celebraron al Señor, 2014](#)).

Succinctly, in spite of changes in global population and religious affiliations, the Catholic faith has maintained a significant presence worldwide, with steady growth in certain regions like Africa and Asia. Nonetheless, the palpable declining numbers of priests in Europe and North America represent not only a challenge but also a general

shift in religious practice. In Canada, a nation that has been historically tied to Catholicism, Catholics constitute the largest religious group, even though the faith has experienced a decline in church membership due in part to the pronounced rise in the religiously unaffiliated Canadians also identified as "Nones". Generational replacement has also played an important role in this trend, with younger generations less likely to identify with organized religion, leading to a "generational gap" in religious engagement.

The situation in the island of Newfoundland reflects broader trends in declining religious commitment and church attendance. Despite a historical association with Christianity, particularly Catholicism, there has been a noticeable decrease in religious participation over time. Factors such as the influence of secular ideologies and changing attitudes towards religious institutions have contributed to this decline. Concerns about the absence of youth and young families in parishes highlight challenges faced by local Catholic communities.

## **2.5 Why are youth leaving?**

### **2.5.1 Data from U.S.A., Britain, and Canada.**

Approximately 10% of adults in the US that were raised Catholic disaffiliate from the Church, most of the times leaving their childhood faith before age 24 ([PRC, 2009](#)) although the median age at disaffiliation is age 13 ([McCarty & Vitek, 2017](#)). About half of the apostates usually become unaffiliated, a quarter joins the ranks of the Protestant Church, and a minuscule proportion switches to other faiths ([PRC, 2009](#); [Hout, 2016](#)), a

phenomenon that is the most prevailing among Catholics compared to other religions: For every new convert to Catholicism, six would leave ([PRC, 2015](#)).

By the year 2014, one-fifth of Americans would call themselves Catholic, representing a 3% decrease since 2007, the share of unaffiliated adults would rise from 16.1% to 22.8% and within it the percentage of agnostics/atheists would increase from 4% to 7% and the irreligious from 12.1% to 15.8%. Approximately three-out-of-five people that were raised in the Church would still identify as Catholics as adults while 41% would not, 28% of ex-Catholics that claim no religious affiliation were raised Catholic, and 20% of these "nones" tend to be millennials, single, white, 3rd generation men that have smaller families, showing an increase as a share over 7 years. For comparison, 50% of this generation would claim to belong to Catholicism compared to 73% of the silent generation ([PRC, 2015](#)).

Roughly six-in-ten former Catholics who have become unaffiliated did so because they stopped believing in its teachings, especially on abortion and homosexuality. From this group, about 40% abandoned the Church because they do not believe in God or most religions' teachings. Less than 30% left due to sex abuse scandals while others cited issues at the parish level, perceived hypocrisy, or sanctimoniousness of Church leaders and members, and religious switching as major factors for disaffiliation. Only a few unaffiliated attributed their abandoning to a belief that religion has been relegated as superstition by modern science ([PRC, 2009](#)).

Most Catholics tend to be women ([PRC, 2015](#)). According to [Gray & Gautier \(2018\)](#), a driving factor for disaffiliation among Catholic women is disagreement with the Church's position on certain social issues, namely homosexuality, divorce, and abortion.



Currently, one-in-three Catholic women manifest they are not proud to be Catholic ([Gray & Gautier, 2018](#)).

Worldwide, 35.4% of millennials are unaffiliated; In Britain, millennials indicating no religious affiliation ascend to 64% ([Collins-Mayo, 2012](#)). In the US, 35% of adult millennials are religiously unaffiliated ([PRC, 2015](#)). In Canada, 24% of this generational cohort professes no religion ([Statistics Canada National Household Survey, 2011](#)) compared to 16% that stated no religion in 2001 ([Statistics Canada, 2003](#)).

According to [McCarty & Vitek's \(2017\)](#) study on why young people in the US leave the Catholic Church, 35% of millennials disaffiliated from religion altogether, 46% switched to another religion, and 14% now identify as atheists or agnostics. This study classified dissenters into 3 distinct groups: a) The injured, millennials that have felt the Church could not help them coping with the loss of a loved one, prevent a family break-up, or see the Church as judgemental towards people with homosexual inclinations; b) The drifters, youth that do not find meaning in the rules, practices and rituals of the Church, or see no necessity to belong to it to find meaning or purpose in life; and c) The dissenters, millennials that disagreed with the church's position on social issues, notably on same-sex marriage, abortion and birth control. Part of this group are those who felt their questions were not being answered with some respondents citing disparity between science and religion as disturbing. In general, young unaffiliates tend to maintain they can be ethical without religion ([McCarty & Vitek, 2017](#), [C.A.R.A., 2017](#)).

### **2.5.2 Rationale behind apostasy.**

Theoretical explanations addressing the question of why youth disaffiliates vary in complexity as much as in nature. Some scholars propose the idea of a link between

the development of an existential security with a growing independence from deities ([Norris & Inglehart, 2011](#)). Likewise, there appears to be a rather direct relationship between affluence, secular views and religious disaffiliation ([Inglehart et al., 2004](#)). Technological and scientific prowess are also seen by many as factors that complicate the acceptance of religion ([Thigpen et al., 2020](#)) while other studies point at youth maturation to be another aspect for their decline in religiosity ([Smith, 2009](#)), in association with different personal characteristics as gender, race, socioeconomic status, and education ([Chan et al., 2015](#)).

According to [Seifert \(2016\)](#), in the Archdiocese of St. John's (NL), many parishioners find the Church's doctrine unsatisfactory. Their criticism is largely aimed at their teachings on social issues which are dismissed as antiquated or irrelevant in the modern world. Also, as an institution, it is despised as hierarchical, bureaucratic, and one that portrays a restrictive, judgmental, and oppressive image ([Seifert, 2016](#)).

## **2.6 Why are youth staying?**

### **2.6.1 Data from Millennial Americans.**

Even though “Millennials currently attend church or worship services at lower rates than Baby Boomers did when they were younger” ([PRC, 2010](#)), among the ones that stay in the Church, 18% attend Mass once per week, with a quarter of them going to confession only once a year (confession tends to be the least practiced sacrament among those who do not go to church regularly). Members of this cohort are less likely to have been Baptised or received First Communion and Confirmation compared to

previous generations. Additionally, Millennials usually consider the sacraments of Marriage and Baptism important, and in general tend to find the sacraments meaningful only if they attend mass regularly. On the other hand, only few millennials deem prayer and reflection, feeling the presence of God, the readings, the Gospel, and communion important in their lives ([Gray & Perl, 2008](#)).

### **2.6.2 Rationale behind loyalty.**

The number of American adults who believe in a supreme being is high in comparison to other developed countries. According to a [Pew Research Center \(2018\)](#) survey, the main reason why U.S. adults go to church at least once or twice a month is because they want to feel closer to God. Other reasons include the edification of moral standards at the personal level and in children, as well as finding comfort in times of difficulty. Notwithstanding the modest decline the believer population in the U.S. has experienced in recent years ([Smith, 2012](#)), or the continuous decrease in the proportion of Americans who identify with a religion, nearly a fourth of the American adult population affirm they participate in religious programs at least once a week, and the fraction of religiously affiliated adults who report participation in these programs was moderately higher in 2015 (30%) compared to 2007 (27%) ([PRC, 2015](#)). These religious programs include prayer groups, scripture study groups, or religious education programs in general. Protestant denominations are more prominent in their weekly commitment to these types of groups compared to Catholics and Mormons, with white, male, college educated millennials trailing in their level of monthly involvement behind blacks, hispanics, older adults, women and adults without a college degree ([PRC, 2015](#)).

[Arold et al. \(2022\)](#) found that a school curriculum, particularly a syllabus including religious education, may impact students' religious attitudes and values over lifetime, being those receiving religious education the ones who tend to show higher religiosity levels in adulthood. Additionally, a sense of belonging to a parish and the strengthening of Catholic values and practices at school and in the home may develop a healthy Catholic identity ([King et al., 2013](#)).

In Pope Francis' 2018 visit to Ireland on the occasion of the IX World Meeting of Families he stated that, although the careful preparation of catechism programs for teaching the faith in schools and parishes is essential, "the first and most important place for passing on the faith is the home. It is in the home that we learn to believe, through the quiet daily example of parents who love our Lord and trust in his word." ([Francis, 2018, para. 12](#)). He culminated his point reminding the attendees that the faith is passed on "around the family table", at home in ordinary conversation, in everyday speech.

In fact, a key determinant of youth religiosity is parent religiosity ([Desrosiers et al., 2011](#)). Parent religiosity persistently appears as an important predictor of youth's religious beliefs and practices ([Bao et al., 1999](#)), and seems to positively affect "all aspects of religiousness among early and middle adolescents" ([Ozorak, 1989, p. 448](#)) ranging from Church attendance ([Suziedelis & Potvin, 1981](#)) to "highly traditional religious beliefs" ([Willits & Crider, 1989, p. 68](#)).

Studies have shown that youth's tendency not to take part in religious celebrations may be affected by familial or communal circumstances. Nonetheless, parents seem to influence the religious inclination of their adolescent children more

significantly than peers ([de Vaus, 1983](#)) or religious education received outside the home ([Erickson, 1992](#)): Parents', specially mothers' religious behaviours regarding identification and ritual practices, are retained by their children ([Bao et al., 1999](#)).

Interestingly, though mothers have been traditionally thought to be the primary spiritual caregiver of their children, fathers are apparently equally important in their children's faith formation ([Shaw, 2016](#)). In a Swiss survey on family and fertility conducted in the mid 90's data showed that when both parents were Catholic, the children would also identify as Catholic ([United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2000](#)). The passing of the faith is apparently not only secured by denominational marriage: the phenomenon is also experienced in interfaith marriages ([PRC, 2016](#)) though in their case, if one parent happens to be, for instance, Catholic, and the other belongs to the Protestant tradition, the child would generally be raised Catholic ([United Nations Economic Commission for Europe \[UNECE\], 2000](#)).

Apart from the religious influence a mother can exert at home, fathers can profoundly affect their children's religious disposition. In a [Pew Research Center \(2020\)](#) study, a link between a father's close involvement in the religious upbringing of their children and their adolescents' religious alignment was found, with the youth identifying religiously closer to their fathers than their mothers.

In many cases, the influence of a father's religiosity over their family's religious identification may be the main determinant of the entire family's religious affiliation. For instance, in [Haug & Wanner's \(1998\)](#) research on religious groups in Switzerland, connections between the religious lives of fathers and those of their children could be

drawn, concluding that a father's religious identification and involvement in religious practices was a strong predictor of not some, but all household members' religious affiliation and rituals ([Haug & Wanner, 1998](#), as cited in [Haug, Compton, & Courbage, 2000](#)).

Pope Francis' remarks coincide with research showing that "the crucial location where youth's religious outcomes are largely decided is not the congregation or the parish, but the home", even though parents "have been permitted to believe that it is someone else who is primarily responsible for forming their children religiously" ([Bartkus & Smith, 2017, p. 7](#)). Moreover, intergenerational solidarity and family factors have been pointed out as elements that influence religiosity over people's lifetime and across generations, not only from parents to children and grandchildren, but also viceversa ([Bengtson et al., 2013](#)). In fact, by regularly modelling and talking to their children about religious matters in their own words, parents seem to be using the most powerful strategies for religious transmission, allowing children to naturally learn the faith over time ([Smith et al., 2020](#)).

What has happened in parishes, schools, and Catholic households regarding faith formation in the past 20 years? At the Archdiocese level, [Seifert's \(2016\)](#) report provides "a window into possibilities, glimpses of potential concerns and issues on the minds of parishioners" via the respondents' general opinion on what has been done by the Church with respect to parochial faith formation. Some participants also manifested that the collapse of denominational education was a great loss to the development of the faith, evidencing a desire for more spiritual formation in catechetical programs at the school level. There is limited information, though, regarding what has been done at the

private level in Catholic households, the place in which, in words of the leader of the Catholic Church ([The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021](#)), the faith is communicated.

As part of a larger project aimed to understand the attitudes and beliefs of young Canadian Catholic adults in regards to God and the Catholic Church, the purpose of this sub-project is to establish if the participants' current level of attachment to the faith has anything to do with the faith formation they could have received during their developmental years. The focus on the young adult segment of the population is due to their evident absence from Church celebrations and parochial gatherings according to what the researcher witnessed during his time in the island of Newfoundland. The context of this study is based on current global, regional and national religious trends, as well as the researcher's own religious experience throughout the Americas (Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, U.S.A.) and Europe (Italy, Hungary, England, Wales, Spain).

In light of these circumstances, this study aims to explore the perceptions of young Catholic Canadians living in the island of Newfoundland about their faith formation during their developmental years while trying to discover if there is a connection between what is currently happening in Canada and the interviewees' upbringing experiences, religious practices and inclinations.

## Chapter 3 - Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction.

The purpose of this phenomenological, grounded theory sub-project ([Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013](#)) is to explore the impact of participants' faith education during their developmental years on their Church affiliation in early adulthood, Mass service attendance, parish life involvement, and Catholic identity, filling a gap in the current literature and identifying key reasons for their continued religious practices and beliefs. Also, besides sharing the same objective as the main project, which is to understand the attitudes and beliefs of young Catholic adults in regards to the Catholic Church, as well as sharing the same collected interview data, this sub-project includes the viewpoints of out-of-province Catholic Canadian young adults who lived in St. John's (NL) at the time of the study and took the interview, but whose views were not included in the analysis of the main project for not meeting elements of the eligibility criteria.

This study aims to uncover, if any, the shared characteristics of the participants during their formation years which may be key to comprehending their current level of attachment to the faith. The findings of conducting qualitative research on Catholic Canadian young adults can help in the re-evaluation, adjustment, or restructuring of catechetical plans at the parish or diocesan levels, the development of future initiatives for attraction, formation, and retention of new members, and building solid, vigorous faith communities.

In the following sections, the Qualitative Method used during the process of this study will be explained, as well as the methodology utilized for the selection of the



sample, the procedures for collecting the corresponding data and how it was recorded. Subsequently, the approach to data analysis detailing aspects regarding its trustworthiness and the ethical principles that guided the study will be presented. The chapter closes sharing the researcher's stance.

### **3.2 A Qualitative Phenomenological, Grounded Theory Research Design.**

Qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” ([Creswell, 2009](#)). In addition, “qualitative research focuses on understanding from the perspective of whoever and whatever is being studied ... [and is] based on the assumption that reality is subjective and dependent on context” ([McMillan and Wergin, 2002, p.119](#)).

Because “the curiosity that inspires qualitative research often comes initially from observations of the real-world” ([Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 27](#)), this sub-project was prompted by a state-of-mind commonplace in many parts of the developed world that was noticeable to the researcher, namely “Indifferentism towards the ultimate truth and destiny”. In this sense, indifferentism to the good and the true—a post-modern mentality associated with the “Meh culture”, being *meh* “an infamous Millennial term for indifference” ([Montgomery et al., 2021, p. 674](#))—has widespread and permeated practically all aspects of life, leaving the obligation to tolerate all points of view as the only moral absolute ([Barron, 2014](#)). *Mehism* is to be celebrated and defended irrespective of how preposterous, unscrupulous, or insidious the assertions invoked under its protection may seem to be ([Singer, 2001](#)), for acting contrarily to this premise

may condemn the transgressor to social isolation, calumnies, or financial ruin ([Scruton, 2017](#)).

Considering the current "I decide what's true" cultural context ([Gunter, 2011](#)) as perceived by the researcher's Canadian life experience, this sub-project aims to unveil the reasons why some young Canadians living in the island of Newfoundland still find attractiveness in real objective values ([Hildebrand, 1953](#); [Kitzinger, 2011](#)). This authentic worth refers to the goods that, because of "their splendor, excellence, and intrinsic worth, draw the person out of himself, bending his subjectivity to them, drawing him toward self-transcendence" ([Barron, 2014](#)), a rather countercultural stance given the reigning cultural relativism imposed on society today ([Kreeft, 1999](#)).

"Certain purposes, questions, and situations are more consonant with qualitative methods than others" ([Patton, 1990, p. 94](#), in [Whitt, 1991, p. 409](#)). The difference between a correct and flawed interpretation of the situation a study tries to understand lies in the small details, as in, for example, the linguistic and supralinguistic features in speech that may depict a more concise representation of findings. These minuscule, though important pieces of data could purposefully or accidentally be left behind if an insufficient, inappropriate quantitative method of research is utilized ([Whitt, 1991](#)). Because of the personal dimension and abstract reach of the proposed topic and the need to understand each participant's most inner thoughts related to the sacred, the study requires a suitable research method. The phenomenological model of qualitative research the most congruent framework to be used in this sub-project, for it fulfills the researcher's interest in discovering "the essence of an experience of a phenomenon shared by all participants" ([Tite, 2010](#)).

