

**The senior secondary school live-in  
retreat: A study of the views of a  
sample of teachers from one  
metropolitan Catholic diocese about  
the purpose and practices of  
retreats.**

**Submitted by**

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## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

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All research procedures in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety committees.

Rachele Tullio

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## ABSTRACT

Senior school live-in retreats, which could be described as intensive personal/spiritual development seminars, are a distinctive feature of the religious programs of Australian Catholic secondary schools. While research on the views of young people has confirmed the popularity of retreats with students (Flynn, 1993; Maroney, 2008), there has been no systematic study of how teachers understood the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats, and of what they regarded as 'successful' retreat work.

This thesis reports a two part research program on live-in retreats. The first, documentary/historical phase of the study examined the spirituality background to retreats within Catholicism which informed the conduct of school retreats. While not attempting an exhaustive or comprehensive analysis of spirituality, this section identified the roots of 'retreat spirituality' in developments within early Christianity such as 'desert spirituality', in the spirituality of mediaeval monasticism, and in the 'religious exercises' of the active religious orders that emerged since the founding of the Jesuits in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Elements such as 'going away' to an isolated place, solitude, silence, reflection and prayer, review of one's life, physical and mental renewal, and spiritual guidance became prominent in the development of retreats for religious personnel and clergy; and this served as the model that informed 'silent' retreats in Catholic schools up to and including the 1960s.

The documentary/historical study also explored the origins of live-in, communitarian retreats for senior Catholic school students in Australia which emerged as a grass-roots educational innovation by teachers in Adelaide in 1964. Eventually, the silent retreats in schools were replaced completely by the communitarian retreats where conversation/discussion, singing and fun activities provided a community-building matrix within which the religious parts of the retreats (Mass, Reconciliation, reflection and prayer) were embedded; this represented something of a revolutionary change in the format of school retreats, while retaining many of their traditional purposes.

The literature review examined the limited range of Australian and overseas writings about retreats. To fill in the sketchy picture of the historical development of communitarian retreats, a number of informants were identified and approached for information in the form of oral history. In addition, other areas relevant to the conduct of retreats were examined; prominent areas included the following:-

- The influence of the Second Vatican Council and of humanistic psychology on the spirituality of those who conducted the first communitarian retreats;
- Theory about the psychological dynamics of personal change through group methods;
- Understandings of youth spirituality that informed the work of retreat leaders.

The second qualitative, empirical part of the research program collected data from a sample of teachers from four schools in one metropolitan Catholic diocese who were involved in the conduct of retreats. Semi-structured interviews were used to document teachers' understandings of the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats. The intention behind the choice of a limited sample was to make a small beginning on research on the views of teachers who were retreat leaders, and to identify issues that could be followed up more systematically through larger scale research across the country.

The data collection showed that the following (as well as other items) were regarded by participants as key elements in the successful conduct of retreats:-

- Time away from school and regular routine.
- Being with friends and friendship development.
- Community building and tangible sense of community.
- Group discussions that were more personal than was the case in classroom religious education.

In addition, the data identified key problems with the conduct of retreats which could affect their place in Catholic schools in the future. Among other issues these included:-

- Excessive reliance on the dynamic of self-disclosure and 'telling personal stories'.
- The place for religious experience within the retreat.
- The staffing of retreats and the professional development of teachers as retreat leaders.
- Potential conflict between staff on retreat and those who remained at school to cover classes.
- Potential problems related to duty of care and child protection policies for educators.

In discussing the meaning and significance of these findings, the thesis proposed ways of addressing the issues that could foster the future development of retreats and to secure their valuable place in Catholic school education. This included identifying and acknowledging the significant educational innovation represented by retreats, and their distinctive potential as a special experience within the school's overall religious education program for promoting the personal and

spiritual development of young people. And it considered that professional development for present and future retreat leaders needed to address a range of relevant topics including the place for personalism and self-disclosure which could be both a valuable aspect of the psychological dynamics of retreats as well as a problem area if not handled sensitively and ethically. The specifically religious dimension of retreats remained a difficult question to interpret. The central concern of retreats is promoting the development of young people's spirituality.

The thesis concluded with a number of recommendations for Catholic education authorities for promoting the future development of school live-in retreats.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have heard retreats referred to as ‘the jewel in the crown’; the ‘crown’ being a metaphor for Catholic education - the ‘jewel’ being the centrepiece of a richly-endowed crown.

This striking imagery has remained with me and stimulated my curiosity to know more about what happened on Catholic secondary school retreats especially from the perspective of educators. Teachers, who have been at their school for a considerable amount of time, have a different dimension of understanding change and development. They are often able to provide a ‘long lens’ view. Their understandings of retreats have been an invaluable contribution to this thesis.

This thesis was inspired by my parents: Raffaele and Maria Grazia Racioppi. They experienced first hand the consequences of a lack of understanding because of their own illiteracy in Italy and in their new-found land: Australia. It is due to their encouragement and witnessing their struggles that I embarked on a life-long passion in education.

Without the support of my husband, Gabby Tullio and our children: Alexander, Ida-Marie, Michael, Gabriel and Aimee, it would not have been possible to complete such a project. Countless hours have been devoted to this research and throughout it all, their wisdom, encouragement and animated discussions have sustained me.

To Gabby, thank you for always believing in my gifts and never mentioning my impediments: for always saying “Yes! You can do this!” without reservation.

To be able to research retreats as a thesis project and to make a contribution to Catholic education regarding retreats has been gratifying. Along the journey, I have been indebted to many people who enabled me to understand retreats better.

I acknowledge Professor Graham Rossiter, Head of the School of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University; Director of Cardinal Clancy Centre for Research in the Spiritual, Moral, Religious and Pastoral Dimensions of Education, whose wisdom and regular discussions encouraged me to believe I could complete a thesis. His support and skilful ability to direct my inquiries in areas that had been previously ‘unchartered’ in retreats provided my studies with clear direction and structure. I thank him for his patience and understanding, especially during difficult times.

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Brian Schumacher, Former Principal of Sacred Heart College Middle School, Mitchell Park, has supported my studies with understanding and interest in recent years. His vision for Catholic education is aligned to my own pursuit of a deeper understanding of what teachers do in schools in order to promote an effective spiritual excellence for students.

Andrew Balkwill, Principal of Sacred Heart College Middle School, Mitchell Park, has inspired me with professional conversations about the vision of Catholic education for the future, and I have endeavoured to apply these discussions to the context of school retreats.

Karen Wilmot, secretarial assistant, who gave generously of her time to read drafts and prepare the final manuscript with professionalism. Her commitment comments and insights enriched the final product.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude all participants who made the time to speak with me, sometimes over long distances, to discuss retreats as part of the history of retreat development in Australia. They are acknowledged in this thesis. Their contributions are significant for Catholic education, despite the many challenges they encountered initially in developing the communitarian style retreat for students. Their excitement, disappointments and support for the new-style retreats often came at a personal price – little of which emerges in this study. Their recall of the early pioneering days of retreats and their interpretations of how retreats developed were often personally fascinating. Catholic education is truly indebted to their vision and retreat initiatives.

I trust that this work will not end but that it will produce more research so that students can benefit from such retreats experiences.

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## **PART ONE**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

##### **1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

A prominent focus on spiritual and moral aims for education has been on the increase over the last thirty years in Australia and overseas (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Groome, 1998; Hill, 2005; Hay & Nye, 1998). Promoting the spiritual and moral development of pupils has long been the purpose of Australian schooling, both in government and independent schools. For example, in 1957, the NSW Wyndham Report proposed the development of “spiritual values” as one of the eight key aims for public education (NSW Government, 1957, p. 40). Both the Hobart Declaration (1989) and the Adelaide Declaration (1999) on national goals for Australian schooling, as well as the more recent National Values Education Study (Curriculum Corporation, 2003, 2005), highlighted personal development aims.

It was noticeable in Crawford and Rossiter’s (2006, p. 245) summary of these developments, that there was an extensive range of ‘personal/spiritual’ aims listed, but the word ‘spirituality’ was missing – even though there was a good case for including it, if developments in British education were taken into account (Arweck, Nesbitt & Jackson, 2005). Understandably, it has been in religious schools where there is a more overt interest in the aim of promoting young people’s ‘spirituality’. This is because of the traditional link between religion and spirituality (Education Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 1990; Tacey, 2000), even though the concept of spirituality has broadened considerably (Hughes, 2007; Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007) – it is no longer associated rather exclusively with religion (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Tacey, 2000).

Catholic school systems, since their beginnings in the 1840s, have always given special attention to the purpose of developing young people’s spirituality in the context of the Catholic religious tradition (Fogarty, 1959; Flynn, 1979; O’Farrell, 1969). This is particularly evident in the formal religion program which is a core part of the curriculum in Catholic schools across all year levels (E.g. Catholic Education Office, Adelaide 2007; Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 2005).

In his national survey of Australian school religious education in 1981 (p. 110), Rossiter claimed that religious retreats were perhaps the most prominent and successful structures within Catholic schools for promoting pupils' spirituality and personal growth. Retreats were like intensive, live-in personal development seminars infused with religious activities. A series of surveys of Year 12 students in Catholic schools during the period 1972-2000 by Flynn (1979, 1985, 1993; and Flynn & Mok, 2002) showed that retreats have always been very popular with students and were regarded by both students and their teachers as making a special contribution to their religious development .

A religious education curriculum document from the Archdiocese of Melbourne referred to the place of retreats as follows:

This dimension (religious education) focuses on the nurturing of the spiritual life, the importance of belonging to the faith community and engagement in community service. It is within this dimension that the Religious Education curriculum extends beyond the classroom to include retreats, the sacramental life of the Church, community service, leadership formation and contribution to civic and faith communities. (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2005, p. 5)

The research findings of Flynn about retreats (noted above) are consistent with a general acceptance within Catholic education circles that retreats are particularly valuable parts of the school's overall religious education program and that "schools are encouraged to integrate these life giving activities" (Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2005, p. 5) as appropriate at the local school level.

The live-in retreat typically involved students staying at a retreat venue for about two or three days, including overnight accommodation. Getting away from the routine of school life for a retreat enabled students to spend time reflecting on their own personal and spiritual development in response to various inputs within the program that included short talks, experiential communication activities and small group discussions that resonated with the "life questions, concerns and hopes of the students" (Sharkey, 2002, p. 2). Retreats provided special opportunities for personal and communal prayer, and they usually included the celebration of the Catholic sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. Community-building and developing friendships were considered to be key retreat dynamics.

This study investigated teachers' understandings of the nature and purposes of live-in retreats through interviewing a sample of retreat leaders from one metropolitan Catholic school system. This researcher has been involved in religious education in Catholic primary and secondary schools since 1980. What emerged

over time from involvement in the conduct of retreats at both levels was an interest in the dynamics of retreats and how they were understood by teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Australia – an area where there has been no systematic research; also significant was a range of issues that are likely to affect the future of retreats in Catholic schools.

## **1.1 ISSUES RELATED TO THE CURRENT PLACE AND FUTURE OF RETREATS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

### *1.1.1 The history and place of senior school retreats in Catholic schools*

While there has been much debate about the relevance and effectiveness of the classroom component of Catholic school religious education (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988, 1993, 2006), since the late 1970s it has been widely acknowledged that the live-in retreats for senior school students were certainly relevant and effective (Flynn, 1993; Roff, 1999; Flynn & Mok 2002; Maroney, 2008). This view is supported by anecdotal evidence in the way of student evaluations of their school retreats (E.g. reports in college annuals such as St Michael's College Annual, 2006; Patrician Brothers' College Annual, 2004; St Dominic's Priory College Annual, 2002; Cabra Dominican College Annual, 2005; Mercedes College Annual, 2002) Yet despite this excellent record of popularity (Mulligan, 1994; Mullins, 1989; Quillinan, 1995), there has been little in the literature that documents the historical development of this form of retreat (Rossiter, 1975) or that identifies the issues that could impact on the future place of retreats in Catholic Secondary schools (Rossiter, 1997).

Silent, on-campus, school day only retreats had been the norm for Catholic secondary school students prior to the introduction of these 'new style', 'communitarian' retreats (Christian Brothers' College Annuals, 1922, 1942, 1945, 1960, 1961). The significant changeover from the *silent* to the *socially interactive* retreats represented something of a revolution, and a major paradigm shift, in the conduct of retreats in Catholic schools (Firman, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Neville, 2007). In many ways, it was more a revolution for the adults who first conducted these retreats than it was for the students who may never have had the experience of the silent retreat to be able to make comparisons (English, 2007).

The significant change in the style and conduct of school retreats did not occur in a vacuum. It was closely related to other major shifts in spirituality and psychology that affected Catholic educators in religious orders at that time – which was generally turbulent for many Catholics as a result of the Second Vatican Council

(Crawford & Rossiter, 1988). The change in format for retreats in Catholic secondary schools was like an icon of the significant changes that were occurring in Catholic spirituality. Contemporary Catholic school retreats in Australia can be understood as expressions of spirituality with their roots in past traditions of Catholic spirituality. The radical changes to the conduct of the retreats in the 1960s now needs to be put into historical perspective.

### *1.1.2 Psychological and spiritual dynamics of retreats*

While retreats were held in high regard as an important spiritual experience by both students and teachers (as noted above), there has been little research that explored their psychological and spiritual dynamics – that is, no systematic account of the mechanisms through which retreats might influence young people’s spiritual and moral development.

In 1978, in the book *Beyond the classroom: New approaches to personal development and religious education*, Rossiter proposed an interpretation of the psychological dynamics of school retreats that drew on both a Catholic view of spirituality as well as on some aspects of the humanistic psychology movement that informed contemporary theories of “organisational change through group methods” (Rossiter, 1978, pp. 69-72). This topic had also been considered in a coursework university essay by McCarthy (1974). There has been no significant publication on this topic since then, even though there are a number of retreat manuals available, particularly in the United States, which are like practical guides for conducting experiential activities on retreats (Braden-Whartenby & Finn Connelly, 1997; Dykstra, 1987; Sawyer 1998).

As far as the official documentation on religious education in Catholic Education Offices is concerned, there are a number of brief statements about the importance of retreats as complementing students’ “faith education” (E.g. Diocese of Toowoomba, 2003, p. 2), but little follow up material explaining why this is the case or the distinctive contribution that retreats were believed to make. There is little written about the nature, purpose and function of retreats that might inform the work of retreat leaders.

Perhaps what is most lacking in the research literature is an account of how the students themselves understand the spiritual functioning of retreats. There is no doubt about the popularity of retreats with students, but nothing systematic been done to investigate their understanding of how retreats might contribute to their

spiritual and moral development.

### *1.1.3 Personnel who conduct retreats in Catholic schools*

Originally, and up to the 1980s, the school retreat leaders in Catholic schools were educators who were also members of religious orders. Usually, it was the staff of the school who served as retreat leaders, while an ordained priest was often engaged from outside to be the principal leader as well as the main speaker and minister who presided over sacramental celebrations of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Some of the religious orders set up special teams of retreat leaders, commonly known as ‘travelling retreat teams’, who were invited into schools to conduct retreats. With their extensive experience in the conduct of retreats, these teams were valued for their specialised programs that were otherwise not available to schools. Some venues owned by religious orders were often made available for school retreats. Schools tended to staff their senior student retreats on a mix and match basis, depending on the tradition of expertise, or lack of it, in their particular situation.

Since the late 1970s, lay people have increasingly taken over all the key roles as school based retreat leaders and as specialist retreat team members, with the exception of the role of an ordained priest to celebrate sacraments for retreat groups. This development has created problems as regards the adequate training of retreat leaders. While there are a number of retreat-training programs available in support of Catholic school retreats, these programs are, in the main, sponsored by religious orders. There is as yet no significant Catholic Education Office involvement in retreat training for teachers. Similarly, there are no specific retreat training programs or units in Catholic universities or theological colleges in Australia. Catholic education authorities have not yet seriously addressed the future needs for the retreat leadership training of teachers. The need for adequate retreat training programs and for teachers interested in undertaking such training remain perennial issues for schools which seek good numbers of experienced, trained personnel for the conduct of their senior school retreats.

While retreats remain highly regarded as a spiritual structure in Catholic schools, there has been no systematic research on the views of the teachers who conduct them, particularly as regards their understandings of the nature, purposes, function and effectiveness of school retreats.

#### *1.1.4 Difficulties for the continuing place of retreats in Catholic schools*

While retreats are generally regarded as an important part of Catholic school religious education, their place within the overall school program is under threat from a number of factors. These include:-

- An intense pressure for curriculum space where it is becoming increasingly difficult to arrange for a suspension of the usually busy and crowded school timetable to allow senior school pupils, together with a number of key staff, to be off campus for two or more days; not all staff will be strongly supportive of the retreat program because of this pressure, and because of potential disruption to their teaching schedules.
- Questions about responsibility, supervision and issues related to child protection make it difficult for teachers to take students away from school, particularly where this involves overnight stays. The demands of providing adequate supervision of students are also affected by concerns about security, insurance and possible legal issues if there were any accidents. Negotiations between teacher unions and Catholic Education Offices about teacher non-contact time on retreat need to be clarified in some dioceses.
- Difficulties with the choice of teachers who would be considered suitable for the role of retreat leadership; the need for a transparent and equitable process for selection of staff for retreat work.
- The need for systematic training programs for teachers who would serve in the role of retreat leaders.
- The need to include parents or student carers in the dissemination of information about retreats. Their understandings and attitudes towards retreats could influence the school's future directions and choices.

## **1.2 SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

This research study sets out to address the key issues related to the nature, purposes, conduct and programming of retreats noted above. The study is divided into two main parts, a documentary analytical study and an empirical study of the views of a sample of teachers. The following paragraphs indicate the scope of the study. The sections describing the first analytical phase of the study illustrate the issues/questions that will be addressed in each; this helps clarify the questions being researched and the reasons why they need to be addressed.

### **Part 1. Documentary, historical, analytical study**

This documentary, historical, analytical study explores the origins, purposes, structure, and function of live-in communitarian retreats for senior school students in Catholic schools.

The following four areas are investigated in Part 1.



*Part 1.1 Historical survey of the spirituality that gave rise to the key principles, structures and practices of retreats within the Catholic religious tradition; How retreats for adults, especially for members of religious orders, came to serve as the model for the retreats which were to be conducted in schools*

While there have been many diverse studies of Catholic spirituality during the history of the Catholic church, this project is the first that sets out to identify the aspects of spirituality that have had a formative influence on the origins, development and function of retreats within the Catholic tradition. It tries to sketch the spiritual background to Catholicism out of which the retreat, in its different formats, emerged. This history dates back to the spirituality of the early Christian church, particularly that of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (Earle, 2007; Forman, 2005; Swan, 2001). A number of the spiritual principles deriving from that time are still discernible in retreats today for both adults and school students.

*Part 1.2 Origins, purposes and practices of the new style 'communitarian' live-in retreats that were introduced to Catholic secondary schools in Australia in the mid 1960s*

Prior to the 1960s, Australian Catholic school retreats were modelled on the traditional, contemplative style of retreats for religious orders. They were 'silent' (there was to be no talking with other retreatants); listening to lectures, 'spiritual' reading, and opportunities for prayer, liturgy, confession and review of life were prominent; usually the retreat was on the school premises for one or more school days (Ryan, 2006, pp. 220-222). These retreats were generally not live-in although some schools had live-in retreats for senior classes.

By contrast, the new style communitarian retreats were 'live-in' experiences, away from routine and away from the school environment. The retreat encouraged talking to others, both individually and in groups; there were fun activities, singing, music and often dancing and games, together with recreation periods. Opportunities for sharing personal reflections, prayer and a review of life were embedded in a communitarian, celebratory, friendship matrix, which contrasted markedly with the private, solitary, individual matrix of the older silent retreats. The purposes of community-building and relationship-enhancing were central. The small group discussions on retreats were usually at a more personal level than was typical of the classroom religion periods. Getting away from the routine of school for a period devoted to rejuvenation and personal development activities was attractive to young people, even if they may have been more interested in the purely social aspect of the

retreat than in its formal religious purposes. Currently, there are a number of other retreat formats that are used in Catholic secondary schools. These include:

- Silent retreats.
- Wilderness retreats.
- Street retreats.
- School-day retreats.
- Retreat-like seminars, off-campus.

This study will be concerned only with the live-in, communitarian retreat format.

While there were accounts of the first new style, communitarian retreats in Australian Catholic schools in the religious education journal *Our Apostolate* (Firman, 1968; Rossiter 1975), there is still no systematic historical record of their origins, or of the influences on their development. Much of their detailed history from the 1960s remains in the memories of the educators who pioneered their introduction. This study addressed the problem by searching for any relevant literature as well as by tapping into oral histories through interviewing key leaders identified in the early development of the communitarian retreats in Catholic schools.

This part of the study will describe how the new style retreats were introduced, and will explore some of the shaping cultural influences on the thinking and spirituality of those conducting these retreats to see how their understanding of the purposes, structures and function of retreats developed.

### *Part 1.3 The psychological and spiritual dynamics of retreats*

While understandings of the dynamics of school retreats no doubt underpin the purposes and practices of the educators who conduct them, as well as the work of those who offer training courses for aspiring retreat leaders, there remains a dearth of documented material that interprets the ways in which retreats affect young people at a personal level. While not providing a systematic treatise on the psychological dynamics of retreats, this study will attempt to explore this aspect in some detail to highlight key issues and principles. For example, it will investigate the significance of emotionality as a key dimension to retreats, one that has importance for personal development, as well as the potential to cause problems such as emotional manipulation (Rossiter, 1997). From a spiritual dynamics perspective, it will also investigate the role of prayer and liturgy and how these are utilised on retreat with young people who are not familiar with Church rituals.

*Part 1.4 The influence of the humanistic psychology movement in the 1960s-1970s on the development of the communitarian retreats in Catholic schools*

This area follows up on one of the main influences on the thinking and spirituality of those who pioneered the communitarian retreats in Catholic schools in the 1960s. It sets out to identify key principles and ideas from the humanistic psychology movement in the 1960s - 1970s that were considered to be relevant to retreat processes.

*Part 1.5 The spiritual context of retreat leaders: The impact of new styles of Catholic spirituality after the Second Vatican Council*

An important influence on the development of the new style communitarian retreats was the changing pattern of spirituality in those who pioneered these retreats. Drawing from a social and global environment that encouraged change on many levels, the retreat leaders at the time were making significant changes in their own understanding and practice of spirituality after the Second Vatican Council. Their interactions with other retreat leaders and their interactions with senior students were a part of the complex spiritual mix that affected their retreat work. Student evaluations often inspired retreat leaders to experiment within the retreat program and to develop a repertoire of activities. Following the initial momentum of the new style retreats, the pioneer retreat leaders were then moved around Australia by their religious orders, sharing their work and findings with other religious. This resulted in a movement that expanded the spiritual understandings of the traditional school retreat beyond the confines of silent retreats. However, these retreat leaders did not automatically gain the endorsement of all as there were other ecclesial issues to contend with after the Second Vatican Council. The oral history of those who introduced the new style communitarian retreats is likely to be particularly relevant to this question.

*Part 1.6 Issues affecting the programming and conduct of senior school retreats*

Attention is given to accounts of key organisational and infrastructure issues that have a bearing on the future place of retreats in Catholic schools, as well as on their structure and function. Increased sensitivities surrounding these issues have made retreats problematic and invite reviews of retreat practices at different educational and administrative levels.

## **Part 2 Qualitative empirical study of the views of teachers who conduct senior school retreats**

This part of the study involved data collection through structured interviews with a sample of educators who have been involved in the conduct of senior school live-in retreats. The teachers, all from one Catholic metropolitan school system, were invited to participate through their diocesan office and the local department head, the school Religious Education Coordinator.

This is the first time that that special research attention has been given to the views of teachers about the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats.

Overall, this research project set out to identify and explore several key issues that are associated with retreats and their conduct. It examined the relationship between traditional and contemporary practices that have contributed to those issues and it will report on how a sample of teachers who conduct retreats have responded to the issues in their conduct of retreats.

### **1.3 POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY**

While there was not scope in this study to survey the views of young people about their senior school retreats, it does make a valuable contribution to the research literature on the place of retreats in schools. In particular, it will canvass and document the available literature on school retreats to give a more coherent picture of the origins and purposes of the communitarian retreat in Catholic schools; also it will identify key issues that have a bearing on the function of retreats and their future place within Catholic school religious education. A distinctive feature of this study will be its report on the nature, purposes and function of retreats from the perspective of the teachers who serve as key leaders.

At this time in the history of Catholic schooling, when the place of retreats is likely to be reviewed at both school and diocesan levels, it will be important that deliberations and decisions have access to systematic research findings. Even though the empirical part of the study is limited to a sample of educators from only one diocese, the issues raised are likely to be relevant to Catholic education nationwide. This study may provide a valuable starting point for further research on retreats, particularly from the perspective of students. Because this study was limited to the conduct of retreats in Australian schools, its relevance to the situation of Catholic school retreats in other countries remains to be determined. Nevertheless, it will provide a useful starting point for comparisons and contrasts.

#### **1.4 STRUCTURE AND SEQUENCE OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS OF THE THESIS**

**Chapter 2** is a literature review which deals with area 1.1 of the first, analytical part of the study. It develops an historical perspective on the development of principles and ideas in spirituality that has affected the purposes, structure and practices of retreats in the Catholic tradition.

**Chapter 3** deals with areas 1.2 – 1.6 of the first, analytical part of the project. It explores the historical origins of the new style communitarian retreats that developed in Catholic secondary schools in the 1960s and which have remained the principal format for retreats since that time. The other areas examined include:- the psychological dynamics of retreats; the shaping spiritual and cultural influences that affected the thinking and planning of the educators who introduced the new communitarian retreats to schools; factors that have a bearing on the conduct and future of retreats.

**Chapter 4** explains the research methodology for the empirical part of the study. It describes the sample of participants and the semi-structured interview procedure, along with issues related to the ethical conduct of the study.

**Chapter 5** reports the data from the interviews and highlights the main findings.

**Chapter 6** discusses the meaning and significance of the empirical research findings, in the light of the issues considered in chapters 2 and 3.

**Chapter 7** presents the conclusions from the study. It proposes implications for the further development of retreats in Catholic secondary schools together with suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### **PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY OUT OF WHICH RETREATS EMERGED: FROM EARLY CHURCH SPIRITUALITIES TO CONTEMPORARY SCHOOL RETREATS**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is an exploration of the historical origins of Christian spirituality that gave rise to the principles and practices of retreats. It will examine the different styles of spirituality that have affected the structure and function of retreats. While this history has its origins in the ascetical practices of Judaism that predated Christianity, the rise of Christian ‘desert spirituality’ could be regarded as an important starting point for the spirituality of retreats. Key principles will be listed in summaries at appropriate places in the chapter.

While not attempting a comprehensive historical review of Christian spirituality, the chapter will focus on the aspects of spirituality that have become enduring features of retreats in the Catholic tradition. The key periods of Christian spirituality that will be covered are:-

- Early Church ascetical religious movements (Athanasius, trans.1980; Gamble, 1995; Swan, 2001).
- Medieval monasticism (Belisle, 2003; Burton, 1996; Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Lawrence, 2001).
- The emergence of the modern religious orders and their retreat practices (Baus, Beck, Ewig & Vogt, 1980; Ivens, 2004; McGreal, 1999; Mottola, 1989).
- The spread of retreats through Catholic Church life.

#### **2.1 EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH SPIRITUALITIES BASED ON ASCETICAL PRACTICES**

##### *2.1.1 Precursors to early Christian spirituality: Links between biblical identities and religious experience*

There are many descriptions of personal, religious experiences in Scriptures that illustrate principles of spirituality that are still identifiable in contemporary retreats in the Catholic tradition. Religious figures in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures appeared to share some common elements in their personal religious experiences. Biblical identities were described in Scripture as encountering or naming God as a religious experience in isolated or withdrawn places such as in deserts or on

mountains (Belisle, 2003; Robbins, 1981). And, according to the Scriptures, all emerged as changed people after such experiences (Genesis 22: 22-32; Exodus 3: 1-22; 1 Samuel 3: 1-21; Jeremiah 1: 4-12; Matthew 3: 13-17; Mark 9: 2-13). Biblical figures such as Moses and Elijah represented models of solitude in the wilderness. The desert became the place for introspection and encounter with mystery (Belisle, 2003).

In New Testament times and in the early years of the Christian church, such a 'retreat' to religious experience in solitude was motivated by the desire to follow the Christian ideals of discipleship and poverty zealously (Dunn, 2003).

This sort of personal religious experience was not exclusive to the Jewish or Christian faiths but "it is a feature of other world religions besides Christianity" (Lawrence, 2001, p. 2). There are parallels in ascetic practices such as silence for Buddhist monks and long periods of fasting and praying alone for Muslims.

### *2.1.2 Religious experience: An understanding of transcendental reality*

Habel, O'Donoghue and Maddox (1993, p. 209) defined religious experience as sacred, in which the believer came in contact with transcendental reality. It was a way in which a believer entered into a relationship with, or gained an awareness of, the sacred within the context of a particular religious tradition. In response to the experience, there was a sense of "something more" (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 64) for the person; an encounter with the transcendent. Wiseman (2006) described this encounter as "the experience of God in the midst of ordinary life" (p. 156). Human beings, faced with experiences that limited their understanding, looked for new experiences "which cannot be comprehended or circumscribed" (Wiseman, 2006, p. 156) and which therefore were 'sacred'.

For the early Christian communities, solitude, prayer and ascetical practices (Forman, 2005) enabled people to be open to a particular kind of religious experience that encouraged a desire of union with God and provided them with opportunities for personal discernment (Belisle, 2003).

### *2.1.3 Early Christian spiritualities that gave rise to the idea of the retreat*

Retreats as such are not easily identified in early Church literature. From the 3rd century onwards, what did emerge were constantly changing structures and activities that supported Christians' attempts to be faithful to the gospels to achieve 'spiritual perfection' (Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Lawrence, 2001). People sought more intense

religious experiences, often by withdrawing from mainstream society to settle in isolated places such as deserts and mountains (Earle, 2007). The founders of these early ‘desert’ movements contributed distinctive expressions of Christian spirituality that are still evident in Christianity today (Belisle, 2003; Brooke, 2003; Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Lawrence, 2001; Swan, 2001).

#### 2.1.4 *The spiritual significance of the desert: The emergence of desert spirituality*

Since the beginnings of Christianity, men and women in the Church were challenged to follow the Gospel message (Earle, 2007). Some of them were attracted to desert life to experience “abundant simplicity” (Swan, 2001, p. 21), as a way of living out this message. For others, the desert provided an “idealism or mystique” (Forman, 2005, p. 29), because it was the complete opposite of inhabited and cultivated land. The desert represented a place of solitude to which the weary city inhabitant could retire to regain peace. “Solitude in desert tradition is a refuge and a great respite. It makes possible the right kind of atmosphere for union and communion” (Belisle, 2003, p. 56) which forced the mind to think and the heart “to open” to God.

In the desert, people sought to unify their life by renouncing whatever were the sources of division. This often included abandoning wealth and the life of the village (Forman, 2005) for a less complicated life in the desert (Brooke, 2003; Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Lawrence, 2001; Mundy, 2000). Hence, the desert became:

...a place far from the attachment to the cares and goods of the world. Thus, ‘flight into the desert’ became flight from the responsibilities toward the land, daily contacts with people, especially the opposite gender, in order to pursue *hesychia* – solitude, tranquillity and the practice of continual remembrance of God. (Forman, 2005, p. 38)

Some of the desert spiritual practices were drawn from the Christian Platonists of Alexandria – a group of theologians who brought to the traditions of early Christianity a combination of Greek philosophy and religious practice. One of them, Origen, preached on the value of extreme asceticism as “angels and demons war over the soul” (Dunn, 2003, p. 4) and encouraged celibacy because Christians could then “achieve a spiritual union with God” (Dunn, 2003, p. 4) for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Heeding this call, individuals and groups of men and women had begun to withdraw from society by the 3rd century, either by themselves or with others, to pursue higher Christian ideals (Burton, 1996) and were challenged to examine new forms of living that would reflect the Gospel message of “repent, and believe the



gospel” (Mark 1: 15). Living in a simple cell, a “small, unadorned hut, perhaps a cave hewn from a rock” (Earle 2007, p. 22), the desert men and women had a ‘sacred space’ in which they could experience the divine Presence in solitude and listen within the silence. However, desert living did not mean immediate freedom from all other temptations and distractions. Desert dwellers encountered personal challenges within the solitude “that manifested themselves in nostalgic memories of past luxuries and relationships” (Forman, 2005, p. 38).

As a response to these much-sought-for Christian ideals, the entire lives of these people became a life-long retreat because it was an ongoing way of life. They did not withdraw from society temporarily only to return to it, but they chose to live permanently in isolation. These early Christians in the 1st century were commonly known as ascetics (Knowles, 1969) and the early Church community believed that they were united more closely to God through their religious practices (King, 1999).

There was some variation to this lifestyle. Some individuals chose to live alone as hermits, shunning human contact whilst others lived in close proximity to each other for safety, but choosing to have minimum contact with each other. New terms, such as ‘monks’, ‘anchorites’ and ‘cenobites’, were introduced to refer to Christian ascetics who moved to the desert (Belisle, 2003). A distinct kind of spirituality developed through the practices of silence, contemplation and prayer.

The ascetical withdrawal from the world was not a new idea as there is evidence from excavations at the Qumran site that “the renunciation of marriage, personal property, and the ordinary pleasures and comforts of life” (Lawrence, 2001, p. 2) were also common elements in some early Jewish ascetical settlements. Hence the emerging Christian desert spirituality could be regarded as an extension of the Jewish ascetic traditions (Dunn, 2003). She noted that these practices by the early Christian groups were an imitation of “the way of life of the Apostles” (Dunn, 2003, pp. 1-2).

The emergence of desert spirituality was also linked to the Emperors Decius (249-252) and Diocletian (248-305). During their reigns, they sanctioned the persecution of Christians in the early Church and as a result, many Christians took refuge in the Egyptian desert for safety. Over time, this crisis ended and the Christian Church eventually became a respected and acceptable religion that no longer faced persecution (Brooke, 2003; Dunn, 2003).

However not everyone in the desert returned to their previous occupations and lifestyles. What continued to appeal to a small group of Christians was the

desert spiritual lifestyle. When peace returned to the Church following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, some Christians decided to remain in the desert (King, 1999). One of the main reasons for this was the growing dissatisfaction among ascetics about the lax standards of Christian ‘witness’ given by people in the newly accepted religion. Martyrdom, the “highest aspiration of the Christian” (Brooke, 2003, p. 28), no longer featured prominently as part of Christianity. “The contrast between heroic Christians and fair-weather Christians who came and went with the crowd” (Brooke, 2003, p. 29) created an unhappy, dissatisfied environment for the desert dwellers who attempted to return to the cities and towns. It was believed that Constantine’s proclamation of Christianity as the official religion of his empire had lowered the standard of Christian life and austerity, reducing the Church to a body “in which few are exceptionally observant and devout” (Knowles, 1969, p. 12). Remaining in the desert was a kind of revolt by those desiring to live the message of the Gospel authentically.

#### *2.1.5 Monasticism and the development of community living*

Living solitary lives was not attractive to all Christians in the desert. It was unappealing to some because the environment was considered hostile (Forman, 2005). Some wanted the seclusion of the desert but at the same time, wanted to live within a community. The hermetical life eventually gave rise to an alternative movement known as ‘monasticism’ where people lived in close proximity to each other while still practicing asceticism (Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Lawrence, 2001). The desire to be closer to God continued to inspire people in the early Christian Church, but for some this took on the distinctive form of a spirituality based on asceticism either in solitary or monastic living.

#### *2.1.6 Anchorites and cenobites*

People who practiced austerity as part of their Christian spirituality became known as hermits or anchorites (Knowles, 1969) and were the earliest known Christians to practice an ascetic and isolated way of life. They lived solitary lives of silence in cells (Russell & Ward, 1981). Repentance of the spirit, mind and body was an important part of restoring a person to their “original spiritual, rational essence” (Dunn, 2003, p. 4). Only when reconciliation had been achieved could the anchorite aspire to “union with God” (Dunn, 2003, p. 4).

Whilst this eremitical life became increasingly attractive, there were some practical safety considerations for the hermits. From the early days it was recognized that anchorites were vulnerable from nomadic and animal attacks (Forman, 2005) due to their physical isolation and so community living developed. These people were known as cenobites from the Greek word – *coenobia* – meaning ‘common’. It was from these communities that monastic life would develop and flourish, following practices that would be eventually be known as monastic spirituality that was eventually taken on and adapted by Christians in the outside world (Brooke, 2003; Burton, 1996; Dunn, 2003; King, 1999; Knowles, 1969; Lawrence, 2001; Regnault, 1999; Russell & Ward, 1981).

*Table 2.1 Summary of key principles emerging from ‘Desert Spirituality’ that have contributed to the development of retreats in the Catholic religious tradition*

- Withdrawing from society.
- Restricted contact with others.
- Living in isolated places.
- Solitude.
- Prayer.
- Silence.
- Ascetical practices like fasting.

## **2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY**

### *2.2.1 Monasticism*

Monasticism was influential in the early Christian Church, providing refuge and stability for those seeking a life of prayer, silence and solitude. Particular individuals, as noted below, contributed new and different aspects of monasticism in different parts of the Church at different times.

### *2.2.2 Antony of Egypt: the anchorite*

The origins of monastic formation and the ideals of monasticism were attributed to the anchorite, Antony of Egypt (c. 251-356) and Pachomius the cenobite (Brooke, 2003) who lived in simple dwellings, free of material responsibilities and obligations (Knowles, 1969). Antony’s model of living in the desert focused on a life of:

- Poverty.
- Chastity.
- Prayer.
- Solitude.

The desert released in Antony “a deep love of life and God” (Torevell, 2006, p. 37), and he emerged from his experience renewed and full of vigour because it provided him with “a context for ‘resting’ in the true self away from the fallen city” (Torevell, 2006, p. 37). It was the “importance of silence” (Torevell, 2006, p. 38) that enabled Antony to flourish.

Over a period of time, Antony’s reputation as a holy man began to spread and others followed his lead and took up solitary asceticism in the desert. He devoted himself to ascetical practices to combat personal ‘demons’ and continuous prayer (Belisle, 2003) and his life inspired others to seek a lifestyle that would enable them to achieve Christian ideals, spiritual perfection and holiness (Brooke, 2003).

### 2.2.3 *The spread of eremitical life*

Within a year of Antony’s death in 356 CE, Bishop Athanasius wrote an account of this hermit’s life in Greek called *The Life of St Antony* and it was soon widely read in the Greek-speaking Christian world. By the 4th century it was translated into Latin by Evagrius in response to people’s request for some account of the founder of monasticism (King, 1999; Russell & Ward 1981). At this time, desert spirituality continued to grow as a key expression of the living out of Christian ideals.

### 2.2.4 *Pachomius: the cenobite*

Life as a hermit did not appeal to everyone. Solitary life and withdrawal from society discouraged many potential participants from eremitical life (Belisle, 2003). The ‘weak’ needed assistance in pursuing higher Christian ideals. These limitations gave rise to the clustering of individual Christians into smaller communities which were initially encouraged by Pachomius. It eventually led to monasteries that lived the communal life (Burton, 1996).

Pachomius (c 292-346) attracted men and women to form colonies, each with its own head of the community. Each colony consisted of a number of simple residences laid out in the style of legionary camps (Lawrence, 2001) becoming a significant model for later monasteries and retreat houses.

Life in the monastery included a daily round of collective worship in the oratory, the common meal and total obedience to the commands of the superior, including the surrender of a personal will and the observation of physical mortifications as required (Lawrence, 2001). Pachomius valued manual work and it

was a compulsory part of monastery life during the day, usually done while listening in silence to one monk reciting Scripture (Dunn, 2003).

### 2.2.5 *Basil of Caesarea*

It was a matter of time before structures were needed to support monastic living. Basil of Caesarea was drawn to the ascetical life but decided that solitary life was less appealing than community life. He created a new cenobitic community in Caesarea, helping to bring the monastic movement under the control of the ecclesiastical authority of the church (Lawrence, 2001).

He outlined the principles of the interior organization of a monastery life. Basil's vision was that it should be totally cenobitical; where the members lived as one integrated community rather than the clustered arrangement created by Pachomius. He reached the conclusion that the ascetical life shared by a community was a better option for living out the Gospel (Lawrence, 2001).

### 2.2.6 *John Cassian*

John Cassian introduced monasticism to the western world (Lawrence, 2001) and wrote extensively about the ascetic way of life. He helped develop the external organization of monasteries as well as systematic teachings for monastic life (King, 1999). His writings were the foundation for the establishment of later monasteries.

### 2.2.7 *Augustine of Hippo*

The first western monastic rule for monks was composed by Augustine of Hippo, dealing mainly with property, the individual needs of the community members, a monastic dress code, and the importance of prayer as well as other aspects of community life which were read out weekly to the community. Most importantly, the Rule *Ordo monasterii* contained liturgical instructions to the community (King, 1999). This recitation of the Office by the monks introduced a sacramental element into monastic life which enabled other sacramental practices to be part of monasticism later on.

### 2.2.8 *Benedict of Nursia*

Monasteries were rapidly multiplying throughout the West. In Italy, some larger monastic houses were guided by different translated versions of the Rule of Pachomius, the Rule of Basil and the works of Cassian. Benedict's distinction in

monastic history was his development of the short *Rule* that was adopted by many monasteries in Western Europe. It became the guide for abbots and monks to provide a workable model for a monastic community to achieve complete obedience, living in harmony with others and striving for sanctity. These were based on a regime of silence, prayer, meditation, spiritual readings and manual work under the direction of an abbot (Brooke, 2003; Knowles, 1969).

Table 2.2 *Summary of key principles emerging from monasticism that have contributed to the development of retreats in the Catholic religious tradition*

- The use of Scripture.
- The development of community.
- The integration of community.
- Monasticism came under ecclesial authority.
- Liturgical instructions.
- The regular recitation of formal prayers.
- Structured prayer and liturgy.
- Guidelines on spiritual practices such as guided meditations, prepared talks and the sacrament of Reconciliation.

### **2.3 NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN RELIGIOUS ORDERS: THE ORIGINS OF THE MODERN ‘RETREAT’**

From the 10th to the 12th century in Europe, monasteries continued to be established in different countries (Brooke, 2003). These religious houses were still separated from the world as members continued to practice ascetic lifestyles within those communities. Along with continuous reforms, monasticism grew and developed towards a “golden age” (King, 1999, p. 134). Key orders of religious men founded in the Middle Ages were the Franciscans and the Dominicans. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine these two orders in any detail, even though they differed in significant ways from monastic communities because of their prominence in the developing towns and cities.

By the 1500s, monastic life was on the wane in the Christian West. Also evident at this time were new movements of religious observance by different groups. These movements spread new and inspirational ideas about religion and religious life based on preaching and teaching that offered structured religious experiences (Brooke, 2003). One religious order of priests, the Jesuits, founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, made an important contribution to the spiritual ideals of Christianity by developing a new understanding of the term ‘retreat’.

### 2.3.1 Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuit Order

Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of a new religious order of priests in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits and was credited with the development of a new spiritual structure that would become known as the ‘retreat’ (Mottola, 1989). The thirty-day *Spiritual Exercises* instituted by Ignatius made “traditional ascetic practices available to religious and lay men and women through retreats and through the Jesuits’ spiritual direction” (Carrera, 2007, p. 240). It also allowed the retreat experience to be portable as Jesuits moved from place to place.

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, participants set aside time to retreat from their work, spending their days withdrawn from society and working through a series of spiritual foci in order to “find clarity about God’s will for oneself” (Wiseman, 2006, p. 153). These *Spiritual Exercises* embodied a holistic and imaginative interpretation of spirituality that involved the intellect and emotions as part of the participant’s religious experience. Within this retreat time, participants experienced times of silence and prayer, drawing from the same principles of early Christian desert living as were noted earlier. The prayer of “recollection” (Carrera, 2007, p. 241) encouraged an examination of conscience as a way of “ascending towards mystical union with God” (Carrera, 2007, p. 242).

The *Spiritual Exercises* were not on-going, monastic-like community experiences as established by the earlier founders, but they focused on the individual and were practiced at a specific time, to experience personal conversion (Ivens, 2004) and therefore became an important, annual, compulsory requirement for each Jesuit.

As a religious order of travelling priests and brothers, the Jesuits did not follow the same strict rules for solitary or communal living as monks did. Their mobility to go wherever they were needed led Ignatius to insist that the *Spiritual Exercises* be part of the ongoing formation for members of the Society and these were written into their constitution.

Over time, the *Spiritual Exercises* or a similar sort of retreat-like program gained popularity as a way of personal conversion and renewal of spirituality within many religious orders and Church circles. As a result of their popularity, specially created houses were established in different countries to cater for annual retreats (Caraman, 1990).

### 2.3.2 *Religious teaching orders and retreats*

As new orders of religious teachers developed, it became the custom for them to incorporate retreats as modified versions of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* as part of their formation. From the 17th century, new religious teaching orders such as the Marist Brothers, the Christian Brothers and the De La Salle Brothers drew on the format of the *Exercises*. Compulsory annual retreats became part of the congregational rule (Statutes, 2002; Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers, 1832). In addition, there was often a short half-day retreat once a month. This time of retreat continued to differ from the earlier monastic model as it was a time of personal renewal – where members could retreat from their teaching routine, recharge their energies and return to their ministries at the end of their retreat, with a particular emphasis on “renewal of the interior and apostolic life” (Colin, 1960, p. 5) as a means of achieving personal sanctification.

However, despite the change in nature and purpose of retreats from monastic spirituality, common elements from it were retained. These included:

- Withdrawing to an isolated venue.
- Withdrawing from community-oriented activities.
- Silence.
- Meditating on Scripture.
- Communal meals.
- Communal prayer.
- Personal discernment.
- Examination of conscience.
- Reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Members of the ‘active’ orders, like those involved in education, were encouraged to integrate retreats into their charism to discern their mission within the Church (Goussin, 2003). As these orders continued to grow, they used retreats as a key component of their overall religious formation programs for members. When religious orders became more established and involved in the world, they regularly withdrew from it to a retreat because of the values still ascribed to the retreat’s ‘spirituality background. “The Brothers make an annual retreat of six full days. They may also make a shorter retreat in preparation for the renewal of vows.” (*Christian Brothers Statutes*, Chapter 5 Para 42.1, p. 8, 2002)



*Table 2.3 Summary of key principles emerging from the spiritual practices of post 15th century Religious Orders (such as the spiritual exercises and community retreats) that have contributed to the development of retreats in the Catholic religious tradition*

- The idea of the ‘retreat’ as a short period of time specially devoted to enhancing spirituality.
- The retreat as a period of ‘renewal’ to enhance people’s personal mission in the world.
- General spiritual education through lectures/inputs from retreat leaders.
- Opportunity for personal review of life and of the place of God in one’s life.
- Opportunity for receiving some personal religious guidance from a retreat leader.
- Religious practices similar to those deriving from earlier periods of Christian spirituality (silence, personal and communal prayer, liturgy and reconciliation [confession], spiritual reading, some ascetic practices).

## **2.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF RETREATS WITHIN MODERN CATHOLIC CHURCH LIFE**

### *2.4.1 Retreats for the Catholic laity*

Retreats continued to be an important part of Catholic spirituality in the 19th and 20th centuries especially in Religious orders – both the monastic and the ‘active’ orders (Simpson, 1927) – as well as for clergy. However, in the contemplative, monastic orders, the way of life was better described as more ‘retreat-like’ most of the time rather than have periodic retreats as was the case for the active orders. Monasteries had long been recognised as places of ongoing contemplation, providing visitors with silence, respite and seclusion to pursue meditation and prayer. While monastic life was understood as a life-long retreat, the laity participated temporarily in this kind of spirituality as part of their private, spiritual renewal (Hood, 1958; Lunn, 1913). The Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton is widely acknowledged as one of the great spiritual masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century regarding retreats, contemplation and silence (Merton, 1996, 1997, 2006).

These retreats for laity became popular for the small numbers of laity concerned (Goodacre, 1970, Hugh, 1962; Lovell, 1994; Wareham, 1950) and were characterised by the following characteristics, clearly linked with the principles for retreats as summarised earlier:

- Withdrawal from society.
- Solitude.
- Silence.
- Meditation.
- Prayer.
- Conferences or talks by the clergy.

- Reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.
- Possibility of receiving personal spiritual guidance.

#### 2.4.2 *The purpose of retreat houses*

Special buildings were eventually set apart to serve as retreat houses for both members of religious orders, clergy and laity (Hood, 1958; Lunn, 1913; Simpson, 1927). They were often, but not exclusively, built in relatively remote places. It was usually the role of priests in religious orders to conduct retreats, given the expectation that participants would receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist during this time. Retreat houses were specially designed for this kind of “holy retirement” (Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers, 1832, p. 61) providing short-term, temporary experiences of monastic spirituality. As retreat houses grew in popularity, the laity became more involved in attending them (Maloney, 1980; Taylor, 1995) making these experiences an increasingly important part of a broader Catholic spirituality. It was noted:

The first half of this century (20th) saw a phenomenal growth in spiritual awareness in England, and much of this was translated into a considerable activity of prayer and ‘retreat’, both inside and outside the newly established religious houses (Goodacre, 1970, p. 1).

Retreat houses and retreats had also assumed a role in promoting vocations to religious life or to the priesthood as part of the process of personal discernment (English, 2007).

#### 2.4.3 *The nature and purpose of retreats in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Complementing attendance at retreats for Catholics in the early to mid 20th century were ‘parish missions’. In a sense, the parish mission was a type of retreat conducted over a week in the parish church. Parishioners were encouraged to attend talks and devotions each evening and mass in the mornings. Sometimes, there were separate parts of the mission for men and women, together with combined sessions for all (O’Farrell, 1969).

In the modern retreat (circa 1950s), the focus still remained on the traditional principles drawn initially from the spirituality of the desert fathers, mothers and monks (Talbot, 1954) and also from the spiritual traditions of the modern active religious orders. Participants followed a set timetable for their individual retreat, converging with others to hear communal lectures given by priests and for meal

times. Retreats were known as “... a time – two or three days, as a rule, for ordinary people – spent in complete silence, consciously waiting upon the will of God and listening to His voice” (Hood, 1958, p. 209) because “the final end is union with God” (Talbot 1954, p. 170).

#### *2.4.4 Catechetical thinking of the 1950s*

Despite the projection of a prominent idea of Catholic solidarity, the Church of the 1950s struggled in “reaching ordinary people” (Alberigo, 2006, p. ix). The catechesis of the time supported a ‘Catholic supremacy’ that rested within a hierarchical Church and it struggled to identify the laity as the Church; as the people of God (Madges, 2003). Church authority on all matters was final.

Another catechetical perspective that shaped the Catholic outlook was the understanding that the world was considered a sorrowful place and Catholics had to be on their guard for spiritual battle because “the pain in the world is due to the devil, not to God” (Talbot, 1954, p. 168). The Catholic world was charged to accept “that there is that in us that has got to be purged and cleansed” to have a relationship with God (Talbot, 1954, p. 169). It was a “sin-conscious mentality” (Firman, 1968, p. 216) that permeated the catechesis of this period, similar to that of the desert anchorites and cenobites discussed earlier in this chapter. The traditional Catholic retreat fitted this spiritual mentality.

Change was about to transform the Church and the prevailing catechesis with the inauguration of a Second Vatican Council (Hellwig, 2003; Ryan, 2007). This period eventually affected different aspects of the Church, especially how the Mass was celebrated. It will be considered in the next chapter as related to the development of the new style communitarian retreats.

#### *2.4.5 Retreats in Catholic secondary schools in Australia prior to the Second Vatican Council*

From their origins in and after the 17th century, the Catholic teaching orders (following up those established earlier such as the Jesuits) gave special attention to the spiritual and moral development of their pupils. Hence prayer and religious education of some form were always a part of the school program (Ryan, 2007). While it has not been possible within the scope of this thesis to track carefully the origins of retreats in Catholic schools both in Australia and overseas, it was clear that from the beginning the religious teachers were likely to have incorporated some form

of retreat-like spirituality into their schooling programs. Through most of the first part of the 20th century retreats in some form were conducted in Catholic schools in Australia.

There is evidence in some Catholic College annuals that retreats were conducted for particular groups of students with an instructional emphasis on the Sacraments. For example: “During the year large classes were prepared for Holy Communion and Confirmation, while for ‘our own household’ – the boarders – a three days’ retreat was conducted by Fathers Andrew and Francis, of the Passionist Order.” (Christian Brothers’ College Annual, 1903, p. 2) The Christian Brothers in Adelaide offered students silent retreats that were conducted at school by the Passionist Order of priests; this included “communion” and a “daily lecture in Christian Doctrine and duties (Christian Brothers College Annual, 1903, p. 2). The lectures emphasised “the necessity of being loyal to the teachings of the Church” and concluded with Mass and “the bestowal of the Papal Benediction” (Christian Brothers’ College Annual, 1913, p. 2).

What is important for this study is to note the general format of the traditional retreat in Catholic schools in the 1950s to serve as a background or foil to the description of what happened with the appearance of the new style communitarian retreats in the mid 1960s. While the formats of the Catholic secondary school retreats in the 1950s drew on the traditional practices of retreats in the religious orders, it will become evident that in the 1960s the innovation in communitarian retreats for senior school students showed a type of ‘reverse’ influence. The new style retreats originated in Catholic secondary schools and from there came to influence what happened in religious orders and the wider Catholic church which eventually adopted the new style communitarian retreat as one prominent form.

The following extended quotation from Rossiter (1997) described the elements that featured in the typical retreat in Australian Catholic secondary schools in the 1950s.

School retreats at this time were modelled on the traditional silent retreats for members of religious orders. As a general rule, silence prevailed for the duration of the retreat. Lectures were given by priests on various topics. Confessions, Stations of the Cross, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and the celebration of Mass were integral components (Rossiter, 1997, p. 1).

The atmosphere of silence was considered fundamental to the success of retreats as it expressed a seriousness that fostered reflection for students. For this reason,

activities which were 'fun', 'community', 'discussion' oriented or even 'experientially oriented' were generally not contemplated as appropriate as it was believed they did not contribute to the success of the retreat.

Two items were central to the retreat: - the celebration of Eucharist; and individual Confession. The retreat was also used as an opportunity for raising questions about a religious vocation to the priesthood or religious life (Rossiter, 1997).

#### *2.4.6 The new style communitarian retreats for senior secondary school students*

Vatican II inspired new ways of thinking about Church (Barnett, 2005; Ryan, 2007; Sullivan, 2002). Young religious men and women teaching in religious order schools who were energized by the Council were responsible for bringing about considerable change in the format and conduct of secondary school retreats. By about 1968 the new-style communitarian retreats for volunteer students from combined clusters of boys and girls schools were making an initial impact in Catholic secondary schools. In Adelaide and then in Sydney, pioneering work in this field was done by the De La Salle Brothers, and the Passionist Order of priests. They were joined by religious sisters and brothers from the other teaching orders.

New elements such as 'having a good time', meeting new people and making new friends, developing community, singing, dancing, fun games, and group discussions became regarded as important for the success of the retreat (Rossiter, 1997). These elements emphasized an "experiential dimension to the new-style retreats" (Rossiter, 1997, p. 2) and were often used as 'lead-ins' for prayer, personal reflection and new understandings of personal development.

Many factors were considered to influence the success of these new format retreats. Instead of attending segregated retreats, young men and women from different senior schools mixed with each other on the communitarian retreats. The friendly climate of the retreats, the informality of the camp sites and the more relaxed relationship with the staff helped make the experience enjoyable. The "acquaintance process" – getting to know members of the opposite sex and learning how to relate to them – featured prominently as a community dynamic in the weekend retreat program.

Gradually, from their beginnings in small voluntary retreats involving students from a group of schools, the new style spread to class and year level retreats, replacing the silent retreats of former years, becoming mainstream.

Eventually this led to the variety of retreats that are now common in Catholic schools (Rossiter, 1997, p. 2).

The following chapter will examine the development of new style communitarian retreats in Catholic secondary schools and the influences that affected their development, structure and function.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **THE NEW-STYLE, COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS IN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THEIR ORIGINS, STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION; AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES RELATED TO THEIR CONDUCT**

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of the development of the new style of communitarian retreats in Catholic secondary schools that emerged in the mid to late 1960s. It explores the factors that influenced their development and examines the issues that arose with regard to their conduct both at that time and in contemporary practice.

The new form of retreats constituted a remarkable paradigm shift when contrasted with the format of ‘silent’ retreats that had been the norm in Catholic schools in Australia for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The significant change in retreat format occurred in a period that showed extensive change in Catholic spirituality following the Second Vatican Council. Also important at the time was the influence of the humanistic psychology movement on the spirituality of those who pioneered the new form of retreats. While the new communitarian format gradually became the ‘mainstream’ style of retreat in Catholic schools since the 1970s, and while they have been regarded as very successful parts of the Catholic school’s overall religious education program, a number of current difficulties could affect the future of retreats.

### **3.1 HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW STYLE COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE MID 1960s**

#### *3.1.1 Oral histories of the early development of communitarian retreats in Catholic secondary schools*

While there is a small literature on the conduct of retreats in Australian Catholic schools (De Souza, 2009; Firman, 1968; Harrison, 1989; McCarthy, 1974; Rossiter 1978, 1997), little was written about the historical emergence of the communitarian retreats in the 1960s (Rossiter, 1975A). Study of these writings has been supplemented by the researcher’s recorded and transcribed interviews with a number

of the key pioneers in the introduction of these retreats. Their oral histories of that time have not only described the structures and processes of the retreats, but have offered interpretations of the factors influencing their development and implementation. In addition, the researcher interviewed other key personnel involved in the conduct of contemporary communitarian retreats. The material provided by these key informants is reported in this chapter. Description of the interview method for the oral histories is given in Chapter 4, as part of the detailed discussion of research methodology. Commentaries from the key informants also informed the discussion of data in chapter 6. The list of key informants is provided in Appendix G.

While the new style communitarian retreats had a significant impact on the students and teachers in Catholic schools at the time, no systematic ‘research-like’ or archival records of developments and events were kept. The developments were based primarily on ‘grassroots’ experimentation by practitioners and were not part of a ‘reform’ program flowing from the decisions of the relevant authorities. In a sense, the pathway was from ‘practice to theory’ – not the reverse. However, this is not to say that the developments were not informed by theory. As shown below, developments in Catholic theology after Vatican II and in the humanistic psychology movement did inform the communitarian retreat movement in significant ways. Much of the thinking and theory underpinning the new style retreats remained unwritten; it was a part of the educational culture that developed and spread amongst those who conducted the retreats. Hence an important and innovative aspect of this research study was to tap into the oral histories of those who introduced the new style retreats.

This project has charted the initial developments of the new style communitarian retreats in Catholic schools in Adelaide and Sydney and to a lesser extent in Melbourne. It was not possible within the constraints of this study to explore what happened in other parts of Australia, or overseas. But it has noted events and developments that proved both innovative and influential within the overall context of Catholic school retreats in Australia.

### *3.1.2 The first ‘Christian Living Camps’ introduced in Adelaide in 1964*

This researcher considered that the first recorded new communitarian retreat for senior Catholic secondary students in Australia was introduced in 1964 by Brother Bernie Neville, then a De La Salle teaching Brother at St Michael’s College, a



Catholic boys' school in Adelaide (Neville, 2007). Neville, together with a group of priests from religious orders and teachers from the religious teaching orders, conducted a voluntary communitarian-style weekend retreat for senior school students in Victor Harbor, a small seaside town some 110 kilometres south of Adelaide in South Australia (Neville, 2007). Neville was interested in applying what he knew about the Cursillo Movement (a communitarian spirituality movement for adult Catholics that had originated in Spain) and what he had studied about humanistic psychology, to the creation of a new style of retreat for senior secondary students. He believed that the Cursillo type of live-in experiences could be adapted for use in senior school retreats.

The Cursillo movement originated in Spain in the late 1950s (Cursillo Movement, 2009; Giossi, 2006) and conducted three-day live-in experiences for adults aimed at Christian renewal. Their programs included:-

- Community living.
- Presentations on Christian doctrine by lay persons and priests.
- Group discussions.
- Liturgy and prayer.

Neville met with several teachers (from religious orders) at St Aloysius College (a Catholic girls' school in Adelaide) prior to the weekend and arranged for a small group of students and approximately six Religious from both schools to trial a new retreat format. The students had been invited personally by various teachers to attend. The event was called a "Christian Living Camp" (CLC) to highlight the emphasis on living together as a Christian community and the focus on 'life' and 'human relationships'. The CLC experience provided about 30 boys and girls (average age 17) with opportunities to get to know each other, to participate in community building activities and to communicate on a personal level. The camp ran from Friday evening to the Sunday afternoon. The program included a film, fun activities, singing folk songs, daily Eucharist, Reconciliation and group discussion. Some priests from the Passionist Order were present and they celebrated Mass and heard Confessions (now referred to as Reconciliation). Subsequently, priests from this order (D. Folkes, and later J. Ives, P. McGrath, K. Dance, and others) became key personnel in the conduct of Christian Living Camps for Catholic schools in Sydney.

Neville's impression was that "the kids went home extremely excited and feeling that their lives had been transformed. The parents remarked on this. I don't think the Church [clergy and bishop] knew anything about it" (Neville, 2007). The

participants from this Christian Living Camp were so enthusiastic about the positive relationships and friendships that developed in the group that the retreat staff decided to offer more voluntary Camps for senior secondary students throughout the year. At this time, the weekend camps did not replace the traditional, compulsory silent retreats for senior students held annually during school hours (St. Michael's College Annual, 1965, 1966, 1967).

Neville indicated that his work in this new form of retreats was influenced by ideas in the writings of the psychologist Carl Rogers about the importance of relationships in personal development. These influences encouraged him "to think of a retreat in those terms" (Neville, 2007).

...it was just a notion of getting the kids together and actually focusing on relationships and developing a climate of trust in which they would be able to grow and develop and reflect on their lives. (Neville, 2007)

Neville further developed the Christian Living Camp weekends in Adelaide for the next three years. Influenced by the positive student regard for the communitarian style of retreats, St. Michael's College at Henley Beach, introduced the "Matriculation Christian Living Camps with girls from Catholic Colleges" in 1971 (St. Michael's College Annual, 'Director's Report', 1971, p. 4) and described them as "a new concept in religious education" (p. 36). By the mid 1970s a number of Catholic secondary schools in Adelaide and Sydney were offering voluntary communitarian retreats to senior secondary students.

