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A Rhythm, Ritual and Rule for a Wisdom Monastic Community for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A RHYTHM, RITUAL AND RULE
FOR A WISDOM MONASTIC COMMUNITY
FOR SECOND HALF OF LIFE PILGRIMS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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Portland Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 22, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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DEDICATION

To Rev. Mark Oldenburg and Rev. Margee Iddings,
who taught me to listen for and recognize the voice of God within.

“We are all just walking each other home.”

— Ram Dass

“Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

the last of life,

for which the first was made.

Our times are in his hand who saith,

‘A whole I planned, youth shows but half;

Trust God:

See all, nor be afraid!”

— Robert Browning

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the establishing of a wisdom monastic community to nurture disciples living into the Second Half of Life. A critical problem facing mainline churches today is the increasing number of US-American adults describing themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.” In 2012, a survey by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life documented that 20 percent of the adults in the United States classify themselves as religiously unaffiliated. Adding to this population are longtime, faithful lay leaders announcing they are “done” with church. Recent research suggests that a growing number of these adults leave congregations that have nurtured their faith through the First Half of Life because churches are ill equipped to offer spiritual nurture for the Second Half of Life. In this dissertation, the researcher explores whether a local spiritual community can effectively nurture the continuing spiritual growth of people living in the Second Half of the Life by establishing a wisdom monastic community. Section One addresses the problems both churches and believers are facing through an exploration of the spiritual needs of those moving in the Second Half of Life. Section Two identifies and evaluates alternative solutions to the ministry problem of continued spiritual nurture for Second Half of Life pilgrims. Section Three introduces A Rhythm, Ritual and Rule for a Wisdom Monasticism tailored for pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. Section Four posits an artifact description of the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule of a Wisdom Monastic Community, including the survey summary, questions conducted to find Second Half of Life Pilgrims and transcripts of interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims. Section Five offers the artifact specification. The Final Section offers a

postscript, providing suggestions for further research. The artifact concludes the dissertation.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Recent studies suggest that a growing number of adults leave congregations who have nurtured their faith through the First Half of Life because churches are ill equipped to offer spiritual nurture for the Second Half of Life. Second Half of Life refers to a social, emotional and spiritual stage of human development. In the First Half of Life a person focuses on the developmental tasks of establishing an identity and addressing the question, “Who am I?” Once this question has been satisfactorily addressed, and a person lives comfortably in their own skin, he or she transitions into the Second Half of Life where the focus becomes the developmental task of “meaning making.” In this season of life, a person addresses the question, “What does ‘this’ mean?... What does my life mean? What does my work mean? What does suffering mean? What difference am I making in the world?”¹ Congregations offer tremendous support to pilgrims in the First Half of Life as they seek to understand their spiritual landscape and who they are as children of God. As these pilgrims transition into the Second Half of Life, however, traditional answers and teachings from their congregation do not satisfactorily address the “meaning making” questions of this season. The dissonance created between Second Half of Life pilgrims and their faith communities most often leads these pilgrims out of their congregations in search of answers elsewhere.

In my pastoral work I encountered some of these Second Half of Life pilgrims. Curious to understand their spiritual needs more fully, I invited them to tell me about their faith journeys. Capturing their stories, in the voice and vernacular they chose, is

¹ For further study into the Second Half of Life see the works of John Fowler, Richard Rohr, Ken Wilbur or James Hollis.

important because it best identifies the ministry problem. I draw from these actual vignettes to address the ministry problem they articulate so well. Listening deeply to their longings, gifts and struggles contributed to the shape of my ministry solution.²

Pilgrim Voices

Kristin: *I don't feel like I grow any more from going to church.... it feels lonely. There's no good solution. We've already tried it all.*

Kristin grew up in the conservative, fundamentalist, Evangelical Free Church. Since heading off for college she's participated in Presbyterian, Vineyard and Episcopal faith communities. While living in Guatemala, Kristin's experience of worshipping with the only English-speaking gathering changed what church looked like for her. "That church was my saving grace while living in that country. It was very relational and community focused. They became our community, our family. It was a very significant spiritual experience."

Upon her return from Guatemala, Kristin began looking to smaller churches for a community experience, realizing that connection mattered more for her than theology. But as her family grew, their growing spiritual needs led them to churches with different gifts: a youth group for her teenage daughter, liturgy and weekly communion, small groups, etc. Always though, something was missing. "I don't really know how to describe it. I don't feel like I grow any more from going to church. Sermons are a waste of time. There is no sense of vulnerability with our spiritual life, no openness to experience God in a new way. So, I started reading this Buddhist book. The Buddhists have a wonderful meditation and I'd like to practice it together with members of my

² I have either been granted permission to use these stories for this dissertation, and/or names have been changed.

church. I anticipate being met with a lot of fear. I think practicing things outside our faith tradition is perceived as a big ‘no-no.’ But, there are gifts in the Eastern traditions that would enhance our worship experience, and take us into a deeper more meaningful relationship with God and one another, and to have self-awareness. I am longing for all of those things. In the meantime my current faith journey feels lonely. There’s no good solution. We’ve already tried everything our protestant tradition has to offer.”

Terry: *I want a creative, innovative offering that allows me to rejoin Church without going back to the First Half of Life churches I left...I don't know how to do that.*

Terry grew up in the Reformed Church of the Midwest and served as a pastor in megachurches in California. During his pastoring years, a Pauline Greek theology shaped Terry’s paradigm, and he found that satisfying. As Terry aged towards retirement, however, a restlessness set in, as well as an openness to other spiritual traditions, that Terry describes as a spiritual transition into the Second Half of Life. Terry’s longing for continued spiritual growth could not be met in traditional Christian churches and led him to the Buddhist community, where he practiced meditation and experienced a shift in perception that allows him to re-engage his Christian tradition with fresh eyes. Terry does not want to go back to the traditional Pauline theology of his early ministry years, but instead to the Jesus who cares about the poor and marginalized.

Terry describes an image of himself sitting as a Christian in the middle of a circle of mirrors from other spiritual traditions: Sufi, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish. Each mirror reflects a truth he came to know as a Christ follower after listening to the mystical language of Paul and John, and reading those passages metaphorically rather than literally. Terry discovered it was easier to return to Scripture than local churches, which

continue to interpret through the more traditional paradigm. For a while Terry withdrew from the Christian community, wandering in the Buddhist tradition by reading and practicing Buddhist meditation and exploring Buddha's teaching through his relationships with practicing Buddhists. In the end, however, Terry says, "I will always be Christian. Other traditions show me parts of Christianity I missed and give me fresh language to re-engage the Christian story. Still, I want a creative, innovative offering that allows me to rejoin Church without going back to the First Half of Life churches I left. I have a yearning for Christian spiritual community. My 'church' is now on Tuesday afternoon when I meet with a friend, or a Thursday afternoon when I meet with my therapist/spiritual director. Wouldn't it be something to gather the Tuesday and Thursday afternoon folks into one space? I don't know how to do that."

Pat: *I'm a student of Buddha and a follower of Christ.*

After sixteen years of Catholic education, Pat entered the convent looking for a community that would deepen her relationship with God. After a year, she realized the convent was the wrong answer. Not knowing where else to look, she redirected her focus to what everyone else was doing: getting married, raising children and professional work. Important milestones in this season brought her back to church—her children's baptism and religious education—but every reentry remained unsatisfying. During a twenty-year dry season, Pat resonated with the poem, *The Hound of Heaven*. "I knew God followed after me. I felt so alone out there, but also felt this longing for divine connection." Discovering Kathleen Brehony's book, *Awakening in Midlife*, drew the dry season to a close as Pat explored and opened to a deeper connection with herself, and the divine. Her

midlife awakening soon ushered in the end of her 28-year marriage, and then her life broke open completely when her son committed suicide.

“That experience wiped the slate clean. This series of losses created a whole new level of consciousness.” Pat’s local church could not hold that level of paradigm shift. “I was beyond dogma. I had been broken open into a broader relationship with myself and divine. The church’s answers to life’s losses didn’t work anymore.” So, when an invitation to a Buddhist program offered a way to explore what lay “outside the box,” Pat signed up. The program introduced Pat to a non-dual paradigm, spiritual practices such as meditation, and new levels of awareness of divine energies like joy and loving-kindness. After six years, Pat emerged from this sojourn among the Buddhist community “knowing the Buddhist practice opened up something important in me, but there is some way that I am deeply imprinted with Christ. I would say to my Buddhist community, ‘I am a student of Buddha, but a follower of Christ.’”³

I met Pat when she returned once more to the Church⁴ in 2014, still trying to connect with the great cosmological Christ.⁵ She discovered the answer was still “no.” The Church continued to teach and preach about the specificity of God’s incarnation in Jesus, but not about the universal presence of God in the Cosmological Christ. The connection she sought with the divine was not to be found there. Pat continues to search for a shared experience of the body of Christ, an experience of communion as connection

³ Kristin, Pat and Terry all found themselves drawn to Buddhism as they searched for new paradigms and practices congruent with their emerging spiritual needs and questions. While the Church’s tradition of the Desert Abba’s and Amma’s might have also addressed their spiritual questions, Buddhism is more prevalent in our culture.

⁴ The “Church” refers to institutional, denominational experience of church.

⁵ The cosmological Christ refers to the experience of Jesus described in Colossians 1:15 as “the image of the invisible God.” The one who is “before all things, and in whom all things hold together.”

with one another and the great mystery of the living Christ. Pat longs for both the sacred ritual of the meal and the community gathered by it, but in a larger paradigm than the traditional church offers and in a language the traditional Church does not speak.

Joan: *I come to church so I can take communion with my grandmother.*

Joan is a grandmother, a widow, serves on the healing team and is a spiritual elder in her congregation. Joan comes every week to “Prayer and Prose,” a gathering at church, where members of the congregation reflect on Cynthia Bourgeault’s books about the Wisdom tradition.⁶ Joan eagerly embraces this way of thinking about church, reality, and God. I thought Pat would find these exercises surprisingly challenging, but I was the one surprised. “I’ve always thought about faith this way,” she responded, when asked what she thinks about Bourgeault’s statement—that the Christian life is about “theosis”—transformation into likeness and union like God, “I’ve just never known anyone else who thought about faith this way.”

When I asked Joan about why she worships in a community that seems out of step with her faith journey, Joan told me about her grandmother: “When I was a little girl, I came to church with my grandmother. She recited the service with the priest. I can still feel her presence in the pew when I worship. She’s next to me when I kneel at the communion rail. I come to church so I can take communion with my grandmother.”

I asked Joan how the church could nurture her spiritual journey. “I love the service, I love the music. I don’t need the sermons. Now that we have this group, I have everything I need.”

⁶ I created the “Prayer and Prose” gathering congregants who hungered for a sacred experience that transcended traditional book and Bible study. This group gathered for Centering Prayer, Chanting and book study.

The “Dones”

In recent years, I’ve noticed people like Pat, Terry and Kristin showing up for contemplative experiences I lead, but rarely for worship, adult formation or other programs offered where I pastored. When Pat stopped worshipping with our congregation a year after she first showed up, I invited her and Gary, her partner, to share their experience with me. Why had they come? Why had they left? Why do they continue to participate in the contemplative experiences I lead? Their story startled me. They had been very active in their church ten years earlier: Sunday School teachers, adult formation leaders, elders and elected officials. And then after years of leadership they quit. They were tired, and they were done participating in institutional church, both as leaders and participants. They disappeared for a decade.

While they were gone, Pat and Gary’s faith journey continued as they discovered programs and experiences that nurtured their spiritual life in ways the church never had. Then one Easter morning they returned to their local church. Jumping back in, they signed up to help lead the adult formation class, eager to share what they had learned during their ten-year sabbatical. It didn’t go well. Few people resonated with their new perspectives on Scripture and theology. The priest leading the Sunday morning discussion didn’t seem to know what to do with them. They left again, deciding it was less lonely to gather with a mutual friend on Friday nights for spiritual conversation and discussion.

Pat and her partner seemed like an anomaly until I ran across an article about “The Dones,” a fast-growing cross section of the US of such significance, sociologists

have identified similar characteristics and assigned them a name. Roughly 30 million Americans are former churchgoers who nevertheless maintain their faith in God and their Christian identity, according to Josh Packard, a sociologist of religion at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley who coined the term.⁷ Among other defining characteristics, Packard distinguishes The Dones who are leaving “The Sunday morning experience” by the tens of millions as:

- Leaving religious institutions, although they still want to be on a spiritual journey with others;
- Seeing faith not as being about rituals and doctrine, but about individuals coming together and enjoying an honest exchange of views; and
- Getting together and finding other ways to do life and community together, and they are not so hung up on, ‘Do you believe what I believe?’⁸

After reading this article, I realized that I knew other Dones, like Kristin and Terry. And while Joan doesn’t look like a Done because she continues to attend worship and offers her gifts in certain ministries, she shares in common with Dones a sense that the church no longer nurtures her spiritual journey. Until I began offering the “Prayer and Prose” gathering, Joan didn’t consider the church a place where her faith could grow.

Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope’s “Dones” Research

Sociologists Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope are among the first to research why an emerging community of Christians, identified as the “Dones” have joined the

⁷ Harry Bruinius, “Why These Americans Are ‘Done’ with Church, but Not with God?” December 19, 2015, accessed on October 28, 2016, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2015/1219/Why-these-Americans-are-done-with-church-but-not-with-God>.

⁸ Ibid.

“Nones”⁹ in the exodus from institutional churches. Packard and Hope describe the Dones as church members who “display an extreme level of dedication and devotion to God and religion, and who honestly believe that the institutional church can be fixed and reclaimed. They believe it’s worth fighting for right up to the point where they don’t.”¹⁰

According to research published in 2014 by George Barna and David Kinnaman “the dechurched¹¹ represents 33 percent of the American population...and is the fastest growing segment.”¹² Packard and Hope summarize their findings about why the Dones are leaving church this way. Dones hoped for:

- Community...and got judgment;
- Active roles in affecting the life of the church...and got bureaucracy;
- Conversation... and got doctrine; and
- Meaningful engagement with the world...and got moral prescription.¹³

While many people leave churches because of anger over theological disagreements, church governance or conflicts with pastors and other leaders, Barna, Kinnaman, Hope and Packard all claim that “the dechurched are not angry in general.” And while they may not be angry, many dechurched in Packard and Hope’s research acknowledge pushing against something in their leaving—mainly judgment, bureaucracy,

⁹ “Nones” is the name given by researchers to the group of adults who do not identify with a religious group.

¹⁰ Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People are Done with Church but not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group Publisher, 2015), 25.

¹¹ Packard uses the word “dechurched” interchangeably with Dones to refer to people who have been active in church, and then leave. Packard distinguishes the Dones and “dechurched” from the Nones.

¹² Packard, 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

doctrine or moral prescription—as much as moving towards something else — community, conversation, meaningful engagement with the world. Barna and Kinnaman’s discoveries echo those of Packard and Hope: Dones “looked at the data provided by their own lived experiences and decided that Church is simply not where they can have the spiritual lives they want.”¹⁴ Instead, they find the spiritual lives they want out in the world, where they are integrating their faith with their daily lives.¹⁵

The Dones described by Hope and Packard’s research echo Terry’s experience of deeply dedicated service to the church, and then a felt need to leave. Like Kristin, the Dones long for deeper theological conversation, but find that conversation shut down or discouraged by references to doctrine. And similar to Kristin, Terry and Pat, the Dones in Packard’s research all long for community. They don’t experience community in their churches because of the distinction Brené Brown makes between, “fitting in” and “belonging”:

True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world ... True belonging does not require you to *change* who you are; it requires you to *be* who you are.¹⁶

This “belonging” that Kristin, Pat, and the Dones described by Packard and Hope, begins inside themselves. As they become aware of their shifting beliefs and faith paradigms, they realize they cannot remain in their congregations without silencing what is emerging in themselves. Barbara Brown Taylor, author of *Leaving Church: A Memoir*

¹⁴ Ibid. 20.

¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹⁶ Dan Schwabel, “Brene Brown: Why Human Connection Will Bring Us Closer Together,” *Forbes*, September 12, 2017, accessed December 19, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2017/09/12/brene-brown-why-human-connection-will-bring-us-closer-together/#457d5aea2f06>. Emphasis mine.

of Faith, and Rachel Held Evans, author of *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving and Finding the Church*, tell similar stories about the challenge of belonging to themselves, while also belonging to Church. These Dones, and many like them, leave the Church in order to belong to themselves, and their changing beliefs about God and faith. Their hope is to find other pilgrims on their path. As this community grows, it is likely they will too.

Alan Jamison’s “Leavers” Research

Packard and Hope’s findings are similar to what Alan Jamieson discovered about why members were leaving Evangelical Presbyterian Churches (EPC) in New Zealand. Jamieson’s “Leavers” describe their life in the church as something they “once found nurturing and encouraging. In fact, the very aspects of church they used to get the most out of and for a long time wouldn’t miss, now seems drab, uninviting and completely un-nurturing. It’s not that the church has changed—the point that often confuses both the potential leaver and those around them. The important change is what is going on within the individual.”¹⁷ Jamieson’s research identified different kinds of Leavers, with each group withdrawing for different reasons.

The group Jamieson identifies as the “Integrated Wayfinders” share the most in common with the Dones identified by Barna, Kinnaman, Packard and Hope. Jamieson describes Integrated Wayfinders as “those who have largely completed the task of rebuilding faith in ways that bring life, new ways of expression and greater connection to

¹⁷ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 128–129.

all aspects of their lives.¹⁸ They differ from Packard and Hope's Dones in that they can't be identified by what they are pushing against, but more by *what they are moving towards*. This distinction matters because the Wayfinders are operating from a less dualistic worldview. This is an attribute many believe emerges in later stages of faith development.¹⁹ Whereas before, they lived out their faith in their churches, as Sunday School teachers, ushers, and members of committees, "the majority of the Wayfinders feel their growing edge is in living out their faith in ordinary life...marriage and family life... and in their Christian community, and in 'seeing God's life become a daily reality,'" writes Jamieson.²⁰

Jamieson's Integrated Wayfinders seem to share more in common with Terry, Pat, Kristin, and Joan, than the Dones in Packard and Hope's research. Integrated Wayfinders shared similar theological paradigms and are comfortable with a less dualistic worldview, something Pat, Joan, and Terry mention as important elements of their spiritual journey. When Jamieson describes Wayfinders as believers in "the goodness inherent in human nature"²¹ and seeing "human weakness... as inviting God's compassion and forgiveness rather than judgment or punishment,"²² he captures the theological stance that emerged in my conversations with Terry, Pat, Kristin, and Joan. Another similarity includes valuing "the Bible as a record or source document. Wayfinders are clear that while they value

¹⁸ Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh, and Adrienne Thompson, *Five Years On: Continuing Faith Journeys of Those Who Left the Church* (Wellington, New Zealand: The Portland Research Trust, 2006), 73.

¹⁹ See Jung, Rohr, Wilbur, and Fowler.

²⁰ Jamieson, McIntosh, Thompson, *Five Years On*, 62.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² *Ibid.*

Scripture, they don't regard in the way they used to."²³ When Joan and Kristin talk about sermons no longer being a meaningful part of worship, it reflects the changing relationship with Scripture Terry mentioned when he spoke of reading the Bible more metaphorically than literally. Like some Wayfinders, Terry, Pat, Joan, and Kristin "can be described as comfortably ambiguous about the Bible."²⁴

The Nones and "Spiritual but Not Religious" (SBNR)

The Dones are not the only population of believers exploring a spiritual life outside the Church. The fastest growing spiritual community according to the Pew Research Center is the "Nones,"²⁵ or religiously unaffiliated:

The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One-fifth of the U.S. public—and a third of adults under 30—are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research Center polling.... However, a new survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, ... finds that many of the country's 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way.²⁶

"Nones," also often identified as the "spiritual, but not religious" (SBNR), articulate their beliefs about God, the human condition, community and the afterlife in language and ideas similar to the "Dones." For her book, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious*, Linda Mercandante interviewed one hundred people

²³ Ibid., 45–46.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The Nones and the Dones are similar, but not the same population. Dones are adults who've been active in a church group, and then leave. Nones may have grown up in church, but as adults do not identify with a church group-

²⁶ Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, October 9, 2012, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

who identified themselves as SBNR. In her book, Mercandante shares the stories of many of those interviewed. Amy, describes her evolving beliefs about God this way:

If we didn't accept Christ as our personal Savior, then we would die and go to hell... There was a full acceptance of God as a strict judge, but also that he was all loving at the same time. I'm not really grasping... how you can hold those two beliefs systems at the same time? ... I take that much less extremely and literally than I used to. It's much more sort of conceptual. I see God more as a Divine presence... It's evolving as I learn more... I could come to a place where God might not be a real entity, more of a concept. I'm not sure yet. I'm still working on that.²⁷

Jeff, another person in a growing community of questioners and sometimes seeming heretics, interviewed by Mercandante, uses language about his spiritual journey that sounds like the “theosis” conversation I had with Joan: “I see myself and everyone else as a god-in-training ... it is the same with Jesus and Buddha and maybe a lot of others²⁸ ... That's what we're working towards. I believe that we are working to progress.”²⁹ Mercandante, who interviewed people, from all generations, notes:

Judy Eberstark, the thoughtful and articulate Baby Boomer woman who is trying to reconcile her Protestant and Buddhist experiences... said of God: “I wouldn't say it's a sentient thing, but it is consciousness... It's conscious because it manifests itself in Jesus or Buddha.” Yoga instructor Becky Samuels framed it similarly: “God is not a separate consciousness to me. I think it's a lot like what Jesus says, especially in the Gospel of Thomas, what Buddha says, what many of the great wise thinkers, the special people in the past, have said, ‘The kingdom is within you and it's all around you’ ... to paraphrase one of the sayings of Thomas. You need to be aware of it, that's your practice. To be able to see it.”³⁰

²⁷ Linda Mercandante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109.

²⁸ I'm trying to objectively state how people responded to field research questions about where they are on their faith journey since leaving the church. Without taking position about their theology, these kinds of statements identify the problem I am addressing. How do we make room for these pilgrims as their spiritual paths take them where they try out new spiritual paradigms?

²⁹ Mercandante, 110.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 110–111.

The SBNR's use of "consciousness" language for God and their references to Buddha as easily as Jesus, echo the spiritual paths Pat, Terry, and Kristin have traveled. While researchers speak about the Dones and the SBNR as different groups of people, this distinction is not clear-cut. Terry and Pat are clearly both. They are Dones, pilgrims once deeply committed to their spiritual traditions, until they weren't. They are now SBNR, pilgrims deeply committed to their spiritual lives and relationships with God, *but not affiliated with a specific religious community.*

Second Half of Life: A Unifying Paradigm

Pat, Terry, and Kristin have joined the large, diverse, and growing community of pilgrims practicing their spirituality outside the Church. Researchers classify this group of by a variety of names: Dones, Nones, the SBNR, Leavers, and Dechurched. They emerge from a variety of faith traditions: evangelicals, main-line protestants and Roman Catholic, and some claim no originating spiritual tradition. Many of them are pilgrims who've left their worshipping communities, but they include people, like Joan, whose bodies fill the pews but whose heart and minds have moved into new spiritual landscapes. As different as these sub-groups may seem, they share in common changing paradigms about belief, God, human nature, and what it means to be on a spiritual path. This does not mean they share the *same* beliefs. Rather, the belief systems of the traditional Church, no longer work for them. They are moving along a continuum of spiritual development that has led them out of their originating spiritual communities, or kept them from finding a spiritual home to begin with.

Dr. Terry Nyhuis' dissertation, "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life"³¹ offers a unifying paradigm for understanding this diverse spiritual community. Nyhuis describes the diminishing capacity of the church to nurture the spiritual development of its most mature leaders. His research considers various developmental models for aging and uses the language of Richard Rohr and James Hollis that speaks of person's life as divided into First Half of Life and Second Half of Life tasks.³² During the First Half of Life a person is "largely concerned about *surviving successfully* ... establishing an identity, a home, friends, community, security, and building a proper platform for our only life."³³ The contrast between the First Half of Life that focuses externally on ego building, and the Second Half of Life, which shifts to an internal focus on spiritual growth, is profound, claims Nyhuis and the developmental theorists and theologians who influence his work. This shift towards inner spiritual work describes well the kind of seeking that led Terry, Pat, and Kristin out of their churches. They went in search of other traditions that led them inward with practices such as meditation. The shift towards inner work also explains why Joan no longer found the church a spiritually nurturing place. Each began asking different questions than their churches were addressing, because in Second Half of Life the questions change.³⁴ Nyhuis

³¹ While the transition into Second Half of Life often begins at mid-life, identified by Nyhuis' research on Baby Boomers, this is not universally true. Rohr, in his work on *A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (N.p.: Franciscan Media, 2004), connects this transition to an unplanned and unexpected event that pulls us downward into a dying process that is largely a matter of timing. Kristin is not a Baby Boomer, but clearly is transitioning into the Second Half of Life.

³² Terry L. Nyhuis, "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life (Challenges for Boomers and Their Churches)," Doctor of Ministry, Paper 136, 2016, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/136>.