Following [Eisner's \(1998, 2001\)](#) six features of qualitative research, this study attempts to align with the expectations for this type of investigation by observing and immersing in the participants' faith communities. These actions can only be effected thanks to the similarities the researcher shares with its target study population, namely shared creed and faith knowledge, enhancing in this way the opportunities for cooperation from the participants involved in the study ([Crowson, 1987](#), in [Whitt, 1991](#)).

The need for a valid interpretation of the attitudes and responses of the participants is paramount to the success of this sub-project and its social utility. Thus, a common framework which minimizes misconstrue will be used: the generation of a theory as the final outcome of the study and placed at the end of a project ([Creswell, 2009](#)) based on answers to questions about the essence of the participants' faith experience over time -phenomenology- or the changes they could have undergone -grounded theory ([Morse and Field, 1995, p. 25](#), in [Creswell et al., 2007](#)).

### **3.3 Sample selection.**

The site in which the study was conducted was the city of St. John's (NL) and surrounding areas, in Canada, which at the time of the study served as the place of residence of the researcher. It was also the location where the first drastic differences in church attendance in North America were noted according to the researcher's life experience. For the purposes of this study, the word Church is used in reference to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Rome, or the Catholic Church.

The selection process for a phenomenology study is quite strict since it attempts to select participants who have experienced the same phenomenon, in other words,

they must meet specific criteria and be able to contribute to an evolving theory ([Tite, 2010](#)). For this study, the target population are young adults between the ages of 19 and 30 who identified as Catholics and lived in the island of Newfoundland. This is a rather invisible population given the perceived low attendance rates of young adults at mass services ([Seifert, 2016](#)), and whose absence caught the researcher's attention during the first days of his time in St. John's.

Catholics are believers of Jesus Christ that share basic elements of Christianity and which regard a continuous tradition reaching back to the Apostle Peter as essential ([Johnson, 2003](#)). Given that the age of majority in Newfoundland and Labrador is 19 years of age ([Age of Majority Act, SNL 1995, c 5\(2\)](#)), the concept of a Catholic young adult Canadian living in Newfoundland is attributed to a person between the ages of 19 and 30 ([Havighurst, 1952](#), in [Bocknek, 1986](#)) who is Canadian by birth or naturalization, and happened to be living 183 days or longer ([Income Tax Act, R.S.C. 1985, c 1](#)) in the island of Newfoundland at the time of the study.

Flyers of the larger project were distributed at Catholic events, in parish halls, MUN's Chaplaincy, MUN's corridors, after Mass celebrations or spread via word of mouth in the Catholic community or social media (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, etc), as well as published in church bulletins and displayed on corkboards at MUN and other public places where young Catholics may take notice of it. Potential participants made contact with the researcher, were referred via networking, or were directly approached. Individuals deciding to participate in the interview process needed to reside on the island of Newfoundland and to agree to hold an in-person, phone, VoIP, or email exchange interview at a time and place convenient to them, which would range from

Church grounds, to library study rooms, to Coffee shops convenient to their location. If consent was given by the participant, something that happened in the totality of cases, the interviews were taped/voice recorded using a voice recorder and later transcribed. If consent was not given, notes from the interview would have been taken on site.

### **3.4 Data collection methods and procedures.**

Effective qualitative inquiry requires that the researcher be familiar not only with qualitative research methods but also with the phenomena under study ([Crowson, 1987](#), in [Whitt, 1991, p. 408](#)). Given the familiarity of the researcher with the topic and the suitability of the interview as a data collection tool for this qualitative project ([Creswell et al., 2007](#); [Tite, 2010](#)), semi-structured interview questions developed for the larger project were used as a springboard from which follow-up questions were instantly formulated as the interviews with the research participants were developing.

#### **3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews.**

"The interviews with people who can provide first-hand information about the topic because they have direct experience of it would be a primary source" ([Tite, 2010](#)). In this regard, the main source of direct information for the study were the interviewees, who provided answers to open-ended questions that were part of a semi-structured interview protocol. In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked about their formative years, their faith experience, and their religious formation in order to identify key factors that could have affected their future religious choices. Next, the interviewees answered questions about their belief in God, what life meant to them,

complemented by the sharing of their moral and value systems in order to draw connections with their past religious formation/life experiences. Finally, the participants had the opportunity to converse about what it meant to be Catholic and how they perceived the Church, giving the researcher a glimpse of how their moral compass could have been guided by their past religious/life experiences.

Out of eight interviews selected for the sub-project, four interviews were conducted at one of MUN's Library group study rooms, one took place at a local coffee shop, one at MUN's Arts and Administration building coffee shop, one at a local Catholic parish, and one via VoIP using Google Hangouts. The length of each interview would range between 30 to 50 minutes. Once each interview had been finished, the annotations and audio recordings from the interview were stored in a password-protected laptop and saved in individual coded folders, each code representing one participant. These same folders were later used to store the corresponding MS Word file containing the corresponding interview transcript, as well as the audio recording's file.

### **3.4.2 Secondary sources.**

#### **3.4.2.1 Documents.**

As a means to complement information extracted from direct sources, secondary sources through stable artifacts, like documents, "can provide rich insights into the setting or processes being studied" ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#), in [Whitt, 1991, p. 411](#)). In the context of this study, these sources include the *Annuario Pontificio*, the

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and numerous surveys and polls on Catholic and religious preferences carried out by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [C.A.R.A.], Pew Research Center [P.R.C.], Gallup, the Government of Canada, etc. These additional sources would give a broader view of the phenomenon being studied, in addition to serve as supporting evidence.

### **3.4.2.2 Observations.**

"As gaps in the researcher's understanding" may become apparent ([Whitt, 1991, p. 408](#)), non-interactive data collection methods in order to correlate, compare, contrast, or complement what had been said during the interview sessions were employed in order to expand and deepen the researcher's knowledge of the topic. These methods include attendance at mass celebrations, parish events and Catholic encounters, among other venues, in which interviewees and other members of the Catholic community participate.

### **3.4.3 Recording of data.**

The interviews took place from May 2018 to November 2019 and were recorded using Sony ICD-MX20 voice recorder in combination with Switch Sound File Converter software. The original files saved using Sony's proprietary audio format MSV would be later converted to mp3 for easier handling. The transcription of each interview was performed by the researcher using Winamp Music Player in combination with its plug-in PaceMaker, an add-on with special playback tools (speed up/slow down track's tempo without pitch alteration) that made the transcription process more efficient.

Field notes were taken using a MS Word document file. As the transcripts were completed, their contents would be simultaneously compared to the field notes taken during the corresponding interview. This process was performed in order to check for congruence, as well as to inform of any linguistic or supralinguistic features used during the conversations that may give additional meaning to the interviewee's response.

### **3.5 Data analysis.**

The interest of the researcher in discovering why there was virtually no presence of Catholic young adults in Newfoundland churches dates to the first days of his staying in St. John's. After visiting a nearby church for Sunday Mass, he noticed this phenomenon which would repeat in subsequent visits to churches in an around the city.

Considering the long-time Catholic tradition for which St. John's had been known for, and accounting for aspects that could have fostered absenteeism in the pews—e.g. unpleasant weather, unappealing Pastor characteristic, inadequacy of Sacred Music being sung or played, inconvenient location of the churches, unattractive church interior designs, disputable prestige of congregations, etc—the unsatisfied researcher faced the mismatch between preconceived reasons for absenteeism and the reality at hand. It was at that moment in which the idea that insufficient faith instruction during the Catholic young adult population's developmental years could be at the base of the phenomenon began to take root, hence the emphasis of the sub-project on the formation years.



### **3.5.1 Phenomenological approach.**

After the interviews were taped and later transcribed ([Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015](#)), each transcript was read several times "to develop a sense or impression of the conversation ([Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013](#); [Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015](#)) and later summarized.

The next step was the horizontalization of the data, a process in which a list of statements describing how individuals perceived a given phenomenon -e.g. faith instruction during the formation years- is made and each statement is given an equal value from which significant statements are chosen thereafter ([Moustakas, 1994](#)). Thus, a list of notable statements was subsequently organized into meaningful blocks, which in turn were used to write up a rich description of the experience. Finally, a stage in which different perspectives of the perceived phenomenon are contrasted with the researcher's perception of it follows suit. This final step aims for the construction of a narrative that would depict how each participant experienced the phenomenon, besides detecting variations among those perceptions.

### **3.5.2 Grounded theory approach.**

"The traditional approach in the social sciences is to allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis" ([Creswell, 2009, p. 187](#)). This "formal representation of analytic thinking" ([Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 160](#), in [Tite, 2010](#)) can become a time-consuming part of the research if done by hand, hence Microsoft Excel -a dedicated computational, analysis and data storage software- was used to organize

data in tabular form in order to assist the researcher in the analysis and establishing of relationships among the collected data.

Afterward, a table containing a list of predetermined codes based on the interview questions was developed. The items on this table would be later paired up with their corresponding definitions, and the generated codebook was expected to evolve and change throughout the study as the analysis of the data was being conducted ([Creswell, 2009](#)). The systematic coding structure in which blocks of data were first categorized and then closely examined developed into an axial arrangement for even further subcategorization, and finally into a selective coding system from which grounded theory emerged ([Glaser & Strauss, 1967](#)).

### **3.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations.**

Triangulation and precise description of the phenomenon being studied are two principal methods for establishing the trustworthiness of this sub-project: The data has been collected from primary sources, such as the interviews conducted with the participants of the larger project, as well as from secondary sources, like the opinions of members of the Catholic community, and stable sources such as documents. The participants included in the study are parishioners from many different churches in and around the St. John's metro area, and their presence seeks to explore the phenomenon from various points of view. Access to the transcripts of their interviews for revision and clarification purposes is also available. All data collected in reference to this sub-project was coded in order to add layers of security and prevent the identification of the participants. Due to the use of data diversification management principles throughout

the data collection stage of the research, the personal information provided in the participants' consent forms cannot be associated to the information collected during the interviews or their corresponding coding.

The approach taken by the researcher was to explore young adults religious beliefs, their religious practice in this day and age, and Catholicism, guided by the many benefits that religious practice apparently offers to those who engage in it, like moral guidance, a positive impact on health and well-being, as well as longevity ([Pargament et al., 2013](#)), together with a sense of meaning in life and a cushion when struggling with personal problems ([Ellison et al., 2013](#)). Notwithstanding the altruist nature of the sub-project and in the best interest of the interviewees, participation in this study was kept confidential by incorporating reference codes and pseudonyms.

### **3.7 Researcher's stance.**

The researcher's investigative experience dates back to 2005, the year in which he presented his first thesis project. Nevertheless, the current project is the first time that a phenomenon that involves members of his own religious community and that he could have personally experienced will be studied. The idea about investigating the perceptions of young Catholic Canadians living in the island of Newfoundland about their beliefs, their sense of right or wrong, and exploring the depths of their innermost convictions about life, death, the afterlife, given the current atmosphere of hyper relativism and secularism in which western civilization and specially the University is pervaded is remarkable ([Van Die, 2015](#)).

Contrary to functioning as a spectator-narrator-investigator of the phenomenon being studied as in the past, the researcher's role in this study requires a more immersive approach to data collection. Therefore, in order to explore the phenomenon to the fullest, the investigator, who already shares the same creed of the participants, becomes part of their faith community to increase the chances of finding common occurrences in the participants' early years' faith formation that would lead to their current affiliation to their religious group using an approach that would be compatible with the characteristics of sound research and catechetical traditions.

In other words, by becoming part of the world of those they study, the researcher materializes the "indwelling" concept ([Maykut & Morehouse, 1994](#), in [Tite, 2010](#)). This membership will not represent a potential conflict of interest, for research "involves interpreting the actions of those who are themselves interpreters" ([Scott and Usher, 1996, p. 20](#), in [Tite, 2010](#)) through an interplay between the elements of the actions that the researcher is trying to understand and an interpretive framework ([Gadamer, 1975](#), in [Tite, 2010](#)). This interpretive action should not be discarded as ill-intentioned bias or harmful preconceived judgment for a full immersion into the phenomenon to be studied manifests an opportunity to have a rather insider view of the circumstances that the study tries to unveil.

Bias, in particular the implicit kind, is seen by many as something intrinsically evil that needs to be avoided at all costs. In this regard, [Peterson \(2022\)](#) confesses "perceiving the world is unduly complicated" ([Peterson, 2022](#)). In fact, according to his 2018 work, "it is very difficult to make sense of the interconnected chaos of reality, just by looking at it. It's a very complicated act, requiring, perhaps, half our brains.

Everything shifts and changes in the real world. Each hypothetically separate thing is made up of smaller hypothetically separate things, and is simultaneously part of larger hypothetically separate things" ([Peterson, 2018, pp. 183-184](#)). That is to say, when we look at the world, we do it under a set of assumptions, using a value structure, but we do not know if that value structure is valid. He continues, "What is truth for someone whose knowledge is limited? ...You can't perceive reality accurately because you don't know everything. You don't really perceive reality, and you don't really perceive accurately, you perceive small portions of reality, extraordinarily limited in space and time, and accurately means well enough so when you do what you're doing it works" ([Peterson, 2018](#)). Our perception, thus, becomes valid only after we lay out our plan, we act it out, and the results we get confirm our predictions.

In a nutshell, the existence of an unconscious bias should not preclude a researcher's attempt to understand a given phenomenon, especially if scientists "don't know how to measure implicit bias with any confidence and that they shouldn't pretend otherwise" ([Bartlett, 2017](#)). That said, the researcher's stance is that there must be embodiment so we can make sense of the world, and that embodiment is being portrayed throughout the study.

## Chapter 4 - Results

### 4.1 Introduction.

The results of this study will be presented in the following sections. The interview data was gathered from one-on-one interviews with 8 participants of which 4 were female and 4 male. Its categories, subcategories and themes will be laid out taking into consideration the research topics:

1. Participants' profiles including similarities and distinctive characteristics from their life experiences.
2. Descriptive information of each participants' faith formation and religious practice experiences during their developmental years.
3. Enumeration of topics in which the participants stand in opposition to church teachings.
4. Recount of current religious practice.

Generally speaking, all participants were single, never married young Catholic Canadian adults, coming from families consisting of at least a mother with a Christian heritage. They all had graduated from high school and continued their tertiary education in St. John's (NL). All the participants had become acquainted with the research study because they attended a Church-related event. Seven of eight participants came from families in which at least one member was Catholic, and had received the sacraments commonly received by Catholic youth during their formation years, i.e. Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation, after being instructed in the faith at home by a family member, at their parishes, at their faith-based school, or using a combination of the

aforementioned options. Only one participant belonged to a family tradition wherein neither parent was Catholic, although he had also been baptized and confirmed in his original faith before having to be confirmed in the Catholic Church after switching.

Except for two participants who demonstrated a rather constructivist, experiential understanding of the faith, the rest of the interviewees seemed surprisingly knowledgeable and well-versed on the precepts and doctrines of the Catholic tradition. Finally, in order to protect their anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym based on the order in which they were interviewed.

## **4.2 One-on-One interviews.**

### **4.2.1 Participant 1: Prima.**

#### **4.2.1.1 Profile.**

“Prima” is a female undergraduate student from Atlantic Canada. She had been living in St. John’s for 4 years by the time in which the interview took place and was about to finish her university degree with the intentions of enrolling in a Master’s program right after that. Before moving to St. John’s she had worked as a nurse in her home province and decided to move to Newfoundland and Labrador to pursue educational goals, among other reasons, because of its proximity to her parents’ place of residence compared to other universities in Canada that offered the same degree.

She is of a Catholic heritage that goes back to her grandparents, has 3 younger siblings, a mother, and a Protestant father who converted to Catholicism in order to marry Prima’s mother: *“as far as I know, he just kind of saw it, like, one of those things that, you know, he needed to do to marry my mom”*, she would reply after being asked about her father’s decision to switch religions.

Prima had considered many times to leave the Church throughout her life, especially after moving to St. John's. Referring to the latest time she experienced this dilemma, she said: *"if there was a point to leave where I wouldn't cause anybody any pain or ire like I would, you know, if I did leave the Church, it would be now."* She would end up staying in the Church, though, remarking: *"I do believe that the Catholic Church, you know, is the only one that has, you know, the Eucharist, the body of Christ. So it was like, well, Where else am I gonna go?"*

Prima attended and graduated from the public secular school system in her home province and took the interview out of interest to know, in her own words: *"why young Catholics leave the Church"*. She was handed out some information about the large project at the end of Mass.