### *3.1.3 Christian Living Camps in Sydney from 1968*

In 1968, Neville left Adelaide for Sydney to teach at the de La Salle school, Benilde College at Bankstown. He organized another group of religious personnel (priests, brothers and sisters) to conduct more Christian Living Camps with year 12 students from a number of Sydney's Catholic boys' and girls' high schools. Neville built on the South Australian experience by experimenting further with programs, working with other key pioneers in the retreat movement: W. Firman, M. Lynch, and P. McCarthy, also de La Salle Brothers in Sydney at the time. Priests from the Passionist Order were also prominent in the programs (D. Folkes, J. Ives, K. Dance, P. McGrath. A. Cleary). According to Neville, no two retreat programs at the time were alike because programs were readily adapted onsite according to the different 'dynamics' in the groups of students attending the camps. Flexibility to change and adapt the program was regarded as an important feature of its success.

A measure of the popularity of the camps was evident in the way that many past pupils returned to participate in camps organised for them after they had left school. A large number of young people who had attended camps at the participating schools when in year 12 formed a loosely organised youth group that revolved around Christian Living Camps (McCarthy, 2007). “The popularity of the new retreats was soon spread by word of mouth. More and more schools were trying out the new approaches” (Rossiter, 1997, p. 4).

As the camps grew in popularity, religious personnel from other schools became involved in running Christian Living Camp weekends. For example, in 1970, a group of Sydney Catholic schools on the North Shore set up their own weekend camps (Rossiter, 2007); the participation of priests from the Passionist Order provided continuity and links with the movement centred on the De La Salle schools. In the same year, the success of the student retreats had such impact on their parents, that a communitarian retreat for parents of the students in the North Shore schools was organised. Initially, parents were curious about what was happening on the retreats, puzzled as to why their adolescent children were so positive in their comments about the Christian Living Camps, which were said to be “fantastic”. This motivated them to experience this sort of retreat themselves as a means of understanding what had affected their children so profoundly. The parental response was also very favourable. Some parents feigned an effusive and emotional display about how much they “loved the retreat” when they returned home, hoping that this might puzzle their children (Rossiter, 2007). Communitarian retreats for parents from Sydney schools in this area were conducted each year until 1985.

Because students responded so favourably to the Christian Living Camps, the de La Salle Brothers in Sydney gradually incorporated the communitarian retreat into their own schools and conducted them during the school week rather than on weekends.

In 1970, the key leaders of the new retreat movement under the leadership of Br W. Firman conducted a weekend camp for religious personnel who were already involved in retreats or who were likely to become involved. This provided a type of professional development training for retreat leaders at the time. It helped substantiate the theory and principles that were being developed for the conduct of these retreats in Sydney (Firman, 2007). However, this theory was embedded in the thinking and practice of the key personnel and the growing number of retreat leaders with little being committed to writing. The first noted article on the new style of

retreats was written by Firman in 1968. McCarthy (1974) in a major essay for a university degree, reported on the development and function of the communitarian retreats in Sydney. He received a Schools Commission Innovations Grant related to the conduct of school retreats. In 1975, after a seminar on retreats for personnel in the Sydney area, material was published on the aims and purposes of communitarian retreats (Rossiter, 1975A). In the same year, Rossiter also received a Schools Commission Innovations Grant for retreats that included school retreats, retreats for parents and regional voluntary youth group camps. This was reported in the publication *Beyond the classroom: New approaches to religious education and personal development* (Rossiter, 1978) which provided an account of different formats for the communitarian retreat together with an interpretation of the psychological and spiritual dynamics of retreats.

Another form of the new style retreat became evident in voluntary youth group camps, usually conducted on weekends or during school holidays as part of regional groupings of the YCS – Young Christian Students movement; This was a voluntary religious youth movement in Catholic schools that was allied with the YCW, Young Christian Workers movement, an association of post-school young Catholics in the work force. These YCS camps became evident in different parts of Australia from the late 1960s. They followed many of the same dynamics as the Christian Living Camp weekends, but they were different in that they drew on students from a wide range of schools – especially if the camps were organised on a diocesan level. Also, student leadership was particularly prominent in the organisation and conduct of the camps under guidance from adults (referred to as Religious Assistants). The communitarian style of the YCS camps may well have preceded that of the Christian Living Camps, and there may have been some influence on the latter. It was beyond the scope of the study to check this relationship.

In Sydney and elsewhere, the evident success of the communitarian retreats that were conducted for volunteers on weekends led to the gradual adoption of this style of retreat within schools to replace the more traditional silent retreat that had been prominent for many years. This meant that a communitarian retreat for students from any one school began to replace the number of inter-school weekend retreats for volunteers that had taken the role of the ‘main retreat’ for year 12 students. Thus the religious personnel would have their school’s one Year 12 retreat (or set of retreats) on school days rather than 4 or 5 weekend retreats for volunteers across the

year. For the North Shore Sydney schools noted above, the first Christian Living Camp weekends began in 1970, but in 1976 they were replaced by a single school communitarian retreat. Similar style retreats were also organised for students in Years 9, 10 and 11.

Despite the success of the new communitarian retreats by 1970, not everyone was convinced about their value (Rossiter, 1997). This may have affected the slowness on the part of some schools to adopt the new format, although eventually they would become the norm. According to McCarthy (2007), some Church authorities in Sydney were becoming alarmed by reports that the new style communitarian camps were celebrating the Eucharist in unorthodox ways. These rumours led to a meeting called by the then Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Gilroy, and members of the De La Salle Brothers in 1971. The Cardinal expressed concern about in-coming reports about liberties taken in liturgies on the Camps (Rossiter, 1997). Soon after, the Cardinal called a wider meeting of all known to be involved in the new retreats at Strathfield. The Cardinal's letter set out the purpose of the meeting as "to put the Camp movement on a proper basis" (Rossiter, 2007). It was to establish a "Camp Committee" under the supervision of Bishop E. Kelly to promote religious camps while at the same time 'credentialing' and supervising those who were conducting the new communitarian style retreats. In practice, the credentialing role was not followed through; most of the members of the Committee ended up being enthusiastic supporters of the new retreats. The Committee recommended the purchase of the Outward Bound campsite north of Sydney to provide a major new venue for Catholic school camps. However, while funding was available, the purchase was vetoed. After a few years, the Camp Committee was dissolved without making any significant contribution towards either enhancing or inhibiting the new retreat movement.

The Christian Living Camps, and particularly the celebration of Mass at camps, became a 'sore spot' for conservative Catholics. "The real cutting edge of liturgical adventurism is most likely to be found during masses at ... retreats." (Gilchrist, 1987, p.64). For example, by 1986 members of the John XXIII Fellowship, a group opposed to any liberal developments in Catholicism (The Fellowship published the magazine *AD 2000*), complained about liberties taken with the liturgy at senior school retreats in Catholic schools. Gilchrist (1987, p.53) claimed that:

Liturgical distractions are liable to include ‘pop’ recordings, secularised reflections, miming or drama, liturgical dancing or ‘movement’, even clowns. The celebrant may prefer the role of compere or commentator to that of a reverent sacrificing priest; he may insist on certain quirkish, embarrassing or annoying innovations during Mass: the possibilities seem endless.

A Sydney diocesan meeting in Wahroonga in 1975 of those involved in retreats and similar ministries (chaired by Br R. Perry fms) further consolidated the importance of the retreats in the spiritual lives of young people. Also, the movement was strongly supported by the religious orders (McCarthy, 2007). In the 1970s the De La Salle Brothers, the Christian Brothers and the Marist Brothers all set up centres for school retreats, together with specialist retreat teams which conducted retreats either at their particular centres or at other venues. Some of these retreat teams still operate in 2009.

It could be said that the innovation in the Christian Living Camps from 1964 eventually made its way into religious orders where communitarian retreats, previously unknown because of the predominance of silent retreats, were adopted and became one of the different forms of retreats in religious orders – silent, and ‘directed’ retreats remained prominent. (Rossiter, 2007). The communitarian format also became prominent in Catholic retreats for adults

#### *3.1.4 The development of the ‘Stranger Camp’ retreats in Melbourne in the 1970s and 1980s*

While it was not possible in this study to trace the history of the new type of communitarian retreats in all the Australian states, it was noted that a similar movement developed in Melbourne Catholic schools in the mid to late 1970s.

Michael Mason, (Redemptorist Order) after having done some retreat work with Marist Brothers’ schools in the United States in a program called “Teens Encounter Christ”, set up a network of voluntary weekend retreats that involved students from different schools. These weekend camps became known as “Stranger Camps”, initially by accident, because they emphasised the ‘acquaintance process’ of having different students from different schools. These young people did not know each beforehand and ‘getting-to-know-you’ was utilised as a key community building dynamic. Six students and at least one adult team leader from each participating schools attended these voluntary, weekend retreats. In addition, past pupils who had left year 12 the year before were recruited and trained by the senior team leaders. They contributed to these retreats as junior leaders and had a key role

in making brief inputs and in working as group leaders in group discussions (Mason, 2007).

Mason (2007) considered that the Stranger Camps set out to add more specifically religious / spiritual content as he felt that retreats at the time were too 'personal development-oriented' and in some instances centred too much on 'personalities'. There were clear similarities between what happened in the Stranger Camps and the activities in Christian Living Camps a decade earlier in Adelaide and Sydney; in terms of prayer, review of life, and celebration of Reconciliation and Eucharist, they were not substantially different from the 1960s Christian Living Camps. Certainly 'personalities' may have been a key difference between the two; but it would have been 'different' personalities rather than a lack of personalities in one. As will be explained later, 'personality differences' may have had a lot to do with the ways different retreat leaders regarded 'personalism' and 'disclosure' as key parts of the retreats' psychological dynamics.

For the Stranger Camps, there was also an acknowledged early link with the intensive community experience in the Cursillo movement, while the school communitarian retreats were much less formally structured (Mason, 2007). The psychological dynamics of Cursillo events worked towards bringing participants to some expression of faith commitment. Mason (2007) considered that the Stranger camps represented a healthy movement away from the more Pentecostal/charismatic tendency to seek expressions about personal conversion that was sometimes evident in the Marriage Encounter movement (a United States led association that conducted spiritual development retreats for married couples). The Stranger Camps did not expect participants to make life-changing religious commitments during the retreat.

When Stranger Camps were commenced by Mason and associates in 1977, the notion of a more experiential religious education had become more accepted than was the case in the 1960s when the Christian Living Camps began in Adelaide and Sydney. It is not clear to what extent the traditional silent retreats were replaced by more communitarian-like activities in Melbourne by the end of the 1970s. But it is likely that the Stranger Camp movement had an influence on the gradual spread of the communitarian format into regular school retreats in Victoria in the 1970s and 1980s.

### 3.2 THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE EARLY COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS, INCLUDING NOTES ON RETREAT ACTIVITIES

This section will draw particularly from the experience of those who conducted the early Christian Living Camps. But it will also include some ideas dating from the conduct of communitarian retreats in the 1970s and 1980s.

Planning: Those responsible for the organisation and conduct of these weekend camps were often young religious Sisters and Brothers. After a full teaching week, they would leave on a Friday, after work, and travel to a campsite with the students and set up for the weekend Christian Living Camp (Neville, 2007; Rossiter, 2007). They were also responsible for establishing a contact person from their Order schools who would disseminate information about the Camps. Often there might be a preliminary planning meeting for the retreat team prior to the event.

Purpose of the retreat: The purpose of Christian Living Camps was to create an authentic Christian community, similar to the purpose for the early Christian communities as described in Chapter 2 (section 2.1, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.1.5), but with a significantly different style of spirituality and activities; and this community could help students to reflect on their personal and Christian identity in a secular world with others (Jolley, 1968). To achieve this, the camp program was carefully crafted firstly to “remove defensive barriers” so that “meaningful relationships can form between people” (Firman, 1968, p. 209). The retreat was to promote personal dialogue amongst the young people, to highlight personal development questions and issues, and to create a new sense of awareness of others. The programs were designed to create a “memorable” experience of relationships between the camp participants to know what a Christian “community of openness and love” actually felt like and that it could be achieved through “honest discussion and living together” (Firman, 1968, p. 177).

The acquaintance process (getting to know new friends): The notion of the ‘acquaintance process’, as referred to above in the section on Melbourne Stranger Camps, was a central psychological dynamic to the first Christian Living Camps. In the new setting with a group of strangers (apart from participants from their own school), ‘getting to know others’ was a prominent theme. Opportunities were created to get the participants to meet and mix with those from other schools. This was also considered important for community building as well as for enhancing individuals’ self confidence. This was the reason for the use of so-called ‘icebreakers’ or ‘getting to know you games’ that could initially help “break down tensions arising from the



unfamiliar situation and assist getting to know one another” (Firman, 1968, p. 178). The new situation capitalised on the possibility of negating previously entrenched patterns of friendships or ‘groups’ with the encouragement to make new friends and to be more ‘open’ to others generally. (It is interesting to note here that some contemporary retreats for students from just the one school may still retain such ‘ice-breaker’ routines even though the students may have known each other for up to 12 years (Rossiter, 2007). Personal interaction occurred in group discussions and forums as well as informally.

Personalism and spirituality: The camps encouraged ‘personalism’ (in the sense of sharing personal insights about self) and this tended to address a certain dissatisfaction with the traditional school silent retreat model. Critics of the silent retreats had already identified listening to lectures and addresses in silence as a ‘weakness’ for youth as early as 1950 (Wareham, 1950). While the silent retreat had been accepted by Catholics for a long time, it no longer resonated with youth growing up in the 1960s, especially in the light of Vatican II and contemporary cultural ideas that called for more dialogue and relationships amongst people. The older model also appeared to reinforce an unacceptable sacred/secular dichotomy in life.

It seems to me that the one disadvantage of the traditional style of retreat – perhaps characterized by silence and all it implies – is that this style of retreat, good as it may be, tends to lead to the attitude that prayer, silence and perhaps Sunday Mass **is** religion, and that our secular activities are something divorced from religion, something tolerated (Firman, 1968, pp. 214-215).

By contrast, the Christian Living Camps were an alternative experience for students, inviting them to explore their relationship with God through personal reflection and dialogue within a supportive community. Dialogue and community had become important foci in the Christian Living Camps and they proved popular with youth. Teacher reflections and student evaluations were predominately positive following each camp, encouraging further experimentation with the new retreat style. What was achieved on these camp weekends far exceeded teacher and student expectations. Discussions, community activities and freedom from time constraints all contributed to a positive regard for retreats.

We felt that...discussions and activities need far more time than the short forty minute periods can provide (at school), that discussions flow much more readily in a camp atmosphere, and that Christian Living literally means ‘to live’, so ... we tried to live as a Christian community. (Jolley, 1968, p. 203)

Flexibility in program: Part of the Christian Living Camp's success was its flexibility and the ability of those conducting the retreat to be able to 'read' the group's dynamics. "I was generally sensitive to the group I was teaching and if I sensed that something wasn't going to work, I wouldn't do it." (Neville, 2007). Freedom of expression in thoughts and feelings with others engendered a sense of community as students learnt about each other.

Community building activities: Developing a tangible sense of community as the key experiential reference point for this sort of retreat was a viewing contemporary films, creating art work/collages/poetry, visual stimulation/drama/mime, and dancing as a major focus in the program. Practically all the retreat activities were regarded as contributing to sense of community, and in turn the sense of community was considered as crucial to the celebration of reconciliation and Eucharist, as well as for any prayer sessions. Hence the following were thought to make community-building contributions:- community singing, eating together, discussions at whole group and small group levels (and including pairs of 'one-to-one' discussions), fun activities, games, recreation activities including walks and games, viewing contemporary films, creating art work/collages/poetry, visual stimulation/drama/mime, and dancing. In addition, prayer times, silent periods, liturgies (Mass and Reconciliation) were also regarded as key community-building activities.

'Sing-alongs' or community singing, accompanied by one or more guitarists (and sometimes other musical instruments) and interactive group games contributed to the "warm, relaxed atmosphere in which community flourishes" (Firman, 1968, p. 179). Br Firman became well known for his "Brother Bill's Songbook" which had the lyrics for many of the songs sung on the camps.

Artwork was a valued 'hands on' community activity in which students were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings with other participants about their 'creations'.

The range of experiential activities that were developed and used in the early Christian Living Camps as noted above (and summarised in Table 3.1) was extensive. Testimony to this is the realisation that many of the early activities are still used in contemporary retreats; in some instances, the range of activities in contemporary retreats is considerably less than what applied in the 1960s and 1970s (Rossiter, 2007). One notable addition has been 'journaling' or students writing a personal account of their reflections and retreat experience.

Religious activities: As noted above, celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist were the focal points of the Christian Living Camps. Usually the Mass was celebrated twice over the two days of the retreat. All the community building activities were regarded as contributing to the tangible sense of community that was celebrated in the Eucharist. The highlights of the first Christian Living Camps were the ‘folk’ Masses celebrated in a relatively informal atmosphere. “Spontaneous and improvised prayer were incorporated into the liturgies” (Neville, 2007) and other basic religious rituals, such as the washing of hands to symbolise the forgiveness of personal sin in the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Students participated in the prayers during the Mass, and in some instances in a “discussion sermon” (Firman, 1968, p. 182) in which participants expressed their thoughts about and understandings of the liturgical readings.

Theological change from Vatican II affecting the liturgy became important for the retreats. English (the vernacular) came into use in the Mass in 1964. Formerly in the Latin liturgy, participants ‘attended’ at Mass, in a sense looking on in awe at what was considered the ‘re-enactment of Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary’. Celebrated in a ‘dead’ language, the Latin Mass left Catholics either to follow the English translation in a missal, or to keep occupied with their own personal prayers. Following the liturgical changes from Vatican II, the new emphasis was on the *celebration* of Mass. Celebration, together with the other two new emphases – *communication* and *participation* – could naturally be enhanced on the communitarian retreat in a more tangible community oriented way (Rossiter, 2007). Neville (2007) and Mason (2008) considered that the early Christian Living Camps, by incorporating progressive ecclesiology and liturgical thinking were able to inspire new enthusiasm amongst in for participating in the Mass. In turn, the Mass and Reconciliation liturgies contributed to “a real sense of community” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 56). This emphasis on ‘good’ liturgy in the first communitarian retreats remained a permanent, distinctive feature of Catholic school retreats.

However, by the 1990s, the role of the priest was reduced significantly as fewer priests were available to attend the whole retreat. By contrast with the first Christian Living Camps where the priest was often the retreat leader, priests would usually be available for Mass and Reconciliation but rarely stayed for the whole retreat. Their contact with students decreased over time as student numbers attending retreats increased. ‘Alternative’, ‘para-liturgies’ were devised in place of the Mass when priests were not available. There was considerable scope for student

participation and creativity in the devising of these celebrations. Para-liturgies of healing were popular with students and teachers, when the traditional sacrament of Reconciliation was unavailable.

Other religious activities included praying together, reflecting on the reading of a passage from the Bible or other relevant literature. Some form of prayer was often used at the start of each retreat session. Meditations were introduced by listening to classical music. Also used were slide shows with music and occasional commentaries. Sequences of 'impact' songs for listening were also used to introduce reflective exercises, sometimes with the participants stretched out on the floor.

Group discussions: Group activities, short inputs and discussions were conducted around themes such as freedom, personal and social concerns, happiness, the Resurrection of Jesus and the relevance of religion. Small group discussions were considered to be a core activity of the retreats. Usually an adult retreat leader served as group leader. A variety of stimulus or 'lead-in' activities were used to introduce the small group discussions. These included short inputs to the whole group from the priest or key retreat leader, short films, readings, Scripture passages, poems, and listening to particular songs (with printed lyrics). There might also be whole group forums as follow ups to the group discussions. Role plays, mimes and creative writing in which students expressed their thoughts and feelings to the rest of the group were also used (Rossiter, 2007)

'Personal sharing' was regarded as the key function of the groups. One of its characteristics was "the depth of their sharing and the new friendships which developed as a result of such intimacy" (Mulligan, 1994, p. 56). But as noted later in the sections on the influence of humanistic psychology on the group leaders, and on emotionality, the model out of which the group leader operated was significant. Generally, the model of group interaction would be best described in terms of being 'communicative', 'personal' and 'generally educative'. But in some cases that could now be regarded as extreme, the preferred model of the group leader might shift more towards a 'counselling' or 'therapeutic' model. The group discussions gave participants an opportunity to explore their own thinking and feelings in a supportive environment and to learn from listening to others; this could help them with the clarification of their sense of personal identity.

Mulligan (1994, p. 57) considered that both intimacy and identity needs were being met within the small group interactions, enabling students to talk about family

and friends, hurts and disappointments, affirmation of each other and relationship with God.

Personal time: The role of personal time was an important feature of the early communitarian retreats. Quiet reflection time and free time were emphasized as being appreciated by students, especially “to be quiet and come to experience God in the quiet of their hearts” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 56). While hardly the same as traditional ‘silent’ retreats, the new communitarian retreats often retained a prominent place for quiet and personal reflection. This was consistent with some of the earliest spirituality principles that affected retreats (c/f Chapter 2) where there was still some sense of withdrawal from the world, prayer and solitude to enhance young people’s religious growth (Shanahan, 1982). These opportunities were regarded as providing students with opportunities to “ponder and reflect” in a world of “noise and pressure” (Mullins, 1989, p. 45).

Resources: The resources used in the early communitarian retreats were contemporary and subject to change, depending on the mood of the retreat group (Neville, 2007). Camp leaders were always on the look-out for new and relevant activities, interactive games or topics for Christian Living Camps with which to engage youth (Firman, 1968; Lundy, 1975). This helped the retreat program to remain up-to-date, effective and relevant.

Perspective on retreats as ‘successful’ religious education: The success of the experiential activities on the Camps affected religious educators’ views of religious education in Catholic schools. From Church documents, the writings of theorists, and professional development related to classroom religious education, they had become interested in a religious education that was trying to be ‘personal’ and ‘relevant’ to the lives of pupils (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). The first communitarian retreats were apparently so successful in doing this, it was like the religious educator’s ‘dream come true’. But this did not solve the problem of personalism and relevance in the classroom component of religious education; rather, it tended to exacerbate the problem initially by raising the obvious question as to why classroom religious education was not ‘doing as well’ as the retreat. At this time, there was no clear or widely accepted differentiation of aims that saw the two contexts as different but complementary as far as young people’s overall religious education was concerned. Some educators tried to replicate the retreat conditions and activities in their religion classrooms; but this proved unsuccessful (Rossiter, 1999). It would take considerable time, and trial and error, before the apparent

problem was resolved with recognition that it was not the appropriate place for special personalism in the classroom; the classroom was more naturally disposed to a 'study' of religion, along the same lines that all other subjects in the formal classroom curriculum were studied. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) have explained this development of a subject-oriented approach to the religion classroom which contrasts with the more experiential component of religious education appropriate in the retreat.

When the first Christian Living Camps were conducted in the mid 1960s, they were seen by some as 'successful' religious education, and as an answer to the problems of growing dissatisfaction with the earlier methods of teaching 'Christian Doctrine' (Rossiter, 1975B). At the time, Firman (1968) considered that the introduction of Christian Living Camps compensated for inadequate teaching of religion in the classroom. As noted above, it took considerable time for the Catholic education sector to understand that retreats were not the answer to problems in classroom religious education.

<i>Table 3.1 Summary of the various activities used on the early communitarian retreats, together with notes on their function.</i>	
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Function</b>
Getting to know you games and 'icebreakers'	Introduction to people from other schools; Learning how to relate to others in a favourable personal climate; Helping overcome shyness and gain self-confidence; Helping participants become more relaxed and hopefully more ready for discussions; Fun methods of community-building; To bring together male and female students to socialize.
Short inputs and stimulus activities	Brief raising of issues and questions for consideration and discussion. Also used to introduce prayer sessions.
Group Discussion	To explore issues in a supportive setting; Learning self-confidence in speaking in a group; Sharing personal ideas and feelings when participants are comfortable contributing in this way. Learning from what others say; Community building; Sharing ideas about personal spirituality and the transcendent.
One-to-one discussions	Helping overcome shyness that may inhibit some from talking in a group; Getting to meet and know particular individuals better.
Affirmation sessions	Usually a part of group discussion where

	participants were invited to make direct positive personal comments about others in the group; when used, this activity was often an emotional one.
Community singing (group sing-along's often with a guitar accompaniment and use of other musical instruments; or singing along to taped songs.)	Community building; Relaxation; Overcoming shyness;
Group activities: art, creative tasks, interactive games, and sport activities, recreation and walks.	To build relationships; getting to know other individuals better; Community building; Stimulus activities for starting discussions; Relaxation and recreation;
Mime/drama	A fun way of introducing topics for discussion or for reporting the results of a discussion. Involvement helps to overcome shyness; Developing a sense of community.
Films	Stimulus material for personal reflection and group discussions; To help with the development of self-awareness/personal development/self-reflection.
Reflections on songs and song lyrics	Stimulus material for personal reflection and group discussions; To help with the development of self-awareness/personal development/self-reflection.
Readings and poetry	Stimulus material for personal reflection and group discussions; To help with the development of self-awareness/personal development/self-reflection.
Meditations (including musical and audiovisual meditations)	Promoting reflectiveness, quietness and prayerfulness.
Communal prayer (prayers, songs, poetry, music)	Praying together as a community; Community-building role.
Private prayer	Personal reflection and prayer.
Mass	To celebrate liturgically with others; An expression of the community being developed on the retreat.
Reconciliation (often included community celebrations of forgiveness/reconciliation together with individual First Rite Reconciliation where the individual meets with a priest for the sacrament).	Promoting personal reflection and spirituality, and 'revue of life'; Reception of the sacrament of reconciliation; Development of a sense of a community that is 'forgiving' and which 'seeks forgiveness'.

The spread of communitarian retreats: In the 1960s and perhaps into the early 1970s, depending on the schools, the new style communitarian retreats coexisted with the more traditional ‘silent’ retreats (Mason, 2008). Gradually, the impact of the communitarian retreats changed Catholic thinking and it was soon felt that the traditional silent school retreat was no longer the only model for young Catholics.

The transition from school silent retreat to communitarian retreat more generally across Catholic schools was a complex process that happened on an individual basis in each school rather than something that was prescribed by school system authorities. Hence it is difficult to map with precision. Further research would be needed to trace this development. The spread of communitarian retreats would have been influenced by a range of factors:-

- Success of communitarian retreats acknowledged by word of mouth among the educators in Catholic schools
- The movement of newly experienced teacher/retreat leaders as they transferred between schools.
- The emphasis on ‘experiential’ and ‘life relevant’ concerns in religious education theory would have made the experience centred communitarian retreats an attractive structure to adopt to promote these aims.
- The spirituality of the new retreats was consistent with the newly emerging Vatican II Catholic spirituality with its emphasis on relationships, Christ-centredness and vernacular liturgy.

### **3.3 CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE NEW STYLE COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS (1960s & 1970s) AND THE MORE TRADITIONAL ‘SILENT’ RETREAT (1950s)**

Table 3.2 summarises key differences between the new communitarian retreats and the traditional silent retreats that were conducted up until the 1960s.

<i>Table 3.2 A comparison of principles/practices for traditional silent retreats with those from the communitarian retreats.</i>		
<b>Comparisons</b>	<b>Traditional ‘silent’ retreats conducted on site at school in the 1950s</b>	<b>Christian Living Camps &amp; communitarian ‘live-in’ retreats away from the school since the mid-1960s</b>
Purposes and aspects that were similar in both formats	To promote the personal spirituality of students within the context of the Catholic faith tradition; To celebrate Mass; To celebrate the sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation; To provide opportunities for individual prayer and reflection on personal life; To receive input from retreat leader(s) that will promote reflection; For ‘live-in’ retreats, to withdraw from the normal activities of school and home; For ‘live-in’ retreats, to enhance the sense of community.	



Some distinctive purposes and practices	Much of the period to be spent in silence; To reflect on (and possibly talk with a priest about )the possibility of following a ‘vocation’ to the priesthood or religious life.	A special focus on living as a Christian community in terms of its friendly accepting relationships.
Silence	Silence a key feature; Often had a talking recreation period in the afternoons when on a live-in retreat;	Occasionally may have opportunities for silent reflection; Otherwise, silence is relatively ‘foreign’ to the retreat community experience.
Inputs/lectures	Extensive series of lectures or inputs from a priest (or retreat leader) were central elements;	Inputs generally brief and as short stimulus material for discussion and reflection.
Discussion	No discussion; May have been a ‘question-box’ time when the priest answered questions for the group.	Discussion a central dynamic to the whole retreat; Discussion was usually within groups, but also included one-to-one discussions and whole group forums.
Forms of address	Those conducting the retreat were addressed formally with titles and surnames.	In some instances, titles were used with Christian names of Religious or Priests.
Personal disclosure	None except for the possibility of a private interview with the retreat priest; Little if any communication with other participants;	Personal self-disclosure of ideas and feelings is common within the groups and one-to-one discussions; Informal times provide opportunities for friendly interactions between individuals; Some retreat leaders may see that telling aspects of ‘their personal story’ is an important contribution; May be conflicting expectations among retreat leaders and participants about how ‘personal’ a group discussion should be and also about the expression of feelings.
Participation at Mass	Traditional ‘attendance’ at Mass in silence; Private prayer during Mass; Mass was in Latin.	Emphasis on active participation, on celebration and on personal communication; Some variety allowed for in choice of readings for Mass; Creative activities may be introduced such as in the use of symbols, mime, artwork, songs etc. Homily may include opportunity for dialogue with the group.
Reconciliation/Confession	Individual Confession a key part of the retreat.	Often a community ‘celebration’ of reconciliation / forgiveness that precedes

		individual first rite reconciliation where individuals receive absolution from the priest.
Site and name of the experience	Usually at school on a school day during school hours; In some instances at a 'retreat house' for a 'live-in' retreat;	Withdrawal to a campsite; The name 'camp' possibly helped distinguish it from the traditional retreat. Hence titles like 'Christian Living Camp' 'Christian Living Weekend' or just 'Camp' or 'Religious Camp'. Eventually the word retreat became the common term.
Singing	None Except for the singing of hymns at Mass	Community singing; 'sing-alongs' to guitar music or taped songs.
Music	None	Songs, reflections on songs as prayers, musical meditations.
Dancing	None	Often a community recreation and community building activity;
Film and audiovisual	Usually none; A feature film might be used in the evening of a live-in retreat – sometimes as a stimulus for reflection; or as a 'fill-in' activity.	Short films and feature films used as stimulus material for discussion; Audiovisual meditations.
Leisure and recreation	When on a 'live-in' retreat, participants often had leisure/recreation time during the afternoon when they could talk to each other.	Leisure activity: games and sports.
Community building activities	The experience was primarily a 'solitary' one; Sense of community might well develop at live-in silent retreats.	Community building regarded as a central dynamic to the retreat; Affirmation by others important in overcoming shyness and developing self-confidence; Many specific community-building activities including fun, games and recreation.
Reading at meal times	Silence at meal times on live-in retreat with readings from lives of the saints, following the common practice at meals in religious communities.	No silence at meals. Meals also regarded as community building activities for meeting and talking with others.
Resources	Literature such as 'lives of the saints' was to be read by students at school day retreats; Note-taking.	Use of contemporary music, songs and song lyrics, audiovisuals, posters, artwork and creative activities as stimulus for reflection and discussion.
Role of retreat leaders	Priest was the retreat leader;	Priest or religious were initially the key leaders, working with a team of adults and at times with help from past pupils; Eventually lay people took all leadership roles on the retreats.

Role of school staff	Mainly in a supervisory role;	Retreat leaders; Leaders of group discussion; Sometimes responsible for particular inputs and stimulus material; Supervisory role;
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A number of the principles evident in the early Christian spirituality that gave rise to retreats (Chapter 2) were evident in both the silent and the communitarian retreats when both were conducted at a live-in site. This included:

- Withdrawal from normal life to a relatively isolated place.
- A live-in community experience.
- Prayer.
- Review of life.
- Sacraments.

Apart from the common purposes listed at the top of Table 3.2, and the focus on prayer and the enhancement of personal spirituality, there was a distinctive difference in the pattern of activities between the two types of retreat. The distinctive difference was the shift from a ‘silent/individual’ style to an ‘active participatory/community’ experience.

### **3.4 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS**

This section will examine some of the factors that affected the development and conduct of the early Christian Living Camps and communitarian retreats.

#### *3.4.1 The Second Vatican Council: The theology and ecclesiology that underpinned the new communitarian retreats and which informed the developing spirituality of the retreat leaders*

The socio-cultural background to the new retreat movement in the 1960s included significant changes both in society and in the Church. While the Second Vatican Council had visions of a new ‘relevance’ for the Church in the modern world, the proposed new vision and understanding of what it meant to be ‘Church’ also caused turbulence amongst those who did not approve of the changes (Alberigo, 2006; *Lumen Gentium*, 1964; Madges & Daley, 2003; O’Collins, 2006).

#### *3.4.2 The impact of the Second Vatican Council on Catholicism*

Vatican II “set in motion wide ranging reforms” (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 41) and this contributed along with other influences to the prominence of a new “experiential catechesis” (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 41). Ecumenism, liturgical renewal and new

understandings the Church had dominated thinking at the Council and immediately after it (O'Collins, 2006). These changes signified a “profound shift in the Church’s thinking about itself and its place in the world” (Ryan, 2006, p. 172). Pre-Vatican II thinking considered that the clergy and religious *were* the Church; to the exclusion of the laity. However the Second Vatican Council regarded the laity as “the people of God” (Ryan, 2006, p. 172), inviting them to contribute to the Church’s identity and mission.

Prior to Vatican II, the Church saw itself as separate from the rest of the world: “If people wanted to be saved, they were obliged to belong to the Catholic Church.” (Madges, 2003, p. 139). This outlook influenced how schools were conducted and how religion was taught. Pope John XXIII’s new vision was “to make clear the Church’s determination not to withdraw into itself” (Alberigo & Komonchak, 2006, p. 26) and to have “definite correspondence with the spiritual needs of the day” (Alberigo, 2006, p. 1). This *aggiornamento* or modernisation would affect the outlook of the retreat leaders and in turn would impact on the structure and processes of the new communitarian retreats.

### 3.4.3 *The place of the new communitarian retreats within thinking about experiential Catechesis*

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) interpreted the development of different approaches to religious education in Catholic schools since the 1950s (See also Ryan, 2006; Rossiter, 1981). The mid 1960s and 1970s was a period when there was a special emphasis on an ‘experiential’ approach (Flynn & Mok, 2002, pp. 259 – 260). While there were difficulties in making this approach work well in the classroom, it seemed to have a ‘perfect match’ with the approach in the new communitarian retreats (Rossiter, 1981). Some religion teachers were so pleased with the success of the retreats, that they tried to implement the same sorts of activities in the classroom – but often this strategy failed. Crawford and Rossiter’s (2006) explanation was that the classroom was not primarily an ideal context for experiential learning in religion; it was more the place for a study of religion with all of the teaching and learning processes that were appropriate to that context. Hence, the retreat was a more ‘experiential, personal and prayerful’ complement to classroom religious education; and it made a significant contribution to the school’s overall religious education program.

Since the 1970s, the success of the retreats and their popularity with students affected teachers' understandings of religious education. For example, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) considered that problems arose with respect to the use of the popular construct 'faith development'. For example: some educators associated faith development with the more personal, experiential parts of religious education (retreats, prayer and liturgy) while the classroom was thought of as concerned only with knowledge. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) felt that this usage was based on an inadequate understanding of how different contexts (retreat, liturgy, prayer and classroom) contributed to pupils' overall religious education and spiritual development.

#### *3.4.4 Change in the spirituality of those who conducted the early communitarian retreats*

Those involved in the development of the early communitarian retreats needed a new theology and theory of catechesis to interpret both the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the camps (McCarthy, 2007). Religious orders were at the forefront of change in the Australian Catholic Church at this time, and this was evident in the developments in the spirituality of its members. In turn, these developments in the spirituality of those who conducted senior school retreats flowed into their understanding of the purposes and practices of retreats; this was to be expected, because enhancing the spirituality and personal development of youth was the overall aim of the communitarian retreats. But the changes in understandings ran more deeply than just style and practices of spirituality; it involved a new understanding of the Church as a prophetic community. In effect a new ecclesiology was emerging (Alberigo, 2006) – and this was affected by a mix of the following influences:-

- The Second Vatican Council;
- Socio-cultural change affecting thinking about human relationships, sexuality etc;
- Humanistic psychology – and the key place of personal relationships in personal development; emphasis on the themes of freedom and individuality;
- Changes within the religious orders that were becoming more attuned to personalism and individualism.
- The new style of communitarian retreats provided a proving ground for thinking through and trying out new approaches to community and personal relationships (Crawford and Rossiter, 1985; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006).

The early retreat leaders considered that the fusing of theological and psychological insights from those times resulted in a Christian (Catholic) spirituality that sought to make the faith tradition and its religious practices as relevant to life as

possible. The very name Christian Living Camp chosen by Neville in 1964 at the start of the new retreat movement was in a sense prophetic. It proposed that the group would try to live together as a Christian community during the camp; and it was hoped that this would provide a model for Christian community that could be taken back into ordinary life. For the students, there were emotions and feelings of euphoria associated with the community experience. It was also likely that the spiritual activities like mass and reconciliation played their part in the overall community experience along with the fun activities and the group discussions.

How the intense experience of Christian community at the retreat might be applied to ordinary life posed some difficulties because all knew that it was not so easy to create a fun-filled accepting personal/social environment in the real world of home, school and life in general. This question will be considered further in the later section on emotionality (section 3.5).

Given the stage of their own personal development while living in a religious order, and given the personal and spiritual issues that they were trying to negotiate at that time just after the second Vatican Council, the agenda on community building, relationships, prayer and spirituality that was being proposed for the students was just as relevant to the retreat leaders. Hence, it is understandable that a number of the adults working in the early Christian Living Camps found that the retreats had a significant impact on their own spirituality. They were working things out for themselves just as much as were the students (English, 2007).

As noted in the section on emotionality, these retreats also helped some young religious learn how to relate to people of the opposite sex at a personal level. For a number of the religious personnel who assisted in the conduct of these new communitarian retreats, their participation in the retreat processes was important for their developing understanding of what a Christian community meant and consequently this affected their thinking about what the Church should be. It also had implications for their changing understanding of what religious life should be. In particular, the retreat movement appeared to convince them that their own personal spirituality needed a strong relationships component. In other words, the capacity to be sensitive to others, to be able to listen and empathise, to be able to reveal one's own feelings and to feel vulnerable in relationships were all considered as integral parts of their new spirituality (English, 2007; Rossiter, 2007).

No doubt because the adults were negotiating some of the same personal development agendas as the senior school students, this would have been reflected in

the adult contributions in group discussions. It could well have been evident to the students that the adult group leaders were not in the groups as representatives of unqualified and authoritative Church wisdom and maturity; but rather, they too were searching for meaning and searching for a personal spirituality. While they had leadership positions, these adults were also 'fellow seekers of spirituality and wisdom' along with the students.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as leaders in the new communitarian retreat movement thought about and experimented with the retreat processes, they were trying to resolve questions about the place of personalism, emotions and spirituality in the new retreat format. However, these issues were not just about senior school retreats. These same questions (about personalism, relationships, emotions and spirituality) were particularly relevant to developments within religious life as the religious orders changed their style of spirituality and living after the Second Vatican Council. Hence the agendas related to the retreats overlapped significantly with the personal agendas of the religious personnel who conducted them. In turn, the planning and conduct of communitarian retreats for senior school students (and later on for adults) often became a significant personal development experience for the retreat leaders (English, 2007; Rossiter, 2007). Aspects of this will be taken up below in the sections on the humanistic psychology movement and on the emotionality of retreats.

The Catholic 'psychological spirituality' that emerged at the time has, in Crawford and Rossiter's (2006) opinion, now become the 'traditional', 'mainline' spirituality of Catholicism in Australia, although there are some Catholics who would prefer to use the word 'traditional' to refer to Catholic spirituality as it was before Vatican II (Gilchrist, 1987). It is likely that those who conduct communitarian retreats today tend to take contemporary Catholic spirituality (with its emphasis on good relationships and community) for granted. Whereas, during the time of the first communitarian retreats, the retreat leaders were actively engaged in forging a new spirituality – a process that was challenging because the pathway forward was not clear. In this sense, the new retreat movement was important for helping promote the development of spirituality in the wider Catholic community in Australia. It was as if both the adults and the senior school students together on retreats were exploring the new agenda of a relationship/community centred spirituality (Rossiter, 2007). As will be noted in the following sections, the retreat leaders were contemplating a spirituality that included a mix from theology

(especially new approaches to Scripture and ecclesiology), humanistic psychology, counselling psychology, personal relationships and emotions – as well as dealing with related issues about the future shape of the Catholic Church and the future form of Christian community within religious orders.

*3.4.5 The influence of the humanistic psychology movement (1960s and 1970s) on those who conducted the communitarian retreats and on their understanding of retreat processes*

In their description of the ‘psychological spirituality’ that emerged in Catholicism in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, Crawford and Rossiter (2006) noted that this was particularly evident in members of religious orders. Many of them were influenced by what was called the humanistic psychology movement as evident in the work of psychologists like Rogers (1961), Maslow (1968), May (1953, 1967), Allport (1961) and even Erikson (1965, 1968). Humanistic psychology made a significant contribution to understanding relationships, personal identity and personal development (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 260). A blending of humanistic psychology with new Christian theology and spirituality was evident in the work of some of the ‘spiritual’ writers of the time such as Kennedy (1967), Greeley (1970), Powell (1969, 1972) and Nouwen (1969).

In the area of Catholic religious education, because of their concern about the “apathy” of the young in religious matters, some educators in the 1960s were challenged to re-think ways to engage with young people (Wolf, 1966, p. 10). Educators were increasingly becoming aware of the limitations of past practices of religion lessons in the classroom (Ryan, 2006). New theories of personal and moral development were thought to be a possible way to engage with students. This thinking would affect approaches to religious education both in the classroom and on retreats (as noted in an earlier section). But it would be on the retreat where this thinking was most applicable.

New classroom curriculum materials in religious education “emphasized the child’s own, personal experience” (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 31). The new experiential approach presumed that God was present in ordinary life and “the task of the teacher was to provide opportunities for students to recognize and experience this presence in their own lives” (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 41). It was within this context that many religion teachers enthusiastically set about to incorporate an experiential approach in the classroom. Within the Catholic community in Australia there was opposition to the experiential approach, claiming that it was ‘vacuous’



(Gilchrist, 1987; Rossiter, 1977; Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 41) because its important emphasis was “personal experience” leading non-supporters to believe that “children were left without a sure guide to their faith” (Ryan & Malone, 1999, p. 41), implying a neglect or omission of Doctrine.

Christian Living Camps reflected well the new experiential approach to religious education. The religious order personnel expressed great interest in “Vatican II theology and in the psychological spirituality that emerged from the 1960s onwards” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 261). The experiential emphasis readily drew on humanistic psychology to inform the activities used on camps to enhance students’ personal experiences and as a result, it was felt to improve their attitudes toward religion (though in fact this did not always eventuate). It was believed that humanistic psychology would make a positive contribution to retreats because the underlying acceptance was that “Camps...constitute an essentially sound psychological approach to religion” (Firman, 1968, pp. 213-214).

Activities like ‘getting to know you’ games, one-to-one discussions, group painting and group singing (Rossiter, 1997) emphasized the experiential dimension of the Camp. Simulation games enhanced relationships between the participants and encouraged participants to imaginatively identify with the situations of others. A drawback of this relational model was that many of those conducting the camps had little experience of knowing how to develop appropriate close relationships themselves and this had the potential to compromise the overall experience (English, 2007).

The new emphasis in retreats on relationships, personal discussion and personal development was something of a social experiment at the time because there were no clear published guidelines as to what should be done on retreats. Hence, a range of ideas from the humanistic psychology movement, encounter groups, counselling and therapy found their way into the rationale of the new retreats and into the language used to interpret their psychological and spiritual processes. Those who were involved in this early retreat ministry, given their lack of experience as group discussion leaders, found that their progress was on “a steep learning curve” (Neville, 2007). Frequently, Neville observed that ‘trial and error’ were part of developing the retreat program and leaders often made appropriate program adjustments during the course of the retreat.

Neville’s theoretical framework for the new style communitarian retreats was inspired by the humanistic psychologists of his era (Neville, 2007). In particular, he

noted the work of Carl Rogers (1963) and Rollo May (1953, 1967, 1969, 1983) who proposed that through intimate personal sharing with others, people were better able to understand and express who they were, resulting in “the grasping of the being of the other person on a different level from our knowledge of specific things about him/her” (May, 1983, p. 92). Rogers (1980), in particular, believed that if people lacked opportunities to communicate their ‘real selves’, then they would experience “the loneliness of not being in touch with any other human being” (Rogers, 1980, p. 166), resulting in a potentially diminished, disconnected person. Rogers (1963) maintained that authentic self-expression only happened when people were in a safe, non-judgmental relationship. “...people instinctively orient themselves toward growth and self-knowledge and that all that is required, in both therapy and education, is the provision of an environment that will facilitate this.” (Taggart, 2001, p. 239)

Retreat leaders considered that the communitarian retreat allowed young people to express themselves freely; this enabled students to “be who you really are” (Neville, 2007) and in turn this enhanced the quality of relationships. Neville’s ideas in developing the new style retreats emerged from the understanding that “human dialogue was a religious activity” (Neville, 2007) as it enabled people to get in touch with the very core of their being.

The experiences of making acquaintance and friendship with both the young participants and the adult team members and the sharing of feelings and thinking with them were acknowledged as ‘personal development’ for those who conducted the new communitarian retreats (Rossiter, 2007). Managing their own emotions from the retreats was as important as managing the emotions of the students. These questions will be taken up in more detail in the section on emotionality.

Central to humanistic psychology and to the spirituality of the retreat leaders at the time was the notion that developing human relationships was a key to personal development. This was something of a ‘new’ and ‘exciting’ and an ‘emotional’ possibility for religious personnel when their immediate past experience in their religious orders was that personal relationships – especially ‘particular friendships’ – were inappropriate and dangerous to the ‘spiritual life’. There may well have been a latent component of homophobia in this earlier prevailing mentality. The new thinking became evident in the way words were used to describe what people were trying to do in their lives and in the new retreats: ‘getting close to people’, ‘being sensitive’ ‘being vulnerable’ ‘sharing feelings’ ‘intimacy’ etc. (Rossiter 2007).

For a number of religious personnel, this new found personalism heightened their feeling that their personal intimacy needs would not be met within a religious order and more than likely this contributed to their eventually leaving the order. For those who remained in the orders, and who valued the new psychological insights, their spirituality came to include an important place for healthy personal relationships and friendships.

For religious personnel, and later for lay people involved in the running of retreats, the interest in personalism and relationships translated into an interest in counselling psychology. In Sydney, the Catholic Counselling Institute set up in the mid 1960s proved to be an ideal organisation for meeting these needs. The Institute, directed by Perry since its inception, and which still functions today, was characterised by its blending of psychology with Christian spirituality. Rossiter (2007) considered that the Institute had made a significant contribution to the personal development of Catholics (especially those involved in education) over many years.

The interest in counselling psychology on the part of the early leaders of the new communitarian retreat movement meant that the sharing of feelings and developing a level of intimacy in group discussions became important aims for the retreat (Rossiter, 2007). While this was often regarded as healthy and beneficial for the participants, there were somewhat inevitable problems when the level of sharing or the feelings expressed were later felt to be manipulated. This issue will be considered further in the section on emotionality.

While few retreat leaders would have considered their group discussions as therapy groups, there may well have been some influence from this sort of 'therapeutic' thinking'. Certainly, the notion of counselling relationships was influential at the time for educators. Some excesses occurred when retreat leaders appeared to be too interested in locating 'problem' students on the retreat who could then be counselled privately (Rossiter, 2007). An indication of the general thinking about these questions in the 1970s was an article published in the North American journal *Religious Education* titled "A Psychotherapeutic Model for Religious Education". Its author claimed that the main aim for the religious educator was to

attempt to establish a curative interpersonal relationship...It is not enough that religious educators have a mastery of their content. Students cannot be transformed just by exposure to brilliantly presented content any more than neurotics can be transformed just by reading a textbook on abnormal psychology. In religious education, as in psychotherapy, curative

transformation is effected only with a process of interpersonal relationship (Brink, 1977, p. 410)

At the time the great interest of religious educators was in *personalism* and *relevance* (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 391). It was a problem at that time determining what was appropriate for personalism in the classroom and in other settings; and to some extent this still remains a problem both for retreats and classroom religious education. The friendly, relatively informal situation in the retreat made it a more receptive environment for personal discussion. Hence, retreat leaders tended to have as one of their main aims to help young people share insights at a personal level. In this sense, the retreat was regarded as a more successful context for religious education. In addition, those who favoured the use of the construct catechesis, which had long been prominent in the official Catholic documents that underpin Church ministry and religious education, would claim that the retreat was a more appropriate context than the classroom for catechesis as a 'faith-sharing dialogue' (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985).

Part of the influence of humanistic psychology on the retreat leaders at the time was also evident in the use that was made of ideas about personal change through group methods. For example, the handbook on *Organisational change through group methods* by Schein and Bennis (1965) was a typical work in this area that was examined as a model for understanding how young people might learn personally from group discussion. Rossiter (1978, pp. 69-72) drew on this work for explaining the dynamics of group discussion on retreats. It suggested that young people might 'scan' the discussion environment for 'new ideas about self' and then 'identify' with images that they found attractive. In addition, some of the retreat leaders in the movement used the encounter group terms such as 'unfreezing' previous attitudes among participants before looking at new ideas about relating at a personal level, and then helping 'refreeze' the new attitudes before leaving the retreat experience – making use of attitudinal change theory (Rossiter, 1978).

Participation in adult encounter groups in university, church and other settings was not uncommon for the retreat leaders at the time. In all likelihood this increased their interest in the psychological dynamics of encounter groups for interpreting their work in retreats. For example, in 1972 a number of key retreat movement leaders in the Sydney area arranged to participate in an encounter group learning experience with Professor P. Pentony, a professor of psychology at the Australian National University (English, 2007; Rossiter, 2007). While aimed

primarily at the personal development of the adult participants, it was regarded as important for understanding the psychological dynamics of retreat work. After this meeting, some of the retreat leaders were more explicit about their role in retreats as engaging in a process of ‘facilitating attitudinal change’ in the students. Some saw this shift in thinking and practice as refining and sharpening the personal influence of the retreat, while others saw it as moving in a direction of emotional manipulation (Rossiter, 2007).

The humanistic psychology movement affected the new retreats by helping to sharpen the importance ascribed to personal relationships in both personal development and spirituality. A part of this was its affect on the approaches taken in group discussions. At the time, this thinking prompted experimentation in discussions ranging from a more generally educational approach to something that was more akin to encounter group processes, counselling or therapy (Rossiter, 2007). Another aspect was the use of affirmation sessions where participants were invited to make personal positive comments about others – this was often an emotional experience. It took time for retreat leaders to develop perspective on how personal a group discussion should be. There were both successes and failures; both healthy discussions and those that could be described as manipulative. In some cases, individual group leaders appeared so intent on pursuing counselling relationships with students on the retreat that this caused problems.

There was a strong agreement amongst those who conducted the first communitarian retreats (and this remains the case for leaders at retreats today), that they provided a special opportunity for personal discussions and reflection on life; and that this was a valuable platform for promoting young people’s spiritual and personal development. But in terms of the precise interventions of adult group leaders to try to make exchanges in group discussions more personal and self-revelatory, there remain questions about propriety and about where healthy personal discussion can merge into something that is emotionally manipulative.

### **3.5 KEY ISSUES RELATED TO EMOTIONALITY IN THE CONDUCT OF COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS**

#### *3.5.1 The emotional dimension of the communitarian retreats*

In retreat practice, the joy of forming new acquaintances and friendships within a favourable climate had a significant emotional impact on the students. In the early communitarian retreats, this was no doubt enhanced by the meeting of boys and girls from single-sex schools. At a developmental stage when the forming of personal

relationships and learning how to share feelings were usually problematic, and at times even traumatic for adolescents (Erikson, 1965, 1968), the communitarian retreat provided a very favourable situation and suitable fun activities that made the forming of new acquaintances and friendships very easy. This community experience inevitably gave the participants a feeling of well-being and euphoria. It generated a lot of emotion. When communitarian retreats became more common in particular schools the early inter-school, voluntary retreats were discontinued. Nevertheless, while the meeting of 'new' friends was no longer be such a prominent dynamic, the friendship theme – for those who already knew each other — remained. The idea of 'going away with friends' still contributed to the retreats' community development theme. And the community experience still generated emotion and euphoria.

Teachers and parents interpreted the effusive expression of emotion and comments about how 'wonderful' and 'enjoyable' the retreats were as indicators that the experience had been very successful. Feeling good about the retreat was taken to be a principal signifier of success and effectiveness. This also applied to the retreat leaders. Their own feelings of euphoria during the retreat became important for them.

As the early communitarian retreats increased in popularity with students, the retreat leaders considered a number of questions related to emotionality (McCarthy, 2007; Neville, 2007; Firman, 2007; Rossiter 2007). Intimate exchanges in group discussions could lead some students to tears, girls more so than boys. For some retreat leaders, 'tears' became a sort of 'barometer of success' for their discussion groups (Rossiter, 2007). After seeing the emotion, and sometimes excessive emotion, on a number of retreats, Neville (2007) noted that that by 1970-71, "I changed my feelings about that. It [emotionality] was fairly big for me in the beginning. My own learning in that was that it was very easy to manipulate kids emotionally in that context, and I didn't want to do it". He added "it seemed a bit risky and manipulative". Expressions of emotion and euphoria were not the aims of the camps but they were often identified as characteristics. Neville (2007) considered that students "were too easily influenced". There were no written guidelines at the time to caution leaders about any excesses with regard to emotionality. To some extent this still remains a problem with contemporary communitarian retreats.

Neville (2007) also drew attention to the situation when students from different schools attended the communitarian retreats; it was more difficult to monitor students' feelings and try to address any potential problems.

It's a bit difficult in those situations when you've got kids from half a dozen schools there and they all disappear in different directions (while on camp) and sometimes, there isn't a teacher [from their school] at the retreat [to help them understand the emotions they are feeling (Neville, 2007).

Debriefing students about how and why there was an intensity of feelings and euphoria on the retreats was an important aspect of helping students "put their felt emotions into some perspective" (Rossiter, 2007). Rossiter (1997, 2007) described what he called 'healthy emotionality and euphoria' on retreats where this arose naturally as a by-product of general educational activities and was not sought after manipulatively by the retreat leaders as an end in itself. It could then be understood by the students as a natural outcome of a good community experience which could facilitate important learnings about community and relationships that endured after the emotion and euphoria had subsided.

The development of a group sense of euphoria often occurred on the communitarian retreats giving the students an enhanced feeling of well-being. Despite debriefing and cautioning students about excessive euphoric feelings, there were still problems: "there were lots of things you could say to them then and they wouldn't hear because everyone's feeling so wonderful" (Neville, 2007). Students' expectation when they were in this state of euphoria was one of disbelief that the 'outside' world would not share their feelings of joy too; they were not always ready to listen to information or advice about putting these feelings into some perspective. Sometimes students felt a type of 'let-down' or 'emotional deflation' after they returned home from a retreat on which they experienced an 'emotional high'. Just what would be the repercussions when students returned home could not always be predicted by the retreat leaders. However, efforts were usually made by teachers from their particular school on a retreat to have some follow up contact with participants in the week after the retreat to see how they felt about the experience and to talk over any difficulties that might be experienced in what was called 're-entry' after the retreat. It appeared that this re-entry problem was less prominent as communitarian retreats became more common. As for many of the issues considered in these sections, there are no systematic research findings about how the students perceived both the retreat experience itself and its possible spiritual influence.

Retreat leaders on the early communitarian retreats acknowledged that euphoria could grow out of whole group activities when students engaged in mood-enhancing games and group singing, and also through the feelings created when individuals made a moving self-disclosure in group discussions (McCarthy, 2007). Tiredness could also influence the group mood. In the inter-school retreats a prime source of intense feelings was the new friendships and relationships that were formed – and the result of young people’s intense engagement with each other. O’Byrne (1982) registered misgivings about giving too much attention to the generation of euphoria; he considered that a limitation of retreat euphoria was the transitory nature of the “high” feelings (p. 48) often resulting in disappointment for students when they returned to their normal surroundings.

### *3.5.2 Personalism and emotion in group discussions*

Retreat group leaders have acknowledged the need for natural limits to self-disclosure in group discussions, and for safe personal boundaries for all participants (Harrison, 1989). No one, including both students and group leaders, should feel any psychological pressure to reveal their personal thoughts and feelings if they did not want to (Rossiter, 2007). This view held that above all there needed to be a sense of freedom and safety, and a lack of any compulsion, if discussions at a personal level were to be authentic and healthy.

The content of many retreat programs is often highly personal in what it asks students and teachers to discuss. This is particularly true of programs which focus intentionally on relationships within the students’ families. Such discussions can lead to what one teacher graphically described as ‘soul-vomiting’, that time when the small group process becomes so intense, students find themselves sharing aspects of themselves that they would not normally share and later regret (Harrison, 1989, p. 16).

Some group leaders seemed to get the emotional dimension out of perspective and gave the impression that they were actively seeking very personal contributions and expression of feelings from participants. This may have resulted in the group feeling that they had participated in a very moving experience; sometimes this was accompanied by tears (Rossiter, 2007). Some group leaders considered that caution was needed here because this approach could be emotionally manipulative. There were instances where students later acknowledged that they did feel manipulated emotionally (Rossiter, 2007). Harrison (1989) believed that retreat leaders should always make the decision “to not open up deeply personal issues in a deliberate manner on retreat” (p. 16), especially when there was no time to discuss in detail,



sometimes “painful experiences, and then wander on into the next session with no further reference to what has been surfaced” (p. 16).

Some retreat leaders may have pursued the emotional approach in part because of their own personal needs. They appeared to use the intimacy of relating to students in the group discussions and in other informal interactions more to meet their own personal needs than those of the students – and this seemed to skew their conduct of discussions and informal relationships. Rossiter (2007) referred to this problem as having some retreat leaders who were “emotional vampires”.

In some instances, this problem extended into counselling relationships. A group leader might appear on the lookout for troubled students and these were then invited to relatively long talks or counselling sessions outside the formal retreat hours; in some cases, these individuals asked students if they could give them a ‘relaxing massage’. Some students who were approached in this way later complained to a teacher back at the school, noting that they felt very uncomfortable in that situation (Rossiter, 2007).

The sorts of problems noted above are still possible in contemporary retreats. However, today, with greater public awareness of, and community attention given to matters of child protection, it is less likely that the last mentioned problem would now occur during retreats. The boundaries and limits regarding relationships between teachers and students are more clearly defined now than perhaps they were at the time of the first Christian Living Camps. The extent to which these questions about emotionality and personalism on communitarian retreats remain issues for those currently involved in conducting retreats is yet to be determined. The survey in the second phase of this study would canvass the views of teachers on some of the questions.

In the interests of promoting a healthy personal environment in communitarian retreats, it remains important for retreat leaders to clarify expectations regarding what is an appropriate level of personal sharing and expression of emotion in discussion groups. This would appear to be an integral part of defining the role of the adult group leaders in the communitarian retreat and a key issue to be addressed in professional development programs for the training of new retreat leaders. Also important would be the articulation of a code of ethics to be followed by the adults who were responsible for the retreats. These considerations need to include a systematic understanding of the emotionality of retreats so that the conduct of retreats and the various activities and discussions would be both

appropriate and healthy for students.

### *3.5.3 Group leaders' expressions of personal views and emotions*

Another issue that was a part of the emotionality of the new communitarian retreats was the extent to which the adults as group leaders would reveal their own personal views and express their own emotions to the students. If the structure of the retreat was naturally geared to personalism, and if communicating at a personal level was proposed as one of the main goals of the discussion groups, then it was appropriate for the adult group leaders to contribute their personal views as would the students. There were differences in the ways that group leaders approached this.

Some group leaders felt that they should set the personal tone in the group discussion by being very forthcoming about their own personal story, and feelings etc. While some contributions in this direction could well have been within the limits that could be interpreted as a healthy personalism, it was also an area where imbalance and excessive self revelation could create problems.

This was one of the areas in the emotional dimension to retreats that required clarification and guiding ethical principles as far as the professional development of retreat leaders was concerned. There was the potential for problems where the adults developed unrealistic expectations about how personal they should be in the group discussions. At times, this question became a crucial one for teachers who were considering, or who were being considered for, the role as a group leader on a senior school retreat. At times, staff might decide whether or not they would be interested in this role specifically because of the stand they would take on this question. Some wanted to be retreat leaders because they felt comfortable with revealing their personal views to students; whereas others were not interested precisely because they were reluctant to be in a position where they felt they had to talk about themselves with students in a personal way (Rossiter, 2007).

Quillinan (1995) claimed that the expectation that retreat staff would share aspects of their personal lives with students in the small group came to be a standard part of their involvement in retreats. Giving 'witness' in a small, secure group was recognized as having the potential to have a powerful impact on students. However, cautions about "foolish or inappropriate disclosure" (Boonen, 1992, p. 23) in the small group discussions were emerging and this served as a warning to teachers to avoid unprofessional personal disclosure that might lead to embarrassing consequences.

Rossiter considered that the key issue here was freedom and lack of any psychological pressure on either adult group leader or students to reveal personal views if they felt in any way uncomfortable about this. He proposed that the principles of committed impartiality as developed by Hill (1981), summarised in Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 295-298) should be adopted by group leaders.

#### *3.5.4 Emotional aspects of the personal relationships between adult group leaders and students*

This was regarded as an important area for the leaders of the first Christian Living Camps. Their personal relationships with students on the camp were intended to model what was appropriate in a Christian community – relationships that were friendly, caring, affirming, and trusting. This inevitably included managing the feelings that the teachers had for individual students and their reciprocal feelings. This was always an area that had to be negotiated sensitively and ethically by teachers at school; but in the friendly and personal atmosphere of the communitarian retreat, it was more noticeable as an issue – both with its healthy potentialities as well as its problems.

For some young Catholic religious teachers in the 1960s and 1970s, relating to 18 year old students of the opposite sex, as well as to other retreat leaders of the opposite sex, was a new and relatively emotional experience. Because of the relative social isolation within the religious orders, and because of the many restrictions on relationships with people of the opposite sex, the friendly relationships between retreat leaders and students in the early Christian Living Camps was as much a personal learning experience in relationships for some of the adults as it was for the students (English, 2007; Rossiter, 2007). How teachers might handle emotional ‘crushes’ on them that some students sometimes developed, as well as teachers feeling attracted to some of the students, were issues that did occur but which were not always talked about by the retreat leaders at the time (Rossiter, 2007). These questions and sensitive, ethical responses to them still remain a part of the overall emotionality of retreats that need to be understood by the retreat leaders.

Because the communitarian retreat had a natural affinity for personalism, it had the potential to promote healthy acquaintances and friendship, as well as emotions and euphoria. Together with this potential, was the risk of problems when this personalism became excessive or exaggerated. Collectively, much of the potential value of such experiences for young people came to be well understood by

the early communitarian retreat leaders, as well as the need for caution. It is likely that these questions have remained important throughout the history of communitarian retreats in Catholic schools, and that they would be important for any professional development aimed at retreat leaders.