³³ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), xiii-xiv.

³⁴ James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 86.

explores the struggle Baby Boomers face as they transition into “the Second Half of Life along the developmental spectrum of life, and discover that their transformed values, perspectives, and beliefs no longer resonate with those of churches oriented to the First Half of Life ... Differences between the values, perspectives, and beliefs of the First and Second Half of Life are significant and deep. The resulting lack of resonance causes pain and confusion.”³⁵

I heard this pain and confusion when Pat talked about her church’s inability to offer her support after her son’s suicide, or when Kristin says, “There is no openness to experience God in a new way.” In Kristin, Pat, Joan, and Terry I hear longing for the inward path Jesus refers to when he says, “The Kingdom of God is within you.”³⁶ Pat and Kristin struggle to find a church that supports this journey. Their dissonance with the Church is understandable. These themes are also echoed in Packard, Hope, Mercandante, and Jamieson’s research. Jamieson’s *Wayfinders* express a comfort with mystery and uncertainty, which they find hampered by the institutional church’s need to “nail things down” with doctrines and creedal statements.³⁷

Nyhuis’ research not only describes the contrast between First Half of Life work to build identity and ego, and the Second Half of Life focus on spiritual growth; he also describes the spiritual focus of First Half of Life Churches. Essential to this study is the understanding of the conflicting paradigms between First Half of Life Churches and the Second Half of Life pilgrim because this dissonance contributes to the growing numbers

³⁵ Nyhuis, “Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life,” 88.

³⁶ Luke 17:21.

³⁷ Jamieson, McIntosh, Thompson, *Five Years On*, 45–46.

of people practicing their spirituality outside the church. Therefore, I draw heavily on Nyhuis' succinct and well-articulated distinctions, summed up in Appendix B.

After reading Nyhuis' research, I realized Terry, Pat, Kristin, and Joan had transitioned out of First Half of Life. The churches they once found nurturing and formational are now experienced as constrictive and limiting. The language of Second Half of Life best captures what they share in common, with each other, as well as with Dones, SBNRs, Dechurched, etc. This paradigm also helps explain why First Half of Life churches struggle to provide pilgrims with meaningful spiritual community and nurture as their faith journey matures.

A Call for a “Whole”³⁸ Church

First Half of Life churches generally consider this Second Half of Life community outside their spiritual net because of their non-traditional beliefs about God and the diverse spiritual paths they explore. And while this community of believers may no longer be at home in First Half of Life churches, the question becomes: can the Western American Church be grown by them? Can the Church create a space where Kristin's questions and Pat's changing spiritual paradigms do not set off heresy alarms, but instead expand the Church's cosmological maps? Rather than leave by the Church's back door, can the expanding community of Second Half of Life believers, like Joan, collaborate with the Church, so *together*, they discover another door, one that offers a spiritual path to follow *and* a community prepared to accompany those who are waking up in new spiritual landscapes?

³⁸ I use the term “whole” to connote the coming together of the Two Halves of Life as well as those in “Halfolescence” (Nyhuis' term for transitioning from First Half to Second Half).

Nyhuis addresses these questions in the conclusion to his dissertation. He calls for “Innovative Churches” and “Innovative Scholars” who can engage in exactly this kind of reconciling work. He calls for “Innovative Churches” that can:

- Listen to and care for Transitioning Boomers who leave churches;
- Understand, accept, and support Baby Boomers as they transition to the Second Half of Life;
- Plant churches and other organizations that orient themselves to the Second Half of Life;
- Develop, staff, and launch ministries within their programming to serve Boomers in the Second Half of Life; and
- Model and teach other churches to incorporate and serve Transitioning Boomers.³⁹

Nyhuis calls for Innovative Scholars who can:

- Confirm and question the scope and characteristics of Baby Boomers shifting into the Second Half of Life through surveys and related studies;
- Develop and teach a contextualized biblical and theological understanding that honors both the First and Second Halves of Life; and
- Propose creeds, confessions, and liturgies that include values, perspectives, and beliefs of the Second Half of Life.⁴⁰

Section Two examines several alternative approaches ministry leaders have sought to support the spiritual nurture of Second Half of Life pilgrims Nyhuis calls for. We begin by considering an evangelical, neo-monastic community. Next, the Wisdom paradigm presented by Episcopal priest, Cynthia Bourgeault is considered. Finally, I will reflect on what I’ve learned from the failure of my first attempt to address this need through an *Anam Cara* small group community I created.

³⁹ Nyhuis, 86.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85.

SECTION 2: OTHER SOLUTIONS

Introduction

In Section One, Joan, Terry, Kristin, and Pat were introduced. Once faithful, dedicated leaders in their congregation for many years, now Terry, Kristin, and Pat have become part of the growing list of people feeling spiritually dislocated and lonely in their desire to walk a sacred path. This list includes long-time believers who consider themselves Done with Church, folks who think of themselves as spiritual but not religious (SBNR), the religiously non-affiliated (Nones), the fastest growing spiritual group, as well as pilgrims, like Joan, who continue to worship in their congregations while lacking opportunities for spiritual growth. A sweeping review of the literature from several inter-disciplinary angles reveals that individuals find their way into these communities of pilgrims practicing their spirituality beyond the church walls by varying paths, at different ages and from diverse origins, including evangelical churches, mainline Protestant denominations, Catholic and Buddhist meditation groups. Despite their sometimes-profound differences, Nyhuis' description of Second Half of Life captures their common experience of moving along a continuum of faith development from First Half to Second Half of Life. Though they may arrive at different answers, Pat, Kristin, Joan, Terry, and many pilgrims like them, are grappling with questions of spiritual identity, life purpose, meaning making and pushing against the limits and boundaries of their first faith communities. This community of questioners, and sometimes seeming heretics, is so diverse because Second Half of Life is not a destination, but a continuum.

In this section I will consider three different programs intended to address the spiritual needs of pilgrims transitioning into or living in the Second Half of Life:

1. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove's evangelical, neo-monastic communities,
2. Cynthia Bourgeault's Wisdom Schools, and
3. *Anam Cara*⁴¹ small group communities I created in a congregation I served.

Criteria for Evaluating Other Solutions

A number of authors have proposed models that map out the progression of spiritual, moral, psychosocial and intellectual development. It is important to understand this progression, and the various stages that comprise the life continuum, because it helps us locate where individuals are in their transition from First Half to Second Half of Life tasks. These developmental models assist in evaluating the varied programs reaching out to the spiritually dislocated so we can better understand why a particular response effectively connects with specific Second Half of Life population.

Nyhuis' research considers four developmental models for moving toward and into the Second Half of Life. After comparing, contrasting and critiquing theories reflective of diverse traditions including Wilbur, (a self-proclaimed Buddhist), Rohr (a Roman Catholic Priest), Hollis (non-affiliated), and Fowler (a minister with the United Methodist Church) Nyhuis synthesizes their perspectives into lists characterizing First Half of Life, Transition to Second Half of Life, and Second Half of Life tasks.⁴² I will use these characteristics to evaluate the models addressing the spiritual needs of Second Half of Life individuals. Nyhuis' full descriptions can be found in Appendix B. In my

⁴¹ *Anam Cara* is a Gaelic phrase meaning "soul friend." A person's *Anam Cara* offers sacred companionship, serves as a confessor and offers spiritual wisdom and guidance. For further reference see Thomas O'Loughlin, Esther De Waal, and John Philip Newell.

⁴² Nyhuis, 38.

evaluations I will quote excerpts relevant to a particular model. I will also consider the suitability of these programs for offering ongoing spiritual development and community.

New Monasticism: Jonathan-Wilson Hartgrove

After listening closely to the stories and longings of people like Terry, Kristin, Joan, and Pat, themes emerged such as yearning for community, desire for more silence and less talk, and resonance with spiritual practices like meditation. I recognized these elements as common to monastic communities and wondered if a new expression of the monastic tradition might be a helpful model for those living in the Second Half of Life. Phyllis Tickle, in reflecting on the thesis of her book, *The Great Emergence*, posits, “about every 500 years the church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale...[and] we are living in and through one of those 500-year sales.”⁴³ During such a season, the Church recognizes that its current institutional structures “must be shattered in order that new growth and renewal may occur... In the course of birthing a brand-new expression of its faith and praxis the church also gains a grand refurbishment of the older one.”⁴⁴

During this current “500-year rummage sale,” Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is a leader of the Church in North America in its recovery and refurbishment of the old monastic furniture in Church’s attic. After growing up in a traditional Southern Baptist town in South Carolina, Wilson-Hartgrove headed to Washington, DC to pursue the next step in his life mission—to take Jesus to the White House. Soon after his arrival in the

⁴³ Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” *Sojourners Magazine* 37, no 8 (August 2008): 28, accessed October 31, 2016, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/212852007?accountid=11085>.

⁴⁴ Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” 30. See also, Diana Butler Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009) and Thomas O’Loughin, *Journey on the Edges: The Celtic Tradition* (New York: Orbis, 2000).

nation's capital, Wilson-Hargrove walked past a homeless man outside Union Station because he had learned in his traditional Southern Baptist town that "poor folks in the city were lazy and begged money to buy drugs and booze."⁴⁵ In this encounter Wilson-Hartgrove discovered that "in my rush to follow Jesus to the White House, I'd almost tripped over him outside Union Station."⁴⁶ The discontinuity of this experience sent Wilson-Hartgrove in search of another way to be Christian in America.

After a series of encounters with communities inspired by the monasticism of Thomas Merton and others, Wilson-Hartgrove discovered a letter written by Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his brother during the height of the Nazi era in WWII Germany saying, "The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism, which has in common with the old, only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ."⁴⁷ Convicted by Bonhoeffer's words, Wilson-Hargrove established his own neo-monastic community, Rutba House, in Durham, NC. He went on to give voice to the grass-roots neo-monastic movement in the United States by shepherding the publication of *School(s) of Conversion: 12 Marks of the New Monasticism*, and creating a website to support the emerging network of neo-monastic communities engaged in this 21st century experiment in new ways to be Church.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, "New Monasticism and the Resurrection of American Christianity," *Missiology* 38, no. 1 (January 2010): 14, accessed October 27, 2016, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

⁴⁶ Wilson-Hartgrove, "New Monasticism and the Resurrection of American Christianity," 14.

⁴⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 33.

The Twelve Marks of a New Monasticism

The “Twelve Marks” of new monastic communities formed under the influence of Wilson-Hartgrove are:

1. Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire;
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us;
3. Hospitality to the stranger;
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation;
5. Humble submission to Christ’s body, the church;
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate;
7. Nurturing common life among members of intentional community;
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children;
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life;
10. Care for the plot of God’s earth given to us along with support of our local economies;
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18; and
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.⁴⁸

Just as the first two of Israel’s Ten Commandments established Israel’s primary spiritual focus as relationship to God, and the remaining eight commandments expressed a way of living shaped by this primary focus, the first four “Twelve Marks of New Monasticism” reflect the primary commitment of new monastic communities shaped by these marks. Wilson-Hartgrove found himself being ushered into the new monastic movement by the discontinuity of his evangelical faith with Jesus’ love and ministry to the poor. The silence of Wilson-Hartgrove’s Southern Baptist church on matters of social justice serves as Wilson-Hartgrove’s ground-zero as he seeks to give birth to a new kind of church in America.

⁴⁸ Rutba House (Organization), *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), Table of Contents.

Evaluating Wilson-Hartgrove's New Monasticism with Second Half of Life Criteria

The spiritual journey that gave birth to the “12 Marks” offers a beautiful parable of one Transitioning from First Half of Life into Second Half of Life. Wilson-Hartgrove found

it more difficult to fit life experiences into old perspectives and patterns... They are also being nudged by life circumstances... They began to entertain questions about the rightness of their thinking and that of their groups. They increasingly questioned the very foundational assumptions of their life.⁴⁹

When Wilson-Hartgrove joined the new monastic movement, his transition to Second Half of Life was just beginning. The fierceness of his social-justice agenda, however, does not allow yet for a decreasing need to always have to be right or clear, defend his group, or think non-dualistically, claims Nyhuis.⁵⁰ The need for this new expression of Church to be “right” revealed itself when a mainline protestant church that had been practicing a form of Celtic monasticism in its urban setting found themselves marginalized at a conference for new monastic communities organized around the “12 Marks.” Because the mainline new monastic community had not emerged from the crucible of evangelical conversation about social justice, or been shaped by the “12 Marks,” leaders at the conference refused to offer hospitality to the Celtic new monastic community, and ensured that the mainline congregation did not join their network of collegial communities.

The pastor of this Celtic new monastic community discouraged this researcher from looking toward the “12 Marks” communities as inspiration for the model I hoped to create for Second Half of Life people I served. Despite this disappointing introduction to

⁴⁹ Nyhuis, “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life,” 41–42.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the “12 Marks” communities, I anticipate they may still have something to teach me. The “12 Marks” includes practices that support an expression of new monasticism that addresses the articulated longing for community, silence, and meditation I heard in my conversation with Pat, Terry, Kristin, and Joan, for example: “(7) Nurturing common life among members of intentional community, (12) Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.”⁵¹ Still, in an essay about the need for disciplined contemplative life, Wilson-Hartgrove focuses solely on individual practice, and considers it valuable to the extent that it supports a person’s social justice work and saves one from “burn out.” Shepherds like Wilson-Hartgrove are essential as pilgrims from First-Half of Life evangelical congregations begin their transition onto the spiritual path into Second-Half of Life. Pilgrims from more mainline Protestant traditions, however, often already embrace the social-justice agenda driving Wilson-Hartgrove’s journey, and instead, long for a community more fully engaged in the Second-Half of Life. So, while this model creates an important bridge out of the First-Half of Life for some, it is not the complete vehicle to bring spiritual pilgrims into the Second-Half of Life.

Wisdom Schools: Cynthia Bourgeault

Similar to Wilson-Hartgrove, Cynthia Bourgeault, an ordained Episcopal priest, charts a journey out of her tradition, down a path of spiritual growth and transformation. Bourgeault writes, “While I loved the liturgy and devotional aspects of the church, I also felt there were huge holes in its theological understanding and practical teachings on spiritual transformation.”⁵² Her search for these missing pieces led Bourgeault out of the

⁵¹ Rutba House, *12 Marks of a New Monasticism*.

⁵² Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), xx.

Church into philosophical circles where she discovered practical teachings on spiritual transformation, but lamented their lack of devotion and reverence.⁵³ In a Roman Catholic monastery Bourgeault finally found a teacher, Rafe, who held together the elements of the esoteric and Christian tradition in a contemplative practice Bourgeault calls the Wisdom tradition. Bourgeault defines Wisdom as:

A precise lineage of spiritual knowledge. Wisdom is an ancient tradition, not limited to one particular religious expression but at the headwaters of all the great sacred paths. From time immemorial there have been Wisdom schools, places where men and women have been raised to a higher level of understanding, partly by enlightened human beings and partly by direct guidance from above. From time immemorial, it is said, Wisdom has flowed like a great underground stream from these schools, providing guidance and nurturance.⁵⁴

After studying under Rafe, Bourgeault went on to create her own system of spiritual transformation using an experience she calls Wisdom Schools. Bourgeault describes the theology, cosmology and spiritual practices of her Wisdom Schools in her books *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, *The Wisdom Jesus*, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene* and *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three: Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity*. Through her Wisdom Schools, Bourgeault creates a week long experience “set up to move people through an orderly sequence of events, each of which becomes a different angle of knowing... in the ancient tradition, known as wisdom knowing, knowing with the whole of one’s being.”⁵⁵ For pilgrims hungry for a experience larger than one week, Bourgeault invites participants into a two year

⁵³ Ibid., xxi.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁵ Robin Whittington, *Welcome to Virtual Wisdom School, Part 1, with Cynthia Bourgeault*, YouTube Channel, Robbin Whittington, February 25, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWL8s0PsFTg.

experience through her partnership with Richard Rohr in “The Living School for Action and Contemplation,” an “‘emergent’ or para-school, on the edge of the inside ...[offering] learning and practices that can support students’ continued growth as fully human, God-indwelled beings.”⁵⁶

Pilgrims in the Second-Half of Life would be hard pressed to find a better guide or companion for their ongoing spiritual growth than Cynthia Bourgeault. She offers a path and practice toward a spiritual landscape that remains grounded in Jesus and Christianity, while simultaneously expanding beyond the creeds and dogmas embedded in the First-Half of Life spiritual experience.

Evaluating Bourgeault’s Wisdom Schools with Second Half of Life Criteria

Unlike Wilson-Hartgrove, Bourgeault seems to have made the transition fully into the Second-Half of Life. She is able to honor her own traditions while knowing her truth has been partial, and limited by her own experiences.⁵⁷ She is not only comfortable with paradox and mystery, but celebrates it. While Bourgeault has surrendered creeds, rationality, and norms as she discerns the quieter and deeper voice within herself,⁵⁸ and she has transcended her tribe, welcoming the common truths shared by the many spiritual traditions of the world,⁵⁹ she has not surrendered Jesus. She has reframed his role though. In her book, *The Wisdom Jesus*, Bourgeault claims that Jesus did not accept the role of priest or prophet, but instead adopted an ancient Jewish role, “a *moshel moshelim*, or

⁵⁶ Accessed October 10, 2017, <https://cac.org/living-school/living-school-welcome/>

⁵⁷ Nyhuis, “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life,” 41–42.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 3.

teacher of wisdom, one who taught the ancient traditions of the transformation of the human being.”⁶⁰ Bourgeault offers a new paradigm for understanding her tradition, without leaving it, while at the same time making connections between Christianity and other ancient Wisdom traditions. Through this work, Bourgeault supports the truth pilgrims such as Joan have known a long time... that we are all on a spiritual path of “theosis,” transformation into likeness and union like God. At the same time, Bourgeault clearly distinguishes between the Eastern traditions’ understanding of this union, and Jesus: “When Jesus talks about Oneness, he is not speaking in an Eastern sense about an equivalency of being, such that I am in and of myself divine. Rather, what he has in mind is a complete, mutual indwelling: I am in God, God is in you, you are in God, we are in each other.”⁶¹

The limitation of Bourgeault for pilgrims looking for a new spiritual home as they enter the Second-Half of Life is the lack of community. *Individuals* sign up for a Wisdom School or Living School experience. During that one-week or two-year experience, they are immersed in a community that dissipates when each participant returns home, changed, but alone. In addition, these schools are expensive and offer limited participation. Bourgeault attempts to address these challenges by offering her curriculum online, but this does not remedy the need for an ongoing community.

⁶⁰ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus* (Boston, MA: Shambhala: 2008), 23–24.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

Anam Cara Groups

I attempted to create a community of ongoing spiritual growth and support through the creation of *Anam Cara* groups,⁶² the Gaelic name for Soul Friends. *Anam Cara* groups emerged when three to four individuals, who had participated in a two-year Discipleship Group experience I offered in the local congregation, expressed interest in pursuing further spiritual work after the small group ended. While Discipleship Groups were gender specific, I created groups for both men and women. The members of these groups had already developed trust, knew one another well, and had engaged in spiritual practices (e.g. Lectio Divina, Labyrinth Prayer, Ignatian Praying with Your Imagination) together. When men and women accepted the invitation to join an *Anam Cara* group, I met with them for a weekend retreat. During this time, they shared their spiritual journeys with one another and I taught them a group discernment practice. Using this process, they listened for how often they would meet, what they would focus on in their gatherings, and what spiritual practices they would engage in, to continue their spiritual journey together. I intended for these groups to be self-sustaining as these Soul Friends accompanied and supported one another in practices that cultivated spiritual maturation.

I invited twenty people into six *Anam Cara* groups. Many of these groups continue to meet, five and ten years later, and the individuals in these groups often tell me how much these groups mean to them. In their gatherings, Soul Friends offer one another mutual support and encouragement, and they bear witness to one another's stories.

⁶² The concept of *Anam Cara* groups grew from a lecture by Len Sweet. He said we all need a small inner circle of spiritual companions. Stirred by this idea, I invited three people I trusted into this role and named it *Anam Cara*, after the Celtic word for Soul Friends. I began our group with a retreat in which we shared our Spiritual Road Maps (see Joyce Rupp, *May I Have This Dance?*) with one another. I taught a Group Discernment process I had learned from a member of my DMin cohort. Using this discernment process, we decided as a group what kind of spiritual disciplines we would practice together, and how often we would gather. I gathered with this group twice a month for a year, and then began to create *Anam Cara* groups for others based on this model.

However, these groups have not become the spiritual incubators I hoped they would. None of these groups practice spiritual disciplines together, or support one another in an intentional way within their individual spiritual work. I experienced first-hand the tremendous resistance within the group to doing deeper spiritual work when I sat in on a few groups, including the one I created for myself.

Group participants preferred to linger over checking in on life experiences, even when they knew this meant there would be no remaining time for a group spiritual practice. I've watched as one member of a group came prepared to lead a spiritual practice, and witnessed the other group members clearly resist it. Occasionally, a group invited me to assist them in reengaging the spiritual work they knew the group had been created to support. Given this explicit invitation, even I encountered strong resistance. Once the group settled into the practice, though, they expressed appreciation for the experience and clearly believed they benefitted from it.

So why so much resistance? I suspect it stems from the anxiety of practicing spiritual work that is inherently unpredictable: "The Spirit blows where it will, you know neither the time or day..." penned the Gospel writer, John.⁶³ Once we give ourselves over to the Spirit's leading we can no longer control what God may stir up in us. I suspect these *Anam Cara* groups do not feel that safe enough containers have been built to risk this kind of spiritual and emotional vulnerability.

In my ministry I witnessed how practicing the spiritual disciplines open us up to shadow places where we've hidden our shame, grief and anger. Practicing the disciplines invites God to lead us inward, toward the places in our heart in need of healing. This is

⁶³ John 3:8.

messy, unpredictable, work. We don't always know ahead of time what kind of emotions and memories wait for us there. Some part of us, though, knows that something hard or uncomfortable will emerge if we take time to pray, sit in silence and listen for the sacred voice. I know now, that the reluctance of participants in *Anam Cara* groups to practice these spiritual disciplines with one another reflected a wise inner knowing. As much as they may have trusted these soul friends with some pieces of their life story, other, more shadow elements needed the presence of someone more experienced with traveling in the dark.

Evaluating *Anam Cara* Groups with Second Half of Life Criteria

When I consider the *Anam Cara* groups through Nyhuis' lens about First and Second Half of Life, I realize most participants were *transitioning* from First Half to Second Half of life. I draw heavily on Nyhuis' *Synthesized Descriptions of Transitioning from First Half to Second Half of Life* in my evaluation. The full list of these characteristics can be found in Appendix B. These Soul Friends were yearning to slow down, relax boundaries and ponder more, to rest into listening more and resisting less, believing more broadly and less rigidly. They needed the *Anam Cara* groups to be able to speak into their new questions and tentative answers. These groups were where they began to ask: Could it be that I am done and ready for a new chapter in my life? What changes do I need to make to keep this process alive? Who can I back away from and who can I spend more time with? The comfort they felt with the other members of their group made it a safe place to consider these kinds of *transitioning* questions.

While they were drawn to Second Half of Life values like simplicity, risk, guidance and direction, and wisdom, and they considered the *Anam Cara* group a place to

explore these qualities, they were not yet like those in the Second Half of Life who are already asking, “How can I reduce the noise of my life that has been drowning out this quieter, subtler voice?” Instead, they tended to resist invitations into these kinds of deeper spiritual experiences.

Anam Cara groups offer an important container for those transitioning into Second of Life. These intimate gatherings create safe spaces to ask those important questions that lead us out of the First Half of Life. We all need communities to belong to wherein we feel seen and safe—ultimately, the fullest expression of the old word, sanctuary. Research documents the tremendous benefits of this kind of intimacy and connection. Dr. Brené Brown, social worker and researcher states, “true belonging, real connection and real empathy require meeting real people in a real space in real time.”⁶⁴ An important need was being met in this ministry, even though it did not develop into the incubator for spiritual growth I had hoped it would become.

If all the participants had fully transitioned into Second Half of Life, *Anam Cara* groups would still not offer a sustainable solution for the longings I heard expressed by Joan, Gary, and the others I interviewed. This ministry taught me the importance of a *facilitated* community spiritual experience. Even individuals with a track record in sacred practices expressed a desire for a facilitator in order to engage in a communal spiritual gathering. Someone needs to gather pilgrims together, create a process and lead them through it. The reasons for this vary. Some participants need a facilitator comfortable with the intense experiences that emerge from deep spiritual work. Other very capable leaders tell me they feel stretched and lack time to add this role their schedules. Even very experienced spiritual practitioners long for someone else to take responsibility for

⁶⁴ Brown, “Why Human Connection Will Bring Us Closer Together.”

organizing, gathering, and leading. Facilitators yearn for a place where they can be a student, even if they are teachers and leaders in other arenas of their lives. This challenge must be addressed. As more ministry leaders transition into Second Half of Life, I suspect they will be attracted, as I am, to these deeper expressions of spiritual leadership and formation.