#### **4.2.1.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Prima grew up in a small town in Atlantic Canada. Every Sunday, she and her immediate family would attend Mass at a Catholic parish frequented by affluent churchgoers and in which she would expect to find many members of her social circle, with whom she would share similar beliefs. Recalling that time of her life, she said: *"we were kind of in a little pocket, were, you know, all our friends and everything were also, ahm, quite Catholic"*. Her grandparents attended Catholic schools in the province and she would see in her grandmother a model of a good Catholic. Prima described her grandmother as *"somebody who... believes... I'd say she believes it 100%"*.

The educational system operating in the province would be different during Prima's developmental years compared to the time of her grandparents', who seemingly attended public Catholic schools. Recollecting the school system in the province, Prima



said, *“there was 1 catholic school in the province that was, a private Catholic school that was, ahm, started I think when I was in high school”*. She attended instead a public secular school in which she did not receive any type of religious formation in the doctrinal sense. In reference to the religious curriculum provided by her educational institution, Prima pointed out: *“we might have done like a “religions of the world” sort of thing in social studies, you know, something like, you know, “overview” sort of thing. But yeah, not like, I mean, in-depth theology in school, no.”*. Her mother, though, who was part of the parish council and served as a catechist, would instruct her in the faith at home apart from taking her to Sunday school to receive catechesis with the rest of her friends. About this experience Prima cheerfully commented: *“she practiced on us and then brought us along”*, adding that this was not a reason to consider herself, in her opinion, *“very learned”* in the faith, but just *“a little bit”*.

At around age 14, during the time she was preparing for Confirmation, Prima started struggling with some aspects of the faith while the rest of her friends apparently did not, which made her realize she was somewhat different from them. In this regard, she said:

*“the friends that I had were, were for the most part, were also similar to me, they were very Catholic, but they were kind of the opposite, like, I would have questions and, it would be like “Oh, this is what it is!”, you know, like, they weren’t questioning at all, which is kind of, kind of odd for me, I thought like I was the odd one out”*, adding *“I, at one point did not want to get confirmed because I thought that I could, I thought like, I can’t say yes if I don’t believe 100%”*.

Bewildered, Prima sought advice from her local priest before sharing her doubts with her family. Remembering this episode of her life, she said:

*“I tried to talk to my parish priest about it, ahm, but, he didn't really, I guess I can say he didn't really answered the way I was hoping to, and, you know, my family, it just... no [laughs], I didn't, it'd just be like, you know, “this is what we believe”, “this is that”, I am a person that kind of need the reasons, and that's why I was kind of hoping for when I talked to my priest that he'd give me, you know, some reading material, or something that I could, you know, wrap my mind around, yeah”.*

In the end, neither the priest in question was able to help her solving her predicament, nor a family conversation about her struggle ever occurred. Still, this inconvenience proved insufficient to deter Prima from eventually receive the Sacrament of Confirmation with the rest of her Catechism class in grade 9, something that she does not regret.

#### **4.2.1.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Prima shared that sometimes her friends have expressed commotion at her comments on people's attitudes towards the rules of the Church to the point of being labelled as “rude”, implying that she portrayed a rather strict alignment with a conservative view of Catholicism. She deems this situation is due to the way in which Catholicism was taught to her and the environment she was brought up in, were rules were acknowledged as necessary to avoid mayhem.

Nevertheless, she feels that in certain cases there do need to be exceptions to the rules. About this point, she explains:

*"I really have a difficult time with the church's teachings on sexuality when it comes to gay people. Ahm, mostly just because it seems... if you read, it can make sense... say theologically... but when you look at how it affects people that I know, or their lives that I know, it just seems to be such a great disconnect, and that really bothers me... because it was like, that felt like the reasons... why, you know, having sex, for example, sex before marriage and homosexual... relations, I think it makes sense on paper but then... what you end up in saying is, well, you... need to be celibate, and basically alone for the rest of your life... and then, it's difficult to, I think, to reach gay people, talk to gay people when, you know, 'well, this is what we're offering you', there you go! ...it's hard, very hard, I know people that suffer because of that".*

Prima firmly believes that it is possible to break one of those rules and still be moral. On this conclusion, she shares:

*"I think you can break these rules and go to confession. I suppose it's the attitude, I think it's more, more so the attitude, like, if you know you're breaking these rules, you don't care why they're there, it doesn't matter to you, personally, Why would you bother calling yourself Catholic?"*

#### **4.2.1.4 Current religious practice.**

Prima revealed she attended mass sometimes up to 3 times a week. This claim was verified by the researcher who would find her regularly, both before and after the time of the interview, at daily mass or Sunday mass. Notwithstanding this pious observance, she considers herself: *"a 'good' person, but a 'bad' Catholic"*. About this contradiction, she clarifies: *"I don't necessarily, you know, agree with the doctrine 100%*

*and... I would like to be a good person AND a good Catholic*". Prima envisions a good Catholic as somebody who has a good relationship with Jesus and is regarded as a kind person, a person that thinks of others, that believes and understands the doctrines of the Church, and that honestly perseveres in adhering to them. She stated she would feel closer or further away from reaching this ideal model of Catholicity, respectively, depending on the month of the year that is used for reference in allusion to the company she would be in at a given time. About this, she explains:

*"Some months I have more grace than others... when I'm with my family I find it's more difficult, 'cause that's when, you know, kind of like arguments arise, or, you know, things like that. Ahm. And while I'm... just, it's just me and my friends here"*.

Prima believes in transubstantiation and considers it the best element that the Catholic Church can offer her. About this point, she shares:

*"... the Eucharist... if I didn't believe that that was the body of Christ, so I didn't feel anything anymore, yeah, I'd, probably, would leave the Catholic Church because right now that's what it offers me... and I think that's why I'm still here"*.

## **4.2.2 Participant 2: Seconda.**

### **4.2.2.1 Profile.**

"Seconda" has lived in the vicinity of St. John's nearly all her life. She has accumulated certificates and diplomas ranging from secular studies to ecclesiastical programs and had recently received her tertiary education degree.

She was raised closely to her grandparents, uncles, and aunts and lives with her father and mother, has an older brother and comes from a long Catholic tradition on both sides of the family that dates back to the time of her grandparents and even beyond. Her relationship with her faith experienced a profound change at age 12 when she became very sick. She explains:

*“the thing of me getting sick for me changed everything, because, before that, I thought I was invincible, that I would never die and that each day it was just a new, a new day, but now I [see] it just as you have to take each day and live it to the fullest for the sake that you can dump out a lot that you have at”.*

After receiving an invitation from a priest who was friend of the family that knew about the large project, she decided to participate in it. The main reason, she said, was *“because it’s something to do with religion and hence to do with MY religion”*. Seconda also graduated from the provincial secular school system.

#### **4.2.2.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Seconda grew up in the company of her parents, brother, and extended family. She remembers that, when she was little, she would go to Church with her parents, in her own words, *“a lot”*. At around age eight, Seconda began attending Sunday school at a different parish from her own, although she was not very affiliated to it because of her family traditions. About this, she recollects: *“every Sunday after mass we’d just go down to my grandmother’s house for Sunday day breakfast”*, so she would have to skip breakfast with the family on Sunday in order to attend catechism classes. Describing her family’s attachment to the faith, she indicates that both sides of her family are, in her

own words, “*extremely religious*” and holds her grandmother as a model. In respect to this, she said:

*“my grandmother, my mother’s mother, ahm, had extreme faith, ahm, she was very... very in touch with God. ...my grandparents and my family have always had pictures of, ahm, like, well, Christ, and Jesus, and, well, Christ Jesus, the saints [thing] and the Holy Spirit, The Blessed Mother, and [saint] and everything.”*

Seconda cited her grandmother, as well as an aunt on her father’s side, had had extrasensorial experiences in connection to her sickness. This was a medical event Seconda experienced at age 12 and was life-changing. It also deepened her understanding of her beliefs. In retrospection, she said:

*“my faith was really strengthened through the experience of me getting sick, but I was faithful before that, but, ahm, I just went to Church with my parents a lot but, after I got sick, I really developed a much larger connection with God and with, ahm, the angels, the saints, and with a lot of people here in Newfoundland and people outside to Newfoundland to pray for me”*.

Instrumental for this realization was her parish priest, who accompanied her family during those difficult moments. Regarding this company, she said:

*“he was one of the most awesome people, and I joined up in a lot of Church related things, like I’ve joined up this group, joined up the choir, I joined up with, ahm, a lot of things related to church... [He] was, very pinnacle on that”*.

When asked if joining church related activities and groups at that time strengthened her faith, she only replied that they were enjoyable but not the actual reason, saying: *“I was already I think pretty faithful”*.

Seconda affirms that this priest and other religious people taught her and her family to live each day at a time. Reflecting on this, she said: *“it’s ok to be upset about it, it’s ok to... I guess, not to be happy with your overall situation, but, they showed us the way they’ve, just to live on for it and my own take each day”*.

These occurrences were key to the family decision of having a bible set up at home: Her mother would pick up the holy book and bring it to the big room area of the home quite frequently. Seconda would stop by and look at it, annotating that her mother would instead go through it everyday. Commenting on this, she said this practice would usually help settle her, as her mother would take it *“several times a day”* and *“read a few passages”*.

Seconda is not sure if hers was the most appropriate way of praying. While her grandmother would say her set of prayers and then talk to God, her father would bless himself and asked the Holy Spirit to come, paying little attention to the way Seconda prayed. She believes that she followed the belief system nonetheless by expressing:

*“In the evenings, when I prayed it on, say a set, set of prayers, I used to, but, ahm, I’d just bless myself, ahm, ask the Holy Spirit to come, and, and Our Blessed Mother or whatever, and then, I’d converse, just like I converse with you now, and my prayers, I don’t know, that’s what I mean by if I pray or not, the time I pray”*.

Besides having unstructured, personal prayer time during the day, Seconda would recite a short version of the full Rosary on her own daily. This practice would take her between 15 to 20 minutes. Apart from this practice, she would pray the full Rosary in the company of her entire family -immediate family, grandmother, grandfather, aunts and uncles- twice a week at minimum, and sometimes a visiting family, and it may have taken anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the week. Retelling her memories from her childhood, Seconda continues:

*“Everyday we had to say grace before supper... everybody in my family bless themselves and say grace before we eat, ahm, my dad always has, my mom always has, and, everyone in my family has always done that... even my brother always bless ...he’s not overtly... he’s, he’s religious, but he’s not churchgoer, he always says prayers before he [took his tests] [laughs]”.*

#### **4.2.2.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

In reference to following the precepts of the Catholic Church, Seconda said: *“I do feel that the rules are there for a reason and that they’re there to be followed... I don’t follow all of them always, but I do follow most of them”.* Elaborating on what she considers irritating topics related to Church teachings, she continues:

*“something that really bothers me... is the sake that a woman cannot become priest, that really, really bothers me, but, ahm, [when] the pope is going friendly, he said at how he’s not at the point to want to change it, from just men becoming priest and men becoming, well, everything that men can become but, he said that he can see the door opening to women being able to become these things, and you know, that’s not, I’m sorry”.*



Another topic that Seconda feels at odds with Church stance is the inability of priests to join in matrimony, especially because of the loneliness that, according to her, accompanies consecrated life:

*“I don’t think that would be a big, big problem, because, I’m not sure if it is going to be the proper thing to say, but in Anglican religion, I know that it’s very similar to Catholicism, but their Pastors are allowed to have, get married, have children...”*

On this topic, she had already shared her opinion with her favourite priest, who explained to her that becoming a priest includes professing the entire self to God, thus forfeiting their ability to get married is one aspect in which this profession is translated. This is a characteristic of clerical life that Seconda affirms she perfectly understands but adds that she knows of at least one Anglican pastor who shared the same belief system—that in order to become someone who professes a religion like an ordained minister they need to be able to only focus on God. Besides from growing in his faith, this pastor also formed a family, and that complementarity would help him teach through his belief system, showing his love for God through the love he gives his wife and children. Her disagreement with this topic goes beyond the idea of priests getting married in the traditional sense, to people getting married in general:

*“I feel like, when God put us here, you don’t think that God has a vendetta against 2 men being together, or 2 women being together, or men and women being together. My best friend is gay, and I don’t see an issue with him, being happy. I don’t think God would have an issue with him being happy, either... I feel*

*that's ok, so long if there's people available to procreate, so long as people are happy, I think that God is happy".*

#### **4.2.2.4 Current religious practice.**

Even though going to church and being in constant connection to parish life were prominent features of her developmental years, Seconda confesses she had to set aside her religious commitment in order to dedicate herself to her studies and work duties, something that she regrets. About this, she comments:

*"I haven't been an adept churchgoer over the past year and a half or so because of school and I was really, really, really busy with school and work, and just, I was really tired all the time, just, and it might be as well a lot, so I just didn't go to Church for a little bit".*

At the time of the interview, Seconda was attending church more often, around once a month to once every 2 months, citing as the reasons for this gradual comeback to Church life the fact that she had already completed her studies, which demanded a great portion of her time, and that she needs to pray.

Seconda considers herself Catholic. For her, trusting her religion, having dedicated prayer time, going to church, receiving the Eucharist, possessing a deep and fervent belief, and professing either to oneself or outwardly somebody's own Catholicism are the distinctive traits of a person who can rightly be called "Catholic". After a long hiatus, she has begun to say the Rosary again.

### **4.2.3 Participant 3: Terzo.**

#### **4.2.3.1 Profile.**

“Terzo” is a graduate male participant that moved with his grandparents and mother from a nearby town to St. John’s at a very young age. He attended a Catholic private school from his early primary years until graduation and pursued higher education at a secular institution right after that, graduating eventually.

His mother’s side of the family is Catholic, including his grandparents, and he learned about the large project at a Catholic event in which he was approached by the researcher. *“I think it’s interesting”*, he would say during the interview referring to the reasons to participate in the project. Commenting on whether he identifies as Catholic, he said:

*“I consider myself for certain to be a Christian, and I think, because of my upbringing, and because of the way I look at things, I tend to lean a little more towards Catholicism in that respect. Yeah. So, to give a short answer, yes”.*

#### **4.2.3.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

One could assume that being raised at home by Catholic grandparents certainly leaves its imprint on somebody’s life. Throughout his whole childhood and developmental years, Terzo’s family would go to mass together at the neighboring church on a weekly basis. About this habit, he recalls who he would go with: *“...mostly my grandfather and my mom. My grandmother sometimes when I was younger but she’s had... more health issues”.*

In his childhood, his grandfather held a high position related to the Atlantic region's Catholic Education regulator; this position would put his grandfather in constant contact with priests and archbishops around the province, giving him a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the Catholic community and potentially, as deduced by Terzo, helping him to choose, among many congregations, the one his family would embrace as their new parish after leaving their home town.

Terzo regards his grandfather as the one that would always lead prayer time at home to the point of surpassing all other household members' religious devotion, as Terzo reminisces, *"by a mile"*. About this, Terzo cheerfully recalls: *"to be entirely honest, usually any weekend he was out to the cabin, grace was abandoned! [laughs]"*, adding that their prayer routine would mostly consist of saying grace before meals, as well as *"a couple of prayers here and there, besides... before bed"*.

Right after moving to St. John's, Terzo began attending a local Catholic school from grade 2 and got involved in many parochial activities at his home parish, including the children's liturgy program, circa grade 6. His participation in the liturgy program would only last for a couple of years, though, since these sessions coincided with his initiation into the Lector's and Church's choir ministries, something he would end up dedicating his time. Even though Terzo's ministerial experience left indelible memories on him, he remarks this cannot be considered as a turning point in his connection with Catholicism but rather *"just more as another... thing that... took off"*, as he put it. He would seldom meet a school friend in Church, noting that children attending church would have a different background than his.

Meanwhile at school, besides receiving religion courses, Terzo would shape his understanding of morals, ethics, and social justice via different study programs available to students, as well as participating in volunteer work in the community or at homeless shelters. This scholastic formation, though, would not yield the same results for all students involved: Terzo affirms that a close classmate, who had moved to St. John's with his mother because of the schooling element, would not believe, notwithstanding the fact they had attended the same school and taken the same secondary religion classes. Terzo describes his schoolfellow as an atheist who was transitioning into a woman at the time of the interview.