### **3.6 OTHER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CONDUCT AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS**

#### *3.6.1 The use of technologies on the early Christian Living Camps and potential problems today*

The early communitarian Christian Living Camps gave special attention to community singing as a key community building and ‘relaxing’ activity (Neville, 2007; Firman, 2007). Overhead projectors, record players, tape recorders, high-fidelity sound systems and the use of song books and a variety of percussion musical instruments, as well as guitars, were used to enhance the community singing and the experience of bonding as a community (Neville, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Firman, 2007). Tape recorders were at this time still something of a novelty. Taped popular songs were often used to substitute for musicians for community singing; they were used at times by students for interviewing participants as part of the process of getting to know each other (St Michael’s College, 1971, p. 37).

Significant use was also made of short 16 millimetre films as stimulus material for discussion and reflection, The United States Catholic series of films *Teleketics* was popular.

Musical meditations in which students listened to classical and other music on high quality sound systems was used. Also audio visual presentations with colour slides and music were also used for meditations (Rossiter, 1978).

#### *3.6.2 Students from single sex vs co-educational schools*

Until the late 1960s, practically all Catholic secondary schools were segregated as single sex schools. The new religious Camps brought together boys and girls from these separate sex schools who were curious and interested about meeting people of the opposite sex; and this was a key dynamic on which the camps built their experience of the ‘acquaintance process’ and ‘community’ (McCarthy, 2007; Firman, 2007; Rossiter, 2007; Neville, 2007). The camps provided a healthy context for meeting young people of the opposite sex, and for learning how to relate to each other; this was a significant part of the appeal for attending. The following reasons for attending Christian Living Camps were given by a group of students in 1971:

- ‘...I thought I’d get more out of a mixed camp’
- “To get to know more girls”
- “A good opportunity to meet and get to know a variety of boys” (St Michael’s College, 1971, p. 37).

By 1970, students from co-educational schools were attending the Christian Living Camps. This did not seem to affect the utility of the dynamic of ‘meeting new people’ (Rossiter, 2007). When the communitarian retreat replaced the school silent retreats, and the need for inter-school camps declined and disappeared, (as noted above) the ‘friendship’ dynamic used on retreats was modified, but still remained important (Rossiter, 2007). The notion of ‘going away with friends’ became more prominent while ‘getting to know people better’ remained.

### *3.6.3 Acceptance of communitarian retreats by school authorities*

While those conducting the early communitarian retreats and students attending them were always enthusiastic, some Catholic schools viewed them cautiously and proceeded to monitor them with a certain reserve. “It was sometimes difficult to get the school authorities (principals) to approve of them” (Neville, 2007). It took time before the name Christian Living Camp changed to the more general terms ‘retreats’ or ‘religious camps’. Nevertheless, many of the same dynamics remained, even if the formats were varied.

Gradually, as the communitarian format became widely accepted and became the norm for school retreats, it was evident that they had achieved strong support from students, teachers, school authorities and parents. As noted in chapter 1, there was eventually some mention of the value of retreats in diocesan documents on religious education and Catholic schools, but the statements were brief and general. While the valuing of retreats in Catholic school culture became strong, this was not reflected in the normative documentation on Catholic schooling.

## **3.7 THE WIDER DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND RELATED ISSUES IN THEIR CONDUCT**

Despite any initial reserve about communitarian retreats in the late 60s by those not involved in their conduct, they eventually became the common format for retreats in Catholic secondary schools. The following sections report on a range of developments and issues related to the wider adoption of the communitarian retreat into Catholic secondary schools.

### *3.7.1 The formation of retreat teams of specialist personnel to conduct retreats for Catholic secondary schools*

The first Christian Living Camps and the follow up adoption of the communitarian format for retreats in particular schools were staffed by key adult leaders from the schools concerned, together with the help of priests from religious orders who were specialising in this form of ministry to youth. “Burnout” (Fledmeyer, 1998) for those conducting retreats on a full-time basis and diminishing numbers of men and women in religious orders were impacting on retreats. This began a tradition that is still followed in some schools which have retained principal responsibility for the conduct and staffing of their retreats. This would include recruitment of new staff who would learn their by participation in the adult leadership team for the retreats.

However, many schools did not have the personnel with expertise to mount a program of retreats; they could not rely on their own resources. A number of religious orders addressed this problem for their schools by setting up specialist retreat leadership teams which would conduct communitarian retreats at a campsite specially set up for the purpose, or at other suitable venues. Examples of this were the Christian Brothers Youth Apostolate Team (YAT) and the Marist Retreat Team. The Christian Brothers team conducted school retreats at the Brothers’ rural establishment at Mulgoa west of Sydney from 1973. Such teams still operate in different parts of Australia in 2009. While initially composed exclusively of religious personnel, these retreat teams gradually included lay people. Also, some young ex-students would serve in a supporting role for a year or so before starting further studies or a career.

Some Religious Education Coordinators in schools considered that ‘ready-made’ retreat packages made the organisation of retreats easier and less labour intensive than a program devised, planned and conducted by the school staff.

While specialist retreat teams conducted programs at their own “home base” (Mullins, 1989, p. 45), they would also travel to particular sites to conduct retreats for particular schools. This proved important for schools in regional areas. Descriptions of the work of these retreat teams were provided by Prout (2001), Shanahan (1982) and Mullins (1989, p. 45). The retreat teams aimed to create a climate “where the youth can discover worth as unique individuals in a community context which is welcoming, happy, free, open and trusting; and can also share the meaningful faith of the Team” (O’Byrne, 1982, p. 47). Students were given opportunities for structured quiet time (O’Byrne, 1982) where they could reflect.

The development of retreat teams was also responding to changes in the profile of staff in Catholic schools where there was a rapid decrease in the numbers of religious personnel and an ever increasing proportion of lay teachers (McQuillan, 2001, p.76; Ryan, 2007, p. 86). In addition, some of the religious personnel moved out of teaching into other chosen ministries, one of which was working in specialist retreat centres as part of retreat teams.

Another development within the specialist teams occurred when some took on a ministry to youth in a more general way that was not specifically in the service of any particular school. Hence, in addition to basic work servicing the retreat needs of religious order owned schools, the residential retreat centres sometimes took on the role of being a 'drop in' centre for youth, with a special interest in troubled or homeless youth (Lundy, 1985; O' Byrne 1982; Rossiter, 2007). This structure also provided some support for those known as 'street kids'. In these situations, something like a communitarian retreat was still offered to the young people concerned. In addition, 'holiday' type camps were offered to disadvantaged groups of children, where local teams of young adults volunteered their services to conduct the program and form communities with the children (E.g. Edmund Rice Camps; Rossiter, 2007). Some retreat teams also offered what were called 'street retreats' which took a small group of students into problem areas in the inner city (like Kings Cross and Darlinghurst in Sydney) and let them see 'street people'. Whether these social engagement experiences qualified for the term 'retreat' has been questioned by some; these activities were also problematic in terms of the potential dangers that might be encountered in these situations (Rossiter, 2007).

An example of new travelling retreat teams that offered programs to schools was the National Evangelisation Team ministry (NET, 2002). The National Evangelisation Teams consist of young people trained in conducting student retreats in schools. These young retreat leaders are involved in a six-week, live-in training program and on completion of their training, are available to conduct retreats around Australia. The extent to which their programs are pentecostalist in spiritual style remains to be considered (Rossiter, 2007).

Harrison (1989) identified issues that were considered impediments to the conduct of retreats. Lack of programming, unclear objectives regarding the retreat experience and poor processes within small groups created a "hotch-potch of content" (p. 16) that exacerbated and restricted "the continuity and creativity of the program" (p. 16) and often resulted in "staff feeling unsure of themselves" (p. 16).

Limited or no opportunities to meet as a retreat staff, regularly frustrated those responsible for their conduct (Harrison, 1989, p. 15). One of the issues affecting the work of retreat teams was the constant pressure under which they worked, the time spent travelling and the maintenance of energy levels needed for this personally demanding ministry. At times the teams have no adequate break between retreats (Prout, 2004). As a consequence of the intense work load, team members have experienced 'burn-out' and this in turn affected the stability of the teams.

Other issues related to the work of retreat teams were:-

- Retreat timing: Sometimes it did not suit schools to offer students a retreat at a time that suited the retreat teams because of potential clashes with other important activities in the school calendar. Schools needed some flexibility in the timing of retreats that fitted in with their academic year.
- Relevance of the retreats: Sometimes it was judged that the programs offered by the retreat teams were not always as relevant to students' needs as they might be. Sometimes the teachers in a school judged that they could tailor make a retreat program to the needs of their students; and there was more scope for follow up than for the retreat team who did not know the students personally, making the retreat less likely to be perceived as a transitory event. Also there was more scope to address the particular needs of students and what were considered to be issues relevant to them. But the cost of this approach meant that schools would have to staff, plan and conduct their own retreats.
- Decrease in numbers of personnel in retreat teams: The number of travelling retreat teams dwindled over the years as religious orders began to decrease their supply of religious personnel for work either in schools, or in support of schools in ministries like retreats. One significant tragedy in 1992 put great pressure on the 'travelling retreat team' model. A team of Passionist priests were killed in a car accident while on their way to conduct a school retreat. This exacerbated the problem in finding suitable retreat teams and priests who could participate in school retreats (Habermann, 2007).

### *3.7.2 Retreat training programs for the professional development of retreat leaders*

As regards both school retreat staff and retreat teams, there was a gradual shift from religious order personnel to lay teachers assuming the responsibility for the conduct of retreats (Boonen, 1992). While, as noted above, some religious orders set up specialist retreat teams to support the conduct of retreats in Catholic secondary schools, and while this also served to help sustain the distinctive historical charism of former religious order schools, the Australian Catholic dioceses, with some exceptions, have not yet taken steps to support the retreat movement in schools in the same way. This pattern has also tended to apply to special retreat training programs for teachers which have, in the main, been initiated by the religious orders.



The need for training programs for teachers who would be involved in the conduct of communitarian retreats was based on the principle that the school itself will provide adult retreat leaders who will contribute to the planning and conduct of retreat activities, especially group discussions, and would not be limited to just a supervisory role. This would be the case even if a specialist was recruited from outside to be the leader of the retreat team. As lay people became the majority of teachers in Catholic schools, and where the schools were committed to the conduct of retreats by their own staff, the need for ‘on the job’ and professional training programs for retreat leaders became more of an issue. For example, Mullins (1989, p. 45) reported that retreats were experiences for “faith and values formation”, challenging all staff to be responsible for them, concluding that “the retreat program is a total school responsibility.”

One example of a retreat training program was set up by the Marist Brothers in Sydney in the late 1990s. Called the Montagne Institute, it conducted a program for the preparation of teachers for the role of adult leaders at school communitarian retreats. In addition, the Institute had the program accredited with Australian Catholic University so that those who successfully completed the program, in its lectures, experiential elements and assessment tasks, would qualify for one unit of credit in the University’s Master of Religious Education program (Ryan, 2008). A similar program was set up at the same time and conducted by a team of key retreat personnel in the Catholic school system in the diocese of Lismore, NSW (Rossiter, 2007). It too was accredited as a Masters of Religious Education unit by the Australian Catholic University.

There is no significant Australian literature on the training teachers for retreat work. Programs such as those noted above would prepare their own notes and resource materials for their own participants. For some teachers interested in the conduct of school retreats, opportunities for them to participate in a ‘staff retreat’ could have been helpful in giving them some idea of what is involved in school retreats (Hanley, 1990).

### *3.7.3 Retreats for the training of teachers*

Some ‘one off’ retreat-training courses were offered at Catholic Education Office levels in some dioceses. Practical advice on how to prepare for and conduct retreats was given in Sydney (1992), Parramatta, (1997, 1998) and Canberra-Goulburn

(1993), (Claessen, 2007; O'Reilly, 2007). In the early 1990s, Claessen developed some retreat guidelines at CEO level:

In addition to writing the guidelines for retreats and providing support and processes for individual schools to develop their own in house programs, I also ran “Planning and Surviving Student Retreats – parts 1 and 2” – a program at an archdiocesan level that lasted for two days. Part 1 focused on general stuff from the guidelines, Part 2 was people actually developing retreat programs for their contexts. Their programs were assessed and those deemed competent by me were given a certificate from the archdiocese which outlined what outcomes were covered in the program as well as the fact that they had completed the assessment task successfully. I even ran this program for a school in the Wagga diocese – with the permission of their CEO (Claessen, 2007).

Despite some promising conversations with tertiary academics of having a retreat program form part of the Graduate Certificate in Religious Education, “we were never able to establish recognition by them of this program” (Claessen, 2007).

Habermann, a Sydney secondary school principal in 1997, tried to address the difficulties schools were having as regards the training of teachers for retreat work by conducting weekend retreat workshops for teachers who were interested in being involved in retreat work (Habermann, 2007). He drew on his previous experience on school retreats as a former religious brother. These workshops proved popular with teachers. A similar program had been conducted earlier for adults interested in retreat work in Sydney in 1978 and 1984 by Rossiter (Rossiter, 2007).

The Parramatta Diocese, from about 1997 to 2001 directed teachers to the Montagne Institute for retreat training (noted above) (Ryan, 2008). The Diocesan retreat courses included opportunities for participants to “explore each person’s ideas on how they see the value of a retreat, what they consider the students will get out of this experience and how they feel about being involved with the intimacy of a three day retreat” (Quillinan, 1995, p. 36).

#### *3.7.4 Spirituality and retreat programs for teachers*

Catholic Education Offices came to regard the spiritual development of educators as an important part of the overall ministry of Catholic education (Quillinan, 1995). In addition to sponsoring studies in theology and religious education, some Catholic Education Offices offered retreat-like spiritual development experiences for teachers. For a number of years up to 2007, the Sydney Catholic Education Office supported a Spirituality Team which conducted various programs for teachers, including retreats.

These sorts of experiences would have been likely to dispose teachers in favour of school retreats and may have contributed something to their interest and skill in conducting school retreats. School administrators would encourage staff to attend retreats or courses in spirituality as part of their professional development (Hanley, 1990).

### 3.7.5 *Training students as group leaders*

One school introduced a system for training older students to act as group leaders on retreats for junior classes. This school used a 'peer ministry' training system. Year 10 volunteer students would act as group leaders for Year 8 retreat days with the Year 10 students committing themselves to "a three hour training program after school" (Mullins, 1989, p. 46). These students were required to participate in one weekly school Mass and one weekly prayer group for an extended period of time as part of their preparation.

In some instances, just as former students were invited to participate as leaders in the school retreats, parents were also involved (Rossiter, 2007). This may have helped address the problem of recruiting school staff. 'On the job' training was presumed as a basis for their involvement. Some past pupils eventually became very experienced in retreats and in youth ministry.

### 3.7.6 *Retreat resources*

By the 1980s, there were a number of youth ministry manuals published in the United States that provided youth leaders with ready-made programs for conducting voluntary weekend or summer holidays youth camps (Harman, 1985; Price & Price, 1987; Reichter, 1983; Rydberg, 1985; Sawyer, 1987, 1988; Schultz, 1989). Most of the manuals emphasized a psychological orientation and gave prominent attention to "share deep feelings and inner thoughts" (Rydberg, 1985, p. 10) as a means "to bring about personal and spiritual growth" (Rydberg, 1985, p. 16).

Most manuals followed similar aims:

1. To provide a place where young people "can share their deepest joys and sorrows" (Rydberg, p. 8)
2. For youth "to discover their unique gifts and abilities" (Rydberg, p. 8)
3. "To know more about the person of Jesus Christ" (Rydberg, p. 8)
4. "To understand and experience joy and fun" (Rydberg, p. 9)

The similarity in purposes was also evident in each of the following areas:

- Providing a place for youth to meet.

- Sharing of personal ideas and feelings.
- To promote personal and social development.
- Religious-oriented focus of Jesus and God.
- Community building; experiencing joy and fun.

It remains to be determined just how much use Australian Catholic school retreat leaders made of manuals like this from the United States. Rossiter (2007) considered that the influence was minimal and that the texts served as a minor source of additional activities that could be used. In addition, he judged that the manuals appeared to presume a clientele of young people who showed a more clear cut commitment to Church membership; in other words, those young people for whom the US retreats were being prepared were more an established church youth rather than like many in Australian Catholic secondary schools where a significant proportion of the students were not regular church goers (Rossiter, 2007).

Little in the way of resource materials was published by educators in the Catholic sector in support of retreats. Claessen (2007), working from the Catholic Education Office in Canberra in the 1990s, produced a manual and ran sessions for conducting retreats. In the early 1990s, Religious Education consultants in the Sydney Catholic Education Office produced a booklet listing available campsites and retreat houses in which retreats could be conducted. But this volume was not in the category of a retreat manual. Some individual schools would prepare their own ‘planning booklets’ which were used to help retreat teams focus on the planning and conduct of their school retreats (Rossiter, 2007).

### *3.7.7 Potential conflicts resulting from the absence of staff from school when away conducting retreats*

It was often the responsibility of the Religious Education Coordinator to liaise with the Principal in selecting staff for conducting the retreat. But it was not always easy to select or invite enough staff members who were interested and willing to serve on retreat teams. Firstly, the retreat work was physically and emotionally demanding; being away from home, especially in overnight stays, was a disincentive to attend – along with the interruption of classes and timetabling. Those staff members who were to remain at the school were also inconvenienced by the retreats (E.g. classes lost, extra supervision lessons) in covering for the staff who were away on the retreat. These problems tended to increase any divisions that were already there about whether or not the retreats were worth the trouble and the costs. These difficulties could affect the future viability of the retreats (Rossiter, 2007).

Mullins (1989) reported that school staff was occasionally divided about the value of retreats. Some reservations emerged from an assessment perspective; the retreats were not assessable as were academic school programs and as far as non-retreat teachers could see, academic work was not achieved.

Nevertheless, the staffing and timetabling problems were in some instances regarded as a natural problem in mounting a valuable retreat program: “interrupted lessons and staff shortages and re-organisation caused by the retreats were seen as a necessary part of enabling such a program to take place” (Mullins, 1989, p. 46). Lesson schedules were inevitably affected and at times both teachers and students felt the pressure to make-up the lost time in preparation for exams.

Retreats continued to be regarded as an important part of the religious experience of students in senior secondary schools but unlike many other school activities, they struggled for legitimacy and wide staff acceptance within the school curriculum (Boonen, 1992; Mulligan, 1994; Quillinan, 1995).

### **3.8 VOLUNTARY VS COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE**

A number of schools made the senior school retreat a curriculum requirement. In this sense, it was compulsory and would require a special parental request to have students exempted. In some cases, the cost of the retreat was prohibitive. Other schools made attendance voluntary and where this happened, there was the added difficulty of supervising at school the students who were not attending the retreat for family or religious reasons (Rossiter, 2007). In turn this contributed to the staffing issues noted above.

Some schools sought to make the Year 11 retreat compulsory – the argument being that if students did not have at least one experience of a communitarian retreat they would not be able to make an informed choice when the retreats were voluntary. These schools would then have a voluntary retreat for Year 12 students (Rossiter, 2007). Some schools with larger groups of students offered a variety of retreat types at different venues.

As student numbers increased in Catholic schools along with the multicultural mix, the size of senior class cohorts rose. When the size was over 100, there were fewer venues that could cater for groups of that size (Mullins, 1989, p.46).

### **3.9 ISSUES RELATED TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE: UNDERSTANDINGS OF YOUTH SPIRITUALITY THAT INFORMED RETREAT WORK**

One of the significant purposes of senior school retreats was to enhance the spiritual and moral development of young people. To do this effectively, retreat leaders would need to have some understanding of youth spirituality. This meant an appreciation of their 'spiritual starting points'. Such knowledge could inform not only the purposes of retreats but also the retreat strategies and choices of activities so that they would be more relevant to the spirituality of young people and make appropriate connections with their thinking and concerns about life.

It is beyond the scope of this study to include a major review of writings on contemporary spirituality and on youth spirituality in particular. Rather, this section will attempt to show how there have been significant changes in the style and orientation of Catholic spirituality since the time when the first communitarian retreats began work to enhance young people's spirituality. In turn, this points to an agenda that needs to be taken up in further research to see how educational practice both in retreats and in other areas of religious education and church ministry might best relate to contemporary youth spirituality. Because there are different and conflicting interpretations of what are the principal trends in youth spirituality, and because there are different value positions about what sort of spirituality should be encouraged by Catholic schools, the treatment of the topic here will inevitably fall short of a systematic evaluation. Significant changes will be reported but not appraised or debated. Nevertheless, this discussion will identify a number of aspects of youth spirituality that are starting points for further study that could inform speculation about how best to address them in retreat and other educational practice.

This section on youth spirituality will serve two roles in this study:

- Firstly, it will flag some of the characteristics of the Catholic spirituality that informed the development of the first communitarian retreats.
- Secondly, because the prominence of the retreats' aims to foster young people's spirituality, attention will be given to characteristics of contemporary youth spirituality that retreat leaders would try to keep in mind when fashioning their programs. Interpretation of the aims and practices of retreats needs to be undertaken against a background understanding of youth spirituality and of the needs / interests of young people.

As noted in section 3.4.5, the educators who introduced the first communitarian-style retreats in the 1960s were particularly interested in the development of young people's spirituality. They hoped that the new retreats would be significant spiritual experiences that might catalyse the further development of

young people's spirituality – in the same direction as they considered that an adult Christian spirituality was developing after the second Vatican Council. Hence, as a preliminary to reviewing the area of youth spirituality, further attention will be given to the emergence of a 'post Vatican II spirituality' in Australian Catholicism. This would have been the reference point or model for spirituality that the retreat leaders would have worked out of.

Also, in the review of youth spirituality, consideration will be given to some of the changes in understandings of spirituality in a culture characterised by secularisation and postmodernity. This is important for interpreting current youth spirituality, by contrast with what it was in the 1960s.

### *3.9.1 The emerging spirituality within Australian Catholicism after the second Vatican Council*

While there is a large literature illustrating the spiritual interests of Australian Catholics in the 1960s and 1970s, one recent review of post Vatican II spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006) provided the perspective that this study needed to highlight the key aspects of the spirituality that informed the work of the first communitarian retreats.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 173-179), in their major study of youth spirituality, have provided an interpretation of the emergence of a 'psychological Christian spirituality' within Australian Catholicism in the 1960s and 1970s. They considered that this eventually became the mainstream spirituality while acknowledging that there remained a variety of spiritualities within Catholicism. They proposed that the following were key characteristics of this Catholic spirituality:-

- The creation of a personally constructed meaning system to suit personal needs.
- More personal autonomy in choosing what to believe.
- A focus on the present life rather than an afterlife, with a special psychological emphasis.
- A lack of satisfaction with and questioning of standard teachings and organized religious practices.
- The seeking of the transcendent and religious experiences.
- "It was a 'relationship-centred' spirituality. Becoming a person was considered to be influenced significantly by personal relationships; similarly, the personal relationship with God was emphasised." (Rossiter & Crawford, 2006, p. 175)

This style of Catholic spirituality was developing among the key leaders of the early communitarian retreat movement in Catholic secondary schools in the mid-

1960s and 1970s. It underpinned the communitarian retreat practices with its special emphasis on relationships; and it was the type of spirituality that the retreat leaders hoped to foster in young people. This spirituality was consistent with some of the emphases in humanistic psychology as noted earlier in section 3.4.5.

### *3.9.2 Changes in understandings of spirituality in a culture characterised by secularisation and postmodernity*

This sub-section signposts some of the cultural factors that have influenced contemporary understandings of spirituality; this will in turn affect the interpretation of contemporary youth spirituality. While detailed attention to this question is not within the scope of this study, it will summarise significant changes in the understandings of spirituality over the past 50 years.

Similar to their useful summary of 1960s-1970s Catholic spirituality (see above), Crawford and Rossiter (2006) provided a summary of key issues in the understanding of contemporary spirituality. They showed how a divergence (and overlap) developed between the ‘religious’ and the ‘spiritual’; formerly all spirituality tended to be religious. Now there are descriptions of spirituality that include the phrases ‘*non-religious* spirituality’ and ‘*secular* spirituality’ (Coles, 1992; Crawford & Rossiter, 1996; Hay & Nye, 1998; Fuller, 2001).

The following summarises the key issues in changing understandings of spirituality as proposed by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 179-198) -

- Divergence between the spiritual and the religious.
- Change in the uncertainty about knowledge.
- Change in the credibility and authority within metanarratives.
- Secularisation and the decline in religious practice giving rise to a ‘Do-It-Yourself’ style of spirituality.
- People drawing on various sources for their spirituality and not just from their own religious tradition.
- A less formal yet more personal spirituality in which people tend to make up their own minds depending on what they find relevant.

### *3.9.3 More widespread acceptance of natural uncertainty in personal knowledge about God*

One of the characteristics considered prominent within contemporary cultural post-modernity is a more widespread acknowledgement of a level of uncertainty in personal knowledge about the spiritual – and hence knowledge about God and the after-life etc. Comparisons have long been available that show people from different religions with significantly different and conflicting beliefs about God and about life, as well as areas of commonality. But this now seems more prominent than at any



former period. While some people reacted to this situation by closing their minds to the differences and clinging even more strongly to the truth of their own religious beliefs, there are others who responded to the situation by acknowledging that personal knowledge about God, and religious knowledge generally, was so different from empirical knowledge that a natural level of uncertainty applied to all such religious knowledge.

Because one of the principal concerns of retreats is the fostering of youth spirituality, it is considered that an understanding of contemporary spiritualities, particularly as manifested in youth, will be one of the key perspectives for both programming activities and the evaluation of the success of retreats. While it will not be possible or ethical to try to measure changes in participants' spirituality as a result of a retreat, it is appropriate to evaluate the quality of retreats by identifying the 'spirituality directions' that are embedded in the retreats' aims and practices. Understandably, some of the general characteristics of spirituality noted in this section will appear again as characteristics of youth spirituality.

#### 3.9.4 Characteristics of contemporary youth spirituality

There is a large literature of youth spirituality which includes academic journals specifically concerned with this topic (E.g. *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality*). While a comprehensive review of this literature was not possible within this limited study, this sub-section will present a background picture of youth spirituality that could inform the interpretation of contemporary retreat work. It will make a list of key principles, questions and issues for youth spirituality derived from a review of six recent studies of youth spirituality, five of which were conducted in Australia. The summary listing that will follow has been developed in the light of findings from the following studies as noted in Table 3.3.

<b>No</b>	<b>Title of research study and authors</b>	<b>Notes on the publications</b>
1	Smith, C., & Denton, M. (2005). <i>Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers</i> .	An empirical study of the beliefs of Church youth from different Christian denominations in the United States together with an interpretation of trends and developments.
2	Mason, M., Webber, R., Hughes, P. and Singleton, A. (2006). <i>The spirit of generation Y: Summary of the final report of a three year study</i> .	An empirical study of a national sample of Australian young people between the ages of 13 and 24. It included telephone

	Mason, M., Webber, R. and Singleton, A. (2007). <i>The spirit of Generation Y: Young people's spirituality in a changing Australia.</i>	interviews of a sample of the population, together with a smaller number of face-to-face interviews. The first publication was a research report while the second was a book with more of the authors' reflections on the significance of their findings.
3	Crawford, M.L. and Rossiter, G.M. (2006). <i>Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality.</i>	A consideration of youth spirituality within the context of a handbook on the spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of education. It includes a major section on spirituality and youth spirituality together with implications for education and religious education.
4	Hughes, P. (2007). <i>Putting Life Together</i>	Report of Hughes' empirical studies over the years from the Christian Research Association.
5	Engebretson, K. (2007). <i>Connecting: Teenage boys, spirituality and religious education.</i>	An interpretation of the spirituality of teenage boys resulting from an empirical study of boys' spirituality in Victoria.
6	Maroney, M. (2008). <i>An exploration of a contemporary youth spirituality among senior students in three Catholic schools.</i>	A Doctor of Education thesis reporting a study of spirituality among senior students in 3 Catholic high schools. It included a detailed literature review of youth spirituality.

The following paragraphs summarise a number of key aspects or issues in youth spirituality derived from these studies. The listing provides a general picture of how many young people think and feel spiritually. While this picture would not necessarily apply to any one individual, it provides a helpful background for understanding the spiritual needs and dispositions of young people. The notion of conducting a retreat that is relevant to young people suggests that the retreat would need to be basically in tune with, or at least aware of, the trends and issues in youth spirituality. This does not mean that the content and process of a retreat need to be geared exclusively to what was considered to be a general pattern of youth spirituality, but it should be helpful in informing the thrust of a retreat program.

### 3.9.5 *A relatively secularised spirituality; it does not draw strongly on the individual's own religious tradition*

The spirituality of many young people is secularised. (Crawford & Rossiter, 1996,

2006; Mason, Webber, Hughes & Singleton, 2006; Maroney, 2008). They may not consciously draw much spiritually from their own religious tradition. They often show some wariness of religion, particularly what is regarded as ‘organised’ religion. It is likely that a number of youth in this category would see themselves as ‘spiritual’ but not necessarily very religious. As noted by Crawford and Rossiter (1985), contemporary young people could be regarded as the first generations in Westernised countries who felt that they had a ‘real option’ as to whether they needed to be part of some organised form of religion.

The principle noted here is important for the work of retreats because the retreat program usually set out to include religious activities like prayer and liturgy in a favourable community context – but it could not presume that all of the participants had a favourable disposition towards the celebration of Mass. The situation in the retreat could highlight the experiential/community dimension which in turn could enhance the tangible sense of community celebration in the Eucharist.

Similarly, when dealing with any elements of traditional spirituality, the conduct of the retreat needs to take into account that it is in a sense presenting a case for these aspects of spirituality; it is in a position of trying to build a bridge between young people’s experience and traditional religious experience like the Eucharist. This thinking is consistent with the efforts often made during retreats to promote student participation in planning and participation at Mass.

### *3.9.6 A tendency towards eclecticism and individualism in spirituality*

A significant number of young people construct their personal spirituality by drawing on a diverse range of sources, extending beyond their own religious tradition (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Mason, Webber, Hughes & Singleton, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Maroney, 2008). They are also more individualistic and less communal in their spirituality. They may include ideas from various religions, astrology and psychology etc. in their meaning system.

While it could be expected that a Catholic school retreat would draw significantly on Catholic spirituality, the experiential focus of the retreat would also enable it to accommodate diverse spiritual elements as stimulus material. This would be in tune with young people’s eclectic spiritual approach, but it should not be regarded as the retreat team’s shying away from Catholic spirituality. For example, there could be prayer elements in some popular song lyrics. Extracts from novels and from psychological writings might be used as stimulus material, as could

Scripture quotations.

### 3.9.7 *Reliance of individuals on their own experience as the ultimate criterion for determining truth and worth*

There is less reliance on religious and moral authorities as individuals tend to make up their own minds about the spiritual dimension to life (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Maroney, 2008). This implies a tendency to judge religious truth as a matter of opinion.

Religion can be regarded as an ‘optional spiritual resource’ or infrastructure that is taken on board by the individual where it is judged to be relevant and useful (Hughes, 2007; Rossiter, 2009). This tendency draws on other factors like the uncertainty in religious knowledge, and a decline in the plausibility and believability of religious authorities. The notions of *utility* and *relevance* tend to become more important than truth – that is, particular religious ideas or teachings would be judged according to whether or not they are found to be helpful rather than on the basis of whether or not they were true. This suggests a line of thinking where ‘truth’ becomes less important than usefulness.

### 3.9.8 *Do-it-yourself (DIY) spirituality*

This style of spirituality affects both traditional and non-traditional religious practices and can be found in both older and younger people. It is “more personally constructed according to need” (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 196) and does not rely on a ‘pre-packaged’, prescribed belief system that tends to be associated with organised religion. A Do-it-yourself spirituality is not restrictive in personal beliefs; it is ‘customised’ or ‘tailor-made’ to assist people interpret life based on different forums of wisdom appeal to them. It has psychological orientation with a particular emphasis on ‘the here-and-now’.

Some of the characteristics of this style of spirituality include:

- An emphasis on personal autonomy, individuality and responsibility of spiritual choices to cater for one’s needs.
- A lack of satisfaction with some teachings and organisational religious practices.
- A ‘de-absolutising’ of religious truths – interpreting them more as symbolic rather than historical or factual.
- Experiencing secularisation as acceptable rather than isolating.
- Selecting religious practices that are relevant to personal needs.

While DIY spirituality values individuality, it can also encompass

community. The particular social and spiritual expressions within the community could differ significantly from organised/structural religion. Therefore, there is less need for religious identity boundaries (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

### *3.9.9 Spirituality in relationships*

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) proposed that a healthy, balanced spirituality should enhance relationships. However, if the dominant focus becomes the personal needs and interests of the individual, this could create a shift from a spirituality that explores “the big spiritual issues of life – God, death and the afterlife” (p.197) to self-centredness and narcissism (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). This balance is needed so that personal meaning is expanded beyond the immediate concerns.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) also proposed that people become persons through social interactions within relationships. Being a contributor and receiver within a community is central to human nature. When applied to spirituality, Crawford and Rossiter argued that “authentic spirituality has to be community-related: you cannot be fully spiritual on you own” (p.200).

### *3.9.10 Interest in new age, astrology, the occult etc.*

Mason and others (2006, 2007) considered that while young people were aware of these areas of the spiritual, young people of school-age appeared to be less interested in and concerned about them than was the case for young people in their 20s.

Hughes (2007) interpreted the situation as many young people thinking that religion tended to be regarded in the same light at areas like psychology, astrology and new-age etc. They all existed in a ‘realm of the uncertain’ where there was a natural level of uncertainty about truth and that in this area, they had ‘options’ to choose what they felt was appropriate for them.

### *3.9.11 A profile of contemporary youth spirituality*

One short but nevertheless comprehensive and general picture of trends in youth spirituality has been drawn up by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p.350) and is summarised in Table 3.4.

*Table 3.4 Nine prominent elements in the spirituality of contemporary young people:*

- 1 Ideals. As regards direction for living, young people look for guidance in clear statements of ideas and ideals about life and its management. An ambivalence may appear in their reluctance to consider ideals proposed by authority; some may oscillate between being idealistic and not caring. For some, definite, 'black and white' answers are needed; others can live comfortably with fuzzy ideas about life by focusing on the here and now and on pursuing a particular lifestyle.
- 2 Varied sources of spirituality. Young people draw from varied sources in constructing their spirituality: - family, friends, personal mentors, their own religion, other religions, secular movements. They tend not to see any so-called division between the secular and the religious. They see a spiritual dimension woven through life. Some actively search for meaning and are said to have a 'hunger' for spirituality; but the proportion that does this may be small; a much greater number are more concerned with lifestyle.
- 3 Being part of a community of faith. If they are interested in religion, it will need to appear personalised, and not too prescriptive as regards morality and beliefs. The feeling of being accepted and comfortable within a local faith community is critical; they need to feel that their needs and interests are being attended to, and they want to have a say in religious affairs. It is not inconsistent for some youth to want to dismiss particular religious beliefs and rules, while at the same time wanting to be part of the community. Some identify with popular Pentecostal churches. Many youth have little or no interest in organised religion.
- 4 Group membership. Social and friendship groups often provide a psychological 'home base' for adolescents that has a major influence on their thinking and behaviour – especially for girls; the 'group' is often their principal 'interface with the world'. Group identification can underpin aggression and violence.  
Rather than join specifically religious groups, they may prefer to participate in movements with social and environmental concerns (E.g. Amnesty International, protest groups), especially those concerned with improvement of the quality of life. Yet there are a significant number of young people who do want to be part of a religious group; at universities, many, but not all of those in religious groups tend to be active in evangelising activities.
- 5 The prolongation of adolescence. While perhaps more individualistic, more aware of lifestyle options and with higher life expectations than their forbears, young people face an increasing period of dependence on family before becoming financially independent and fending for themselves. This situation generates various social and psychological frustrations that impact on personal relationships and group membership; ambivalence about traditional goals such as settling down, marriage and raising a family. They see life like a 'degustation menu' – they can pick and choose from a variety of lifestyle options at will, trying them out. They have many more options than did the precocious 'baby boomers' and they are more ready to explore them. Tasting from an extensive range of sporting opportunities is also available for Australia's sport hungry teenagers.

The prolongation of adolescence tracks back to those of school age affecting their expectations. Some can adopt the extended adolescent lifestyle well before they leave school, regarding school attendance as an extension of their leisure time with some incidental learning.

6. Cultural plurality. Young people value the global aspects of popular culture with which they identify, especially clothing styles and music. But at the same time, they are ambivalent about the extensive cultural plurality they experience in Western countries. They are puzzled about how to understand the extraordinary range of belief systems and behaviours in the culture; they may take refuge in closed social groups.
7. Social and political concerns. Compared with the politicised views of youth in the 1960s and 1970s, today's young people are generally wary of, and disillusioned with, political institutions and large corporations; authority is questioned and not respected. Yet they do little to challenge status quo, while they realise that they do not have much political leverage in any case. However, for some young people, they will not worry too much about these potential threats as long as they do not appear to affect their lifestyle. For others, the gap between hopes for career and a successful life and the reality of possible unemployment is an ongoing source of worry.
8. Environmental concerns. In addition to the increased public acknowledgment of environmental issues, more awareness of these issues is fostered in school subjects such as science, geography, economics, society and culture, and religion – as well as in media awareness programs (like Cleanup Australia). The young have an excellent environmental education. However, this does not readily translate into actual support by young people: for example, Cleanup Australia usually attracts only a small percentage of youth. But there is in spirit strong support for initiatives that are pro-environment.
9. Anxiety about a violent society. While earlier generations were anxious about a possible nuclear holocaust, since 9/11, Bali, and terrorist attacks in Britain and Spain, today's young people live with a backdrop of global terrorism that has almost daily reminders. As a result, in a perceptibly higher numbers, there is a hardening in prejudice against minorities and those who do not appear to embrace the lifestyle and belief systems similar to what they think is the westernised norm. A positive valuing of multiculturalism and a multi-faith community has been diminished as the hopes for a peaceful and tolerant society recede. Other concerns contributing to anxiety are: - levels of crime; more people in prison; increased evidence of security measures and surveillance; tighter immigration and refugee controls.

The extent to which teachers in Catholic schools in the conduct retreats would be familiar with research insights into youth spirituality is likely to vary considerably from individual to individual. Nevertheless, it is an area of significance for those who conduct retreats because the retreat is intended to be in tune with young people's spiritual needs as well as being an experience that should enhance their spirituality.

### **3.10 RESEARCH ON CATHOLIC SCHOOL RETREATS IN AUSTRALIA**

In the publication arising from the Commonwealth Curriculum Development Centre's survey of Religious Education in Australian schools, Rossiter (1981) reported that retreats were regarded as a very successful and distinctive feature of religious education in Australian Catholic schools. In this and other publications (Boonen, 1992; Edmonds, 1997; Firman, 1968; Harrison, 1989; Lundy, 1985; Mullins, 1989; Quillinan, 1995), there are records of the value ascribed to retreats, even though there was no systematic research on their aims, processes and outcomes.

Some educational research in Australia that looked at young people's attitudes and views about their schooling recorded the views of senior school students about the experience of retreats (de Souza, 2009; Flynn, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002). Flynn's series of longitudinal studies of the views of Year 12 students in Catholic schools noted the high regard that students had for retreats (Flynn, 1993). He concluded that while 38% of respondents believed the retreat was the most significant religious experience of their life, over 66% of students thought it had "more influence at the human level than the religious level" (Mulligan, 1994, p. 54). Another evaluation in a study involving eight Marist schools indicated that 94% of students rated the retreat as "valuable to very valuable" (Mulligan, 1994, p. 54). However, a more recent study of senior secondary retreats (Flynn & Mok, 2002) identified a shift in student's positive attitudes towards retreats. When attitudes in 1990 were compared with those in 1998, the positive response of students had declined from 54% to 43% (p. 287), less than half of the Year 12 students surveyed. Flynn and Mok (2002) concluded that students' declining positive attitudes towards retreats "when faced with the pressures of the HSC examination, continue to be a concern!" (p. 287).

### **3.11 NOTES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITARIAN RETREATS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

The following is a brief account of the comparable development of communitarian retreats in Catholic schools in other some other countries, based on brief notes from some overseas informants (For a list of the overseas informants see Appendix G). This material was based on 'yes or no' like answers to 7 questions about the change from silent to communitarian retreats. It represents a very broad and simple picture showing that there were comparable developments in Catholic schools overseas. The informants acknowledged that they did not have any detailed information about the introduction of communitarian retreats; none could identify a precise date for their



origins; they indicated only roughly the time when they became aware of their existence. There was also an indication that the Australian De La Salle brothers, who pioneered the communitarian retreats in Australia, may have had some influence on developments (especially within De La Salle education) in the United Kingdom and the United States. This section was in no sense a systematic study of overseas developments – but an attempt to signpost similarities that would need more extensive investigation if the details were to be explored.

*The United Kingdom:* In the United Kingdom, a key development in the conduct of ‘out-of-school’ communitarian retreats for young people was the opening of the Kintbury Centre in the 1970s by the De La Salle Brother, Damian Lundy. The Centre still conducts live-in retreats for school and youth ministry groups. Lundy was familiar with the retreat movement in Australia from his contacts with fellow brothers Rummery and McCarthy from Australia in (1974-5). He worked for some months at the Australian De La Salle Retreat Centre in Cronulla (Sydney) in 1977 to experience the similarities and differences between retreat work in the United Kingdom and Australia (Rummery, 2009).

In turn, Lundy was influential as a resource person for the training of youth retreat leaders from the United States. Some educators from the United States visited the Kintbury Retreat Centre and worked there during the summer school vacations. Lundy twice visited the United States to conduct retreat training sessions for De La Brothers and lay people.

Silent retreats were conducted in Catholic secondary schools up to and including the early 1960s. The British informants suggested that the change from silent to communitarian live-in retreats occurred from the late 1960s to the early 1970s (Sullivan, 2009). Travelling retreat teams, comprised of men and women religious, were also a feature of later communitarian retreats. These were considered “highly professional” and had a “very powerful impact on the school, parents, staff and students” (Sullivan, 2009).

*The United States:* Parralleling their involvement in youth retreat work in Australia and the United Kingdom, the De La Salle Order in the United States opened youth retreat centres in California at Santa Helena in the Napa Valley (now closed), outside Chicago at Plano, and outside St.Paul-Minneapolis at Dunrovin – both of the latter centres are still functioning. The De La Salle Order was evidently prominent in the origins of the communitarian youth retreat in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Rummery 2009).

Silent retreats were the norm up to and including the 1960s for a day or longer. The first live-in retreats were silent retreats in the 1950s; the new communitarian retreats were introduced sometime during the 1960s. Van Grieken (2009) believed that communitarian retreats for teenagers were developed within both youth ministry in Catholic parishes and in Catholic secondary schools.

*Canada:* As part of the changing Catholic culture inspired by the Second Vatican Council, communitarian style retreats were introduced in Catholic schools in the late 1960s. It was common for retreats to be conducted by travelling retreat teams, but eventually they were replaced by school personnel. Initially, when the communitarian retreats were first introduced, there were a few youth retreat centres which conducted retreats for groups of students from Catholic schools and/or from Catholic parishes.

*Belgium:* Silent retreats were not common in secondary schools in Belgium up to and including the early 1960s. Communitarian-like retreats were conducted at retreat centres, commencing at some stage during the 1960s. If requested, retreat teams were available to conduct retreats for schools.

*Ireland:* Catholic secondary schools in Ireland conducted silent retreats in the 1950s. It was not possible to ascertain when they changed to the live-in, communitarian format for senior school students in Catholic schools. While travelling retreat teams were initially available for schools, they disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s due to a lack of funding.

*New Zealand:* The development of communitarian retreats in New Zealand paralleled what happened in Australia, but at a later date. Until the 1960s, religious orders and/or clergy conducted silent school retreats. Gradually a focus on personal development and faith formation was introduced based on Marist retreat material in the 1970s.

*Table 3.5 The origins and conduct of communitarian retreats in Catholic schools in different countries*

Country	Silent retreats in the 1950s	Change in format to communitarian retreats	First introduced in schools	Retreats developed in parishes or youth ministry	Staffed youth retreat centres for schools	Travelling retreat teams available to conduct school retreats	Schools responsible for the conduct of senior student retreats
Australia	Yes	Yes	1964	No but communitarian style camps	Yes	Developed in 1970s	Yes

				were available such as Young Christian Students (YCS) camps			
United States of America	Yes	Yes	1960s	Yes. Prominent in youth ministry	Yes, at adult retreat houses	Yes	Yes
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	Late 1960s to early 1970s	Not prominent	Yes.	Yes	Yes but not consistent
Canada	No	Yes	Late 1960s	Not prominent	Yes	Yes	Yes
Belgium	No	Yes	Not sure (probably 1970s)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not many
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Unsure (probably 1970s)	No	Yes	Yes in the 1980s	Yes
New Zealand	Yes	Yes	1970s	No			Yes

### 3.12 CONCLUSION: CATHOLIC SCHOOL RETREATS INTO THE 2000s

Senior secondary school retreats continued to be popular in the 2000s. In one survey, 40% of students perceived these experiences to be “most helpful” (de Souza, 2009, p. 56.), however there were mixed responses to retreat and reflection days with only 54% of students agreeing that these days “nurtured their faith and a spirituality” whereas, 37% felt that these took up valuable study time at senior secondary level (de Souza, 2009, p. 55).

The basic communitarian format remained the dominant feature of these retreats. They were characterised by a strong emphasis on “developing reflective awareness, a sense of belonging and connectedness, an appreciation of the need for reconciliation, a deep respect for individuals and their stories and a search for religious meaning” (Edmonds, 1997, p. 21). Rossiter (1998) claimed that attempts to make them “personal and relevant to the lives of students” was part of their success. In the quest for personalism and relevance, retreats were one activity that had been tested and experimented with “many successes and failures over the years” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 261).

While schools regularly offered students the model of retreat that included withdrawal from society and community living, new types of retreats emerged in Catholic secondary schools that gave students a diversity of choice as regards participation in a retreat. Alternative experiences were considered as making useful

contributions to personal and spiritual development. The emphasis on social justice issues and the desire for students to have relevant experiences of gospel values expanded the understanding of 'retreat' to include 'outreach' and community work. Journaling or continual monitoring of thoughts and feelings in a diary, by students of what they saw and did was a way of recording personal reflections. These experiences were experiential and included activities that were offered only during school hours and were:

- Metropolitan based.
- Outreach focused.
- Community oriented.

As Catholic secondary schools expanded social justice programs for students, these activities sometimes replaced the traditional live-in retreats. Some schools developed one-day wilderness retreats, artistic retreats, street retreats or sport retreats. Whether these activities qualify as 'retreats' according to the frameworks of spirituality developed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis is a matter for debate. However there have been significant shifts in teacher understandings of the term 'retreat' and how they have subsequently shaped experiences for students.

From a historical perspective, retreats in Australian Catholic schools have evolved significantly over time in terms of their nature, function and purpose, yet the most prominent recent format, the communitarian live-in retreat still retained many of the principles that derived from the early Christian 'retreat' spirituality. The next chapters in this thesis report on the second, empirical part of the research, in which the views of a sample of teachers who conducted live-in communitarian retreats will be reported and interpreted.

## **PART TWO**

### **CHAPTER 4**

# **PART TWO: QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL RETREATS**

## **THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design used in the second part of this study – a qualitative investigation of teachers' understandings of the nature, purposes and function of retreats for senior Catholic secondary school students. It will describe the methods used to gather and analyse data, as well as give details of the sample of teachers interviewed, the schools involved, the questions administered and the data analysis procedures followed. After discussing the use of the semi-structured research interview for teachers, the method used for interviewing 'key informants' for their oral history of the new retreat movement (Chapter 3) will be described.

Initially, the epistemology and theoretical framework for this part of the study will be outlined.

### **4.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is underpinned by a theoretical framework that is appropriate for both the empirical and non-empirical parts of the study. The key components of the first non-empirical stage involved *interpreting* both the history of the Catholic spirituality that informed retreats and the historical development of school communitarian retreats. The second stage required an *interpretation of the meanings* that participants had for their conduct of retreats.

In accord with the principles proposed by Crotty (1998) a theoretical framework was adopted (Table 4.1) which accommodated this emphasis on interpretation. The framework helped ensure consistency between the research problem, research methods, presentation of data and the interpretation of the meaning and significance of the results. The theoretical framework included an epistemology of *Constructionism* and a perspective of *Interpretivism*.

<b>Epistemology</b>		<b>Constructionism</b>
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>		<b>Interpretivism</b>
<b>Research Methods</b>	<p><b>Part 1. Documentary, historical and philosophical section</b></p> <p><b>Part 2: Participant interview</b></p>	<p>Exploration of relevant literature on spirituality.  Exploration of the history of retreats in literature.  Oral history from key informants.  Interpretation of key issues in the development of spirituality underpinning retreats and in the history of communitarian retreats in Catholic schools since the 1960s.</p> <p>Semi-structured interview of participants  Recording of interviews/transcription/analysis of results on the basis of key words and concepts</p>

#### *4.1.1 Epistemology: Constructionism*

In their account of research methodology, Cresswell (2009) and Strauss & Corbin (1998) defined epistemology as the area of philosophy concerned with the nature, origins, methods and limits of human knowledge.

*Constructionism* is a perspective on knowledge that regards it as actively ‘constructed’ by the knower and not just passively received through the senses (Cresswell, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In addition, according to Cherryholmes (1993), a constructivist view of knowledge emphasises social interaction as the key source of personal knowledge that helps individuals organise their view of the world.

In this study, the constructivist view of knowledge applied both to the data generated from the interviews (interaction between researcher and participants) as well as to the historical interpretation. The participants actively ‘constructed’ their subjective view of the retreat process, highlighting what they considered to be the important issues.

#### *4.1.2 Theoretical perspective: Interpretivism*

Within the broad epistemology of constructionism, Crotty (1998) located the theoretical perspective of interpretivism. This perspective focuses on the way individuals interpret the meaning and significance of their own experience and their communication of these meanings which make them accessible to others.

Individuals arrive at their own subjective interpretation of their experience and this usually includes value judgments about the key issues. This development of

knowledge “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). It regards individuals’ reporting of their experience as interpretations; and it acknowledges that these interpretations may be influenced by social and cultural conditioning, as well as by the individuals’ own beliefs, attitudes and values.

The principle of interpretivism postulates that the researcher gains access to the meaning behind participants’ experience (Crotty, 1998). In the qualitative empirical phase of the study, the first task of the researcher is to record accurately the data, preserving the intended meanings (interpretations) of the participants. Then in the analysis of these interpretations, the researcher necessarily introduces a further level of interpretation (and generalization/abstraction). Hence the study results in the researcher’s interpretation of the meaning and significance of the participants’ interpretations of their experience with school retreats.

In the historical/philosophical phase of the study, the researcher was concerned not so much with the description or documenting of historical events, but with interpreting the key points within the historical development of Catholic spirituality and of school communitarian retreats. This part of the study endeavoured to show how socio-cultural factors influenced the developments; of special interest were the interpretations of the pattern of development by key informants who participated in the history of school communitarian retreats.

#### **4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY USING INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

Complementing the first part of the study, which was concerned with the documentation and oral history related to senior school retreats, this second part of the project explored the understandings of a sample of teachers who were involved in the conduct of school retreats at this level.

A set of open-ended questions was used to guide interviews of the twenty-three teachers. The questions took into account a number of the issues about conduct of retreats that were identified in the previous chapter.

The design of the research instrument intended to give special attention to the retreat experiences of the teachers. A qualitative approach (rather than a quantitative study with questionnaire items) was used to explore teachers’ understandings of the retreat process and its intended contribution to the spiritual and moral development of young people. It sought teachers’ reflections on their personal experience in this

work, and to elicit the meanings they ascribed to it (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). This allowed for the collation and interpretation of a range of different meanings ascribed to the retreat experiences. It also allowed for exploration in considerable detail, with participants describing instances or examples that illustrated “depth rather than breadth” (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2002, p. 64).

Interviews as a part of qualitative research are a “social event” (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2002, p. 171) between participants. There is participation in learning through the interview – a discovery or uncovering of processes that “generate the rules by which they are playing” (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2002, p. 171). The interview itself can be a highly interactive activity that reveals depth of meaning, especially as it enables people to talk about their experiences and “disclose more about themselves” (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994, p. 135).

### **4.3 THE INTERVIEW AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research interviews and ordinary conversations share some common ground in which a researcher “is seeking responses for a particular purpose” (Gillham, 2000, p. 1) from the interviewee in a “natural setting” (Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella, 1999, p. 258). These responses attempt to describe the ‘real world’ or the ‘big picture’ of the interviewees and are less concerned with isolating variables in situations. The researcher becomes part of the data collection instrument and the data can only be understood when conducted in the context of the participant’s world. Therefore, the researcher becomes a participant with the interviewee.

Qualitative methods (Mason, 2002), unlike quantitative methods (Bailey, 2007) are descriptive in nature (Green, 2002) because they describe events as part of the process of meaning-making and change (Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella 1999) as well as describing the outcome of the study. Human behaviour is often the focus of qualitative research (Green, 2002) and as such, a methodology that can effectively describe details was chosen. While quantitative researchers are more concerned with ‘hard data’, qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning individuals attach to their experiences. As such, qualitative researchers may spend a significant amount of time interacting with the participants in a study to understand a difficult-to-assess phenomena (Bailey, 2007; Flick, 2006; Gomm, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Mason, 2002; Rubin & Rubin 1995).



As conversations are part of qualitative research, researchers must listen intently to each answer to determine the next question based on what was said, sharing the task of maintaining the flow of dialogue. The interviewer has an important engagement with the interviewee because there is the capacity for deep listening and minimal response to what is said by the interviewee. Interviews, however, can differ in the intensity of listening to the content of what is being said (Rubin & Rubin 1995) in order to ‘hear the meaning’, and to interpret and understand the world of the interviewee. It is especially important for the interviewer to “pay attention to the symbols and metaphors with which people describe their worlds” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 8).

#### *4.3.1 Advantages of the interview technique*

Interviewing participants has some advantages over survey or questionnaire instruments for the sort of research questions in this study. People come face-to-face during an interview with the researcher gauging voice, face and posture and interaction with the participants. However, it is not only the interviewee that has an important role in the interview: Bailey (2007) emphasised that as researchers “you cannot simply dissociate yourself” (p. 99) from maintaining a good social relationship during the interview because it can influence the responses from the participants. Therefore common courtesies and a respectful, appreciative tone are important during interactions (Mason, 2002). These are main features of conducting interviews effectively because “after all, the participants are under no obligation to talk to you” (Bailey, 2007, p. 105). The interviewer is also at liberty to convey his/her personal interest in having the participants describe and explain the meanings of their experiences and this can positively influence their participation.

During a structured interview, the interviewer determines the questions, controls their order and pace and attempts to keep the respondent on track (Bailey, 2007). Most interviews are also pre-planned to be scheduled for a particular time and place and generally follow a time plan. This is an assurance for the researcher that time will not be wasted and adds a level of professionalism to the task.

Often interview responses can be complex. If a response is brief or not clear, the interview method enables the interviewer opportunities to return to the topic and explore the response at greater depth. Clarification is important in research, not innuendo.

Structured interviews are “particularly useful for comparing answers from different groups of respondents” (Bailey, 2007, p. 99). Using the same standardized open-ended interview questions would generate different responses from the participants and would enable them to expand on what they mean, thus avoiding ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers and fixed responses. Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella (1999) emphasised the key advantages of the standard open-ended interview. The questions are set prior to the interview and are provided in the same order so that:

- The interview instrument can be inspected by others.
- The variability in the manner in which the interviewer asks questions can be minimized.
- The interview is focused so that a great deal of information is gained within a limited amount of time.
- The scoring of the interview is simplified since researchers already have the categories determined in advance.

Good interviews require practice. Before undertaking the first research interview, the interviewer has the opportunity to conduct pilot interviews with others as interviewees for feedback purposes (Bailey, 2007). This research method allows the researcher to modify or delete questions that are not expressed well, are difficult to understand or are irrelevant before the interview. The interview questions for this research were simple and direct, not requiring a trial run or any modification.

#### *4.3.2 Disadvantages of the interview technique*

Face-to-face interviews can be time-consuming and energy-sapping. Gillham (2000) highlighted the following disadvantages:

- Setting up and travelling to and from the interview location.
- Transcribing the interview.
- Analysing the interview.

Other factors to be aware of are interviewer anxiety, lack of confidence in the technique and a failure to appreciate the role of silence.

Interviews can be unpredictable because the answer to a structured question can divert the focus to related aspects or the person being interviewed can “change the subject, guide the tempo or indicate the interviewer was asking the wrong question” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 7). The interviewees share in the work of the interviewer by guiding it into channels of their own choosing. Other disadvantages include hostility from the interviewees, becoming overly friendly, threatening or flirtatious with the interviewer.

The standardized open-ended interview limits the information that is obtained (Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella 1999):

- The questions are not tailored to each participant and situation.
- The interview is more formal and less spontaneous.

This structure may weaken or lessen the explanations provided by the interviewees because the questions are less natural. Some of the questions may lose their relevance when prepared beforehand because the question may not match the participant's experience. However, to counter this potential problem, interviewees in this study were given the option of making further comments on any questions or on any other issues they felt they would like to raise with the interviewer.

#### 4.3.3 *Semi-structured interviews with participants*

Gillham (2000) believed that all interviewers have a structure for interviews which they use flexibly according to what emerges. The interview signals that it is a 'special occasion' for people to put forward their views and experiences, especially if they have not had other effective forums in which to be "listened to" (Gillham, 2000, p. 8). This has been the experience of this researcher in attempting to draw out understandings and issues associated with retreats. In choosing an appropriate method to record teachers' understandings of retreats, a standard, open-ended interview was selected. It is a familiar method in which there are pre-developed questions that interviewers ask throughout the interview (Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella 1999). Each participant was asked the same questions in the same order enabling this researcher to be more efficient in collecting data and minimizing distractions from the focus of the interview.

In recounting their experiences, the participants provided a background of their involvement in retreats. The narratives produced by the informants as a form of data allowed the interviewees' to draw on their experiences as "a mode of knowledge and of presenting experiences" (Flick, 2006, p. 173) in a structured and comprehensive way. Rubin & Rubin (1995) suggest that informants could also be "conversational partners" (p. 11) because both parties are not neutral to each other in shaping the discussion. Each "conversational partner" responded in a distinct manner: some were self-revelatory and others were more restrained.

In the semi-structured interview, this researcher had some level of flexibility regarding how the interview was administered. The interviewer was guided by specific questions but these were not necessarily asked in a specific order (Bailey,

2007) because of the some of the responses given, leading to new opportunities of inquiry.

#### *4.3.4 Elements of the narrative interview as a method*

Narrative inquiry has had a long tradition in the social sciences because “of its power to elicit voice” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 118). Narratives are used in interviews to receive a more comprehensive and contextualized version of events and experiences, especially when exploring issues of social change, causality and social identity (Elliot, 2005). There are different ways of conceiving narratives in interviews as the main form standing alone or embedded in different forms of questions. The narrative interview, mainly used in the context of biographical research, was developed in the context of the informant relating a personal story (Bertaux, 1981; Rosenthal, 2004). A story is told about an area of interest of the relevant events from its beginning to its end (Bailey, 2007; Flick, 2006). This method uses a “generative narrative question” (Reimann & Schutze, 1987, p. 353) which refers to the topic of the study and is intended to stimulate memories and experiences. Narrative inquiry requires trust and openness between the participant and interviewer (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and demands intense and active listening.

#### *4.3.5 Elements of the episodic interview as a method*

The episodic interview was the most appropriate research instrument for interviewees. The starting point for the episodic interview is the assumption that the informants’ experiences of a specific topic are remembered. Episodic knowledge is “organised closer to experiences and linked to concrete situations and circumstances” (Flick, 2006, p. 181) starting from the informants’ episodic-situational forms of experiential knowledge. Special attention is given to the episodes in which the interviewee has had experiences that are relevant to the study, telling it according to aspects of its relevance.

In several domains, the episodic interview facilitates that presentation of experiences in a general, comparative form and at the same time, it ensures that those situations and episodes are told in their specificity. (Flick, 2006, p. 182)

The central element of this form of interview is that the interviewee is asked to present a narrative of situations by reflection and memory. It triggers a chain of situations that links different events within the narrative. The basic principles that guide the interviewer are:

- Familiarising the interviewee with the topic (e.g., “What is the need for a retreat?”).
- Probing the interviewees’ imaginations of expected or feared changes (e.g., “What are the current issues associated with retreats?”).
- Asking for the interviewees’ subjective definitions (e.g., “What do students enjoy when they are on retreat?”).
- Asking for abstractive relations (e.g., “In your opinion, what are the future issues for retreats?”).

#### *4.3.6 Interview of key informants for their oral history of the origins and development of the new style of communitarian retreats*

The interviews with key informants were different from the interviews with the sample of teachers. Key informant interviews were informal discussions with former school retreat organisers who provided background information about the origins, conduct and further development of the new style communitarian retreats in the 1960s. Some key informants also suggested others who might be interviewed, helping the researcher develop a network of informants as noted in Appendix G.

The key informants in Australia were contacted by phone or email. All of those approached were willing to give information and consented to having the interviews recorded. Despite the length of time that had transpired since their involvement in retreats in the 1960s and 1970s, the key informants were able to provide information about the origins and issues associated with the new style communitarian retreats. Often, the information was verified through the different sources, adding to its reliability.

In addition, email contact was made with some potential informants involved in Catholic education overseas (See Appendix H). Here the request for information was different, being limited to a few short ‘Yes/no’ answer questions that tried to identify whether there were similar developments of communitarian retreats in Catholic schools in other countries, while not seeking any detailed information about those developments.

#### 4.4 THE CONTEXT, LOCATION AND SAMPLE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

##### 4.4.1 *Context: Four target schools*

Negotiations between the researcher and one metropolitan Catholic Education Office provided the opportunity to study retreats from the perspective of teachers. Once this had been agreed to, ethical clearance was obtained from the Australian Catholic University Ethics Committee. The same diocesan Catholic Education Office consented to selecting four colleges for research. The Catholic Education Office contacted the schools and organised for coordinators to invite teachers to participate. A total of twenty-three teachers indicated they would participate in the study. A letter of introduction, explaining the purpose of the retreat and endorsed by the university, was sent to each college to be distributed to those teachers involved. Copies of the relevant letters to school authorities and participants are provided in Appendix C, D and E. The schools involved in the study were:

- One single-sex girls' college.
- Two co-educational colleges.
- One single-sex boys' college.