Conclusion

Though not an exhaustive study, three alternative solutions to the ministry problem of nurturing spiritual growth for Second Half of Life pilgrims have been considered and contrasted in Wilson-Hartgrove's New Monasticism, Cynthia Bourgeault's Wisdom Schools, and *Anam Cara* (Soul Friend) Small Groups. Wilson-Hartgrove's New Monasticism offers a great model for refurbishing traditions from the Church's attic. I believe the practices and community of new monasticism hold great promise when the Rule of the community emerges from Second Half of Life values. Cynthia Bourgeault's Wisdom Schools captures the theology, cosmology and practices for Second Half of Life spiritual development. These components need to be integrated into an ongoing communal setting, however. *Anam Cara* groups offer a great rhythm for ongoing spiritual community, but need a facilitator who can provide structure and rituals necessary for these group to become places of transformation. Each model offers meaningful components. None of them offer a full experience that would create a new spiritual home for Terry, Pat, Kristin, or Joan. A model that integrates the best of each of the models, and addresses their challenges, on the other hand, has the potential to become the "Whole Church" plant in keeping with guidelines proposed by Nyhuis, one that:

- Orients itself to the Second Half of Life;

- Develops, staffs, and launches ministries to Second Half of Life pilgrims;
- Develops and teaches a contextualized biblical and theological understanding that honors both the First and Second Halves of Life;
- Proposes creeds, confessions, and liturgies that include values, perspectives, and beliefs of the Second Half of Life;
- Listens to, understands, accepts, supports, and cares for pilgrims leaving churches while they are transitioning into Second Half of Life; and
- Offers a model that can be used to teach churches how to incorporate and serve pilgrims Transitioning into Second Half of Life.⁶⁵

I present myself as both the Innovative Scholar and the Innovative Church planter Nyhuis calls for at the end of his dissertation. First, using a survey created from Dr. Nyhuis' *Synthesized Descriptions of the Second Half of Life*,⁶⁶ I identified persons living in the Second Half of Life who had become Done with the churches that nurtured and formed them. Next, I interviewed fourteen of these respondents to identify what kind of experiences would best nurture and further their spiritual growth in the Second Half of Life. Then, based on their responses, my accumulated experience of offering spiritual formation to this community in my role as a congregational pastor, and the best qualities of each of the three options I just reviewed, I propose *A Rhythm, Ritual and Rule for a Wisdom Monasticism for Second Half of Life Pilgrims*.

In Section Three, I introduce this model of spiritual nurture in which Pat, Joan, Terry, Kristin, and other Second Half of Life pilgrims may find themselves at home.

⁶⁵ Nyhuis, "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life," 85–86.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 85, 43–46. See Appendix B.

SECTION 3: THESIS

Introduction

Section One explored the diverse and growing community of spiritual pilgrims looking for ways to practice their spirituality when the church no longer offers experiences they need for continued spiritual development. The intention was to objectively and simply describe the phenomenon of people leaving churches as a field researcher, without critique or reaction to it.⁶⁷ I contended that this list of Dones, Nones, SBNR's, and Dechurched, all at different ages and from diverse origins, share the common experience of moving along a continuum of faith development from First Half to Second Half of Life. I agree with Nyhuis' conclusion in his dissertation, "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life," that these pilgrims need a spiritual community prepared to nurture and support them as they transition and settle into Second Half of Life spiritual development.

Section Two considered three of the Church's responses to creating space for a Second Half of Life spiritual community: 1) Wilson-Hartgrove's New Monasticism; 2) Cynthia Bourgeault's Wisdom Schools; and 3) *Anam Cara* groups, a congregational, small group ministry program I created. While coming up short in some regards, each of these models also offer valuable elements supportive of Second Half of Life pilgrims, which I am integrating and implementing into a monastic wisdom community:

1. A contemporary monastic community shaped by a shared Rule of Life in which to practice ongoing spiritual growth;

⁶⁷ Much of the literature written about people leaving churches is reactionary in nature. Approaching the ministry problem with the foundational fear that "Christianity is in crisis" and in need of rescue, lends to jumping hastily to answers before asking adequate and thorough questions.

2. Non-dual, mystical spiritual language, cosmological maps, spiritual practices and a theological framework deeply rooted in the Wisdom Tradition and congruent with Second Half of Life spiritual values, in other words, Rituals; and
3. An intimate community created by an intentional small group shaped by a regular Rhythm.

A broad range of authors and researchers have considered the growing population of pilgrims leaving churches. In her memoir, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*, Barbara Brown Taylor considers the phenomenon from her own lived experience. She shares how stepping out of her role as a priest in the Episcopal Church became necessary for her wholeness, and how she's looked beyond the Church for her spiritual community.⁶⁸ Rachel Held Evans also speaks of her similar journey in her book *Searching for Sunday*. She, too, shares from a personal perspective, though as a layperson from a younger generation and from the evangelical branch of the Christian family. Phyllis Tickle, in her books *The Great Emergence* and *Emergence Christianity*, addresses this issue from a historical perspective, and from her vantage point as an expert on American Religion as Religion Editor for *Publisher's Weekly*.⁶⁹ Diana Butler Bass, in her book *Grounded*, reflects on this shift in American Religion both personally, like Taylor and Evans, but also sociologically similar to Tickle.⁷⁰

Nyhuis, building on the work of Fowler, Hollis and Wilbur,² considers this shift from a developmental perspective, making the argument that this movement away from

⁶⁸ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

⁶⁹ Tickle, 16.

⁷⁰ Bass, *Grounded*, 26.

institutional Church reflects the growing number of pilgrims transitioning out of First Half into Second Half of Life. Rohr reflects on this topic through this lens as well. In his book *Falling Upward*, Rohr suggests “The Hero’s Journey” is a helpful paradigm for understanding the shift from The First Half to Second Half Spirituality.⁷¹

This brief survey of other authors reveals the growing conversation about the increasing exodus of pilgrims from the institutional Church. A remarkable consensus abounds as to what is taking place. There is little consensus, however, about how to address it. The solution I seek integrates input gathered from the literature as well as placing great importance on interviews conducted with Second Half of Life pilgrims. Based on what I learned in my interviews, I incorporate compatible components of Other Solutions in Section 2, and best practices gleaned from programs I’ve led and created, wherein Second Half of Life pilgrims have attended. My solution grows from the soil of the Christian tradition, modeled on the life of Jesus, reframed though a wisdom paradigm. While many people leaving the institutional Church migrate toward Buddhism and other Eastern traditions in search of spiritual disciplines to guide them toward the Kingdom of God within them, my solution mines the Christian tradition for these disciplines. From the Church’s attic, I retrieve rituals, rhythms and rules cultivated by the Desert Ammas and Abbas, the Celtic church and the monastic communities to which the Desert tradition gave birth.

⁷¹ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 17.

Important Components Derived from Other Solutions: Rhythm, Ritual and Rule

Wilson-Hartgrove's "12 Marks" offers the kind of structure that builds a sacred container for communal, spiritual experience, much like a liturgy creates an order for shared worship. In earlier monastic communities, a *Rule of Life* created this sacred container. Cynthia Bourgeault's practices of *Lectio Divina*, chanting, Centering Prayer and "in the body" experiences like gardening, chopping wood, etc., as well as her study of non-traditional texts, offer important *Rituals* that facilitate significant spiritual transformation into expanded non-dual perception and consciousness. *Anam Cara* groups offer a *Rhythm*, a communal gathering space on an ongoing basis, to practice these rituals and support one another in a rule of life that proves challenging to sustain alone in a culture living by very different values. A faithful response to the spiritual needs of pilgrims in the Second Half of Life needs to include all three of these elements: *Rhythm, Ritual and Rule*. In addition, such a response needs to provide leadership to create a rule and facilitate these gatherings and rituals so pilgrims in the Second Half of Life discover something they can step into, join and participate in, rather than having to fully create it.

Rhythm

a movement, fluctuation, or variation marked by the regular recurrence or natural flow of related elements.⁷²

The word *rhythm* has its origin in words related to "flow."⁷³ Every community of faith lives by a sacred rhythm. Liturgical churches organize their communal life around a sacred calendar shaped by the story of Jesus' life and then the life of the Church. The

⁷² Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. "rhythm," Merriam-Webster, accessed November 18, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhythm>.

⁷³ Ibid.

rhythm of the Jewish community is shaped by historical events in Israel's story (the Exodus from Egypt, the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the fall of Jerusalem in 6th century BCE) as well as the natural rhythms of the lunar cycle (Sabbath begins at sundown, the date of Passover).⁷⁴ Bhuddist and Hindu communities mark their major festivals according to lunar and solar rhythms as well as historical events like the birth of Buddha.⁷⁵ All sacred communities use a shared rhythm to create an ordering principle for their sacred experiences.

Ritual

- 2 a :ritual observance; *specifically* :a system of rites
- b :a ceremonial act or action
- c :an act or series of acts regularly repeated in a set precise manner.⁷⁶

The repeated practices that take place within the order created by a rhythm become a community's rituals. In Christian communities, this includes the celebration of Holy Communion and Baptism, as well as rituals tied to the rhythm of the liturgical calendar such as Ash Wednesday, Pentecost and Easter. Jewish rituals include Yom Kippur, Bar Mitzvahs and circumcision. The ritual of unrolling a prayer rug and facing east at certain times of day to pray, or fasting during Ramadan shape the life of Muslims.

Rituals serve as spiritual shorthand, gathering into a symbolic action the shared understanding and beliefs about great mysteries like birth, forgiveness, impermanence, death, healing and grief. They acknowledge significant milestones in life like marriage

⁷⁴ Accessed December 28, 2017, <http://www.mesacc.edu/~thoqh49081/handouts/jewishyear.html>

⁷⁵ H.L. Richard, "Counting Hinduism," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 9, no. 1, (2013), accessed December 28, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol9/iss1/2>.

⁷⁶ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Ritual," accessed November 18, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual>.

and coming of age (confirmation, bar/bat mitzvah, etc.) that redefine a person's role within the community. They also mark communal sacred time by gathering people for festivals (Vesak or "Buddha Day," Hanami, Japan's Cherry Blossom festival) and holy days (Christmas, Diwali the Hindu Festival of Lights) that create a shared narrative and form a common identity.⁷⁷

Rule

- a :a prescribed guide for conduct or action
- b :the laws or regulations prescribed by the founder of a religious order for observance by its members
- c :an accepted procedure, custom, or habit⁷⁸

Monastic communities offer our most familiar associations with Rules of Life.

The Rule of St. Benedict continues to shape religious communities of men and women fifteen centuries after Benedict wrote it. Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN; St.

Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, CO; and Holy Cross Monastery in Hyde Park, NY; are just a few of the existing monastic communities living by Benedict's Rule of Life.

Joan Chittister, a member of a women's monastic community, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, PA, offers wisdom for contemporary spirituality from Benedict's Rule in her book *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*.⁷⁹ Saints Augustine, Ignatius, and Francis also wrote Rules of Life for their communities.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Accessed October 31, 2017, <http://www.sj-r.com/opinion/20171016/letter-happy-diwali-and-happy-new-year-to-all>.

⁷⁸ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "Rule," accessed November 18, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rule>.

⁷⁹ For other books by Chittister, see also, *The Radical Christian Life: A Year with Saint Benedict; Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today; The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life; and Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*.

⁸⁰ Accessed December 28, 2017, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/stfran-rule.html>.

Life in Buddhist monasteries centers around the Vinaya, a collection of rules for monastics. Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *Freedom Wherever We Go: A Buddhist Monastic Code for the Twenty-first Century*, updates this code for the 21st century. The Jewish Torah, which includes the long list of laws in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, remind us that Rules of Life extend beyond monastic communities and shape the everyday lives of faithful people. While they may not be known as “Rules of Life” every faith community knows it’s ‘rules’—the behaviors expected, and to be avoided—by its constituents. My brother-in-law, a kind and gentle man, will not allow me to pray in family gatherings because he lives by the rules of his Church of Christ community, shaped by Paul’s teaching, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”⁸¹ Lutheran identity centers around Luther’s *Confession*.⁸² *The Book of Common Prayer* functions as the Rule of Life for the Anglican Communion and for the United Methodist Church. *The Book of Discipline* operates as their statement of how United Methodists agree to live together.⁸³

Although Rules of Life, or the ‘rules’ of a particular tradition, seem to focus primarily on behavior, underlying values truly create a Rule; behaviors serve as the outward expression of the mostly deeply held values of the Rule’s creator. “For Benedict,

Ingatius of Loyola, Louis J. Puhl, translator. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Chicago: Loyola Press: 1968). See also, Augustine, *The Rule of Saint Augustine*, trans. Tarsiciuis Van Bavel (New York: Penguin Random House: 1986).

⁸¹ 1 Tim. 2:12.

⁸² Accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/concord/web/augs-004.html>.

⁸³ *Book of Discipline*, 21. Accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?id=87&pageid=920#9568>.

listening is the fundamental attitude from which all other attitudes flow.”⁸⁴ Hospitality also deeply influenced the life of Benedict’s monasteries: “St. Benedict seems to have expected that many different people would come to the monastery. He even placed a porter at the monastery’s entrance to make sure that visitors would always be recognized and greeted.”⁸⁵

In the Jewish community the values of *hesed*, lovingkindness, and hospitality underpinned Israel’s laws so deeply, that one could violate a specific law in service to these larger values. Jesus made this exact argument when he challenged the religious leaders of his day because their strict observation of the Sabbath violated the value of *hesed*.⁸⁶ Rather than create a long Rule of Life, explicating specific behaviors, the Northumbrian Community, a Celtic monastic community established in the early 1980’s, chose instead to name their values as their Rule, “The Rule we embrace and keep will be that of *availability* and *vulnerability*.”⁸⁷

Of the three elements, Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule, The Rule of a community exerts the greatest influence because it is so deeply rooted in foundational values. The Rule determines what kind of Rituals will shape a community’s spiritual identity as well as the Rituals created to mark milestone moments for individuals in the community. Much like

⁸⁴ Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, *A Listening Community: A Commentary on the Prologue and Chapters 1-3 of Benedict’s Rule*. Translated by Matilda Handl and Marianne Burkhard. Edited by Marianne Burkhard. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 6.

⁸⁵ Aaron Raverty, OSB., “Hospitality in the Benedictine Monastic Tradition.” *Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* [Brasília] 20, no. 38 (Jan./Jun. 2012): 252.

⁸⁶ Luke 13:10–17.

⁸⁷ Accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/>.

the banks of river, the Rule provides a boundary that defines the Rhythm, and flow of life together.

To create a meaningful Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule for spiritual pilgrims in the Second Half of Life, I needed to learn more from them about the values shaping their lives, the rhythms that ordered their time and the varieties of rituals that deepened their experience of the sacred.

Input from Second Half of Life Pilgrims

In the conclusion of his dissertation, Nyhuis calls for Innovative Scholars that can “confirm and question the scope and characteristics of Baby Boomers shifting into the Second Half of Life through surveys and related studies.”⁸⁸ I discerned a similar need as I sifted through the current research on Dones, Nones, SNBR, and Leavers. As noted already, within this group on the continuum from First Half to Second Half of Life, there are important distinctions. Differences in theology, worldview and faith practice call for different responses for those hoping to offer spiritual nurture to this vast and growing community.

While Packard and Hope’s research is robust, the dechurched these sociologists identified still have not fully transitioned into the Second Half of Life. Most of them are pushing against issues within their originating congregations, as much as they are moving toward new paradigms.⁸⁹ Therefore, the conclusions Packard and Hope draw from their

⁸⁸ Terry L. Nyhuis, “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life (Challenges for Boomers and Their Churches),” Doctor of Ministry, Paper 136, 2016, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/136>, 85.

⁸⁹ Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope. *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People are Done with Church but not Their Faith* (Loveland CO: Group Publishing, 2015), 28.

research, about how to support the Dones they interviewed, did not resonate with the needs I heard expressed by Pat, Kristin, Terry, and Joan.

Mercandante's interviews with SNBRs offered diverse and rich insight into their spiritual paths. Many of Mercandante's interviewees spoke of their spiritual lives using Second Half of Life language.⁹⁰ Mercandante's, though, was not yet in the Second Half of Life, and therefore did not ask the kinds of questions I'm curious about for this project.

Jamieson's Wayfinders appear to have moved more fully into Second Half of Life. They are blazing their own spiritual paths beyond the Church and are contently finding the way on their own.⁹¹ I am asking a different question: "What kind of support, leadership and community, can I offer to Second Half of Life pilgrims who don't want to blaze their own trails, but remain, as Pat says, 'followers of Jesus'?"

Terry, Joan, Kristin, and Pat had already begun to answer these questions in their conversations with me. They each gave me a glimpse into what kind ministries, biblical and theological understandings, and liturgies would honor the values and beliefs of Second Half of Life pilgrims. Still, I needed more input from pilgrims living into the Second Half of Life. The challenge was to find a representative sample of such pilgrims within the time and scope of this study. A small sample exists within any congregation, but most Second Half of Life pilgrims have left their churches. So, where else could I look?

⁹⁰ Linda Mercandante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110–111.

⁹¹ Alan Jamieson, Jenny McIntosh, Adrienne Thompson, *Five Years On: Continuing Faith Journeys of Those Who Left the Church* (Wellington, New Zealand: The Portland Research Trust, 2006), 67.

A Survey to Find Second Half of Life Pilgrims

I currently lead a number of experiences Second Half of Life pilgrims find meaningful, such as retreats and Quiet Days. Over the years my list of Facebook friends has swelled as I've used this social media tool to remain connected with friends, retreatants and congregants across the country. I decided to use Facebook to find additional Second Half of Life Pilgrims to interview.

Using Nyhuis' research, in particular his questions and characteristics of people in Second Half of Life, I crafted a survey that allowed me to identify spiritual pilgrims in the Second Half of Life (See Appendix C). I invited all my friends on Facebook to take the survey, and encouraged them to share it with their Friend network. This process resulted in over 200 survey respondents. Using specific criteria, I filtered the survey responses to determine which respondents indicated a high likelihood of having transitioned into Second Half of Life. Using this smaller pool of Second Half of Life pilgrims I invited twenty of them to interviews. Of the twenty people I invited to interviews, fourteen responded. In my interviews, I asked the following questions:

1. Remembering questions: What spiritual tradition did you grow up in? What held and nurtured you? Did you serve as a leader in this community when you were old enough? If so, how and where did you offer your leadership?
2. Bridging questions: If you are no longer in that community, why? When did things begin to shift for you?
3. Present questions: Where are you now? What holds and supports your spiritual growth?
4. What else questions: What do you still need or miss? What might attract you to a spiritual gathering?

These questions were focused enough to provide a common pattern of conversation and sharing among the interviews, and yet broad enough to allow the particular path of a person's story to emerge.

An Important Lesson Learned Early On: Second Half of Life Pilgrims Want More Than Worship

Before I began my interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims, I expected my response to their longing for spiritual community would be to create a worship experience shaped around Second Half values, language, theology and rituals they found meaningful. I went into my interviews listening for the kind of elements they hoped to find in such a gathering. I expected to hear a desire for silence, contemplative practices like *Lectio Divina*, shared wisdom through a highly participatory gathering (rather than a sermon from an institutionally ordained authority), and simple music, like chants. I did hear a longing for those experiences, *and*, I heard a longing for something more than a worship gathering.

These conversations reminded me that worship does not create community. Rather, worship is the fruit of a spiritual community grounded and ordered by shared values and beliefs. Worship is what we “do” together, when a community feels established and connected. I did need to create a meaningful worship gathering, but it needed to emerge from a larger constellation of spiritually nurturing experiences. Many of these elements were a part of the solutions offered by Wilson-Hartgrove's New Monasticism, Cynthia Bourgeault's Wisdom Schools, and my earlier creation of *Anam Cara* groups.

A Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule have shaped the spiritual lives of faith communities for thousands of years. While the content of these elements differs for each faith community, Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule universally create sacred containers and structure for life together. Most Second Half of Life pilgrims come from faith families with particular Rhythms, Rituals, and Rules. When they experience discontent in their traditions of origin, it's often because they no longer find the Rhythm, Rituals, or Rule of those communities meaningful. Their greatest discontent is often with values expressed in the Rule. Two Roman Catholic women I interviewed become "done" because of the Church's expressed value for male leadership over female.⁹² Often evangelicals find themselves "done" when their churches' values of biblical authority lead to the marginalization of many populations, including the poor, gay and lesbians, as well as women.⁹³ And one Unitarian-Universalist I interviewed explained that she was "done" because her tradition overvalues intellectual knowing at the expense of emotion, connection, and "heart" knowing.⁹⁴

My proposal is to offer experiences of spiritual nurture for pilgrims in the Second Half of Life through the creation of a Wisdom Monastic community. The community's core purpose is to learn from Jesus the practice of *kenosis*, the self-emptying love Paul

⁹² Drawn from interview data. See appendix A.

⁹³ Wilson-Hartgrove, "New Monasticism and the Resurrection of American Christianity," 14.

⁹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 33.

⁹⁴ Drawn from interview data. See appendix A.

describes in his Philippians hymn.⁹⁵ The culmination of following Jesus down this distinctly Christian path is a shift in consciousness, allowing a person to move into what I call their wise mind. The fruit of a wise mind is the capacity to love as Jesus loved, to see as Jesus saw and to participate, with Jesus, in a mutual indwelling with God: I am in God, God is in me, I am in my neighbor. This mutual indwelling with God, described by Jesus in John 15, allows for the flow of divine love into us, through us, and out into the world.⁹⁶

The creation of a Wisdom Monastic community with this intention begins with a Rhythm, Ritual and Rule shaped by:

1. My interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims;
2. Best practices gleaned from programs I've led and created, that Second Half of Life pilgrims attended; and
3. Values and practices of the Wisdom Tradition.

In my interviews I listened for: “What shared values need to be included in a Rule of Life? What Rituals best express these values? What Rhythm creates a sacred container for holding these Rituals?” Some of the Rituals and Rhythms, practiced in the communities the interviewees came from, remain meaningful to them when allowed to express different values. One pilgrim who adamantly stated how “done” she was with her church, also expressed excitement that I would be leading Advent worship on my farm. “I love Advent,” she told me. When I queried her as to why she continued to find the celebration of Advent meaningful, even though she no longer subscribed to a Christocentric theology, she paused. “It’s about Incarnation, about how God comes to us in darkness. I no longer believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, or that he was born

⁹⁵ Phil. 2:5–11.

⁹⁶ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 31–32.

uniquely as the Son of God. But God did come in Jesus. I don't know."⁹⁷ This conversation serves as a reminder of how messy, "un-nailed down" and full of ambiguity spirituality in the Second Half of Life becomes.

Although this pilgrim didn't say so explicitly, her response alludes to the importance of metaphor that other respondents have directly commented on. One woman who remains content in her Episcopal congregation, while living fully in the Second Half of Life, says she can find meaning in the biblical stories and the language of liturgy because she translates everything into metaphor. This is the power of Advent for the woman who is no longer subscribes to Christocentric beliefs. The metaphor of Advent, of making room for something new to be born, calls her into deep spiritual work she finds meaningful and fulfilling. For a Rhythm, Ritual and Rule to be helpful it needs to be a container that can hold ambiguous and deeply symbolic rituals, even when they originate from traditions that no longer offer a spiritual home.

The needs and longings expressed by the Second Half of Life pilgrims are summarized below, along with best practices gleaned from programs I've led and created, that Second Half of Life pilgrims attended. These elements, along with values from the Wisdom Tradition will be integrated in the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule for a Wisdom Monasticism.

Rhythm for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

Wayne Mueller begins his book, *Sabbath*, by naming the pervasiveness of rhythm. "There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body's need for rest. There is a rhythm in the way the day dissolves into night, and night into morning. ... There is tidal rhythm,

⁹⁷ Drawn from Interview data. See Appendix A.

a deep, eternal conversation between the land the great sea.”⁹⁸ Rhythm provides order and sanctifies time. The longing and need for rhythm is pervasive and universal. The Jewish celebration of the Sabbath speaks to the power of Rhythm to shape, hold and give meaning to people. “During Sabbath the Jews, by keeping sacred rest, could maintain their spiritual ground wherever they were, even in protracted exile from their own country. ‘It was not Israel that kept the Sabbath,’ it is said, ‘but the Sabbath kept Israel.’”⁹⁹

Rhythms that were *liturgical, creation-based, and oriented toward the human life cycle*, came up in my interviews as significant to pilgrims in the Second Half of Life.

1. *Liturgical Church Year*

Liturgical traditions shaped the spiritual lives of fifty-three percent of the persons I interviewed. Eighty-five percent continue to find the rhythm of the liturgical calendar meaningful, ordering their spiritual lives and engaging in meaningful rituals by the seasons of the Church year, such as Advent, Lent and Pentecost. These persons participate in Advent Quiet Days, Pre-Lenten retreats and Worship gatherings focused on familiar festivals like All Saints Day.

2. *Nature Cycles*

While the liturgical calendar provides a sacred container for spiritual experience, it falls short when attending nature’s seasons and celebrations. Thirty-eight percent of the people I interviewed expressed a desire for a rhythm connected to nature cycles.