#### **4.2.3.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Notwithstanding the close relationship with the Church that Terzo has maintained since his childhood years and the abundant teachings he received regarding faith matters and Catholic life via his parish, school, and religious atmosphere at home, there are certain elements of Catholicism that he questions. He shares:

*“in the Catholic Church priests don't marry... if you look in the bible... it's well documented that Peter and the other apostles and that actually did marry, they did have wives. That's something that was implemented later on, and so, while it might have been, ah, while, some might argue that they, that it was a divinely inspired decision... it certainly became canon law, it was also a man-made choice...”*

Apart from being in disaccord with certain features of the celibacy vows of priests, Terzo differs from Church's stance regarding the homosexual:

*“I’m certainly... pro LGBT rights, and... pro-gay marriage... I myself am straight, but I don’t see any issues with that. And, I think the Church has come, it certainly come aways in its opinion... it’s trying to be a little more open and friendly... towards the gay and trans community... and that part it’s also, it’s got a long ways to go to, I think.”.*

Terzo shared that he personally knows of homosexual individuals that have tried to maintain serious romantic relationships over time and have either gone through turbulent times or lived in relative harmony for decades. Speaking about the steps that, according to Terzo, the Church has made to approach these individuals, he annotates:

*“they’ve certainly done some, like I said, they’ve opened the doors a lot more towards... the gay and transgender, but I think... until the church offers, ahm, offers gay marriage and that, it’s ‘gonna be very hard for that group to reconcile with the Church.”.*

Terzo also disagrees with the Church’s stance on procured abortion. On this topic, he comments:

*“Me personally, I actually tend to lean a little more towards pro-choice, and, I think... there’s a lot of women both in the Church and outside the Church that... have a lot of difficulties with the Church because of... those stances. Some groups... they’ve come a long way, in the sense of they’ve asked for a lot more now in terms of counseling.. they offer counseling, and, so... they don’t just shut the doors on you anymore because you’ve had an abortion, there have been a lot of groups in the Church over the years that have done that, and that’s caused a big rift with it, and quite understandably so, and so, I think they’ve tried to do a*

*little more to reconcile with that, but, again, I think they've got, they've got ways to go in that, in that regard".*

The manner in which the Church has treated cases of sexual abuse of minors committed by clerics is another factor that Terzo is in conflict with, even though he acknowledges his upbringing was filled with positive experiences at his parish and school and was not aware of any major physical or sexual abuse issues compared to the Catholic school system. He reflects:

*"the abuse element, you've seen that, you've seen that here in the news all the time, ahm, and they've, they've tried to do a lot but, again, it's a rift that will take a LONG time, LOT of work, and LONG, and it's one of those rifts that may, that may never heal... So, they're doing, they're doing more in that regard,,. but, eh, there are certain, there's a lot of elements there, that are involved with, for example, ah, there have been priests that, that have been found guilty of abuse and have left the Catholic Church, but there have been also many that have never face, ah, for example, criminal prosecution. There have been many bad, ah, there have been cases of priests that have been moved around, but are still involved in the Catholic Church... and that's very hard for people to reconcile... Have they done work to reconcile these areas? They've certainly tried. Will there ever be a full reconciliation in those areas? Very hard to say... and in some areas, I'd say it's a little doubtful."*

#### **4.2.3.4 Current religious practice.**

Terzo attends Mass service on a weekly basis. Given his close relationship with the parish over the years and with the Catholic community of St. John's and surrounding

areas in general, he would attend more celebrations in a given week. He also participates in regional and international Catholic gatherings frequently, as well as youth dialogues about the faith at the local level.

Terzo has been through times of dissatisfaction with his faith, which has prompted him to consider joining other branches of Christianity for different reasons. While recalling the spiritual options that he had at hand, he said:

*“I think from a music perspective, ah, I tend to lean a lot more, more some of the music and the ideas of, say, the Baptists or the Pentacosts, but, in terms of some of the other spiritual teachings, not so much... I think the Baptists tend to be a little more hard-lined in some of their spiritual teachings and opinions than I am”.*

Referring to whether he would remain faithful to the Church in the future, he replies: *“I never want to fully say, you know, “yes, completely, for the rest of my life”. So, I’d say, at the moment, at the moment, yes”.*

#### **4.2.4 Participant 4: Quarto.**

##### **4.2.4.1 Profile.**

“Quarto” is a male participant from Newfoundland’s West Coast who moved to St. John’s in pursuit of his undergraduate degree. Referring to the research study he was about to participate in, Quarto said: *“I knew how a lot of young people, ahm, people of my age, they don’t really practice faith, ...trying to figure out why or what the attitude is towards it I think it’s important to understand that”.* He learnt about the project at a Catholic venue after the researcher approached him and extended an invitation to be part of it.



Born to a family consisting of a father from the Anglican tradition and an Eastern Orthodox mother, he and his older brother were not exactly raised practicing their parents' faith, although he would be baptized and confirmed in the Anglican church. About 2 years before the time of the interview, he experienced an inexplicable resurgence of his faith. He recalls: *"it was a very lonely time for me, and I had a lot of time to just think, you know, you sure have really deep thought".* After a transcendental personal experience and some time of discernment, he decided to become Catholic. He attended the public secular school system from Kindergarten until graduation.

#### **4.2.4.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Among the interviews that were conducted during the data collection phase of the study, Quarto's experience with the faith was the most radical and exceptional, to say the least: A self-professed atheist during his teenage years, Quarto can now be perceived as one of the most fervent young Catholic adult believers whose opinion appears in this study. The origins of his tremendous attachment to the faith and the precepts of the Church cannot be easily traced back to his childhood years: Quarto grew up in a rather secular environment even though his parents came from different religious traditions. Talking about the religious atmosphere at home during that time of his life, he recalls:

*"my dad is... Anglican, his side of the family... going back it's all British... he doesn't really practice, you know, and when I've talked to him about it, his ideas had seemed opposed. My mother is Eastern Orthodox... she never did practice... she'd describe herself as spiritual but not religious."*

The religious attitude of his grandparents did not differ much from that of his parents, regarding them as “*not very religious*”, but surprisingly, his great-grandparents apparently had a completely different stance towards faith. Basing his opinion on family anecdotes and memories that had been carried over by many generations, Quarto was able to reconstruct his great-grandparents’ religious life, citing:

*“my great-grandparents were incredible religious [laughs]... my paternal grandmother... she came from a family of 12 children, and... my paternal grand-father, he was also raised Anglican... there was only two of them in his family ‘cause his parents had children very, very late in their forties, it’s like they only had 2 children, but they were very religious... like, his mother, you know, said [the same contritions] all day, and... his father was like that, a hard-working, kind of, classic guy... worked all day, built a house and fixed everything up himself, and he was that kind of guy... they were very religious, and then, on my mother’s side, they were very Eastern Orthodox, I think, incredibly. But then, after World War II, then, you know, things really changed her”.*

Around the time Quarto was 14, he remembers his family discarded faith almost entirely to the point of not even turning on their Christmas tree and, although he still was “*technically*” Anglican and attending Mass was not foreign to him, he did not really believe in his religious tradition’s creed. By the time he was 19, he had gradually come to the conclusion that having an atheist stance towards existence was more aligned with the principles of logic and science, branches of knowledge that he holds in high regard. This attitude towards life would lead him to experience a chronic period of depression, which he explained as follows:

*“I thought: “well, life doesn’t matter”. I actually may be depressed for maybe about a year, like I was, like, probably from 17-18, I was depressed with life, because I thought, you know “what’s the point”, you know, it was, “nothing matters”, you know, I started to, ah, kind of get on that pathway, so I’d “well, you know, good and evil don’t really mean anything” and, you know, like, like “morality can be broken down” and then I like just didn’t really kind of care about anything. It was really sad”.*

At the end of his school years, Quarto had the opportunity to work, travel and live outside of Newfoundland and Labrador for many months. He remembers he felt very lonely during this time of his life. While being away from family and friends, he was able to have time to just *“think”*, get to know himself better, and reflect upon what he believed. Then, something unexplainable happened. He reminisces: *“there was a few churches around. Every time I would see them I was just like: “I, I want to go in”, but I would be afraid to go in, and, you know, it really kind of, it’d just starting to, kind of, come back in me, but I... I didn’t really know what to think about it...”*. Quarto did not know what denominations those churches belonged to, only that they were certainly Christian. He continues:

*“...but then, when I got home over that spring and summer, I’d say May of that year, I had a very interesting conversion, like I believed that it was God who was reaching out to me now, well, the Holy Spirit really, was influencing me very directly, and, it was a very instantaneous, like conversion, I guess”.*

Quarto came to the conclusion that it had actually been God who was calling him that day by himself, spontaneously, without the need for a guide of any sort.

Back in Newfoundland and Labrador, he did not speak to his parents about the event, but to a Catholic friend who was in a “*reversion*” phase of his faith journey. The two of them decided to go to church more often and learn more about the origins of many Christian denominations. As this happened, they realized the newly acquired knowledge made “*natural, logical sense*” to them, gradually changing their “*very liberal*” thinking absorbed during their high school years to a more conservative stance. After months of religious formation, both at the parish level and in private, Quarto completed the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and became a Catholic at the Easter Vigil in a ceremony presided by the Archbishop of St. John’s. When asked if he now believes in God, he joyfully replies: “*Absolutely... that’s a pretty easy one [laughs]*”.

#### **4.2.4.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Quarto sees himself as a Catholic with a traditional mindset. He does not disagree with beliefs that could be seen as archaic by other members of society, but he is cognizant that sharing his views and what he really believes about current hot topics in Church teachings may make him the object of harsh criticism from nearly every member of the social groups he is part of to the extent of facing ostracism.

Regarding the precepts of the Church and the adherence of the faithful to them, Quarto comments:

*“No matter what rule you put out there, there’s always going to be an exception, but of course, you can’t just list every single one because you’re not going to be able to do that, I mean, you know, an unknown sequence of events could have happened and, you know, something could occur, like, that could go against the rule ... it’s hard to describe but, yes, I do think that there can be exceptions, ahm,*

*but usually it's pretty written in stone... it's something to be very wary of, very careful of...".*

To illustrate his point, Quarto presents the example of procreation as the primary end of sex between married couples and how it can turn into a difficult issue. He explains:

*"...every marital act is to be used for reproduction as taught by the Church, and then, there's some people, [a few where] "well, what about, you know, National Family Planning" in the context that the woman cannot conceive for a certain amount of time for her own health or something like that. Well, that's, that would be an exception to the rule I've said. You know, when it comes to a bigger detriment of something else, but at the same time, of course... you want to avoid those collutions... It's better to stay strict, but if, of course, if there's a greater detriment... a greater, very serious detriment, then, you know, and not just like, 'oh, I'm going to, maybe, hurt someone's feelings' or something, like, you know, that's different... probably someone sought the advice of a priest and maybe it's like, "well, in that particular scenario", you know, "it seems permissible" but only because it, is stopping a greater evil... it's, again, it's hard to say... sometimes it can be a case by case".*

Although Quarto considers himself a Catholic that abides by church precepts, he disclosed his opposition to some aspects of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, commonly known as the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II. This posture, he affirms, has to do with the type of person he is, somebody who prefers the traditions, and in the way he experiences the celebration. On this, he comments:

*“Mass as it is, to me, a good descriptor... it nourishes the soul, and I find that nothing does that better for me than Latin Mass, and it’s not like I have... attended Novus Ordo... I have many times, but, I just, yeah, it’s just something that just draws me to Mass”.*

#### **4.2.4.4 Current religious practice.**

During his time out of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quarto got impressed by a Tridentine Mass celebration he attended. He describes:

*“... it’s a Latin Mass up there, Traditional, and, ahm, it was a very, very, very vibrant parish... it was very alive and well, I found... you had families there, with like upwards of 10 kids... women were all veiled... the parish was very... they were very, incredible choir, it was almost professional, like, you know, how good they were... Gregorian Chants and incensing and the priest would throw the Holy Water at the beginning of [five] Masses. It was incredible, you know”.*

He finds the Catholic communities from other places in Canada as more intense compared to the ones in St. John’s, regardless of the stereotypical image Canadians may have of Newfoundlanders’ religious habits. With a hint of irony, he contrasts: *“a lot of people would say: ‘Oh, Newfoundland is, like, one of the most religious places”, and I was like “Ok, sure, you know, maybe just in own personal belief... but in practice?”.* At the time of the interview, Quarto could be seen at Mass and receiving Sacraments at least on a weekly basis, apart from being present at Catholic events in and around St. John’s, as well as volunteering for the evangelization of other adults.

## **4.2.5 Participant 5: Quinta.**

### **4.2.5.1 Profile:**

“Quinta” was approached by the researcher at a Catholic event. She is a female participant from a town nearby St. John’s who at the time of the interview was pursuing tertiary education. Her family consists of her mother who is Anglican, her Catholic father, and in her own words, a “*modern, feminist, secular*” sister. Even though her mother was Anglican and baptized her in the Anglican tradition, she raised her Catholic and received Catholic confirmation at age 15: “*I was a cradle Catholic before*”, she said describing her degree of involvement with her faith during her formative years.

At age 16 she would eventually abandon the faith. Remembering this episode, she said: “*My relationship at the time was ending... I wanted to be in control of my life... I felt I was my own God*”. Looking back at the time in which she had just begun her higher education studies, she would see herself in retrospect as, in her own words, somebody who “*didn’t believe and behaved secularly*”.

About 2 years before the time of the interview, Quinta decided to join her boyfriend in his religious quest. In reference to what motivated her to rediscover her spirituality, she said: “*I knew there was a higher power*”. Quinta attended and graduated from the public secular school system.

### **4.2.5.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Even though Quinta attended non-denominational schools throughout her childhood, she explains that most students in her class were Catholics. Raised in a town in the vicinity of St. John’s in which a priest had to provide for the spiritual well-being of

parishioners distributed among three churches, she recalls that Catholic traditions were palpable within the school community and persisted throughout her elementary school years, but not so much into high school. Quinta relates she would attend mass with her parents regularly, every Sunday, from age six until she was 11, the year of her life in which they distanced themselves from the Church.

Eventually, Quinta would get confirmed in the Catholic Church, but confided she was not interested and did not even remember the things that she learnt in preparation for receiving the sacrament. After being away from the Church during the last years of high school, Quinta joined her boyfriend on a spiritual quest, an experience that after two years has redirected her attention back to the transcendent and rekindled her faith. At the time of the interview, Quinta manifested her belief in God and that this belief gave meaning to her life, a belief that is translated into serving Him and helping others find Him by volunteering and nursing.

#### **4.2.5.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

When Quinta listens to the words “Catholic Church”, she thinks of her Church with a mix of devotion and sadness. She firmly believes that religions are not all the same and that there is only 1 church, but as an Institution it is not doing enough. Referring to how the teachings of the church are not being translated into action in this day and age, she concludes: *“It's not doing the job as it used to because it's aging.”*

Still, Quinta considers Church precepts are still relevant in today's complicated world. According to her, an example of the effects of this lack of concise action on the general population is the sex scandals. She summarizes: *“You see all the damage”*, adding that the precepts of the faith in this regard have been misunderstood and



unseemly imparted so much so that *“people don't want to be Catholic because of having to wait to get married to have sex”*.

She also annotates there are notable exceptions but mostly from side groups—like Catholic university movements and clubs, usually formed by young adults who are dedicated to the evangelization of other adults, as well as other private agents that provide pregnancy and post-abortion support and counseling to people that have experienced these events—who continue the work that the Church herself has not been able to fulfill. Expanding on Catechesis, Quinta believes the Church should take appropriate steps to help older churchgoers discard obsolete rationale in this regard: *“The aging population is affecting the Church, the way that generation was raised, going to Church because they had to... the Church made them feel that they were outsiders... never felt welcomed.”*

#### **4.2.5.4 Current religious practice.**

In her own words, being Catholic for Quinta means to *“live like a Catholic”*, that is, to believe in God, to receive the sacraments, to attend Church on Sundays, to pray, and be compassionate, or simply put, to *“Serve God and help others find God”*. Quinta believes that confession, or the sacrament of reconciliation, is the best the Church can offer. At the time of the interview, she would frequent Mass at least weekly, volunteer at Catholic social and formation programs, and participate in various activities related to the Catholic community.

## **4.2.6 Participant 6: Sesto.**

### **4.2.6.1 Profile.**

“Sesto” is a male participant from Newfoundland’s northeast who moved to St. John’s to pursue an undergraduate degree. He agreed to take a phone interview when he went *“back home from school for the summer”* after learning about the project from his home Church’s bulletin. Sesto stated he *“never met any of the researchers in St. John’s”* when he was there.