##### 4.4.2 *Teacher sample selection and sample size – choosing interviewees*

Considering the limited resources of access to people, of time and money in research (Flick, 2006) it was not possible to study whole populations of teachers involved in retreats in Australia. A sample of teachers, randomly selected from four secondary schools in a large Catholic archdiocese, provided the data for this research. Of the twenty three secondary school teachers who were interviewed, not all of them taught senior secondary classes. Religious Education Coordinators from each school invited teachers with different levels of experience in the conduct of retreats to be part of this investigation. This criterion sampling (Patton, 1987) involved setting up a criterion of performance: this being that the teachers had been involved in the conduct of school retreats at their school at some level.

The participants ranged in retreat experience, providing a broad cross-section of teacher understandings and experiences. This range helped provided information that was used to assess whether there had been any significant shifts in the last twenty years regarding teachers' understandings of retreats and whether there were shared understandings amongst younger teachers. In particular, it was assumed that younger teachers would not have had the same experience as those who had previously assisted and learnt from religious order retreat teams about the conduct of

retreats. Those with less retreat experience would have been involved only in lay-conducted retreats. This was significant because it helped identify the different training strategies that were used to induct new teacher recruits. It gave the researcher opportunities to identify how influential the religious orders had been in passing on and preserving their experience for others without the support of recognised and accredited retreat-training courses and to identify what kind of support was given to those newly inducted.

This study also gave the less-experienced retreat teachers opportunities to identify the specific needs for retreat involvement from practical perspectives and without bias. With this in mind, these less experienced teachers were asked for their opinion regarding the future viability of retreats and what they identified as the issues of the future. These future issues were the same as those they perceived to be issues of the present time.

#### *4.4.3 The setting and location of the interviews*

The selected colleges were actively involved in the conduct of Catholic senior secondary school retreats. Interviews were held in different locations for each school. Teachers were interviewed individually in either a private room or in a separate space in the staff room. While noises and activity in the staff rooms did not appear to affect the participants, it had the potential to be intrusive through unpredictable distractions such as student-movement, phones ringing, school announcements, end-of-lesson sirens and talk amongst colleagues. It was not possible to pre-screen the location beforehand as suggested by Bailey (2007, p. 105) as the researcher did not have access to the school in the time leading up to the interviews. While it was not possible to eliminate background sounds in the staff rooms from the recordings, this low level background noise did not significantly affect the quality of the interview process.

Questions were read out to the participants and occasionally the interview process would be interrupted because the participants had requested 'thinking time' before replying, despite having been given a copy of the questions by the Religious Education coordinator beforehand.

At the conclusion of each interview, a participant code letter and number was added to the tape which did not identify the participant. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher, giving the opportunity to listen to interviews several times for significant nuances, silences or spontaneous expressions that

communicated personal stances on a question. Short responses implied that the participant was either not familiar with the focus of the question or was reluctant to present a personal opinion. Such reactions were noted for the question about the role of prayer and liturgy on retreat through the memoing process. The data was then read several times and matched to the original interview of the Dictaphone recording, taking particular note of any previously missed nuances or expressions.

## **4.5 PROCEDURES FOLLOWED IN THE RESEARCH**

### *4.5.1 Framing the interview with the informants*

Bailey (2007) reminded the interviewer that “a good interview begins not with the questions, but with the care and nurturance of the relationship between the researcher and the person being interviewed” (p. 104). It was challenging for this researcher to locate participants and establish the desired rapport described by Bailey (2007) in a short time frame as the informants and the researcher had never met beforehand. Some success was achieved by making several preliminary phone calls to the responsible person at the school to explain the purpose of the study. This enabled a familiarity with the researcher and the focus of study to develop.

Providing this background information meant that many participants were available and willing to be part of the research, recognising the potential significance of their contribution to the overall study. All informants were invited to relate their memories of the events that led to their involvement in retreats. Occasionally, memory recall about their first retreat experience was challenging, especially for those who had had extensive retreat involvement but they managed to provide the researcher with their coherent understanding of the development of and practices of retreats.

### *4.5.2 Ethical considerations*

It is important for researchers to be clear about operating a moral research practice at all stages of the research process because the researcher is often faced with making decisions on-the-spot without anticipating them (Mason, 2002). Part of the researcher’s preparation for this was to think through the kinds of ethical issues that might arise and possible responses to them. Some forward planning helped avoid ethical difficulties. Informed consent and lack of any possible manipulation were important criteria for the interview process (Bailey, 2007) and were a priority of this researcher. Teachers involved in this study were provided with a consent form



explaining the purpose of the research and were provided with the focus questions beforehand so that they could prepare their responses (See Appendix B). Given the bulk of data created by interviews, teachers were consulted about the researcher tape recording the interview prior to its conduct and all agreed with this process.

Teachers were assured that they would not be identified by their data and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The approach to data gathering assured teachers' anonymity and an appropriate level of ethical behaviour on the part of the researcher. Nevertheless, it was important to engage with individual participants just prior to the interviews to re-assure them they would not be identified or disadvantaged by what was said. One reservation that this researcher picked up from a few participants was a concern that their own opinions would not be reported back to administration in a way that identified them personally. Bailey described this as "sensitivity to the context in which an informal interview occurs" (2007, p. 106). Being sensitive provided the researcher with a focus for asking more or asking less about a topic. Despite being careful with personal topics so as to not cause the participants any emotional distress, Bailey stated that "you often won't know whether an issue will be painful or sensitive for someone until it is too late" (2007, p. 106).

Teachers were invited to participate on the understanding that their contribution was a 'first' in retreat research. It was explained prior to the interview that retreats had not been studied before from a teacher's perspective.

#### 4.5.3 *Active listening*

Researchers need to be good listeners (Bailey, 2007) because listening is a skill that can influence the richness of data collected (Gillham, 2000). Skilled interviewers demonstrate an economy of words and steer the interviewees to reveal what they know that is relevant to the focus of the interview. However, active listening also includes other skills such as techniques in facial expressions, eye contact, head nods, gesture and physical proximity.

The tone of voice can convey messages to the interviewees that can also influence what is said, because "it isn't that the words one uses aren't important but rather that the tone cancels them out" (Gillham, 2000, p. 34).

When a new question was asked of the interviewee by this researcher, it was a conscious decision to stay appropriately silent. Listening enabled interviewees to speak freely without feeling they were being judged by the interviewer. Often,

listening enabled new issues to emerge which resulted in probing at a deeper level. New insights and understandings of retreats emerged because of this technique.

#### *4.5.4 Terminating the interview*

Not all interviews ended in precisely the same way. Sometimes interviewees wanted to continue the conversation after taping has stopped and expressed opinions that they knew were not recorded. This was an ethical dilemma for the researcher described by Bailey (2007) to determine whether un-recorded information could be used as part of the interview data. It was the decision of this researcher to record those comments in a note book and discern its contribution to the overall patterns that emerged in the data. Because the un-recorded data was judged to add nothing of significance over and above the recorded data, and because it was congruent with the recorded data, it was included in the qualitative data for analysis.

### **4.6 ANALYSING, CODING AND CATEGORIZING THE DATA AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS**

For qualitative data to be useful it must be interpreted (Flick, 2006). This involved analysing the data through a process of breaking it down into smaller components, investigating its importance and hence, interpreting its meaning. Bailey suggested that the analysis of data “begins at the moment the researcher starts to think about conducting a field research project” (2007, p. 125) rather than when all the data has been collected. Analysis is on-going.

Coding is about organising a large amount of data and placing it into smaller segments that can be easily retrieved (Bailey, 2007) with the aim of “categorizing and/or theory development” (Flick, 2006, p. 296). Creating categories from the coding is an important part of the ongoing interpretation of the data (Mason, 2002). Making the data from this research manageable was a significant challenge as over one hundred thousand words were transcribed from the total interviewees.

Bailey (2007) described two kinds of coding used in qualitative research: initial or open coding and focused or axial coding (pp. 128- 133). Initial coding began the process of breaking up the retreat data into more manageable segments that could be grouped together as illustrated in chapter 5. Open coding was used initially in this study because it aimed at expressing the data and phenomena in the form of “concepts” (Flick, 2007, p. 297) by ‘disentangling’ or segmenting them. Codes were units of meaning that classified expressions such as single words or short sequences of words. They were created in order to attach annotations and “concepts” to them.

Once the data had been coded, the next step in the procedure was to group them into phenomena discovered in the data which were particularly relevant to the research questions. The codes were then reduced further into larger categories that subsumed the multiple codes. From the various categories that were generated by the data, axial categories promised further elaboration for the interpretation of this study. The goal in focused or axial coding (Flick, 2006) was to move from a fairly literal code into a more conceptual one so that specific targets were identified. Axial coding was used in this study to identify key themes or issues that were highlighted in the research data.

#### *4.6.1 Memoing*

The process of memoing (Bailey, 2007, p. 133) was also used in the analysis of data because it permitted this researcher to create, define and refine the conceptual categories and to note any links between concepts and understanding the setting. Coding and memoing were “iterative processes” (Bailey, 2007, p. 133) to remind the researcher about impressions and intuitions developed during the data collection. This was important in determining the support teachers received from colleagues about their involvement in retreats. What was not spoken of during interviews was another key function of memoing as a personal record and data for subsequent analysis.

#### *4.6.2 The questions administered during the semi-structured interviews*

Maxwell (2005) linked research questions to interview questions by stating that “your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92). The development of good interview questions required insight and creativity (Appendix F). Questions should not be concealed from participants nor manipulated “to produce the data you need” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92) but should be ‘real questions’ – ones where the researcher would be genuinely interested in the answer, rather than contrived ones or to elicit particular data.

The qualitative data from the interviews will be reported and analysed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM THE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

#### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports and analyses the data from the semi-structured interviews. It will summarise the responses to each question in tabular form with follow up comments to highlight the main findings. In addition to interpreting the meaning of the data by inspection and key word/concept analysis, the coding of responses (as explained in Chapter 4) also made it possible to convert the qualitative data to quantitative measures of the frequency of key word indicators. This helped show the relative strength or importance that participants ascribed to key concepts. It also helped verify the validity and reliability of the data and the interpretation of its meaning.

The analysis was conducted sequentially at three levels. The first level involved the tabulation of data question by question. Secondly, after inspection and interpretation of key concepts consistent with the words and meanings of the participants, codes were defined to cover the analysis of data for each question into categories. Thirdly, from these coded concepts, the principal themes in the responses were identified. The quantitative measures of code frequencies were used to determine some measure of the relative importance of the participants' ideas about the purposes and conduct of retreats. Three quantitative measures were used: 1) overall frequency of use of key words; 2) number of participants (out of the total of 23) who used the key word; and 3) the percentage of participants who used the key words.

#### 5.1 QUESTION 1: WHAT MADE A LIVE-IN RETREAT ENJOYABLE FOR TEACHERS?

Table 5.1 summarises the coded responses to question 1.

<b>Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data</b>	<b>Total number of times key words used across all responses</b>	<b>Number of teachers who used the key word</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers who used the key word</b>
<b>Community/relationships and friendship</b>			

<i>Relationship</i> (with teachers and students)	21	15	65.2
<i>Community</i>	10	8	34.7
<i>Trust</i>	5	4	17.3
<i>Connection</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Bonding</i> with other students	2	1	4.3
<b>Time and environment: both physical and social</b>			
<i>Time</i> (time away from school, from routine, from pressure, from family)	22	12	52.1
<b>Personalism / Intimacy / Emotion / Euphoria</b>			
<i>Intimacy</i>	7	7	30.4
<i>Disclosure</i>	4	5	21.7
<b>Reflection/Spiritual/Relationship with God</b>			
<i>Spiritual</i>	6	4	17.3
<i>God</i>	7	4	17.3
<i>Reflection</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 1

#### 5.1.1 Relationships

The responses answered the question about ‘enjoyability’ of retreats mainly from the students’ point of view. Relationships featured prominently in the teachers’ understandings of what was enjoyable for them on a retreat. They considered that relationships between students and between students and teachers had the potential to improve in the ‘away from school’ setting and that this beneficial development seemed to last for the rest of the school year.

Developing relationships featured as a principal purpose of retreats for 65% of the teachers. They felt that in contemporary society, the ability to have meaningful relationships with others was constantly being eroded away by the ‘busyness’ of life.

#### 5.1.2 The value of time away as an important feature of relationship building

‘Going away’ and ‘having the time’ to focus on relationships were prominent responses to question 1. Staying at school for a retreat was not thought to be suitable for creating a deeper sense of community, whereas, living together, away from school and family pressures, dialoguing, reflecting and sharing were all regarded as important for deepening relationships between people.

The teachers reported that for the students, the time away from the intense school environment was a welcomed reprieve from the pressure of study. They acknowledged that the retreat experience provided students with a “space to think and to reflect” (School A, teacher 1); it was a valuable opportunity to slow down the hectic pace of senior secondary life and for students to consider their world without being confronted by the lack of time to do so. The pressure of time in the senior secondary years was also felt by teachers and they spoke about the positive aspect of going away with students on retreat to establish or to re-establish positive relationships with them. The following ideas were common in responses:

Spending some time away from the school environment where everything is so rushed and you really don't have time to sometimes get to know the students as you would like and form those bonds with them (School D, teacher 4) and

...you can really see other sides of their (students') personalities that you're not always allowed to see in a school environment (School B, teacher 6).

Many of the teachers believed that the retreat was not just about getting to know students, but they saw it as an opportunity to share part of themselves – to provide students “with the realisation that there's a human side to a school teacher” (School D, teacher 3).

### *5.1.3 The negative effects of a time-poor environment on students' relationships*

One teacher lamented the loss of relationships and deeper connections within the family unit as a reality that some students experienced regularly. It was expressed by the following:

...we're busy parents, busy people... they [parent and child] often don't have that connectedness and relationship to talk about those sort of things anymore, sitting down at the dinner table and discussing how your day was and how you felt about it and you know, especially that 'how you felt about it'...not 'how was your day?' (School C, teacher 2).

It took time to enter the world of another and connect with their feelings. The speed of society and the demands it made on students, the teachers believed, did not encourage the flourishing of relationships.

Another expression of the time-poor environment was:

Well, I think that in society these days, there's very little time for 'time out'. And we live in a rapidly changing society where everything is 'now!' Everything is McDonalds, everything is fast, everything is done...there's no time for them to really sit and 'be' and do nothing, and sometimes, just sit around and have the opportunity to talk about things that are sometimes confronting...we tend not to do that in our society because we're so in a

hurry...we're busy with assessment tasks and all those sorts of things and we often don't teach them the value of time out and the value of introspection and knowing yourself and that's quite frightening sometimes but it's important in terms of their growth, in terms of who they become (School C, teacher 2).

This observation of not having time to simply 'be and do nothing' was regarded as having the potential for important consequences in terms of a student's personal identity development. The rush of student life had other implications in relation to family life. As pressures at school increased for students, dialogue and personal interactions with family appeared to decrease. The teachers noted that many students went to the retreat with personal issues about their family. They also noted that the family unit had changed and the lack of time impacted on its ability to function without stress. They explained that as students became older and more independent, families saw less of each other and spent less time in dialogue. This had a direct impact on the quality of family relationships.

...we have kids here that sometimes...there's giant houses, they go home...I've actually spoken to kids and they've said, 'oh, I didn't see mum or dad at all last night,' I'm talking senior kids, because they go up to their section of their big house...their parents come home at whatever time and sometimes they don't have any of that connection...that family unit that once was there that, I think, helped nurture that sort of thing, and going on picnics together and days together (School C, teacher 2).

At a time when support from family was crucial for students in the senior years, the participants noted that some students missed out on dialogue time and disclosure opportunities within their own family, creating distance in their relationships. Retreats therefore became important forums in which students had the opportunity to express their feelings – how they 'felt' in a time-rich retreat environment. It was sometimes expressed that the retreat often became a substitute-like family for those students who lacked connections at home – a place to be nurtured and feel affirmed.

The idea that a retreat was to be 'enjoyable' and a 'good experience' was often presumed by the respondents to be a key aim as part of the richness in concentrating on relationships while on retreat. Hence, what made them enjoyable were also regarded as successful elements in the program.

#### *5.1.4 Developing teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships*

Developing relationships between teachers and students was regarded as a key element in the success of a retreat. 65% of the respondents believed that relationships were

improved through interactions with students on a retreat. It became for teachers “an opportunity to understand where they [the students] were coming from” (School A, teacher 2) as well as a worthwhile experience that fostered greater understanding between people. But it was not limited to just the teachers learning about students. The perception was that students benefited from this time too: “I think they (students) really enjoy the opportunity to relate to us on a different level...I think it’s about relationship (School B, teacher 3) and “they like the opportunity to relate to the staff in a more friendly way too (School B, teacher 2).

Also considered important were the relationships between students themselves; this idea merged into sense of ‘togetherness’, which in turn contributed to a heightened awareness of community.

#### *5.1.5 Building community through relationships*

Doing things together, sharing ideas, listening and responding influenced the building of community. Spending time together enabled students and teachers to relate to each other on a friendlier level. Being together without the distractions of school and study helped to create a generally positive atmosphere among the participants and this was commented on by 34% of the respondents.

I think it can really cement relationships with kids or it can help them to begin to flourish...I think it breaks down some barriers and it can be really useful when you’re relating with them later (School B, teacher 2).

The teachers found this time together personally fulfilling and commented that it could not be replicated at school.

#### *5.1.6 The role of the large group and teacher ‘personal stories’*

The teachers enjoyed the group activities that were a focal point for personal expression. Sometimes the whole group would work on ‘construction’ activities where it would be given a task to complete to prompt students to express and explain their feelings. The whole large group was assembled periodically for explaining what the next activity would be about before the small groups met. Often, the whole group session included a ‘witness’ story that was shared by one of the adult retreat leaders with the rest of the participants.

“...with those large group sessions, all the teachers play their part in introducing different concepts and discussing different ideas” (School D, teacher 1). What and how much was shared was left up to the discretion of the teachers. Usually, this aspect of personal story telling was shared around the teacher leaders so



that the different stories would provide variety. However, this was a dilemma for one teacher:

...as a teacher if you're willing to share, it's amazing what you're able to get back, they learn about your life about your struggles and those sorts of things so you have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone sometimes and be prepared to trust the kids .... and sometimes that's hard cause there might be one child ... and you think...oh...I wonder what they're going to do with that sort of information? (School C, teacher 2)

New teachers who had been invited to participate in the retreats often felt vulnerable about sharing personal material in front of a large group of students for the first few times and "...the suggestion always is that they [also] start off the sharing in any small group discussion and that they share very deeply and that sets the tone for the group to function at that level" (School C, teacher 3). One teacher said the sharing of personal stories with students and staff was not explained to new teachers prior to the retreat and often was described as "confronting" (School C, teacher 3) when they realised this was an expectation of their being on retreat. It was a significant shift from their role of professional teacher to that of personal 'witness' and one that not all teachers felt comfortable with, preferring not to be re-invited back to the next retreat.

We have had some teachers who have said, 'please don't ask me to go again' as much as they really enjoyed the retreat, they just thought it was the most invaluable thing for the kids, they could not give as much as they wanted to... and they did something in their lives that they are just not prepared to share with the kids...and that's fair enough...and they said...and in my experience, there have only been two, and they have said, the depth that's required is more than I can give...and they only said 'don't ask again' (School C, teacher 1).

#### *5.1.7 The role of the small group: Personal sharing*

Small group discussions tended to expand on what was said in the large group. Students "really love the small groups because they can have more intimate and intense discussions" (School D, teacher 1). However, teachers with less experience were not very confident in knowing what personal aspects of their lives they could share with students.

If the person wasn't very experienced I think they definitely have the opportunity to ask about...ask what they should do and then if the person who was leading it was aware that that person was inexperienced in group situations, they might speak to them about it and just give them a few guidelines... (School B, teacher 4).

Teachers were expected to model the discussions in the small group. When asked what their role was, one respondent said:

I think to show them. To be an example that you don't have to be scared to share. Cause if you start off with sharing some personal aspects of your life, the kids kind of use that 'if Miss can do it or Sir can do it, then I can do it...and I know that it's going to stay in the room...' And we always start every group saying, whatever is said in the room, stays in the room (School C, teacher 5).

The intimacy of the small group allowed students to discuss different aspects of the large group witness talk in a confidential setting. This confidentiality was stressed by teachers as being "an unspoken pledge" (School C, teacher 1) ensuring that what was said within the group stayed in the group. Adherence to confidentiality also enabled the small group leader, usually a teacher, to recount their own personal story in a safe environment and share insights of what it all meant. Often, stories were told so that students could identify with the issues, feelings and relationships. If students could identify with the story, teachers observed that the story and the resulting discussion enabled feelings of "empathy" to develop (School C, teacher 2). The theme of 'personal storying' was regarded as central to the dynamics of the retreat.

Achieving a level of 'personalism' (a desire to communicate at a personal level) was highly regarded as a key element in the success and 'enjoyability' of retreats. This involved personal "sharing" of thoughts and feelings (School A, teacher 4) which in turn, created a level of "intimacy" (School C, teacher 2). Personalism developed when teachers and students had the time to socialise without time constraints and with an assurance of confidentiality. Within this secure, time-rich environment away from their usual routines, "...the understanding...the confidence...the trust" (School C, teacher 1) between people was nurtured beyond any experience back at school. But not everyone felt comfortable sharing. One teacher said that it was awkward to share personal information with students. "...I'm sometimes uncomfortable with that experience, because it's also hard for me, I feel pressure in that as well..." (School C, teacher 2).

Helping students to "open up" (School A, teacher 1) but not divulge too much indicated how the majority of teachers saw their role in the small group. When teachers shared honestly "This is how I felt at your age..." (School A, teacher 2) it enabled students to realise "Oh...he/she was like that when he/she was my age too..." (School A, teacher 2) which then opened up channels for further dialogue.

However being asked to respond on a personal level also created awkwardness for some students. Not all small group discussions were interactive especially when ‘there are a lot of quiet moments...and the kids don’t want to answer questions when they’re questioned on things’ (School B, teacher 1). Teachers saw their role as “being able to draw information out” (School B, teacher1) and “to encourage kids who are more reluctant to talk” (School B, teacher 2) as a way of involving everyone and building up relationships.

Sharing within the small group had the effect of giving “kids an opportunity to be heard by their peers” (School A, teacher 3) and became an important vehicle “to build trust within the group” as “an important sort of relationship building” (School A, teacher 3), especially “their relationships between each other” (School A, teacher 4). The small group gave students a forum in which to “hear other points of view” (School B, teacher 2) and “allows them to articulate their ideas in more detail” in safety. This ensured that students shared their own views and would “feel accepted” (School C, teacher 1) rather than be the mouth-piece of a group.

#### *5.1.8 Time to explore students’ relationship with God*

17% of the teachers said that the retreat was an opportunity for students to explore their relationship with God. While God was not the main theme of the retreat, the participants said that when God was spoken about, the session was clearly named such as the “God Session” (School A, teacher 2). Students were invited in this session to make connections between what they experienced in their lives, their relationship with others and whether they could name the presence of God within these. This was described by teacher 3 (School A):

I think that the emphasis is a lot less on ... a God-type experience...with these days, it’s more on relationships, I think, and not just with God. It’s relationships with others, the families and the relationship with God. And so, it’s not a full-on God experience, you know, the God who is still watching and judging you all the time... hat used to be the focus for me...a decade ago.

The teachers were conscious of not imposing their own beliefs about God on students. The “God-Session” and the liturgy often became a gentle exploration of whether or not God was a reality for them. Hence, the retreat was an opportunity “... to think about what their relationship with God is...whether it exists for them, whether they’re not quite sure whether there is a relationship or not...whether there’s a very strong commitment to that relationship with God...” (School A, teacher 4). Some teachers did not emphasise God in the discussions because they were concerned about

students' perceptions about the retreat. Some students had told them "...they think that it's all about religion" (School A, teacher 5) and teachers were anxious not to play into the hands of this stereotype.

## 5.2 QUESTION 2: AN EXAMPLE OR ACTIVITY TO WHICH THE STUDENTS APPEARED TO RESPOND VERY FAVOURABLY

Table 5.2 summarises the coded responses of the participants for question 2.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Personal Engagement</b>			
Possible attitudinal change through <i>discussions</i>	13	12	52.1
<i>Personal affirmation</i> by teachers and student peers	13	9	39.1
Listening to <i>story</i>	19	9	39.1
<i>Talking</i> to others	11	8	34.7
Having <i>personal insights</i> as part of student personal development	7	6	26.08
<i>Personal reflection</i>	6	6	26.08
<i>Personal journey</i>	11	5	21.7
<i>Parent letter</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Listening</i> to others	3	2	8.6
<b>Group Involvement</b>			
<i>Activities</i>	32	17	73.9
<i>Meditation</i>	5	5	21.7
<i>Liturgy</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Games</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Expressions of Emotion and Euphoria</b>			
<i>Emotions</i>	7	5	21.7
<i>Euphoria</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 2

The participants indicated that students responded positively to personal affirmation activities that enabled them to engage with others positively. Discussions within groups were also highly regarded because they created an atmosphere that was open to a personal, reflective reassessment of previously held attitudes. Student personal reflections and time to think during or after discussions of people's life journeys could possibly lead to a change in previously-held notions of other students as well

as to some change in their view of self. The teachers noted that some discussions appeared to lead to improved relationships between students.

### 5.2.1. *Affirmation activities*

These were considered important for improving students' relationships with others. Such activities required talking, writing or expressing actions that communicated positive, affirming thoughts and feelings to others. As one teacher remarked "I think one reason is, it doesn't happen [the affirmations] often enough in normal life, whether it be in their family or even in their school. So often people will concentrate on the negatives and they'll let you know when you've done something bad" (School D, teacher 1). An activity called 'The Beatitudes' was positively rated because students got "a different perspective on how other students actually see them..." (School D, teacher 3).

Affirmation activities enabled students to "feel accepted" and feel "really good about themselves" (School C, teacher 1) which were important possible retreat outcomes. No teacher wanted students to feel negatively about themselves or to be rejected by others. Some teachers considered that students' emotions and euphoria were often a natural result of experiencing personal affirmation. The participants reported that students were sometimes moved to tears by affirmations and by insights and new understandings of their relationships with family and their peers: "I didn't realise that [they]... thought so well of me" which students found "exceptionally moving" and "exceptionally affirming".

#### 5.2.1.1 *Parent-letter*

The parent-letter activity in which parents wrote a letter to their child did not rate so highly with the teachers. They were unable to control the letter contents. They expressed reservations about parents' expressing their feelings appropriately on paper. There was an element of risk if it was not done well. Despite this, when students *were* affirmed by the contents, students enjoyed reading their letter and were often moved to tears. If the letter was used as a tool to highlight students' failings within the family, then it contributed to negative feelings and this was probably one reason for the teachers' lack of confidence in this activity. It did not provide consistent results for all students.

### 5.2.1.2 *Candle-making and meditation*

Whole group activities, such as candle-making, encouraged students to reflect on their personal journey collectively and individually. The participants considered that students also enjoyed guided meditation “where they were taken through some relaxation exercises and were asked to think about certain things and they responded to that really favourably ...because it’s personal, it’s relaxed...and they enjoyed that process of winding down” (School B, teacher 2). It was important for the teachers that the retreat helped reduce students’ stress levels.

### 5.2.2 *Different aspects of the retreat that did not make it enjoyable*

Not all retreat activities were considered enjoyable. 8% of the participants said that some liturgies were problematic. Students sometimes felt excluded if the liturgy explicitly demanded a faith commitment or response that they were unwilling to make.

you need to keep a really good balance between the way that you approach liturgy, but then also, making sure that it’s open enough for them not to feel that if they don’t believe a certain thing or think a certain way then that’s bad or that’s wrong (School D, teacher 1).

It was considered that starting sessions without generating some initial energy amongst students would impact negatively on the activity. One teacher noted: “without that euphoric start at times, you can find that your session can be dull or boring or lifeless” (School A, teacher 2). This would reduce the enjoyment. 34 % of the teachers said that staff selection affected the success of the retreat and did not make it enjoyable for students. The participants were clear about the skills or dispositions needed to make the retreat effective. “You don’t want someone who’s highly-strung”; the preference is that they be “fairly relaxed” (School A, teacher 7) to be flexible enough to cope with any unplanned changes to the program. It was important that teachers attended the retreat with the students’ wellbeing in mind.

Take the time to listen to what the kids are saying. Don’t cut them off. Just really give them your full attention. And have that attention to give them. If you’re going to go there with a 100 other things on your mind, you’re not really going to be there for the kids. There’s no real point of going (School C, teacher 5).

The teachers said that when staff attended but were distracted by other issues, the retreat was not as enjoyable.

### 5.2.2.1 *The involvement of the priest in the retreat Mass*

While a prominent focus of the retreat was to make it enjoyable for students, occasionally factors beyond the control of the retreat leaders impacted on the success of an activity or the positive mood of the retreat. Visitors, such as priests invited to celebrate Mass, sometimes affected the positive mood of the retreat. Some participants spoke cautiously about the influence of the priest.

Given the lack of time, the priest was usually only available for the Mass and would leave afterwards. Rarely did a priest stay for the entire retreat. In most cases, it was reported that the priests were positive and hence they were well received by the retreat group. But there were also negative comments including disagreement with the purposes of the retreat leaders: "...his (the priest's) approach at times wasn't always the same as ours in terms of, he...sometimes... just had different opinions about what we should have been talking to kids about... he disagreed with us..." (School D, teacher 1).

Such disagreements created tension for the retreat staff (and possibly also for the students). Some comments were more scathing, indicating anger:

it's very sad when you've opened up with the boys and they've talked about a whole lot of things that are important to them and you've developed great trust, you've talked to them in a non-judgemental way about a whole lot of issues...you haven't been forceful about what is right or wrong...and then you go into a liturgy where the priest who says the Mass lectures them about the evils of the world... and makes statements in a homily along the lines that abortion is a far more evil sin than a priest being a paedophile. The year that we got the big lecture about abortion and paedophilia, he was there for the Mass only. He came down...he didn't hear any Reconciliation and said the Mass...and thankfully disappeared...probably before we tore him apart... (School D, teacher 2).

As a result of 'hit-and-miss' successes with priests on the retreats, some participants indicated that they were selective about which priests might be invited to attend and celebrate the Eucharist. Depending on (a) the perceived personal presence of the priest, (b) his understanding of youth lifestyle and spirituality and (c) his outlook on matters of the Church, some of the participants indicated that they were prepared to omit the celebration of Mass if the presence of a particular priest was going to be detrimental to all that had developed positively on the retreat.

### 5.2.2.2 *Disciplining students*

It was reported that occasionally students needed to be disciplined for unacceptable behaviour and this was usually the responsibility of one teacher for the whole retreat because the participants believed "You're not the disciplinarian anymore" (School D,

teacher 2) if there was the aim of developing relationships with students and achieving the retreat outcomes.

If you're away with a group of students who have a lot of discipline problems and they're not going to be able to have a good retreat, if you can't get through the discipline issues first...if you've got at least one person there who is a strong disciplinarian and they know they're not going to get away with stuff, they won't try it. They'll be more inclined to participate in the way the program should run (School C, teacher 4).

To emphasise how the teachers saw themselves on retreat not to mar the positive tone, one teacher remarked: "You sort of hate to be jumping up and down and making discipline a big issue when you're trying to focus on something else" (School A, teacher 6).

When serious discipline problems did happen, those students were removed from the retreat site and taken home. "The time that we've had a discipline problem, Teacher X (the principal) had been up there and we actually drove the boys back to school. So we actually took them out of the retreat" (School D teacher 4).

Predictably, this action affected the tone and mood of the retreat.

No teacher spoke about drugs being brought into the retreat. This was unusual given the common knowledge of a drug culture amongst some the young.

### 5.2.3 *Time to think and reflect*

One of the most valuable aspects reported for the retreats was for students to have time made available to them in which "to think about issues that might be very personal" (School D, teacher 2) and to listen and reflect on their own "life journey" (School A, teacher 2) and the journey of others. It was considered that through the telling of personal stories, students came to illuminating moments of realisation. It was through being open to others' personal stories that students came to identify their own story more clearly. Most of the teachers believed that by narrating their own story, it provided a catalyst for students to think and reflect, hopefully enabling some of them to enter into the mystery of their life journey. Connecting their personal story to some reference to God and presenting it to students as a spiritual explanation of that mysterious life, became an important invitation for some teachers to reflect on their own lives. "There is something out there that we're really not that familiar with" (School A, teacher 2) alluding to the sense of mystery within spirituality. This awareness of mystery was said to be felt more acutely when the sharing was done in community. All of the teachers spoke of the importance of listening to others and



some added that it was not essential that everyone shared deeply because some students were not able to do this.

#### 5.2.4 *The fostering of attitudinal change*

Participants reported that the retreat provided students with “quiet reflective time” (School A, teacher 2) in which to examine relationships that tended to focus on parents and peers. Sometimes this resulted in students making startling discoveries about their depth of feelings towards particular people. Statements from students such as “I never thought about my family like that before” (School C, teacher 1) were considered as hints that some attitudinal change may have been catalysed or started through such reflection. However, one participant added a cautionary note that “teary-ness is a by-product of too much reflection” and teachers needed to be sensitive to this potential problem (School A, teacher 4).

### 5.3 QUESTION 3: THE MOST VALUABLE AND IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF RETREATS FOR STUDENTS

Table 5.3 summarises the coded responses from the interviews.

<b>Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data</b>	<b>Total number of times key words used across all responses</b>	<b>Number of teachers who used the key word</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers who used the key word</b>
<b>Relationships and Community</b>			
<i>Teachers knowing students (relationships)</i>	33	17	73.9
<i>Community building</i>	19	13	56.5
<i>Trust developing between participants</i>	6	5	21.7
<i>Disclosure/honesty by participants</i>	9	4	17.3
<i>Respect for students</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Acceptance of others/attitudinal change towards others</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Personal issues explored with others</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Teacher witness in personal sharing sessions</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Coping strategies for going back to school or home such as debriefing students</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Time and Environment</b>			
<i>Personal time/Quiet time</i>	32	18	78.2

<i>Reflection</i> on students' life journeys	14	10	43.4
<i>Withdrawal</i> from routine	12	9	39.1
<i>Freedom</i>	5	5	21.7
<i>Relaxation</i>	2	3	13.04
<i>Fun</i> with others	2	2	8.6
<b>Spirituality</b>			
<i>Introspection</i> ; reflection about self; "deep" thinking	8	8	34.7
<i>Spirituality</i>	7	5	21.7
<i>God</i>	7	5	21.7
<i>Prayer</i>	3	2	8.6
<i>Personal discovery/revelation</i>	3	1	4.3
<i>Self-awareness/perceptions</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Affirming</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Personal focus</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Relevance</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 3

#### 5.3.1 *The significance of time for students*

As shown in Table 5.3, the participants were aware of the significance of time for students, especially reflective, personal time that was needed to break the cycle of constant activity. 78.2% said that teenagers needed quiet time to think.

I think that most teenagers now, don't have quiet time any more...they don't have...their life is so full, so many other things are happening around them that they just go at breakneck speed all the time, and they don't have the opportunity to just think about anything...that might be more important in the scheme of things. (School A, teacher 4)

#### 5.3.2 *The relationships between teachers and students*

73.9% of participants indicated that teacher/student relationships improved significantly during a retreat because there was time for it to happen.

I guess bonding with the students away from school was really important; we became, I guess, friends in that period of time. We talked about a whole lot of issues, even out of retreat time; in social time. We might have been playing table tennis or we might have been out on the tennis court or we might have gone for a bush walk...where the boys just talked and chatted to you on a very personal level, and you just don't get that opportunity back at school in a busy world. (School D, teacher 2)

This teacher named the depth of relationship with the word 'friend', but admitted that it was only a temporary experience. Perhaps this implied that they could not be 'friends' once back at school because of teacher-students code of conduct, but they could remain friendly towards each other. It was acknowledged by

some participants that teachers and students could never return to the level of relationship before and during the retreat either.

In a natural setting that was physically removed from school, teachers and students had opportunities to “mix and blend... on a different level...and build up trust, build up a bond so that they know there is somebody they can turn to when things are tough” (School D, teacher 2). The bond of trust that developed was an important factor for relationships to move forward. This may explain why some of the teachers were willing to be called by their first name on retreat; they perceived it as a gesture of trust between teachers and students.

I think that if you’re going to stick with the ‘Sir’ or ‘Mister’ routine, I think you’re already putting up barriers...that prevent the kids being able to relate to you as just another human being. I think that it’s an important issue that they just see you really as that; not as a person in a position of authority, but as just another person who expresses their feelings and share ideas (School D, teacher 3).

One teacher was unsure as to where the tradition for addressing teachers on a first name basis came from.

I don’t know...there’s no policy...there’s no thing that says, ‘let them call you by your first name’ and there’s nothing that says ‘don’t let them call you by your first name.’ I don’t usually make an issue of it. If someone...if some student there says ‘can I call you by your name?’ so I then don’t say ‘no’, like you can’t...but I don’t encourage them to. If it’s going to make them feel better...make them feel a part of the group, then I really don’t have an issue with it” (School C, teacher 4).

It was reported that on their return to school, the assumption of trust continued. Teachers trusted that students would revert back to using teacher titles of Mr or Ms without forcing the issue. This did not happen consistently.

‘Sometimes...not always...they don’t usually ‘revert’...it’s not something that comes about on retreat...someone, every now and then feels the need to call you by your name just to let you know that they know it...or something” (School C, teacher 4).

Not all teachers agreed to being called by their first name on retreat. One teacher admitted “I think there are some teachers who feel uncomfortable with being referred to on their first name basis” (School D, teacher 3) but did not elaborate.

For 65% of the teachers, those bonds of trust and relationship were considered to affect the teacher/student relationship in a positive way, believing that it contributed to developing community spirit among all of the participants which then continued back at school. “the relationships that you’ve formed with the kids on

that retreat...they stay forever...yeah... I think they're a lot stronger and they're lovely" (School B, teacher 1).

### 5.3.3 *The relationship between teachers and teachers*

Bonding with other teachers was considered to make the retreat enjoyable and worthwhile for teachers. Going away on retreat with colleagues tended to result in "...better relationships with staff...it's a bonding session. You get...lunch times to talk to people...you talk to them on the run (at school)...but...it's definitely a bonding session...everyone that goes...gets on really, really well" (School B, teacher 1). The participants indicated that the retreat affected relationships between colleagues in a positive way, and on the whole, resulted in improved collegiality. Going away each year with the same teachers enabled the formation of a "team" (School D, teacher 2) that enhanced the 'flow' of the retreat program.

### 5.3.4 *The impact of community and relationship-building*

Enhancing relationships was considered an important aspect of effective retreats. The teachers believed that students appreciated their efforts spent in getting to know them better. They emphasised that relationship-building led to community-building – and vice versa.

When student-teacher bonds strengthened, trust increased. As a consequence, honest disclosure about the self in discussions also tended to increase. A genuine willingness by teachers to share parts of their personal life journey contributed to the increased feelings of trust and heightened the sense of bonding between students and teachers. Within this environment of trust, it was acknowledged that students risked becoming vulnerable by sharing their personal issues with their peers; therefore it was considered important that teachers modelled and monitored aspects of appropriate personal sharing with others in the small group.

### 5.3.5 *The role of spirituality as distinct from religion*

The *spiritual* nature of the retreat emerged more prominently in the participants' comments than the more 'formal' *religious* aspects. Spirituality as encompassing the idea of communal journeying without a specifically Catholic association was evident in the comments of 39% of the respondents; there was an emphasis on expressing spirituality as being together and not being alone. A more generic understanding of spirituality was evident in the view that the retreat "was with people who were on a similar journey" (School A, teacher 1). Shared personal stories were understood as

spiritual stories because they were about journeying in life. These journey stories became a source of encouragement for the future and enabled students to reflect on the key question: “What is it that I take with me on the next stage of my journey?” (School A, teacher 1).

### 5.3.6 *Student perceptions about the retreat and ‘God-talk’*

According to the participants, and as described in 4.1, God was not always a prominent focus of the retreat but it was often an emerging one. The word ‘God’ was heard by students when the teachers named God in their own personal stories and when they interpreted how they understood God. It was considered that talk about God often emerged as a consequence of sharing one’s personal story.

The teachers indicated that students were not always well informed about the purposes of the retreat prior to attending. Some students were suspicious or uneasy that the experience would be all about God and not fun. The teachers tried to distance the retreat from this perception, with the result that not many teachers appeared to talk much about God at the retreat. It was said that the word ‘God’ was used sparingly because it could conjure up an image of religious authority for students along the same lines as school authority. The softer perception was expressed by School D, teacher 1: “I just say that we’re looking at relationships and that goes from relationships with other people to relationships with ourselves, to relationships with God, however that it viewed...” Hence God was frequently explored in a gentle manner through the topic of relationships. The participants indicated that no authoritarian images of God were ever presented to the students; rather questions were posed along the lines of: Who is God for you? What kind of relationship do you want with God?

## 5.4 QUESTION 4: THE ROLE OF GROUP DISCUSSION

Table 5.4 summarises the coded responses from the interviews for this question.

<b>Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data</b>	<b>Total number of times key words used across all responses</b>	<b>Number of teachers who used the key word</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers who used the key word</b>
<b>Discussion and Communication</b>			
<i>Discussions</i> with others	79	22	95.6
<i>Personal sharing</i> in a safe environment	41	17	73.9
<i>Listening</i> to others	22	14	60.8

<i>Modelling by teachers on how to do sessions</i>	15	9	39.1
<i>Building student confidence</i>	7	7	30.4
<i>Emotions</i>	12	5	21.7
<i>Reflecting and responding</i>	6	5	21.7
<i>Safe environment in which to share personal stories</i>	4	3	13.04
<i>The examination of different perspectives</i>	3	2	8.6
<i>Setting limits of personal sharing</i>	6	2	8.6
<b>Enhancing Relationships</b>			
<i>Teacher facilitates direction of group</i>	57	18	78.2
<i>Relationships with teachers and students</i>	51	16	69.5
<i>Teachers creating comfortable atmosphere for students</i>	52	14	60.8
<i>Building trust amongst participants</i>	42	14	60.8
<i>Developing connections with people</i>	20	13	56.5
<i>Establishing confidentiality within the small group</i>	20	9	39.1
<i>Activities</i>	14	9	39.1
<i>Attitudinal change</i>	11	9	39.1
<i>Developing respect</i>	18	8	34.7
<i>Accepting others</i>	7	5	21.7
<i>Personal development</i>	7	3	13.04
<i>To provide a balance of student personalities</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Freedom from group pressure</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Resilience</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Other aspects</b>			
<i>Flexibility in modifying retreat program</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Focussing students back on retreat tasks</i>	5	2	8.6

#### Key findings from Question 4

##### 5.4.1 Group discussion

Group discussion rated very highly (95 % of the respondents) as an effective tool for communication. Two distinct groups were used for discussion purposes: (a) the large group and (b) the small group. Large groups gathered all students for presenting a witness story from an adult. As a strategy it ensured that all students heard the same

talk. "...a large group is to almost get some of the different ideas and opinions out there...so that students realise that something that they might be thinking is quite normal because someone has suggested it" (School A, teacher 7). Students predominately listened and did not usually respond to the story or to each other in the large group.

#### 5.4.2 *Listening*

The participants reported that the small groups were understood as 'expression forums' where students would again listen to the small group leader's personal story and were encouraged to participate in the discussion. Rules of conduct were discussed beforehand so that listening and speaking were carried out respectfully. Confidentiality was assured with "what's said in the group...remains in the group..." (School D, teacher 5). In listening to others, the teachers said that the participants reflected on what they heard as a kind of personal "soul searching" (School C, teacher 5) activity. Questions emerged and they thought about the meanings of people's stories.

Listening was not restricted to students. 60% of the respondents said that the teacher had an important role in the small group of "mainly to be a good listener" (School C, teacher 4). It was rated highly by one teacher who said: "I think that's the most important skill on retreat...[is] active listening. Because if you don't listen to what the students are saying, then there's no point on being on a retreat." (School B, teacher 5).

#### 5.4.3 *Personal disclosure and personal sharing*

73% of the teachers said that it was important that students felt 'safe' when sharing some aspect of their lives with others. One teacher said:

I think it's very important not to use the group discussion as a mechanism for students off-loading everything and disclosing. I feel that it's important that they don't see it as a moment where they have to disclose everything. And if a student does that, and I think it's important that the group leader is able to pull that back a bit (School A, teacher 1)

Teachers emphasised it was important for them to model the style and depth of personal disclosure that was required from the students and to ensure that the group did not become "a mechanism for students off-loading everything" (School A, teacher 1). The small group discussions enabled students to reflect on different points of view and respond in a positive way because it was meant to be a safe environment to express and accept differences. Differences of perspectives were

often explored within the small group. The teachers also used the small group to re-focus students back on retreat tasks and set limits on how much personal sharing was appropriate.

Much of the dynamics of the group discussion was regarded as dependent on the teacher who “would take the lead and offer some kind of feedback to the kids and say, ‘this is what I think about the particular issue’ and give them something to follow” modelling the “depth of response and you’d expect the kids to make” (School A, teacher 2). Personal sharing by teachers with students did not follow guidelines. One teacher described it as:

...they (retreat leaders) kind of leave it up to your personal judgement. It’s not so much a ‘training’. (It’s) emphasised that you share as much as you feel comfortable sharing and that you don’t go out of your comfort zone if that’s not what you want to do. So it’s very much up to the individual. (School C, teacher 5).

Given the complexity of relationships, the teachers said it was becoming increasingly difficult to decide the nature of what could be shared.

...it’s hard to draw that line on sharing and stuff with them, there’s a lot more pressure on you these days from society...you’re not so much worried about what might happen, but more about people’s perceptions...of what might happen (School C, teacher 4).

This teacher was aware of innuendo among the retreat participants if the sharing created an impression that the teacher-student relationship had become too close.

you’re worried about students wanting to share stuff with you and then become too clingy, I guess, they see you as a .... if they’ve been having a really troubled time and all of a sudden you’re a male figure that is being nice to them, they might become too sort of ‘clingy’ and there could be all sorts of various repercussions, I guess” (School C, teacher 4).

Teachers identified students who did not participate in the small group sharing.

There are still students who are reluctant to do that and there are students that you can’t force obviously, to become part of the group...you do get the odd small group where you’ve got one student who isn’t participating, and you can tell isn’t participating and from experience. I’ve found if you speak to them on a one-to-one basis, and just reaffirm that what they say there is privileged information and won’t be shared anywhere (School D, teacher 3).

Talking privately to those students and reassuring them of confidentiality often swayed them to disclose personal stories.



#### 5.4.4 Enhancing relationships

The teachers reported that group discussion often enhanced relationships. 60 % of the respondents reported that group discussion increased trust levels that led to enhanced positive feelings. The sharing of thoughts and feelings was considered as a catalyst for possibly promoting some attitudinal change towards others. It was felt that students developed new understandings and acceptance of others through group discussion through “the understanding...the confidence...the trust...all of that is built up in small groups” (School C, teacher 1).

78% of participants said it was the teacher’s role to monitor the balance of sharing within the group. Some students were more vocal than others and the teachers needed to encourage responses from the quieter students. When students were placed in small groups away from their regular friends, it was felt that they experienced greater freedom to express their personal thoughts – rather than what their friends might have expected them to say. 30 % of the teachers believed that personal sharing and discussion contributed to student resilience.

### 5.5 QUESTION 5: THE ROLE OF LITURGY AND PRAYER

Table 5.5 summarises the coded responses from the interviews for this question.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Personal Effects</b>			
<i>Important</i>	47	19	82.6
Need to be <i>meaningful</i>	44	15	65.2
<i>God</i> /explore meaning of God	30	13	56.5
<i>Reflection</i> on life	19	10	43.4
<i>Student ownership</i> makes liturgy meaningful	10	8	34.7
Creates an awareness of <i>spirituality</i>	5	5	21.7
<i>Meditation</i>	5	5	21.7
<i>Powerful</i>	7	4	17.3
<i>Invitation</i> to be with and reflection on God	2	2	8.6
To be in touch with their <i>feelings</i>	2	2	8.6

<i>Personalises worship</i>	3	2	8.6
<i>Remembering the journey</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Calming technique</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Prayer offers wisdom</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Prayer offers challenge</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Group Effects</b>			
<i>Prayer/liturgy an expectation</i>	17	14	60.8
<i>Connecting</i>	10	6	26.8
<i>Liturgy sets tone</i>	11	5	21.7
<i>Symbolic ritual</i>	8	5	21.7
<i>An intimate outlet of emotion</i>	9	3	13.04
<i>Reconciliation as healing</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Listening</i>	6	3	13.04
<i>Support from others during student faith journey</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Prayer would create a mood</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Group participation</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Other Effects/Understandings</b>			
<i>Used as a debrief</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>A focussing tool</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>A way of centre-ing students</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Traditional prayers and Mass are meaningless</i>	3	1	4.3
<i>Session builds towards prayer</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 5

#### 5.5.1 *The religious dimensions of the retreat in prayer and liturgy*

While the religious purposes of the retreats were presumed by participants, they did not rate the retreat solely as a religious experience especially when they gauged students' reactions. The respondents indicated that there was a difference in purposes for the retreat from those that applied to classroom religious education. Many of them showed that they were aware of the students' negative feelings about formal religion lessons at school and they did not want to give students the impression that the retreat would be an extended religion lesson. Some participants noted that information pertaining to the retreat and preparation for it was somewhat

secretive; the teachers did not tell students too much in advance as regards what the retreat was about:

...the kids in year 11 (after the retreat) they say things like ‘I thought this was going to be really religious, that we’re going to talk about God all the time, but it wasn’t much at all...it was really good! Like it wasn’t religious...’ So kids have got this barrier...about something’s that’s going to be religious...whatever their definition of religious is...which I think is praying all the time and talking about God... ...in effect, it is really religious without their really knowing... (School C, teacher 1).

The general view of participants was that prayer and liturgy were ‘givens’ on retreat and their function was to consolidate the experience of community among the participants. One teacher explained that the liturgies were effective “because they’ve (students) spent that intense amount of time together” (School D, teacher 1). Liturgy and prayer set the tone and mood for the retreat. Both helped to recall the journey so far with the students. The term ‘liturgy’ was generally used to describe a Catholic Mass. However, when a priest was not available for the Mass, a flexible liturgy like format of celebration and prayer (or para-liturgy) was used. The format of para-liturgy enabled the teachers to encourage greater student participation and expression throughout, which would not be possible with the celebration of Eucharist.

It was reported that prayer and liturgy on the retreat were often more meaningful than they were at school because they became “a reflection of life” (School A, teacher 1) in which all that was expressed during the retreat was acknowledged. Expressive liturgy in particular had the potential to open up students to “think about their relationship with God” (School B, teacher 6) as part of the “awareness of their spirituality” (School A, teacher 7). But it was considered that both had to be done in a certain way – not like at school. On the retreat, prayer and liturgy were expressed differently; students were able to reflect without “the hurried times (of prayer and liturgy) at school” (School B, teacher 5). It was felt that liturgy and prayer at school were not as effective as they were on a retreat.

On a cautionary note, some teachers advised that prayers and liturgies needed to be balanced and not confrontational. Prayers and liturgies were considered to have the potential to alienate students “because they’re at a really questioning age in terms of their spirituality” (School D, teacher 1) and needed the time and space to question.

### 5.5.2 *Student involvement in liturgies*

Despite consensus amongst teachers that liturgy was an important feature of the retreat, the teachers admitted that it did not feature prominently as an activity that students would have willingly chosen to participate in or describe as enjoyable had it not been for teachers' insistence. This was often because students held perceptions that liturgies were celebrated in the same way as the school Mass. Teachers felt that "the kids tend to get a lot more out of it if you're willing to let them take ownership of the Mass' songs or the liturgy" (School B, teacher 3).

It was reported that tensions emerged around prayer and liturgy because the teachers knew that there was a high expectation from school leaders such as principals and Religious Education coordinators. A 'you had to have it' attitude was considered prominent for liturgy irrespective of the cultural mix of students or of their level of religious understanding. As a response to this tension, when a priest was not available, the teachers more freely adapted the para-liturgy replacement for the Mass as a relevant, creative and understood experience for students.

Prayer and liturgy were considered to provide students with opportunities to explore the meaning of God in their life journey, but this was not expressed in the same way as in school prayers and liturgies. The teachers considered that liturgies, para-liturgies and prayers needed to be meaningful and relevant to the overall focus of the retreat – not "in the traditional sense of what the Vatican or the Church would classify as liturgy and prayer" (School A, teacher 7). Many of the participants saw prayer and liturgy as opportunities for 'unchurched' youth to experience the sacred. They were adapted and crafted by teachers to create an awareness of spirituality within the group – spirituality that was presented as a mysterious journey of life because "the kids don't understand the symbolism and the ritual" (School A, teacher 7) of Church tradition. Wherever possible, the participants set out to give students freedom of choice in selecting music and readings, often combining drama or mime into the liturgy.

#### 5.5.2.1 *Symbolism and liturgy-like healing ceremonies*

Prayer and liturgy brought students together to worship and reflect on their retreat journey. The expectation was that all students were to be present.

Liturgy-like healing ceremonies were regarded as valuable activities. They offered students opportunity for healing that addressed a need for general personal forgiveness in their relationships with family and significant others. "We tend to vary ... with the reconciliation...sometimes it's a kind of a third rite thing but a lot to

the times, it's the symbolic business of being sorry or whatever, and making up to people in the group" (School A, teacher 6). This was expressed symbolically and communally towards the end of the retreat that included a personal affirmation session, helping students to feel "accepted and forgiven" (School A, teacher 6).

A combined liturgy-like healing ceremony and affirmation activity was considered to enhance student relationships and help create a heightened sense of community. It was often considered a "highlight" (School A, teacher 1) of the retreat and teachers frequently referred to it as 'reconciliation'. In reality it was described as "a liturgy of almost forgiveness" (School B, teacher 3). Little was said by participants about the formal Sacrament of Reconciliation involving a priest; they indicated that the communal expression of forgiveness emphasised relationship-building.

#### 5.5.2.2 *Celebration of Eucharist*

The participants said that they were able to adapt the readings and student participation in the Mass in ways that were intended to take into account both students' spirituality and their needs. The Mass was omitted when a priest was unavailable: "You just can't get a priest on tap and say 'could you just drop everything and go to (location)...and say Mass please?'" (School B, teacher 6). The teachers' familiarity with the religious practices of their students was said to affect their view of the place of the Mass during the retreat. They indicated that many of their students did not attend Mass on a regular basis and a number did not know the Mass responses. They also reported that it was difficult to get a priest who had a good understanding of youth culture and who would be flexible with the Eucharistic celebration for it to be expressed and celebrated meaningfully. One respondent believed "if I had a choice of having a priest who expected it done a certain way, or not having a liturgy at all, a Mass at all, I would always go for liturgy and...let it come from the students" (School A, teacher 1).

#### 5.5.3 *Images of God*

The teachers said that they were realistic about not seeing the 'evangelising' of youth as the sole focus of the retreat. Evangelisation was still regarded as a key purpose of Catholic school as part of the overall mission of the Church. However, some of the teachers' understanding of the 'evangelising' of students appeared to be similar to 'indoctrination', where students were obliged to accept Church teachings. They understood the retreat purpose was to explore relationships; it was not an

opportunity to press for an overt commitment to Catholicism. Teachers spoke about an ‘invitational’ God; a God whom students could choose to have a relationship with or not. They considered that if there was too much talk about God on the retreat there was a risk of that this would ‘turn the students off’, affecting the positive atmosphere of the retreat. School A, teacher 1 believed: “I think it’s about an invitational God; ... I think that’s what we try to do on retreats...that we try and show the kids an invitational God that allows them to look at their own life...”

There appeared to be a specific criteria for presenting an invitational God to students; (a) teachers had to be able to express their own beliefs and understandings about God, (b) they had to feel comfortable reflecting on their own relationship with God, and (c) they had to be familiar enough with youth spirituality to be aware of the kind of God young people wanted or needed in their lives. Many of the teachers highlighted the God of relationship for students as being the most significant theme to explore as expressed in the following:

... once again I would say the nurturing of your retreat staff would be a very important aspect...and educating them in how to run retreats and as student spirituality changes to become less connected to a set faith doctrine or religion, I think that it’s important that the people who are giving the retreat have a moment to reflect on youth spirituality as their own spirituality and to try and work out what is the God that these young people want to meet and how is the best way to invite them to do that (School A, teacher 1).

The sharing of teachers’ stories that highlighted their personal questioning and doubts often set the scene for students to reflect on their own challenges.

It was considered that relationships, acceptance and forgiveness all resonated with students. The retreat was seen as a discreet opportunity for students to name the God-Presence in their lives. Some teachers made the link between God and community; that God was known and discovered through community and that God was revealed in experiences, especially by those who supported and cared for them. If people did not care, then there was some tendency of students to feel there was no God. Through the caring of others God could be experienced in community. This was explained as follows:

During the time, I think the most important thing is that they realise that they’re not alone...that there are others who have been through things that they’re going through and there are other things that they’ll never go through...that they’ve found solace in the fact that they’ve got a community that supports them...and they’ve got a God who listens to them and they have an opportunity to share with their community and to rely on their God to support them. Kids at this stage really don’t think that...But on retreat, whenever you mention God for the first

time, it's always a bit of a cringe, but as the retreat continues the kids understand that, 'ah! There is something out there that we're really not that familiar with, that there's some kind of relationship that we need to develop over time... Without retreats, they may never get to that point. And it happens by adults getting up there and saying 'Yes! I have a relationship and yes, it's changed over time and yes, there have been times when I thought that maybe I wasn't being listened to and other times when I thought that I was. It helps them to understand that that relationship is one that is a two-way street and you have to be involved in it somehow (School A, candidate 2).

The witnessing of teachers was regarded as important in helping students consider the idea of an 'invitational God'. The role of the retreat experience was to enable students to 'get to that point' of awareness that God is relational and, more importantly, real. A principal retreat focus was on providing students with opportunities to examine their relationships. When teachers talked about their own relationship with God within the small group, admitting that their own relationship had not been "smooth-sailing all the time...that it has it's up and downs and that sometimes you don't think that the relationship exists" (School A, teacher 2), created new insights for students about their teachers. The question of God was to be explored and reflected on during the retreat – especially through one's life experience; but there was no coercing of students to believe.

## 5.6 QUESTION 6: TEACHER UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT EMOTIONS AND EUPHORIA THAT ARE GENERATED ON RETREATS

Table 5.6 summarises the coded responses from the interviews.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Positive effects</b>			
Emotion created by <i>talking and remembering/sharing/listening</i>	24	12	52.1
Euphoria generates <i>relationship</i>	15	8	34.7
Retreat gives students permission to express <i>emotions</i>	12	7	30.4
Euphoria generates <i>energy</i>	9	6	26.8
Euphoria heightens sense	14	5	21.7

<i>of community</i>			
<i>Emotional release</i>	9	5	21.7
<i>Emotions and euphoric expressions are fantastic</i>	4	4	17.3
Euphoria prepares students for <i>sessions</i>	2	1	4.3
<b>Cautions and potentially negative effects</b>			
<i>Vulnerability</i>	32	11	47.8
<i>Cautious attitude about student vulnerability</i>	28	10	43.4
Teachers feel they must be <i>careful</i>	24	9	39.1
<i>Dangerous to have euphoria and emotions</i>	17	9	39.1
Euphoria build up students' <i>emotions</i> to unrealistic level	14	7	30.4
Euphoria is <i>manufactured well-being</i>	6	5	21.5
<i>Disapproval of stimulating emotions</i>	10	4	17.3
<i>Not genuine</i>	4	3	13.04
<i>Unsure about role of euphoria and emotions</i>	3	3	13.04
Euphoria makes students <i>uncomfortable</i>	3	2	8.6
Emotions create <i>exhaustion</i>	3	2	8.6
There is an <i>expectation</i> that emotions and euphoria are part of the retreat	2	2	8.6
Stimulating emotions and euphoria are seen as <i>manipulation</i>	2	2	8.6
<b>Teacher advice on the role of emotion and euphoria</b>	<b>Total number of times key words used across all responses</b>	<b>Number of teachers who used the key word</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers who used the key word</b>
<i>Teacher must have skills to direct the emotions and excitement of students</i>	30	13	56.5
<i>Euphoria and emotions not aim of retreat</i>	7	5	21.5
Makes students <i>vulnerable</i>	9	4	17.3



It is important to <i>debrief students</i> during emotions and excitement	7	4	17.3
<i>Focus</i> on euphoria has <i>changed</i>	4	3	13.04
Facilitator <i>responsible</i> for euphoria and emotions	3	2	8.6
There must be <i>balance in sharing</i>	2	1	4.3
<i>Teachers must be flexible to change direction of emotions</i>	2	1	4.3
Both emotions and euphoria are <i>necessary</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 6

#### 5.6.1 Euphoria and emotionality

The structure and content of the retreat program were regarded as contributing to the emotions and euphoria experienced by the students. 52% of the respondents said the activities that encouraged student participation with others generated emotional and euphoric responses. Listening to others' personal stories, sharing their own and remembering were important elements. However, 43% of the teachers were wary about creating an emotional atmosphere on retreat. But there was ambivalence in some responses. It was expressed as

we need to be careful how we handle students' emotions...the fact that they become emotional is in itself not a bad thing...but on the other hand, it can get to the point where students... that some people are going to feel extremely inhibited by the fact of all of this emotion, ...they could well retreat into... into themselves...withdraw...that's right....withdraw from the whole process because it's just too overwhelming for them. It's just too much (School A, teacher 4).

A minority of teachers regarded tears as a positive feature of the retreat. School C, teacher 5 believed that tears "enhanced the retreat atmosphere" because it encouraged students to support each other through personal sadness. This sometimes had the effect of creating empathy and closeness. However teachers admitted that there was no satisfactory method of predicting when students would become emotional. Often, the retreat provided students with the right environment to shed tears about "something that has been bothering them for a long time" and the tears enable them to have "gotten rid of it" (School C, teacher 1). Tears were regarded by some participants as an emotional release for students.

30 % of the teachers said that a general sense of euphoria or wellbeing could be created and monitored on the retreat. This was easier to manage than the personal emotions felt by students.

Experience of ‘what worked’ as games or tasks, enabled the teachers to create different energy levels in students. Some considered that euphoria was needed as a preparatory strategy to raise student energy levels for participation in the different sessions.

...we do have the other extreme where kids are jumping up and down and they are so excited to be there...but eventually they come down again and it’s easier to control in a sense than kids crying for two and a half days...yeah...it’s very difficult” (School C, teacher 1).

But this did not resolve the problems with emotions and euphoria that could arise on a retreat. 17% of the respondents said that students usually went home on an emotional high:

...they have such a feeling that everything’s going to be okay...everything in the world is good and they’re a great person...and it doesn’t last very long and they want to keep it going...they don’t want to leave the retreat because they feel so good. I guess it’s is like being on drugs, not that I’d know but...they get that sense of well-being and euphoria...and they get that on retreat without any medication or anything like that so they just want to keep that alive...and so they’re really hyper when they’re going home on the bus (School C, teacher 1).