Respondents expressed a desire to mark the solar and lunar cycles with rituals like drum

⁹⁸ Wayne Mueller. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam: 1999), 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

circles at full moons, and worship gatherings at the Summer and Winter Solstices. The power of allowing the rhythms of nature to call us into sacred time, is that once out there in the world, we remember how fully present God is there. Elizabeth Barrett Browning captures this truth in her poetry:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.¹⁰⁰

In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor offers simple rituals, like taking a walk outside, to both call us back into creation, and offer us ways to notice how every bush is afire with God.¹⁰¹ The rhythm of the natural world offers us a sacred cycle for paying attention in this way.

While it did not come up in my interviews, there is a growing interest among alternative faith communities across the country in events related to agricultural rhythms. The Episcopal, Lutheran and Reformed churches include prayers and liturgies in their worship resources for Rogation Sunday, blessings of seeds, prayers for rain and crops, and more.¹⁰² These resources, neglected by churches disconnected from agricultural rhythms, are being rediscovered by faith communities seeking fresh expressions and

¹⁰⁰ D. H. S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee, eds., *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1917); Bartleby.com, 2000, accessed December 30, 2017, www.bartleby.com/236/.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperOne: 2009), 53.

¹⁰² <http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/worship-services/rogation-blessing>, Sundays and Seasons, copyright 2003, Augsburg Fortress, p. 195, from *Worship From the Ground Up: a Worship Resource for Town and Country Congregations*, Dubuque Iowa: Center for Theology and the Land, Accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.rca.org/resources/dayprayercropsandindustry>.

spiritual practices. An emerging faith community in the city of Durham, NC, describes itself this way:

Farm Church is an emerging New Worshipping Community in the Presbyterian Church (USA)—a community, we believe, that will create both a setting for mission and an ethos of loving community that will be an attractive alternative for those who struggle to connect with more traditional Christian churches. Farm Church invites the spiritually curious into a life-practice of Christ-centered faith and service where Christ's rituals of feeding, teaching, and healing are couched in the growing, collecting, preparing and serving of food.¹⁰³

One does not need to be a farmer to find agricultural rhythms meaningful. Most of us can grow some of our own food. Planting *something*—sunflowers, tomatoes, lettuce, pumpkins, impatiens, a kitchen herb garden—keeps us mindful of the growing season: when it's warm enough to plant, when to water, harvest, or prune. Like the farmers who lean into sacred trust because they know how deeply their crops depend on measures beyond their control, we too, can allow the rhythms of our simple gardens to draw us into sacred connection with the presence of God in the land. Just as the farmer blesses the field, we too, can bless our seeds and give thanks for our harvest.

3. *Life Milestones*

Life milestones are experienced as individual events within community. Birthdays, births, deaths and marriages, cannot be calendared like Advent or Summer Solstice. Therefore, a rhythm will be created that allows for these moments to be celebrated and experienced with others, using language of blessing, ritual and spiritual expression congruent with a Second Half of Life paradigm.

One woman, who gathered with a small spiritual community outside her traditional church, shared the importance of their birthday rhythm. Members of the group

¹⁰³ Accessed December 18, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/pg/FarmChurch.Org/about/?ref=page_internal.

would write a letter naming the growth, gifts and blessings they had witnessed for each person's birthday. Persons disconnecting from their former church communities express concern and desire for life milestones to continue to be marked in a sacred way. In addition to offering meaningful rituals for these moments that occur randomly, a monthly rhythm for honoring birthdays, and annual celebrations for coming of age, graduation, retirement, etc., will be important components of a Rhythm for Second Half of Life pilgrims. When we acknowledge these rhythms with sacred rituals we sanctify time with prayers and blessing, festivals and confessions, welcomings and good-byes. We create a holy order, which in the end holds us.

Rituals for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

When Second Half of Life pilgrims leave the Church, many of them deeply miss the rituals. Pat shared how much she missed Communion. Some pilgrims like Joan, and others I interviewed, remain in congregations because the power and meaning of the Church's ritual keep them there, even when little else nurtures their spiritual life. Such is the power of ritual. In my interviews, I asked people what rituals had been important to them during their time in the Church, what rituals are meaningful for them now, and what rituals they still long for in their lives. Their responses can be summarized by these themes: Creation Focused, Liturgically Focused, Communal Prayer, Shared Meals, Worship, Music and Chant, Communion/Eucharist, and Life Milestones.

In addition to these, it's important to mention the rituals of *Welcoming and Departure*. Rituals that convey the manner in which new people are welcomed, and members of the community are celebrated when they leave express the values of hospitality and compassion contained within the Rule. These ritual moments provide

opportunities to practice hospitality to new comers, as well as honoring and celebrating the gifts people have contributed while in the community.

1. Creation Focused

The desire for rituals connected to the natural rhythms of creation came up among sixty percent of the interviewees. Rituals connected to welcoming the darkness and celebrating the light at solstice and equinoxes were named as desirable.

Another component of creation-centered rituals involves growing and harvesting food. Farm Churches attract participants longing for more intentional and concrete connections between their faith with creation. One congregation began their growing season this year by blessing their fields.¹⁰⁴ Another church in Austin, TX creates opportunities for members to farm and rediscover a sacred connection to the land, food and the labor that produces it.¹⁰⁵

2. Liturgically Focus

Many rituals connected with the Church Year remain meaningful, especially when celebrations connected specifically to Jesus' life are reflected on metaphorically. Ash Wednesday invites confession and forgiveness. Christmas welcomes pondering about Incarnation. Good Friday and Easter encourage reflection on the need for something to die before resurrection and new life are possible. Rituals like Foot Washing, connected to Maundy Thursday are powerful, intimate moments that allow an experience of reciprocity in giving and receiving that is necessary for intimate relationships.

¹⁰⁴ Nurya Love Parish, "We Blessed the Fields Then We Planted Them," Plainsong Farm, May 30, 2017, accessed December 18, 2017, <http://plainsongfarm.com/2017/05/30/we-blessed-the-fields-then-we-planted-them/>.

¹⁰⁵ Accessed December 18, 2017, http://www.amplifiedchurch.com/single-post/2017/11/14/Farm-Church-A-faithful-community-connecting-people-to-God-food-and-the-land?utm_campaign=buffer&utm_content=buffer8a269&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com

3. *Communal Prayer*

Monastic communities organize their life around a rhythm of communal prayer. One of the people interviewed came from the Roman Catholic tradition, and had spent time in religious orders. She continued to pray the office for vespers, compline, and other hours on her own. Other forms of communal prayer lend themselves to Second Half of Life spiritual practices as well, particularly Group *Lectio Divina* and Centering Prayer.

Lectio Divina continues to be, a central practice in monastic communities, deeply nourishing the sacred lives of those who feasted on the Word.¹⁰⁶ This form of reading scripture invites those who practice it to focus on depth rather than breadth. Its intention is not information, but formation.¹⁰⁷

This time-tested exercise for individual spiritual formation, offers the same benefits for small groups. When used in group settings, the steps are the same, only after each step group members are invited to share their reflections. This communal prayer is particularly suited to persons in the Second Half of Life because it invites people who have been cultivating their inner life to enrich the group with their wisdom, rather than limit leadership and teaching to externally authorized leaders.

Centering Prayer, another transformative individual practice, also translates well to groups. Cynthia Bourgeault considers Centering Prayer a primary practice for “putting on the mind of Christ,” for it offers practitioners multiple opportunities to practice *kenosis*, the discipline of releasing and self-emptying. For persons invested in the Second

¹⁰⁶ C. Cummings, “Monastic Practices,” (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 33, as quoted in Jo-Ann K. Badley and Ken Badley, “Slow Reading: Reading along ‘Lectio’ Lines” (2010). Faculty Publications - School of Education. Paper 35, accessed November 19, 2017, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/35.

¹⁰⁷ Jo-Ann K. Badley and Ken Badley, “Slow Reading: Reading along ‘Lectio’ Lines” (2010). Faculty Publications - School of Education. Paper 35, 34, accessed November 19, 2017, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/35.

Half of Life work of developing their capacity for non-dual perception, this spiritual discipline is considered essential.¹⁰⁸ While primarily, a daily spiritual discipline, when practiced as a group, participants report that the experience changes. Participants speak of an awareness of sacred presence between persons, and within the group, that they don't experience when practicing the prayer on their own. During my interviews, sixty percent of the respondents expressed a desire to be a part of group centering or communal prayer experiences.

4. *Shared Meals*

One person interviewed expressed a desire to cook and eat together. In other interviews, the longing for community would resonate with shared meals. This is something churches and para-church groups are engaging in more often. For example, *Dinner Church* has become a nationwide ministry offering hospitality and community through meals.¹⁰⁹ My experience leading small groups confirms the essential role eating together plays in formation.

Breaking bread together as a sacred experience is deeply rooted the biblical narrative for both Jews and Christians.¹¹⁰ Len Sweet, in his book *Tablet to Table* captures the importance of this spiritual practice: “At the table, where food and stories are passed from one person to another and one generation to another, is where each of us learns who we are, where we come from, what we can be, to whom we belong, and to what we are

¹⁰⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2016), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.dinnerchurchcollective.net/>

¹¹⁰ Gen. 18:1–15; Luke 7:36–50; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 24:13–35; Luke 15:11–32.

called.”¹¹¹ The ritual of table fellowship, more than any other ritual, expresses the core value of hospitality. We use meals to welcome people into community, to form community, to heal community and to bless people as they leave community. “Have your breakfasts all alone. Share lunch with your best friends. Invite your enemy to dinner, wrote Nelson Mandela.”¹¹²

5. *Worship*

Kristin and Joan both specifically identified the diminished role of the sermon. This was my first signal that for Second Half of Life pilgrims, the worship leader’s role changes. They serve less as the proclaimer of truth, and function more as a facilitator, inviting participants to share their own wisdom. The leader’s role though is essential. Four respondents shared their desire for a participatory gathering facilitated by someone else.

The facilitator gathers the community regularly for shared song, prayers, laments responding to sacred texts, and celebrations. These gatherings shape the life of diverse faith traditions. Some communities meet weekly, others only for major festival celebrations. For worship in the Second Half of Life to remain congruent with its Rule, the facilitator must practice hospitality in the choice of sacred texts, music and God language.

¹¹¹ Len Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2015), 8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 139.

6. *Music and Chant*

The powerful role of music cannot be over stated. “One of the glories of music is that it says what words cannot say.”¹¹³ One of the longings I heard again and again was for an experience of community. While community is nurtured in many ways, music plays an essential role in community building. Paul Westermeyer says, “Music has a peculiar communal and mnemonic character. A group who sings together becomes one and remembers its story, and therefore who it is, in a particularly potent way.”¹¹⁴ Brené Brown discovered this as well in her research: “Laughter, song, and dance create emotional and spiritual connection; they remind us of the one thing that truly matters when we are searching for comfort, celebration, inspiration, or healing: We are not alone.”¹¹⁵

Because music is powerful and carries so much emotional presence (good and bad), finding music that will be meaningful for a diverse community can be challenging. For some people hymns become triggers for worship experiences that felt oppressive and non-inclusive. Yet, this same music can call forth deeply sacred encounters for others. A priest at Trinity Church Wall Street struggled with the challenge of finding meaningful music for a diverse community, until he discovered the simple melodies taught by a non-profit, *Music that Makes Community*.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Alice Parker, *Creative Hymn Singing*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music, 1976), 6.

¹¹⁴ Paul Westermeyer, “The Functions of Music in Worship,” in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber, vol. 4, bk. 1, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Star Song, 1994), 101.

¹¹⁵ Brené Brown, *Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden: 2010), 118.

¹¹⁶ Accessed November 18, 2017, http://www.musicthatmakescommunity.org/presenters_blog

I have been experimenting with these chants with similar outcomes. Chanting, an ancient sacred practice, continues to find fresh expressions for communal worship. In addition to its facility to build community, chanting supports the inner work of spiritual development. Cynthia Bourgeault claims “chanting is at the heart of all sacred traditions worldwide... What meditation accomplishes in silence, chanting accomplishes in sound... Sacred chanting is an extremely powerful way of awakening and purifying the heart.”¹¹⁷

7. *Communion/Eucharist*

Conversations about the ritual of Communion/Eucharist surprised me. Despite its strong ties to institutional church, forty percent of the people interviewed name this as one of the experiences they most miss if they no longer worship in a congregation. Three people who continue to worship in congregations name this ritual as one of the reasons they stay. Communion is very powerful and for most this ritual lives into the true meaning of sacrament— “a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.”¹¹⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault echoes this in her description of how her first encounter with the Eucharist became a conversion experience.¹¹⁹

Not everyone I interviewed considered Communion/Eucharist an essential ritual. One respondent preferred to experience communion as what she described as an Emmaus Road moment. “I take dinner to young 28-year-old mother of twins once a month. That is

¹¹⁷ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 2009), 105.

¹¹⁸ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “sacrament,” accessed November 19, 2017, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrament>.

¹¹⁹ Accessed October 31, 2017, <http://www.soundstrue.com/podcast/transcripts/cynthia-bourgeault.php?camefromhome=camefromhome>

communion for me.”¹²⁰ Still, since forty percent of those interviewed commented on the importance of this ritual, it needs to be included in worship and other moments of communal gathering.

8. *Life Milestones (Marriage, Birth, Death, Retirement, etc.)*

Spiritual institutions mark significant milestones such as: marriage, birth, death, coming of age, etc. These rituals continue to hold importance in the Second Half of Life. One person I interviewed created her own spiritual community when she lived in another city. She described how they created a marriage ritual for a lesbian couple because they could not celebrate this significant life moment in the traditional church community. Another person shared her fear about where her funeral would take place if she no longer belonged to a church.

Rituals matter especially during times of transition. Joshua Clark, while writing on ritual and religious tradition, states, “Rituals allow the devotee’s voice and identity to be asserted in times of confusion and helplessness.”¹²¹ Rituals for life milestones also serve to strengthen the community that shares in them because “ritual as a communal act connects us one to the other, expressing and creating a community,” claims Rachel Wise in her article published in the *Denison Journal of Religion*.¹²² Along with the previously

¹²⁰ Drawn from Interview data. See Appendix A.

¹²¹ Joshua Clark, “Ritual and Religious Tradition: A Comparative Essay on the Use of Ritual in Christian, Jewish and Hindu Practice,” *Denison Journal of Religion* 6, no. 1 (2006): 9, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol6/iss1/2>.

¹²² Rachel Wise, “Reclaiming Religious Symbols in a Secular World: Ritual and Uniting the Faith Community Within the Prophetic Tradition,” *Denison Journal of Religion* 5, no. 1 (2005): 10, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol5/iss1/2>.

discussed rituals, an important component in the “Rhythm, Ritual and Rule” will be rituals that recognize, name and celebrate the milestone moments of life’s journey.

Rule of Life and Values for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

Four key values for Second Half of Life pilgrims emerged from my interviews: Creation, Hospitality, Metaphorical Theology and Contemplative Action.

1. Creation Matters

Sixty percent of the persons interviewed talked about the importance of nature. Some talked about needing to spend more time outside because they connected with what felt sacred to them in Creation. Others talked about the importance of connecting with the natural rhythms of the earth: the monthly lunar cycle, the summer and winter solstices, the equinoxes.

Eriugena, one of the primary theologians of the Celtic Church “taught that Christ moves among us in two shoes, as it were, one shoe being that of creation, the other that of the Scriptures.”¹²³ For the Celts, God could speak through the power of an Atlantic storm or offer revelation about shared leadership and power through the rhythm of the tides. Some pilgrims looking for meaningful spiritual engagement find themselves drawn to the Wiccan tradition because of a sacred rhythm shaped by the natural cycles of the moon and sun.¹²⁴ In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor explores the important role Creation plays in sacred experience.¹²⁵ Diana Butler Bass echoes these same themes her book, *Grounded*, noting how many people who are no longer

¹²³ Newell, 34.

¹²⁴ V.K. Duckett, “The Wheel of the Year as a Spiritual Psychology for Women,” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 137–151, accessed December 5, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies/vol29/iss2/12>

¹²⁵ Taylor, *An Altar in the World*.

comfortable in churches are experiencing God in Creation.¹²⁶ For further study on creation as a foundational value of our faith, I suggest some of the beautiful work by Norman Wirzba on the sanctity of food and care of the earth.¹²⁷ Ecotheology is on the rise as spiritual pilgrims in the United States realize this devastating void in our Christian history.

2. *Hospitality*

Not surprisingly, hospitality emerged as a core value among pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. Like Jesus, those in the Second Half of Life embrace a broad and expansive practice of hospitality not “limited to its literal sense of receiving a stranger in our house, but as a fundamental attitude toward our fellow human being, which can be expressed in a great variety of ways.”¹²⁸

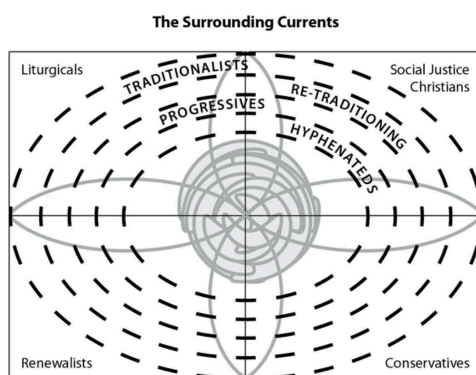
Second Half of Life pilgrims practice hospitality by embracing diverse leadership and community, including women, people of color, gay, lesbian, and transgender leaders. This expansive hospitality extends itself beyond people to ideas and texts. Participants in my interviews are curious about other sacred texts, like the Gospel of Thomas, and open to new ways of interpreting Jesus’ role in Christianity’s sacred story. Hospitality also finds expression in an openness to other spiritual traditions.

¹²⁶ Bass, *Grounded*, 23.

¹²⁷ Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015). Also, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating, Being-In-Creation*.

¹²⁸ Henry Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1986), 47–48.

Phyllis Tickle addresses this broad, wide open inclusiveness in her book *The Great Emergence* when she names the collapsing boundaries between what used to be distinct expressions of faith: Liturgicals, Social Justice Christians, Conservatives, and Renewalists. I find her image for this shift compelling, as it not only illustrates what Second Half of Life pilgrims describe about their own experiences, but it also maintains the strict distinctions still important to First Half of Life believers, and reflects the currents that are leading pilgrims from their boundaried communities to more inclusive ones.¹²⁹



Hospitality serves as a core value in most spiritual traditions. One of Judaism's founding stories tells of Abraham welcoming three strangers, preparing them a feast and before sending them on their way discovering he has been visited by God and two angels.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 123–140.

¹³⁰ Gen. 18:1–19:29.

Despite this core tenant in the Jewish tradition, Jesus encounters great resistance when he practices hospitality by eating with tax collectors and sinners.¹³¹ Jesus pushes the boundaries of hospitality even further when he challenges a questioner, attempting to limit hospitality with a narrow definition of “neighbor,” by telling the parable of the “Good Samaritan.”¹³²

Judaism and Christianity reflects the changes that had already been taking place among religious traditions since the late Iron Age (ca. 1000–200 BCE). As deities for local tribes gave way to universal gods, new values emerged. “As a result, the new prophets, storytellers, and philosophers valorized an important ethical and spiritual practice, one that came to form the core of most faith traditions: hospitality.”¹³³ Second Half of Life pilgrims embrace this value as central to their maturing faith, and expand the definition of hospitality so that it extends beyond the welcoming of strangers to include the welcoming of ideas and paradigms once considered strange. As one interviewee commented, “There can’t be a lot of no’s, you can’t have unitive consciousness with a long list of no’s.”

3. *Metaphorical Theology*

Sacred stories continued to be meaningful, and powerful to the pilgrims I interviewed. The Incarnation, Resurrection and Passion matter, not only because they happened to Jesus, but because respondents experience them as universal experiences that happen to all of us. The Exodus and the Wandering in the Wilderness tell the common

¹³¹ Luke 15: 1–2.

¹³² Luke 10:25–37.

¹³³ Bass, *Grounded*, 217.

story of struggle we experience when extricating ourselves from all forms of captivity and slavery. For my interviewees Jesus incarnated the universal human journey coming to reveal what we are all here to do, which Paul describes in Philippians: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.”¹³⁴

The word translated “emptied” is the Greek word *kenosis*. It describes a spiritual discipline, first practiced by Jesus, which he then taught his disciples.¹³⁵ Cynthia Bourgeault claims that *kenosis*, the practice of self-emptying, of dying to self, is Jesus’ unique contribution to the Wisdom tradition.¹³⁶ As a Wisdom Teacher, Jesus taught that *kenosis* is what the spiritual path is about. This work of putting on the mind of Christ Jesus is not about becoming divine, but instead focuses on entering into the same relationship with God that Jesus shares, one of “complete, mutual indwelling.”¹³⁷ To live in this kind of divine flow requires the ongoing practice of dying to the ego. Contemporary mystical theologian Ramon Panikkar describes it this way, “If I do not desire anything for my ego, I am everything and I have everything. I am one with the source insofar as I, too, act as a source by making everything I have received flow again—just like Jesus.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Phil. 2:5–7.

¹³⁵ Matt. 16:25; John 13:12–15.

¹³⁶ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2008), 63.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

¹³⁸ Ramon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 2004), 115–116.

While none of my interviewees spoke explicitly about *kenosis*, the language they used to talk about Jesus, and their spiritual path, resonated with Cynthia Borgeault's writing on the Wisdom tradition. When I mentioned Cynthia Borgeault and her work in my interviews, there was interest among seventy-seven percent of the respondents in exploring her theology and gathering with others to discuss these topics. This kind of theological reflection is an essential ingredient in a Rule for pilgrims in the Second Half of Life because one of the values that needs to be considered is "How do we understand Jesus?" When creedal statements that talk about Jesus with language like "virgin birth" and "only Son of the Father" no longer give voice to a person's experience of God and Jesus, what replaces it?

In his seminal work in progress, *The Whole Theological Enchilada*, Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, narrative theologian, published author, and emeritus faculty of Vanguard University, suggests that an Analogical-Metaphorical-Poetic language¹³⁹ may be a way of naming what shifts for pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. This kind of language not only offers a new way of describing this Second Half of Life spiritual experience, proposes the author, but also describes an entirely different thought structure and paradigm. Camery-Hoggatt sorts the different ways we use language into three categories, which he calls the Three Minds: The Rational Mind, The Narrative Mind, and The Analogical-Metaphorical-Poetic Mind. In an email to Donna K. Wallace he writes:

Each of these minds functions in its own way. What makes for a good lecture isn't the same as what makes for a well-told story or an impactful analogy...people tend to associate with other people whose mental habits are the same. It's not only that they feel understood within their same group, but that they *actually experience reality in different ways...*

¹³⁹ For further study, see the classic work by David Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination*.

I wonder if there aren't people whose direct experiences of the world are poetic. What if poetry isn't only a matter of expression, but of primary experience in the first place...

I have sometimes thought that this is at the heart of the mystic's experience. As I read their literature and the literature about them, one overriding theme is that the rational mind is inadequate for this form of knowledge. The mystics always seem to slip instead into an analogical or metaphorical mode, which to them is the only way to honor the experiences they're trying to describe.¹⁴⁰

The use of Metaphorical Theology emerges as one of the foundational values of a Rule for the Second Half of Life. This mode of thinking and knowing allows for another way of considering the significance of Jesus as the Christ without needing to reconcile it with other modes of thinking and knowing.

A Rule grounded in Metaphorical Theology allows for new ways to perceive, understand and follow Christ. Metaphorical Theology also creates room for living with unanswered questions and space for ongoing reflection, both within the larger community and each person's inner sacred dialogue.

4. *Contemplative Action*

Seventy percent of the people I interviewed participate in some kind of ministry on behalf of others. They integrate Healing Touch into their medical practice, serve on non-profit boards that serve children in need, take on mentor roles in Alcoholics Anonymous, teach literacy to inner city children, etc. None of them use the language of social justice or talk about the need to change oppressive systems, however. The energy of their deep engagement toward their neighbor emerges from a loving and compassionate place. The people I interviewed embody the activism Nyhuis describes as part of Second Half of Life:

¹⁴⁰ Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, Ph.D., in correspondence with Dr. Donna K. Wallace, which she shared with me during the discussion about this topic. Permission granted. *Emphasis mine.*

They engage the world open to those who are different, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies... Their response is compassion... They are able to spend and be spent in quiet and profound love and justice... They engage turmoil and injustice without being engaged by it. They disrupt systems not as warriors, but as mystics.¹⁴¹

The individuals I interviewed responded to suffering with accompaniment, supporting others as they find their way through struggle. I heard stories of quiet support for those in need, a deep commitment to volunteer in communities of suffering, a desire to teach resilience, and contribute to healing. Second Half of Life respondents expressed a need to engage in this kind of healing, transforming work with individuals and communities. An important component of a Rule for Second Half of Life pilgrims is a commitment to contemplative action driven by compassion and non-violence.

These values of Creation, Hospitality, Metaphorical Theology and Contemplative Action emerged as shared values among in my interviews thus providing a foundation for a Rule of Life, inform what kind of rituals will be meaningful, and the rhythm needed to provide a structure for life together. The values identified offer insight about how the community may gather, the communal and private practices that will nurture their spiritual lives, how they will engage in theological discourse, reach out into the world and more.