Sesto is the middle child between two sisters and used to move around Canada frequently while growing up by reason of his father’s profession. Due to this, he attended the public school system in two different provinces.

Sesto said he considered himself Catholic from the moment he *“was able to understand what going to Church was”*. He would also consider his mother, father, and sisters Catholic, even though they would attend Mass as a family only sporadically. About this time of his life, he commented:

*“we, ah, kind of stopped going to Church a little bit. Ahm, but then it sort of picked up again, ah, especially after my sister, ah, came back from a, from a kind of a big retreat in Steubenville, and, ahm, so we, we started going to church more often, and then I got involved with, you know, ah, doing readings at the church, and just random volunteer”*.

### **4.2.6.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Sesto had a preferred parish to visit during the time he would be back home during school breaks. He would also try to maintain a close relationship with the Church

while he was away. Nevertheless, while living on his own in St. John's, his study schedules, workload, and other pressing needs made his pious intentions somewhat difficult to fulfill to the point of stopping to go to church altogether. He considers himself the type of person that approaches learning in a holistic manner, taking information and trying to reconcile it with his own personal beliefs. This is how Sesto has developed his understanding of the faith and his level of belonging to it. In his own words:

*"I would definitely say I come from a Catholic family, yeah. I mean, you know, not [every] agrees with every single piece of dogma that's associated with the, you know, one religious label or another, but, ah, yeah, I would absolutely consider myself and my family Catholic".*

Due to his frequent geographic relocation during his childhood, Sesto attended Catechetical programs on Sundays in two different Atlantic provinces, although his participation decreased after switching to his new parish in Newfoundland and Labrador. This instruction in the faith would not be complemented at school since he attended the public school system which offered no means for students to keep advancing in the understanding of their particular creed, and his family could not afford to send him to private educational institutions that could have offered such an option.

At home, it was a family tradition to say grace before having a meal so he would naturally join the other members of the family in prayer. Prayer is something that Sesto confessed he has never had a clear idea of its meaning. About his permanent intentions to comprehend this practice, he would say: *"I've definitely tried it"*. This cloudiness about the purpose of prayer would make him face a dichotomy: To do it for the sake of

besieging God for things he wished for or clearing up his mind to communicate with God freely.

In Church, Sesto would sometimes find some friends from school who attended mass regularly, recollecting that the temple would only reach full capacity for the major religious feasts. He would eventually receive both first communion and confirmation sacraments. After being asked whether he believed in God, he assertively replied: “Yes, *I do*”.

#### **4.2.6.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Sesto makes use of experiential learning to examine whether a precept of the Church can be sustained without recouring to an exemption. Referring to the abiding of rules, he maintains that they can be broken and those who break them still can call themselves Catholic. He describes his stand as follows:

*“Certainly, I don’t agree with all of them, and I think there are exceptions to, pretty much every rule... you have to filter it through your own experiences, trying to come up with an issue or a concept as close to the truth as possible”.*

The tragedy of abortion is a topic that springs to Sesto’s mind when thinking of current issues in the Church. Denoting how a firm stance on the topic can put its supporters in a difficult position when facing an ethical problem, he comments:

*“the whole abortion debate in modern day... I feel like both ends are a little too solidified and I, you know, I personally believe that... it’s not just a women’s rights issue, it’s not just a human rights issue, you know... it’s both... like, late-time abortions especially cause suffering to... what is a grown and living human being, but at the same time... sometimes, when these big things go on in*

*extenuating circumstances can lead to more suffering... it's not something that I would ever presume that I have a definite answer for...".*

#### **4.2.6.4 Current religious practice.**

The commitment to his university studies and the diverse needs Sesto had during his time in St. John's made him unable to dedicate himself to fulfilling religious duties like going to Mass and receiving the sacraments. Notwithstanding his actual distance regarding participation in religious activities within a community, Sesto believes that the Church has definitely helped him try and find a direction for his life in his journey to discover who he is. He added that this quest may never reach a final point, only checkpoints along the way. On this conclusion, he shares:

*"...I'm still a pretty young person, I'm still a student, so... young people are [still] trying to find their place in the world and... you sort of have to try and look at yourself and, at the world... and trying to figure out what your place in it is".*

#### **4.2.7 Participant 7: Settima.**

##### **4.2.7.1 Profile.**

"Settima" is a female participant who took the interview after hearing about the study during the announcements after Mass. A working professional, she had lived in St. John's all of her life except for the time in which she was pursuing graduate studies in Central Canada. Her mother and father raised her in the Catholic faith and she would find an encouraging atmosphere for religion at home: Her father was part of a group of people that supported the opening of a private Catholic school in the wake of the 1998

Referendum that abolished the denominational educational system that had been operating in Newfoundland and Labrador; she would describe her parents are fervently committed to Catholic education and Catholicism in general.

Her attachment to the faith has been very consistent over the years: Settima attended and graduated from a local Catholic private school, besides going to Sunday school at her parish and weekly Mass since age five. Her vision of Catholicism leans towards the ideals of the spirituality that inspires the mission of the Catholic school she attended.

#### **4.2.7.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Since her kindergarten years, Settima has been formally educated in the faith at her local parish, a religious instruction that was itself complementary to the religious formation she received at school and the modeling she would learn from her parents at home. The catechetical program she attended focused on bible study and explaining how certain devotions, as the Rosary and others, were practiced. Recalling these courses, she said:

*“just like the regular Sunday school program, start in October and end around April or May, ... we did like kindergarten and then grade 1, 2, 3, so grade 2 would be first communion, and then we did reconciliation grade 3, 4, 5 and then confirmation... in grade 6”.*

At home, Settima’s father would undoubtedly be the one guiding the religious practices of the family. He would do this by ensuring an encouraging atmosphere for a personal encounter with God in a household in which prayers effected before having a

meal or going to bed would not be uncommon, but neither were part of daily life.

Speaking about catechesis at her private educational institution, Settima narrates:

*“we didn’t really have, like, a Sunday school program in the school ‘cause everyone kind of went to their parishes, so you would do your first communion in your own Church, but then, like, in school, we might have, like, a celebration that everyone got their first communion in grade 2... So, it wasn’t like a dedicated Sunday school program, but, you know, primary, elementary, and junior high we had, ahm, like, religion classes, and then, ahm, grade 10 was more all theology and then grade 11 was philosophy and then, ahm, grade 12 was world religions, so, it was a religion program, but, I guess not the same kind of, like, Sunday school curriculum”.*

Settima deemed the religion program imparted at school as detailed and very sufficient. When asked if she believed in God, she replied with a quick and youthful “yep”.

#### **4.2.7.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Settima’s attachment to the Catholic Church has been consistent over the years whether she lived in the province with her parents or outside of it on her own.

Nevertheless, she manifests disagreement with the Church’s stance on key issues. For instance, speaking about the ordination of women for the priesthood, she shared:

*“...there are definitely some things that I don’t know if I would necessarily agree with, like, I think that women should have an opportunity to become priests”*, calling in this way for a revision of the precept that only men can access the priesthood to the detriment of religious women.

On the abortion question, she differs from the position maintained by the Magisterium: “...I think that, you know... a woman should have a right to choose about her own body”, signaling the prerogative of women to decide about the fate of the unborn they may be carrying in their womb as supreme. Concerning the Church’s posture towards the homosexual, Settima maintains: “I don’t necessarily agree on their social stance about the LGBTQ community, like, you know, I... think they weren’t welcoming them...”, summing up that all these topics can be effectively dealt with by modernizing the Church’s opinion on the matter in order to keep up with the times, or in her own words: “we need to bit of catching up”.

Settima considers the Church should also switch the focus of the social programs currently run by it, from attenuating the effects of the problem to solving directly the cause of the issue. On this proposal, she indicates:

*“We do a good job of helping in the short term, but, like, in terms of policy, I think we can have a better stance... just say homelessness, it’s like ‘wow, there you can feed the people immediately’, but there’s still the underline factor of people are homeless because they can’t make enough money or they had underlying mental health conditions, so kind of addressing the like social and psychological, economic factors that would surround homelessness as opposed to addressing the, like, the immediate problems”.*

She recognizes that there may be a disconnect between the social programs themselves, ranging from soup kitchens to music education and healthy eating clubs, and the actual spiritual gains of those who benefit tangibly from them. Settima stated



her puzzlement about how to approach the issue saying: *“I don’t know how to fill the gap”*. Still, she believes the answer lies in a paradigm shift, describing it as follows:

*“I think reaching outside the church, like, we always do this prayer at, like, I’ve been inclined to that ‘oh, we pray that people will go to church’, but if we’re just praying for people inside the church for people to come to church, it’s like you’re preaching to the converted. Reach out to other groups, I think, university students... I think a sense of community would be important”*.

#### **4.2.7.4 Current religious practice.**

Settima attributes her religious customs to *“a habit that started young”*. She says being Catholic means: *“willingness to help others... empathy... like the sense of stewardship when it comes to the environment... I think that my moral compass was set by going to church”*. At the time of the interview, Settima would attend Mass service with her family on a weekly basis. She was also involved in a Ministry at her local parish and participated in parochial events of many sorts.

#### **4.2.8 Participant 8: Ottavo.**

##### **4.2.8.1 Profile.**

“Ottavo” was first contacted to participate in the project at age 18. He took the interview after turning 19 years of age. Referring to what motivated him to take the interview, he said: *“it was an interesting idea or a concept, to say the least”*. After graduating from the secular school system, he continued his higher education in St. John’s. Ottavo comes from a town in the vicinity of St. John’s. His parents and brother

are Catholic, and so are his Grandparents and aunt. He was baptized and received first communion and confirmation in the Church. Ottavo considers himself Catholic because of being brought up in the Catholic faith. Remembering the home in which he grew up, he recalls there were religious objects throughout the house. He comments: *“every doorway had a palm cross, or Mary... in my room, I had a room blessing thing for a long time. I’d say, it’s a light which was an angel.”*

Ottavo cannot think of an occasion in which he stopped believing in God. His conception of God has been pretty well the same, although he says it recently experienced a rather drastic change due to his increased involvement in the Church, something that has given him the opportunity to see, in his own words, the *“Church’s view of God”*. Approaching the Church is something Ottavo has done by himself, recognizing that he has always believed in God, that no one forced him to believe but instead it would naturally come out of him: *“I felt pretty well that there was always someone there, essentially.”*, he comments.

#### **4.2.8.2 Faith formation characteristics during developmental years.**

Ottavo’s impression of his community while he was growing up is one in which the people were brought to the sacraments without having to go to Church in the first place. He laments: *“we weren’t really taught very much”*, reflecting upon the knowledge of the faith that he received from the catechetical programs he attended that were run in either his parish or a nearby one. Even though the schools he attended during his childhood had been previously owned by the church, the whole of Ottavo’s education was imparted in a secular environment. This was due to the referendum held in the province in the late 1990s that put an end to the denominational education system.

Ottavo would oftentimes go to Church voluntarily in the company of his family members or on his own. This habit would be something that distinguished him from the rest of his friends who, according to him, went to Church under obligation, most likely because their parents brought them along so they can be confirmed in the faith.

Ottavo is not certain about his parents' church practices in their youth except for knowing that his father was an altar server. His grandparents and aunt still frequent the Mass service. He attributes his mother's, brother's, and own inclination for the transcendent to be rooted in congenital or even hereditary factors. About this, he explains: "*my ancestors feared God, someone might [have] handed it off to me*". At home, there was no designated prayer or praising time, but this lack of dedicated observance did not discourage moments for the discussion of religious topics among family members from happening occasionally. Behind his constant struggle to construct a conception of God that perhaps may be perceived as more aligned with the teachings of the Catholic faith, is the absence of formal faith formation opportunities during his lifetime. He observed: "*I more or less understand God as a spiritual force and try and figure out how that works out*". This idea has mostly been the same as far as he can remember, although it has recently been adjusted with new input from Church teachings due to his genuine pious interest in learning more about the faith.

#### **4.2.8.3 Topics in which the participant stands in opposition.**

Ottavo considers that a distinction should be drawn between "*the rule of the Lord*", that is, the rules given by Jesus Christ, and "*the rule of the Church*", which according to him are the rules the Church decides on. In his opinion, one may break the *rule of the Church* without ceasing to be Catholic:

*“to be frank, a lot of times I question the rule of the Church... I really do... In ways, I trust the Catholic teaching, the catechism [must have been] developed, I think, that many of these rules are good, sometimes I question it, I don't think we should bow, or deviate from the word of the Lord, and, we all call ourselves 'Christian'”,*

Ottavo thinks that some groups have not been approached adequately by Church members and that these actions have tainted the image of the Institution. On this idea, he shares: *“I think in some ways a lot of people in the Church had done terrible things...”*. He takes as an example the experience of people with homosexual inclinations, commenting that the Lord did not teach His followers to hate but still they show hatred, adding: *“... we don't necessarily have to go after people, right, we can help other people without having to cast omens at them”*.

Besides these tensions, Ottavo assesses the evangelization efforts performed by the Catholic Church have not reached their desired outcome, a situation that undermines the realization of the teachings of the Church. His disappointment is also expressed recalling broken promises regarding the Church's commitment to the evangelization of indigenous groups, citing it was the Church's fault not to follow through with an agreement to teach Mass in their indigenous language. Ottavo culminates regretting the involvement of members of the Church in the residential school scandals:

*“The responsibilities in some of these schools, it's very, it's very hard. I mean, an organization that I'm a part of, something that I believe in, see so much was*

*given it's coming from it, I can't help but wonder what's going on, and, if it is up to the organization ultimately, if there's some sort of systemic problem in there..."*

#### **4.2.8.4 Current religious practice.**

Notwithstanding the sadness that some episodes involving the Church have left in Ottavo's heart, he still believes that the Church has something to offer. On this idea, he reflects:

*"I think there's community and, it's a group, it's a group of spiritual people that you can talk to about God, you can't really talk about God to most people, it's, that's not people want to talk about 'cause, in my mind, people don't like to think that they were doing anything wrong. If you believe in God, you believe that, perhaps, God has set out a certain, certain rules, ideas that are good, a lot of people don't like to think that they are doing things that are bad 'cause it hurts, especially when it's something that they like to do, perhaps, what benefits them. A lot of people... don't like to break away from bad habits to get into good ones because it's a, it's a pain in the short term, but, it's a long-term goal and it's a long-term benefit. What you get from deep spiritual understanding is much more than you could in short-term pleasure or monetary gain... and I say that as in a canvas".*

Ottavo sees the revitalization of the faith as something possible. In order to achieve this, he valiantly calls to stand for what the faithful believe. He, points out:

*"I think if you can't stand on your own grounds, your own words, your own beliefs, you can't hold to the Church, you're afraid of that, I think, I think there's something not only wrong with society, I think there's something wrong with*

*yourself in a certain manner, I think you shouldn't be afraid of what you believe, I think we should have the courage and faith to stand up front, stand on our own, stand together as a Church, I think it's important that some of these features are passed on, or we live in a society that some would say "is very religious society", I would say, from my ... perspective I'd begged to differ wholly, much of what we've had in our society is most certainly against God, and against the Church".*

At the time of the interview, he could be seen attending Mass and Catholic events regularly. Before finishing his participation, he concludes with the following observation: *"Religion offers something deep down... something within that you cannot get from frivolous things that won't follow you to the end".*

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction.**

The subsequent sections will contain the interpretation of the findings and the corresponding discussion of the participants' similarities and distinctive features of their lives. This analysis includes the participants' faith formation experience, the topics in which the participants stand in opposition to church teachings, their religious practices during their formative years and at the time of the interview. Its objective is to elucidate the aspects of faith formation received during childhood or other factors that could have made young adult Canadians interviewed for this project stay in the Catholic Church during their early adulthood.

### **5.2 Participants' similarities and distinctive characteristics from their life experiences.**

Generally speaking, all eight participants were single, never married young Catholic Canadian adults that became acquainted with the research study because they had attended a Church-related event. They all graduated from the primary and secondary levels of compulsory education in Canada. Of the eight participants included in the study, six attended public secular schools throughout the entirety of their school years, and in Settima and Terzo's case, a Private Catholic institution since Kindergarten and grade 2, respectively. They all continued their tertiary education in St. John's (NL) and came from families consisting of at least a mother with a Christian heritage (six Catholic, one Protestant, one Orthodox), and a male figure in the father's role: a

Christian father in seven cases (six Catholic, one Protestant), and a Catholic grandfather in one case. This means that seven-out-of-eight participants originated from families in which at least one member was Catholic and had received the sacraments commonly received by Catholic youth during their formation years, i.e. Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation, after being instructed in the faith at home by a family member, at their parishes, at their faith-based school, or using a combination of the aforementioned options. Only one participant, Quarto, belonged to a family tradition wherein neither parent was Catholic, although he had also been baptized and confirmed in his original Protestant faith before having to be confirmed in the Catholic Church after switching. Apart from Sesto and Ottavo, the two participants who demonstrated a rather constructivist, experiential understanding of the faith, the rest of the interviewees seemed to have used the knowledge received through catechesis and religious studies to shape their understanding of the faith.