The heightened feelings of happiness were acknowledged as being ‘transitory’ by the respondents. 8% of the teachers believed it was their responsibility to ensure students were supported during their euphoria and not letting them go home feeling vulnerable because of they were feeling ‘high’. They said it was important to provide students with strategies for ‘re-entry’ back home.

Being able to give them mechanisms to close down so they don’t leave on an emotional high that’s going to put them in a situation that when they come back home that can end up crashing them to the ground (School A, teacher 1).

### 5.6.2 *The need to be cautious about manipulating the emotions*

There were mixed feelings among the participants about the place and function of euphoria and emotions on retreat. ‘Feeling high’ led to positive feelings about self and this emotional release enabled students to bond with each other. However, the majority of the teachers were cautious about euphoria and emotions. Some considered that stimulating emotions was “manipulating the students” (School A, teacher 6) by getting them to cry or get high on purpose. Some were concerned

about students' feelings escalating to the point of "hysteria" (School B, teacher 4).

This same teacher illustrated the point by describing

...some girls in particular they just can't stop crying ...the slightest thing sets them off... they just don't seem able to control their emotions anymore and then there's no time given to talk them back into reality, almost.

School D, teacher 5 warned that exposing students' emotions could lead to vulnerability and it was impossible to predict how students were going to address it. "We've got to be very careful because we've got to know how the students are going to deal with that."

But there were also warnings from teachers "not to play amateur psychologist" with students (School A, teacher 6). The sternest warnings came from School B, teacher 3 who considered that teachers had to be extremely careful with students' emotions. This teacher recalled a former retreat where "everybody cried for three days" and then they went back to school without any support or debriefing about emotions. Prominent cautions about misuse of emotion and euphoria claimed that it could place students in "an unrealistic situation" (School B, teacher 3) where there was "messing with their heads and I think that's dangerous" (School B, teacher 3).

Students tended to become emotional when listening to personal stories and empathising with those stories. 48% of the teachers felt that stimulating students' emotions made them vulnerable; and they disapproved of looking for 'tears' as a sign of a successful discussion. Inappropriate generation of emotion potentially had negative consequences for students. The attitude of being 'careful' about students' emotions, and not setting out to stir up emotions to unrealistic levels was prominent in the participants. These 'manufactured emotions' were considered to be exhausting to deal with and they created levels of confusion for some students that extended beyond the retreat: "I've seen a few kids that have been... two weeks after retreat still crying about something that upset them on the retreat" (School B, teacher 6).

A number of the experienced teachers in the sample acknowledged that some past school retreats had been judged as successful based on how many students "managed to cry and pour out their hearts" (School A, teacher 1). But for most of the participants crying was no longer acceptable as an outcome or an intended goal that indicated success; but at the same time, they noted that emotional responses were sometimes unpredictable. Students who may have become emotional over something talked about in the groups did not intentionally set out to cry; nor was this

the intention of teacher-sharing or a purpose of small group or large group discussion. If it did happen, teachers believed that retreat teachers needed to be skilled in helping students to manage their emotions and to return to normal levels of relating again. 47 % of the teachers disapproved of any retreat activities that might make students feel vulnerable or fragile.

### 5.7 QUESTION 7: WHAT TEACHERS THINK ARE THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS WITH THE ACTUAL CONDUCT OF RETREATS

Table 5.7 summarises the coded responses from the interviews.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Teachers' concerns</b>			
<i>Duty of care/increased teacher responsibility</i>	30	11	47.8
<i>Child protection</i>	12	8	34.7
<i>Teacher tiredness/extended hours</i>	20	6	26.8
<i>Increased school workload</i>	8	4	17.3
<i>Retreat relevance</i>	7	4	17.3
<i>Teacher participation/committed staff</i>	6	4	17.3
<i>Time constraints at school to plan retreat</i>	4	3	13.04
<i>Teacher-student relationships/knowing where students are at psychologically and emotionally</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Teacher family responsibilities/leaving own family</i>	3	3	13.04
<i>Lack of parental support</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Lack of time to nurture spirituality of staff</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>That they (retreats) are compulsory</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Teacher and student participation/keeping everyone involved</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Teacher debriefing</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Concerns about students</b>			
<i>Student relationships/fallout/exclusion</i>	8	4	17.3
<i>Poor student behaviour</i>	4	3	13.04

Developing student <i>spirituality</i>	3	2	8.6
<i>Students not participating on retreat</i>	1	1	4.3
Students missing out by not having parental permission/ <i>students not attending retreat</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Mobile phone/use of during retreat breaks</i>	9	1	4.3
<i>Transition back to school/after retreat/re-entry</i>	3	1	4.3
<b>Issues related to the timing, structuring and administration of retreats</b>			
<i>Staff selection/who is selected to go on retreat</i>	14	8	34.7
<i>Cost</i>	13	6	26.8
<i>Lack of support from school staff/those left behind to teach</i>	7	5	21.5
<i>Venues/appropriate accommodation, good food, availability of activities</i>	16	4	17.3
<i>Administration/filling forms/teachers trying to organise the paperwork</i>	5	3	13.04
<i>Timing of retreats</i>	5	3	13.04
<i>Training of teachers</i>	3	2	8.6
<i>Public liability</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Repetitive retreat material</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>The valuing retreats by teachers</i>	2	1	4.3
<i>Finding trained retreat personnel</i>	1	1	4.3

### Key findings from Question 7

#### 5.7.1 Responsibility and Duty of care

47 % of the teachers identified ‘duty of care’ as one of the biggest problems with the actual conduct of retreats. They felt an increased sense of responsibility for students because retreats were conducted in isolated venues with extended hours of supervision, including the overnight periods. Linked to this was concern about public liability such as damage to property or personal injury. One teacher described a major plumbing accident caused by students on retreat:

We just had an accident on our last retreat where a kid kicked a football and broke a water pipe and flooded the dormitory and like it was just major...major!... A teacher was on duty...but anything can happen in a split second like... and so we then had to give the teacher’s name to the insurance and all of that and kids are saying, ‘are you going to get into trouble for this, sir?’ and I’m thinking, ‘well, accidents happen.’ (School C teacher 1).

Despite the intense planning by retreat coordinators, when students were away from their home environment and in the company of their friends, there was always the likelihood that ‘something’ would happen. One teacher said that the future of retreats rested with this issue as “people worry about liability and kids getting into trouble” (School A, teacher 2). The possibility of personal claims against the school or the teacher was a reality for the respondents. “...litigation is a big thing...fear of litigation...everything we do where we take the kids off campus...we have to worry about...are we covered? We worry about what we’re allowed to do and what we’re not allowed to do...so it tends to inhibit, for a start, some of the physical activities.” (School B, teacher 2). This was one example of the fears the teachers experienced when responsible for a cohort of senior students on retreat. Despite teachers saying that they were usually familiar with the retreat sites, it was still difficult to determine student safety and liability. The venues tended to be isolated and the respondents said that their sense of responsibility was heightened to ensure that “no one drowns in the pool or gets lost in the bush” (School B, teacher 3).

### 5.7.2 *Child protection*

The participants reported that child protection issues had the potential to affect teachers developing positive relationships with students. One teacher questioned whether it was permissible or appropriate to hug a distressed student in relation to the current understanding of child protection, citing that the policies were not clear.

I think child protection is a big one because the policies are...it sounds really weird, but in a way they’re too specific and in a way they’re too general...like they don’t really break down what is the correct conduct and what isn’t and they don’t allow for.... they don’t allow for things like school retreats and such and ...I mean as a teacher, if you’ve got a kid who’s absolutely emotionally disturbed almost...emotionally upset...and you do, your natural instinct would be to hug that person, but always constantly in the back of your mind, you’re thinking, ‘oh, well, this kid could turn around and say... I don’t think it is for a lot of people...I don’t think that some people don’t think about the child protection as seriously, but I think...I’m always one of those ‘what if?’ types of people and ... it is hard (School A, teacher 5)

Given their training in mandatory reporting matters, 34% of the respondents knew that sensitive information about abuse shared in the small group by students needed to be acted upon. Dilemmas arose for some teachers because in this environment of trust, issues were sometimes raised by students spontaneously.

I mean sometimes stuff just pops out but if you’re sensing that a child is going to tell you something, you have to the child, like you obviously want it

to be private, you have to say to them, ‘if you tell me something of this nature, I will have to tell somebody else’. You kind of get stuck in that you want to remain faithful to the child who’s placing their trust in you...but you are required by law if a child discloses something to report it to your principal, because, I mean, not just will you be ...like there’s a huge fine if you don’t say anything, but also the emotional...like how you would feel if you didn’t say something so it is a hard.... (School A teacher 5)

Another example of this dilemma for teachers with confidentiality was: That’s a tough one because it’s breaking confidences and but I think that they’re all very aware that if something does happen, we have an obligation to take it further if it does come up (School B teacher 1).

The majority of teachers indicated that they were skilled enough to stop personal sharing if it became too graphic and they indicated that they would speak with the student individually after the small group session if this was needed.

However, one teacher shared the following:

There are boys who are using recreational drugs and finding it hard to cope; I guess it gives you a chance to talk to them in a non-judgemental way, and some of them have been thrown out of home, by year 11 and year 12. Some of them are living with friends... School D, teacher 2

This teacher said that anything that students shared was “never, ever” repeated to others, even when they returned to school (School D, teacher 2).

The teachers gave examples of students relating disclosures that affected them personally. Students in the small group would speak of the relationships that troubled them and sometimes cited examples within their family. One example of disclosure that involved violence towards male students was:

a lot of the boys who have parents from a cultural background that is either Islander or the Italian background or Lebanese...that they couldn’t talk to their parents and they didn’t feel that...or they thought that their fathers were a bit heavy-handed as well. (School D, teacher 4).

The term “heavy-handed” described fathers ‘laying down the rules’ of conduct for their sons and who sometimes “hit them” (School D, teacher 4). This teacher said that the students affected by being assaulted were “happy” to disclose this information with their peers in the small group on the last day of the retreat and emphasised “it doesn’t go anywhere else”. This is one example of how confidentiality in the small group was regarded as “an unspoken pledge” when the information was “extremely sensitive” (School C, teacher 1).

Other teachers were more aware of discussing issues of a sensitive nature and the professional boundaries that ensured the protection of all:

you’ve got to be very careful about what you say and what you do within the retreat situation because you do have the responsibility of young people and

...you need to be careful that the way you use that responsibility is appropriate. That you don't overstep the mark (School A, teacher 4).

When this happened, the teachers said that they assessed the situation and it was not unusual for them "to step in" and make the necessary changes to ensure a safe retreat climate by speaking with students or re-arranging groups. The expectation to protect students and teachers was described as "a responsibility to make sure that what the parents would expect in their homes that. . . or maybe even a higher standard than that, . . . you're not going to have students behaving inappropriately" (School A, teacher 4). This awareness emerged from the prominent emphasis that was given to child protection by the school in teacher professional development days where "we really do get briefed on it" (School A, teacher 5). "if a kid says anything to you that has...like any disclosures...the word they generally use...you must report it and all the rest of it. So you do get briefing on those very, very serious issues." (School A, teacher 5).

### 5.7.3 *Stress and workload issues*

Workload issues related to retreats emerged as a significant issue for 17% of teachers for whom "up until very recently, there was a lot of give and take in Catholic schools" (School B, teacher 1). Those committed to retreats said that they gave their time generously. But they indicated that industrial issues regarding teacher workloads have started to impact on the school. One teacher said that as schools made teachers more accountable for their professional time at school and stipulating higher expectations, this created new attitudes towards extra curricular activities such as "Nope! I do my 85 hours a week or whatever it is and I'm not going to do anymore." (School B, teacher 6). It was the opinion of this teacher that industrial workload issues would "kill retreats". The same respondent cited an example of teachers at loggerheads with a principal at a previous school over too rigid an expectation of retreats without staff consultation.

At a school I was at a few years ago, they had retreats/camps and ...the principal said, 'you will do this, this and this' and he didn't negotiate with anyone about the timing of the retreat, when it was or anything else, he just said, 'you will do it' and so the staff just said, 'well, sweetheart, you just take in it on your own back and none of us will go on retreat.' So the school missed out that year, because of it. The staff said, 'you negotiate things like this' (School C, teacher 6).



Increased workloads tended to peak with events such as the senior secondary school retreat. Sleep-deprivation and lack of rest were key issues. School B, teacher 6 believed

They (teachers) are still only operating on three or four hours probably of sleep and they get very tired and I think it would be nice if we had the luxury of more teachers so that we could have a couple that are dedicated to just being the night owls.

Those responsible for the overall organisation of the retreat felt the increase in workload more than those assisting in the retreat. “There’s just the administrative work about notes home for students and their medical details...money and pricing on it” (School C, teacher 4). The teachers were aware that the finer details of organisation had increased due to new teacher accountability policies which took considerably longer to finalise than in the past.

The participants indicated that teacher workloads also increased when preparing to go on retreat; for both those attending and those remaining behind to cover lessons. The teachers on retreat indicated that they were expected to fulfil their teaching obligations before they went by providing non-retreat teachers with lessons for students; and they were expected to review and assess the work that was left for students during their absence. “When I go out on retreat, I’ve got huge numbers of lessons to leave...” (School A, teacher 7). This amount of work could discourage teachers from going on retreat. “I guess the hardest part is having work prepared for three days that you’re leaving behind. And hoping that when you get back, it’s actually been done!” (School D, teacher 2)

Apart from camps, retreats were one of the few school activities that required these teachers to contribute continuously for long periods of supervision without adequate rest. The combined issue of extensive supervision and duty of care was regarded as a serious one for this group of teachers. “I think the hardest thing about retreats is night times... you’re tired... you’re flat out during the day and the whole problem of supervision at night and all of that sort of stuff... it’s probably the hardest thing at the moment” (School A, teacher 6). “You just can’t do that much giving continuously...” (School C, teacher 1). The new teachers inducted into the retreat program felt that they were overwhelmed by the effort it took to be on retreat. “I see the young teachers go just like that! They don’t seem to have as much stamina...” (School C, teacher 1). This suggested that retreat work was not only physically demanding in terms of preparation time, but in terms of the energy levels it required.

Lack of time to nurture and prepare teachers for their involvement in the retreat was considered to be another important issue. The teachers had little preparation time at school to review the retreat program before they attended. It was assumed that once at the retreat, the teachers would ‘run with it’ and sessions would be reviewed during the program breaks.

In an environment of increasing potential liability, there was an acknowledgment that retreats seemed to have lost some of the ‘carefree climate’ that they appeared to have in the past and that personal and public liability for the general safety and well-being of students now rested heavily with the teachers. This burden was considered to create a heightened sense of vulnerability amongst the teachers about taking students away from school for three days because something might go wrong. “I’m worried 24 hours a day when I’m on retreat. I can’t relax” (School B, teacher 5) summarised the general feeling about this responsibility. Away from the familiar school environment, duty of care was probably the most prominent potential problem that the teachers were concerned about, “...teachers who are away are basically responsible for these kids 24 – 7 and that can be a really huge responsibility” (School D, teacher 1) and impacted significantly on the physical resources of teachers. Often the admission was: “... we’re exhausted! Yes, we are exhausted! But I think we just acknowledge that part...it’s the nature of it and I don’t know how you get around that...” (School C, teacher 2).

Teacher tiredness and increased workload were considered by the group to impact significantly on their perceptions of the conduct of retreats. 26 % of the participants reported that retreats diminished their energy levels. Many of them were concerned about the pre-retreat and post-retreat workloads that needed to be organised before going on retreat. Administrative demands such as student permission, health information and liaising with the retreat venue were also key concerns. Leaving family and other responsibilities to go away on a live-in retreat also posed dilemmas for some staff as it often meant organisational shifts on a personal level.

#### *5.7.4 Staffing and the timing of retreats and perception of retreats by the school community*

The teachers indicated that the scheduling of retreats had an impact on the school curriculum and timetable. Often the timing of retreats coincided with the end of mid-year trial exams, and this was viewed as a time for students to recharge their energies. However, there was no one distinguishing timetable pattern that emerged

from the participating schools. Different schools conducted retreats at different times of the year depending on “when you can book the venues” and “and you sort of work around that” (School A, teacher 3).

The general consensus in the group was summarised by the following comment: “Timing is always a problem...there’s never a good time to do it because we’re so busy” (School C, teacher 2) and “there’s never a good time in HSC because there are always things in kids’ lives” (School A, teacher 3). These comments illustrated the tension and stress that the teachers experienced about the need to have a retreat yet not knowing where to best place them in the calendar year. “It’s [having retreats] one of the goals, one of the things of this school...a Catholic school and we try to encourage them” (School D, teachers 5). But there was also concern among the group that what the retreat stands for in the school curriculum may have little status in an environment that is largely defined by academic results.

When probed further on this issue, one teacher explained that retreats were not treated with any favouritism; they had to compete for curriculum space in a crowded school curriculum just like any other activity:

...trying to fit it in because you have a whole lot of other people at the school who all have their own things they want on, like there’s exams, and there’s also students who do subjects who have major projects and others that do TAFE courses and finding a time where you’re able to get people together (School C, teacher 4).

Some participants reported the concerns of teachers back at school who objected to having retreats: “We’re not going to meet our... (curriculum targets)” and “Why are we having this retreat?” (School A, teacher 7). This situation was said to lead to a reluctant acceptance of retreats by teachers not involved in them; they tended to perceive retreats as a time luxury that students could not afford in their senior secondary years. In turn, this was felt to be a growing cause for resentment on the part of those teachers who remained at school to teach.

The group also reported that this situation was stressful for them, particularly when colleagues back at school viewed the retreat as a ‘holiday’ for the retreat leaders. They saw the problem arising mainly from misunderstandings about the nature, purpose and function of retreats by those staff who remained at school. One teacher spoke about “the whingeing and complaining about the teachers who are out and the classes that have to be covered” (School A, teacher 7). Another participant noted: “They don’t understand the process...and are not prepared to try and understand the process.” School C, teacher 1. There was also some acceptance that

“...there’ll always be the knockers and they’re not even interested in going and seeing what it’s like because they have a pre-conceived idea that it’s just a waste of time” (School C, teacher 1). The lack of full support from all the staff in the school was acknowledged as a significant problem for retreats.

Despite the fact that both the principal and the deputy principal from one school were actively involved in retreats, some participants felt that this still did not stem the disapproval of retreats that remained with some school staff. If they had to, the participants said that they would like to draw on hierarchical support in the debate about the role of the retreat in the life of the school, especially when it appeared that there would not be a favourable consensus. It was reported that some teachers ‘pulled rank’ with an ultimatum about the value of the retreat: “because the school says ‘this is it’ ...if you don’t like it...you know...” By implication this view suggested that staff either supported retreats or looked for an alternative school. This commentator also noted that after the retreat was over, the issue could fade in prominence –until the following year when the pressure of achieving work targets would resurface at the time when the retreat was due. One teacher (School C, teacher 5) hinted that for some teachers back at school, their disapproval would never diminish, irrespective of how positively the administration supported the retreats.

The teachers reported that many parents appeared to have a limited understanding of the retreat program and that a small minority of students, presumably reflecting the views of their parents, did not attend. The interviewees considered that in some cases, non-attendance at retreats was based on cultural or religious grounds, especially by families of different denominations.

Some kids always miss out...who aren’t allowed to go...there’ll always be a very small number of kids, for cultural reasons, or family reasons, aren’t allowed to go (School B, teacher 2).

This led some teachers to suggest that retreats should be voluntary rather than compulsory.

It was sometimes the case that there were students who did not keep to the behavioural expectations set out by teachers prior to the retreat. The teachers noted that a lack of “willingness to participate” (School B, teacher1) in the activities or a lack of engagement with others was a problem and it tended to create an unsettled atmosphere.

If you have kids who don’t get on well. . . kids that speak out of turn...kids that can often put others under pressure in large or small group situations just with their comments, or you know, speak out of turn...put another kid down,

so as to speak...it can really ruin the whole experience for others. I think that if kids are excluded from group situations, it can also lead to problems.  
(School A, teacher 3)

It was reported that students who continued to behave poorly, after a number of warnings, would be returned home, escorted by the school principal or a teacher.

Students using mobile phones had become a more recent problem according to 4% of the teachers. Texting and the noise from incoming calls as well as students contacting their friends during breaks interrupted the retreat program. One teacher said that it was “unfortunate” that students were allowed to bring their mobile phones on retreat (School C, teacher 1). “I’ve only had that probably twice and it’s usually someone from the other group that’s sending them a text message...” (School C, teacher 1). The communication was reciprocal with students wanting to tell others about the retreat. The teachers admitted that students seemed to be less able to isolate themselves from others and withdraw from ‘the world’ – one of the more traditional aims of retreats.

But they do use them generously at free time, but that’s okay, I don’t care...they’re contacting their friends who are on the other group...or their friends back at school and telling them how great it is or they’re ringing boyfriends and girlfriends...just keeping in touch with the world...as much as we don’t want them to keep with the world at that particular time, but that’s what society is now and it’s pretty hard to fight against (School C, teacher 1).

## 5.8 QUESTION 8: THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF LIVE-IN RETREATS

Table 5.8 summarises the coded responses from the interviews.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Issues for the future conduct of live-in retreats</b>			
<i>Duty of care</i>	16	11	47.8
<i>Child protection</i>	32	10	43.4
<i>Legal liability</i>	14	9	39.1
<i>Relevance/ focus of retreats</i>	10	9	39.1
<i>Venue</i>	21	7	30.4
<i>Cost</i>	14	7	30.4
<i>Retreat staffing</i>	11	6	26.8
<i>Staff training</i>	11	5	21.5
<i>Teacher tiredness</i>	4	4	17.3
<i>Multiculturalism/ lack of</i>	6	3	13.04

support from parents			
<i>Timing of retreats</i>	5	3	13.04
<i>Personal sharing</i>	4	3	13.04
(That retreats are) seen as <i>a priority in school</i>	5	2	8.6
Lack of <i>student support</i> for retreat	5	2	8.6
<i>Resources</i> for staff	4	2	8.6
<i>Administration</i>	2	2	8.6
Unpredictable <i>future laws</i>	4	1	4.3
Teachers not espousing <i>Church values</i>	3	1	4.3
Lack of time for <i>retreat preparation</i>	2	1	4.3
<i>Time away</i> from school	1	1	4.3
Lack of <i>staff support</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Length</i> of retreats	1	1	4.3
<i>Appropriate activities</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Financial remuneration</i>	1	1	4.3

#### Key findings from Question 8

##### 5.8.1 *Duty of care, child protection and potential legal issues as significant concerns*

As for question 7, the issues of child protection and duty of care were prominent in responses. Not only were they problem issues for the present conduct of retreats, it was considered that the future of retreats may depend on how these issues are addressed. 43% of the respondents wondered if child protection policies might end up putting an end to retreats.

The participants considered how child protection policy could impact on the conduct of small groups, querying what could be disclosed in them. They were unsure as to whether it would change the purpose of the retreat in the future.

I don't know how far it's going to go, to be honest. Like is it going to get to the point where you can't have a small group? (School D, teacher 5).

It was generally believed by the participants that while child protection laws would not necessarily stop retreats in the future, they would more than likely influence their nature, function and purpose. As noted in previous sections, as well as in the data from question 8, the teachers were aware of the dangers of too much personal disclosure in the small groups. Teachers were faced with dilemmas in small group sharing

Legal liability also featured prominently as an important issue for the future of retreats. Given the participants' awareness of the potential for legal liability, the

future of retreats was summarised by one as “it seems as though we might not be able to do it anymore, because of insurance purposes” (School D, teacher 5).

### 5.8.2 *Venue and cost*

The availability and suitability of venues was considered an important issue because having a retreat was (School A, teacher 3) “a matter of when you can book the venues”. However, problems arose when venues that had been used before, closed down. “The actual availability of the venues is getting a bit tight now...that’s another problem” (School C, teacher 1). Some of the teachers said that most venues were ‘camp-like’ and did not have the ambience of a religious setting where there were rooms to set up for sacred spaces, small group discussions and personal prayer.

Also regarded as important were increasing annual costs associated with venue hire and to cover public liability and insurance.

### 5.8.3 *Staff Selection and training for retreat work*

The participants were concerned about which staff should be invited to join the retreat team. They had clear ideas about what sort of person would make a positive contribution to the overall retreat, wanting colleagues who would be “genuinely committed to and participate fully the retreat program” (School A, teacher 6). Being flexible and having an innate intuition of “reading a group” (School A, teacher 7) were desirable retreat skills. The teachers felt that there needed to be a good balance of genders, ages and skills. The criteria were very specific, with the use of words such as “understanding of young people” (School A, teacher 3). Sensitivity/empathy and good communication skills were considered essential qualities. Also, “...you need to be able to make kids feel comfortable with coming forward and sharing” (School A, teacher 3) meaning teachers students could relate to. Added to these qualities were “a sense of humour and someone who was not over-emotional themselves” (School A, teacher 4).

The interviewees often recalled encountering difficulties the first time they and other teachers, new to the retreat, participated. Their inexperience and lack of understanding about the nature and purpose of the retreat “makes them (new teachers) going into it, all guns blazing instead of sitting back and letting people just talk” (School A, teacher 1). Those responsible for the retreat lamented the fact that they did not have time to sit and plan with the teacher leaders before the retreat. The extent of student- teacher sharing was left up to their own personal judgement, depending much on their own level of comfort in sharing. Regarding the depth of

sharing, “We’ve taken staff, parents and ex-students and they all act as small group leaders and they ...the suggestion always is that they start off the sharing in any small group discussion and that they share very deeply and that sets the tone for the group to function at that level” (School C, teacher 3). However, the admission was, “...that for those who come for the first time, and they’ve never been exposed to something like this, that it can be real confronting” (School C, teacher 3).

The training of teachers in the conduct of retreats was an important need because “often you have to work with a group of people that need a lot of help...a lot of training...a lot of guidance in running groups particularly...and conducting themselves...or being a part of the retreat team” (School D, teacher 5). Many of the participants felt very little attention had been given to the training and support of teachers who conduct retreats. One expressed the problem ambivalently: “...it was never something that was taught nor was it ever taught with any further training that I did...” (School A, teacher 4).

The majority of the participants’ training in retreats consisted of “...on the job training I guess is how you’d put it” (School C, teacher 4) and despite the lack of skills “...it’s almost an expectation that it (experience in conducting retreats) will evolve and that’s not here...that’s everywhere...that as a teacher, you can do this sort of thing...” (School B, teacher 1). The teachers acknowledged that there was no training available for retreat work and that personal training was “based on your own expertise...” (School B, teacher 2).

When asked about the availability of teacher training and support in conducting a small group, one teacher said, “No, I don’t think so and I don’t know if we’ve really been taught that...” (School C, teacher 2), adding that much of their skill was in reading students’ “body language” (School C, teacher 2).

The interviewees considered that staff goodwill enabled retreats to happen, but they added that this was not a guarantee for the future.

#### *5.8.4 Retreat program relevance*

The teachers interviewed believed that the effectiveness of the retreat lay with it being relevant to contemporary student issues. The program needed to change as the issues changed. “Sometimes we take the view of 30 or 40 year old adults and think what we think would be best for the students and maybe that might not be the most important thing; so yes, continuing relevance” (School B, teacher 5).



Some of the teachers were concerned about “keeping it (retreat programs) fresh” (School B, teacher 2). The programs were sometimes repetitive, lacking new content from year to year. Retreats were often considered to be spiritual experiences by many teachers but they were unsure how to develop this aspect within an unchangeable or rigid retreat program. Getting “as many people into good residential (retreat) courses as possible” (School A, teacher 1) was one suggestion to address this need.

#### 5.8.5 *The nature and function of retreats in an increasingly multicultural and multi-faith school community*

As schools become increasingly multicultural with students from multi-faith backgrounds, the interviewees considered that they needed to explain more clearly the role and rationale of retreats to families and students.

I think the other issue that comes to mind is the fact that we’re so multi-plural that some kid’s don’t want to go away on a Catholic retreat as such...that when they are from another religious denomination they’re a little bit confronted by that” (School B, teacher 1).

Not all students were of Christian or Catholic background, and this posed challenges for schools.

### 5.9 QUESTION 9: IMPORTANT SKILLS AND DISPOSITIONS FOR THE SUCCESSFUL CONDUCT OF RETREATS

Table 5.9 summarises the coded responses from the interviews

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of times key words used across all responses	Number of teachers who used the key word	Percentage of teachers who used the key word
<b>Teacher skills</b>			
<i>Good listener</i>	17	11	47.8
<i>Flexible</i>	13	9	39.1
<i>Good communication skills</i>	7	5	21.5
<i>Organised</i>	5	5	21.5
<i>Small group skills</i>	7	4	17.3
<i>Perceptive</i>	5	4	17.3
<i>Create a comfortable atmosphere</i>	4	4	17.3
<i>Professional</i>	5	3	13.04
<i>Creative</i>	8	2	8.6
<i>Mentor</i>	6	2	8.6
<i>Competent</i>	4	2	8.6

Know what is <i>appropriate</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Balanced</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Pacing yourself</i>	2	2	8.6
In control of <i>personal sharing</i>	2	2	8.6
<i>Can read a group</i>	2	1	4.3
<i>Good judgement</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Mediator</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Discernment</i>	1	1	4.3
<i>Good at games</i>	1	1	4.3
<b>Teacher dispositions</b>			
Relational	26	12	52.1
Understanding	11	6	26.8
Honest responses	8	6	26.8
Empathetic /empathy	7	6	26.8
Care/affection for students	7	5	21.5
Someone who values retreats	6	5	21.5
Non-judgemental	6	5	21.5
A sense of humour	6	4	17.3
Giving	5	4	17.3
Caring	4	4	17.3
Kind	4	4	17.3
Calm	8	3	13.04
Spiritual	5	3	13.04
Genuine	5	3	13.04
Patience	5	3	13.04
Confidence to share personal story	4	3	13.04
Relaxed	3	3	13.04
Approachable	3	3	13.04
Compassionate	3	3	13.04
Sincere	3	3	13.04
Positive	5	2	8.6
Energetic	3	2	8.6
Human	3	2	8.6
Enthusiastic	2	2	8.6
Encouraging	2	2	8.6
Supportive	2	2	8.6
Easy-going	2	2	8.6
Friendly	2	1	4.3
Sensitive to people's feelings	1	1	4.3
(Teachers who are) happy with themselves	1	1	4.3
Tactful	1	1	4.3
Authentic	1	1	4.3
A sense of maturity	1	1	4.3
People who enjoy life	1	1	4.3
Tolerant	1	1	4.3
Motivated	1	1	4.3
Prayerful	1	1	4.3

## Key findings from Question 9

### 5.9.1 *Desired skills and dispositions*

There was a strong support for teachers who work on retreats to have appropriate dispositions and skills. Desirable dispositions were cited more often than skills. A high priority in the dispositions was given to being ‘human’ and ‘relational’. Their involvement in retreat work demanded they be positive and have approachable characteristics. It was considered by 47% of the respondents that retreat leaders needed to be good listeners. It was not a disposition that all retreat leaders had initially but they thought that it could be learnt: “you have to learn to listen to your students without making a judgement” (School D, teacher 2).

The ideal retreat teacher was summed up by the following comment: People who are kind; people who are compassionate; people who are good listeners; people who don’t want to dominate; people who don’t want to lecture; who don’t want to tell them (students) how to live their lives; people who are just willing to listen...with compassion and be open themselves (School C, teacher 3).

The desired dispositions of teachers on a retreat showed a change of style from that of ‘teacher’ in the classroom to one of ‘mentor’ or even “friend” (School D, teacher 2) who interacted on an informal level with students. It was considered that if this quality were absent in the retreat leaders, the students would struggle to create a sense of community.

Another important skill identified by 39% of the teachers was the ability to discern the needs and moods of the students as a collective group and “to be flexible, because retreats, as much as we’d love them to be structured, they really don’t end up being structured” (School A, teacher 5). 21% of the teachers also wanted retreats to be well-run, organised experiences; so they required people with good administrative skills. Finally, the interviewees wanted mentor-teachers to show them how to conduct different parts of the retreat. They believed this ‘hands-on’ approach would instil greater confidence in their retreat involvement. People who were competent but not strict disciplinarians were considered to be essential.

## 5.10 QUESTION 10: OTHER ISSUES ABOUT RETREATS TEACHERS WANTED TO COMMENT ON

Table 5.10 summarises the coded responses from the interviews.

Key themes and concepts that emerged from the data	Total number of	Number of teachers	Percentage of teachers
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	times key words used across all responses	who used the key word	who used the key word
<b>Other issues or perspectives about retreats from teachers</b>			
Retreats are seen as <i>important experiences</i> in the life of the school for senior secondary students	26	12	52.1
Retreats are <i>relational experiences</i> between staff and students	16	9	39.1
Retreats are seen as <i>extra work</i> by staff	7	7	30.4
<i>Developing relationships</i> is a key focus/aim of the retreat	7	4	17.3
Retreats are understood as being <i>spiritual experiences</i>	28	4	17.3
<i>Staff/adult spirituality</i> must be strong in staff if they are to help/understand the youth spirituality	9	3	13.04
Teachers require <i>training</i> to conduct effective retreats	3	2	8.6
Retreats are a <i>positive experience</i> for staff	2	2	8.6
The <i>timing</i> of retreats is an issue	1	1	4.3
Teachers need <i>resources</i> for retreats	1	1	4.3
Teachers want to be <i>debriefed</i> before and after the retreat: before going on retreat and on their return from retreat.	1	1	4.3

#### Key findings from Question 10

##### 5.10.1 Retreats as important human and spiritual experiences

52% of the participants maintained that retreats were very important experiences for students. Not only did teachers understand them to “have an important part to play in students’ personal development” but “also in the religious life of the school” (School D, teacher 1). Teachers linked the retreat closely to the religious dimension of Catholic schools.

When under pressure, students’ relationships with others struggled to thrive. However, when taken away from a routine environment and provided with ample time to socialise and discuss, as in a retreat, relationships were enhanced, enabling community to flourish.

Retreats were commonly understood as spiritual experiences and not as extended religion lessons. 17% of the respondents were surprised or “amazed” by the depth of students’ responses and insights about spirituality “even though they may not have shown it by weekly attendance at a church” (School D, teacher 2). The

teachers described students who willingly spoke about their relationship with God in the small group and how they perceived God's presence in their lives. It was an important forum for students to do this "because these days, many of the students don't go to church. We come from families where religion is not seen as being very important" (School C, teacher 3) and teachers believed the retreat satisfied this need to explore students' spirituality. Hence, it was considered important that staff had a sense of what youth spirituality encompassed and to be able to relate to it.

The sharing of staff spirituality "to nurture the spirituality of staff" (School A, teacher 1) was also considered important if students were to explore their own spirituality on retreat. The teachers said that without a focus on developing teachers' spirituality, retreats were less effective with students.

#### *5.10.2 Retreats as extra work for teachers*

30% of the respondents said that retreats were perceived as extra work for teachers. One teacher (School A, teacher 6) called for a review of retreats because the circumstances of religious schools that had originally been responsible for them had changed. What was once done willingly by members of religious orders as part of their vocation in the early days of communitarian retreats no longer corresponded to what was the reality of this particular teacher.

I think, somewhere along the line, teachers need to be paid for their time and for too long, I think, people have relied on good will and the Catholic Education system has been built on good will. You know, you go back some...the last century and the Brothers and Nuns, virtually doing things for nothing (School A, teacher 6)

#### *5.10.3 Retreat training for teachers*

The teachers in this study described the different methods they experienced as part of their retreat training. There were examples of teachers attending Catholic Education Office approved courses in which "the CEO have run things (courses) from time to time" (School B, teacher 1) while some teachers described a less formal retreat formation.

The parish priest invited a small group of us to be leaders so we actually did a training course for a weekend on how to lead small groups within the parish. We had a couple of guest speakers come along to us and we did a Saturday/Sunday...not a live in, it was just like 2 days within the parish. Then here at school, I was asked if I would go on the retreat team, we had a couple of meetings after school where the retreat program was looked at as to how we would run it. And then three years ago, the year 11 coordinator at the time had had a lot of experience running retreats and I found him to be a great source of inspiration and knowledge as well (School D, teacher 2).

The teachers reminisced about the different levels of ‘training’ in retreats. One teacher recalled that training consisted of “nothing...it would be based on your own expertise (School B, teacher 2). Another teacher said that it was ‘instinctive’ training – where teachers acted out of their own “personal judgement” (School C, teacher 5).

While trying to remember specific details of retreat training, one respondent said “I don’t know if I had any special training on it...I think it’s really something that...you just... you sit down with whoever the actual group leader is...of the camp or retreat (School B, teacher 4) to learn about the retreat program’s aims and outcomes.

The teachers said that training them for retreat work was not considered a priority by their school. It was “almost an expectation” (School B, teacher 1) that teachers were capable of leading retreats because they were able to direct students and lead them at school. 8% of the teachers noted that there was a need for more specific training of retreat leaders in the time prior to a retreat. 4% complained that “there’s no debriefing for teachers...no formal debriefing for teachers when you come back (School D, teacher 4). One teacher said the retreat staff would welcome training, but it was “a time issue” (School C, teacher 1). To address this lack of time for training, one teacher noted that he/she was given a retreat handbook to assist them so that they were not “floundering” (School C, teacher 1). “On the job training” (School C, teacher 4) and making mistakes was part of the standard induction for new teachers.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS: SIGNIFICANT ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE STUDY OF TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF RETREATS

#### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the meaning and significance of the qualitative research data reported in the previous chapter, in the light of issues for retreats considered in chapters 2 and 3. It will focus on key questions/areas affecting teachers' understandings of the nature, purpose and conduct of retreats and of their future place in Catholic education. The chapter will be organised under the following 3 headings:

- 6.1 Structure, function and conduct of retreats
- 6.2 Personalism, emotions and euphoria as key dimensions to retreats
- 6.3 Structuring and timetabling of retreats in the school program and related issues

These headings were formulated in the light of the most important emerging issues in the data reported in chapter 5. Table 6.1 below illustrates these issues by summarising the frequencies of references to these themes/issues by respondents. The frequencies are some indication of the relative importance of the issues as perceived by the participants. There was overlap and repetition in the responses to the questions, showing up linkages between the questions and categories: for example - what was regarded as 'enjoyable' was also regarded as 'engaging of students', and 'important'.

*Table 6.1 Frequencies of comments on particular themes for each interview question*

Key issues	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Community building	11	15	9	1	10	2				
Discussing/reflecting	4	3	6	26	8	10			14	
Relationships	20	4	9	8	4	9		2	13	4
Prayer/liturgy	2	6	2		6	1			2	1
Spirituality/God	1	1	8	3	19	1	1		1	9

Time for retreats	7	1	14		10	1	4	3		
Euphoria/emotionality	1		1	4		13				
Administrative issues				1			11	6		
Child protection				3		2	4	6	18	
Duty of care/litigation						23	7	12	2	
Teacher-training issues				19		22	9	8	1	2
Resources				2		2	10	10		
Teacher staffing				7	1	4	18	17		

## 6.1 STRUCTURE, FUNCTION AND CONDUCT OF RETREATS

### 6.1.1 *The significance of 'Time Away' as a key aspect of retreats*

The retreat was regarded as a valuable 'time away' from school by 51% of the respondents. They were sensitive to the situation of young people who were under pressure to use their time effectively. One reason the retreats were considered to be favourably received by students was because they provided young people with a 'temporary escape' from this pressure – similar to the findings of Flynn (1993).

The literature review (c/f chapter 2, sections 2.1.3; 2.1.4) reported that this 'escape' is linked with the concept of spiritual 'renewal', where people's energies were recharged. 78% of teachers regarded 'quiet time' for students as being valuable for recharging their energies. This was one of the key aims of retreats as far back as the time when Ignatius introduced the *Spiritual Exercises*, and it is still prominent in Catholic retreats generally (Clery, 2004; Hugh, 1962; Job, 1994; McCarthy, 1974; Pierce, 1989; Rossiter, 1999; Schofield 1927, Simpson 1927, Taylor 1995; Wareham 1950).

'Time out' and 'time away' have always been an important part of Christian spirituality, especially the 'ascetic spirituality' of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, (c/f chapter 2, section 2.2). It was evident in early monastic spirituality where people withdrew from society to the wilderness to pursue the spiritual life in solitude (Belisle, 2003; Lawrence 2001). The desert provided people with the opportunity to "clear their mind of distractions" (Dunn, 2003, p. 14) and to "overcome the passions of desire, fear, anger and grief" (Dunn, 2003, p. 35). It was also a time to reflect on and confront psychological pressures in life (c/f chapter 2, section 2.1.4). While this same sort of language would not be used today to describe the contemporary communitarian retreat, there remains an evident link with this key principle from



early Christian spirituality. This is particularly pertinent if the reason to go away is to facilitate personal or attitudinal change.

‘Time away’ from school to “get away from it all” (Bell, 2005, p. 87) as part of the school retreat structure was not considered just a holiday, but a significant part of an environment and situation that were designed for promoting personal reflection, personal communication – and ultimately the hope of personal development.

Because the notion of ‘going away for retreat’ was regarded as central to its psychological/spiritual function, it is likely that respondents would have had definite views about the value of ‘stay at school’ retreats, conducted on the school premises during a school day. These retreats conducted at school were not likely to provide students with any ‘break’ or ‘time away’. Hence, they were not likely to be regarded as effective compared with those conducted at a live-in site.

#### *6.1.2 The importance of time in the development of relationships*

For the participants, one of the most significant aspects of time away was its contribution to ‘community building’ and to the ‘development of relationships’. Three quarters of the participants (more than for any other aspect) valued the opportunity of getting to know students on a more personal level – an important aim of the retreat. Enhancing relationships was considered to be better achieved in an environment that was free from distractions. And, time away from the usual patterns of life and school was considered an important part of building relationships between the students and between teachers and students. This is consistent with Rossiter’s (1999) claim that when students spent time away from school on retreat, it offered valuable relationship-building opportunities that could not be replicated in the classroom. This theme was also prominent in some Christian spiritual writing – for example Powell (1976, p. 25) who considered that it helped people to “go out of themselves in genuine caring and concern for others”. It was an important way of enhancing bonds between people.

This thinking was evident in the first new style communitarian retreats in the 1960s when time away from home was felt to help them experience community life resulting in “more relaxed relationships with staff” (Rossiter 1999, p. 2). Students learned to relate better to each other and teachers were better able to communicate personally with students than when at school (Firman, 1968). If time to do this was not long enough, the potential for developing positive relationships was thought to

be decreased. For those interviewed, the preferred time away for live-in retreats was 3 days and 2 nights. While this may have been a common period for secondary school retreats in this particular diocese, it is likely that this sort of thinking about being away for more than one day was a distinctive feature of the approach to retreats more widely across Catholic schools in Australia.

Table 6.2 summarises the values that were ascribed by the participants to the ‘time away’ factor on retreats.

*Table 6.2 A summary of the reasons participants regarded ‘time away’ as an important dimension to school retreats.*

**Why ‘time away’ on retreats was considered important for students**

- Removes students from stresses of school and home
- Enables students to unwind and relax to some extent
- Enables socialising between teachers and students, and between students and students
- Enables students to have fun
- Provides students opportunities to communicate more freely with fellow students and staff, to listen and respond
- Provides students with opportunities to share their personal story
- Provides students with time and space to reflect
- Provides opportunities for enhancing student-teacher relationships; provides new insights about relationships
- Enables students to affirm others and be affirmed
- Re-news and energises students

*6.1.3 The importance of relationships and community-building as a focus for retreats*

Teachers in this study concluded that the retreat, based within an enjoyable community atmosphere as an experiential reference point, provided students with opportunities to think about community and to reflect on their relationships. This was consistent with views of the ‘community building’ role of retreats reported in the literature review (c/f chapter 3, section 3.2). The teachers’ views of the importance of community-building on retreats should not be interpreted to mean that they felt that it did not happen elsewhere at school. The findings of Flynn and Mok (2002) confirmed that students were generally satisfied with community-building at school but “some degree of alienation” (p. 138) related to examinations and late adolescent development impacted on community building. Rather, it was likely that teachers regarded the retreat as a special case or opportunity for enhancing ‘community’ – an aim that had long been central to the purposes of Catholic schooling (Ryan, 2006, p.

311), and in practice, one of the most successful features of Australian Catholic school systems (Flynn & Mok, 2002; Rossiter, 1999).

The data indicated that the very favourable community setting, and a palpable feeling of friendly acceptance, were regarded by participants as providing a special opportunity for young people for extending friendships and even making new friends – and this could include the teachers. This activity was facilitated by the community atmosphere while at the same time it contributed to enhancing the community atmosphere. The two processes worked hand-in-hand. A key element in both was what participants described as ‘more personal’ communication. There was an element of ‘thrill’ and ‘good feeling’ in knowing more about individual people; one felt ‘closer’ to others; and the sense of an ‘expanding network’ of friendliness and closeness to others made for good feelings of ‘being in a community’ – there was a sense of an enveloping community climate of acceptance and friendliness.

Rossiter (1997; 1999) and Crawford & Rossiter (2006) regarded these processes as central to the notion of ‘personalism’ that had long been one of the key concerns of Catholic school religious education. But it was very prominent and influential in the experiential domain of the live-in retreat where the structures were particularly favourable for its development; whereas, an unrealistic pursuit of ‘personalism’ in classroom religious education was, and still remains to some extent, a problem in the theory and practice of Catholic religious education (Rossiter, 1999). By comparison with the ‘peak experience’ potential of the retreat for personalism, a different form and level of personalism was appropriate in the classroom where the ‘channel to personalism’ was also different – through an open, inquiring *study* of religion (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 375, 391 ff). Other aspects of ‘personalism’ will be considered later in section 6.2

The special facility of retreats for enhancing personal communication, community and relationship-building was acknowledged by the Australian pioneers of the new-style communitarian retreats in the 1960s and this thinking figured prominently in their understanding of the purposes and function of the retreats (c/f chapter 3, section 3.2) In addition, they considered that this dimension of personalism was consistent with the theories within the humanistic psychology of the times (Firman, 2007; McCarthy, 2007, Neville, 2007) and noted in chapter 3 (section 3.6.5).

The school retreats, as described by the participants who were interviewed, represented a significant shift in student attendance profile from the original communitarian retreats which were ‘inter-school’ (with groups from a number of participating boys and girls schools), voluntary and on weekends. The ‘new friendship dynamic’ between boys and girls who did not know each other beforehand was a key ‘community-building’ and ‘relationship developing’ process in the early Christian Living Camps (c/f chapter 3, section 3.1.2) – students from single-sex schools learning how to relate to each other. Students in the contemporary school retreats already knew each other and usually had well established friendship groups that were in play during the retreat. Hence, the ‘acquaintance process’ could not be used in the same way as it was in the early Christian Living Camps. Nevertheless, as noted by the participants, the purpose of enhancing students' relationships and friendships remained a key dynamic of the retreat.

Closely related to the interpretation of the significance of ‘relationship reflection’ and ‘relationship building’ in retreats, was the understanding (65% of the respondents) that retreats enabled young people to reflect on personal issues through the ‘medium’ of their relationships; they also felt that ‘going away’ on retreat was an important catalyst for making such ‘personal learning’ possible – or at least more likely to stimulate helpful reflection than might occur in their usual school situation or when with friends informally.

The special capacity of the retreat for community building was regarded by the participants as particularly pertinent to young people’s contemporary need for feeling some sense of community. The participants identified family life as a fundamentally important influence in students’ lives; but they noted the fragmentary nature of family life as experienced by many of their students. In turn, this related to concerns about the wider breakdown of sense of community as noted by Eckersley (2007) in terms of the fast pace of life, constant changes in society and cultural diversity having created uncertainty for the family and community – resulting in high levels of “ambivalence, ambiguity, relativism, pluralism, fragmentation and contingency” (Eckersley, 2007, p. 41).

As students moved towards maturity, the process to “expand, extend, become autonomous and develop” (Rogers, 1995, p. 35) emerged, often enabling students to become more aware of the impermanence of community as they searched for new ways to engage with it. Family, sports, friends, work and study commitments were

often important sources of community building but these often drew energy from their limited resource: *time*. While some activities created a sense of membership, some students lacked a sense of community because they found it “hard to fit in, to make relationships” (Hughes, 2007, p. 87). Students who are different in their background or physical characteristics can find it difficult to relate to others; so also can students who are shy (Hughes, 2007, p. 87).

The respondents noted that a number of their students seemed to miss out on good experiences of community because of a lack of harmonious parental relationships, as well as because of the pressures of studying and the demands of part-time jobs and complicated relationships. These students appeared to experience a greater sense of disconnection from their society and environment, with poor prospects of being in a supportive community. The family unit was not often regarded as a traditional sanctuary from life’s pressure; nor was it the place where community-building occurred regularly because in a time-poor environment, “family and community ties have been loosened” (Eckersley, 2007, p. 41). Earlier humanistic psychology interpreted the problem as young people’s natural urge to grow and mature becoming stunted by conflicts in family relationships resulting in their “becom[ing] deeply buried under layer after layer of encrusted psychological defences” (Rogers, 1995, p. 35) and feeling apart from any community. Given the home and school pressures of students, if they could not find a community that could support and care for them in critical times, then students were at risk of being isolated and further alienated and this would have serious implications for their well-being (Rogers, 1995; Vanier, 1989). In the light of this sort of diagnosis of the social situation of their students, the teachers reported that they purposely tried to engage them in community-building activities during retreats as a way of ‘re-discovering’ the value of community and, to some extent, for overcoming the family-related impediments to developing community.

The respondents considered that an important element of community building was just to have ‘fun’ with friends and this was consistent with Mason, Singleton and Webber’s study (2007) that said that young people “having fun with mates” (p. 35) contributed to a sense of connection with each other. “Having fun” provided the students with a reprieve from pressure. It was recognised that there was little scope for this in the formal school setting; but the retreat was ideal for fun-based community building. A good example of this is evident in Hughes’ (2007) report on young people’s spirituality.

I was talking to a class of young people in a Catholic school. I asked them, as I had asked so many other young people, what was the most fun they had ever had. The class answered with one voice. It was a retreat that they had been on. I was taken by surprise. The most fun they had ever had? A spiritual retreat? Yes, they said. It was fun because they had said things to their friends that they would never normally say. The retreat had focussed on relationships. It had helped them to express themselves to each other. It had taken friendships to new levels. And in that, they had glimpsed something of the sacredness of the other and the spirituality of close friendships (Hughes, 2007, p. 87).

Similarly, the early communitarian style retreats also emphasised communal fun as a way of releasing pressure and sharing enjoyable experience together (Firman, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Neville, 2007; Rossiter, 2007). Community-building has remained a 'signature' purpose and key process of the communitarian school retreats since their inception in the 1960s.

#### *6.1.4 The importance of students' relationships with teachers*

74% of respondents believed that a key function of the retreat was to create positive relationships between students and teachers. They appeared to imply that the enhancement of relationships with teachers had potential for promoting some attitudinal change on the part of the students. This thinking was prominent in the conduct of the early Christian Living Camps (Firman, 1968; McCarthy, 2007; Rossiter, 2007) and was consistent with the ideas about attitudinal change in humanistic psychology. For example, Rogers (1995) claimed that "...individuals who live in such a relationship even for a relatively limited number of hours show profound and significant changes in personality, attitudes and behaviour" (Rogers, 1995, p. 36).

The participants considered that nurtured relationships within the retreat had the potential to contribute to young people's personal development by helping them make progress in the following ways or areas:-

- Be themselves with others.
- Value themselves more.
- Helped students develop greater self-confidence.
- Helped students develop greater self-understanding.
- Enabled students' self-perceptions to change from negative to positive.

Teachers were expected to have pastoral dispositions that could nurture relationships with students. The most valued quality endorsed by 52% of the teachers was that staff had to be 'relational'- they had to like students and get along with them. The 'disciplinarian' teacher was not suitable for retreats if the aim was to

develop positive relationships within the student cohort. However, there was a need for discipline on retreat, especially when there were incidents that breached acceptable conduct, such as alcohol, drugs or other activities. This role was usually assigned to a different member of staff attending the retreat and who was not leading groups; sometimes this was a teacher who also had a similar role of disciplinarian back at school. When a teacher had to act as both small group facilitator and disciplinarian on retreat, it created personal conflict for them and it was considered as likely to spoil the community atmosphere. But having a clearly identified ‘disciplinarian’ on retreat who was not required to ‘switch’ roles relieved the retreat team of the negative connotations associated with this role to some extent.

While the role of teachers on silent schools retreats in the 1950s was often that of disciplinarian, (c/f chapter 2, section 2.4.5) the early communitarian retreat leaders emphasised ‘fun’, singing and discussion. This happened because the religious personnel strove to create a warm and friendly community that reflected the new catechetical thinking of Vatican II (Alberigo 2006; Barnett, 2005).

#### *6.1.5 The importance of relationships between staff members as part of the retreat team*

Students were not the only beneficiaries of ‘time away’. Retreats were also regarded as important for ‘bonding’ amongst teachers (73% of respondents), often creating small, regular retreat ‘teams’. This ‘team’ provided stability for the program because colleagues had good working relationships with each other; they were familiar with the retreat dynamics and understood the processes required to create community within a short time frame. The retreat provided teachers with the same sort of relationship-enhancing opportunities as it did for the students to get to know each other by being away from school and having fun together. Hence, teachers emphasised that positive relationships with each other on a regular team contributed to the strength of the retreat. The literature review (c/f chapter 3, section 3.7.1) confirmed that travelling religious order retreat teams provided stability for the retreat programs with the same personnel, providing a sense of continuity and identity. While this was one satisfactory solution to an ever-increasing demand for retreats by Catholic secondary schools, the drawback of this model became evident when there was a change in personnel due to movement to another ministry, or from individuals’ experience of retreat ‘burn out’ – conducting live-in retreats on a continuing basis was taxing on physical and psychic energy.

Individual Catholic school retreat teams faced the same problem. Retreat teams were reliant on teachers' experience of retreat practices, but the teachers in the study believed that schools had not adequately addressed how retreats would be affected if there was a significant change in the retreat personnel. The respondents supported the view that there was often a conscious preference in who was selected to be part of their team (c/f chapter 5, section 5.9.2), and they acknowledged that it took considerable time and involvement before teachers, new to the team, understood the nature and purposes of the retreat. Changes in the retreat team membership affected not only the program but also the friendships that staff had established with each other.

Some teachers said they did not go on retreat each year, preferring to have a 'fallow' year intermittently. This was considered to be a safe-guard to the stress and 'burn-out' levels that affected some of the earlier travelling religious retreat teams. How this impacted on the particular school retreat team and hence, the relationship between teachers, was not explored in their responses, but this researcher believes that taking 'time out' from retreat work helped teachers to sustain their energy for the times they did attend.

The early communitarian retreats in the 1960s experienced the same kind of issues on a different level. Religious orders regularly sent their members to where there was a need. Friendships that developed in the formation of a team were interrupted and this impacted on the retreat teams that were trying to establish and perfect their retreat programs (Neville 2007). By the same token, individuals who had had positive retreat experiences as religious order retreat leaders were often able to start up new retreat initiatives and teams in their new ministries, expanding the understanding of communitarian retreats in new settings.

An emerging frustration that was identified in the data was the lack of time for teachers (13% of the participants) to meet at school prior to the retreat to plan. Unlike Neville's communitarian retreats in the 1960s, where special meetings were called to discuss the retreat program, (c/f chapter 3, section 3.2) there were few opportunities for the participants in this study to meet regularly and fewer opportunities to explore new and innovative activities that could refresh the retreat program. Teachers said they needed time to meet with their retreat colleagues and talk about retreats so that their own narrative in the small group would be relevant and prepared. The less-experienced teachers often related how on their second retreat, they were often approached during a break in the program and asked to do



the next large group session on personal sharing; often with only ‘five minutes’ to prepare their talk. Apart from being somewhat overwhelmed by this request, it was a precarious situation because teachers had to judge what to include and what to omit from their own story without preparation time. The data (section 5.10.3) drew attention to the vulnerability of teachers when asked to do this. More attention will be given to this practice in section 6.2.

This lack of time tended to affect the selection process for retreat teams. There was a preference for teachers who were familiar with the program while at the same time were flexible enough to adapt to the changes of the program at short notice. As a consequence, the same staff members often attended the retreat each year with few new teachers invited to participate. While many respondents cited this as an example of the retreat program’s strength, it was also interpreted as a ‘weakness’ because it left the bulk of responsibility for the conduct of retreats to a select number of staff. How schools would address this issue in the near future would then be important for the continuation of retreats. It was understood that a key feature of successful retreats was the function of enhancing their own relationships as a team.

#### *6.1.6 The impact of contextual pressures on young people’s relationships with self, family and friends*

The teachers reported they were aware of the psychological pressures on students to achieve good academic results, and this pressure was sometimes evident in tensions in the classroom, leading to less-than-relaxed relationships between teachers and students – relationships that were often strained. They talked about the corrosive nature of this pressure which led to feelings of dis-empowerment which then made them somewhat negative in their relationships and outlooks. The teachers noted that for some students there were likely to be multiple, hidden scenarios being played out in their lives, which their teachers were unaware of, that impacted on their ability to cope at school. Apart from exams, there were relationships issues, family issues, work issues and concerns about the future – and these all contributed to a heightened sense of having few opportunities in which to escape from these pressures (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Engebretson, 2007).

The teachers in the study considered that when young people were under psychological pressure from their context, their relationships were also under pressure. This was consistent with Hughes’ (2007, pp. 75-88) view that their

relationships with family were strained when there were issues of independence, relationships outside family and responsibilities. While this is an aspect of students' lives that was not well covered in the research literature, Rogers (1995, p. 32) explained that there was often a struggle to respond positively to pressure solely through the "means of intellectual or training procedures" which relied only on knowledge. The human condition, when challenged, required more than a *clinical* solution. A change in a person's outlook was often brought about "through experience in a relationship" (Rogers, 1995, p. 33) and it was through this relationship they discovered within themselves "the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change" (Rogers, 1995, p. 33).

Given the working relationship between teachers and students as noted above in section 6.1.4, one could assume that the teachers in this study were generally aware of the issues and problems affecting students. While some of the relationship pressures were similar to those experienced by students on the Christian Living Camps and Stranger Camps in the 1960s and 1970s, the data suggested that the contemporary issues facing students were probably more complicated and had greater potential to impact on student-function and well-being at school. But it was beyond the scope of the study to explore this difference further.

Just over half of the respondents felt that when relationships between teachers and students improved, it had a positive, cohesive, flow-on effect in other areas of the young people's lives. By having opportunities to re-evaluate their relationships in a retreat, students might develop new understandings of, and more positive attitudes towards others. Significantly, relationships within the students' own family needed to be recognised as a key source of pressure as young people struggled to combine study, part-time work and the complications of friendships. However, it was often not until retreat time, when people were removed from school to the retreat setting, that teachers became more aware of the pressures in students' lives that impacted on their relationships.

#### 6.1.7 *The importance of prayer, liturgy and rituals in the retreat*

Creative, meaningful liturgies that engaged students and involved significant student participation were highly rated by sixty-five percent of the participants; they considered them important in relationship and community building as well as for enhancing spirituality. It was often the use of creative liturgies such as healing-like rites and para-liturgies that set the tone for personal reflection in which students not

only pondered their own lives but reflected on their relationship with God (56% of respondents).

The teachers confirmed that prayer and liturgy on retreat were different from what students experienced at school. Some of the practices of desert spirituality (c/f chapter 2, section 2.4 and Table 2.1) were still practiced in contemporary retreats – in particular, providing students with opportunities to experience introspection and encounter with mystery (Belisle, 2003) through prayer and liturgy. However, the teachers believed it was sometimes difficult to achieve an uplifting experience while maintaining a balance between a liturgy that reflected the retreat theme and liturgical expectation in Catholic worshipping communities, such as the Sunday liturgy or a school Mass. While not wanting to alienate students by following traditional patterns in ritual, the teachers tried to invite their full participation, encouraging them to express their spirituality in creative and meaningful ways. This was also a feature of the early communitarian retreat liturgies and other rituals discussed in chapter 3.

The results of a study by Mason, Singleton and Webber (2007) were consistent with what teachers said about the latitude given to youth in relation religious practices (pp. 121-126). Young people's preferences for private and personal religious practices were not related to formal expressions of religion as part of their 'spiritual consciousnesses'. The data of this research about the disparity between formal religious practices and young people's personal spirituality was consistent with Mason, Singleton and Webber's findings: "there is too wide a gap between elementary experiences of transcendence and the elaborate system of doctrine and worship" (p. 124).

These issues had implications for the style, frequency and length of prayer and liturgy on school retreats. An overt emphasis on prayer, silence and God that were prominent features of the desert, monastic and religious order retreat traditions was felt to be detrimental to the building up of community on school retreats (c/f chapter 5, section 5.3.4). Despite a consensus about the importance of prayer and liturgy to assist in the development and enhancement of spirituality and community by 82% of teachers, there was variation in estimates of their overall effectiveness for promoting student cohesion. As noted earlier in this section, prayer and liturgy did not always follow traditional forms but were adapted to suit the mood and understandings of students. These were often considered more meaningful than what was celebrated at school because the retreat environment provided students with experiential referents – they experienced the developing sense of community that

made rituals more meaningful and purposeful. Against a backdrop of decreasing attendance at Catholic Sunday Mass in Australia (Hughes, 2007), teachers, therefore, went to great lengths to try make the experience of liturgy relevant for students.

The teachers were unanimous in identifying the impact ‘good and relevant’ prayer and liturgy had on community building. Students’ satisfaction levels increased. However, this study also identified dissatisfaction with the ways in which prayer and liturgy were celebrated at school, with teachers noting a distinct difference between the two experiences. While prayer and liturgy were not considered an overall negative experience for students at school, the teachers spoke about students’ passivity and sometimes reluctance to be actively involved in the same way as they did on the retreat.

Priests’ availability for celebrating Mass was problematic for teachers. A shortage of priests within Catholic parishes and an increase in their pastoral workloads, as well as fewer religious order priests, often meant that priests were less regularly involved in liturgies at secondary school retreats. However, in the absence of celebrations of Mass and Reconciliation, the teachers appeared to cope by developing and celebrating their own alternative prayer and liturgy-like rituals, keeping the liturgical celebration closely related to the retreat theme of community.

Unresolved tensions with clergy about the conduct of liturgies on retreats appeared to influence decisions about whether to invite them on retreat or not; the teachers were concerned that their efforts at creating community and their own positive relationship with students might risk being undermined by unsupportive priests who had different perspectives about the discussion topics or had a disengaging manner with youth (c/f chapter 5, section 5.2.2.1). The literature did not provide clear direction or strategies to support retreats in such a situation. This problem has emerged as a relatively recent issue facing school retreats that was not a problem with the early communitarian retreats where priests from religious orders were often key leaders of the retreat teams.