Wisdom Monasticism for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

My interviews with Second Half of Life pilgrims, the values and practices from the Wisdom traditions, and the learnings from creating meaningful Second Half of Life experiences, shaped the Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule I created for a Wisdom Monastic

¹⁴¹ Nyhuis, "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life," 45–46.

community for pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. This Rhythm, Ritual and Rule addresses the longing I heard from Kristin, Joan, Pat, and Terry, and affirmed by the fourteen others I interviewed for this project.

The Wisdom Monastic community offers Second Half of Life pilgrims a place of spiritual nurture, and support for those on the wisdom path focused on growing into their wise mind. To respect the continuum along which pilgrims transition out of First Half into Second Half of Life, the Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule focuses on invitation rather than prescription. This differs from traditional monastic rules because it does not require a commitment to a set of values and practices. This invitational approach intends to create what Diana Butler Bass refers to as “the commons,” a shared space with fluid boundaries where people come and go. This fluid community can be formed of a variety of people engaged in shared practices that embody the ideals of the inhabitants.¹⁴²

The Rule names the “ideals of the inhabitants.” The Rhythm and Ritual detail shared practices that nurture the spiritual lives of Second Half of Life Pilgrims, and also support their pursuit of the wisdom path. Pilgrims interested in the Wisdom Monastic Community are invited to participate in a way that feels congruent with their place on the continuum. Some pilgrims will participate in a weekly rhythm of Farm Church, which integrates the rituals of *Lectio Divinia*, Chanting and Communion. They may also participate in communal rituals like monthly Common Meals and seasonal retreats. Other pilgrims, ready to venture further down the wisdom path may join the weekly rhythm of the “Prayer and Prose” group, which incorporates the rituals of Group Centering Prayer, Chanting and Reflection, focused on wisdom teachings. Pilgrims participating in this community ritual may also commit to a daily rhythm of Centering Prayer on their own.

¹⁴² Bass, *Grounded*, 240–241.

This monastic model reflects the original meaning of a monastery, which derives from *mono*, meaning alone and *-terion*, a place for doing something... a place for doing something alone. While we think of monasteries as communal places, there is truth in this definition. The inward journey is one we embark on alone. Only we can walk the path toward the wise mind within us. The gift of a monastic community is walking this inward path in the company of others doing the same. I believe Ram Dass captured the essence of this kind of spiritual community when he said, “we are all just walking each other home.”¹⁴³

Conclusion

Section One considered the diverse and growing community of Dones, Nones, SNBRs, and the dechurched of different ages and from diverse origins. These spiritual pilgrims share the common experience of moving along a continuum of faith development from First Half to Second Half of Life, that has led many of them out of traditional churches. My conversations with four people from this community, Pat, Terry, Joan and Kristin, alerted me to the need for these pilgrims to find new spiritual communities prepared to nurture and support them as they transition and settle into Second Half of Life spiritual development.

In Section Two, I considered three responses to this need for a Second Half of Life spiritual community:

1. Wilson-Hartgrove’s New Monasticism
2. Cynthia Bourgeault’s Wisdom Schools
3. Anam Cara groups, a congregational ministry program I created

¹⁴³ Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help?: Stories and Reflections on Service* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), 212.

Each of these responses offer elements supportive of Second Half of Life pilgrims, but also come up short in areas. I felt a need for further study and development, which prompted further literature review and a study of the specific needs of my local community of spiritual pilgrims. Therefore, in this Section, I proposed a solution, *A Ritual, Rhythm and Rule for a Wisdom Monasticism for Second Half of Life Pilgrims* informed by input gathered from interviews with Second Half of Life pilgrims and my own best practices. The components of the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule identified here will form the framework of the Artifact portion of this dissertation. The details of the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule are included in my artifact.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

This dissertation proposes that the large, diverse, and growing community of pilgrims practicing their spirituality outside the Church share the common experience of moving along a continuum of faith development from First Half to Second Half of Life. Congregations that have nurtured their faith through the First Half of Life are ill equipped to offer spiritual nurture for the Second Half of Life. This dissertation addresses how to offer support and spiritual community to this growing population of believers.

Informed by input gathered from interviews with pilgrims in the Second Half of Life, as well as my own best practices in ministry, I created a Rhythm, Ritual and Rule sensitive to the values, theological and biblical paradigms meaningful to pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. The Rhythm, Ritual and Rule organizes experiences of spiritual nurture intended to support their continued spiritual growth and life together. The components identified in this study will form the framework of the Artifact. The details of the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule include:

Rhythm

- Liturgical Year
- Life Milestone
- Natural Rhythms

Rituals

- Creation Focused
- Liturgically Focused
- Communal Prayer
- Shared Meals
- Worship
- Music and Chant
- Eucharist/Communion
- Milestones

Rule

- Creation
- Hospitality
- Metaphorical Theology
- Contemplative Action

The Artifact portion of this dissertation consists of:

1. A detailed description of Tikkun Farm's Rhythm, Ritual and Rule.
 - a. The Rhythm will organize our life together by daily, weekly, monthly, and season gatherings (how often Farm Church gathers, the dates/seasons for the retreats and quiet days that anchor our life together, how we gather around the natural rhythms of the solar and lunar cycle, the agricultural rhythm that shapes our year, etc.)
 - b. The Ritual will detail the practices that help us grow spiritually as individuals and as a community (Farm Church, retreats, volunteer days, drum circles, communion, etc.)
 - c. The Rule will describe the beliefs and values that shape the community at Tikkun Farm.
2. The Survey questions based on Dr. Terry Nyhuis' characteristics of Second Half of Life pilgrims. In addition to the questions, the Artifact will include a summary of two hundred respondents who responded to my survey.
3. The interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims who responded to my survey and shared their faith stories.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Audience

This Rhythm, Ritual and Rule has been created specifically for Second Half of Life pilgrims gathering at Tikkun Farm, the setting for my ministry. Tikkun Farm is a three-and-a-half acre urban farm sixteen miles from the heart of Cincinnati, OH. This farm serves as the home for a non-profit, as well as the gathering space for a growing community of Second Half of Life pilgrims. The Rhythm, Ritual and Rule of the Wisdom Community of Tikkun Farm will help Second Half of Life pilgrims orient themselves to the beliefs and values that shape this community, discover the kind of spiritual experiences offered and become familiar with how frequently and in what ways we gather together. The Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule intends to be invitational, helping Second Half of Life pilgrims discern if Tikkun Farm's community feels congruent and supportive of their spiritual path. The Wisdom Monastic community will be local, at least initially. Individuals who participate in events at the farm and express interest in a deeper involvement would be invited to read through the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule. It will also be available on Tikkun Farm's website and Facebook page.

A secondary audience will be churches, pastors and bishops interested in learning more about the kinds of gatherings, beliefs, values and experiences supportive of Second Half of Life pilgrims within their churches and faith communities

A third audience is seminaries. I would like to see seminaries introduce research about Second Half of Life into their curriculum, helping students grapple with how to offer spiritual nurture to this population when the students themselves may not be in that

place on their journey. It's a question of pastoral leadership, and seminaries can be part of the solution.

Content

The content of Tikkun Farm's Rhythm, Ritual and Rule will be:

1. A description of the Rhythm that shapes the community's life together;
2. A list and description of the Rituals the community gathers around; and
3. An explanation of the foundational values and beliefs that inform the Rule of Life.

Promotion

Tikkun Farm's Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule will be listed on the Tikkun Farm website, included on Tikkun Farm's Facebook page and will be available as a paper copy at Tikkun Farm for visitors, and for sharing with congregations and retreatants in other settings.

Budget

The budget for this project will be minimal because most of the costs are in-house. I will work with the graphic designer who created Tikkun Farm's website on visual design. The cost of his time will be less than \$500. The cost for printing and binding will be approximately \$100 for ten paper copies.

SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

Interviewing Second Half of Life pilgrims to determine the kinds of practices, rhythms and experiences they find meaningful taught me a lot about what how to create a meaningful ministry for them. It also taught me that we still have a lot to learn. My interviews were limited to people I found using my Facebook Friends network. Ninety percent of the respondents to my survey were women from the mid-West, and all of them were Caucasian. There needs to be additional research specifically related to traditional research methods (randomized sampling, etc) with people who have transitioned into Second Half of Life that includes:

- men
- people of color
- people from a broad geography

This level of research was not within the scope of my project. I was looking for pilgrims who could offer input into the specific programs and experiences I provide in my context. Additional interviews will confirm and challenge if what I learned about my context applies to a larger, more diverse community.

When I began this research, I was serving as a pastor in an Episcopal congregation. My hope had been to develop a ministry that could partner with, or be integrated into, the ministries of that church. This would have made it possible to create a ministry for pilgrims like Joan, who will remain in their congregations, even if they are no longer growing spiritually. Unfortunately, I was released from this congregation before I completed my dissertation (see Appendix C: A Cautionary Tale). It would be good to find a traditional church willing to partner with Tikkun Farm, or offer

components of the Rhythm, Ritual and Rule to Second Half of Life members of their congregation. This would offer important information to local churches seeking ways to nurture the spiritual lives of their Second Half of Life members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None of the important work in our life is accomplished solo. The big, meaningful ventures result from community and interdependence. This project fully bears that out.

This work began ten years ago when I searched for a seminary that believed the study of Spiritual Formation warranted a Doctorate in Ministry program. I found one. George Fox. I'm deeply grateful to this lovely community in Portland, OR for offering me a way to dive deeply into this field, and swim around in it for a decade. Not only did they create a nurturing and beautiful environment for study, they allowed time for life and research to coalesce in some kind of divine alchemy that eventually produces a dissertation. I am not the only student on the ten-year track. Thank you Loren Kerns and Cliff Berger for embodying a gracious culture that said again and again, "We're more interested in you finishing your dissertation, than meeting a deadline."

George Fox introduced me to the gracious advisors who midwived this work. Thanks to the incredible research of Dr. Terry Nyhuis I discovered language and paradigm for the problem I kept bumping up against in my ministry. In his role as advisor he embodied the grace and patience of the seminary as I figured out a solution that reflected my interests and gifts. I appreciate how he holds academic excellence and pastoral support in a single whole.

I would not have finished this work without Dr. Donna K. Wallace. From the first time, I talked with her about participating in her Dissertation Writing Studio she believed I could finish this. Her confidence in me, combined with her skill as researcher, writer and coach eventually convinced me too. Because I've never been the athletic type, I had not experienced the incredible power of a coach, someone who sees in you what you

can't see in yourself. In Donna I received this gift. I am only completing this journey because she said I could, and I believed her.

Two congregations supported my study while I served on their staff. I'm grateful to the beautiful disciples of Gloria Dei Church, and St. Thomas Episcopal, for financial and emotional support while I did this work. They signed up for retreats and quiet days., shared their lives with me in Spiritual Direction, trusted me to lead them through sacred spaces in Ireland, all the while not realizing how much they were teaching me. I continued to learn from the Second Half of Life pilgrims who vulnerably shared their faith journeys with me. What a gift to listen in on all the holy ways God calls us to find Love in the world. Thank you!

For the two years of my coursework I was a single parent. My two-week forays to the west coast required teams of people to ferry my son to school, band practice and karate, not to mention bathing, feeding and bedtime stories. I could never have managed this without my mom's move every semester into my home, and the support she received from so many of my friends: Gwyn, Mona, Julie, Michael, Dawn, Patty, Bob, Trish and Lisa.

The sacred surprise of this work was Greg York. He agreed to serve as my expert advisor, but soon became my beloved. When he stepped out of his official role to marry me, he became my biggest cheerleader, accompanying me on international travel for research, building me a beautiful office to write in, cooking countless meals and taking care of our shared life so I could get to the end of this path we began together. In the face of the many things I've neglected in our life together to finish this project, he's only offered me love and support. I may be the writer, but his love fills these pages.

Sacred community, like the one that produced this work, reflects the flow of Trinitarian love. God pours out love into the Son, who pours out love into the Spirit, who returns love to the Father. It's a continuous dance of creative fecundity. I've been privileged to participate in this divine dance, to be loved into the process and through it. God called me into this work, and then called me into relationship with the community that made it possible. Thanks be to God!

APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT

Rhythm Ritual and Rule for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

SUMMARY OF ARTIFACT HOURS

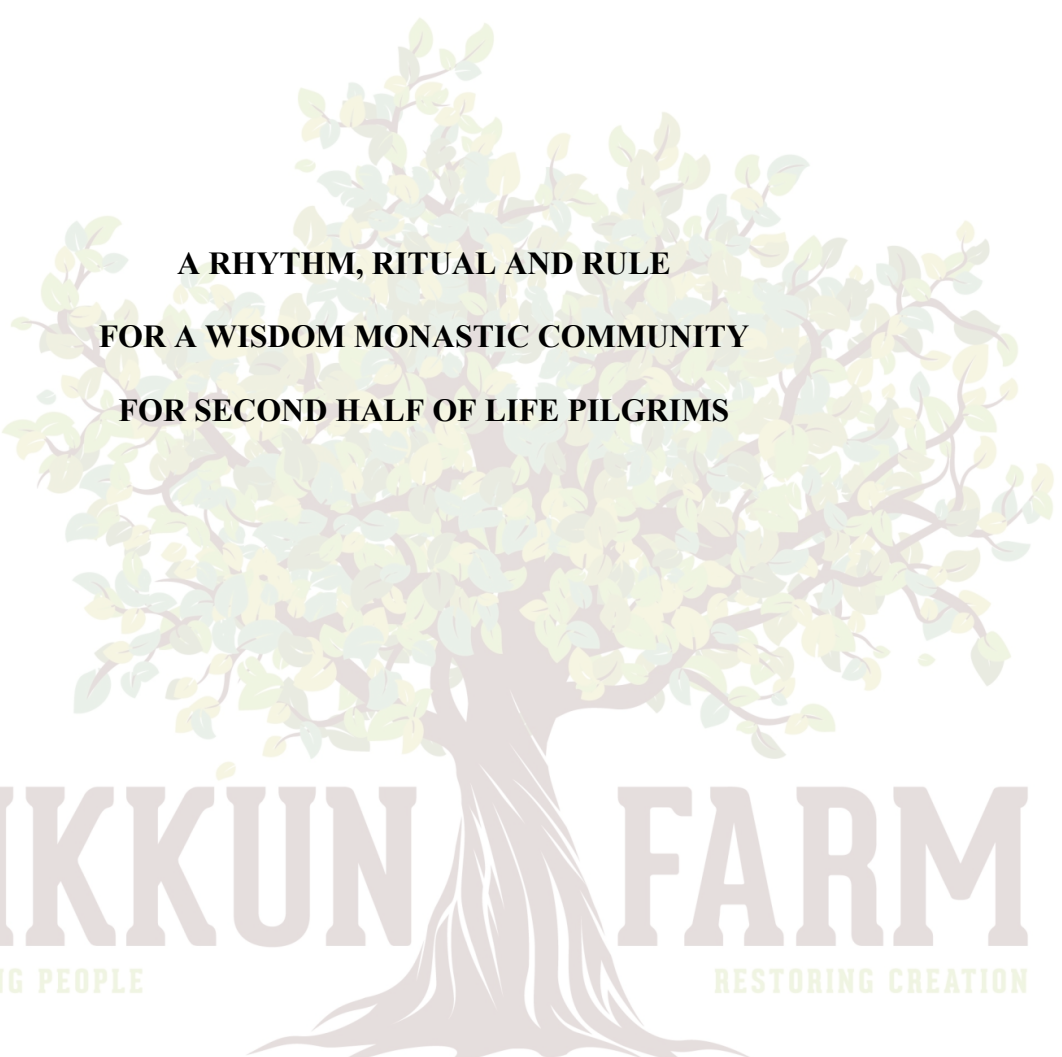
This artifact, was created through the collection of many inputs:

1. The distillation of eight years of ministry with Second Half of Life pilgrims;
2. Reading books used in ministry with Second Half of Life Pilgrims;
3. Travel to, and interviews with, monastic communities serving Second Half of Life Pilgrims;
4. Creating a survey to identify Second Half of Life pilgrims, and analyze its data;
and
5. Interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims.

I have been practicing the ministries that shaped my artifact for many years. Every retreat, Quiet Day, Spiritual Direction visit, Farm Church worship gathering, etc. with Second Half of Life pilgrims was a data collection experience. Through trial and error, intimate conversations, and discernment I learned what kinds of experiences Second Half of Life pilgrims longed for, and what practices and offerings nurtured their spiritual journeys. Without these years of ministry experiences, I would not have known what kinds of questions to ask in my survey, how to interview Second Half of Life pilgrims, or how to craft a Rhythm, Ritual, and Rule they would find meaningful. It's been more than a 100-hour project.

Summary of Artifact Hours - Mary Laymon

Activity	Hours	
Creation of Artifact	20	
Wisdom Prayer and Prose Gathering	480	Once per week for 2 hours x 60 months
Cynthia Bourgeault and Richard Rohr book reading	32	
Quiet Days	162	5 Advent @ 9 hours for two days, 2 All Hallows Eve, 2 Easter
Retreats	200	5 New Years Retreats @ 20 hours each, 5 Lent Retreat @ 20 hours
Soul Collage Workshops and Training	120	10 times per year @ 5 hours each X 2 years, 20 hours training
Farm Church	36	9 Gatherings @ 4 hours each
Marketing of the Gatherings/Events	30	Newsletters & Facebook Events
Facebook Daily Blog/Gratitude Practice	213	30 mins per day @ 14 months
Trip to Northumbria and St. Aiden and Hilda Community	175	Planning, Flights, 5 days in Community
Led Celtic Pilgrimages for Groups to Ireland/Scotland	360	Planning, Flights, 10 days of Hosting
Solstice Gathering	6	
Spiritual Direction for 2nd Half of Life Pilgrims	400	8 Pilgrims average of 10 hours each per year for 5 years
Survey & Interviews of 2nd Half of Life Pilgrims	45	Questions- 4 hours, Create surveys -2 hours, Analyze Results -4 hours, 14 interviews @ 2 hours each, Transcription of Interviews
Music Makes Community training and implementation	32	4 days of workshop and training
Total Hours	2311	



**A RHYTHM, RITUAL AND RULE
FOR A WISDOM MONASTIC COMMUNITY
FOR SECOND HALF OF LIFE PILGRIMS**

TIKKUN FARM

HEALING PEOPLE

RESTORING CREATION

REPAIRING COMMUNITIES



The Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm

The Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm intends to be a spiritual school for the Second Half of Life. This school is a community of pilgrims learning together how to move more and more into our ‘wise mind, rather than a school in the genre of experts teaching students.

Our ‘wise mind’ is different from our thinking mind. Wisdom is knowing *deeper*, with more of ourselves involved, rather than knowing *more*. The wise mind knows by seeing the larger patterns of connection that hold us all together, one to another. The wise mind sees no separation - between God and us, or between us and one another. This contrasts with the thinking mind, which knows by comparison and contrast, through differentiation.

Jesus taught that the “Kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21). When our spiritual path leads us to the sacred space within us, it leads us into our wise mind. Our wise mind then leads us out into the world transformed, able to see the presence of Love in all things.

The Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm welcomes all pilgrims seeking companionship on this inward journey, toward our wise mind, and home to our truest selves.

I invite you to learn more about the spiritual foundations and assumptions of this Wisdom community by reading through our Rule of Life. If a community shaped by these values interests you, I invite you step in the Rhythm of our life together by joining in some of the Rituals, that both lead us into our wise mind, and create a community of companionship for this inner work.

I also invite you to visit with me, or another pilgrim on the Wisdom Path. Sometimes a conversation offers the best way to explore a new room in our heart. It can help to have someone wander around in there with us, as we discern new patterns, pay attention to emerging longings, or ask vulnerable questions. Often, when we first feel drawn to a community like ours, it is because we feel discontent with where we’ve been. It can be disquieting to think that the way we’ve always thought about our spiritual life could be changing. It helps to know others have been stirred by similar questions, discontent or longings, and they have made the journey into a new sacred landscape.

Welcome the Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm. We’re glad you found us.

Shalom, Mary Laymon Pilgrim Pastor of Tikkun Farm



The Rule of Life¹⁴⁴ of the Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm

Why Wisdom?

The Wisdom Tradition is a way of knowing the world through our wise mind, the lens of Love. It allows us to see the larger patterns of connection that hold us together, and how we are all one within the presence of Love. The Wisdom Tradition has existed since the beginning of all the world's religions and is in fact their common ground.¹⁴⁵ Using specific sacred practices, the Wisdom Tradition offers a path of spiritual transformation that leads pilgrims into their wise mind.

Jesus came as a Wisdom Teacher, to show us the way home to Love. When he taught that the “Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) he invited his followers to join him on this sacred inward path, toward our wise mind, where we experience union with him, God and one another.

The Second Half of Life is about making this inward journey toward our wise mind. There is more than one path for this journey. Jewish pilgrims find their way through Torah. Buddhist's practice meditation, compassion and mindfulness. The Wisdom Tradition, with Jesus as our teacher, is the path we choose for doing this inner work.

Why Monastic?

Jesus said the “gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life” (Luke 7:14). Not everyone chooses it. Barbara Brown Taylor, a pilgrim who left the Church to walk this path, talks about it this way: “Committing myself to the task of becoming fully human is saving my life now. This is not the same as the job of being human, which came with my birth certificate. To become fully human is something extra, a conscious choice that not everyone makes.”¹⁴⁶ Many pilgrims within the Christian tradition have made this conscious choice to pursue the Kingdom of God within. Many of them left the world to do it, much as Barbara Brown Taylor left the Church.

The earliest pilgrims moved out into the Desert to live a solitary life and focus on this inner work. They found their way home to themselves and into their wise mind. They became known as the Desert Abbas and Ammas. Before long, other pilgrims followed, seeking to learn from their wisdom. Out in the desert, these Desert Ammas and Abbas set up schools for spiritual transformation, called monasteries. Curiously, the word monastery derives from *mono*, meaning alone and *-terion*, a place for doing something... a place for doing something alone. While we think of monasteries as communal places,

¹⁴⁴ This Rule of Life is where our community begins. As we live into it, it will change to reflect the truths and needs we do not yet know. Changes to the Rule will be made through prayer, discernment and conversation within the community.

¹⁴⁵ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 2003) xvi.

¹⁴⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006). 229.

there is truth in this definition. The inward journey is one we embark on alone. Only we can walk the path toward the wise mind within us.

Monasteries offer a place for doing this inner work, in the company of others committed to their own wisdom path. Traditional monasteries required pilgrims to leave the world and move into residential community to do this. While there are certainly benefits to withdrawing from the distractions of a life complicated by career, family, neighborhood and a culture pursuing very different intentions, it is not the only way to pursue the Kingdom of God within. Some monasteries offer pilgrims committed to this inner work a non-residential relationship with a monastic community. The important element is not *where* you live, but *how* you live.

We offer Second Half of Life pilgrims a place to pursue the wisdom path, in the company of others committed to the same task. We gather in the spirit of Ram Dass, who said “we are all just walking each other home.”

What kind of Monastic Community are we?

We are a community growing from the soil of the Christian tradition

- We model our life on the life of Jesus, as seen through the Wisdom lens
- We allow for new ways to perceive, understand and follow Christ
 - Some of us believe Jesus is the Son of God
 - Some of us are not sure what we believe about Jesus’ relationship to God
 - Some of us would characterize Jesus relationship to God using different language
 - It is not necessary to agree on how we think about Jesus’ relationship to God.
- We create room for living with unanswered questions and space for ongoing reflection, both within the larger community and each person’s inner sacred dialogue

We are the Beloved community

- We are born the beloveds of God and nothing we do changes that
- We believe in the essential goodness of the human family and that all people bear the image of God

We are a community of Radical Hospitality

- Hospitality is “not limited to its literal sense of receiving a stranger in our house, but as a fundamental attitude toward our fellow human being, which can be expressed in a great variety of ways.”¹⁴⁷
- We celebrate diverse leadership and community, including women, people of color, gay, lesbian, and transgender pilgrims.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1986), 47-48.

- Our expansive hospitality extends to sacred texts, and an openness to other spiritual traditions.

We are a *kenotic* community

- We follow the *kenotic* path of Jesus as described in Philippians 2:5-8

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied(kenosis) himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—*

even death on a cross.

- *Kenosis* is the spiritual discipline of surrender and pouring ourselves out
- *Kenosis* is a path of spiritual transformation that leads us into our wise mind
- The fruit of the *kenotic* path, and growing into our wise mind, is the capacity to love as Jesus loved, to see as Jesus saw and to participate, with Jesus, in a mutual indwelling with God: I am in God, God is in me, I am in my neighbor.
- This mutual indwelling with God, described by Jesus in John 15, allows for the flow of divine love into us, through us, and out into the world.¹⁴⁸

We are a community committed to Metaphorical Theology

- Sacred stories are meaningful, and powerful, but not because they are historical.
- The Incarnation, Resurrection and Passion matter, not because they happened to Jesus, but because we experience them as universal experiences that happen to us all

We are a community of that practices Contemplative Action

- We participate in some kind of ministry on behalf of others
- We respond to the suffering in the world with accompaniment, supporting others as they find their way through struggle
- We engage the suffering of the world with compassion and non-violence

We are community listening and looking for the sacred presence in Creation

- Creation is a sacrament; a visible sign of God's presence in the world.
- Creation is a sacred text, through which God reveals and teaches
- All of Creation is suffused with God's presence. God is in all things.