One participant, Seconda, underwent a health-related experience during her formative years that deepened the way in which she lived her faith. Finally, another interviewee, Quarto, experienced a moment of unparalleled, overwhelming emotion at the onset of his adulthood that moved him to seek the true faith.

### **5.3 Participants' faith formation and religious practices during their developmental years.**

#### **5.3.1 Religious legacy of mothers.**

With regard to the religious legacy of Catholic mothers, [Bao et al. \(1999\)](#) suggested that mothers' religious behaviours concerning identification and ritual



practices were retained by their children. This conclusion would partially explain the potential reasons why the participants were still attached to the faith at the time of the interview. The aforementioned phenomenon was also noticed in interfaith families ([PRC, 2016](#)) like Quinta's, whose father is Catholic and her mother Anglican. In her case, her mother raised her in the Catholic faith despite her Protestant origins. This result coincides with the findings of the 1994-1995 Swiss Fertility and Family Survey which revealed that if one parent was Catholic and the other belonged to Protestantism, the child would usually be brought up as a Catholic ([UNECE, 2000](#)).

### **5.3.2 Religious legacy of fathers.**

The general passing of the faith in Catholic or Protestant-Catholic families from which seven of the eight interviewees originated was apparently not altered if the mother was not perceived as the leader or religious reference at home, as it was the case for Settima and Ottavo (father), or Terzo (grandfather). In respect to this difference, the results of the [Pew Research Center \(2020\)](#) study that linked a father's close involvement in the religious upbringing of their children with their teenagers' religious alignment may also help explain the interviewees' religious attachment in the long run. The adolescents of the 2020 study considered themselves religiously closer to their fathers than their mothers. This finding also shares similarities with [Haug & Wanner's \(1998\)](#) research on religious groups in Switzerland from which connections were drawn between the religious lives of fathers and those of their children, signaling a father's religious identification and involvement in religious practices as a strong predictor of all household members' religious affiliation and practices ([Haug & Wanner, 1998](#), in [Haug et al., 2000](#)). This father-children connection could also be at the base of the

transmission of religious identification and practices in these participants. Although Seconda and Settima mentioned their fathers would commonly take part in prayer at home, with Seconda noting his father's participation in weekly Rosary group prayers, the male participants involved in this study apparently did not experience the same level of paternal involvement in devotional practices, something that St. John Paul II instead enjoyed. According to his biographer, the modern Saint remembered his father "as a 'man of constant prayer'" ([Weigel, 1999, p.30](#)):

*"At night, as in the early morning, young Karol would find his father on his knees silently praying. Father and son read the Bible together and prayed the rosary regularly",* being his father's way of life that *"first planted in the future pope the idea that the life of faith has first to do with interior conversion"* ([Weigel, 1999, p.30](#)).

Still, a father's less involvement in devotional practices, as in Sesto and Ottavo's case, did not lead them to disalign from their paternal religious belief, but perhaps left them with uncertainties about the faith that translated into a search for religious meaning outside the family and the Church. A similar result could be extracted from Terzo's religious experience: Even though his grandfather was regarded as the leader and reference on religious matters at home and maintained strong ties with the Catholic community and its leaders, he may not have replaced the image and modeling that a religiously devout father could have imprinted on their children's minds. This missing model could have provoked in Terzo the frequent periods of uncertainty about his religious beliefs that he described, in spite of being in constant contact with the faith at home, at school, and at his parish, and in the face of research that supports solidarity

between grandparents and grandchildren as influential for the intergenerational passing of the faith ([Bengtson, 2013](#)). This result may actually align with the [Bengtson et al.'s \(2009\)](#) study on intergenerational transmission of religion which found that grandfathers in particular did not influence their grandsons' religious service attendance patterns or religiousness. In fact, of all the participants interviewed in this project, Terzo was the only male interviewee that, notwithstanding his faith formation and involvement over the years, gave signs of an imminent abandoning of the faith.

### **5.3.3 Longitudinal consistency in religious practice.**

Of the seven participants that were born to a Catholic or partially Catholic family, Seconda and Settima showed consistency in both practice and belief during their formative years, followed by Prima and Terzo who experienced moments of doubt about the faith either at specific moments of her life (Prima) or more recurrently (Terzo). These four participants were connected and involved in parish life and experienced the faith in their homes, with Terzo and Settima continuing to receive Catholic education at school. A sense of belonging to a parish and reinforcement of Catholic values and practices at home and at school may help explain why these participants never drifted from the faith during their formative years, assuming a development of a healthy Catholic identity had taken place in accordance with [King et al. \(2013\)](#).

Seconda and Settima, the participants who during their developmental years were perceived as the most adherent to the precepts of the Church along with their families, share some interesting similarities in their upbringing: a) Both families counted with a Catholic mother and a Catholic father to whom prayer would not be an unusual practice, b) both families were actively involved in parish life and maintained a

permanent, close connection with their parish priests, c) both participants attended Sunday school, and d) neither of them attested to have experienced periods of doubt or distance from the faith before reaching adulthood. There may be, though, some significant differences present in both participants' developmental years that could have affected their attachment to the Church as of the early years of their adulthood: While Seconda's experience of a serious illness during her early teenage years may have given her the spiritual impetus to get more involved in prayer and parish life during her adolescence, its effects could have receded to the point of making her decide not to go to Church at all during her College years. Also, Seconda attended public secular schools throughout her developmental years, which are schools belonging to an educational system whose morals and practices may tremendously differ from the ones found at Catholic educational institutions. Contrastingly, though Settima did not experience a chronic malady during that time of her life, she would be attending a Catholic school daily throughout the same period.

These dissimilar life experiences may suggest, *ceteris paribus*, that a longitudinally stable connection with the faith that survives into young adulthood may not be based on striking life experiences encountered during childhood but on a continuous, day-to-day religious experience in which the quotidian environment plays a major role on the reinforcement of religious doctrine and practices. This conclusion goes in line with [Arold et al. \(2022\)](#) findings that a school curriculum may influence the religious attitudes and values of students over lifetime and that students who had religious education in school tend to show higher religiosity levels when they are adults,

although these levels of religiosity may not always seem to differ considerably from those of secular school graduates ([Uecker, 2009](#)).

#### **5.3.4 Moments of doubt and distancing from the faith.**

Within this same group of participants that were born to a Catholic or partially Catholic family, Prima and Quinta experienced periods of doubt or distance from the faith during their adolescence, around age 13 to 14. This coincides with the median age for disaffiliation proposed by [McCarty & Vitek \(2017\)](#). Coincidentally, though not Catholic at the time, Quarto and his family also lived through a time in which they distanced themselves from their faith when he was 14. Prima's period of doubt was not long lasting, whereas Quarto and Quinta's lasted several years. The difference may lie on Prima's personal and family attachment to religious practices and a solid faith formation received at home, at the parish, or both, which may have given her the answers or the necessary confidence to trust one's faith in times of doubt. This result echoes Pope Benedict XIV words from his encyclical *Etsi Minime*, "There is nothing more effective than catechetical instruction to spread the glory of God and to secure the salvation of souls." ([Benedict XIV, 1742](#), para.13)

All participants that experienced periods of doubt about the faith or time away from religious involvement at any point of their lives, whether Catholic or not, came from families in which the father was not perceived as being intrinsically motivated to be actively involved in Church life on a permanent basis, or from a home in which there was no father but a father figure instead. Of all the interviewees' nuclear family members, only Settima's father was noted as the leader and reference on religious matters at home that seemed immanently involved in parish life, community

engagement, and the faith formation of his children out of home during Settima's formative years. She was the only interviewee that portrayed the most consistent relationship with the faith and the Church over time without any noticeable periods of doubt or distance from them. This connection is consistent with the findings from [Haug et al. \(2000\)](#), [PRC \(2020\)](#), and [Weigel's \(1999\)](#) account about the profound impression that religiously committed fathers may imprint in their children's attitudes towards the faith.

### **5.3.5 Religious commitment of both parents.**

On the whole, the religious commitment of both parents during their children's developing years appears to minimize the chances of seeing them leaving the faith during their adolescence or beyond, suggesting that both parents' involvement in the religious upbringing of the growing child is paramount for the transmission of the faith. This suggestion agrees with [Shaw's \(2016\)](#) study in which an effort was made to decouple the idea of the mother being the primary spiritual caregiver of their children and include the father as an equally important, strategic partner in their children's faith formation. Also, this result would be similar to the findings of the 1994-1995 Swiss Fertility and Family Survey, which presented data showing that when both parents were Catholic, the children would also identify as Catholic ([UNECE, 2000](#)).

### **5.3.6 A supernatural factor: God's Grace.**

A family's intermittent fulfillment of religious duties or a father's perceived lack of inherent motivation to participate in Church and prayer life will not necessarily lead to their children's ultimate abandoning of the faith: During his developmental years and

despite these factors, Ottavo would sometimes go to Church on his own, out of his own will, evidently not to fulfill a religious duty or a family obligation, nor to socialize or to conform to peer pressure, but because he never had a doubt about God's presence in his life and had always believed in Him.

Taking into consideration Ottavo's lifelong spiritual disposition, Quarto's personal faith resurgence experience, and Quinta's permanent spiritual certainty which developed into a faith quest, there may be an inexplicable factor imprinted on these participants' souls that moved them to find an answer to their longing for an epistemic transcendence ([Gorelik, 2016](#)) that no other resource available to them could satiate. This interpretation agrees with St. John Paul II's insight shared during his December 2003 general audience, that the search for greater material well-being, the pursuit of ever-more advanced social, scientific and economic goals, or even a better fulfillment of personal expectations and those of the community may not be enough to satisfy the most intimate aspirations of our soul ([John Paul II, 2003](#)).

In this regard, the concept of grace, or the "*favor*, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life" ([Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, 1996](#)) may help to elucidate the reasons behind these participants longing for the transcendent. This gift, which is innately "meant to arrive unbidden and unexpected" ([Mac Carthy, 2020, p. 178](#)), "can come in an angel's visit or with the rending of the heavens as it did with Paul on the road to Damascus, but to most it is manifested by the small, still voice within" ([Boswell, 1967](#)), an impulse that could have translated into what the interviewees experienced in their souls, namely a lifelong spiritual disposition, a

dramatic faith resurgence, and a deep sense of certainty about the transcendent, and that could be at the basis of their motivation to seek for that unfulfilled yearning of their being.

### **5.3.7 The conception of God and the conciliation between science and faith.**

Sesto and Ottavo seemed to have formed their conception of God and of the Catholic faith more holistically than from catechesis and this learning experience, or lack thereof, would produce two different outcomes: Sesto, who frequently struggled with religion when trying to reconcile it with technology and science, would stop going to Church when he lived away from his family as a young adult, only visiting it when he was back home on vacation. Ottavo, on the other hand, with the idea in mind that science and God were not mutually exclusive entities but rather the former being a systematic analysis of the works of the latter, would find ways to get in touch with the faith as a young adult. These means would include events such as joining faith youth groups, attending faith and religion courses, mingling with the Catholic community, and participating in Mass and Catholic activities. By doing this, he would learn more about those aspects of his religion that he had no access to through lack of quality catechesis opportunities during his childhood, all without experiencing any periods of doubt or distance from the faith or the Church. These differences in spiritual outcome lead to the conclusion that, perhaps, the discovery and application of insights that settle questions about the faith may pave the way to a deeper approach to religion and its various tangible and abstract components. Interestingly, despite his struggles, Sesto never



abandoned the faith to the point of disaffiliation, but instead distanced himself from certain aspects of the practice of religion while he had to attend to other pressing needs, still identifying himself and his family as “Catholic without a doubt”.

Sesto and Ottavo’s experiences showcase an aspect of the [PRC’s \(2009\)](#) study in which just a few apostates attributed their abandoning of the faith to a sense that religion had been relegated as superstition by modern science, and of the [McCarty & Vitek’s \(2017\)](#) research that cited disparity between science and religion as a reason for disaffiliation only for some dissenters. In other words, it may take more than a perceived incompatibility between science and religion for somebody to leave behind a religious belief that could have been nurtured from a very young age. This spiritual resiliency may actually withstand the absence of a solid catechesis received during a person’s developmental years, as well as the pernicious effects the popularity of modern science can have in today’s youth: a branch of knowledge that either “gladly makes the leap of faith to assert that human beings can ascertain true causes, or it simply assumes that we can” ([Principe, 2006](#)). On this point, and notwithstanding the success modern science has had at verifying that their starting assumption works, “the argument from success is not an argument for objective truth of the starting assumption”, an objective truth or true causes that, philosophically speaking, we cannot really ever tell that we have uncovered or are even able to uncover ([Principe, 2006](#)). In this case, faith and reason should be seen as “two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” ([John Paul II, 1998, para. 1](#)), a combined approach suggesting not either, but both aspects of the human intellect working in conjunction to advance towards the objective truth may be necessary to continue one’s personal journey to the

transcendent, for “Science can purify religion from error and superstition” and “religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish.” ([John Paul II, 1988, para. 29](#)).

### **5.3.8 Once a Catholic, Always a Catholic.**

According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church \(1992\)](#), being Catholic involves the following:

1. Acceptance and proclamation of the Gospel: Being part of the Church requires not only hearing the proclamation of the Word of God but also accepting it. This disposition of following Christ results in conversion.
2. Profession of Faith: A responsible affirmation of the Trinitarian faith is necessary as well as a firm intention to grow in knowledge and to conform to Scripture and Tradition.
3. Participation in the Sacraments: The Sacrament that marks the beginning of a person's journey as a member of the Church is Baptism, followed by Confirmation which fortifies and completes the grace received in Baptism. The regular reception of Christ's Body and Blood in the third Sacrament, the Eucharistic Communion, is needed since it nourishes and transforms the disciple's soul.
4. Adherence to the moral teachings and precepts of the Catholic Church as articulated in the Catechism.
5. Maintaining unity and communion with the Church in its Pope, bishops, and faith community as members of the Body of Christ.

“Despite the tide of secularism which has swept our societies” ([Francis, 2013, chap. 2](#)) and notwithstanding the type of academic or religion formation the interviewees received, or the many different ways in which they may not conform to what is proclaimed by the Church, all seven participants that were raised Catholic in their childhood continued to identify as Catholic at the time of the interview. This ratio (seven participants-out-of-seven or 100%) does not align in any conceivable way with current research that predicts at least a 10% apostasy rate ([PRC, 2009](#)) for Catholics growing up in this new millenium. These seven participants had at least two adult members of the family, generally those playing the mother’s and father’s roles, attending Church on a rather regular basis throughout their developmental years. In some cases, some of these adults, and their children by extension, would go to Church only sporadically or even stopped going to Church altogether. Despite such factors, this finding gives support to [Desrosiers et al.’s \(2011\)](#) research on parent religiosity, or in this study’s case, the religiosity of a parent or a parent figure, which appears to be a powerful determinant of youth religiosity that may survive into young adulthood. This parent or parent figure potentially influences the religious tendencies of adolescents more significantly compared to peers or the religious education received outside the home as an extension to what was stated in [de Vaus \(1983\)](#) and [Erickson \(1992\)](#) in this respect, accordingly.

## **5.4 Topics in which the participants stand in opposition to church teachings or the Church's response given to an issue.**

### **5.4.1 Introduction.**

Though all participants in this study identified as Catholics, each of them presented at least one topic in which they showed some kind of opposition to Church teachings or feelings of resentment towards it, some in the social realm, others in the catechetical one. When interviewees were asked about what they thought were controversial themes regarding Church teachings or the approach given to them, Church rules that can be broken, or similar questions in order to draw out subjects they were partially or fully in disagreement with, seven-out-of-eight participants named a sexual-related subject, such as: a) teachings on homosexual acts/Church's stance on homosexuality (four participants), b) teachings against abortion (three participants), c) celibacy of priests (two participants), d) sex abuse scandals (two participants), e) celibacy of the laity (one participant), and f) treatment of the homosexual by the Catholic community (one participant). Other controversial themes unveiled during the course of the interviews were the priestly ordination of women (two participants), and treatment of indigenous peoples in North America and Newfoundland and Labrador (one participant).