Prayer and liturgy still had an important role on retreats despite young people’s limited and tenuous connections with formal religion. It could be that the encouragement of young people to participate in prayer and liturgy on retreat (which were adapted to suit their needs) could result in a more positive attitude amongst the young towards Catholic liturgy. This was consistent with the experience of the leaders of the early Christian Living Camps. (c/f Table 3.2).

### 6.1.8 *The dimension of rituals on retreat*

According to Duffy (2006, p. 177), young people were mostly absent from regular worshipping communities and did not have a well-founded ecclesiology. This was supported by what participants said (c/f chapter 5, sections 5.5.2.2; 5.5.2.3) about creating rituals that appealed to unchurched youth in Catholic schools. In their nurturing of students' faith, teachers encouraged them to participate in communal rituals, even if these were not Eucharistic. Duffy's observation about the value of sacrament-less rituals was consistent with the value that teachers ascribed to such rituals on retreats.

The sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist were often replaced with prayer liturgies and healing-like rituals. Emotions expressed in these healing-like rites had a powerful effect on students that will be discussed further in section 6.2. Such rituals were often regarded as the high point of the retreat. A typical healing session gathered students together and they participated in a ritual where they felt purged of personal weaknesses or negative feelings. This did not happen as a testimonial event because there was no pressure to testify publicly before the student cohort, but was done as a personal and interior reflection (but sometimes there was an expectation to testify by ritual participation). The healing-like ritual was reserved for the last night of the retreat. Even though it might be referred to as reconciliation, it did not draw directly from the sacrament of Reconciliation because the teachers believed it was important for students to experience a generic form of healing that included everyone, irrespective of their beliefs. 39% of the respondents said that the healing-like rituals were valued because they were also affirming. By acknowledging not only their personal burdens and weaknesses, students experienced a kind of collective 'redemption' through the affirmations they gave each other – hopeful that they could 'put the past behind them' and start again. While this was a popular activity, it occasionally produced reactions that affected students' emotional state which will be explored in section 6.2.2.

Therapy sessions, as described by Rogers, that involved similar foci of introspection, trust and feelings were considered by him to be a part of "the process of becoming (a person)", (1995, p. 203). When this was achieved, divisions between people were removed (Rogers, 1995, pp. 201-205) and a new, authentic 'self' emerged. While therapy did not always "solve problems" (Rogers, 1995, p. 203) through healing-like rituals, they identified an aspect of personal weakness that blocked the potential for developing harmonious relationships. Therefore rituals

“simply open up a new way of living” (1995, p. 203) enabling “relationships with others to lose their artificial quality” (Rogers, 1995, p. 203) so that they became deeper and more satisfying. Healing-like rituals were akin to repentance – an accepted practice for the anchorites (c/f chapter 2, section 2.1.4) in their desire to have union with God and experience peace. The teachers also noted a sense of peace and harmony within the student cohort following healing-like rituals.

#### *6.1.9 Students’ relationship with God*

Getting students to think and talk about their relationship with God, while listed as an important purpose of retreats in the literature, was referred to by only 21% of teachers in the study. There appeared to be some reticence on their part about this aspect; the teachers gave the researcher the impression that their principal concern was with community development and the enhancement of personal relationships and that a focus on God and on formal aspects of religion was accommodated within this ‘personal development’ orientation. This was somewhat different from the early communitarian retreats where there was a prominent community-building focus, but where there was also much prominence given to prayer and reflection/discussion about relationships with God.

While not always stated explicitly, the interviewed teachers implied that a too direct a focus on God could have been counterproductive given that many contemporary young people appeared to be uncertain or ambivalent about belief in God, about what God was like and about how one related to God personally. While there were students for whom belief in, and relationship with, God was very important, there were others who were unsure. Given this range of attitudes towards God, the teachers wanted to present a model that would engage the students personally, while giving them opportunities to consider the place of God in their spirituality if they wished to do this. Talking about God in a ‘God-session’ (School A, teacher 2) was a preferred way to invite students to reflect on a God who was not ‘out there somewhere’ but was presented as someone who was found in the students’ experience of ordinary life. This kind of thinking influenced teachers (chapter 3, section 3.2) to try to develop for students an image of a relational God, and it was this sort of relationship with God that teachers explored cautiously on retreat.

The teachers acknowledged that students were not fully aware of what the retreat entailed before attending, because they wanted to keep some aspects of it as a surprise. It also helped the teachers avoid answering too many direct questions about

the place of religion in the retreat. The students usually did not receive a detailed program beforehand. As a consequence, some students, prior to going on retreat, had preconceived ideas that it may have been an 'extended religion class'. The teachers indicated that they distanced themselves from this understanding of the retreat. In response to students' questions about what retreats were like, they gave varied and vague descriptions without giving them too many details. This placed some teachers in the awkward position of trying to explain and defend the retreat to students who were naturally curious about how they would be spending 3 days and 2 nights with their teachers on what was basically a religious activity. Sometimes, the lack of clear answers to their questions was interpreted with misgivings by students. They wanted to know how they would be spending valuable time away from their studies, work commitments and family and whether this would be 'worth it'.

Because of the specifically *religious* focus of Catholic retreats throughout their long history and the models of retreats used by past religious order travelling retreat teams, there could readily be an un-spoken expectation that it was natural, even in school retreats, to have a prominent 'God-focus' throughout. Some Catholics could consider that if God was not the prime focus of a retreat then it could hardly be called a retreat! But it was evident in the respondents' comments about the place of God in the retreat that there was some problem or ambiguity in talking about this question. None of the respondents' comments suggested that God was 'not to be talked about' on retreat. But they did acknowledge that talking about God was a problem area for a number of young people. They noted that young people's discussions on retreats were not always related back to God or even to the Christian narrative. Sometimes the personal comments of students linked up with, or complemented, what teachers had said about their own sense of relationship with, and trust in, God. But at other times this did not happen. This was consistent with Flynn's report that Catholic school teachers perceived "the principal influence of retreats to be at the human level" (Flynn, 1993, p. 258) and not always about God.

The data could not confirm what was discussed about God because the teachers did not elaborate on what stories they told students, but they hinted that these included some of the personal challenges and disappointments in their relationship with God which were eventually resolved. The teachers acknowledged that their personal stories offered students ways of finding religious meaning in the face of adversity and within a community.

Only 17% of the respondents in this study referred to the retreat as an opportunity for students to explore their relationship with God. Duffy's (2006) findings reported that students "thought there was no need to discuss one's faith" publicly because it was undesirable to do so due to fear of other students' reactions. This was a possible explanation for the reluctance of students to speak openly about God on retreat, even when in the small group. More than a quarter of the students in Duffy's study indicated that they felt uncomfortable trying to talk in a group about God because this sort of talk was "private and sacred" (Duffy, 2006, p. 177).

Young people talking about God was inevitably related to their spirituality; and for many people today, including youth, spirituality is increasingly 'relationship-centred', eclectic and secularised (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 209). In the past, spirituality was often linked to formal religion but more recently it has become evident that it "can and does exist both in relationship to religion and independent of it" (Duffy, 2006, p. 10; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Therefore, it was not surprising that the teachers reported that students' relationship with God tended to be more relevant when explored within the context of relationships rather than through reference to the more formal God-images. This was also consistent with Maroney's (2008) findings about young people's images of God. They tended to believe in a God they could 'relate' to rather than speak about God in the abstract.

There has been a considerable shift in the purpose of retreats since early Church times. While exploring one's relationship with God was an important focus in all retreats and retreat-like practices (c/f chapter 2, section 2.2) since the emergence of early Christian spirituality (Belisle, 2003), in the communitarian style retreats for school students, this was not always as prominent a focus. Developing relationships with students and building up community rated more highly with teachers (Hughes, 2007). These retreats no longer had the same strong religious overtones they had for adult Catholics in the past. The new emphasis was to "give students a greater understanding of themselves and enable them to respect the view of others" (Flynn, 1993, p. 258). Young people's relationship with God would be approached on retreats through this channel. In addition, the teachers' acknowledgment that an indirect rather than a direct approach to reflection on one's relationship with God appeared to take into account the relatively secularised spirituality of youth (Hughes, 2007; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Engebretson, 2007). Also, given the increasing proportion of students (and parents) who are not in regular attendance at a Catholic parish or local community of faith (Bellamy, Black, Castle,



Hughes & Kaldor, 2002), the teachers could not presume that all student participants on a retreat shared a starting assumption that the retreat was specially concerned about reflection on and talking about one's relationship with God. Increased multicultural and multi-denominational enrolments were also factors in making it problematic to assume that a solely Catholic-oriented, or even a God-centred secondary school retreat could be conducted.

A more relationship and community-centred focus in the retreats could imply that the teachers regarded contemporary young people as less ready to talk openly in groups about their relationship with God than was the case formerly. It was apparent in the earliest Christian Living Camp retreats that focus on relationship with God was often direct and prominent (Firman, 1968; Mason, 2008; Rossiter, 2007). However, contemporary retreat leaders being somewhat more cautious and hesitant about approaching the topic of God on retreats did not mean that the *opportunity to talk about God and one's faith* was excluded from the retreat. If anything, the accepting social climate of the retreat should make it easier for young people to talk about their faith in this context – more favourably than say, in classroom religion lessons. It may be that students' *more general reluctance to speak openly about God and one's religious faith* on retreats was more a part of an *overriding social and cultural change*, rather than because of changes in retreat purposes and processes which might have changed the dynamics for this topic. Those conducting the retreats may have been responding to their sensing or diagnosis of this reluctance in young people. Hence, it is concluded that for those leading the retreats, the opportunity for young people to reflect on their relationship with God and their faith remained an important part of the retreat; but care was needed in approaching the topic.

#### *6.1.10 Sharing personal stories in group sessions: A 'Narrative' process for prompting personal change and for enhancing relationships*

The participants indicated that the dynamic of sharing one's personal story had become a central theme that affected two areas of the retreat: whole group sessions where the adult team members shared part of their personal history and spirituality; small groups where both students and teachers shared aspects of their own personal stories.

Before further commentary on the views of participants, the following paragraphs have been included to highlight the history and theory behind the use of personal narrative in the retreats.

From the perspective of humanistic psychology, Rogers (1995) and May (1983) proposed that a prominent cause of human anxiety and disconnection from others was not having the time to explore issues, especially personal ones that had a significant relationship component. Young people's personal relationships had the potential to be fraught with complications; at times, they were painful and dissatisfying, resulting in a tendency to try to reorganise their personality and relationships with others (Rogers, 1995).

May (1983, p.27) referred to people seeking a "centredness" in their lives to reduce personal turmoil that resulted from unhappy relationships. One of the ways this adjustment in relationships might be achieved in the clinical practices of humanistic psychology in those times was by participation in small encounter groups in which traumas and anxieties were *shared* with others and a person's struggle was eventually converted to courage through *story-sharing* (May, 1983). Narrative therapy, based on the sharing of one's personal story, is still prominent in the social sciences as a valued part of therapeutic treatment (Brown, 2007). While the live-in retreat did not claim to include this function of an encounter (or therapy) group, there is a significant parallel with encounter group functions in this regard, even if it was at a more general educational level. This parallel was clear to those who first conducted the Christian Living Camps in the 1960s (McCarthy, 2007; Rossiter, 2007).

Personal narratives, according to Brown (2007), can provide an entry point into exploring meaning. "We make sense of events in our lives and our emotional responses to them through the stories we tell" (Brown, 2007, p. 190) enabling people to unpack them and explore what they have come to mean. Johnson (2005) believed that individuals, irrespective of age, were continuously engaged in reflective practice, in which they thought about what had happened during their day and worked towards "reaching some conclusion about how that experience should affect or influence what we do and how we do it in the future" (Johnson, 2005, p. 149). The end result of reflective practice was "reflection in the form of life histories" (Johnson, 2005, p. 152) that offers self-understanding and personal growth. Rogers (1995) supported the personal development benefits of story-sharing because it imparted the message that life's problems were not insurmountable and that there was hope, no matter how tragic or difficult the circumstance.

These insights from psychological theory are consistent with the prominence of the notion of 'sharing your personal story' in the thinking of the teachers who

conducted retreats. 39% of the respondents considered that teachers' telling some details of a personal story was often a key strategy used by the adults at the retreat to serve as a catalyst for encouraging the students to talk about aspects of their own life stories. They thought that students often developed deeper insights into the personalities and life stories of others when the relationships of those telling the stories were characterized by "genuineness and transparency" (Rogers, 1995, p. 37) even though this was not something that could be open to measurement. Such responses paralleled the thinking of Bausch (1986) who valued story telling as "a way of going back, not to change an unchangeable situation, but to reinterpret it creatively" (p. 25). Hillman (1979) found that when people told their stories they were better able to come to terms with their own history and this was confirmed by the importance the participants attached to personal story telling in the large and small groups.

From a theological point of view, the personal stories told by adults could be considered a witnessing or what Bausch (1986) described as narrative theology: a "theology of story telling" (p. 19). He identified thirteen characteristics of story telling (chapter 2, pp. 29-63) that had parallels with personal story telling. Some significant points were that story telling:

- is a "bridge to one's roots" (p. 33) that provides direction and healing.
- it binds people together because people discover how similar they are.
- provides escape from loneliness.
- provides a basis for hope.

Bausch (1986) believed that stories helped people to assess a common experience and forge new bonds. It was also through story that people "escape from reality when the world is too much with us. A good story can give us a break as well as pull us back to reality, renewed and determined" (p. 45). This view supported how some participants understood the sharing of their personal stories. 39% of the teachers said listening to personal stories helped students be more positive about returning to school and about coping with the rest of the academic year because they did not feel so isolated by their own problems and this outlook gave them a sense of renewal. 52% of the respondents said that when personal stories were discussed, it enhanced positive attitudinal change in students.

It was difficult to determine whether teachers used the same personal stories each year. This researcher sensed that most teachers re-told stories about their life that they knew would have some connection with students' lives. New staff members were often unaware that sharing your personal story was an expectation of

the retreat leaders, especially if there had been no prior planning meeting. In the absence of a meeting, a commonly described strategy for assigning teachers different responsibilities was described by one participant as follows:

We meet beforehand and that's often where we'll work out what sessions we might really want to be involved in...and then, we'll have regular meetings...whether it be during the free time or even over a meal, just a quick kind of chat or after some small group sessions when the boys are going out to have their morning tea or whatever...we'll just do a bit of 'okay, well, next session, this is where we're going to go.' And we compare the responses of the small groups too, without discussing anything in detail obviously, we talk about whether a session was successful or whether a teacher had real trouble getting through to the boys and then we know where to go from there as well (School D, teacher 1).

This model of 'discussion planning' used on some retreats indicated that not much structure was always provided for teachers on retreat. Some said there was little time to plan the next session of the retreat program. This problem had the potential to create a sense of panic for some teachers because they had to think about their life story under pressure and make hasty decisions about what they could include or filter out in the narration. These comments indicated some conflict between the importance ascribed to teachers' personal stories and the uncertainty and anxiety that some teachers felt about being required to do this. The data suggested that new teachers tended to accept what was being asked of them, but it was also an anxious experience for them, and it may be that not all were fully convinced that personal story telling was such an important retreat dynamic. The literature review indicated (c/f chapter 3, section 3.5.1) that personal disclosure by adult team leaders, like personal wisdom stories, was regarded as important in the early communitarian retreats, especially within the small group where it was also important for students; narrative techniques were regarded as important ways of promoting personal reflection and discussions with a view to making contributions to attitudinal change. But it was also acknowledged as a potential problem area if this was given inappropriate emphasis. Rossiter (2008) considered that the early communitarian retreats used a greater variety of stimulus materials and strategies to lead into group discussions than was the case in contemporary retreats, and that the dynamic of telling your personal story has probably been over emphasised recently to the extent that it may come across as somewhat contrived and artificial to students. Rossiter (2008) also considered that the telling of a personal story could be somewhat 'stylised' because teachers did not disclose their entire life story but were encouraged to share stories that fitted in with other teachers' expectations. This potential

problem in personal story telling is a part of the more complex general question of the place of personalism in retreats; it indicates that over the history of school retreats there has been a significant shift in what teachers were expected to contribute personally to the program and that the emphasis given to sharing personal stories has possibly been overrated.

While participants acknowledged the natural sensitivity around individuals' own personal self-revelations, they still regarded these contributions as of fundamental importance for the conduct of retreats. It remains an area that requires wisdom and discernment on the part of those who conduct the groups and who serve as leaders of small group discussion. It is a matter of determining when the sharing of personal stories is a *healthy* way of promoting personal discussions that, in turn, provides useful data for young people to reflect on as regards developing their own personality and their own relationships. Otherwise, where this procedure seems artificial, or where it appears to put psychological pressure on individuals to reveal personal thoughts and feelings when they feel discomfort in doing this, there is the possibility of psychological manipulation and lack of respect for individual privacy. The teachers considered it was important to identify the appropriate boundaries and limitations for personal story-sharing.

While, as noted above, having personal discussions was regarded as a very important process from the time of the earliest communitarian retreats, at that time *teachers telling their personal stories* was given less prominence than was apparently the case in the experience of participants in this study. Those conducting the communitarian retreats had more variety, such as films, songs and short talks, to engage students that did not include personal story-telling (Rossiter, 2008). It was easier for students to respond to different topics rather than asking them to share personal aspects of their lives. It may well be that a particular culture of adults telling their personal stories is now strong among the retreat leaders in this particular diocese, and it may possibly be related to the particular retreat training program that teachers in this diocese have attended; it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate this question further.

While personalism has been accepted as a most desirable aim for retreats, the pursuit of personalism should not be undertaken without caution. In retreats, there is sometimes a fine line between healthy personalism and emotional manipulation, especially when "they (students) don't always feel comfortable sharing intimate

details” (School C, teacher 2). The related ethical questions about personal discussions will be taken up in section 6.2.

## **6.2 PERSONALISM, EMOTIONS AND EUPHORIA AS KEY DIMENSIONS TO RETREATS**

### *6.2.1 The dynamics and expectations of personal sharing*

The teachers expected personal sharing as an outcome of group discussions and there was a tendency to judge their success in terms of whether or not and how much, personal sharing occurred. The implied problem was vagueness in determining *how personal* a discussion needed to be before it was considered *successful*. The word ‘deep’ was occasionally used to characterise the desired sort of personal sharing. But this was probably intended to mean some *sharing of real personal experience or feelings* as opposed to superficial conversation. At the same time ‘deep sharing’ within the small group was acknowledged as an important problem to be careful about; while it was recognised that this kind of sharing may have some benefits for students, it should not proceed without caution. If this depth of sharing was pursued as a requirement of the retreat or if there was psychological pressure on participants to communicate at this level, then they would be compromised because of a lack of freedom about whether or not they wished to participate in this way. Conducting the small group along these lines was akin to exposing students to a form of ‘psychological surgery’ that they did not agree to when they elected to attend the retreat (Rossiter, 2007). The participants noted that the students were generally not informed in advance of this expectation to share at a personal level. The teachers also noted that when students did share personally without feeling any pressure to have to do so, it was usually regarded by both participants and retreat leaders as more valuable and helpful for the group.

The positive values or learnings from personal disclosure could be a natural by-product of having the right conditions in which to share where both students and teachers felt that there was no coercion to contribute at that personal level. Whereas, there could be negative effects where they felt forced into a position of having to share personal aspects of their lives. Clear boundaries for so called ‘deep’ personal sharing were not well defined in the data; and this lack of clarity had the potential to place those sharing personal information in precarious situations. Given the professional, ethical conduct required of teachers, it was not only problematic for students to share too intimately on a retreat but also teacher-sharing placed them in a position of risk because they could not predict whether what was disclosed in a small

group while on retreat would be circulated back at school or at home – despite the precautionary retreat mandate by some teachers who told students “...whatever is said within the walls of this room is never, ever to leave!” (School D, teacher 2).

The teachers reported that judgments about what was an appropriate level of personal sharing were usually left up to the discretion of the teacher group leaders. For some participants, the expectation that ‘deep personal sharing’ was needed in the small group discussions made them feel that a counselling-like orientation was required of the group leaders – and this they found problematic. They attempted to resolve the question by consulting with more experienced retreat leaders as to ‘what’ and ‘how much’ should be disclosed in the small groups. In judging on this question, the researcher concluded that there was a need for clarity on the part of both adults and students that the retreat was not a therapy group and that its group discussions needed to allow for, without prescribing, a healthy level of personal sharing that could be best described (as noted earlier) as free, authentic, enjoyable and generally educational, without any psychological pressure. There may be unknown and unpredictable consequences if personalism in retreat discussions deviated from a friendly educational focus into overly-intimate sharing.

Personal discussions in the small and large groups were valued by 95% of the teachers. In most cases, discussions and personal sharing created an intimacy that was not the custom in daily teacher-student relationships at school. The shift in this relationship was deliberate on the teachers’ part as it was believed that most students would welcome a forum in which they could speak honestly about themselves and listen to what others had to say. 60% of the teachers said that it was their responsibility to create a comfortable environment in which this could happen and this extended beyond the small group to the whole of the retreat cohort.

The participants had definite views about different aspects of generating personalism in the small group such as its size and the rules for listening and sharing. The majority of the teachers (78%) believed they were responsible for creating the boundaries and the tone of the small group. They considered that the location and the size of the group affected personal sharing. Smaller groups were preferable to larger group because it enabled the teacher to identify which student was ‘holding back’ from sharing. Without personal sharing, the teachers believed that relationships within the group could not thrive and new understandings would not be generated. Discussions were always teacher-initiated and directed as a way of ensuring that conversations were sustained and that students had opportunities to

speak. The teachers felt that personal sharing had to be modelled if students were to understand the expectations. When they lacked the confidence to steer the conversations in this direction, they became anxious because it was likely to affect the degree of personal sharing. Despite their efforts, the teachers admitted that sometimes there were periods of awkward silences in the small group and they did not view these positively. Although silence had been an important feature of retreats from the time of the anchorites (c/f chapter 2, Table 2.1) to the time of silent school retreats in the 1950s, it was not a desirable feature when it was felt to inhibit personal sharing.

Rogers' (1995) hypothesis about the effectiveness of the small group leader and personal disclosure is summarised as: "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover in themselves the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur" (p. 33). The teachers endorsed personal sharing as an important purpose of the small group. As this type of sharing was often intense, Rogers (1995) described a relationship of trust between people as being one of the most significant elements for personal sharing to occur. Without high levels of trust, new insights about the participants were unlikely to occur.

Rossiter (2007) considered that personalism referred to the general educational aim to develop a climate where individuals were able to communicate at a personal level. It was a naturally problematic term because on the one hand it considered that interactions at a personal level – where people disclosed aspects of their personal life – could be an opportunity for personal learning for those who shared the disclosure, with the potential for affecting their personal development. On the other hand and at the same time, there was an important need to protect people's privacy and freedom with respect to their personal thinking, beliefs, values and feelings. In other words, there were conditions and safeguards that were needed if personalism in an educational setting was to be healthy and not manipulative. Rossiter's 'shorthand' view of what constituted healthy personalism on a retreat proposed that these contributions needed to be "authentic, enjoyable and educational – and not artificial and manipulative" (Rossiter, 1997, p. 2).

Earlier in section 6.1.3, the notion of 'personalism' was referred to with respect to the retreat aims of developing relationships and sense of community. Going away, having fun, being with friends, meeting young people of the opposite sex and various retreat activities can all contribute to a friendly personal climate, and



thus can contribute to the dimension of personalism. In addition, section 6.1.10 noted the importance that retreat leaders ascribed to the process of telling a personal story as a key psychological process in the retreat. Here, attention is focused on the *level of personal disclosure and communication*, particularly in the small group interactions.

The participants in this study highlighted the following questions, without always appearing to have convincing answers – suggesting that personalism still remained a problem area in the conduct of retreats just as had been the case in the early Christian Living Camps in the 1960s.

- When was personal sharing ‘too deep’? That is: when personal sharing that was regarded as desirable and helpful became undesirable, inappropriate and potentially damaging.
- On the retreat, who determined what was appropriate to share?
- How could teachers be sure that personal sharing in a group would not have problematic personal repercussions later on?

The participants reported that when sharing in the small groups was sometimes very personal it made some students cry, and there were instances where they cried about this some weeks later (c/f chapter 5, sections 5.6.1.1; 5.6.1.2). This may have been an emotional expression of empathy; in some instances, the students may have been disturbed by what they heard – for example, the harsh life experiences of some classmates. This raised questions about:-

- What the retreat leaders would judge to be an inappropriate disclosure in the small group discussions.
- The students’ capacity to cope with some confidences that perhaps should not have been shared.
- A need to protect students from the possibility of disclosures that may become stressful for them.

In turn, these questions, and the earlier discussion in this section, raised more general issues about what the retreat leaders say and do to help the students develop healthy and realistic expectations of the procedures in the small discussion groups.

All of the following need to be addressed:-

- Clear guidelines from the adult leaders about what the small groups are intended to achieve – that is, a generally educational level of shared personal insights and not like a therapy group where important personal disclosures are expected;
- Students need to feel personal freedom and protection from any psychological pressure of expectations to make personal disclosures that they may feel uncomfortable with;

- Students feel free to make personal comments about themselves or their experience if they feel this is helpful for the group and themselves;
- An understanding that if there are confidential disclosures, then these confidences need to be respected;
- It is inappropriate in the small groups for students to reveal personal problems of abuse which require mandatory reporting by the supervising teachers according to law.
- The precautionary availability of follow up counselling services for individual students when this is judged as a need by the supervising adult retreat leaders.

As noted in chapter 3, (section 3.1.3) the Christian Living Camps developed an interest on the part of retreat leaders in the way that personal disclosure could be an important mechanism for promoting personal and spiritual development. This was allied with theories of personal development within humanistic psychology, and particularly with the psychological dynamics of Rogerian encounter groups (Rogers, 1969). At the same time, as this sort of personalism was being promoted, and retreat leaders gained more experience in the conduct of retreats, they experienced different reactions from students that were linked to this personalism. It was early in the development of communitarian retreats that cautions about the sensitivity of personal communication and about the need for safeguards and respect for privacy to avoid any manipulation began to emerge.

### 6.2.2 *Emotionality*

All of the respondents in this study were aware that some students cried or were emotionally moved on retreat. 52% said emotions were often evoked by the personal disclosures that happened in the small groups; this was consistent with the emotions identified in the Christian Living Camps (section 3.2). Even for those involved in the early communitarian retreats, emotions were an important natural ingredient for students when they were expressing how they felt about different issues or topics.

The participants in this study reported that the healing-like rituals and subsequent affirmation sessions were often emotional and it was not unusual to have some participants crying. One affirmation session that teachers from one diocesan school used on retreat was the parent letter to their child. When parents wrote personal, affirming letters to their child and students read them during this session, feelings of joy often led to tears. Teachers said that the personal contents of the letters expressed to their son or daughter how much they were loved and valued, despite the possibility that some experienced the strained family relationships described earlier in 6.2. However, the teachers occasionally had to deal with

emotionally distraught students after they received a critical letter that produced feelings of anger and at times, despair. In such instances, the teachers tried to salvage something positive for those students from what had turned out to be a session of discouragement rather than affirmation. Communicating clear expectations to parents about what happens on retreat continues to be an issue when their involvement affects the well-being of students. In contemporary society, pressures of time are not exclusively a student issue; many adults have busy lives and this can affect their relationships.

In the first communitarian retreats, it was never the intention of the leader Neville (2007) to create a teary atmosphere but to provide opportunities for interaction, fun and prayer. Once Neville (2007) identified a recurring pattern of 'teariness' in the early retreats, he adapted his programs to avoid them. Teachers in this study said that when students shared their deepest thoughts and feelings in the group or were moved by other activities, students cried. Some teachers believed that crying students created empathy in others and this seemed to create a sense of support and solidarity amongst them similar to that of therapy groups described by Rogers (1995). However, 8% of participants said that a display of tears did not have this effect on all students. They noted that at each retreat, some students were reluctant to participate in the small group or activities that were emotionally revealing. Their lack of engagement could be interpreted as a protest against, or distancing from, psychological processes that left them emotionally vulnerable or which could lead to crying. If students were unaware of the prominence that emotionality would have on the retreat before attending the retreat, then these students might well interpret deep personal sharing as a kind of 'emotional ambush' in which they felt coerced to reveal their story or to participate in intimate activities that could lead to excessive emotion. At times, it may be that those students who teachers labelled as poorly-behaved in the small group were just protecting their vulnerability; they may have felt uneasy with the process of personal sharing and they responded in distracting and disruptive ways that deflected the problem; others may have responded by 'closing up shop' and not saying anything.

As referred to in sections 6.1.7 and 6.1.8, activities such as Reconciliation, healing para-liturgies and the Mass, also played a significant role in emotionality. Often, students' tears were a kind of release of pent-up emotions. Acknowledgment of students' emotions and of their place in the retreat process became more noticeable as the communitarian model developed in schools. Rossiter (1997) noted

that sometimes sessions were deliberately ‘orchestrated’ by retreat leaders to evoke emotional responses and tears; he referred to such leaders as “emotional vampires” because meeting their own personal emotional needs appeared to be their driving motivation, rather than meeting the needs of the students. Such a manipulative situation made the students emotionally vulnerable while it gave these retreat leaders scope for being ‘consolers’, ‘affirmers’ and / or ‘counsellors’ – roles that gave them emotional satisfaction. (c/f chapter 3, section 3.4.5). 39% of the respondents considered it was potentially harmful for students’ well-being for retreat leaders to purposely aim to produce tearful outcomes; whereas 13% of teachers were non-committal on this question. This study showed that there was still a measure of uncertainty and ambivalence among retreat leaders about the place and educational use of students’ emotions on retreats.

What has emerged from the data is that addressing students’ emotions, and contributing towards their emotional development and maturity, have become an acceptable part of the purposes of retreats – even if more needs to be done to articulate this theory and practice. A recent start on a theory of ‘educating’ young people’s emotions has been considered by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 383-292) where they examined questions about the promotion of emotional learning and emotional maturity.

The teachers who approved of crying as a valuable part of retreats said that tears were to be interpreted as a good sign of students bonding with each other (c/f chapter 5, section 5.6.1). They were aware that a well-told story of one’s personal struggles often evoked strong feelings with which students identified. Knowing and implementing what ‘worked’ in stirring up students’ emotions walked a fine line between being educative and manipulative – depending on a series of risk assessment questions:- what was to be done; the anticipated emotions that might be triggered; how the anticipated emotion might be expressed; how appropriate was the anticipated show of emotion likely to be in that context; how might the anticipated emotion be handled by the retreat leaders and the students; how might the expression of emotion be followed up by de-briefing and interpretation that helped students put the emotion into perspective.

Activities that appeared to manipulate students’ emotions to create empathy within the group were regarded as inappropriate by many of those involved in the earliest communitarian retreats (Rossiter, 1997; Neville, 2007, c/f chapter 3, sections 3.5.1; 3.5.2). They also noted that sometimes when this did happen, it seemed to

give those retreat leaders who saw themselves primarily in a counselling role in small groups, the impression that real progress in a student's personal development had occurred – judging that healing had commenced when the students had 'broken down' and were ready to talk about it. In this problematic situation, the small group tended to be mistakenly perceived by the group leader as a therapy session (c/f chapter 3, section 3.4.5).

While some participants remarked that tears were often considered a 'benchmark' of a successful retreat if the majority of students cried and talked about personal matters. This caused concern for 47% of the teachers who disapproved of deliberately manipulating students' emotions to make them vulnerable, especially when students returned home and there was no follow-up immediately after the retreat to support them. A number of the respondents said they would go home and worry about emotional students who were teary and could not stop crying. 47% of the teachers said sessions that discussed sensitive issues were sometimes too overwhelming for some students to cope with and that teachers were out of their depth in trying to discuss these matters with young people in a group. They were concerned that vulnerable students did not have the emotional resilience or coping strategies to deal with some issues during and after the retreat (c/f chapter 5, sections 5.6.1; 5.6.2).

The early communitarian retreat pioneers identified this concern as early as 1970-71 (c/f chapter 3, section 3.5.1). What has become problematic is how teachers address the diverse outlooks on the place of emotionality in the retreat process; questions need to be raised as to the appropriateness of tears on retreat – when is this a natural outcome of a healthy educational process or a response to an activity that could be regarded as manipulative? There appears to remain a significant lack of consensus about a range of issues related to the emotional dimension to retreats. 17% of the participants viewed emotionality as a positive aspect of retreats; but not all of these would approve of excessively emotional activities.

Those teachers who disapproved of activities that might easily result in excessive emotion felt that extra supervision needed to be in place for the remainder of the retreats in case some students reacted unpredictably. It was not just the crying of students that was the issue, but it was felt that those who empathised strongly were also at risk.

What created disquiet amongst 43% of the participants was that a significant proportion of their colleagues did not share their outlook about the possible negative

effects of retreat emotionality on students' well-being. It appears that this issue has been an on-going point of tension for teachers involved in retreat work (c/f chapter 5, Table 5.6).

When dealing with distressed students, the teachers appeared to make personal judgements about a student's emotional state. Usually there was no specific support from more qualified school personnel such as school counsellors in assessing students' emotional difficulties because this would have required additional school staffing requirements. Asking a colleague 'to keep an eye out' for particular students after an emotionally-charged sharing session was a common request according to the participants. This indicated that the teachers were worried to some extent about possible repercussions for students' well-being if these young people isolated themselves from the rest of the group. The data also raised the question of whether some sessions in which students' cried beyond the norm constituted a possible duty of care issue. Given that 47% of the respondents said that duty of care was a priority on retreat, it would require further research to ascertain teachers' understandings of 'duty of care' when on retreat. If teachers' understandings of their retreat expectations differed from each other, then the stated outcomes and purposes of the retreat would also vary amongst the staff. The teachers who were concerned about emotional students appeared to be more aware of an element of risk in this matter. They were conscious that the small groups were not therapy groups and that they were not trained as therapists nor was this appropriate as part of the generally educational purposes of the retreat.

Some retreat leaders in this study saw themselves primarily in the role of counsellors and this had been a problem in some of the early communitarian retreats (c/f chapter 3, section 3.2). It may well remain a problem with contemporary retreats; this study had no conclusive data on this question. It remains a difficult question as to the level of personal support and pastoral care that is appropriate to expect from teachers on a retreat, compared with what would normally be expected on the school campus and off-campus excursions. It is also a question of being aware of the need for professional boundaries and for a code of teacher ethics that applied to school activities whether on site or when away from the school on a retreat.

The data was not refined enough as a basis for judging whether the contemporary retreats were 'more' or 'less' psychologically oriented than the original Christian Living Camps of the 1960s. It appeared that those who conducted

these programs in the early years were more familiar with the psychodynamics of personal change and with humanistic psychology than were those who took part in this study, even though a number of the latter had participated in a formal retreat training program. The Christian Living Camps also made good psychological use of the acquaintance process (the meeting and friendship development for boys and girls from different schools who did not know each other prior to the retreat) whereas the contemporary retreats were not set up on an inter-school basis and as a consequence could not use the acquaintance process to the same extent (c/f chapter 2, section 2.4.6).

While ‘on the job’ learning by teachers on retreat as well as participation in retreat training programs have contributed to the development of skills and experience in the leading of retreats, it is noted (chapter 3) that the thinking and program development from the early years of these retreats (1960s and 1970s, as well as more recently) were not well documented. Much of the wisdom in the conduct of retreats from those times was passed on through practice. To some extent, while schools retain copies of recent programs, there is still a problem with the limited extent to which thinking about retreats and retreat planning and programming is documented.

### 6.2.3 *Euphoria*

The respondents’ reference to ‘having fun’, ‘being away from home’ and ‘being together with friends’ pointed towards the same sort of *feel-good* features of retreats that characterised the first communitarian retreats (c/f chapter 3, section 3.1.2). These were elements of a sense of *euphoria* that developed during the program. 34% of the respondents linked emotions and euphoria, suggesting that the two were complementary yet different. While emotions sometimes created ‘low’ feelings (at times associated with tears), euphoria had more to do with ‘high’ feelings and excitement. The teachers considered it easier to create euphoria than to evoke emotions in students – even though the two were related. In the early communitarian retreats, group games and community singing were used to develop a sense of community, which in turn contributed to feelings of euphoria and heightened well-being (c/f chapter 3, section 3.4.4).

The data showed that teachers considered it important to use euphoria carefully (39% of the respondents) because it had the potential to lead to unrealistic and unsustainable emotional highs in students. Just as tears could produce

vulnerability, euphoria could produce unpredictable behaviour and responses. There appeared to be a preference for the term euphoria over emotions because they felt they could better control and predict its effects by making some adjustments to the retreat activities; also euphoria seemed to be a more readily acceptable retreat outcome, and a less problematic term than emotions. While it was appropriate for energy levels to be increased at different times in the retreat, the dilemma for retreat leaders as described in chapter 3, section 3.5.1 was about how to restore students' emotions to a balanced level after activities that led to the expression of a lot of emotion; it was easier to help students progress from euphoria to normal routine back at home than it was from an emotional state.

30% of the teachers believed that unrealistic levels, and the transitory nature, of euphoric feelings could be detrimental to the overall well-being and function of students when they first returned home. Parents and family members could be puzzled as to what had happened to their son or daughter on retreat when they returned home in a euphoric state. Sometimes the parental perception was reported as: their children were different but the parents did not understand what had brought this about. Respondents explained that this was because the retreat processes were not fully explained either to the students or their parents. The standard practice was to send a letter home outlining some of the organisational details but with no information about what the retreat would actually involve. That flexibility in the program was maintained could be one reason why more program details were not made available to students and parents beforehand. (c/f chapter 3, section 3.1.3). The net result was that the parents were not advised about the nature and purpose of retreats, or about program activities.

As noted earlier, the teachers preferred to retain a certain mystique about what was planned for the retreat because they felt this enhanced student participation. But at the same time this could have unintentionally contributed to some confusion in parental and student understanding about the purposes and activities of the retreat. As noted in section 3.1.3, such lack of publicised information about the purposes and activities of retreats was a problem for the early communitarian retreats, particularly when they were felt by students to be so successful and enjoyable; this also proved to cause problems with bishops and clergy. (c/f chapter 3, section 3.1.3).

Only 8% of the teachers reported de-briefing their students on how to manage their emotions on return from the euphoric experience of the retreat. Such de-briefing had been particularly important for the early communitarian retreats



(Neville, 2007; c/f chapter 3, section 3.5.1). The teachers noted that when they tried to offer students advice about managing their feelings of exuberance at the conclusion of the retreat they were often met with resistance. They reported that the students appeared at the time to disbelieve that their feelings about community, relationships and themselves generated at the retreat might eventually subside. This issue was similarly expressed by Neville about the euphoria experienced by some students in the early communitarian style retreats (c/f chapter 3, section 3.5.1). Some of the teachers reported that they too were affected by the new-found euphoria and happiness expressed by the students. While apparently of less concern now than was the case with the first communitarian retreats, de-briefing about the euphoria and emotions generated on retreats (for a constructive 're-entry' to home and school life) remains an important issue for their future conduct because euphoria and emotions remain key elements in the experience, with the potential for affecting personal development.

The teachers said that students' feelings of euphoria from the retreat did not persist for too long after their re-entry to home and school life. Feeling on a 'high' during and just after the retreat sometimes required adjustment when the students came back 'down to earth'. Rossiter (2007) considered that the best way of addressing the potential problem was to help the students understand or get into perspective both how and why they felt that way; some understanding of how their euphoric feelings developed, which could be addressed at the retreat, as well as some discussion of how they might feel during their re-entry could help students manage the decline in euphoria and learn something from it.

While some participants had concerns about euphoria on the retreat, 34% considered that it had a positive effect on relationships; they felt that students' returning home on a high was preferable to their being in a low. The student euphoria on a retreat was interpreted as an indication that the retreat had been successful; success was an important expectation. However, one issue that emerged was whether some retreat leaders intended to manufacture or contrive particular activities that produced euphoria – by contrast with accepting euphoria when it developed as a natural by-product of healthy retreat activities (c/f chapter 3, section 3.5.1). Also, there was some concern that if too much was made of students' 'having a good time', this might give an impression that the spiritual purposes were becoming secondary. While it was generally agreed that euphoria could be a

valuable, natural part of the retreat dynamics, there was a need to address potential problems related to students' feelings after they returned from the retreat.

Further more detailed research on the subtle and complex place of emotion and euphoria in retreats is needed, particularly from the point of view of the students.

### **6.3 STRUCTURING AND TIMETABLING OF RETREATS IN THE SCHOOL PROGRAM AND RELATED ISSUES**

#### *6.3.1 Timetabling and locating of retreats*

The retreat increased responsibilities for teachers who were retreat leaders, as noted by half the respondents. They emphasised personal sacrifices related to time and energy that were required in over-night, live-in retreats. In particular, they were conscious of the extensive efforts of retreat coordinators to organise the retreat. This was often the responsibility of the Religious Education Coordinator. Sometimes the time commitment for preparing a retreat extended for a number of months.

The teachers did not have any particular preference for the timing of retreats as different schools appeared to have their own established times. 13% of the respondents said the retreat time was more effective straight after mid-year exams, enabling students and teachers to get away from academic pressures. 21% of teachers spoke about colleagues who complained about the retreat. The respondents felt professionally undermined and devalued when this happened. Lack of support for their efforts created a strain in collegial relationships on staff before and after the retreat. This was consistent with the concerns identified by Mullins (c/f chapter 3, section 3.7.7) that some teachers rated retreats as being less important than academic study at school because they were not assessed. While the respondents were aware of this division, the teachers said they were often frustrated when these colleagues rejected their attempts to involve them in the retreat as a way of helping them understand the retreat's purpose. However, it could well be these teachers had issues with retreats that were not identified by this researcher and this requires further exploration.

Concern was expressed about conducting retreats at suitable venues; there was disappointment when facilities were of sub-standard quality because this impacted on the ambience of the retreat. The participants considered that going away included an expectation that the venue would not be spartan, given that students had paid to go on retreat. In a time when some organisations were rationalising resources and selling/restructuring sites that had been used for retreats, the location of suitable venues became a problem. It was difficult to find venues that

catered for school retreats. Finding suitable accommodation was considered to be fast approaching crisis point. As venues closed, retreat leaders found it difficult to locate suitable replacement venues at a reasonable cost; increasing the retreat fee could impact on family and school finances. Also, it was not just a matter of finding another venue. Different venues had associated potential risks and compiling the degree of risk-assessment increased the pressure and workloads of retreat leaders. Having appropriate sleeping accommodation was also an issue for the participants. Night supervision of male and female dormitories was said to increase teacher responsibilities and workloads (c/f chapter 5, section 5.7.2).

The participants noted that camp sites often used by schools did not enhance the retreat dynamics because they lacked Christian symbols, such as statues and icons, a chapel and appropriate meeting rooms for small groups to gather and discuss. In other words, a retreat site needed to be 'spirituality friendly' (c/f chapter 2, section 2.4.5).

While initially small, voluntary weekend experiences, communitarian retreats eventually became mainstream events held during school time – sometimes voluntary and sometimes a required part of the school curriculum. Even while voluntary, the early Christian Living Camps were regarded as key aspects of the school's overall religious education program (Rossiter, 1978), in some instances they were regarded more as an optional extra-curricular activity. One informant's description considered that:

In those early days, retreats of this style had no official status - they were not considered to be a part of the school (or Religious Education) curriculum. They were regarded as an 'extra' run by a small number of staff (in those days, all religious) and therefore had to exist outside normal school hours. In those early years, all students within a Year group were not invited to participate - individual invitations were given to selected students. We used to finish school of a Friday afternoon, pack up the retreat gear in a station wagon. One of us would drive the wagon to the retreat site. The other one or two staff would meet the kids at about 4.00 pm at the school, walk down to the train station and travel to the site. We would reverse the process after lunch on Sunday. Then back into school Monday morning (Habermann, 2008).

### 6.3.2 *The organisational features of retreat work*

#### 6.3.2.1 *Voluntary Vs compulsory student attendance*

The debate whether retreats should be voluntary or compulsory was evident in teachers' responses. The schools involved in this study had experimented with both compulsory and voluntary retreats. 78% of respondents supported compulsory retreats and commonly added comments like: "I know they are hard work, but I hope

we don't lose them in our school because students get so much out of them". It was generally agreed that retreats had the potential to be an effective experience for most students, but not for all. The participants noted that problematic student behaviour could destroy teachers' efforts in creating community. When this happened, it left some retreat leaders feeling 'devastated' because the resultant disciplinary action further affected the dynamics of the retreat; at times it was felt that little could be salvaged when this occurred. It was also reported that students could feel angry and disappointed when their peers compromised the positive ambience of the retreat; the students knew the retreat was a 'one off' or unrepeatable experience for their particular class; and they would not have another opportunity to create community in this way.

While the teachers had both high hopes for retreats as well as misgivings about high levels of teacher input, they were convinced that retreats were predominately beneficial and this is why they were concerned about maintaining a future for them. They said that students rated the retreat so highly that young people could not stop talking about it when they returned to their classes. The popularity of retreats was recorded in school year books; it was often regarded as a 'high point' for Year 12 students. This was similar to the research findings of Flynn (1993, p.241) who found that senior students liked retreats and considered them helpful to their spirituality. These good results for retreats probably affected the teachers' judgment that retreats should be compulsory – so that all senior students could experience one.

While compulsory retreats were the preferred model of the majority of the teachers interviewed, the voluntary/compulsory question remains an important one for the planning of retreats in Catholic schools. Four key issues are:-

- Students having freedom to choose to attend or not.
- The effect of choice on the quality of student participation.
- All students having exposure to a retreat.
- The administrative, teaching and supervision problems that arise if some students opted to attend the retreat while a proportion remained back at school where a program had to be sustained for them (would the classroom curriculum in all subjects continue? Or would it be 'marking time' until the retreatants rejoined the classes?).

When there was compulsory attendance, the level of student engagement in a retreat may not be as good as it might be if there was voluntary attendance, depending on the disposition of the individual students. Having at least one compulsory retreat gives all students the opportunity of experiencing a retreat; this might be then followed by an optional retreat

### 6.3.2.2 *How retreats were regarded by staff that remained at school*

21% of the respondents indicated that they felt they were not always supported by colleagues back at school. One remarked that unsympathetic colleagues described their time away as “having a bludge” by the “knockers” (School C, teacher 1). The respondents noted that in an already crowded curriculum, the retreats had to compete with other subjects for place and time. This added to the pressures for retreat staff.

Flynn and Mok’s research (2002, p. 114) identified two key factors that influenced teacher thinking about what was important in secondary schools: academic expectations and the personal development of students. Good final year examination results were considered so important that the idea of interrupting valuable teaching time by taking students away from school work for a ‘break’ was not likely to be viewed positively by those teachers left behind – unless they understood, and were supportive of, the school’s purposes for the retreat. The respondents reported that complaints from other staff about the retreats usually emphasised the amount of work that students were missing by being away for 3 days and 2 nights in a crucial academic year; this was heightened by concerns that there was not enough time to complete curriculum deadlines. In addition, the teachers not on the retreat could be irritated by having to take additional classes to cover the absence of colleagues on retreat. These concerns could also affect teachers who went on retreats because they often taught at senior secondary level and were aware of the problem and that additional efforts might be needed from them to catch up on lost teaching time and on the marking of student work.

This problematic situation could help explain why there was lack of support for retreats on the part of some teachers. The extent of this problem could not be assessed from this study; but this question merits further investigation. As suggested above, the attitude of teachers who were not on retreats may be affected by how well the school provided information to all staff about the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats, and by the way in which it engaged staff in identifying and attempting to resolve as harmoniously as possible the timetabling, staffing and supervision problems.

### 6.3.3 *Child protection legislation: Implications for the conduct of retreats*

One of the issues impacting on retreats identified by 43% of the respondents was child protection. There were no doubts about reporting child incest, sexual or

physical abuse, but the data suggested that teachers faced a dilemma about this sometimes (c/f chapter 5, section 5.7.1.1).

In more recent times, public attention in Australia has been drawn to the mandates of the Child Protection laws (*Child Protection*, 2008; *National Child Protection Clearinghouse*, 2008; *Protecting Children*, 2007; *Australian Centre for Child Protection*, 2007). Identifying young people at risk is an important task for child protection agencies and Catholic school policies reflect this. These policies have impacted on how teachers and students relate to each other on excursions, camps and at school – and although not stated explicitly, this includes religious retreats. All Catholic Education Offices in Australia have produced child protection policies and mandatory reporting professional development courses are available to teachers. However, Child Protection laws apply to young people only up to the age of 18 (Chapman, 2009). This means that there is no obligation to report confidential information by students 18 years and older because they are young adults. However, it is the opinion of this researcher that this law needs to be clarified for schools because a relationship exists between the students and the school.

34% of the participants said that they explicitly cautioned their own small group on retreats about the inappropriateness of using the small group as a place for disclosures of a sensitive nature. They referred to their legal obligation in relation to Child Protection laws to intervene and report any instance of abuse that was disclosed (School A, teacher 5). This understanding did not appear consistent with 17% of the teachers who believed in the importance of trust and confidentiality that was established within the group and who insisted “it didn’t go anywhere else” (School C, teacher 1). But in these cases the respondents may have been referring to personal disclosures that were sensitive and meaningful but not necessarily of abuse that required mandatory reporting. Nevertheless, as indicated in chapter 5, section 5.7.1, these teachers had dilemmas about the question of confidentiality for small group discussions. For example: When do they report on situations? When do they opt out of reporting disclosure? Currently it depends on their judgement and the data suggests that it has become a problem for some of the respondents even though the mandatory disclosure laws are clear about what constitutes reportable matters.

It then becomes problematic as to what guidance, if any, would be given to new teachers on retreats and to past pupils and parents who may be assisting. The advice of “sharing what you are comfortable with” (School C, teacher 5) was too broad and did not provide teachers with boundaries.

This issue requires further investigation and clarification. Schools need to give special attention to Child Protection laws for retreats so that they are understood in a consistent manner by teachers and other volunteers on retreat.

#### *6.3.4 Supervision of retreats, Duty of care and public liability*

Public liability was linked to teachers' duty of care by 47% of the respondents. They said that their sense of duty of care for student safety increased significantly when they took students away off-campus. They were concerned about the potential for accidents that could jeopardise student safety. The teachers related incidents where students caused property damage, either accidentally or on purpose. While feeling the responsibility of around-the-clock duty of care, 26% of the respondents were concerned about the inadequacy of the staffing formula for supervision that was applied to retreats. 17% said they struggled to maintain energy levels to sustain their ongoing duty of care regime and by the end of the retreat, they felt exhausted. They were worried that the long hours of duty they performed, without a substantial break, impaired their ability to respond to critical incidents on retreats. One teacher noted:

I wish we had enough money to have a night shift... I think that's the one thing teachers are literally on duty from the moment they leave school to the moment the buses unpack at the end of it and I think that when you've only got a few people, no matter how relaxed you try to make things, they're still only operating on three or four hours probably of sleep and they get very tired (School B, teacher 6).

Duty of care became an increasingly important one for some of the respondents, especially those teachers who were close to retirement. They considered that younger colleagues did not appear to cope with the energy levels required for retreat work and supervision, despite their youthful enthusiasm. But energy levels for conducting retreats was generally an issue for all participants.

The participants noted that as legal requirements of duty of care and risk assessment increased when teachers took students away from school; they considered that the burden of these requirements would restrict and inhibit the valuable place of retreats in secondary schools. Worrying about public liability and damage to property that might be caused by students added to the sense of responsibility that teachers had at the retreats. One respondent noted these worries as "...people worry about liability and kids getting into trouble and all that kind of thing" (School A, teacher 2) and "...making sure that no one drowns in the pool or gets lost in the bush or just those sorts of general [problems]" (School B, teacher 3). Risks were minimised when retreat planning was thorough.

While no doubt those who conducted the first communitarian retreats exercised responsibility and duty of care for the young people on their retreats, there did not appear to be the same public focus on duty of care and public liability as there is today.

The respondents in this study indicated their awareness that more attention these days is given to the possibility of legal action and negative publicity when there is failure in teacher duty of care. The extent to which a school could support teachers who were on duty when a problematic incident occurred on a retreat would depend on how well they had exercised reasonable care and discharged their responsibilities. This pointed to the need for clarification of responsibilities, for risk assessment, for appropriate advance information for parents and students, and for the issuing of pertinent cautions about potential problems and disciplinary matters. Being responsible for students away from home always has an element of unpredictability to it and it will always remain a matter that has to be addressed by retreat leaders as an essential part of their work.

### *6.3.5 The use of teachers' personal names on retreat*

Of various approaches and activities used on retreats to promote friendships and community building, one somewhat controversial practice reported was the overt invitation to students to call the teachers on retreat by their first names. It is not known whether this was a practice that developed specifically amongst the teachers in this particular diocese (or in the training course that served teachers in this diocese) or whether it is more widespread in senior school retreats for Australian Catholic schools. The purpose was to promote a relaxed, friendly environment. But little was said by respondents about how successful this strategy was. And not much was said about the potential problems that it might create.

This first name strategy seemed to presume that the usual, formal appellation for teachers by their students at school was some sort of 'barrier' to community building between staff and students. On the contrary, the maintenance of the normal social boundaries between adult teachers and their students, even in informal situations, did not necessarily impede the development of good friendly relationships and a sense of accepting community.

This question needed further investigation from the points of view of both teachers and students. Some of the implications and potential problems in students' using the first names of teachers when on retreat that need attention are:-



- Will the practice be limited to the retreat period? After that, will students have to revert to addressing teachers in the usual formal way? If this is the case, what does this say about the authenticity of the practice in the first place? – is it therefore superficial and manipulative?
- What are implications for the teachers remaining at school during the retreats? How does this intimate gesture impact on them?
- How does it affect those students who did not attend the retreat? What are likely to be their perceptions of the retreat when they find out about this retreat practice? Will they feel encouraged to assume it is also acceptable for them to call teachers by their first names?
- What will parents think about the practice? How do parents interpret the use of first names? How does it impact on their understandings of the purpose of the retreat?
- Is this level of informality between students and teachers sanctioned by the school and the Catholic Education Offices? What is their position on this question?

Nothing could be found on this question in any school or diocesan literature that referred to retreats. Diocesan codes of conduct for teachers (Archdiocese of Adelaide, 2005) indicated that designated titles of respect were to be used by pupils when addressing teachers at school. Rossiter (2008) noted that first name familiarity was not used in the early Christian Living Camps, although the retreat leaders, when talking to the student group, and when referring to another adult member of the retreat team, often used a modified appellation: for example – “Brother Joe will now conduct this session” rather than “Brother Smith will now conduct this session”. An invitation to call adult retreat leaders just by their first name (without any designation) was never considered seriously as having any relevance to community building. Consistent with this view, Rossiter (2008) judged that the practice of inviting students to call teachers by their first name was artificial and somewhat manipulative, and likely to create difficulties in terms of implications for students, staff, school and diocesan authorities as well as parents. He considered that the use of first names had little if anything to contribute to the development of a retreat, given that there were so many other important aspects to building a sense of accepting and friendly community on a retreat.

Questions can be raised about how students would be told of a ‘first-name’ practice that was to be followed on a retreat:

- It is an awkward expectation for students to remove the formality they have been accustomed to when addressing their teachers.
- If students were informed at the retreat, how would those students who were not comfortable with this new level of relating with teachers manage?

- Did the school Principals endorse this expectation? How would Principals feel about being called by their first name on retreat?

The participants in this study appeared to regard this practice as important for teachers to be relaxed and approachable as part of the building-community processes in a retreat. However, the issue at stake about whether or not students should address their teachers on the retreat team by their first name was whether this deliberate step towards informality was considered to be an essential part of community building during the retreat. The data contributed by the teachers in this study did not adjudicate on this question. But because the practice was reported by a number of respondents, the impression gained was that there was a level of acceptance of the practice in this sample.

Some respondents believed that not all teachers on a school staff were considered appropriate as retreat leaders. This may have had something to do with capacity to feel comfortable in relating informally to students and preparedness to share some personal spiritual insights with students in small group discussions and in presentations to the whole group as mentioned previously. From this perspective, feeling comfortable with being on a first name basis with students could then be a criterion for determining the suitability of staff for work on the retreats. Similarly, staff members who were opposed to this practice, for whatever reasons, would understandably not accept an invitation to be part of a retreat leaders' team.

Other participants said that they accepted whatever the majority of teachers thought was appropriate on a retreat, and especially the views of those who had more retreat experience. If new teachers felt uncomfortable with being called by their first name, they did not protest for fear of 'being the odd one out'. However, it may be that this custom of first-name basis may have been introduced when old scholars who had been former students at the school, were called upon to assist in the retreats. Often, these young people who assisted in the retreat were not much older than the students themselves. Given their working relationship, it was likely that teachers and old scholars did not refer to each other with formal titles of address when discussing the retreat beforehand. This familiarity was then extended at the retreat. If students were introduced to these young people by their first name because of their similar ages, then this practice may have been extended to calling teachers by their first name as part of a certain consistency in address. This then could become part of the accepted retreat culture.

*Table 6.3: Summarises different arguments and implications related to the practice of inviting students to address their teachers by their first names when on retreat.*

<b>Arguments for the use of teachers' first names on retreat</b>	<b>Arguments against the use of teachers' first names on retreat</b>
1. A new way of relating to each other while on retreat.	1. It could create confusion for students who were unsure about, or uncomfortable with, this new level of relating.
2. Helped to remove formal boundaries between students and teachers making for greater sense of friendliness and acceptance.	2. Could blur the boundaries between teacher-student relationships that needed to apply both in formal school and informal settings.
3. Helped to eliminate divisions between teachers and students that were related to status and power.	3. Could diminish student respect for the identity of teachers as the key persons responsible for student well-being and behaviour on the retreat.
4. Encouraged informality and familiarity as part of relationship-building.	4. Created an artificial environment for relationship-building that could not be sustained back at school.
5. This informality helped students see that the retreat was a special community/spiritual experience in its own right – it was not an extended version of formal school religion classes.	5. At no other times (such as the formal classroom, excursions, parent-teacher nights and school camps) would teachers consider asking students to refer to them by their first name.

In the light of this discussion, the researcher judged that inviting students to first-name informality with their teachers was an inappropriate and unjustified practice for school retreats. The need for retreat staff to be relaxed and approachable to students as part of building-community should not require students to be invited to call teachers by their first names. Making such an invitation to students could well be judged to be inappropriate according to accepted codes of teacher conduct (Catholic Education Office Adelaide, 2005; Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission, 2006; Catholic Education Office Wollongong, 2003).

The practice has potential problems and implications, probably more than those identified above. Hence its inappropriateness is considered to be clear cut. As will be noted later, the level of personal communication and personal relationship between teachers and students on retreats is regarded as a crucial part of the retreat dynamics. Precisely because it is personal there is an important need for guidelines as to what is appropriate and desirable, and as to what is inappropriate. As part of teachers' ongoing professional conduct, it is important to remember that professional behaviour and natural professional boundaries need to be in place with regard to students, even in the more casual environment of the retreat.

### 6.3.6 *Teacher workloads*

30% of the teachers felt that retreats involved ‘extra work’ above and beyond their normal school workload. They were often stressed by pre-retreat preparations and post-retreat catch-up to mark students’ work. Retreats created a “huge pressure” (School C, teacher 1) because it meant finding the time to prepare lessons for classes prior to the retreat, in addition to the basic preparation for conducting the retreat itself. Working for 3 days and 2 nights, often late into the evening, was the retreat regime that most of the participants had experienced. It was rare for them to have a reprieve from the constant activity during the retreat. A number said they dreaded their return to school because their work did not quickly or easily return to normal. Combined with feelings of tiredness, they said that they often struggled to cope at school on their return. Irrespective of reported comments by non-retreat teachers about retreats being a ‘holiday’, those actually involved knew differently. As noted in section 6.3.4, being responsible for students continuously for the whole period of the retreat was a significant part of the felt workload.

While noting that purpose of retreats was to enhance the personal and spiritual well-being of students, the teachers also indicated that attending to their own needs was an important part of the overall process. Comments were made about the personal sacrifices they made to participate in the retreat: for example, leaving behind a young family; rearranging family commitments to fit in with the retreat timetable; arranging for and paying carers to look after elderly, frail parents in their absence. A number of participants felt that retreat involvement was an expectation of the school rather than an optional extra-curricular activity for them.

For those involved in the early Christian Living Camps, the weekend retreat work was often understood as an extension of their religious ministry. The physical, psychological and social demands of retreat work were demanding and sometimes led to personal burnout. This was evident in the experience and high turn-over rate of those who served in the travelling retreat teams described in chapter 3, section 3.7.1. The teachers in this study considered that if they had little or no respite from duty and work while on a retreat, then it affected their overall health and ability to function effectively. The extra workloads associated with the planning and conduct of retreats probably explains why there are usually no ‘follow-up’ retreats in the school year (even on weekends), despite teachers and students’ enthusiasm for the annual retreat.

Inevitably, teacher involvement in the conduct of retreats increased their workloads as well as extending their duty of care responsibilities. It should not be presumed that problems and imbalances in workload can simply be accommodated by the good will and generosity of teachers. Hence this question will remain a significant issue for Catholic secondary schools that retain live-in retreats. Addressing workload requirements and problems with equity will remain a factor that affects the future of these retreats.

### *6.3.7 The Training of Teachers for Retreat Work*

The need for retreat programs that were relevant to the social and emotional needs of students and which could enhance their spirituality was noted by Mason, Singleton and Webber (2007, p. 41) in their study of the spirituality of Generation Y.

However, as identified by the participants in this study, there are indications that the future of retreats in Catholic secondary schools faces a number of challenges. A principal concern was the ongoing availability of teachers who were committed to the value of retreats in the school's overall religious education program, and who were suitably trained to be able to conduct retreats competently. 34% of the teachers in this study believed that future of school retreats depended on having staff who knew what made a retreat effective. They identified the need to have courses to support their work at school and especially in the development of new, relevant resources. Without this support, they felt that the future of retreats in Catholic schools would remain tenuous.

21% of the participants cited retreat training as an important issue. They expressed a strong need for support in all aspects of the conduct of retreats and said they would attend courses if they were available. When asked if they were aware of courses for this purpose in their diocese, some said they were unsure.

Generally the participants tended to view their own school retreat program as relatively fixed in content and not readily open to review. For inexperienced teachers, this was not an issue; however, if the same program was repeated year after year, this eventually gave rise to professional dissatisfaction. An increasing frustration was identified in the experienced teachers: they said that once a strategy worked effectively on retreat, it was usually repeated in the next few years. While some considered this to be an aspect of the retreat program's stability, it was also felt to stifle creativity because it did not encourage change. By contrast, the descriptions of the first communitarian retreats (c/f chapter 3 section 3.2; Table 3.1) seemed to

show the use of a greater range of approaches and more varied stimulus material, as well as being more flexible in the program – they seemed to have been more experimental with variation in inputs and activities which still fitted well with the overall purposes of the retreat. Judging what are appropriate activities on a retreat, programming and flexibility in the adaptation of programs are all affected by the experience and training of the retreat leaders.