We are a community supportive of individuals making the conscious choice to seek the Kingdom of God within and engaging in practices that will grow them into their wise mind

- We offer Rhythm and Rituals in support of that work

¹⁴⁸ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Jesus*, 31-32.

The Rhythm & Ritual of the Wisdom Monastic Community of Tikkun Farm

Why Rhythm?

Wayne Mueller begins his book, *Sabbath*, by naming the pervasiveness of rhythm. “There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body’s need for rest. There is a rhythm in the way the day dissolves into night, and night into morning... There is tidal rhythm, a deep, eternal conversation between the land the great sea.”¹⁴⁹ To live through a year, is to be submerged in a whole series of cycles which are all interrelated and influenced by one another. At the most basic level, we live within the rhythm of the universe as our planet moves around the sun. With every orbit our bodies grow, our lives encounter new mile-stones. This larger rhythm dictates seasonal rhythms that shape the growing season, the celebration of the liturgical seasons, the daily rhythms of light and dark, work and rest.

Rhythm provides order and sanctifies time. The longing and need for rhythm is pervasive and universal. The Jewish celebration of the Sabbath speaks to the power of Rhythm to shape, hold and give meaning to people. “During Sabbath the Jews, by keeping sacred rest, could maintain their spiritual ground wherever they were, even in protracted exile from their own country. ‘It was not Israel that kept the Sabbath,’ it is said, ‘but the Sabbath kept Israel.’”¹⁵⁰

Why Ritual?

Rituals are practices that gather us, grow us, heal us. They orient us and name important moments in our life story. Rituals matter especially during times of transition when a person’s role and identify are shifting. Rituals carry us across thresholds into adulthood, marriage and parenthood, when we find ourselves divorced or widowed, and on into retirement. They welcome us into the world, and shepherd us home to God. Rituals, like baptism and communion, mark the moments in our sacred story, and family rituals, like saying grace and bedtime prayers, remind us how sacred our everyday life is. Rituals strengthen the community that shares in them because they create moments of connection and a shared narrative.

Rhythm and Ritual Belong Together

Rhythm, like a clock, creates the order that rituals need to occur. Rituals, the numbers on the clock, sanctify time with prayers and blessing, festivals and confessions, welcomings and good-byes. Together they create a holy order, that holds us and grows us.

The Rhythms and Rituals of The Wisdom Monastic Community at Tikkun Farm

Although we do not all live together, there are common rhythms and practices that help us grow into our wise mind. While some rituals are practiced individually and others are shared communally, the fact that we practice them, wherever we are, reminds us that we

¹⁴⁹ Wayne Mueller. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam: 1999), 1.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

share a common journey. In addition to rituals that support pilgrims on the Wisdom path, Tikkun Farm offers additional opportunities for worship, prayer, and spiritual practice that nurture the spiritual lives of Second Half of Life pilgrims

Rhythm and Ritual for Pilgrims on the Wisdom Path

Events with an asterisk (*) include communion

These rhythms and rituals serve two purposes

- 1) To support the work of growing into our wise mind using practices drawn from the Wisdom Tradition
- 2) To support pilgrims on the Wisdom Path by offering opportunities to gather and celebrate with others consciously doing this same work

Daily Rhythm

Centering Prayer (ideally twice a day, once is fine)

Gratitude (name at least five specific experiences that blessed your day)

Weekly Rhythm

Sabbath (choose a day of the week when you will rest, play, create and not live by a schedule)

Monthly Rhythm

Community Meal* (a time to cook together, share our stories, break bread and bless one another)

Community Work (an opportunity to do more together, than we can do alone)

Community Worship* (prayer, chanting, reflection, communion with a Wisdom Path focus)

Anam Cara¹⁵¹ (meeting monthly with a spiritual companion or spiritual director)

Seasonal Rhythm

Retreats

- Wisdom Path Retreat* (communal time for rest, play, prayer and study with a Wisdom focus)
- Annual Silent Retreat (a personal retreat)

Book Study, Discussion & Reflection (shared reading that helps us shift our perception and move into our wise mind)

Rhythms for the Human Journey

Blessings of Welcomings and Good-byes for those choosing the Wisdom Path

¹⁵¹ *Anam Cara* is Gaelic phrase meaning “soul friend”. The Celtic Church believed it was essential for a person pursuing spiritual growth to have an *Anam Cara*. An often-repeated adage was that ‘a person without an *Anam Cara*, was like a body without a head.’ A person’s *Anam Cara* offered sacred companionship, served as a confessor and offered spiritual wisdom and guidance. Sometimes a person’s *Anam Cara* was older and farther down the spiritual path, other times a peer served as an *Anam Cara*.

**Additional Rhythms and Rituals
for Second Half of Life Pilgrims**
Events with an asterisk (*) include communion

Daily Rhythm

Yoga (offered morning and evening)

Weekly Rhythm

Farm Church* (a participatory worship gathering with shared reflection)

Fiber Arts with Refugee Women (an opportunity to serve and connect with other cultures)

Monthly Rhythm

Soul Collage (a contemplative, creative process for listening for our deeper truth)

Lunar Drum Circle (an opportunity to the honor presence of God in creation)

Seasonal Rhythm

Retreats*

- New Year's Retreat (a sacred way to review the year & set intentions for the year ahead)
- Lent Retreat (discern a discipline and invite God to be at work in you for 40 days)
- Sabbath Retreat (consider the gift of Sabbath and ways to practice it)
- Creativity Retreat (how do we practice creativity in our life and work?)

Quiet Days*

- Advent (time to ask the question, "Where is God being born in me?")
- Lent (a reflection on the gifts that come only from struggle and suffering)
- Easter (a time to consider how endings are making room for new beginnings)
- Sabbath (a time to practice some Sabbath disciplines)
- All Hallows Eve (opening up to a thin place in time and considering how we remain in community with those who've gone home to God)

Creation Celebrations

- Winter and Summer Solstice (an opportunity to honor the presence of God in creation, and consider the gifts of Light and Dark)
- Spring and Fall Equinox (reflections on what shifts in us as we move toward Light and Dark)
- Blessing of the Fields/Seeds (blessing the farmers at Tikkun Farm, and our own seeds)
- Thanksgiving for the Harvest (Community meal and blessing with our farmers)

Blessing of the Animals (celebrating our animal companions)

Rhythms for the Human Journey

Blessings for Life Milestones* (rituals for weddings, funerals, coming of age, divorce, baptism)

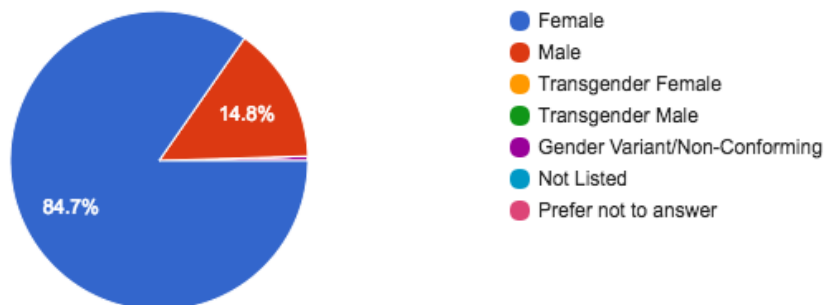
Survey Questions, and Summary of Survey Results Looking for Second Half of Life Pilgrims

Demographic Data

The percentage of men responding is actually 10%. One man filled out 10 surveys.

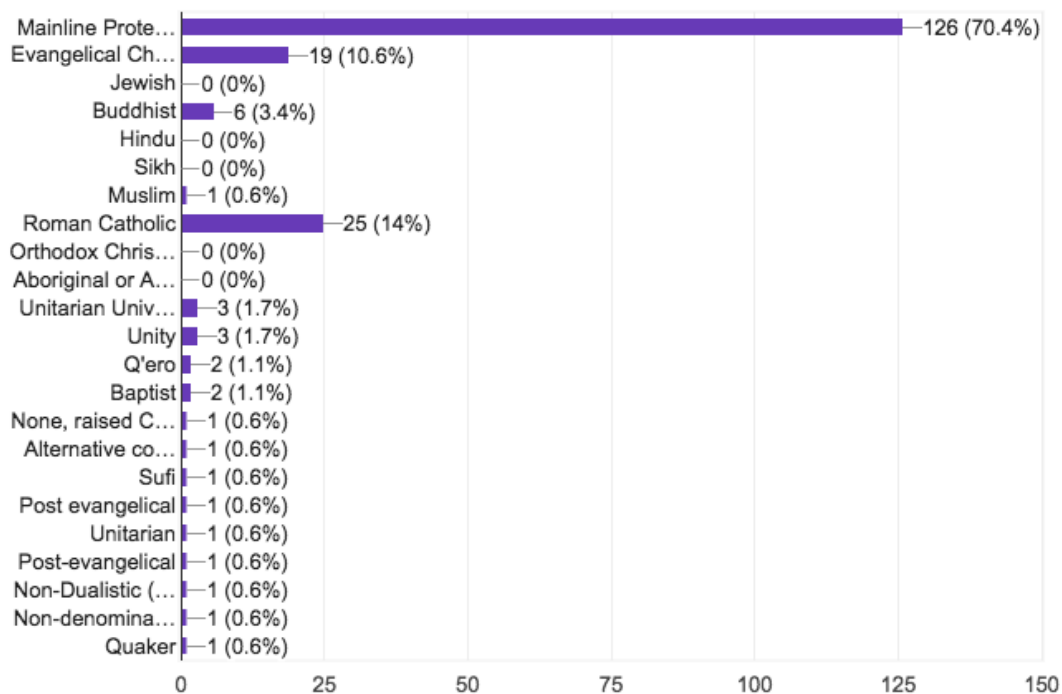
To which gender identity do you most identify?

203 responses



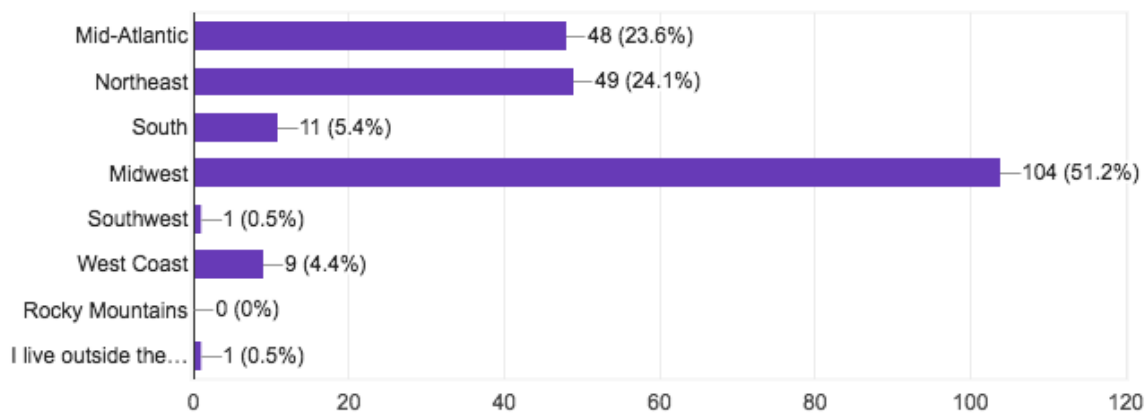
If you belong to a faith community, check the one(s) that apply:

179 responses



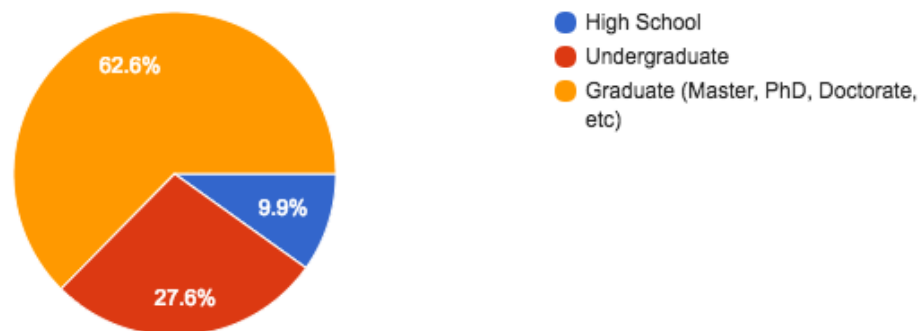
What area of the country do you live in?

203 responses



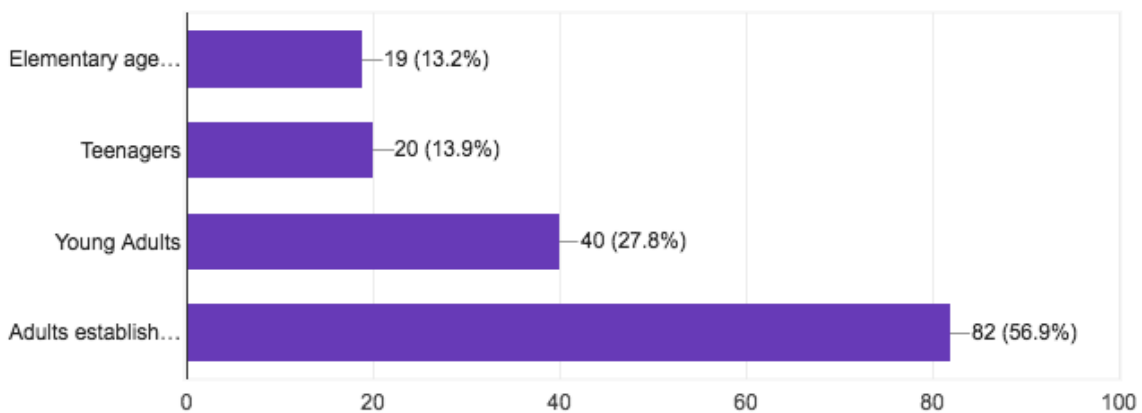
What is your highest level of education?

203 responses



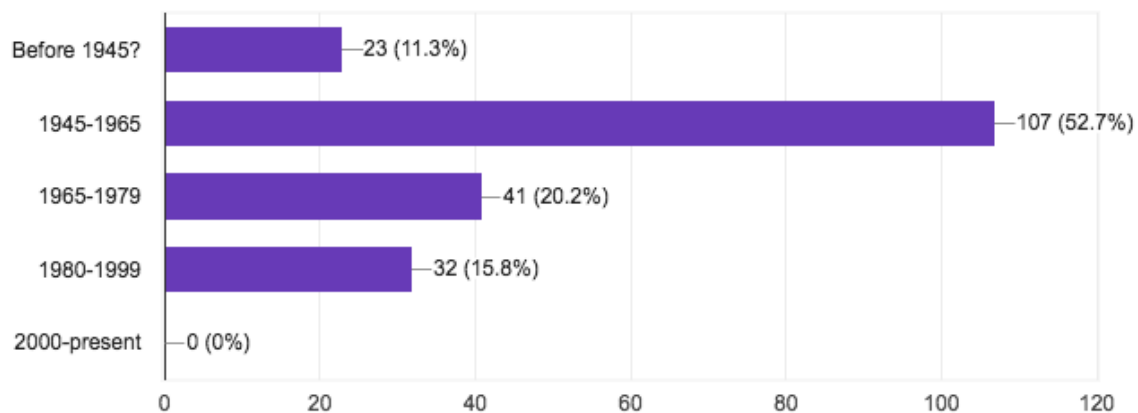
If you have children, how old are they? (check all that apply)

144 responses



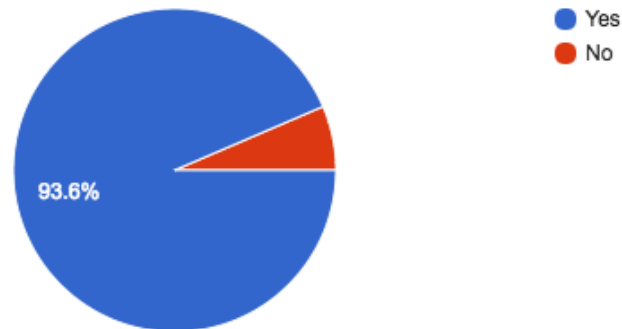
When were you born?

203 responses

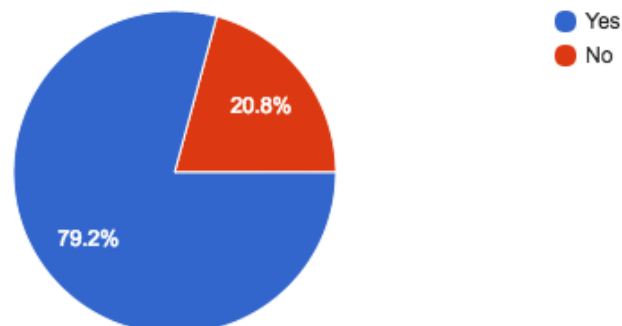


Questions about your relationship with organized, institutional faith communities.**1) Did you go to church, religious education or Sunday School as a child?**

202 responses

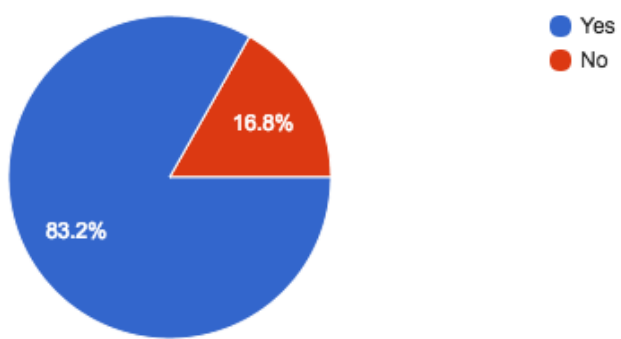
**2) Did you participate in significant religious milestone rituals like Bar/Bat Mitzvah, First Communion or Confirmation?**

202 responses



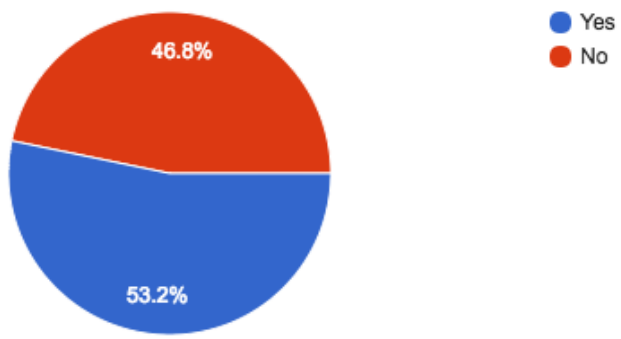
3) Was your family connected to a faith community?

185 responses



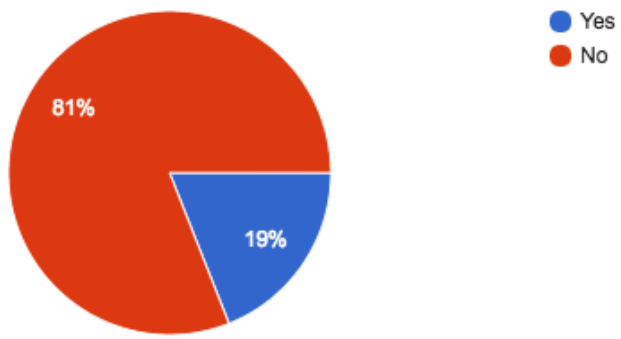
4) As a young adult did you remain involved in the faith community of your childhood?

201 responses



5) Did you join a faith community for the first time as an adult?

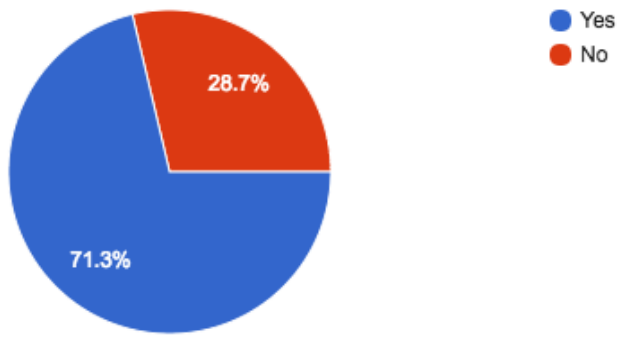
200 responses





6) Are you part of a faith community now?

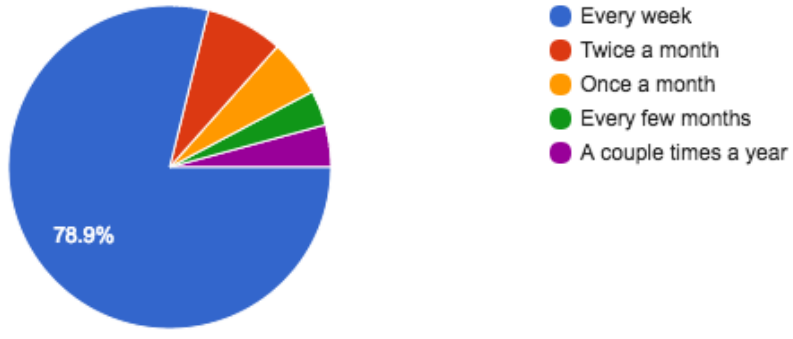
202 responses



Please complete this section if you are currently part of a faith community.

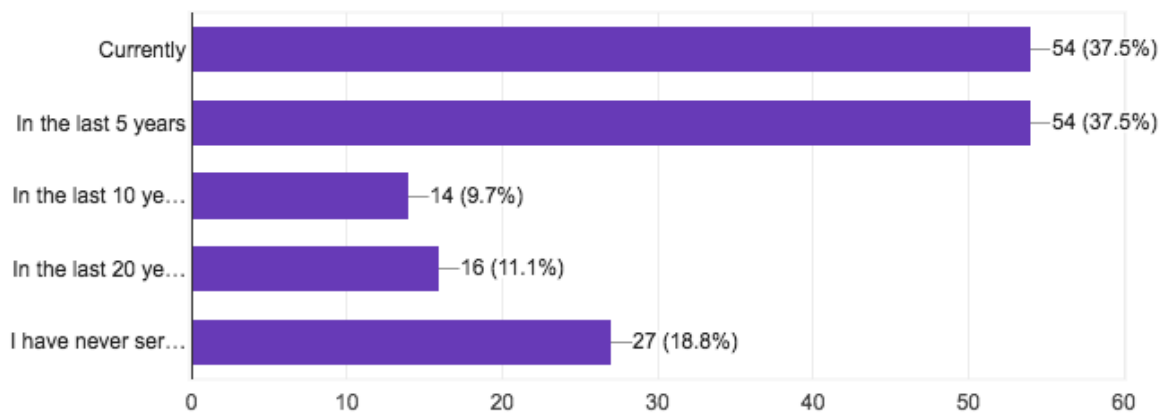
How often do you attend worship?

142 responses



I have served as a volunteer leader, teacher or committee member...

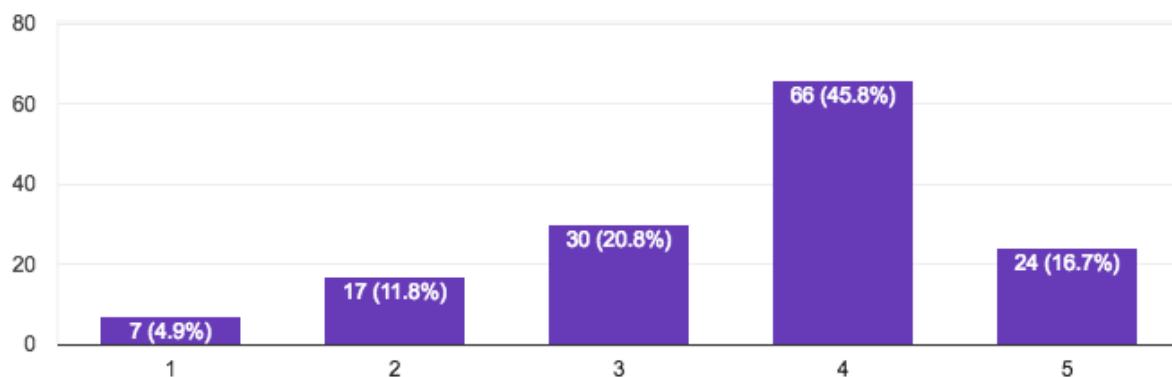
144 responses



Respondents were asked to respond to each statement by indicating how TRUE it was for them, with ONE being not true at all and FIVE being VERY true.