On the catechetical realm, one participant voiced her concerns about how the aging churchgoer's attitude towards religious duties provokes conflict with newer generations of Catholics to which going to Mass was not instructed as an obligation, and a perceived lack of evangelization programs aimed at the wider population. Another participant raised doubts about the efficacy of church-run social initiatives in the

long-term, citing that social work is currently aimed at palliating the effects of a much complex problem that is not directly being dealt with. Lastly, one participant expressed his dissatisfaction with the changes brought forth by Vatican II, preferring the Extraordinary Form of the Mass to the Novus Ordo Missae for being what draws him to Mass.

#### **5.4.2 Sexual-related subjects: Teachings on homosexual acts/Church's stance on homosexuality and abortion.**

Sexual-related topics were the most numerous among the participants of this study. Regarding the position of the Catholic Church on homosexuality, three-out-of-four female participants and one-out-of-four male interviewees cited some form of disappointment or disagreement with it. On the subject of the Church's stance against abortion, one-out-of-four female participants and two-out-of-four male interviewees showed various degrees of conflict accepting it.

In respect to the answers received by female participants on these topics, the interviewees seemed quite resolved in their position and gave the impression of been awaiting the Church to surrender its actual stance on these subjects for the sake of sentimental compassion towards the people experiencing these circumstances (Prima, Seconda) or to conform to zeitgeist (Settima), without giving hints of being open to discuss these issues. Since these female participants had either completed or were about to complete their tertiary education, these data can be informed by [Schellenberg et al.'s \(1999\)](#) study on the attitudes toward homosexuals among students at a Canadian University which found that college education may promote a reduction in

anti-homosexual prejudice among young people (p. 139). Also, [Gray & Gautier's \(2018\)](#) analysis that cited disaccord with the Church's position on certain social issues, like homosexuality, divorce, and abortion, as a driving factor for disaffiliation among Catholic women may serve as a warning sign for Church leaders of a pending abandonment of the faith by affected female members should appropriate, timely action not be taken. Of the female participants, only Settima desired the Church to change its position on both homosexuality and abortion.

Regarding the results drawn from the male participants, just one male interviewee, Terzo, emphatically supported the pro-homosexual and pro-abortion agenda, compared to the other male participants who, when asked their opinion on these topics, seemed to favour the need for dialogue between the parties involved or find instances for healing by the affected members, without appearing to be in support of any of the aforementioned movements. His stance on these topics was akin to the partial positions taken by the majority of female participants on these themes, in contrast with the other male interviewees' rather balanced viewpoints. The reason for this similarity may be extracted from the results of the study conducted by [MacCallum & Golombok \(2004\)](#) on children raised in fatherless families from infancy in which it was found that "boys being raised without a father showed more feminine characteristics, although no less masculine ones" ([MacCallum & Golombok, 2004, p. 1415](#)). Assuming that Catholic parents who go to Church with their children want them to inherit the faith, the fact that Terzo was the only male participant that grew up without a father but a father figure in his place may account for the divergence between his stance and the actual Church's position on these topics. This conclusion is based on psychological

research that has found that children who show the highest levels of moral virtue and a healthy spirituality in adulthood learned it from their fathers ([Popcak & Popcak, 2010](#)). Moreover, these same studies indicate that a mother's effort of passing the faith to her children can be significantly hindered or even negated "if the father is not leading the way" ([Popcak & Popcak, 2010, p. 281](#)).

Interestingly, besides being interviewees that had graduated from a secular university and were exercising their profession at the time of the study, both Settima and Terzo, the participants whose views on both homosexuality and abortion were at odds with the Church's stance, attended Catholic schools during their developmental years. This finding can be informed by [Maher's \(2004\)](#) study on Catholic High School students' attitudes toward homosexuality which found that "graduates of Catholic High Schools had more homo-positive attitudes than graduates from non-Catholic high schools, and graduates from coeducational Catholic high schools had more homo-positive attitudes than graduates from unisex Catholic high schools" ([Maher, 2004, p. 462](#)). Also, research supports a positive association between higher levels of education and acceptance of abortion attitudes even among Catholic college students, with the greater opposition to abortion found among female students due largely to their greater religiosity ([Heimer, 1976, p. 259](#)), as well as their academic inclination toward the social sciences, their plans on whether embarking on graduate studies, and their past religious service attendance ([Bardis, 1975](#)).

None of these participants attended, immediately after graduating from high school, a Catholic university. According to [Heimer \(1976\)](#), attending a higher education institution in the Catholic tradition may reinforce attitudes towards homosexuality and

abortion more in accord with Church teaching. It is possible, then, that a secular environment at the tertiary level favouring a lax attitude towards homosexuality and procured abortion may have had an impact on the corresponding participants' stance during their adulthood, for the more advanced in their higher education studies an interviewee happened to be, the more liberalized their attitude towards these topics was.

Regarding the support, acceptance, and practice of homosexuality and abortion, topics which in countries like Canada enjoy federal sponsorship and their mere questioning is deemed intolerable, even punishable by law ([Bill 43, 2016](#); [Bill C-3, 2021](#); [Bill C-4, 2021](#); [Bowal & McIntyre, 2017](#); [Catholic Civil Rights League, 2020, 2022](#); [Higgins, 2023](#)), the Catholic Church is one of the few, perhaps the only institution in the Western World ([PRC, 2013, 2014, 2015](#)) that has maintained its stance on these subjects throughout the ages ([Paul VI, 1968](#); [Seper, 1974](#); [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975](#); [Ratzinger, 1986, 2003](#); [Pope John Paul II, 1995, 1998](#)). This uniqueness puts the Church and its followers in permanent conflict with a dominant culture that, according to [Wallace \(1989\)](#), shows signs of “a loss of conviction or agreement about rational standards for the conduct and resolution of moral disputes” ([Wallace, 1989, p. 327](#)). In these circumstances of general antithetical attitude towards engaging in a coherent dialogue, it is highly unlikely that a thorough instruction—one that seeks the elucidation of the repercussions that adopting these sexual and birth control practices may carry on both who effect and are affected by them—may happen, thus conditioning any future developments on the previously observed trends in these topics.



### **5.4.3 The celibacy of priests, the laity, and the sex abuse scandals.**

The celibacy of priests and the laity was considered an issue by two and one participants, respectively, whereas the sex abuse scandals was a theme brought up by two interviewees. These subjects, when pointed out by interviewees, seemed to have been named independently from each other, suggesting the participants were potentially unaware of any correlations between them, only singling them out because they felt at odds with the Church's stance on the matter. In a 2020 article, [Ballano](#) advanced a connection between the Catholic laity's lack of participation in ecclesial governance and the clerical sexual abuse scandals by applying a sociological analysis of Vatican II reforms through the lens of lay empowerment. The findings of this study led him to argue that the adoption of married priesthood should be part of the changes to be implemented by the Church in order to prevent clerical sexual misconduct cases from happening. His stance was that, by doing this, it will allow "diocesan priests to experience a more intimate social bonding and stronger direct and indirect social controls" (p. 2), which are said to be insufficient in today's diocesan priestly life. The author advocates for a greater participation of the laity in Church governance and the adoption of married priesthood, deeming them as needed constituents to make the Church's clerical sexual abuse procedures more robust. He also judges them as effective elements to dissuade the clergy from engaging in potential sexual misconduct, especially given what he describes as the "loneliness and solitary life of diocesan priests who, unlike religious clerics, do not have a cohesive religious community in the diocese" (p. 13). For this study, insights from studies on the perceptions of priestly life by newly ordained priests ([Hoge, 2002](#), in [Ballano, 2020](#)), the main sources of clerical

stress ([Hoge et al., 1995](#), in [Ballano, 2020](#)), and sociological theories on deviance ([Hirschi, 2002](#), in [Ballano, 2020](#)), among others, were extracted. Though the application of sociological hypotheses to an ecclesiastical conciliar process may produce conclusions pointing at clericalism as the culprit of this serious crisis in the Church, researchers cannot overlook other factors that could lie at the core of the problem. On this point, the late Fr. [Richard John Neuhaus \(2002\)](#) describes:

“At the epicenter of the continuing crisis is the simple, however difficult, virtue of fidelity... if bishops and priests had been faithful to the teaching of the Church and their sacred vows, there would be no scandal. Those who would confuse the subject reflexively reach for complexity... We are reaping the whirlwind of widespread infidelity.” ([The Nerve to Govern, para. 13](#)).

On amending the law of celibacy for the priesthood, [Sepe \(1993\)](#) presents a remarkable message. Subsequently after the Vatican II conciliar period, a Russian Orthodox bishop of the Patriarchate of Moscow expressed what can happen to the Church should this path be followed:

“For us Orthodox, the priesthood is a sacred function. For this reason we are convinced that you, Westerners, you Latins, are not on the right path where you allow the question of ecclesiastical celibacy to be debated in public, in the forum of public opinion. In our Oriental tradition, it has been possible to authorize the ordination of a handful of married men, as in any case you have done and go on doing in certain regions. But take care: in the West, if you separate the priesthood from celibacy, a very swift decadence will set in. The West is not mystical enough to tolerate the marriage of its clergy without degenerating. The

Church of Rome (and this is to her glory) has preserved this ecclesiastical asceticism for a whole millennium. Beware of compromising it..." ([Pastoral Reasons section, para. 4](#))

After analyzing the factors both enlightening and affecting the understanding of celibate priesthood, [Sepe \(1993\)](#) is led to conclude that the importance of the connection between presbyterate and celibacy has to do with the achievement of the highest truth:

"The 'yes' to celibacy is a question of faith, not only on the part of the men who are ordained, but also on the part of their families and the entire people of God. In the ultimate analysis, we are talking about the folly of the Cross... And what more eloquent proof could be offered today to demonstrate that one's own faith is genuine, than that of a free, joyous, warm-hearted renunciation of human love for the sake of Christ and the brethren?" ([Conclusion section, para. 2](#)).

This conclusion echoes the words of Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* (1967), which teaches on the priest's solitude:

"his solitude is not meaningless emptiness because it is filled with God and the brimming riches of His kingdom... Though set apart from the world, the priest is not separated from the People of God, because he has been 'appointed to act on behalf of men,' since he is 'consecrated' completely to charity and to the work for which the Lord has chosen him" ([Paul VI, 1967](#)).

## 5.4.4 Other controversial topics.

### 5.4.4.1 The incorporation of women into the priesthood.

Regarding the ordination of women to priestly office (2), the interviewees' position aligns with Pew Research Center studies in which almost six-out-of-ten of U.S. Catholics thought the Church should ordain women ([PRC, 2015](#)), compared to 42% support for women ordination among Latin American Catholics ([PRC, 2014](#)) and 41% among Catholics in Central and Eastern European countries ([PRC, 2017](#)). The two participants that voiced their support for this change were females (Seconda and Settima), had graduated from a secular university, and were exercising their profession at the time of the interview. They were born to Catholic families and raised in the Catholic tradition while in permanent connection to their corresponding parishes. In addition, Settima had attended a Catholic school from kindergarten up to grade 12 while Seconda had obtained a parish degree in religion. In spite of their religious background and formation, both participants were perceived as truly convinced that the option for adopting the ordination of women was open to discussion. On this matter, in his 1994 Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, St. John Paul II definitely declared that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women" ([John Paul II, 1994, n.4](#)). This position was subsequently reaffirmed by both Pope [Benedict XVI \(2012\)](#) and [Pope Francis \(2013, 2016\)](#), which invites to wonder whether the interviewees were aware of the impossibility of their aspirations to be realized. Moreover, it can also be a cause for concern that a Church's stance and doctrine that

have been reaffirmed numerous times over the span of different papacies could still be unknown, or perhaps disregarded, by confirmed Catholics.

#### **5.4.4.2 The treatment of indigenous peoples.**

This topic was cited by 1 male participant (Ottavo) signaling a variety of issues, some comments being more explicit than others, making reference to unhonored promises received by local indigenous peoples in Newfoundland regarding Mass celebration conducted in their own native language, reactions to claims of food mismanagement and misappropriation in times of scarcity, and, in his own words, the “responsibilities in some of these schools”, potentially implying the actions or response of the Church or its members in the residential schools scandals. The treatment of indigenous peoples and the Church’s response to this issue have been cited by at least one self-identified former Catholic Canadian in the media as her reason to renounce the Church altogether ([Hardaker, 2021](#); [Battis, 2021](#)). Though issues regarding the Church and indigenous peoples have not been numbered among the potential motives Catholics may abandon the faith, pastoral attention should continue to be given to the impact this matter may have on the faithful, especially due to the strikingly divergent accounts regarding particular events related to the subject ([Duncan, 2021](#); [Farrow, 2021](#); [Rouillard, 2022](#); [Glavin, 2022](#)) and in light of Pope Benedict XVI’s 2009 expression of sorrow, which addresses “the anguish caused by the deplorable conduct of some members of the Church” in the Canadian Residential School system ([Vatican City, Holy See, 2009](#)), and the recent request for forgiveness given by Pope [Francis \(2022\)](#) during his Apostolic Journey to Canada.

#### **5.4.4.3 Disagreements in the Catechetical realm: Attitudinal differences towards religious duties.**

One participant (Quinta) voiced her concerns about intergenerational conflicts in the pews, citing attitudinal differences towards religious duties —And by extension, to those who portray them—as the culprit. An example of this issue would be Mass attendance on Sundays: According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church \(1992\)](#), Catholics are required to “attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation” in order to “participate in the Eucharistic celebration when the Christian community gathers together on the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord” (n. 2042). Although there have been no changes to this requirement, the difference that is being referred to is the change of emphasis from the *requirement* to fulfill the obligation per se to the *responsibility* of Catholics to fulfill their Sunday obligation and *respond* to God’s love ([Kerper, 2008](#); [O’Malley, 2011](#)). The embodiment of this change of focus has been signaled as causing dissension among the laity, a disagreement that still has not been resolved, with earlier generational cohorts viewing Mass attendance as a categorical imperative whereas younger affiliates conceive it as a “response to a commitment of love” ([O’Malley, 2011, p.6](#)).

#### **5.4.4.4 Efficacy of church-run social initiatives.**

One participant (Settima) was doubtful about the effectiveness of church-run community and social services in the long-term judging them as not addressing social problems at the core but rather trying to alleviate their effects. In his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), Pope Benedict XVI remarked that the Church’s deepest nature

could be expressed in her three-fold responsibility: evangelizing, worshiping, and serving the poor. On the idea of caring for the poor, he teaches: “Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc.” ([Benedict XVI, 2005, para. 31a](#)). The cases cited in the encyclical letter exemplify how the Church embraces charity towards the needy, which in turn translate into the social and community projects run from the diocesan to the international level. Moreover, the Encyclical letter observes that the establishment of just structures in society belongs to the realm of politics, an arena in which the lay faithful rather than the Church can become actively involved. In the end, the Church clarifies its duty and that of their members in this regard, calling the laity to directly participate “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.” ([Benedict XVI, 2005, para. 29](#)).

#### **5.4.4.5 Dissatisfaction with the changes brought forth by Vatican II.**

Finally, one participant (Quarto) expressed disinclination to the changes to liturgical practices set forth in the Vatican II process, specifically the changes made to the way in which Mass was to be celebrated, which left the traditional worship conducted in Latin for the use of approved translations of the liturgy into the vernacular languages of the faithful ([Cunningham, 2023](#)). Interestingly, the participant in question also exhibited a heightened awareness and appreciation of the broader historical and present-day Catholic collective.

In [2007, Pope Benedict XVI](#) promulgated the Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* on the use of the Roman Liturgy prior to the reform of 1970. In this letter it was decreed that the celebration of the Mass following the typical edition of the Roman Missal published in 1962 by St. Pope John XXIII was permitted, making the use of the Latin Mass more available to the faithful who were still sentimentally attached to the ancient liturgical form of the Mass due to the impact it had in their cultural and spiritual formation. This action would be regarded as a continuation in the pastoral efforts of St. Pope John Paul II who in two earlier occasions (a special Indult in 1984 and an exhortation edict in 1988) manifested his concern for the tending of this segment of the Catholic population ([Benedict XVI, 2007](#)).