Participants in this study queried why professional development training did not extend to retreats if they were so important to schools. They noted that teachers regularly attended professional development courses in other areas of curriculum, including religious education, but little appeared to be done for those who conducted retreats. (The researcher was aware of two retreat training programs functioning in NSW at the time the research was conducted. Recent reports (30 July 2009, ACU Sydney Symposium) confirmed that one course is no longer on offer; but the existence of programs in other states was not investigated. A number of Catholic diocesan school systems around Australia (Parramatta, Hobart) offered retreats for their teachers; but these were concerned with staff spirituality and not with training to conduct student retreats. Experienced retreat leaders were not as concerned about training as the less experienced teachers. They had familiarity with their school's retreat program which was not usually subjected to any significant changes in form or content over a few years – apart from minor changes, such as updating of songs, to help keep the retreat relevant. While an increasing number of teachers in Catholic schools have studied to gain tertiary qualifications in religious education and theology, this training did not specifically address the skills and knowledge needed for the conduct of retreats. While the external professional programs (noted in chapter 3) that were given credit at Masters level by Australian Catholic University, there were no university units concerned specifically and exclusively with the conduct of retreats. While it could be anticipated that qualified religion teachers would have some understanding of the nature and purposes of retreats from their tertiary studies, others who were not involved in classroom religious education were recruited to retreat teams. This often included the Year Level Coordinator and Home Room/Pastoral Care teachers; whether or not they taught religion. This situation indicates the important need for professional development programs for teachers that are specifically concerned with the conduct of retreats.

While on-the-job training will remain important for the development of competent retreat leaders in Catholic secondary schools, this needs complementing

with retreat professional development programs for teachers. The future of retreats appears to need this form of professional support from Catholic Education authorities. This researcher considers that it will not be enough to leave this responsibility to the individual schools. In the final chapter, in the light of the findings of this study, suggestions will be made to the matters that such programs need to address.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the key conclusions to the study and makes recommendations about how the findings can inform future development of live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools. It will consider the implications for the conduct of retreats from the perspective of Catholic education, and to a lesser degree, from the perspective of the Catholic Church in Australia. The proposed recommendations are pertinent to:

- Those involved in the conduct of retreats in Catholic secondary schools.
- Decision-makers in Catholic education at school and system levels.
- Diocesan leaders within the Catholic Church.
- Retreat leaders who work in the area of local church youth ministry.

This research project has developed a picture of the purposes, processes and underlying spirituality to the contemporary communitarian live-in retreats from a study of the literature and from data collected from a sample of secondary school teachers in one metropolitan Catholic school system. In addition, it has identified a range of issues that affect both the planning and conduct of retreats, as well as their future place in Catholic schools.

Because Catholic secondary schools across the country conduct live-in retreats, and because attention was given to the historical origins of this type of retreat in Australia from its beginnings in 1964, it is anticipated that many, if not all of the issues identified here will be relevant to the conduct of similar retreats in other Catholic dioceses. In other words, it is expected that the thinking about retreats evident in the sample of teachers interviewed in this one diocese would be similar to that of their counterparts in other dioceses. However, there may well be idiosyncratic differences between dioceses. Further research would be needed to determine the extent to which the profile of purposes, practices and issues established in this study applies elsewhere in Australia – and in Catholic secondary school retreats in other countries.

Another key question that was not examined in any detail in this study, but which needs further investigation, is the difference between live-in retreats and non live-in, single day retreats conducted either on the school premises or in some suitable location away from the school. Also, this study did not survey the views of



the young people who have experienced live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools – a crucially important area yet to be explored.

A number of the judgments and evaluations made in this chapter are controversial; not all Catholic educators would interpret the results in this same way. Nevertheless, the chapter does identify important issues and questions about the place and conduct of retreats in Catholic schools. Further study and research are needed to determine the extent to which this same agenda is evident elsewhere in Australian Catholic education. In turn, systematic research on retreats, particularly from the perspective of young people, could inform the maintenance and further development of retreats as a valuable component of Catholic secondary schooling.

The discussion of issues is arranged in four groups:-

- 7.1 Major theoretical and educational issues
- 7.2 Psychological and spiritual issues related to the conduct of retreats
- 7.3 Contextual factors that have a bearing on the implementation of retreats
- 7.4 The resourcing of retreats and the professional development of retreat leaders

This then follows sections on recommendations for Catholic education and further research.

## **7.1 MAJOR THEORETICAL AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES**

### *7.1.1 The 'new style' communitarian live-in school retreat: Evidence of both continuity and change in Catholic spirituality*

This study has shown how the notion of *going away* on a *retreat* had its origins in early Christian spirituality, particularly in what has become known as 'desert spirituality' (Chapter 1). Desert spirituality presumed that one could get closer to God by retiring, even temporarily, from the concerns of everyday life to commune with God in silence and solitude. While silence is not always a prominent feature of contemporary school retreats (or in Catholic retreats generally), there are a number of aspects of early retreat spirituality that are still evident in the purposes and activities of live-in school retreats today.

The life of monks in the monastic orders was like a continuous retreat; but the 'active' religious orders (such as the Jesuits, and the teaching orders founded since the 17<sup>th</sup> century) developed the structurally lasting characteristic of the retreat as a *time out* for physical and spiritual rejuvenation. This more 'portable' retreat came to have a significant influence in Catholic Christianity. It could be argued that the longevity of the retreat movement within the history of Catholicism showed that it had endured by adapting successfully to different circumstances.

Up until the mid to late 1960s, Catholic secondary school retreats in Australia were modelled on the ‘silent’ religious order or clerical retreat. Then, the introduction of the Christian Living Camps in Adelaide in 1964 represented a dramatic transformation in the purposes and mode of conduct of school retreats. For the first time in the history of Catholic spirituality (at least in Australia), the notion of retreat became associated with fun, friendship, celebration, discussion and community. Now in this more personal / communitarian context, the idea of taking time out and going away to reflect on one’s relationship with God was being presented in a different light. The spiritual dimension of retreats was usually always a positive experience in the Catholic spiritual tradition. The communitarian retreat would add the elements of enjoyment, fun and exhilaration.

While to some extent, this new form of school retreat was influenced by the experience that some of the original retreat leaders had in the adult Catholic Cursillo movement, in the main, it represented an innovation in Catholic spiritual practice that had its origins in Australian Catholic schools. From there, the acceptability and the desirability of communitarian retreats spread to religious orders and the wider Catholic community in Australia. This is an interesting incidence of the Catholic school system coming to have a nation wide spiritual influence on the Catholic Church in this country (as explained further in section 7.1.2 below).

While there are many aspects of the communitarian retreat that were new and innovative in the 1960s, there is still evidence of a continuity with the spiritual principles associated with the historical development of the retreat within the Catholic spiritual tradition since the times of the early Church fathers and desert spirituality. This is illustrated in Table 7.1.

As considered in more detail below, the new communitarian retreat was to become a key signpost in the development of Catholic spirituality after the Second Vatican Council. It represented the quest for a ‘personally relevant’ spirituality in modern times.

<i>Table 7.1 A summary of retreat practices and emphases in spirituality from the early Christian communities through to contemporary live-in school retreats. It shows areas of continuity and change.</i>				
<b>Retreat practices and emphases in spirituality</b>	<b>Early Christian monastic communities</b>	<b>Religious orders, especially the teaching orders (following the innovation of the Jesuits)</b>	<b>Catholic secondary school retreats in the 1950s</b>	<b>Contemporary communitarian Catholic secondary school retreats</b>
Withdrawal from	<b>X</b> life was like a	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> limited withdrawal	<b>X</b>

society	continuous retreat		when conducted on school premises	
Going away to live at a relatively isolated place	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	Usually stayed at school	<b>X</b>
Spiritual practices/prayer	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Liturgy and sacrament of reconciliation	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> special attempt to highlight the community experience of Eucharist as a keynote of the whole retreat community experience
Silence	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
Personal reflection	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Being in a community	<b>X</b> the taken for granted living structure of the group	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b> special emphasis on community building as a principal retreat dynamic
Fun activities and recreation				<b>X</b>
The joy of going away with friends				<b>X</b>
The joy of meeting new people and making new friendships; enhancing existing friendships.				<b>X</b> this applied to the early 'inter-school' and 'stranger' camps and retreats and not to retreats for one school's pupils only.
Extensive discussion in groups				<b>X</b>
A special emphasis on 'personal development' alongside the 'spiritual' dimension.			In these times it was presumed that the spiritual dimension to retreats would be important for overall personal development – but this link was not stressed	<b>X</b>

### 7.1.2 *The new communitarian retreat: An innovation in Catholic spirituality from the time of the Second Vatican Council*

The transition from traditional, 'silent', 'religious order modelled' school retreats to the new, celebratory, community-modelled, discussion-oriented retreats was iconic of the transition from a 'traditional 1950s' Catholic spirituality to what could be termed a 'Vatican II' spirituality. During and just after the Second Vatican Council, Catholics in Australia were making significant adjustments to their practice of spirituality – changes which were more extensive than had occurred for centuries

since the Reformation (Groome, 1991, 1998; Tacey, 2003; Schillebeeckx, 1985; Sullivan, 2002; Alberigo, 2006).

The adults who conducted the first new style communitarian school retreats in the 1960s (all of whom were members of religious orders) were concerned with trying to enhance the lives of young people in Catholic schools with a 'relevant' spirituality; this was an additional stimulus for them to work out what was a 'relevant Catholic spirituality' for adults. They acknowledged that working together, and with young people on these retreats provided an influential forum that affected their own personal spirituality, as well as their approach to resourcing the spirituality of youth.

In a sense, for a number of these retreat leaders, the conduct of retreats served to 'fast track' both their personal and spiritual development. A key factor in this movement was their growing belief that *relationships* (friendship and being 'close' to people) were central to personal development and spirituality (c/f the section on spirituality in Chapter 3). Being in a responsible position to model and teach spirituality on retreats put them in the role of 'bridge building' from the traditional to a new style of Catholic spirituality.

Another factor was their flexibility in trying out new and innovative community building activities that addressed youth spirituality; this enabled them to change the activities and the retreat focus, often at short notice, if the group was not responsive, or if they felt a new direction was needed at that time. However, there were some concerns, even in the early stages of development of these retreats, about the important explicit, spiritual dimension of retreats. This still remains an issue today.

A key to understanding the changing spirituality background to the emergence of the communitarian retreat and its psychological dynamics lay in the new Vatican II spirituality. Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 173-177), as noted in chapter 3, gave a succinct account of the development of what they called a Vatican II "psychological Christian spirituality" in the 1960s and 1970s. They claimed that this represented a quantum transformation in Catholic spirituality, and that it set lasting precedents such that it eventually became the 'mainline' spirituality in Australian Catholicism since that time. However, there remains considerable diversity in Australian Catholic spirituality and a number of Catholics would not identify with this so-called mainline spirituality whose authenticity they would question.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) proposed that the key characteristics of this new spirituality were:-

- The continuation of the revelation of God through human experience (Moran, 1966, 2002, 2008; Second Vatican Council *Dei Verbum*, 1965).
- Personal relationships were central to both human development and spirituality.
- The development of community was central to the development of personal relationships.
- The psychological dimensions of spirituality needed articulation – religion (theology, Scripture and spirituality) needed to be perceived as relevant to people's lives which led to a psychological Christian spirituality.
- Authentic liturgy involved: - community, participation, communication and celebration (contrasting with the earlier emphasis on: - individual, attendance, silence and awe). While liturgy was still regarded as the 'human interfacing with the divine' the emphasis shifted more towards the human experience side of the equation.

While one of a number of arenas where the new Vatican II spirituality was being forged, the senior school live-in retreat was important for three reasons:-

- Those religious personnel involved in the new communitarian school retreats became influential spirituality leaders in the Australian Catholic community.
- The Vatican II spirituality of the new retreats became embedded in Catholic schools where this culture of Catholic spirituality affected generations of Catholic educators; in the schools, it probably had a more significant influence on teachers (especially religion teachers) than on the students.
- The school students, who became the successive generations of Catholic laity, absorbed this new spirituality from the schools, and in particular from its special expression within the communitarian retreat.

From this perspective, the school communitarian live-in retreat made an important contribution to the development of Australian Catholic spirituality after the Second Vatican Council.

### *7.1.3 Application of humanistic psychology and group dynamics theories to religion/spirituality and education*

The work of Carl Rogers (and others like Rollo May, Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow) in humanistic psychology in the 1960s impacted on popular culture in Western countries by underscoring the importance of the development of relationships within the overall developmental task of 'becoming a person'. *On becoming a person* (1961) was the title to one of Rogers' most influential books. As suggested in 7.1.2 above, the relationship dimension to spirituality became prominent in the 1960s and humanistic psychology was a significant influence on this

development. The human and psychological dimension to spirituality focused on the *human* side of the quest for God and the spiritual. Hence the word ‘relevant’ became prominent in spirituality – that is, the application of spirituality to everyday life; it needed to make sense by being applicable to ordinary life.

As well as having applications to clinical practice in therapy and counselling (Kennedy, 1977), the use of encounter groups, personalist psychology and group dynamics also spread to the business world where they informed organisational development and were used for staff professional development programs (Schein & Bennis, 1965).

Rogers (1969) also applied his psychology to education with the popular publication *Freedom to learn*. He claimed that “There is *no* resemblance between the traditional function of teaching and the function of the facilitation of learning.” (Rogers, 1983, p. 135), and in so doing, contributed to the development of contemporary thinking that emphasises ‘learning’ while underplaying ‘teaching’ – the latter tends to be replaced by the idea of ‘facilitating’ (a development critiqued by Moran, 2008).

While not the only forum where humanistic psychology was impacting on religion/spirituality and education, the early communitarian school retreats were important opportunities for their retreat leaders at the time to explore (both for themselves and their students) the interfaces between religion/spirituality, humanistic psychology (and the social sciences in general) and educative processes. For them, this highlighted a psychological perspective on religion and it fostered the development of a psychological spirituality (c/f Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 173). It emphasised the quality of personal relationships as a key to personal development – and hence to spirituality. The persistence of the Catholic Institute of Counselling in Strathfield (Sydney) which continues to offer personal development programs for adults (since the 1960s) remains one prominent organisational testament to this movement.

The personal interactions and community development on school retreats meant that a strong personal development emphasis became prominent in the school retreat movement – along with the more traditional spiritual dimension. It became an area of work for educators where humanistic psychology was affecting their understanding of both personal development and spirituality. The live-in retreat was probably the most appropriate school venue where humanistic psychology might be relevant to student learning. The idea of facilitating *personal* learning makes more

sense in the retreat situation because in effect it is structurally like an ‘intensive personal development seminar’.

While the literature (like the example of Schein & Bennis, 1965) considered the use of humanistic psychology in organisational development in the work place, and while there is much evidence of its use in counselling and therapy (Kennedy 1977), the Catholic secondary school live-in retreat was a situation where this psychology was applied in an educational fashion to the personal development of school pupils.

#### *7.1.4 Psychological insights into youth spirituality*

The special circumstances for enhancing teacher-student relationships in the live-in retreat helped Catholic educators (both in the first communitarian secondary school retreats, and on a continuing basis since the 1960s) develop more insight into, and greater professional interest in, youth spirituality. This special interest in youth spirituality has influenced the thinking and professional practice of generations of teachers and educational leaders within Australian Catholic education. In turn this has contributed positively to the spiritual/moral dimension of Australian Catholic schooling.

The retreat provided adults with a privileged situation for talking over questions about spirituality with young people. The founders of the communitarian retreats in the 1960s believed that the retreat experiences were very important for them in coming to a better understanding of the personal and spiritual needs of young people, as well as of what they considered to be the ‘big’ spiritual/moral issues in their lives and the world at that time. While this theme question was not raised specifically with the participants in the study, it was likely that the retreat still provides some stimulus to educators to think about contemporary youth spirituality and how they might best promote its development. Further research could check whether the situation of retreats provided educators with more significant insights into youth spirituality than their corresponding classroom experience.

The leaders of the first communitarian retreats considered that the psychological dynamics of retreats were favourable for promoting attitudinal change. While the teachers in this study did not specifically refer to this possibility in the same psychological terminology of attitudinal change, they indicated that the promotion of personal / attitudinal change and the development of spirituality were regarded as important aims for retreats.

The range of issues for contemporary youth spirituality identified in chapter 3 provides a profile of spirituality that could inform the work of school retreat leaders. It is not that all young people could be adequately described by a single profile, but familiarity with the trends and issues could be helpful for retreat leaders in shaping retreat activities that would be more in tune with the spiritual starting points of their students. Also, some of the issues themselves could well become useful content for inputs at retreats (E.g. the way that a consumerist ideology and practice can affect young people's identity development.).

Given the overall interest of retreats in developing young people spiritually, it is suggested that a study of youth spirituality should be an essential component of any professional development program or book resource for retreat leaders. Also of importance for retreat leaders, would be some appreciation of the nexus between spirituality and humanistic psychology that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (as discussed above) because of its importance for understanding both the development of Australian Catholic spirituality as well as of the psychological and spiritual dynamics of live-in retreats.

#### *7.1.5 The communitarian retreat: A significant 'grass roots' education innovation and example of school-based curriculum development*

In writings about the development and implementation of school curriculum, much attention was given to the progression from system policy to the operationalising of change and innovation at the school level. Even school-based curriculum development (SBCD) was usually driven by central system-wide policy. The literature often proposed approaches to make system-wide, government-mandated and 'top down' models of curriculum change work more effectively (Print, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Slattery, 2006). The origin and consolidation of the new style communitarian retreats in Australian Catholic secondary education was quite different. It represented a significant 'grass roots' innovation in Catholic schools commenced by practitioners and maintained by schools that eventually became a mainline practice in Australian Catholic education.

The innovation was carried forward and supported by religious orders. The original pioneers and the 'early adopters' of the new style retreats were members of religious orders and their work in school retreats was quickly endorsed by the authorities in the Orders. In turn, the religious orders further supported the new retreat movement by instituting travelling retreat teams, setting up retreat centres and commencing programs for the professional development of teachers as retreat



leaders. While not as prominent in Catholic diocesan religious education guidelines as might be expected, retreats are still regarded as making a distinctive contribution to the Catholic schools' overall religious education program. Rossiter (1981, p. 110), in his review of religious education in Australian schools, considered that retreats were perhaps the most distinctive feature of Catholic school religious education in this country.

Apart from the contribution of the religious orders, the development of communitarian live-in retreats in Catholic secondary education was almost exclusively the initiative of the schools and not of systemic authorities. Similarly, the resourcing and training of retreat leaders was primarily school-based. This gave freedom to the schools but it also tended to leave retreats vulnerable in the long term because their future was too dependent on the situation in particular schools. Change in school staffing could deplete the retreat team and also change the culture of acceptability of retreats within the school. If retreats were generally regarded as an important part of the school's religious education program, then it could be expected firstly, that this position would be reflected in diocesan curriculum documentation. And secondly, there should be a commitment to the development and resourcing of retreats as well as to the leadership training of teachers.

#### *7.1.6 The communitarian retreat: Providing insight into the spiritual moral dimension to school curriculum*

The links between educational practice and personal change in pupils (in beliefs, attitudes and values) have always been complex and tenuous, and are influenced by many non-school factors. The retreat was like an intensive personal development seminar where its psychological dynamics were considered as contributing to attitudinal change (Neville, 2007; Rossiter, 1978). The psychological dynamics of retreats suggested that personal change is more likely to be promoted in a personal environment where there is:-

- Freedom.
- Supportive community setting.
- Friendly and fun activities.
- Friendship and scope for friend-making.
- Small group discussions favourable for exchange of personal views.
- A favourable psychological environment in which new thinking about potential personal change could occur, together with the 'imagining' and 'rehearsal' of what such personal change might be like.
- Opportunity for personal reflection.
- Informative stimulus material for discussion.

A favourable place for such opportunities is when students ‘go away’ from the formalities and routines of school and home life. This view also suggests that the potential for promoting personal change in the classroom setting is different – where it is more concerned with an intellectual engagement with spiritual/moral issues in the format of a regular, open, inquiring, informative *study*; in other words, a *different channel* towards personal change that is a natural part of the *academic school subject*.

Crawford and Rossiter’s (2006) conceptual scheme for interpreting the spiritual and moral dimension to the school curriculum set out to chart the limited potential of classroom teaching and learning for promoting the development of young people’s beliefs attitudes and values. They described *personal change* and its relationship with *personal learning*; they raised questions about so called ‘personal pedagogies’ that claimed to be effective ways of promoting personal change/personal learning in the same way is that ordinary classroom teaching might lead to changes in knowledge, understanding and cognitive skills. They stressed the importance of freedom and psychological safety if any personal change in pupils in the classroom was to be authentic.

According to this scheme, the same principles and safeguards that applied to personal learning in the formal classroom context should apply to the live-in retreat, and in particular to its small group discussion. However, the live-in retreat provided a naturally more personal and informal environment than the formal classroom, making it particularly suitable for personal reflection and discussion; this situation could not easily be replicated in the classroom. Hence, it could be expected that there would be more scope for personal discussion on the retreat. It would then be reasonable to conclude that the retreat had greater natural potential for prompting students towards a review of life and consideration of possibilities for personal change then could be expected in the regular classroom.

The contribution of regular classroom discussion towards personal change is more indirect through the channel of *informed inquiry* (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 282). By contrast, the distinctive channel towards personal change in the retreat is more *psychological* and *emotional*. It is not that one channel is better than, or should be preferred to the other. Both can be used to provide personal development opportunities for young people at school. Understanding the distinctive possibilities for promoting personal change in the retreat goes hand in hand with appreciation of the complementary possibilities in the regular classroom.

According to Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 414), acknowledgment of the distinctive potential of retreats for prompting personal and spiritual change in pupils was evident in some commentaries on religious education. These commentaries tended to regard the retreat as a more of a ‘catechesis’ like experience (that is, a faith-sharing and faith-developing experience) than was the case in the classroom teaching of religion; in turn, they tended to equate ‘emotionality’ with ‘faith development’, identifying the retreat (and ‘personal sharing discussions’) as more effective in promoting faith development than classroom religious education. Crawford and Rossiter considered that this terminology reflected a problematic interpretation of the nature of faith. Their view would acknowledge the distinctive potential of the retreat for personal reflection and interactions, but it stopped short of labelling this somewhat unconditionally as ‘faith development’. Their approach was concerned with identifying educational strategies that could point young people in the direction of personal change (and faith development) while not presuming that any pedagogy could make this happen on cue; this emphasised the students themselves as the authentic authors of their own personal change.

While there is some debate about whether the retreat should be regarded as more of a co-curricular or extra-curricular activity, this study takes the view that it is a key and intentional part of the overall curriculum.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 305 ff.) have provided a systematic account of issues related to the spiritual and moral dimension to the school curriculum. They differentiated between the following main strategies:-

1. Explicit approach (in a special spiritual/moral subject or in particular units within regular subjects).
2. Implicit approach: dealing with spiritual/moral issues where these arise naturally across the curriculum.
3. General skills and consciousness raising.

The live-in retreat fits into the first strategy where it takes up a special position in the form of an intensive personal development live-in seminar.

*7.1.7 The psychological, community and spiritual dynamics of retreats: How some of these same dynamics are evident in other community activities*

*7.1.7.1 Different meanings associated with the word ‘retreat’*

The word ‘retreat’ has extensive common usage in referring to some degree of withdrawal from the demands of the ordinary life and/or work situations. It includes the notions of escape, relaxation, refreshment, renewal and rejuvenation. This

opportunity for ‘recharging’ the individual’s physical and mental ‘batteries’ may be focused on preparing for a healthier, purposeful return to ordinary life. In addition, the retreat may be used as an opportunity for reflection as a part of important personal decision-making; and for ‘finding the self’ – a phrase referring to a review of personal identity and the appraisal of behaviour that has identity consequences; this could include reflection on the possibility of new thinking and new behaviours. Thus the retreat in its most generic sense has an important natural place in personal and social life and it is not surprising that the term came into religious usage with the added connotation of renewing spiritual health.

Hence the word retreat has been applied to a special room or place in one’s house or place of work, to a holiday house, to a rehabilitation centre and even to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum – as well as to the psychological encounter group.

While at an ordinary human level, and in the religious situation, there was always a ready understanding of the purposes of a retreat, the development of humanistic psychology, and in particular, the sensitivity or encounter group by Carl Rogers and other psychologists, led to more formal reflection about the psychological dynamics of personal change through group methods. This was encapsulated in the title of Schein and Bennis’ (1965) seminal book: *Personal and organisational change through group methods*. This psychology identified the potential for personal change within a complex of the following aspects or qualities of the live-in retreat.

- Removal to a new situation.
- The relative isolation put individuals temporarily out of contact with the home situation and their usual reference groups of family, friends (and perhaps work).
- The new situation was a stimulus to personal change with community support.
- Making new acquaintances and developing new friendships, and / or the enhancement of old friendships were exhilarating.
- Community building occurred, often resulting in good feelings about group identity.
- The isolated retreat situation, as well as the group interactions, could prompt individuals to reflect and review their personal lives and perhaps talk about this in the group.
- Group discussions and one-to-one interactions provided scope for imaginative rehearsal of new thinking, new values and new behaviour (personal renewal).
- The group could provide an understanding and supportive reference point for experimenting with new thinking and new behaviour.
- There was scope for preparation to return to ordinary life with a new outlook.

This study has provided an opportunity to show how the psychological and spiritual dynamics at work in the secondary school retreat were also identifiable in a number of other situations. This section will note how some of these same dynamics were evident in the Catholic World Youth Day program in Sydney in 2008; and it will note, for the sake of identifying examples, some institutions, public events and television programs that show evidence of some of these principles in operation.

#### 7.1.7.2 *Similarity with the community and spiritual dynamics of World Youth Day*

The community, psychological and spiritual dynamics that could be identified at work in young people during the Catholic World Youth Day in Sydney in July 2008 paralleled a number of the dynamics in the live-in communitarian retreat. These included:-

- The going away – even to another country.
- An association of religious activities with community development and friendship.
- The generation of positive emotions and euphoria through the acquaintance process and community activities.
- Negotiating the problems in saying goodbye to new friends and in ‘re-entry’ to ordinary life after a significant emotional experience.

Hence, the claims made for World Youth Day as a significant experience of evangelisation (WYD Syd, 2006; AYCS and AYCW, 2007A, 2007B) could be equally applied (and perhaps even more so) to the school retreat because of the potential for ongoing follow-up after the event back at school, together with the ongoing religious education through the school’s formal classroom religion curriculum. While at World Youth Day, the religious activities were of a more traditional type (Latin Mass, Benediction, traditional Stations of the Cross, the Angelus in Latin etc.) at the communitarian retreat, there was greater scope for making the prayer and liturgy more relevant to contemporary youth spirituality; and there was more scope for student involvement and engagement in the liturgy as growing out of, and as a celebratory climax to, the development of community during the retreat. Like at the World Youth Day Mass, the tangible sense of community at the retreat contributed to both the prayerful and the emotional dimensions of the celebration.

The public documentation used in preparation for World Youth Day showed the intention of making the event a significant religious experience for youth that would be accepted as a type of ‘New Evangelisation’ (WYD Syd, 2006). This could

help renew their sense of Catholic religious identity; and there was also the hope that it might lead youth to more engagement with the local Catholic parishes, and their religious life. Arrangements for follow up activities to facilitate new relationships with parishes were organised. Similarly, the idea of New Evangelisation could be applied to the school retreat.

It is evidently important for Catholic authorities to know that events like WYD and school retreats are effective and relevant spiritual/religious experiences; if not, then it would be difficult to justify their costs and resourcing, as well as for retreats the disruption of the school timetable for year 12 students and teachers. These spiritual/religious experiences are holistic in the sense that enjoyment, good feelings and community identification have infused the religious practices, and to that extent become somewhat inseparable from them. It is therefore problematic to try to differentiate the ‘human’ gains from the ‘religious’ ones – and the human enjoyment from the potential religious development.

It is considered that retreats provide a positive and healthy spiritual/religious influence on young people, but this does not necessarily dispose them towards becoming regular Sunday Mass attendees. It is unlikely that the cultural decline in formal church participation in Australian Catholicism over the last 60 years can be reversed in a significant way by any program or religious experience – WYD, school retreat etc. Hence, it is concluded that the potential enhancement to personal spirituality in these experiences should be offered to youth *unconditionally*. Criteria for addressing youth’s spiritual needs are required for appraising the value of experiences like retreats.

#### *7.1.7.3 Examples of contemporary institutions, events and practices that show up the operation of some of the psychological and community dynamics identified in secondary school retreats*

As noted at the start of this section, this concluding sub-section will identify, by way of illustration of examples, some events and organisational structures that show evidence of employing some of the same sorts of psychological and community dynamics considered to operate in school retreats. While it is beyond the scope of this study to describe these similarities in detail, Appendix I will describe the following examples which can be used to illustrate the parallels in the use of some similar psychological dynamics to those of retreats. The appendix considers the following examples: - the following is an example list of events that illustrate the parallels.

## **7.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE NATURE, PURPOSES AND CONDUCT OF RETREATS**

This section discusses a range of significant areas for the purposes and conduct of retreats. These issues need to be addressed as part of the ongoing enhancement of retreats. In addition, they raise questions that need to be taken into account if the future of retreats in Catholic secondary schools is to be preserved and developed.

### *7.2.1 The place of personalism in the retreat process*

The idea of personalism, as used in this study, is the intentional interest in promoting the personal dimension of retreats – including emotion, good feelings, sense of community and a personal level in discussions and interactions. It values the practice of personal sharing and personal disclosures.

In his (1978) book on retreats, Rossiter considered that developing the personal and community dimension to retreats was one of the key purposes of retreats leaders who first conducted communitarian retreats since the mid-1960s. He pointed out that while having personal interactions was an important aspect of retreats, it was also in need of caution because of the potential for manipulation. Later, when reviewing the history of Australian Catholic religious education in 1999, Rossiter considered that “the quest for personalism and relevance” was one of the key thematics to have a distinctive influence on developments, structures and pedagogies; and in his opinion, it still remained an important issue to resolve and to get into healthy perspective in contemporary religious education.

This researcher concludes that an understanding of the subtle, complex place of personalism in retreats is a key to interpreting their psychological dynamics and their potential for promoting spiritual and moral development. In turn, this understanding needs to be contextualised within the broader framework of the place of personalism within the whole educative process of schooling. It is considered that the work of Crawford and Rossiter (2006) provides a conceptual scheme that serves these purposes well.

The following sub-sections will examine some of the principal problems and potentialities for personalism on retreats, and will propose what is considered to be a healthy way of interpreting and utilising the psychological dynamics of retreats. In turn, this will be a prelude to consideration of the spiritual/religious dimension of retreats. All of the questions and issues discussed here are regarded as important both for understanding the place of retreats within Catholic schooling, as well as pertinent content for the professional training of retreat leaders.

Just as for the pioneers of the communitarian live-in retreats, the quest for personalism still remains both a prominent interest and a significant problem area for the conduct of contemporary secondary school retreats.

#### 7.2.1.1 *Emotion and euphoria*

Emotion, good feelings and euphoria have long been known to be prominent in live-in retreats (Rossiter, 1975, 1978). 'Re-entry' to ordinary life and making some adjustments following the emotional high of a retreat have been taken into account by retreat leaders. But there is evidence that while retreat leaders valued young people's enjoyment of live-in retreats, they did not show that they had a good functional theory for understanding and interpreting the natural place and the educational significance of emotion and euphoria within retreat dynamics.

The scheme of Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 283-286) proposed a theory as to how emotion can be regarded as a useful and healthy part of personal learning. Just having emotional experiences in themselves was not necessarily educational. They considered that appropriate expressions of emotion by young people in the educational context were healthy when they grew naturally out of educative experiences – as natural by-products – and not out of situations that were intentionally devised to stimulate their emotions. The presence of emotion often made a learning experience more holistic. One of the useful contributions that school education might make to the development of young people's emotional maturity would be to help them learn how to identify emotion and to be able to put it into some sort of perspective. In other words, there needed to be the promotion of some understanding of emotion and of when and where different expressions of emotion would be acceptable in a community. Also needed would be some understanding of the positive contribution that emotions make to human expression, communication, behaviour and personal maturity.

Rossiter (1978) considered that when emotion and euphoria flowed naturally from fun educative activities on retreats and youth camps, this contributed significantly to the development of a sense of community and to the experience by individuals of the joy and exhilaration in developing new friendships and in affirming old friendships; and this included some friendship with the responsible adults. Sometimes there could be valuable personal learning's, first experienced within the favourable and euphoric situation of a retreat, which could then gradually



become more of a conviction and commitment after the initial euphoric feelings faded.

There is a need to acknowledge that there is value in students having healthy fun and enjoyment for their own sake. However, this in itself would hardly be a good justification for having a live-in retreat. Hence there is a need to adopt a scheme similar to that devised by Crawford and Rossiter (2006) to show how emotion and euphoria will be interpreted as a contributing part of the retreat process which can in turn affect the personal and spiritual development of the student participants. Such a scheme also needs to include an ethical code to guide retreat leaders in the use of activities that will stimulate emotions. Some consideration needs to be given to the emotional potential of an activity before it is implemented. If it triggers an excessive expression of emotion that cannot adequately be dealt with within the normal complement of staff resources at the retreat, then such an activity should be judged inappropriate. Inexperienced teachers may have lacked the skills to deal with students' emotions in an appropriate fashion. Healthy emotional responses could be accepted as natural consequences of retreat activities; but it would be questionable to make specific emotional responses the intentional outcomes to be pursued in the retreat.

It is educationally valuable to affirm that good feelings and euphoria can contribute to young people's sense of well-being and sense of community at the retreat. This can be evident in laughter, smiles and camaraderie with others. And in turn this euphoric feeling can flow into the celebration of liturgy, making it a more tangible expression of a caring, believing community.

As noted above, there is a need for retreat leaders, in both the retreat and post-retreat processes, to address potential 're-entry' problems where some students found it difficult to reconcile their extremely happy retreat feelings with the reality of less than happy feelings in their life at home and school on their return. If the retreat euphoria was not identified, named and explained to some extent, the students may have felt puzzled by it, and perhaps emotionally manipulated by the retreat leaders.

This study has shown that retreat leaders have often associated emotions and euphoria with personal disclosure in group discussions. This question will now be considered in more detail.

### 7.2.1.2 *Personal sharing and personal disclosure in small group discussions*

The sample of retreat leaders who were interviewed considered that the notion of ‘telling your personal story’ was a central theme in the dynamics of their retreats. Often, it was expected of the adult retreat leaders that they disclose something of their own personal ‘story’ (presumably including their own beliefs and values) either in short whole group inputs or in small group discussions as a principal stimulus for getting the students to talk about their own personal lives. The idea of personal sharing was espoused, and the success of small group discussions tended to be measured in terms of whether or not they resulted in personal disclosures from students. In turn, such disclosures could develop an ‘electric’ like atmosphere of emotion in the groups which could lead to strong feelings of group bonding and sense of group identity; sometimes this led to crying or even a level of hysteria. Underlying this practice was the presumption that this sort of personal disclosure and personal sharing in the groups was an important mechanism for the personal and spiritual development of young people during the retreat.

While affirming the importance of the personal/emotional dimension to live-in retreats, including the value of good feelings and personal sharing, this researcher questions the validity and the appropriateness of giving excessive attention to the ideas of personal disclosure and telling your personal story. The following paragraphs argue the case. They will identify a number of the problem areas before proposing a more generally educational view of the retreat’s small group discussion, where there is a need for more substantial content that is relevant to young people’s lives, which enables them to reflect and even talk about personal issues with a sense of freedom that is otherwise inhibited if there was too much emphasis on initiating personal disclosures.

### 7.2.1.3 *The purposes in promoting personal sharing and personal disclosure*

In a favourable and friendly environment, away from school, personal discussions and disclosures were considered useful for creating empathy and bonding. This was not unlike the dynamics used in counselling ‘sensitivity’ or ‘encounter’ groups, even though the retreat was basically an educational activity and not a therapy group. It was thought that personal sharing would help create a sense of community. But what was problematic was determining ‘how personal’ the discussion needed to be – in other words, what was the appropriate depth for personal revelations by both teachers and students.

Perhaps some retreat leaders thought that by revealing personal issues, problems might be eased or relationships could be enhanced. This thinking is judged to be too therapeutic for the retreat's discussion groups which should be more generally educational in tone. Where some sharing of personal insights could develop naturally (that is, without any feeling of compulsion or expectation) in a group discussion of a more general topic, such personal sharing could be regarded as healthy. But in this instance, there was no pressure of expectation to contribute at such a personal level. Personal disclosure was not the direct or formal purpose of the discussion, but if it did occur, it could be acknowledged and valued for the contribution that it made.

### *7.2.2 The thematic and process emphasis on 'personal story': Potentialities and problems*

An excessive emphasis on telling one's personal story, both by retreat leaders and students, as the core process of the retreat, could be experienced as emotional manipulation or the 'engineering' of emotions which failed to respect adequately both the privacy and freedom of individuals. Some retreat leaders gave the impression that they could readily predict what student emotions would be triggered by particular retreat activities. This also suggested that they tended to see their role as discussion group leaders in terms of creating a climate for intimate discussion and personal disclosure. It is understandable that this situation could create anxiety both for students and retreat leaders; within this confined 'emotionally claustrophobic' environment, there were few avenues for escape from the psychological pressure of having to contribute at a personal level.

With these criticisms and cautions stated, it is important to note that the sharing of personal insights and personal story has been, and will continue to be, a valuable dynamic within live-in retreats – as also in regular classroom discussions. It is not that there is any inherent problem with healthy personal sharing in an educational setting. It is a question of balance and a matter of respecting freedom and privacy. In other words, a healthy personal sharing on retreats makes a potentially valuable contribution to young people's spiritual and moral development.

Retreat leaders, in their attempts to create an atmosphere of trust and friendship, may end up regretting that they told students too many details of their personal lives. While personal disclosures may well have created sentiments of empathy, it was not possible to predict how personal information might be used by students either at the retreat or in other settings. The use of technologies in the

transmission of personal information such as mobile phones, emails, Face Book, My Space, You Tube etc. could potentially cause anxiety and regret for retreat leaders. They would have little control over the extent to which their personal disclosures might be circulated to others beyond the retreat discussion group – and the consequent potential anguish and embarrassment. It would not be enough for retreat leaders simply to propose group confidentiality about any personal disclosures made in that situation. The spread of personal information about teachers could possibly affect their professional standing. This same problem of confidentiality would apply to personal disclosures made by students. Breaches of confidentiality could affect them, as well as their families and friends – and the school community.

Teachers new to the retreat work have sometimes felt that they were left to flounder in the small group because, while personalism figured prominently in the retreat aims, there were no clear guidelines on what personal sharing should mean in the retreat context. To be told to “only share what you are comfortable with” was vague. There would be a disparate range of comfort levels in doing this: what one teacher felt comfortable with in sharing would be different for others. Another problem was the possibility that the values implied in some personal stories might conflict with Church teachings.

Some other potential problems stemming from a strong focus on personal stories and disclosure included the following:

- Some personal stories, from teachers and students, may have been somewhat artificial, or constructed into a stereotype that might prompt personal empathy from others. Personal disclosures could be perceived as either ‘real’ or ‘manufactured for effect’.
- Students (and teachers) might have felt pressure to ‘compete’ with the stories from others as a way of contributing to group intimacy and identity.
- The very contribution of elements of personal story in a group may have been made because participants were under the impression (and the psychological pressure) that this was a ‘requirement’ of group discussions.
- The success of retreat discussion groups might be judged by retreat leaders and students in terms of how much was revealed of their inner personal lives and of how much emotion was generated as a consequence.

The complexity of these issues suggests that this is where further research needs to explore what the students have experienced, and what they felt about group discussions and the place for personal disclosure and emotions.

Clear policy and guidelines are needed to help retreat leaders in relation to the question of personal disclosures and confidentiality. This would need to apply in all group discussions. Students and parents also needed to know what the ground rules

were. These would be precautionary rules needed to govern group discussions even where, as recommended, they were not intended to be principally concerned with personal disclosure. Within such a framework, when personal disclosures did occur naturally without any compulsion, they were more likely to be healthy and appreciated by group members; and any resultant emotion would also feel healthy and not the result of manipulation, and this could be accommodated within the group without problems.

The retreat leaders, as well as the students, have both a duty and a right to privacy. Some things they ought to keep to themselves; and they should feel free from any compulsion to reveal personal views. These regulatory principles engender a sense of personal freedom and protection within group discussions and other interactions; and they tend to promote and enhance healthy personal sharing rather than inhibit it.

As far as disclosing personal information is concerned, retreat leaders need to keep to the same standard of professional ethics that would govern their behaviour at school. Thus it is inappropriate for retreat leaders to disclose personal information that goes beyond the expectations of professional conduct within a teacher-student relationship.

### *7.2.3 Proposed guidelines for group discussion*

It was usually the intention for retreats to include discussions that were at a more personal level than might be the case in school religion lessons. This was in keeping with the idea that reflection on life and some healthy sharing of personal insights would be valuable for personal development. This can be affirmed as appropriate and valuable, as long as the cautions noted above were in place. The implications in those cautions were that the problem was not so much in having personal discussions as such, but in the ways they might be prompted and introduced. A healthy personal discussion required a sense of freedom and comfort on the part of the participants where there was no psychological pressure on them to reveal personal views.

It is proposed that the best way of fostering an authentic, healthy level of personal sharing in groups was to avoid focusing directly on personal disclosure, and rather to operate with a more general educational focus on questions and issues that were judged to be relevant to young people's lives. Whether or not this included significant personal disclosures was then not relevant. The participants themselves had the power to contribute at whatever level they felt comfortable with.

This approach is consistent with the guidelines for the place of personalism in student religious education discussions proposed by Crawford and Rossiter (1985, pp. 18-19; 1988, pp. 58-59; 2006, pp. 286-291). This same scheme devised for the classroom could be applied in the retreat, together with recognition of the natural differences in context. Classroom discussion was expected to be more ‘academic’ or formally oriented in the format of ‘informed debate’, because it was associated with the exploration and study of content and engagement with resource materials. Whereas on the retreat, the discussion was less formally oriented and more geared towards thoughtful personal interactions and was associated with personal reflection. But the same ethical guidelines and protection of individual freedom and privacy should apply in both contexts. As noted earlier, having such an ethical scheme in place to provide a safe discussion environment would not inhibit personal sharing, but would ensure that if and when it did occur, it would be authentic, and unaffected by any feeling of manipulation.

This approach, with more content (but not the same as ‘content’ for classroom study), is considered healthier than placing too great a reliance on ‘telling your personal story’ as the dominant theme for discussions. The latter is too narrow, being prone to problems with narcissism, stereotypic self-revelations and potential emotional manipulation. It is recommended that retreat leaders introduce more variety to the strategies that can be used as stimulus activities/materials for group discussions, as appeared to be the case with the earliest communitarian retreats. Appendix K has been included in this thesis to illustrate one example of what a retreat program with more ‘content’ looks like, by contrast with what might be expected from programs where the emphasis was on ‘sharing personal stories’.

In conjunction with the suggestions made about retreat leaders’ understanding of youth spirituality (sections 7.1.4 and 7.2.5.2) a number of key issues in youth spirituality need to figure more prominently as content on retreats for promoting reflection and discussion.

#### *7.2.4 Addressing teachers by their first name: A useful community-building strategy or an artificial attempt to build community while compromising student-teacher relationships?*

This research reported the retreat practice where students were invited to address their teacher retreat leaders by their first names. This was done to help promote a relaxed, friendly, community environment and it would help give the retreat an ambience of freedom different from what the students would normally experience at

school; and it was consistent with the general purpose of promoting personalism on the retreat, and in particular, good student-teacher communication. This move tended to surprise the students and sometimes it resulted in an unsettling start to the retreat. Some students interpreted it with suspicion (teachers wanting to become the 'students' friends'); and it made some wonder about what other 'surprises' were in store for them.

This researcher concluded that asking students to call retreat leader teachers by their first name was an unwise strategy because it created many ongoing problems with teacher-student relationships both at the retreat and back at school, while at the same time there was little or no evidence that it made any significant contribution to the informality and community building atmosphere on the retreat, or to the enhancement of student-teacher relationships. The following paragraphs argue this case.

The use of a first-name address for teachers conducting communitarian retreats may have resulted from what happened on the early inter-school communitarian retreats. For Marist and De La Salle Brothers, and for practically all of the orders of religious sisters, individuals were addressed by their Religious or Christian name prefixed with the term "Brother" or "Sister". Hence for example: "Brother William" or even "Brother Bill" and "Sister Mary" rather than "Brother Smith" and "Sister Jones". Because of the informality of these Christian Living Camps, these appellations took on the feeling of less formality and more staff-student friendly communication than was the case at school where the adults were still referred to as Brother William and Sister Mary. Use of the prefixes Brother and Sister meant that the ordinary level of formality in address was retained; this did not amount to inviting the students to call the staff by first names. Often this matter was not mentioned at these early communitarian retreats in any case; but the student participants simply took cues from the way that the adult staff would use such terms when publicly referring to their colleagues. Similarly, where religious personnel were normally named at school by their surname (For example, in the Christian Brothers: Brother Brown) there was a progression on the retreats for them to be called publicly by a phrase such as "Brother Tom" rather than use their surname; this usage was also applied to the priests on the retreat. This did lead to some change where students might then refer to this individual as "Brother Tom". But again, this was not an invitation to the students to use such terminology; and for many students it made no difference to their calling the individual Brother Brown on the retreat.

This pattern for referring to retreat staff was clearly different from the situation where students were specifically invited to call retreat leaders by their first name

Where students were asked to call teachers by their first name, this apparent ‘handing over’ of the usual professional title used at school was not necessarily perceived by students as a realistic gesture of friendship between teachers and students. Hence, its potential for enhancing retreat informality was questionable. Students did not automatically respect more or like more a teacher because they could call them by their first name. The teachers spending time with students in a relaxed environment, working in discussion groups and other retreat activities, and having meals with them would no doubt help create friendly teacher-student communication and relationships; but this could ensue whether or not there was any suggested change to a more informal first name appellation.

The shift from professional title to first-name-basis appears to be an exaggerated and artificial attempt to build friendship and community on a retreat. The following points highlight potential problems and questions created by such a move:-

- It exposes the teacher unnecessarily to vulnerability from a professional stance.
- Even if the ‘friendship rationale’ for using first names was understood and accepted by the retreat teachers, there was no guarantee that the student participants would accept it in the same way; they could see it as artificial and perhaps even manipulative.
- Would the first-name basis be extended to the principal when he/she attended the retreat? If not, as tends to occur in practice, this creates perceived inconsistency and double standards.
- It can give students the perception that teachers want to be ‘one of them’ and this can compromise the normally accepted professional boundaries between students and teachers.
- Students usually do not want teachers to be ‘one of them’ but they want their teachers to be open and someone they may be able to relate to – as well as expecting them to be good teachers.
- Teachers being friendly with students and having good communication with them does not depend on the use of their first name, and relationships can develop without changing the accepted way in which students address their teachers in the ordinary school situation.
- Usually before a retreat students would not have expected that they would be asked to call their teachers by their first name on the retreat. Some students would not feel comfortable with the removal of the formal mode of address.
- What would happen when the students returned to school after the retreat? Would they still be able to call retreat teachers by their first name or would they need to revert to the more formal language used prior to the retreat? How would students address teachers who were not part of the retreat teams?
- How would students who did attend the retreat address their teachers?



- How would the teachers not on the retreat teams accept the use of first name appellations for some of their colleagues? What conclusions might this lead them to draw about the conduct of retreats?
- How would parents judge this practice?
- Would this strategy discourage some teachers from joining retreat teams?

This list of potential problems far outweighs the dubious potential gains from student use of teachers' first names on a retreat. The need for teachers on school retreats to be relaxed and approachable as part of the overall community-building strategy of the retreat does not need to include this practice.

### 7.2.5 *The spiritual / religious dimension to the retreat*

Given that the basic idea of a retreat in Catholic tradition considers it to be primarily a religious experience that enhances the individual's relationship with God, it is likely that both Catholic Church and Catholic education authorities would see the spiritual/religious dimension to retreats as fundamental and hence very important. Similarly, from this religious perspective, the justification for the time, costs and investment of staff resources in live-in retreats would need to include a convincing account of how the retreat makes a distinctive contribution to the spiritual/religious aspects of young people's lives. But, articulating the links between retreat processes and young people's specifically religious and moral development is more difficult today in a secularised, individualistic, consumer-oriented wider culture than would have been the case in the relatively religious culture of Australian Catholicism say in the 1950s.

One of the central issues is the combination of religious experience with fun/community and enjoyment. It is difficult to try to differentiate the relative importance and contribution of each dimension to what is a holistic experience. However, there will usually be concerns by authorities if the latter appears to be disproportionate to the former, or if the latter seems to eclipse the former; if it is mainly a fun experience, is it justified? Also, there may be the additional question: does the activity promote increased engagement with the Church (including, increased attendance at Sunday Mass). Addressing this problem requires understanding the interrelationships between religious and community experience, and between the religious and the spiritual.

Hence, it is proposed that an understanding of the spiritual and religious dynamics of retreats requires a prior understanding of the complexities in the current relationships between the *spiritual* and the *religious*, as noted briefly in the material

on spirituality in chapter 3. There is a need to be careful that measures of religiosity more appropriate to an earlier time not be used to gauge the success of contemporary senior school retreats. As noted in section 7.1.7.2, the gradual cultural slide from regular Sunday Mass attendance by Catholics in the 1950s to its current low level is not likely to be reversed by any activities or programs like retreats or Catholic schooling or World Youth Days. These structures and activities may well be making a valuable contribution to the spiritual and moral development of young people, but it is not possible to measure the results of this contribution in the short term, and neither is it possible to find simple measures of religiosity that will give an adequate account of the complexity to this growth and development. Nevertheless, the longitudinal studies of Catholic year 12 students in New South Wales by Marcellin Flynn (Flynn, 1975, 1979, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok 2002) reported students as always valuing highly their school retreats. More recently, the survey of three Catholic secondary schools in Sydney indicated that 30% of the sample of boys considered that the retreat was “a deeply spiritual experience” while for girls the percentage was 52% (Maroney, 2008A; 2008B, p. 5).

It is considered that both Catholic schooling generally, and live-in retreats specifically, need to have religious purposes that take into account the contemporary situation where the ‘locus of the spiritual’ (that is, where the spiritual dimension is most readily encountered in life) seems to have shifted from a more formally religious position within a clearly identifiable religious culture to a more personal and individualistic place within people’s daily life structure. This would imply that the retreat should aim to promote the spiritual and moral development of young people in the way that is judged most appropriate to the live-in setting; this will mean focusing on activities that are more evidently identifiable as *personal development oriented* than activities that are *formally religious*. This was exactly the same situation of the first communitarian retreats conducted during the mid-1960s. They were primarily personal development oriented, but they were conducted within an overarching religious structure, and they included a prominent place for key religious activities like the Eucharist, Reconciliation and prayer. They also operated within a framework where spirituality was considered to be more than just the religious – that is, a spirituality that was relevant to the students’ everyday lives and to the spiritual and moral issues that they were encountering.

In the main, this study of contemporary live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools showed that the core spiritual/religious purposes of communitarian retreats

had not changed since their origins, even though there may be different estimates of the relative contributions of various retreat strategies and activities. Nevertheless, the difficulty that schools now have in arranging for priests to be present for the celebration of Mass, let alone the possibility of being key retreat leaders during the course of the whole program, means that adjustments have been required to address this change in the availability of ordained ministers.

It can then be concluded that the live-in retreat for Catholic secondary schools should be regarded as a special personal development opportunity based on community building, discussion and personal reflection, that includes a distinctive place for spiritual and religious activities like the celebration of Eucharist, Reconciliation and various prayer activities.

The following paragraphs consider further some of the questions and issues related to the spiritual/religious dimension to the retreat.

#### *7.2.5.1 Human/personal dimension to spirituality*

Retreats were often considered ‘spiritual’ experiences by those involved in their conduct because they were perceived as enhancing the personal life of students through reflection on life experiences and their interactions with others. In this sense, spirituality was embedded in a community experience that explored family relationships, friendships and the wider community – as well as relationships with God. The live-in retreat provided a particularly favourable personal and social environment where the community building experiences provided an experiential base for this sort of reflection. In this sense, the retreat was something very different from an extension of school religion lessons. On the retreat, there was much more scope and freedom to explore and discuss the complexities of relationships – relationships with self, others and God.

The retreat thus sought to enhance young people’s self-awareness and self-understanding; this was considered a ‘spiritual quest’ as it helped in the search for personal meaning and identity. Educators who saw these considerations as a core part of spirituality would have no difficulty in seeing the retreat as engaging with, and fostering the development of, young people’s spirituality; for them, the personal and the spiritual were closely interlinked. However, for those who had a more formally religious understanding of spirituality, this could look like a ‘watering down’ of the religious dimension of the retreat. How the spirituality dimension of

the retreat was to be interpreted would then be important when it came to judging the value and appropriateness of retreats.

It is considered that the planning and conduct of retreats require an insightful understanding of contemporary youth spirituality – hence the importance of the issues raised in the material on both spirituality generally and youth spirituality in particular in chapter 3. This includes understanding the distinctions that have emerged between the spiritual and the religious, as well as the relationships between spiritual and personal development. This is consistent with the claim that Westernised cultures are showing a shift in the focus of the spiritual dimension from more formally religious activities to contemporary life issues.

#### 7.2.5.2 *Spirituality: The core to retreat purposes and processes*

In the conduct of the first communitarian retreats in the 1960s, one of the driving forces of the movement was the exploration of an emerging, new type of Christian spirituality that was in tune with the Second Vatican Council's call for a "reading of the signs of the times". This same quest for a relevant spirituality remains central to contemporary Catholic school retreats.

How Catholic spirituality is to be interpreted underlies the retreat purposes and processes. It is considered that their success ultimately depends on the quality and the perceived relevance of the spirituality that is brought into play during the retreats. Inevitably, questions about the value and the success of the retreats will be conditioned by different estimates of what an authentic modern Catholic spirituality looks like. Hence it is to be expected that there will remain divisions and ongoing debate about how the retreats should operate and about what they should be expected to achieve.

A sufficiently broad-based view of spirituality needs to inform this debate. The retreats will function best for young people if they are not used as vehicles for promoting either a conservative or a progressive spirituality. To some extent, these divisions need to be transcended. The spiritual profiles of young people and of retreat staff will cut across these categories. A broad spectrum spirituality is required in the retreat so that it can be taken up differentially by participants according to their situation and needs. But it is considered that special attention needs to be given to the secular/individualistic trends in contemporary youth spirituality because the majority of participants will fall into that category of being tentative and unsure about the spiritual.

### 7.2.5.3 *Decreased focus on God in retreats?*

The prominence given to ideas such as spirituality, search for meaning, identity, self-understanding and relationships etc. could be interpreted by some educators as going hand-in-hand with a decline in the specific reference to God. In other words, they regarded retreats as problematic when there was a lack of ‘God’ content; or if the overtly religious content seemed to be replaced with an emphasis on personal development, moving attention away from the religious domain, and resulting in a more secular, psychological focus to the retreat program. This was an issue in the early development of communitarian retreat programs in the 1960s. According to Mason (2008) it was a particular concern of the Stranger Camp movement in the late 1970s in Melbourne. He considered that this movement set out to inject a more specifically religious element into the retreat content and process. Nevertheless, the content and process Mason referred to were similar to those in the Adelaide and Sydney Christian Living Camps from the 1960 and 1970s.

It is concluded that there will always remain some ambiguity and concern about what constitutes an appropriate religious dimension to the communitarian retreat. This is compounded by the reality that it is not possible to know or understand what is happening within the spiritual depths of those participating in the retreat; their thinking about God and their personal relationship with God are private, even though they participate in public prayer and liturgy.

What the retreat can do is provide for young people, in an unconditional fashion, the special community experience that includes content and activities intended to engage them in thinking about their relationship with God and to dispose them towards prayer. But their overt response to these opportunities cannot be predicted or anticipated. To look for positive overt responses as a measure of the religious success of a retreat would be to compromise the freedom that is essential to any authentic faith response and spirituality.

### 7.2.5.4 *Promoting the spirituality of youth who were uncertain about belief in God*

When the first communitarian retreats were conducted in Adelaide in 1964, the retreat leaders could have presumed that practically all of the students who attended believed in God and had a reasonably strong identification with Catholicism even if not all of them were regular Sunday Mass goers. There has been a significant change in both the religiosity (measure of religious observance) and spirituality of young Catholics since then. For example, in Maroney’s (2008B, p.7) research study of

Year 12 students, 40% of the sample of boys and 12% of the girls indicated that they did not believe in God, while 31% of boys and 48% of girls indicated that they “hoped that God exists, but were not sure”.

As explained in the spirituality section in chapter 3, one of the prominent characteristics ascribed to the present cultural post-modernity that affects many people (both adults and youth) is that there is now a much more widely accepted view of a natural uncertainty to personal knowledge of God. This was epitomised in one of the cartoons used as stimulus material in Maroney’s research where the young person when praying says: “God, I am not sure if you are there or if you can hear me. But I hope you are in charge of the universe and that you care for me.” (Maroney, 2008A, p. 127). Given that a significant proportion of the young people attending Catholic secondary school retreats think this way, retreat leaders would need to show, both in their language and in the retreat activities, a consciousness of this tentativeness about belief in God. It is not that they would be affirming this tentativeness, and they would not need to conceal their own belief in God, but they would need to avoid working out of an assumption that all of the young people in the group were firm believers with no doubts or uncertainties. In other words, they would be attempting to help the retreat participants to think through issues and questions about the spiritual that would help keep them open to possible engagement with religious belief.

Hence, a discussion session directly concerned with debating the existence of God could be perceived as an apologetic exercise rather than one geared to help students explore the spiritual and transcendent dimension to life. On the retreat, it was a question of how religious adults, representing the Catholic tradition, could provide personal/spiritual experience that might enhance young people’s spirituality; and this was likely to be more relevant and effective if it concentrated on the points where the spiritual and moral dimension impinged on their lives. It would be counter-productive to have sessions which set out primarily to convince them about the existence of God or to try to make the Church appear more relevant for them.

On the other hand, when liturgy was celebrated on the retreat, it made presumptions about the common shared belief of a community of faith (of some sort), even if there were elements of uncertainty in the personal faith of a number of the young people present. On the whole, the students understood that celebration of the Mass was an important part of the retreat and they participated appropriately. This same situation applied when Mass was celebrated at school. However, at the

retreat there was the advantage of being able to carry the level of community development achieved during the retreat into the liturgy making it a more meaningful and tangible expression of the celebration of a believing community.

#### *7.2.5.5 Attempts to make religious rituals more relevant to young people's spirituality*

As noted in the above sub-section, the community dimension to the retreat had the capacity to enhance the celebratory dimension of the mass. This helped those students who may have lacked understanding and experience of Catholic liturgy because of their relative disengagement from the Church. This may also have been a problem for some of the teaching staff. The retreat was a well placed situation for helping participants see more meaning and relevance in traditional religious rituals. To some extent, this could compensate for their not being part of a regular worshipping community and their lack of familiarity with religious rituals, symbols, readings and responses.

Efforts to engage students in meaningful Catholic liturgies on retreat have tried to link them with the complex spiritual/moral issues of their world. For example, naming their 'brokenness', and the conduct of 'healing-like rituals' and 'personal affirmations' have been used. Such activities tried to signal a renewed, more spiritual, hope-filled approach to life for students who felt they were at a vulnerable stage of their lives. The tangible sense of a community environment was a favourable place for proposing this idea of personal renewal.

However, care and wisdom are needed when trying to help make rituals more meaningful. Sometimes there is a danger that the emotional slant put on a 'healing' ritual is more the idiosyncratic interest of a retreat leader than something that is relevant to youth spirituality. Striving to achieve emotional significance in rituals can sometimes come across to the students as 'staged' or 'contrived'. Where this happens, the effort to make the ritual more relevant becomes counterproductive.

#### *7.2.6 Potential in retreats for promoting the development of personal faith in participants*

It is evident that retreat leaders gave considerable thought to the ways in which retreats might enhance the spirituality of young people and make bridging connections with the religious spirituality of the Church. The questions they worked with when planning retreats included the following:-

- How to make the retreat experience as relevant as possible to the spirituality of the young people attending.

- How to maintain or even increase a religious focus in the retreat program that took into account the relatively secular spirituality of the participants; this included a proportion of students who either did not believe in God or who remained uncertain of what they believed.
- How to balance and integrate a religious dimension with the personal development and community building elements in retreats; in other words, to plan a personal development / community experience that provided favourable opportunities for spiritual reflection and the celebration of Catholic liturgy and prayer.
- How does the spiritual/religious content address the needs of students from a non-Catholic background.

Given the favourable community climate of the live-in retreat, where young people were more receptive to considering and discussing spiritual/moral questions and reflecting on their own lives, and because of the prominent place for prayer and liturgy, the retreat presented perhaps the best structure for evangelisation within Catholic schooling. They could be regarded as prime opportunities for the evangelisation of young people. But their evangelising potential could be compromised if too much was expected of them in the way of overt religious activities; hence, it would be problematic to consider them as catechesis groups. For example, there is a significant difference in spiritual starting points between these retreats and live-in retreats for adults; in the latter, attendance is based on adults freely choosing to attend precisely to share and enhance their personal faith.

For the young people in Catholic secondary schools, many are at a position of uncertainty about what their faith means and hence they are not yet ready for the engagement in sharing their faith insights freely with committed believers – the situation that needs to apply in an authentic catechesis group. While neither are they un-believers, they are often at a naturally uncertain stage in believing. A well conducted youth retreat could provide them with an excellent opportunity for the further exploration of the spiritual/moral dimension to life. Hence, retreats have great significance for the potential development of religious faith in the young.

Research on the views and attitudes of senior school students in Catholic schools since the 1970s continues to affirm that they liked retreats very much and they saw them as significant spiritual experiences, as well as special opportunities to think about life and discuss these questions in a more thoughtful and personal way that was possible in classroom religious education.

The high regard in which retreats were held by young people in Catholic schools suggests that more needs to be done to develop retreat programs for young people in the parish-based situation. While retreats are well established in Catholic



secondary schools in Australia, they are not common as parts of parish youth ministry – certainly not as prominent as they are within youth ministry in Catholic parishes in the United States.

#### *7.2.7 Different models or types of retreat in Catholic secondary schools*

While this study has concentrated on one particular type of retreat, the communitarian live-in retreat conducted at a venue away from the school, it provides an opportunity to comment on the value of having a range of retreat types available within Catholic secondary schools.

A healthy future for retreats in Catholic secondary schools would be fostered by further research to identify different types of, or approaches to, retreats and to explain their function and their considered educational potential for promoting young people's personal and spiritual development. This should also include an appraisal of the strengths and potential problems with different retreat formats. This sort of information would better inform the selection of retreat types and could guide their implementation. This research information should also become a part of retreat professional development programs so that retreat leaders would be more aware of the range of retreat approaches that could be adopted and of how different strategies can be used to achieve different purposes.