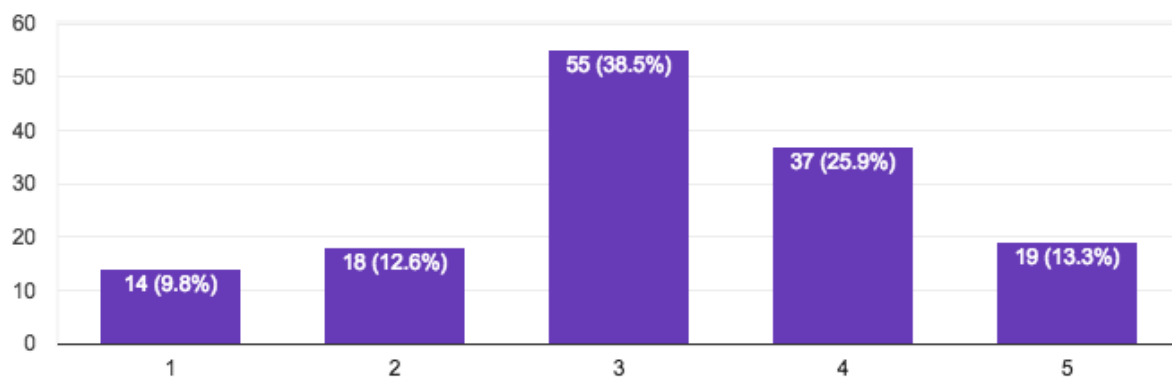
My faith community offers me experiences that nourish my spiritual growth

144 responses



How engaged are you in your faith community now, compared to five years ago?

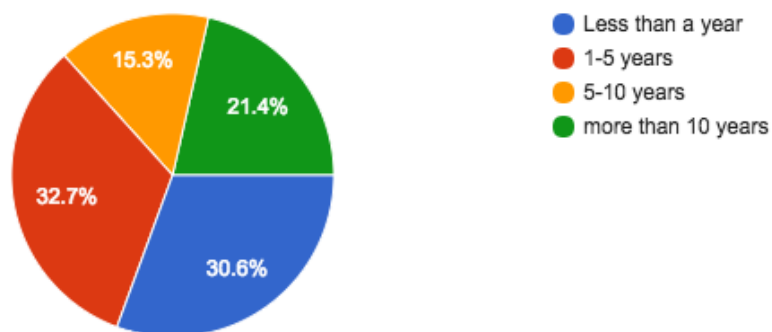
143 responses



Please complete this section if you once belonged to a faith community, but no longer do.

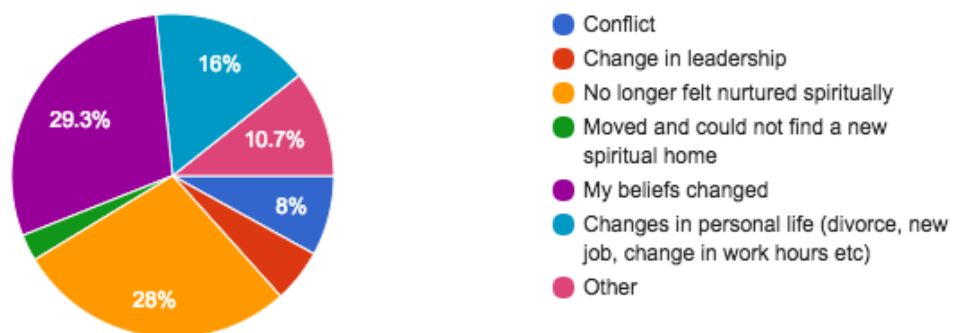
How long has it been since you've been a part of a faith community?

98 responses



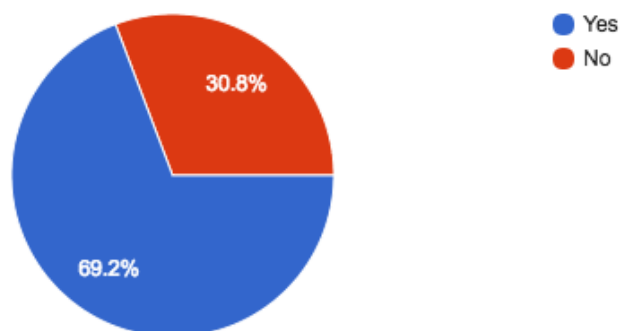
Why are you no longer a part of a faith community (check all that apply)?

75 responses



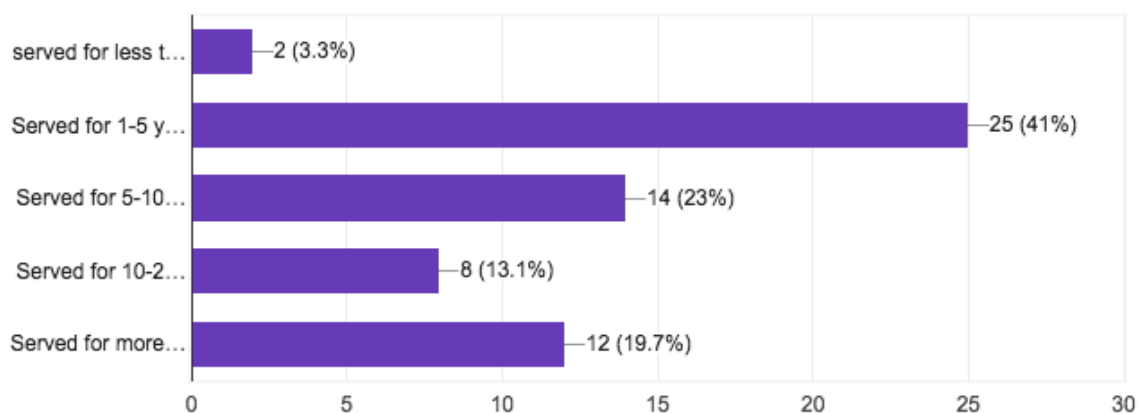
Before you left your faith community, had you served as a volunteer leader? Teacher? Committee Member?

78 responses



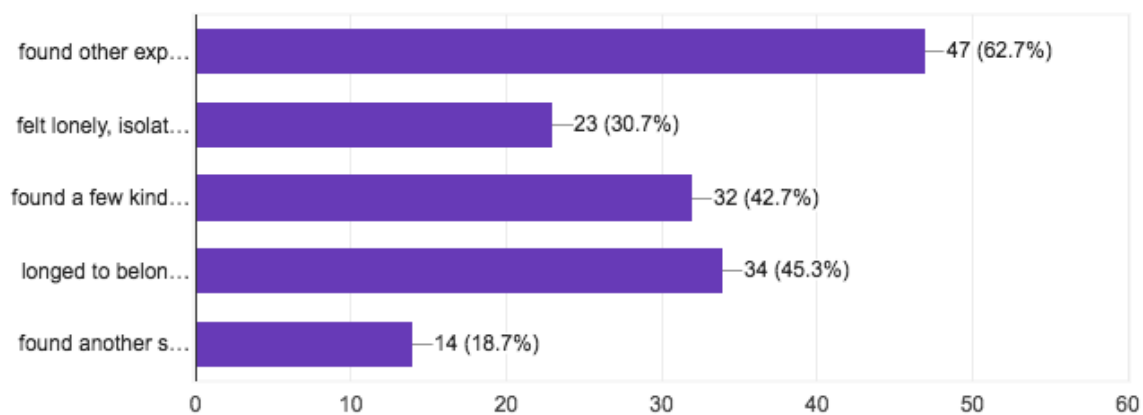
If you served as volunteer, teacher, leader or committee member, check what best applies to you:

61 responses



Since leaving my faith community, I have (check all that apply)

75 responses

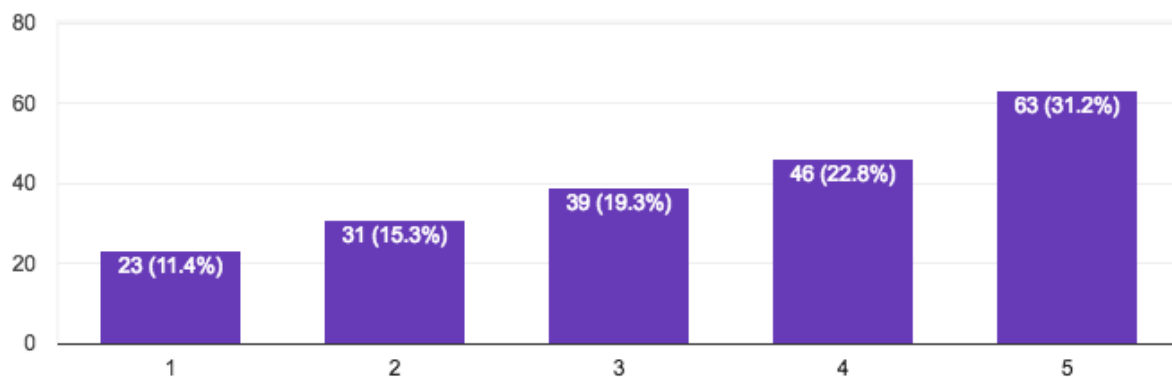


Questions about where you are on your spiritual path

Respondents were asked to respond to the following statements by indicating how TRUE it was for them, with ONE being not true at all and FIVE being VERY true.

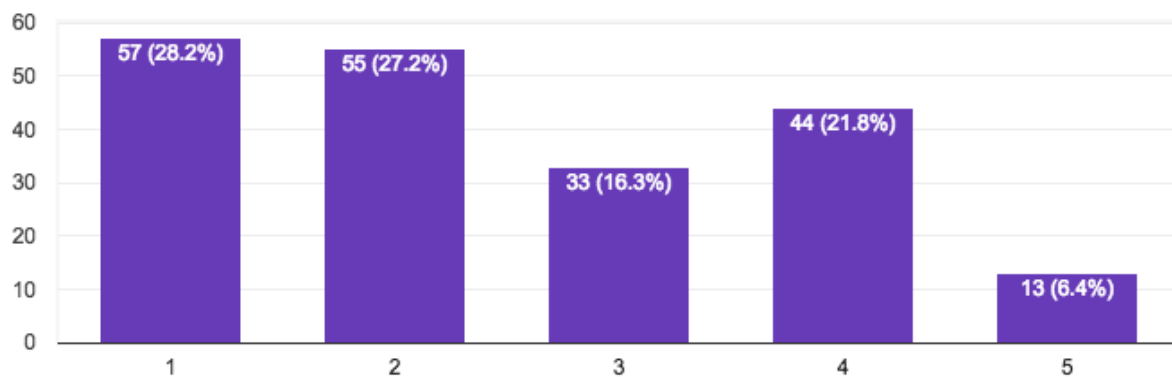
My life experiences no longer fit comfortably into old perspectives and patterns

202 responses



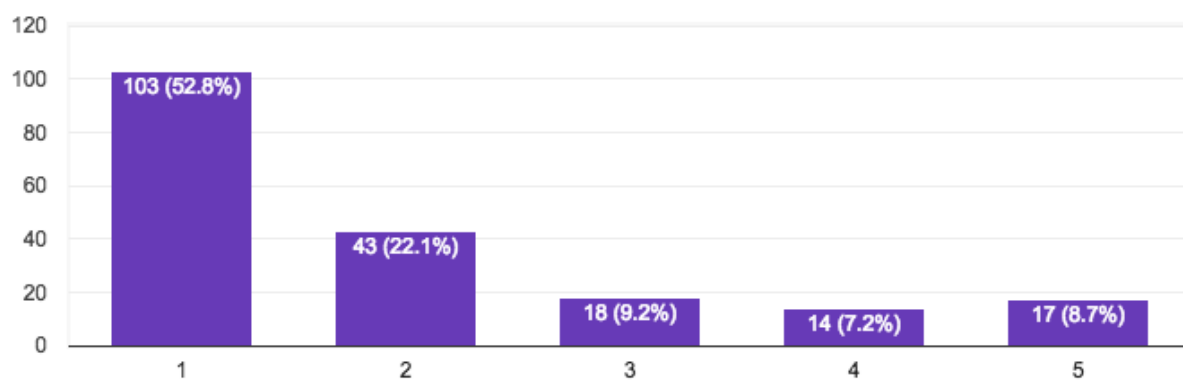
I have found myself slowed or stopped by struggles with illness, loss of loved ones, retirement, less physical ...amina, and/or cultural marginalization

202 responses



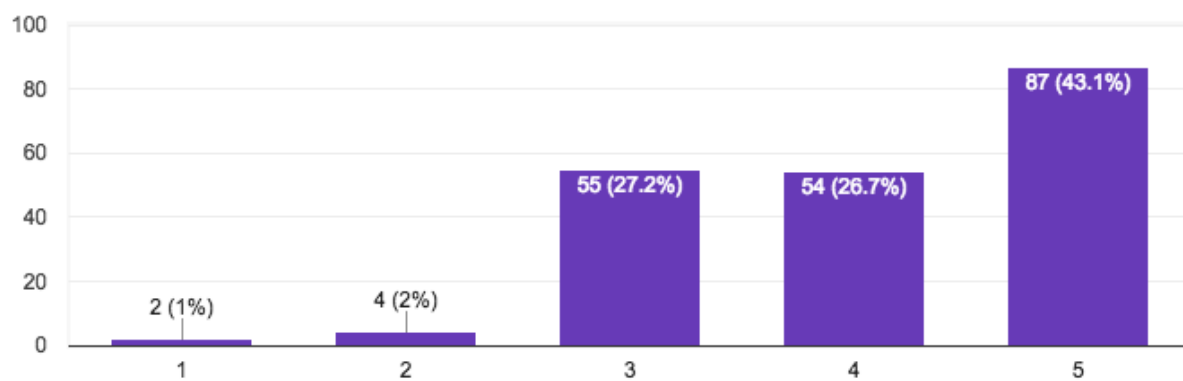
I have left one church hoping to find more of what I need in a new church, but still don't feel I've found my spiritual home

195 responses



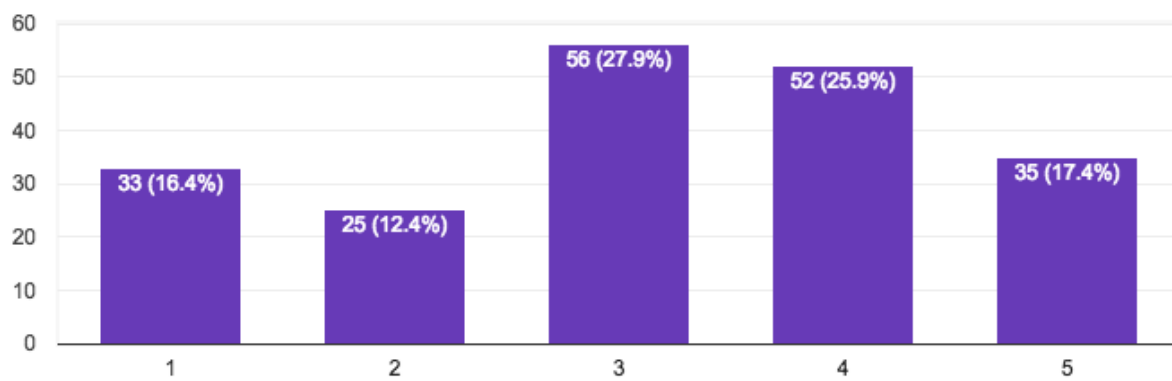
I have discovered that power, stuff, and status aren't as important to me as they used to be

202 responses



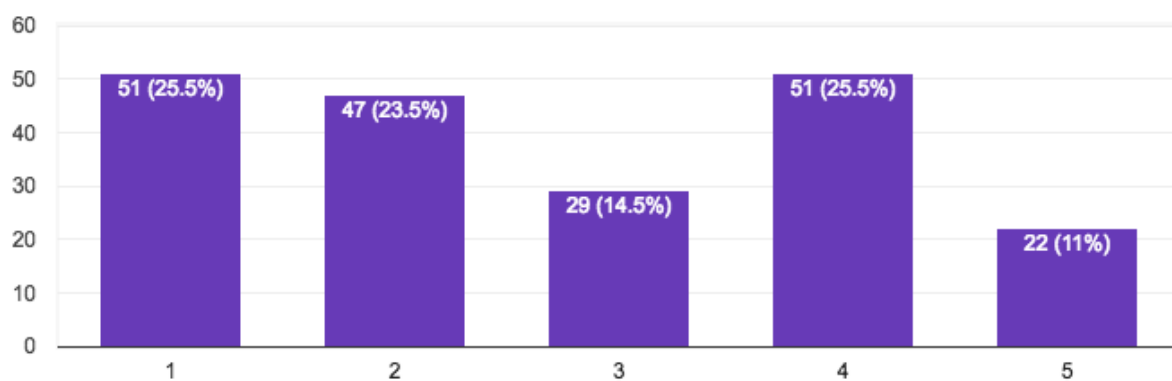
My choices, ideas or beliefs cannot be as easily sorted into right and wrong and I wonder about what I believe and who I trust

201 responses



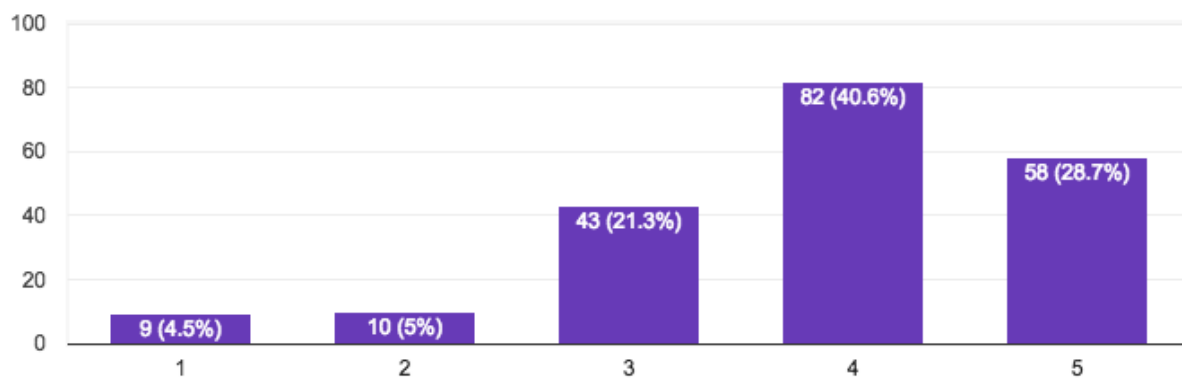
I have asked myself "What am I trying to prove and to whom?"

200 responses



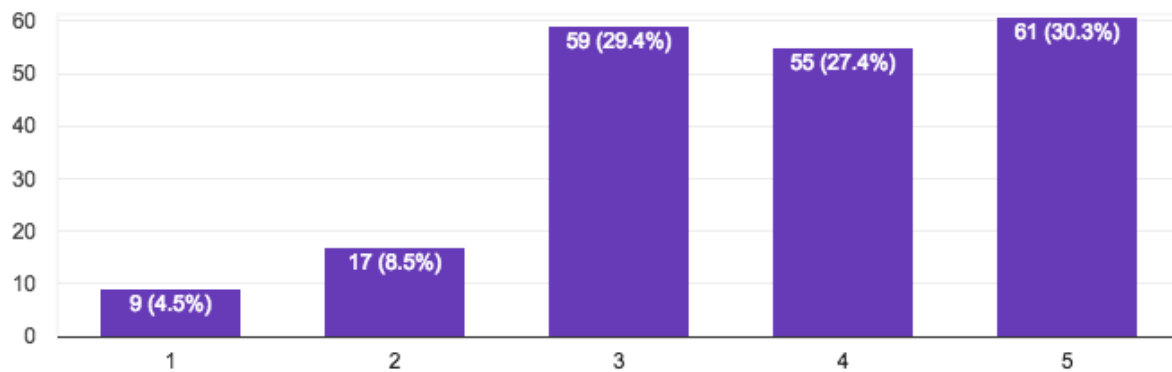
Boundaries that felt very important before, are diminishing and I am opening to broader horizons

202 responses



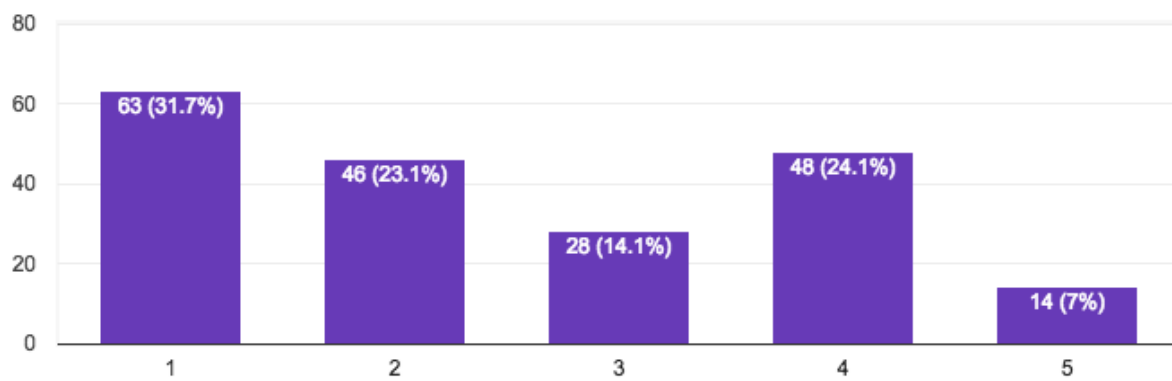
I have been reducing the noise in my life that drowns out a quieter, subtler voice

201 responses



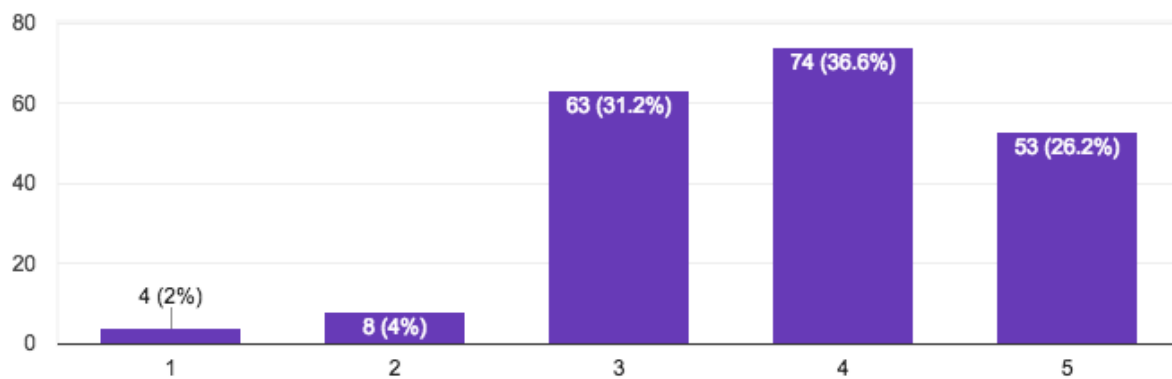
I am wondering if this is all there is, and what happened to my motivation to work for more

199 responses



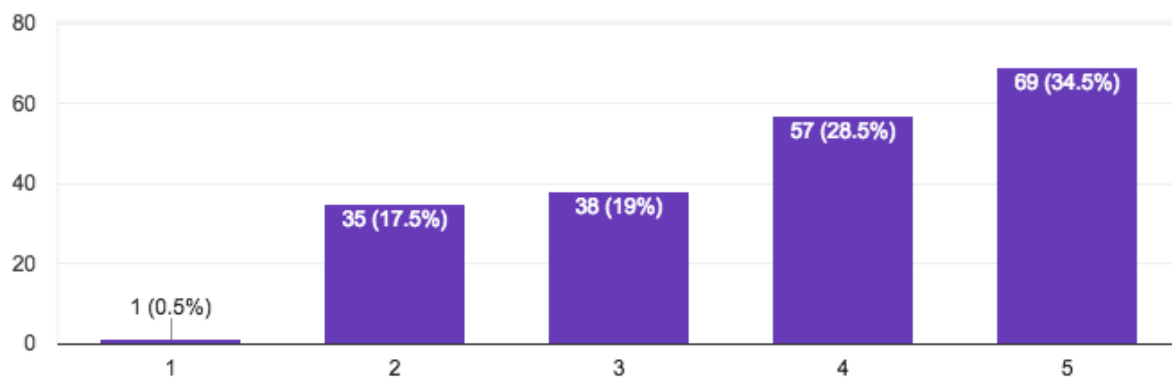
I am engaging the turmoil and injustice of the world from a place of deep inner knowing, rather than power and competition