By the year 2015, media reports describe this papal allowance had made Mass participation to grow exponentially, comparing it to the rapid development of mushrooms, though also observing that “enthusiasts of the Latin Mass are too young to recall when it was the standard for Catholic churches” ([Lyman, 2015](#)). After many signs that the revitalization of the old rite was developing into a new form of Protestantism within the Church eroding the legitimacy of Vatican II, [Pope Francis \(2021\)](#) promulgated the Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio *Traditionis Custodes* “in defense of the unity of the Body of Christ” due to the “distorted use” that had been made of the faculty of priests to say Mass according to the 1962 missal ([Francis, 2021, para. 8](#)). This letter contained guidelines and restrictions to the celebration of the Latin Mass, but these instructions, which were deemed as “already sufficiently clear” (“[Pope Francis clarifies](#)”, [2023, Authority of Apostolic See, para. 3](#)), have required the need for further clarification from the Pope in order to be efficiently implemented (“[Pope Francis clarifies](#)”, [2023](#)).



In fact, the regulation continues to face opposition from clerics and laity who are still attached to the old rite up to this day. This is a minute but influential portion of the Church's population which seemingly ignores or is unacquainted with the exhortation Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) made to all those who wished to remain Catholic: "not to 'turn back', but rather, 'to return to the authentic texts of the original Vatican II'." ([Ratzinger, 1985, pp. 30-31](#)). In this respect, the future pope indicates that preserving the Council means preserving the true tradition of the Church, not otherwise, calling it not an abandonment of the tradition, but rather a continuity that is not longing for the past or impatient for the future ([Ratzinger, 1985](#)).

### **5.5 Participants' religious practices at the time of the interview.**

The majority of the interviewees (six-out-of-eight, or three female and three male participants) attended Mass at least on a weekly basis (Sunday) apart from participating in Catholic related activities in private settings or at their parishes, in the St. John's metropolitan area, or in its surroundings. This personal involvement was confirmed by the researcher who would frequently meet most of the interviewees at Catholic events. At the individual level, Prima would be seen attending Mass service sometimes 3 times a week as well as receiving the Sacraments, while Terzo would be present every weekend at his local parish as well as regularly serving in other Catholic events. Quarto would also receive the Sacraments once a week and, together with Quinta, consistently participate in both the Novus Ordo and the Tridentine Mass besides allotting weekly time to support Catholic youth groups spreading the faith. Settima continued her habit of attending Sunday Mass together with her parents, serving in parish Ministry and assisting parochial initiatives while Ottavo would come to St. John's to attend Mass

during the week and to learn more about the faith by joining informal Catholic youth groups and enrolling in faith discovery courses. Only two participants, Seconda and Sesto, were not actively involved in the faith: Seconda had just resumed to attend Mass service more often compared to her latest Mass attendance frequency -every two months- and to pray the Rosary as before, while Sesto would visit his local parish only on vacation.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion.

The interpretation of the findings of this study shows the importance of parent involvement, particularly that of the father, for the successful passing of the faith onto new generations of Catholics. The more a father was involved in a parish, parochial school, and his children's religious formation, the more consistent his children's religiosity and faith commitment were. Also, the role of a solid catechesis proves decisive in solving personal doubts relating to the faith especially in times of uncertainty, and the quotidian immersion in a Catholic community, be it domestic, parochial, or school-based, seems to increase the chances of youth staying in the Church well into their young adulthood years.

Additionally, it is striking to realize the profound effects that a lack of familiarity with Church documents—from Encyclical Letters, Apostolic Exhortations, Papal Addresses and Communiqués produced at the Vatican, to Apostolic Letters and Homilies published at the diocesan and parish levels—can create among the faithful. The discontent produced by gaps in knowledge of the faith can lead the laity to adopt postures in line with zeitgeist or strengthen currents of Protestantism within Catholic lines; it can even fuel resentment among parishioners or towards the Church.

This study could not find a way in which youth can alter their destiny themselves if not by the guiding hand of the ones that look after them, namely their parents and religious leaders. But there are deeper levels of reality, and the presence of an inexplicable element kindling the thirst for the transcendent in the believer's heart, which

in this study was described as “grace”, can be a determining factor in a young adult’s spiritual quest.

Polls, research documents, and observations persistently show a decline in Church attendance among youth in many countries around the world. “But what should we do?”, asked Pope Francis in a 2022 address, to which he also replied:

“Those who let themselves be overwhelmed by pessimism put faith aside. It is the Lord in history who supports us and invites us to fidelity and fruitfulness. He takes care of his “remnant”, looking with mercy and benevolence at its work, and continues to send his Holy Spirit... There are those who focus too much on the outside (structures, activities...) and lose sight of the superabundance of grace that is in people and communities. Therefore, please keep away the spirit of defeat, the spirit of pessimism: this is not Christian. It is not Christian. The Lord will not fail to be close to the people, and He will do it this way or that way, but it is he who is important” ([Francis, 2022, p. 3](#)).

He concludes his point by inviting the faithful to emphasize the value of fidelity in following Jesus in accordance with the spirit of the Founders, not the spirit of the times, and to be attentive to community life, interculturality and intergenerational exchange “in the Church and in society.” ([Francis, 2022, p. 3](#)). The answer, thus, lies in fostering community life, a community nurtured by the teachings of the Church, that studies and prays together ([Barron, 2021](#)). This living body would be a place in which young and old can communicate, dream, and move forward together.

## **6.2 Limitations of the study.**

Any conclusions drawn by this study shall be attenuated by the limitations found within it. The original sample, to begin with, was limited to a very specific group: the Catholic young adult population living in St. John's (NL), and nearby areas that participated in a previous research. The sampling of the sub-project was based on an expansion of the original, stricter criteria of the larger project which aimed to study the attitudes towards the Church and God of Catholic young adults born and raised in Newfoundland and Labrador. Due to the provincial focus of the larger project, many out-of-province Catholic young adults that were eager to participate in studies for Catholics were not provided with the opportunity to partake in the interview sessions because their place of origin did not meet the study's criterion. Others instead would sign-up for an interview, and later reveal they were not from Newfoundland and Labrador, thus needing to be removed from the original sample. As a consequence of the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, no additional interviews were carried out for the sub-project.

## **6.3 Recommendations for further research.**

Given the small number of practicing Catholic young adults found in St. John's and surrounding areas during the time of the study and in order to increase the chances of reaching a greater number of participants from the initial stages, future projects on the topic could use broader sample selection criteria which can then be further subclassified depending on the focus of the new study. The Coronavirus pandemic drastically changed the religious practices of Catholics around the world: the degree of

national/regional lockdown orders, social distancing mandates, limitations in church capacity and caps in social gatherings may have impacted their faith among other aspects of their lives ([PRC, 2021](#)). The comparison of the participants' postures regarding their faith and religious practices before and after the emergence of COVID-19 could give a greater insight into the effects of faith formation in the early years on young adults' attitudes towards Catholicism.

This sub-project is strictly qualitative in nature and as such it may be complemented by quantitative elements. The sample was composed of practicing Catholic young adults. They all attended or were current MUN students. Life experiences of practicing Catholics from college and vocational backgrounds originating from diverse socio-economic statuses, as well as the memories and attitudes of non-practicing Catholics should be included in future studies in order to convey a fuller appreciation of the situation among Catholic young adults.

The majority of the interviewees knew the researcher before the interviews had taken place as he was an active member of the Catholic community of St. John's at the time of the study. The interviewees are assumed to have acted bona fide and their responses to have reflected their true thoughts, although this may not have been the case. This possibility allows room for the future development of subsequent studies focusing on what has been discussed in former interviews and draw conclusions after comparing responses and contrast them with observations.

Because the coding and data interpretation were done by the researcher alone, testing tools like crosscheck, validation and verification of the coding of the data would

consolidate the accuracy of the interpretations. The rationale behind it is to counter any potential inherent biases occurred during the analysis.

Literature on the topic is limited, with some references appearing slightly dated, and the majority of studies that share some degree of similarity with it come from abroad, mainly the US. In that regard, the interested reader should bear in mind that "extremely few scholars have studied how and why religious parents raise their children to pass on to them their religious practices and beliefs" ([Smith et al., 2020](#)). Because of its originality, a need to conduct further research to support the arguments presented in the study aligns with the expectations of the literature review section.

#### **6.4 Researcher's personal reflection.**

Research is an ongoing, continuous process. As a qualitative research that aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals ascribe to a human problem, many interviews were carried out. From them, relevant information on the most inner thoughts on conscience and spiritual comprehension of the participants was captured in order to derive meaningful insights. This discernment and its subsequent, transcendental answers were not bounded by the preliminary design of the study or the many questions asked during the interview: they actually went beyond the realm of the physically possible. This insight opened the door to a deeper level of reality that seems to be locked in current academic research.

The psychologization of the transcendental reduces all nuances of the human experience to the merely physical level, something that would have been detrimental to the potential reach of this study. In this way, both the physical and metaphysical

answers to the unknown reasons for the faith stability of the studied subjects over time are meaningful as they challenge prevailing assumptions. This is just what a research study is expected to accomplish: to contribute to a deeper understanding of the research topic.

In words of St. John Paul II: "we cannot stop short at experience alone; ... speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises." ([John Paul II, 1998, chap. 7](#)). In sum, spiritual questions deserve spiritual answers, that is what this thesis has provided.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research Approval**

## Appendix B Recruitment Advertisement



Faculty of Education  
St. John's, NL Canada A1B 3X8  
Tel: 709 864 3402

### **Young Catholic adults and the Catholic faith: Attitudes and beliefs towards religion, Church and God.**

Do you know a young adult who may have thoughts about religion and the Church? Or do you know a young adult who has no interest in religion or the Church? If so, researchers at Memorial University would be interested in hearing from them.

My name is Dr. Tim Seifert, a professor at Memorial University. I am interested in learning more about what young adults (approximately 19-30 years old) think about religion, the Church, and God. If you know a young adult like that, I would be interested in hearing from them.

Perhaps they would be willing to take part in an interview, complete a questionnaire, or both. It will not take much of their time, and involves no risks. However, their participation would be greatly appreciated and beneficial. If you know a young adult who might participate, please ask them to

Scan the bar code

Or contact me at [cmstudy@mun.ca](mailto:cmstudy@mun.ca)

or click on the link <https://goo.gl/forms/82aww4zV87MZ88xw2>



If you have questions, please contact us at [cmstudy@mun.ca](mailto:cmstudy@mun.ca)

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the rights of a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr.chair@mun.ca](mailto:icehr.chair@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

## Appendix C Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

Title: Young Catholic adults and the Catholic faith: Attitudes and beliefs towards religion, Church and God.

Researchers: Tim Seifert, Faculty of Education, Memorial University  
cmstudy@mun.ca

Juan Marcelo Zapata Rugel, Faculty of Education, Memorial University  
cmstudy@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Young Catholic adults and the Catholic faith: Attitudes and beliefs towards religion, Church and God.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Tim Seifert at cmstudy@mun.ca, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

#### **Introduction:**

As a professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, I am interested in learning more about what young people think about religion, Church, and God. What role does religion play in the life of a young adult? How do they perceive the Catholic Church? Do they believe in God, and if so, how do they think about God? In this project I hope to learn more about how young adults think about these things.

#### **Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the views of young Catholic adults concerning religion, Church and God. I want to better understand what young people think about these topics.

**What You Will Do in this Study:**

Your participation would involve taking part in an interview. I, or my research assistant, would like to have a conversation with you about your thoughts and beliefs about God, religion and spirituality. This would include topics such as belief in God, the meaning of life, and being Catholic.

**Length of Time:**

This conversation would be an open-ended interview that would last about one-hour or so, and would be at a time and location convenient to you.

**Confidentiality:**

Please be assured that your responses will be held confidential as far as possible. No one other than my research assistant and I will have access to the information you provide, and we will not share that information with anyone.

**Anonymity:**

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and the information you provide will be treated anonymously. As is common in many studies using interviews, you will be given a pseudonym which will be used in place of your identity. You will not be identified in publications or presentations. Any quotes used will not contain identifying information. The information collected is in digital form, will have no identifying information, and will be stored in password protected accounts. With your permission, I might wish to use quotations from transcripts in preparing a report. Any quotations used will be done so anonymously.

**Withdrawal from the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Answering questions during the interview is voluntary with no obligations and you can stop the interview at anytime. You may withdraw from the study up to the point of having reviewed and approving your transcript. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be discarded.

**Possible Benefits:**

While you may not benefit directly from participating in the study, your answers will help build a better understanding of how young people think about religion, Church, God and spirituality. This may lead to cultural and societal benefits for young adults in the future. In appreciation for your participation, you will receive a \$10 honorarium.

**Possible Risks:**

There is no foreseeable risk of harm associated with participation in this study. However, if you find the topics to be stressful or emotionally distressing, you may contact the Newfoundland and Labrador Mental Health Crisis Line at (709) 737-4668.

**Recording of Data:**

With your consent, I would like to audio-record the interview. This will make it easier to have a conversation, and to accurately represent your ideas. The audio-recording will be transcribed into a written document for analysis. A summary of the transcription will be sent to you for your review, at which time you may make additions, deletions, corrections, or withdraw from the study.

**Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:**

All of the data will be stored in digital format on a password protected computer. Only I and my research assistant will have access to the files. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. My research assistant will have signed an agreement to treat all of your information confidentially.

**Reporting of Results:**

Results from the analysis of the interviews may involve the use quotations of your comments, if you have consented. Quotes will be attributed only to a pseudonym and no identities will be reported in published reports. I anticipate that the results of the project will be presented at conferences and meetings, and published in journals and magazines.

**Sharing of Results with Participants:**

A copy of the final report will be available to you upon request. If you would like a copy of the research report, please contact me at the email address below.

**Questions:**

You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

T. Seifert  
Faculty of Education  
Memorial University  
709-864-8648  
cmstudy@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your

rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

**Consent:**

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end participation during data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw after data collection has ended, your data can be removed from the study up to the completion of data analysis.

I agree to be audio-recorded

Yes  No

I agree to the use of direct quotations

Yes  No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

**Your Signature Confirms:**

- I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

**Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

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Signature of Principal Investigator

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Date



## Appendix D Interview Protocol

### Interview protocol (Study 2)

The interview is a semi-structured conversation around some themes of interest. The preliminary protocol is as follows:

#### Establishing rapport.

1. At the start of the interview, the goal is to establish rapport and trust with the participant. It is important to reassure the person that there is no right answer, nor is there any attempt to persuade or convert.

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. There are many different views or attitudes about God and religion, and towards the Catholic Church. I am interested in learning more about what young people think, and what your views are.*

*May I ask how you learned about this project?  
What made you decide to participate?*

#### Growing up

When you were growing up, did you ... (exploring thoughts and feelings about that)

- attend mass
- participate in Sunday school or catechetical program
- friends and Church
- parents and parenting practices toward Church and religion

#### Belief in God

Do you believe in God?

*If yes ...*

What is God like for you? How do you think of God?  
(explore the conception of God)

*If no ...*

Did you ever believe in God?

*If yes ...*

What was God like for you then? How did you think of God?  
When did you stop believing in God?  
Was there a reason why you stopped believing?

#### The meaning of life

Do you think about the meaning of life?

What gives meaning to your life?

*If a materialistic answer ...*

Do forgiveness, mercy and compassion important to you?

Can science explain the meaning of life to you?

Can God give life meaning for you?  
Can religion explain the meaning of life?  
Do you ever think about what it means to be human?  
*If yes ...*  
What does it mean to be human?  
*If no ...*  
Is that question important to you?  
Do you have a soul?  
What sorts of things are important to you?  
What makes you happy?

### **Morals and values**

Are you a person with good sense of right or wrong?  
*If no ...*  
What makes you say that?  
  
*If yes ..*  
How can you tell if something is right or wrong?  
How or where did you learn your sense of right and wrong?  
  
Why do people do bad things? What makes people do bad things?  
Do you think a person can be redeemed? That is, can a person who does bad things become someone who does good?

### **Being Catholic**

Do you consider yourself to be a Catholic?  
What does it mean to you [for someone] to be Catholic? That is, what makes someone a Catholic?

*If no ...*  
Was there ever a time when you considered yourself to be a Catholic?  
*If yes ...*  
When did you consider yourself to be a Catholic?  
When did you stop being a Catholic?  
If you went to a wedding or funeral in the Catholic Church now, would you receive communion?  
Is there a reason that you are not a Catholic?

*If yes ...*  
What is it that makes you Catholic? Why do you consider yourself to be Catholic?

*If because of following the rules ...*  
Do you think there are exceptions to the rules?  
Do you think it's possible to break one of the rules and still be Catholic?

## **The Church**

What do you think of when I say the words “Catholic Church?”

Do you think the Catholic Church has anything to offer you in your life?

Do you think the teachings of the Catholic Church have any relevance for living in today’s complicated world?

Do you think religion in general has anything to offer?

Are all religions equal?

Does the Church do enough to help people who need help?

Do you know if the Church does things to help those in need?