An initial listing of different types of retreat could include the following:-

- One day non live-in retreats held at school or at a nearby venue.
- Silent live-in retreats.
- Twilight or evening retreats for students on a voluntary basis.
- Wilderness retreats.
- Street retreats (these have been described as involving visits with homeless youth on inner-city streets and also contact with adult homeless persons).
- Social justice retreats.

Some concerns have been raised about whether the word retreat should be applied to 'street retreats' because the latter would be better termed a community engagement or social justice excursion. Also, there have been questions about accountability problems with taking school students into inner city areas at night.

The question arises as to what criteria should be satisfied before the word retreat is applied to a particular program. If the activity does not have an evidently strong religious/spiritual component, then it could possibly contribute to a spiritual dilution of the very notion of retreat.

Where primary or junior secondary classes have a camp or excursions that include a liturgy and some prayer activities, it would not be appropriate to label such

an event as a retreat. This does not deny the community building and spiritual development potential in such activities; but it avoids creating expectations of retreats where the spiritual/religious expectations might be minimal.

*7.2.8 Differences between the 'live-in retreat' and the 'non live-in retreat' conducted at the school or other venue*

While this study was specifically concerned with live-in retreats, questions have arisen about the relative appropriateness and effectiveness of these retreats by contrast with those conducted for one day on the school premises or at some nearby more congenial site. The obvious structural difference is in the going away and staying overnight. The argument that needs to be addressed is whether this makes sufficient difference to justify the financial and logistical costs, the sacrificing of precious Year 12 class time, and other problems associated with mounting a live-in retreat for more than one day. Similarly, if the day retreats employed the same procedures and appeared to achieve the same sorts of outcomes, even if at a reduced level of quality, as those from live-in retreats, then they may be judged a more appropriate and cost effective alternative.

While these questions were not addressed in the interviews, some anecdotal evidence and comments from key informants have led the researcher to the following conclusions.

The live-in experience makes a distinctive contribution to the community dynamics of the retreat – and this in turn affects the personal/social environment and the potential for personal/spiritual development. With the travel in going away, an overnight stay (or two nights) and two days or more of retreat activities, the live-in retreat offers much more scope for community development as well as formal retreat activities than the school premises, one day retreat.

In addition, there are problems with the school on site day retreat related to the students' expectations of religious education. Students may tend to identify the on site retreat as like an extended religion lesson. The live-in retreat creates a more unambiguous distinction between the formal classroom religion curriculum and the retreat. The on site day retreat may also be perceived by students as similar to the classroom religious education seminars that have sometimes been used in Catholic secondary schools (and common in denominational religious education in government schools); these were basically religion lessons extended over a longer period with a greater range and length of activities than was possible within the

regular religion lesson.

There tends to be negative perceptions of classroom religious education on the part of senior school students for a number of complicated reasons as explained by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 307-309). Even though students may have indicated that they like religious education, the personal development potential within this area of curriculum tends to be subverted by what Crawford and Rossiter have called the “psychology of the learning environment” (2006, p. 307). Religious education does not have the perceived ‘mark status’ of the traditional subject areas like English, Maths and Science – even if it was perceived as both enjoyable and relevant to their lives. Anecdotal evidence from teachers who have been involved in both the on site school day retreats and the live-in retreats suggests that the quality of student participation and engagement in the former is significantly inferior to what is experienced on the live-in retreat (Rossiter, 2008).

It can be argued that, because key criteria considered important for the dynamics of the live-in retreat (going away, community building activities, longer time on retreat, the euphoria in friendship development) are missing in the on site day retreat, it would be a mistake to think that the school on site retreat could replicate both the ideal conditions and the sorts of outcomes that have come to be expected of the live-in retreat.

Sometimes schools have changed their senior class retreat offerings from a live-in retreat to a one day school retreat not because the latter is regarded as superior in quality, but because of the logistical and timetabling difficulties in conducting live-in retreats. Other factors like size of class, loss of class time, costs, suitable venues and transport difficulties also affected such decisions. If it became too difficult and disruptive to continue with live-in retreats, then the school day retreat may be regarded as the next best option, and at least this was felt to be better than having no retreat at all.

The value of onsite school day retreats by contrast with the live-in retreats is a question that warrants more systematic research.

While acknowledging that in some situations the school on site day retreat is worth having rather than have no retreat at all, this researcher judges that the live-in retreat should be retained within Catholic education because of the distinctive possibilities that it creates for enhancing the personal and spiritual development of young people. Hence, it is argued that there is need for schools to try to address and alleviate the various problems that militate against the inclusion of a live-in retreat

within the senior school religious education program so that these events, which have become an important feature of Catholic school religious education, can not only be retained, but enhanced and further developed.

### **7.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT HAVE A BEARING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RETREATS**

#### *7.3.1 Potential conflict in the school related to the timetabling and conduct of live-in retreats*

In the schools represented in this study, only a particular group of staff members worked on the senior retreat team. Not all staff understood or agreed with the current view of the nature and purposes of retreats. Some teachers did not feel comfortable about being involved in retreats and advised the administration and colleagues of this. These and others indicated that they did not have an affinity with retreat work. At times this was evident in criticisms of retreat team members because the retreat was perceived as akin to a holiday, the retreat was considered to be a ‘low key’ fun and recreation activity that lacked any academic or assessment component. In addition, there was concern about the loss of teaching time for the senior examination year students; this added to concerns about the normal level of distractions during the school year that already led to loss of class time. To make matters worse, the absence of the retreat staff could increase the workload of staff back in school who may have had to take substitution lessons for absent staff. All of this led to a divided school culture about the legitimacy and value of live-in retreats for Year 12 students (and for other year levels as well).

Given the inevitable organisational difficulties, costs and use of staff resources that were required to timetable and conduct live-in retreats, the situation of a significantly divided staff over whether or not to have the retreats could tip the balance in a school towards discontinuing them, or replacing them with one day retreats.

While there is no easy solution to the logistical and cost problems with retreats, particularly in a period of economic difficulty, something can be done to address the problem of conflict in staff expectations of retreats. Firstly, there is a need for a staff consensus in *understanding* the nature and purposes of retreats; they need to be well informed. This will not necessarily result in a similar consensus about the *relative value* of retreats and about whether they are justified in the school at this time. But at least the lack of misunderstandings about retreats should engender more acceptance of their place in the overall curriculum.

If there was a reasonable understanding by all staff of the place of retreats in the school, this could serve as the starting point for achieving some whole school sense of cooperation in the responsibility for the effective and efficient conduct of a retreat program. If the staff back at school could give moral support to the retreat, as well as see that their maintenance of the school's efficient function in the absence of the retreat team staff was a pivotal part of the success of the cooperative venture, then there could be some reduction of the staff friction that at times is caused by the retreat.

This potential development could also help correct the misunderstanding that the retreat was a staff holiday; and it could help retreat staff see that the work of colleagues at school supported and complemented their endeavours; in addition, it could provide a more favourable environment for the recruitment of new staff to retreat work. If there was a good staff understanding of the nature and purposes of retreats, this could be spread to parents and students. Where there has been a somewhat secretive approach to retreat work on the part of retreat teams, it is considered that this is inevitably contrary to the development of a consensus and hence not likely to support the place of retreats in the school.

### *7.3.2 Workload and supervision issues*

There is a need to address workload and supervision issues for the teachers on retreats to achieve a balance compared with what is expected of teachers not involved. Being on a retreat often meant that the teacher's workload increased because their temporary absence from the school required catching up on class work and the setting and correction of work for classes missed. This also often impacted on the teachers remaining at school through added substitution lessons together with additional supervision duties. It was not uncommon for both groups to feel some resentment.

Given that the same teachers usually conducted the annual retreat, this created a dependency on their skills and dispositions. But this also put pressure on them through increased demands on their time prior to, during and after a retreat – often without much support or respite.

As part of their attempts to lessen the friction and frustration from disruptions caused by the absence of staff and senior students on retreats, schools need to consider how the apparent workload inequities might be addressed. This in turn could affect the future viability of the retreats. An activity as religiously significant

as retreats need to have a clear commitment of staff time and resources set aside to enable them to be conducted without unnecessary staff stress. Without adequate planning time and without acknowledgment that the retreat calls for an investment of time and energy that goes beyond what is required on a normal school day, teachers may re-think their commitment to retreats as their level of dissatisfaction increases. If this happens, it could be the critical factor that leads to the discontinuation of these highly regarded experiences in a school – and perhaps eventually this could contribute to their possible disappearance from Catholic schools. It would be a mistake for Catholic education authorities, both in the school and at diocesan level, not to address industrial teacher workload issues related to teacher involvement in retreats.

As noted in section 7.2.8, some schools have discontinued the live-in retreat in favour of a scaled-down, seminar-day precisely because of workload or staff time commitment issues. Such days have been called ‘day retreats’ but, as noted in that section they differ significantly from the live-in retreat.

Workload issues need to be addressed if retreats are to be well covered and supported by the teachers remaining at school as much as they are by those on retreat. And as noted in the sections above, this includes achieving some staff consensus about the value of the retreat, as well as having readily available detailed information that clarifies their nature and purpose for teachers, parents and students.

### *7.3.3 Understanding of the nature and purposes of retreats by all school staff, including those who will not be involved in the conduct of retreats: The need for documentation about retreats at both diocesan and school levels*

If the conclusions reached in the previous sections are valid, then there is a need for formal documentation about the nature and purposes of live-in retreats, at both diocesan and school levels, to inform staff thinking and decision making about retreats. Also, given that there are many problems associated with the retreat process, official documents affirming an important place for religious retreats in the senior secondary school need to show that they are aware of potential difficulties.

Such documentation would be a useful starting point for some whole school staff activity (perhaps a staff meeting every few years) that could further explain the rationale and purposes for retreats, stressing that the success of their implementation depended on a whole staff favourable endorsement. Both the retreat activity itself and the teaching going on at the school need to work together harmoniously to

enable the successful conduct of retreats in a time when the level of disruption to the school timetable can be a critical factor.

Without a clear mandate from diocesan authorities and clear rationale about their value, purposes and processes (together with complementary school documentation), retreats will continue to struggle for recognition; or their potential value will be undermined within an over-crowded curriculum. This situation needs consideration not only at school and diocesan level, but also by the leaders within the Australian Catholic Church.

#### *7.3.4 Support for retreats from Catholic education authorities*

In a number of the sections in this chapter, it has been noted that there is an important need for official diocesan documentation affirming the important place for retreats in Catholic secondary schools as well as for explaining their nature, purposes and practices – and including some account of the possibilities and problems in the conduct of retreats. More readily accessible information is needed about the contemporary rationale for retreats and their contribution to the overall educational aims of Catholic schools.

There is an impression amongst Catholic educators generally that retreats are important for Catholic schooling and that this is supported by a long history of practice. However, this view from within the culture of Catholic education is not strongly reflected in specific, substantial commentaries on retreats in official Catholic diocesan documentation. Little if anything is said about their nature and purposes, or about how they present a special experiential event for promoting spirituality. Rather, the value of retreats has to be surmised from general statements about religious education and commitments to promote young people's spiritual and moral development.

This notable absence from official documentation may be explained in part by the historical development of communitarian retreats. Initially they appeared as voluntary extra-curricular activities on an inter-school basis. Then as they became popular with students and teachers, they assumed a place within each school's own religious program. These developments were examples of school based curriculum development (noted in section 7.1.5) which were independent of diocesan authorities. The retreats became accepted important parts of the schools' religious education without the need for much if any official endorsement by diocesan education authorities. And this unarticulated relationship has tended to remain. Their

importance remains presumed rather than clearly articulated. But if this relationship does not become more formalised and supportive of retreats, their lack of official endorsement could affect their future negatively.

While most Catholic educators would see retreats as an essential part of the Catholic school's mission, evangelisation and religious education program, some would prefer to see them as extra-curricular or co-curricular activities to distinguish them from the formal classroom religious education. It depends on how the terminology is interpreted. This study presumes a broad definition of the school curriculum to include all intentional activity that promotes pupils' learning, and their personal and spiritual development. Retreats fit within this definition. However, it remains important to distinguish the co-curricular, away from school activities that have different contexts and learning potentialities from the regular classroom.

The same problem of lack of endorsement of retreats is often also evident in particular schools' own documentation about their mission and religious education. Because retreats received little if any attention in diocesan literature about Catholic schools and religious education, the relationship between Catholic Education Offices, school retreats and support for retreats remains ambiguous. It is problematic for retreats in schools to continue only on the basis that Catholic educators presume they are good to have. Too much is thus dependent on the religious culture of the particular schools.

This researcher considers that the future of retreats in Catholic secondary schools cannot be presumed to be secure in the current educational and financial environment. A number of factors militating against the continuation and further development of successful retreat programs have been identified in this study; and these include contextual factors as well as problems with retreat expectations and processes. Hence, the future of the retreat movement in Catholic education needs a strong and supportive endorsement by Catholic education authorities. And this endorsement needs to be backed up with commitment to the resourcing and training of retreat leaders. Also, within current university and diocesan professional development programs for teachers in Catholic schools (at pre-service, postgraduate and in-service levels), the place and role of retreats need to be explained to show that they are integral to Catholic school religious education. In addition, as noted in section 7.6, the position of retreats in Catholic education can be strengthened by further systematic research.



### *7.3.5 The need for a prominence for retreats in the school's religious education documentation*

Just as retreats need affirmation in diocesan documentation on Catholic schools and religious education, this requires follow up in the school's own documentation about its mission and religious education. This will support the continued use of retreats as a key component of the overall religious education curriculum by providing a rationale endorsing their role in promoting young people's personal and spiritual development, and a historical context showing their long valued place in Catholic schools.

The retreat may appear to lack status because it does not qualify as an assessable academic experience; nor does it have measurable outcomes along the same lines as academic subjects. This researcher considers that there is a current crisis of understanding regarding the place of retreats in Catholic secondary schools; and this affects not only school staff but also parents and students who are often a little confused about the nature and purposes of the retreat. Clear documentation about the rationale and proposed outcomes for the school's complete religious education program needs to give a prominent place to retreats so that all Catholic school stakeholders will have access to an informed understanding of the retreat's distinctive contribution.

A well set-out school statement about retreats, grounded within the normative diocesan educational framework, would provide much more clarity about the place of retreats in the school's educational activities. In turn, this could help substantiate the place of retreats within Catholic religious educational culture. If not, the absence of references to retreats could continue to reinforce the ambiguous and relatively precarious position of retreats in Catholic secondary schools.

While it is usually a standard procedure for schools to send letters home explaining the purpose of the retreat (and sometimes with comments about the retreat format), together with the need for parental permission for their children's attendance, a clearer, more informative process is needed to lessen possible confusion about what will happen on retreats. It is understandable that both parents and students feel reluctance about taking leave from studies at senior secondary level for any extra-curricular activity. The impression that retreats are predominately fun activities that lack substance would reinforce this view. Students and their families need to know something about how the retreat time will be spent, even if this does

not cover practical details; otherwise schools risk losing parental and student support for retreats.

### *7.3.6 The availability of suitable retreat venues*

The successful conduct of live-in retreats, with minimal disruption to the school's regular program, requires the ready availability of suitable venues that are not too distant, or too costly, that cater properly for retreats. When venues are substandard, this affects the enjoyment of the retreat. Some 'camp' venues may often lack a retreat ambience that enhances retreat activities; that is, one that is conducive to reflection and prayer. An absence of sacred spaces, reflective/prayer areas and visible religious symbols and icons can minimise the religious/spiritual overtones that might be fostered in a more appropriate venue; and this can impact on the mood of a retreat, giving students the impression that they are attending a 'camp' rather than feel that they are at a 'retreat'.

It will be important for Catholic diocesan education authorities, either by themselves or cooperatively, to consider what might be done to keep up the provision of suitable retreat facilities. A number of religious order owned venues have been used to date, but this is changing as some are being sold. Other Christian denominations have had a long history of providing campsites for youth work; but not all of these are suitable for the live-in retreat. As the pool of available, suitable retreat venues shrinks, this will impact on the organisation of secondary school retreats by restricting choices and affecting timetables.

Other questions associated with retreat venues include:

- Occupational health and safety issues that require vigilance by teachers, especially if they are not familiar with the venue.
- The high cost of retreats that impacts on some families.
- Dissatisfaction with the facilities, especially when it affects the quality or volume of food, bedding and heating/cooling.
- The availability of venues when required by schools rather than when the venue is 'free'.

The issues noted in this section will affect the future viability of school live-in retreats.

### *7.3.7 Potential problems with duty of care and mandatory reporting*

Extensive mandatory reporting laws and child protection policies directed by government authorities and school administrations present new challenges for retreats. Past practices where teachers assured students they would not disclose

sensitive, personal information shared in group discussions need to be reviewed and understood within the context of government legislation. A standard understanding of teachers' legal obligations to report student-risk situations that have been identified on a retreat is needed across the levels from Catholic Education Offices, schools and retreat teams – as well as for parents and students. This would serve to clarify any existing ambiguity.

Mandatory reporting came into play when students on retreat made disclosures about an abusive situation they were in. Where the small group discussion was proposed to students as a safe forum in which to speak frankly with others, to express their feelings and to build community through mutual sharing, there was the possibility that personal disclosures of problems might be made. Where maintaining confidentiality was the principal and over-riding concern of the teacher, this could compromise their legal obligations as professionals with a duty of care to safeguard the wellbeing of their students if they did not report serious cases disclosed during the retreat.

According to the South Australian Youth Services (Hugo, 2007), mandatory reporting ceased once a school student was 18 years old. Teachers were then not obliged to mandatory reporting procedures because of the student's legal age; however, they could encourage the young person concerned to pursue the matter further by contacting the police. This discrepancy complicates the expectations of teachers with respect to mandatory reporting. Legal advice sought on this question (De Ruvo, 2008) proposed that, irrespective of the legal age of a student, the courts would be more interested in determining the 'relationship between the school and the students' and whether this gives rise to a duty of care and the nature and extent of that duty of care. If this were 'active', then the onus was on teachers to report students at risk.

While the legal responsibilities of teachers for the care of their students on retreat were no different from what they were back at school, the problem here extends to the perception that the retreat small group discussion might be the setting where disclosures about child abuse were likely to occur.

Any practice by retreat leaders that strongly emphasised the value of personal disclosures in the small group, together with talk about the obligations on group members to keep confidential material exclusively within the group, may be questioned as creating unhealthy expectations of the role of small group discussion. This sort of introduction to a small group could well convey to young people the

expectation that there ought to be significant personal revelations, most probably about personal problems; in turn, this could create a not too subtle psychological pressure on individuals to 'bare their souls'.

As noted in section 7.2.1 on the place for personalism in the retreat, it was proposed that the expectation for a healthy small group discussion should be pitched at a general educational level, and not at significant personal disclosures. No participant, either student or staff member, should be under any pressure to have to reveal their personal views, let alone talk about their personal problems. These running rules do not actually stifle a personal discussion, but create the protective environment within which an authentic, free personal sharing is most likely to occur. It is considered therefore, that retreat leaders need to be very careful in the introductions they give to the small group discussions. Problems occur where the expectations for personal disclosure are inappropriate and unhealthy. Personalism can be one of the most valuable aspects of a retreat; and if distorted, then potentially it can be the most manipulative.

If this recommendation is followed, then student participants should be clear that the retreat small group discussion is not the place for making vulnerable disclosures of personal problems and certainly not for revealing mandatory child abuse situations. However, if these safeguards were in place, and if there were a significant disclosure of a participant's personal problems, then the staff member and students should acknowledge this revelation with respect, empathy and personal support; this should not preclude mandatory reporting by the teacher if the situation warranted it; and it would merit teacher comments about the need for group confidentiality to protect the individual's personal contribution. But, given a clearly stated purpose of group discussion, reinforced by the teacher/leader's role in the group, this situation should be the rare exception to the normal rule.

## **7.4 THE RESOURCING OF RETREATS AND THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF RETREAT LEADERS**

### *7.4.1 Resources*

The transition from the traditional silent school retreat to the communitarian live-in retreat in the 1960s was a stimulus to retreat leaders to find new resources that could be used. Many of the resources initially put together were *ad hoc* stimulus materials and notes on activities which were sometimes shared with retreat leaders from other schools. There were a number of retreat manuals for youth ministry published in the United States which included various experiential and prayer activities; but these

volumes did not attend comprehensively to informing the overall strategies and issues related to the conduct of retreats in Australian Catholic schools. The style of retreat in the United States Catholic sector addressed a predominately voluntary, weekend youth ministry experience and differed somewhat from the retreat experience of Catholic secondary school students (these differences were not investigated in this study).

While retreat training programs, such as the Montagne Institute in Sydney, issued its own locally developed and printed resources, each school involved in the conduct of retreats usually had its own current resource materials that related to retreats for the current and preceding years; these were usually updated periodically with minor changes.

Experienced retreat leaders often possessed an effective repertoire of activities and strategies they had accumulated over time. This may well have included materials borrowed from other sources. With the recycling and /or modification of resources each year, experienced teachers were familiar with the retreat format and knew what to expect in each of the program's sessions; on the whole, student responses were felt to be predictable when the annual retreat was presented with minimal changes to program and personnel. Continuity in retreat personnel from year to year probably contributed significantly to the stability of retreat programs and to the longevity of resources; when there were changes in personnel, this would be likely to affect the program.

Similar retreat themes that were considered relevant to students at the senior secondary level were followed in various schools. Hence the overall bank of retreat resources was spread across schools on a relatively individualistic basis. But it was likely that, because of similarity in retreat themes, there were some commonalities in activities and resources based on the acquisition and exchange of materials by retreat leaders. It was not within the scope of this study to determine the extent of commonality or difference in resource materials across schools.

#### *7.4.2 Staff professional development and the training of retreat leaders*

While there were practical student resource materials that retreat leaders could refer to for program development, there was no significant recent literature readily available that could be widely used for the professional training of teachers for the conduct of retreats. Much of the professional wisdom that had accrued in the conduct of retreats remained unwritten from both a religious order and lay

perspective. Religious orders were pioneers in developing communitarian style retreats and when lay teachers inherited this legacy, a new dimension in accumulated wisdom began to develop in schools through their extensive involvement in senior secondary school retreats. However, as for the religious order supported developments, the lack of documentation of developments by lay teachers has remained a problem.

Similar to the early work on communitarian retreats, current teacher retreat leaders continued to learn through trial and error about what constituted a relevant and meaningful retreat experience for students. They were influenced by the views and experience of the more senior retreat leaders in their schools in what was primarily a school-based training. In some instances, experiencing a retreat first hand provided a basic introduction to the work and some support for teachers, but this was often a private initiative where teachers sought training to assist them in the conduct of retreats.

The training of retreat leaders in Catholic secondary schools has been inconsistent since the need for such training emerged in the 1960s. This researcher was aware of only two recent diocesan programs on retreat training, including the Montagne Institute in Sydney sponsored by the Marist Brothers and the Lismore diocesan program which has been discontinued. It was beyond the scope of the study to investigate the history of any such programs nation wide.

Thus, in the main, the professional preparation of teachers for the role of leading retreats was limited to what has been provided within their own school. The usual induction into retreat work relied on the 'watch, copy and do' method at the actual school retreat with little pre-retreat planning or post-retreat debriefing. This has tended to be a daunting experience for some teachers, especially for those who were new to retreats; the retreat expectations and outcomes differed from the norm in the ordinary classroom religious education curriculum.

One key area where new retreat team members needed help was with understanding the personal dimension to the retreat. This involved a range of questions from handling emotion and euphoria to the conduct of discussion groups that included personal sharing, and through to wisdom in addressing situations where students' personal problems may have been disclosed, as well as to strategies for adequate follow up after the retreat when this was needed. They needed to be informed by adequate guidelines that identified both the healthy possibilities as well as the potential problems.

While it can be argued that repeated retreat programs without much change from year to year added stability to the experience, it can also be concluded that this tended to stifle creativity because teachers might not get to ‘own’ the retreat program as one they were involved in developing. And the outcomes in terms of student responses may have become too familiar and too predictable. Repeating the same retreat program with ‘cosmetic’ changes, might do little to stimulate teachers into developing new and innovative retreat experiences for students. However, sameness and stability to a program may have been important for teachers who were pressured sufficiently by their school responsibilities to have little time and energy to commit to experimentation with new strategies, activities and resources.

The lack of a literature combined with limited scope for professional development beyond the on-the-job training provided by schools can make it difficult for teachers new to retreat work to develop a comprehensive grasp of their nature, purpose and conduct. This lack of support programs for retreat leaders remains a significant problem that could affect negatively the future of live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools. If the work of retreats in Catholic secondary schools is to continue and develop, then opportunities for professional development for retreat leaders need to be provided at the least at regional level. Understanding the purpose and content of this training needs to be consistent across the different levels in Catholic education from the diocesan office to the school. Also valuable would be retreat professional development programs available at university level as parts of Masters and Graduate Certificate/Diploma courses. Such opportunities could help overcome the problem of professional isolation that often applied to those who conducted retreats. With on-the-job training, and schools totally responsible for their own retreat programs, the retreat leaders have operated relatively independently from the wider diocesan support structures. This situation needs to be changed.

#### *7.4.3 The recruitment of new school staff for the conduct of retreats*

Those who conducted the first communitarian retreats in schools were members of religious orders. Then the religious orders supported schools with travelling retreat teams, some of which still remain in operation. However, the significant decline in numbers of religious personnel in schools, together with the decrease in the numbers of travelling retreat teams meant that the total staffing of retreat leaders often had to be met by the schools themselves.

Despite the relative stability in personnel and retreat programs that often seemed to apply (as noted above), the recruitment of appropriate new teachers as retreat leaders remains important for the future of retreats in any school, as well as for their maintenance as a valued part of the Catholic education system's overall religious education program. There could be a crisis for retreats if there was a rapid decline in the numbers of available experienced retreat leaders, resulting in a significant loss in the pool of experience and skills. Diocesan support for retreats, as considered earlier, would be important for the continued recruitment and training of retreat personnel at school level.

Another issue related to recruitment of staff for retreats is the selection criteria for recruitment. This will be considered in the next section.

#### 7.4.4 *Criteria used in schools for inviting teachers to joint a retreat team*

How to invite new members into a retreat team in a school posed a number of problems. As noted in section 7.3.1, there was often a division between the retreat team members and the rest of the staff; not all of the latter approved of retreats and the general appreciation of the nature and purposes of the retreat amongst staff was usually low. Thus, there was sometimes little scope for increasing (and training) the number of teachers who might serve on a retreat team. In practice, recruitment was more a matter of inviting rather than mandating new staff participation.

A personal criterion was often the key indicator used for judging teacher suitability for retreat involvement. Desired people-skills or dispositions to interact comfortably with students at a personal level were regarded as the psychological characteristics in the adult personnel that would help create a favourable climate for group discussion and personal sharing; these included:-

- Good listening skills.
- The ability to direct small group discussions.
- The capacity to create a confidential environment for personal disclosures in groups.

These dispositions were not always easy to develop as part of the retreat teachers' role because they required a significant shift from the set of expectations that went from the role of *teacher-disciplinarian* to that of *teacher-confidante/friend*. The observed style of relationship that teachers had with students at school was thus used as a measure of suitability for work on the retreat team.

Such a personal selection criterion was heavily weighted according to the notion that personal sharing and telling one's personal story were central dynamics to



the retreat. The subtle personal selection criterion could create ambiguity of expectations about the retreat on the part of both teachers and students regarding the perceived importance of personal sharing. This could also create difficulties back at school after a retreat, because the usual naturally accepted boundaries between students and teachers had the potential to be blurred.

The expectations of teachers new to retreat work could understandably be unnerving, particularly where the extent of the personal challenges involved were not clear at the time. Sometimes this pressure appeared to result in withdrawal from participation in retreat work. This approach to teacher recruitment in turn pointed to the place for personalism in the retreat as a central theme that needed appraisal (see the separate section on personalism earlier). A recruitment policy and guidelines need to be articulated in the light of such a review.

#### *7.4.5 The role for volunteer assistant leaders and parents in the conduct of retreats*

##### *7.4.5.1 Volunteer assistant retreat leaders*

Some schools have encouraged young adults, including recent past pupils, to assist school staff in the conduct of live-in retreats. Where these young people have been in tune with the way the retreat is conducted, they have been able to contribute energy and enthusiasm to the retreat. Not being much older than the students was also regarded as a plus in terms of having a retreat team with sensitivity to students' needs and interests. Where their outlook on the retreat aims and processes were different from those of the school staff, there was potential for conflict of purposes that would affect the retreat negatively. While the youthfulness of the volunteers appeared to offer relevant connections with secondary students, this could also be perceived as a disadvantage because they lacked experience and life skills. A lack of training also raised questions about accountability; it was not enough for volunteers to have nothing more than a police clearance to accredit them to interact with students on a retreat.

The use of volunteer assistant staff was sometimes encouraged by school administrations because of the valuable contribution they could make, and also at times because this arrangement helped address problems such as shortage of staff to go on retreats and lack of financial resources. Participation by past pupils could help build up the strength of the retreat culture in the school.

As for regular school staff, retreat training would be essential for volunteer assistant staff. They would also need to participate in both the planning and

debriefing processes, and have a clear understanding of the aims and processes of the retreat.

#### *7.4.5.2 Parents as assistant retreat leaders*

Although this has yet to be explored, there may well be a valued role for parents in the conduct of senior school retreats. This would be one avenue for the school to encourage home-school cooperation in the school's overall religious mission. However, it may create peculiar problems for the sons and daughters of parents if they were on the same retreat as their parents.

Parental involvement would require the same sort of expectations for their participation as for school staff and volunteer assistant staff. This implies the need for familiarity with retreat purposes and practices, and a need for systematic professional development in preparation.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

Within its limited scope, this research set out to chart the development of the contemporary communitarian live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools, even though there was not the opportunity to do this in detail Australia wide, or to check the various diocesan church and education archives for pertinent historical materials. Similarly, there was not the scope to compare the Australian developments with those overseas, even though a general picture of some developments overseas was developed through contact with a number of overseas informants. While pertinent information was provided by key informants who were involved in the retreat movement in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne in the 1960s and 1970s, more work would be needed to provide a comprehensive picture of how these retreats developed across Australia.

Limited in scope also was the review of Catholic spirituality that informed the development and conduct of retreats in the Church and its schools. While not extensive, it did identify a number of key principles that have informed Catholic retreats, and that are still evident in senior school retreats. The purpose here was to open up this area to further investigation rather than provide a comprehensive review.

The empirical part of this study was limited to interviews with a sample of teachers from one Catholic diocese. While the issues identified are likely to be pertinent elsewhere in Australian Catholic secondary schools, more research is

needed to see how extensive particular thinking about retreats might be and to see if there is regional variation. Some of the ideas emphasised in the data in this study may be idiosyncratic to the teachers in this particular diocese.

Also, this study did not attempt to document in any detail the programming and use of various activities on retreats, together with reports of how they were interpreted as contributing to the overall retreat process.

In chapters 6 and 7, a particular value position was taken for interpreting the data and for making evaluative judgments about issues that were considered to be emerging from the teacher comments in the interviews. The researcher has extrapolated from the issues raised by this sample of teachers; the interpretations need wider empirical investigation. Not all educators would take the same viewpoint as to what the issues were and about what might be done to address them. But at least this material will serve as a substantial stimulus to more serious consideration of the nature, purposes and conduct of senior school retreats. As an important part of the Catholic school's overall religious education program, the retreat warrants such attention.

The sample size of teachers interviewed was small, and limited to one diocese. More extensive information about teacher thinking is needed. But this represents only one side of the story of retreats. Perhaps what will be more important will be the views of the students who have experienced the retreats. As noted previously, research has long identified that young people valued the retreats they experienced (E.g. the research of Flynn and Maroney). But so far there has been no research that explored in detail their perceptions of retreats. Their perspective on the nature, purpose and conduct of retreats, together with their understandings of how the experience may have contributed to their personal and spiritual development need to be investigated.

## **7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The maintenance and future development of retreats in Catholic secondary schools in Australia needs to be informed by further research. Taking into account the points made in the previous sections, the following areas can be proposed as important for ongoing research.

1. *Wider replication of the study of teachers' views of the nature and purposes of retreats*

The questions asked of the sample of retreat leaders from one diocese need to be posed to a wider sample across all Catholic dioceses in Australia.

2. *Investigation of retreat programs and retreat operation*

Programs used by different schools for senior school retreats need to be collected and compared, providing an analysis of the types of activities used together with explanations of the purposes of particular activities and strategies. One aspect of this research could investigate the question of a balance in approach and focus – that means studying the relative emphasis given to contemporary spiritual/moral issues, to theological questions and spirituality, and to psychological/personal matters.

This research could also investigate how issues related to timetabling, organisation, workload, legalities and lack of support impacted on retreats.

3. *More extensive and detailed history of the development of Catholic secondary school retreats in Australia*

Further investigation could show how Catholic school retreats developed in all Australian states and territories since the 1960s.

4. *Comparison with the historical development of live-in retreats in the Catholic sector in other countries.*

The question here is to see if a similar pattern emerged in other countries. Also, there may be different emphases in the conduct of live-in retreats elsewhere.

5. *Students' views of their experience of secondary school retreats; their perception of nature, purposes, practices and psychological dynamics.*

This investigation is needed to show the student perspective on retreats.

6. *Investigation of the scope, purposes and practices in student volunteering and community engagement activities.*

Catholic schools have provided opportunities for students to be engaged in community service activities. The idea was to give them first hand experience of such involvement. Complementing the study of retreats, research is needed to explore the scope of this sort of activity in schools and to highlight the thinking that is behind volunteering and community engagement as experiences that may help promote spiritual and moral development.

## **7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION REGARDING THE MAINTENANCE AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF LIVE-IN RETREATS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

This section will make recommendations for Catholic secondary education about the maintenance and enhancement of live-in retreats as important elements in the school's overall religious education program.

Firstly there is a need for *policy development* from the Diocesan level to the school level that underlines the importance of the school retreats as a part of Catholic schooling. This will necessarily include statements about purposes and practices. In addition, this policy development may well require the endorsement of the Catholic bishops in their respective dioceses. Without a clear diocesan policy that

contextualises retreats within the mission and religious education of Catholic schools, there is the danger that these highly regarded religious experiences may increasingly struggle for sufficient authoritative support to retain a prominent place in Catholic secondary schools because of timetabling and resourcing difficulties, as well as problems relating to different estimates of their contribution to young people's spiritual and moral development.

A Catholic schools' retreat policy would not in itself mandate or guarantee the future of retreats, and neither would it guarantee the delivery of quality retreats, but it would be a good starting point for a new public and educational valuing of retreats within Australian Catholic education. In turn, this valuing could contribute not only to their maintenance in schools, but to their further refinement and improvement and to more extensive resourcing and teacher training for retreats. Staff members, volunteers and parents would be able to access information about retreats starting with such policy statements; this would be a first step in helping eliminate some of the mystery and misunderstandings about retreats. A strong rationale for retreats at diocesan level would help schools retain and enhance their current place in the school curriculum and timetable.

The need for *professional development programs* for the training of retreat leaders was an issue that came through strongly in the empirical data in this study. It was concluded that an understanding of the nature, purposes and conduct of live-in retreats would be an essential part of such training. Misunderstandings and ambiguities in purposes would be likely to cause problems with the conduct of retreats. It might help avoid giving excessive attention to approaches judged to be too subjective/introspective/narcissistic or too emotional. Attention could also be given to issues and dilemmas associated with duty of care and mandatory reporting.

Catholic Education Offices, either individually or cooperatively, are in an appropriate position to offer accredited training programs for retreats leaders. At times this might be complemented by short sessions within regular professional development programs that serve to update school executives and teachers on the work of retreats.

The Catholic Education Offices might also endeavour to *build up the practical literature informing the conduct of retreats* (As noted in Section 7.6.2 above). This could include a collection of programs used by schools over the years, together with retreat resources. In addition, experienced retreat leaders could be encouraged to reflect on and write about their work to ensure that the accumulated

wisdom in practice was not lost. Material on programs could help illustrate the religious dimension of retreats; it could inform program development at school level; and it could show how research-identified trends in contemporary youth spirituality were being addressed. In addition, this material might help maintain content balance in retreats so that attention could be focused on some spiritual/moral issues (such as social justice, environment, spirituality) and not exclusively on personal disclosures.

*An understanding of the nature and purposes of retreats* is not just needed by retreat leaders. If retreats are to continue and develop within Catholic secondary schools, then they need an endorsement not only by school authorities but by *the whole school staff*. This is needed to help address the problems faced in mounting a retreat program within a school timetable that is crowded and pressured by the desire for good academic results. A better whole staff understanding of retreats would help address the conflict that arises over the value of retreats and whether or not their place in the curriculum is worth the cost in terms of resources and time lost from senior classes. These understandings are also needed by parents and students.

Appendix K presents a summary of the areas that are considered to be *key content for a professional development program* on the conduct of retreats. As well as serving as a possible checklist for the content of such programs, this could also be considered as the sort of content that all staff in the school need to know something about to ensure that they understand adequately the purposes of the retreat.

## 7.8 CONCLUSION

This project has researched the live-in secondary school retreats with attention to their background spirituality and historical origins, together with questions related to their nature, purposes and conduct. The first documentary part of the study was complemented with qualitative data from interviews with a sample of retreat leaders from schools in one metropolitan Catholic diocese.

Although limited in its scope, the study has identified the development of the live-in communitarian retreat as a significant example of a school based curriculum development – initiated and implemented almost exclusively by school staff without much systemic support – that has become the mainline approach to retreats in Catholic schooling in Australia, even if this place is not yet adequately reflected in the normative documents of Catholic education in this country.

The study has identified and discussed a range of issues and problems related to understandings of the nature, purposes and conduct of live-in school retreats. It

was considered to be iconic as an educational innovation in the 1960s that was one significant expression of the major movement within Catholicism after the Second Vatican Council to develop a relevant, personal spirituality more in tune with the “signs of the times”. How contemporary spirituality is to be interpreted and how it might be promoted remain the core issues over which any debates about the purposes and value of retreats will continue to revolve.

In valuing the place of retreats in schools in times when a number of contextual factors tend to militate against their continued place and prominence in school timetables, the study has drawn conclusions and made recommendations that could lend much needed support to the rationale for school retreats and to their resourcing, and the professional development of retreat leaders.

## APPENDIX A

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



## Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Dr Graham English Sydney Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Prof Graham Rossiter Sydney Campus

**Student Researcher:** Ms Rachele Tulio Sydney Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

School Religious Retreats: Teachers' understandings of the nature and function of retreats and their perceptions of the skills required for the effective conduct of senior school retreats.

**for the period:** February 2004 to June 2004

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** N2003.04-20

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

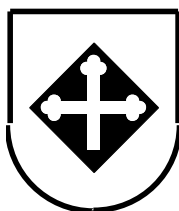
Signed: .....  
(Research Services Officer, Strathfield Campus)

Date: 3/2/2004



## APPENDIX B

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS



**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY**

School of Religious Education

## CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: School Religious Retreats: Teachers' understandings of the nature and function of retreats and their perceptions of the skills required for the effective conduct of senior school retreats.

NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS or SUPERVISORS: Dr Graham English and Dr Graham Rossiter.

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]: Ms Rachele Tullio.

I ..... (*the participant*) have read or, have had read to me and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time . I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE

.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE: .....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

*Rachele Tullio*

DATE:

APPENDIX C  
INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

I am a doctoral student who is interested in researching school-based religious retreats.

Retreats are an important feature of the Catholic school curriculum. Students in Australia have had opportunities to attend school retreats since the 1950's. Over the years, retreats have changed. Those responsible for retreats and how they are conducted has changed dramatically. I would like to research what teachers' understandings of retreats are and what teachers say are the necessary skills they need to have an effective school based, live-away retreat.

There are no possible risks, inconveniences or discomforts to you through this research.

In accepting to be a participant in this research, I will need to interview you at your school in a quiet room for forty minutes.

The potential benefits to you and to other teachers in Catholic secondary schools are positive ones. Participants involved in this research will be able to inform the researcher about the practicalities and skills needed for retreat involvement. It would be an opportunity to make recommendations to improve retreats based on their personal experience and perceptions. It is hoped that any practical recommendations will be made available to society in general, in particular, those agencies that are involved in teacher training courses.

Should you decide to withdraw your consent for this research at anytime, you are free to do so without having to justify that decision. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice you future care or academic progress.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from it. Schools will not be identified by name or location and participant's names or other identification will not be used during the interview and during the analysis of the data.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor.....name and to me.

Should you wish to contact me on completion of this project, I am happy to respond to your queries.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have a query that the Supervisor or I have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

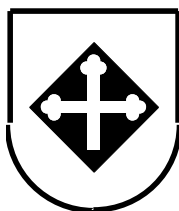
Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Sydney campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: 02 9701 4159  
Fax: 02 9701 4350

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me.

Yours truly

Rachele Tullio

## APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS INVITING THEIR STAFF TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
RESEARCH PROJECT

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY**

School of Religious Education

## INFORMATION LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

**TITLE OF PROJECT: School Religious Retreats: Teachers' understandings of the nature and function of retreats and their perceptions of the skills required for the effective conduct of senior school retreats.**

.....  
(block letters)

**NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS or SUPERVISORS: Dr Graham English and Dr Graham Rossiter.....**

(block letters)

**and/or NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER : Ms Rachele Tullio .....**  
(block letters)

**AND NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED: Doctor of Education.....**

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student who is interested in researching school-based religious retreats. I would like to access your teachers to participate in my project for the purpose of exploring teacher understandings of retreats.

Retreats are an important feature of the Catholic school curriculum. Students in Australia have had opportunities to attend school retreats since the 1950's. Over the years, retreats have changed. Those responsible for retreats and how they are conducted has changed dramatically. I would like to research what teachers' understandings of retreats are and what teachers say are the necessary skills they need to have an effective school based, live-away retreat.

There are no possible risks, inconveniences or discomforts to you, to your teachers or to your school through this research.

In accepting to be a participant in this research, I will need to interview your Year 11 teachers or at your school in a quiet room for forty minutes.

The potential benefits to you and to other teachers in Catholic secondary schools are positive ones. Participants involved in this research will be able to inform the researcher about the practicalities and skills needed for retreat involvement. It would be an opportunity to make recommendations to improve retreats based on their personal experience and perceptions. It is hoped that any practical recommendations will be made available to society in general, in particular, those agencies that are involved in teacher training courses. I intend to publish the data in summary form in academic journals for teachers interested in religious education.

Should you decide to withdraw your consent for this research at anytime, you are free to do so without having to justify that decision. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice you future care or academic progress.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research by not discussing the interviews with others with the exception of my supervisors. Your school will not be identified by name or location during the interview and during the analysis of the data. I will discuss all matters confidential with supervisors, and I will not disclose confidential matters to others except with the approval of my principal supervisor, Dr Graham English.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to:

Dr Graham English  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Mail Bag 2002  
Strathfield NSW 2135  
Ph: 02 9701 4310

Or to me at:  
Rachele Tullio  
1 Pierce Street  
GRANGE SA 5022  
Ph: 08 8355 6223

Should you wish to contact me on completion of this project, I am happy to respond to your queries on the above number.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have a query that the Supervisor or I have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Sydney campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: 02 9701 4159  
Fax: 02 9701 4350

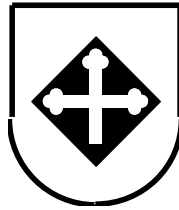
If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me. Any complaint will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

Yours truly

Rachele Tullio

## APPENDIX E

## INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY**

School of Religious Education

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**INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

**TITLE OF PROJECT: School Religious Retreats: Teachers' understandings of the nature and function of retreats and their perceptions of the skills required for the effective conduct of senior school retreats.**

**NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS or SUPERVISORS:** Dr Graham English and Dr Graham Rossiter.

**and/or NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER :** Ms Rachele Tullio.

**AND NAME OF PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** Doctor of Education.

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> May 2004

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral student who is interested in researching school-based religious retreats. You are invited to participate in my project for the purpose of exploring teacher understandings of retreats.

Retreats are an important feature of the Catholic school curriculum. Students in Australia have had opportunities to attend school retreats since the 1950's. Over the years, retreats have changed. Those responsible for retreats and how they are conducted has changed dramatically. I would like to research what teachers' understandings of retreats are and what teachers say are the necessary skills they need to have an effective school based, live-away retreat.

There are no possible risks, inconveniences or discomforts to you through this research.

In accepting to be a participant in this research, I will need to interview you at your school in a quiet room for forty minutes.

The potential benefits to you and to other teachers in Catholic secondary schools are positive ones. Participants involved in this research will be able to inform the researcher about the practicalities and skills needed for retreat involvement. It would be an opportunity to make recommendations to improve retreats based on their personal experience and perceptions. It is hoped that any practical recommendations will be made available to society in general, in particular, those agencies that are involved in teacher training courses. I intend to publish the data in summary form in academic journals for teachers interested in religious education.

Should you decide to withdraw your consent for this research at anytime, you are free to do so without having to justify that decision. If you withdraw you may also request that your data be destroyed. Any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice your future care or academic progress.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research by not discussing the interview with others with the exception of my supervisors. You will not be identified by name or location during the interview and during the analysis of the data. I will discuss all matters confidential with supervisors, and I will not disclose confidential matters to others except with the approval of my principal supervisor, Dr Graham English.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to:

Dr Graham English  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Religious Education  
Australian Catholic University  
Locked Mail Bag 2002  
Strathfield NSW 2135  
Phone 02 9701 4310

or to me at: 1 Pierce Street  
Grange SA 5022  
Work contact details: Phone: 08 8276 5528.

Should you wish to contact me on completion of this project, I am happy to respond to your queries on the above number.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have a query that the Supervisor or I have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services



Australian Catholic University  
Sydney campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: 02 9701 4159  
Fax: 02 9701 4350

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to me. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

Yours truly

*Rachele Tullio*

Rachele Tullio;  
27.11.03

Signed: *R. Tullio* .....Date:

Dr Graham English: Signed:.....Date:

Dr Graham Rossiter: Signed:.....Date:

*Australian Catholic University Limited ABN 15 050 192 660*

## APPENDIX F

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. Describe briefly an example of what made a live-in retreat enjoyable for you.
  2. Describe an example activity from a retreat to which the students appeared to respond very favourably.
  3. What do you think are the most valuable and important aspects of retreats for the students?
  4. Comment briefly on the role that group discussion plays in retreats.
  5. Comment briefly on the role of liturgy and prayer in retreats.
- 
1. What do you think about the emotion and euphoria may be generated on live-in retreats? How does this enhance or inhibit the success of a retreat?
  2. What do you think are the biggest problems with the actual conduct of retreats?
  3. What do you think are now the most important issues for the future of live in retreats in Catholic secondary schools?
  4. What do you think are the most important skills and dispositions of teachers needed for the successful conduct of retreats?
  5. Are there any other issues or questions about retreats that you would like to comment on?

Approximate time: 50 minutes

## APPENDIX G

List of key informants on the historical development and conduct of communitarian retreats in Catholic secondary schools

<b>Names of key informants who contributed oral history of retreats</b>	<b>Note on historical involvement in retreats</b>	<b>Notes on interview</b>
Ms Gloria Claessen	As a consultant in the Catholic Education Office in Canberra gave special attention to the training of teachers for conducting retreats, in the 1990s. Experience of the communitarian retreats in Sydney Catholic schools as a student 1973-1975	Recall of retreat development as a member of a religious order. Extensive involvement in retreat development.
Dr Graham English	Involvement in the Christian Brothers Retreat Team ( <i>Youth Apostolate Team</i> ) 1973-1975 as well as in voluntary Young Christian Student camps in the early 1970s.	Comments on the expertise levels of young religious conducting retreats and on the impact of Vatican II spirituality.
Br William Firman fsc	A key leadership figure in the development of communitarian retreats in Catholic secondary schools in Sydney from 1968.	Accounts of retreat development within the De La Salle Order schools.
Mr Denis Habermann	Involved in conducting communitarian retreats in the early 1970s and conducted training weekends for teachers interested in involvement in communitarian retreats 1990s.	Involvement in the practical training for teachers conducting retreats which included providing them with a retreat experience.
Fr Justin Ives cp	A priest in the Passionist Order who had extensive involvement and leadership in Christian Living Camps in Sydney 1968-1980	Confirmation of the first Adelaide communitarian retreat and those involved. Collaborated on the Christian Living Camps with Br Bernard Neville and with the first CLCs in Sydney late 1960s and 1970s.
Prof Patricia Malone rsj	Involved in the earliest Christian Living Camps in Sydney 1968 and with knowledge and experience of the Stranger Camp movement in Melbourne in the late 1970s.	Insights into the nature and purpose of earliest Christian Living Camps.
Br Patrick McCarthy fsc	A key leader in the development of communitarian retreats in Sydney 1968 onwards.	Recall of retreat development in Sydney.
Mr Bernard Neville	Conducted the first communitarian retreats Adelaide 1964. Leadership in the development	Provided a detailed scope and sequence

	of retreats in Adelaide and Sydney schools.	of how the first communitarian style retreat originated.
Mr Patrick O'Reilly	Teacher and Catholic Education Office Religious Education Consultant involved in the conduct of retreats in Catholic schools 1990s and 2000s	Extensive involvement in retreats.
Fr Michael Mason	Founded the 'Stranger Camps' in Melbourne in the late 1970s.	Recall of the development of Melbourne retreats in an interview with G Rossiter.
Prof Graham Rossiter	Involved in the conduct of Christian Living Camps for students and parents in the North Sydney region 1970-1985.	Comprehensive information provided about the development of retreats in Catholic schools.

## APPENDIX H

List of overseas informants who provided information about communitarian school retreats

<i>Country</i>	<i>Name</i>
The United States of America	Prof Gabriel Moran Br George Van Grieken Br John Crawford Br Richard Moratto Prof Gloria Durka
Canada	Mr Don McLeod
The United Kingdom	Prof John Sullivan
Belgium	Prof Herman Lombaerts Prof Bert Roebben
Ireland	Mr Paddy Devitt
New Zealand	Br Kevin Wanden

## APPENDIX I

Examples of the use of similar psychological dynamics of retreats incorporated by different agencies.

***Public events***

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Retreat.

***Corporate structures***

Corporate Retreats; as conducted by Sheila Campbell; USA.

***Community health structures***

Hospital rehabilitation / physical therapy.

Mental/psychiatric institutions

Rehabilitation Centres for substance abuse.

Programs and clinics for withdrawal from alcoholism.

***Adolescent youth structures***

Operation Flinders: a South Australian-based program.

***School structures***

School Camps and/or alternative campus experiential programs.

***Television programs***

*Brat Camp*; Reality television: USA and United Kingdom.

*Ladette to Lady*: Reality television program. UK and Australia.

*The Abbey*: Women experience life in a monastic institution.

*Big Brother*: Competition program.

## APPENDIX J

Key content areas for professional development programs on the conduct of retreats.

### **Nature and purposes of retreats**

- Exploration of the aims and purposes of retreats showing the importance of community building, personal relationships, spirituality, prayer and liturgy.

### **Psychological and community dynamics of retreat**

- Understanding of how development of community and friendship generates emotion and euphoria; and of how this needs to be managed sensitively and non-manipulatively so that students can be helped to translate emotional experience into longer term learning about relationships and community.
- Appreciation of the sensitive but valuable place for the sharing of personal insights on retreats while aiming discussions at a general educational level where there is a sensed freedom for participants as to whether or not they will make personal disclosures. Identification of potential problems: E.g. excessive attention given by teachers telling their ‘personal stories’ as stimulus material for promoting personal life story sharing in the small groups will come across to students as contrived and somewhat manipulative.
- Understanding of the use of a variety of activities and content for stimulus material – including film extracts, short readings, song lyrics, poetry, Scripture, and short verbal inputs; as well as activities like community singing, dancing, role plays etc. Addressing potential problems with inflexibility and repetition in programs.
- Understanding principles of retreat programming to show how various elements contribute to the ‘flow’ of a retreat program; this leads to skills in discernment about what is needed in a program and about how it may need modification or adjustment during the course of a retreat – depending on how well the initially planned activities appear to be working.
- Identifying the need for retreat planning by adult retreat teams.
- Identifying potential problems with regard to ‘personal disclosures’ in small group discussions. E.g. finding a balance in facilitating ‘personal’ discussions without psychological pressure on anyone to make personal disclosures; confidentiality; identification of vulnerable students and students with problems who may require referral to professional counselling; being aware of what requires mandatory reporting according to child protection legislation.
- Understanding of the key role of adult retreat leaders. Guidelines for appropriate personal relationships between staff and students – given that the quality of personal relationships is a key aspect of community development on retreats. Awareness of potential problems such as:- immature fraternisation; inordinate counselling interest; aloofness.

### **Spiritual dimension to retreats**

- Understanding of the psychological dynamics of retreats where opportunities to ‘get away’, ‘be with friends’, develop new relationships, have personal

discussions are linked with religious activities like reflection, review of life, prayer and celebration of religious rituals.

- Planning and celebrating liturgies on retreats
- Reconciliation and 'healing' rituals; potentialities and problems.

#### **Understanding youth spirituality**

- Understanding of contemporary youth spirituality and of social and cultural influences.
- An understanding of group dynamics that will help group leaders in small group discussions.

#### **Place in the school curriculum and problems with the timetabling and implementing of retreats**

- Information about the nature, purposes and activities of retreats that is to be given to the whole school staff, and to parents and students. Strategies for addressing conflict among staff over the place and resources committed to retreats in the school.
- Exploring the potential for the involvement of volunteers such as past pupils and some interested parents in the conduct and supervision of retreats and of appropriate training for them.

#### **Supervision, duty of care and risk management**

- Identifying potential disciplinary problems and considering strategies for avoiding and minimising such problems.
- Responsibilities for supervision and discipline. Duty of care responsibilities. Awareness of child protection laws and potential implications for the conduct of retreats.
- Developing a code of retreat ethics for teachers that specify the professional standards to which they will be committed.
- Identifying possible problems and risk reduction strategies.



## APPENDIX K

**Example of a proposed retreat program for Year 12 students that gives more attention to ‘content’ than to the thematic of ‘telling your own personal story’**

Marisa Crawford  
Graham Rossiter  
September 2008

**General note about the retreat**

This sketch notes various sessions on particular topics that could be included. It does not provide a detailed timetable, nor a precise sequence of topics/sessions. It could be implemented over two full days of retreat work. It is provided as an example of ideas/inputs/activities that could be included or which could lead to the development of similar or complementary items.

A key aspect of the retreat should be the adults helping create a space of tranquility for the young people to reflect about what is going on in their lives – a key opportunity for some personal review.

Teenagers like collaborative learning. In groups they can look at things generally, with space for personal reflection. But they do not have to disclose their own views in the small group. They may share personal insights if they wish, but there is no pressure on them to ‘perform’ at that level. This expectation needs to be clear so that an atmosphere of freedom permeates any group discussion.

There is a need for more specificity in content for consideration and discussion. As a general guide, topics need to be relevant to young people’s lives. This can include a number of aspects of personal/spiritual development as well as some contemporary personal/social issues (for example, as well as specifically spiritual/religious and personal development topics the program might look at : personal relationships, the use of alcohol, the partying mentality etc.).

**Travel from assembly at school to the retreat venue**

**1. RETREAT INTRODUCTION** (E.g. after arrival at the retreat venue by bus)

So called ‘warm up’, ‘getting to know you’ or ‘ice-breaker’ activities, which were used initially for inter-school groups where the students did not know each other, are not relevant to a group of students from one school who already know each other. Such activities are therefore largely redundant and unnecessary, as well as time wasting. The relaxation and ‘warming up’ has already occurred on the bus on the way to the retreat facility.

**Clarification of expectations**

Explanation of the expectations for the retreat to the whole group; running rules and any disciplinary matters are clarified.

This includes an account of the purposes of inputs as well as of the role of the small groups.

The retreat is regarded as a valuable opportunity for thinking and talking about people's search for meaning and happiness in life; some of the wisdom from the Catholic tradition and insights from the adult group leaders will help with these considerations.

While the small groups provide great scope for talking over issues and questions, this is done with respect for the privacy and freedom of all participants. While participants can learn much from sharing ideas, the group is not a therapy group or for personal problem-solving, and there will be no pressure on anyone to make personal disclosures.

## **2. SPIRITUALITY Short input with follow up discussion on spirituality.**

This session will help the students consider at what point in their spiritual development they feel they are at during this stage of their lives.

It could begin with a mini-talk, explaining what religious spirituality was like in the past and how things are different today.

- Catholics are encouraged by their tradition to look towards oneness with the universe;
- Spirituality is what defines people as truly human;
- The search for something valuable and spiritual in life is not done just in mundane terms, but it can be more helpful if done as part of a community of searchers for meaning;
- Spirituality can be evident in the values that people live by; Links with mysticism and sense of transcendence and religious experience.

### **Group discussion**

The students could try to identify what are the aspects of their lives that are 'other than' catering for their own personal needs and the mundane. What takes them outside their natural preoccupations (friends, fashion, pimples, texting, music etc.)? How might they feel connected with others, the world the cosmos, the divine? E.g. a passage showing someone connecting with nature, a numinous experience.

Possibly make use of colour slides/pictures, music & pictures

A group discussion can confirm their findings.

Participants' own personal views will come in naturally.

### **Reflection**

Following the discussion there is an opportunity for individuals to reflect further on this topic. They could talk about it to someone if they wish.

## **3. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT Insights into personal development**

Short input on what personal development is and how it occurs

For example: this could make use of a scaled down version of Fowler's stages of believing (or Erikson's stages of personal/identity/social development) to provide some framework and reference ideas about personal development that could help the students see where they think they might be with reference to this scheme;

- They could reflect on what they thought they were like when they were at particular stages;
- Can they see something about what increasing maturity might mean within this framework?
- They could identify examples of people acting maturely and showing concern for others as well as examples of immaturity;

- The scheme used is one of a number that might have been used – all usually provide some useful insights; they provide some plan or ‘spectrum’ for personal development that can help individuals in their own personal review of life;
- The personal development schemes help in identifying the values in people’s behaviour and it helps make an evaluation through this scheme as a sort of ‘lens’ for highlighting key aspects of personal development.

### **Discussion**

Students could sit in pairs, 3s or 4s and talk over their reflections on the ideas just put to them in the input. They could talk about where they saw themselves fitting into or diverging from the scheme. They could talk about figures they know in the local community who might fit various parts of the scheme.

- The students could prepare a chart to show what behaviours or signs of different stages of development might be evident in the whole life of the school across all year levels;
- This could help them see the notion of ‘progression’ in stages of personal development;
- They could also suggest how this scheme might help them see similar stages in the actions of community leaders and celebrities (including music and film/television stars);
- The group could prepare a poster on this topic for display.

The discussion is about making judgment calls about how mature different behaviour is regarded and about how a genuine spirituality is something that goes beyond self interest; this helps with the appraisal of spiritual values

### **4. MEDITATION Meditation in context**

**Introduction:** This could begin with a very short input on the origins of meditation and its different types of contribution. E.g. Christian monastic tradition; Transcendental meditation; Mystical dimension; Psychological effects (calming etc.).

Experiential meditation: May be aided by a tape with ideas for reflection; use of music and perhaps visuals; could also use incense and water sounds. Sometimes a ‘guided’ meditation with music and words to suggest themes.

### **5. COMMUNITY What does it mean to belong to a community**

This session would help students explore ideas about the notion of community. Hopefully it would help them understand something of the centrality of sense of community to the retreat experience. Ideas for consideration could be:-

- The idea of both contributing to and receiving from a community would also be noted; and what makes for the development of community and what tends to diminish it.
- The early Christian community – what it would have been like; celebration of Eucharist in those communities.
- How do contemporary families celebrate their experience of community.
- How does the school celebrate community.

- How within the context of a community there can be feeling of support and sense of group identity.
- Considerations tied into preparation for the retreat group's own celebration of Eucharist

Teachers and students could be involved with the preparation of symbols for celebration of Eucharist. Each group elects someone to talk about their symbolic representation. Also explain choice of readings. Organize a 'sacred space' where the celebration will be held. If no priest is available for mass, then the groups organize their own retreat para-liturgy

## **6. FORGIVENESS RITUAL This could involve sacramental Reconciliation**

*A healing/forgiveness ritual:* Previously there had been too much emotion – apparently for its own sake; and this got the idea of a forgiveness ritual (with our without sacramental reconciliation) out of perspective. Hence there was a need to be less 'emotionally ambitious' if such a ritual is conducted. For example, it could take the form of a more quiet/reflective activity; possibly with appropriate music as well. If there is sacramental reconciliation, this needs to be integrated within a prayerful/reflective ceremony.

Avoid the 'sins on paper' and 'burning' ritual which seems to have been repeated without much change since the early 1970s. Rather try to put the notion of Christian reconciliation/confession briefly into some historical context. Look at different ways the Catholic Church has looked Sacrament of Penance/Confession/Reconciliation. What does it really mean? What psychological and religious functions does it have?

Prompt for persona reflection about wanting to change one's life. Think about whether they may be going about this in a constructive or destructive way. Think about whether one may continue to do the same things and causing the same problems again and again – or can one learn from experience.

The notion of reconciliation means some harmony in one's life. And this does not happen without hard work. People may need help with this. This is where sacramental reconciliation may come in.

## **7. CELEBRATION OF EUCHARIST (or if a priest is not available, a para-liturgy developed by the whole retreat group)**

The celebration of Mass needs to be related to 5 above about community and the place of Eucharist within the context of Christian community.

There is a need for time for groups to explain the symbols they have developed for the Mass.

## **8. CONCLUDING SESSION – SPIRITUALITY FOR LIFE Opportunity for tying up what has been considered and done during the retreat.**

It is an opportunity for some 'consolidation' of what has been covered.

Maybe make use of the summary of 9 key aspects of Youth Spirituality (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, pp. 224-226). Students could be asked to consider the 9 characteristics. Do they agree with them? Would they modify them? What might they want to add or subtract.

There may be an activity like writing a letter to themselves about their spirituality; or it might be a letter about the review of their life they have worked on during the retreat.

## **9. Other notes on program**

*Free time:* This should be free time for students; if they wished, this could include allowing them to work on a school assessment task (often a concern for Year 12 students even at retreat time) rather than ban all academic work during free time with the requirement that the students be 'sociable'. Students' own selection of music could be played in free time.

*Mobile phones:* Students should be told in advance that their use is not permitted on the retreat; any use for an emergency could be handled by the teacher/supervisors.

*Music background at lunch time:* This helps make the retreat into a different sort of experience; but it could be turned off once all students were seated and eating. Music could also be played during clean up work and perhaps during afternoon tea (E.g. sound tracks from some films). With choice of background music establish that this is a 'different experience' – hence music in context when they are not familiar with it.

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