202 responses



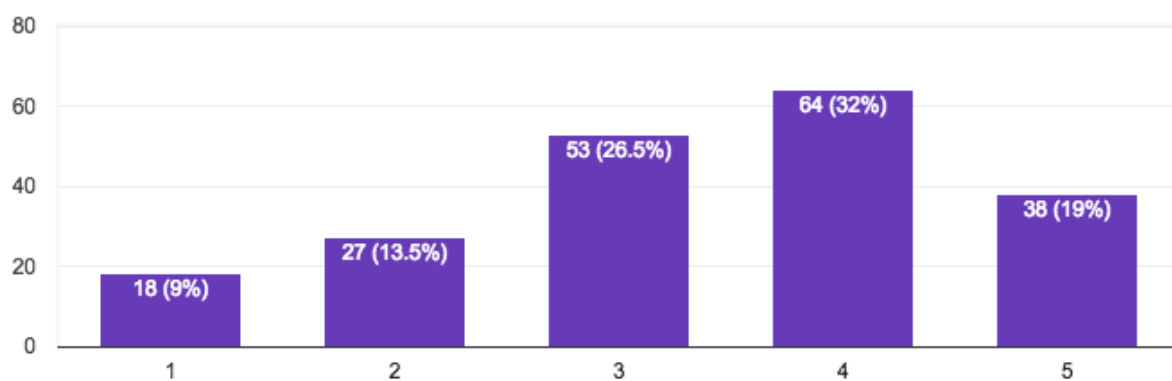
Less suddenly looks so much better

200 responses



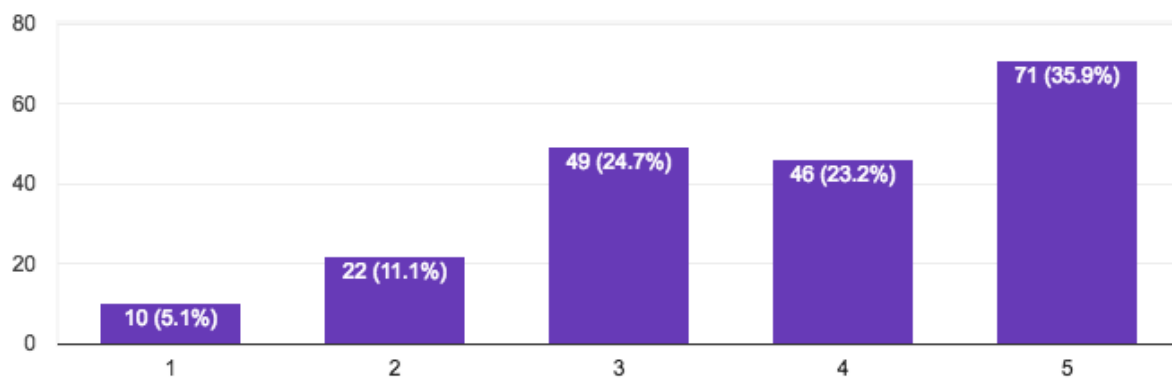
I find myself backing away from groups or people I used to feel comfortable with and wondering who I can spend more time with instead

200 responses



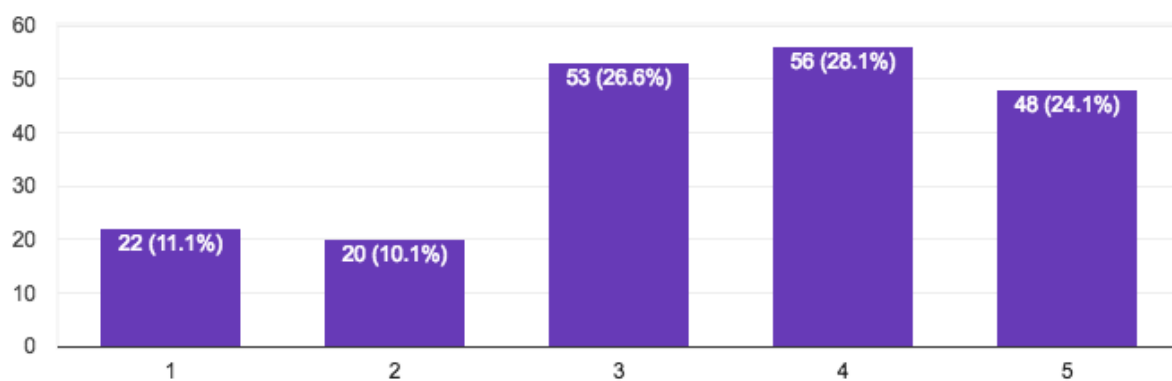
My way of seeing the world is shifting from "either/or" thinking to one comfortable with paradox, mystery, and "both/and" thinking

198 responses



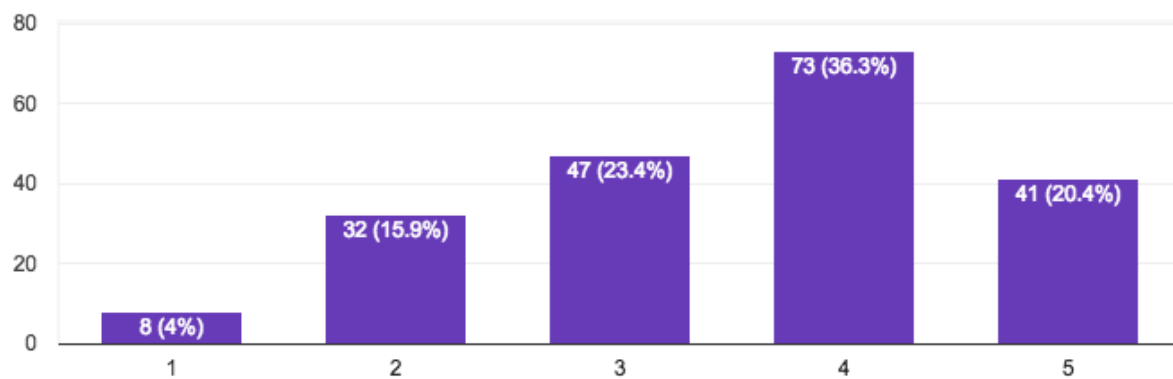
Something has shifted in me, leaving me with the question, "What now?"

199 responses



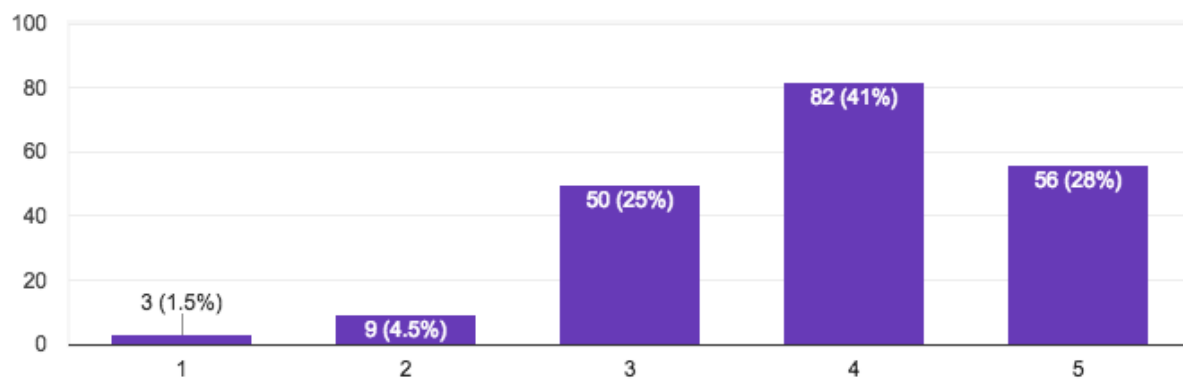
I am finding myself less concerned about being right or clear

201 responses



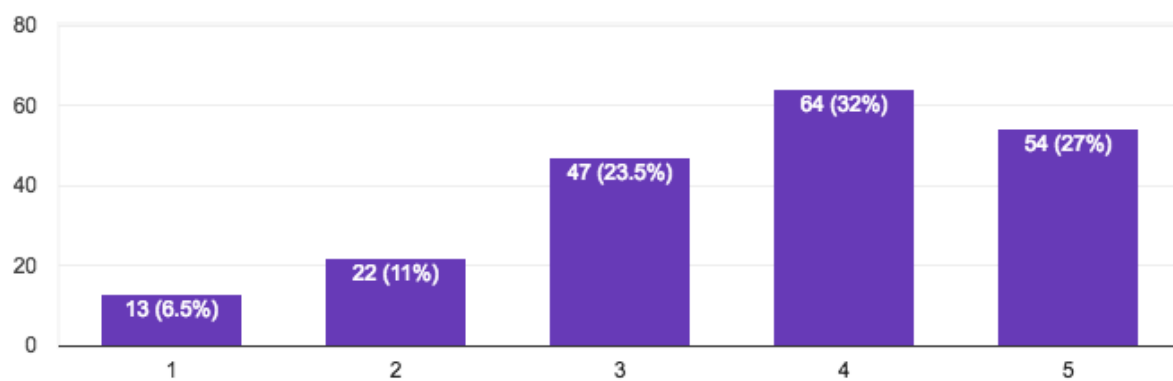
My desire to accumulate, compete, and influence has diminished

200 responses



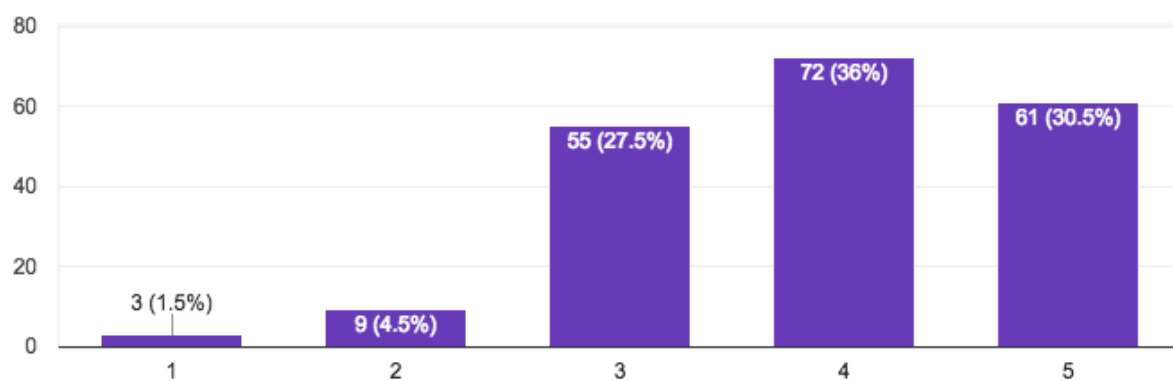
Beliefs I used to be sure about are becoming more fluid

200 responses



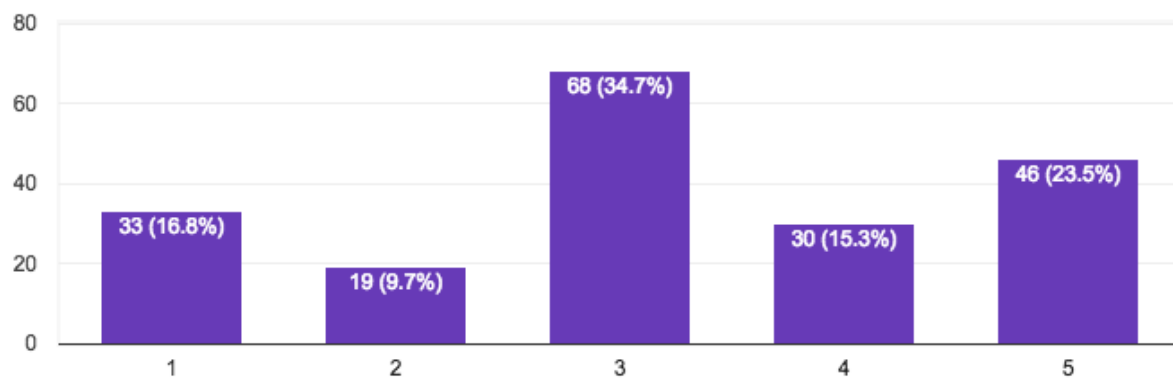
Self- image, role, power, prestige or possessions are becoming less important as I pursue a meaningful life

200 responses



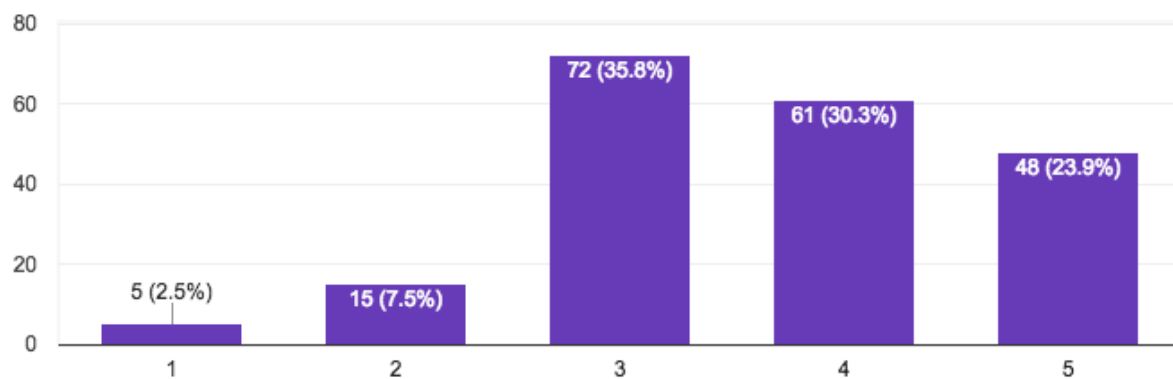
I am feeling out of step with my faith community

196 responses



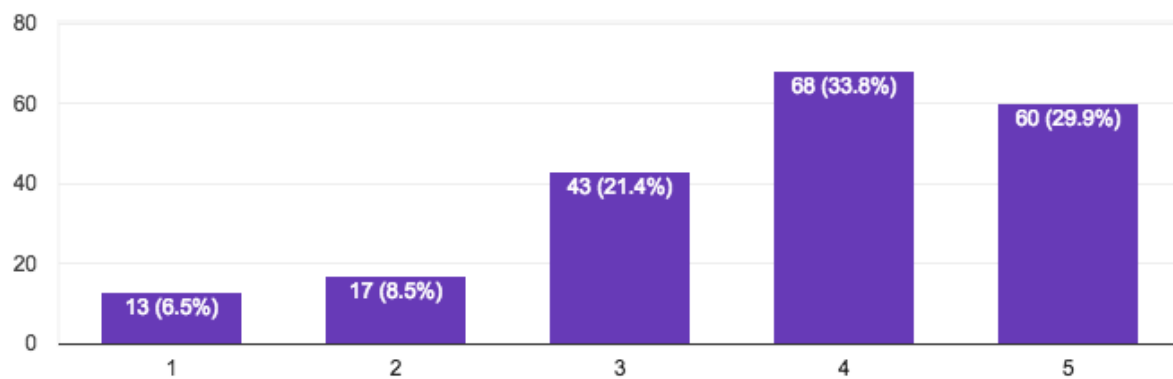
I am living less defensively, combatively, and anxiously

201 responses



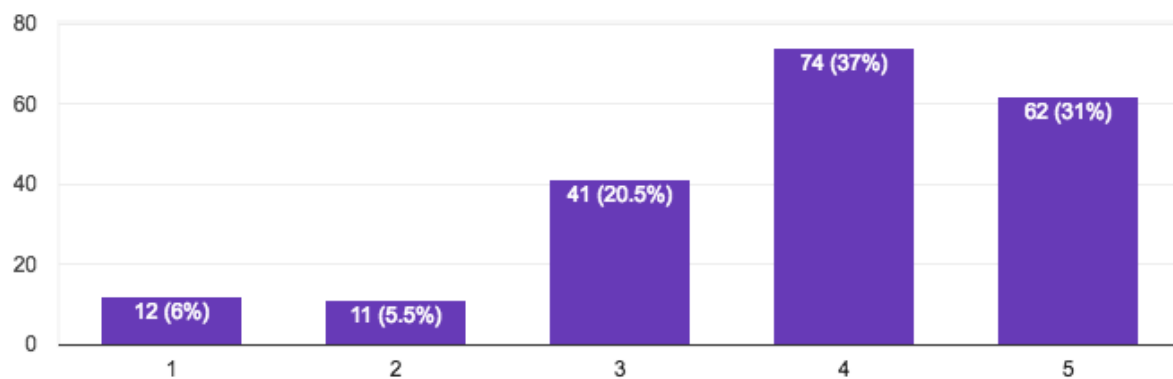
I am looking for new people to listen to, books to read, and/or ideas to study

201 responses



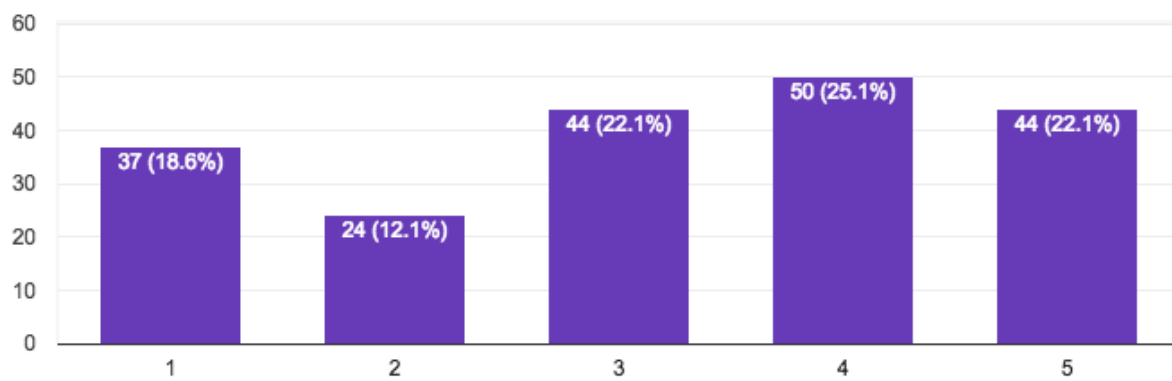
I yearn to slow down, relax boundaries and ponder more

200 responses



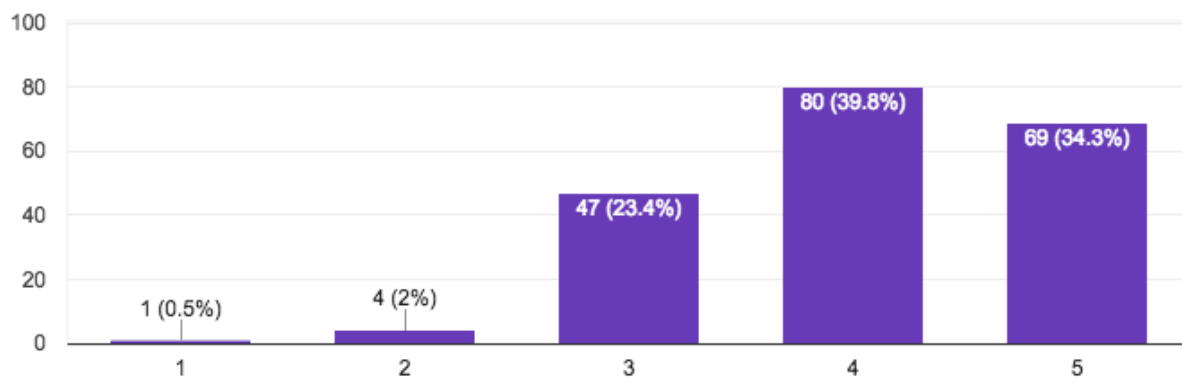
I have begun to question some of the core beliefs of my faith community, political party and/or my long established social group

199 responses



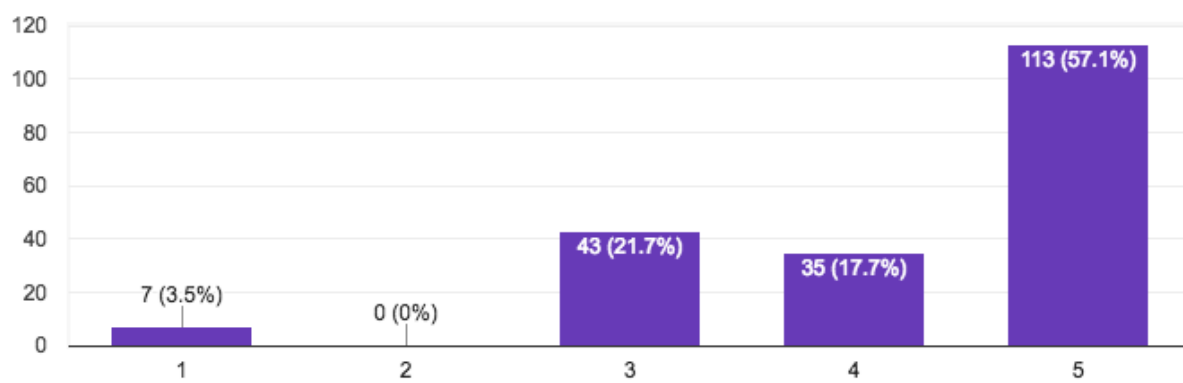
I find I have more capacity for the painful parts of my story, alternative perspectives, and people who are different

201 responses



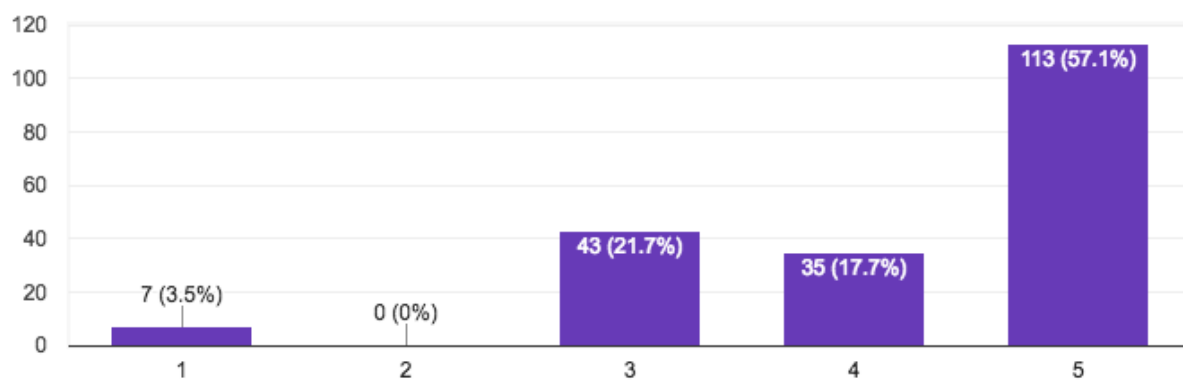
I trust in a spiritual reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence

198 responses



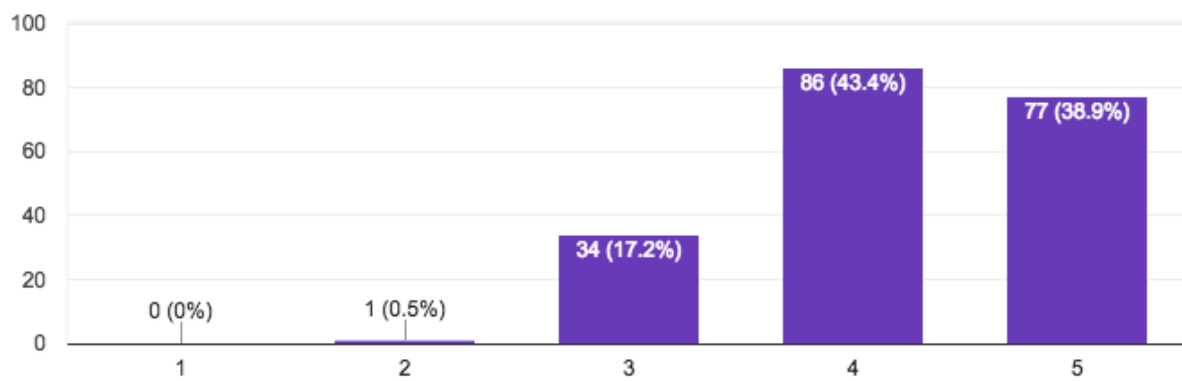
I trust in a spiritual reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence

198 responses



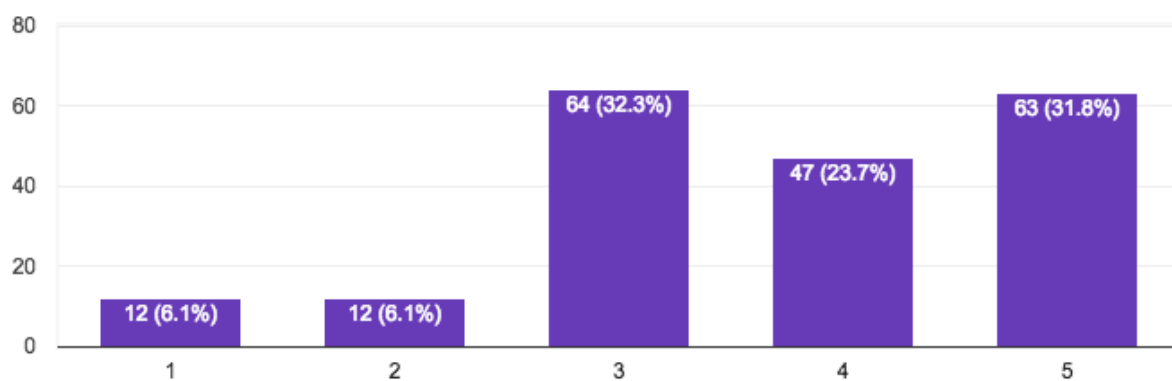
My response to difference is less judgey and more compassionate, enriched by joy, sadness, and acceptance

198 responses



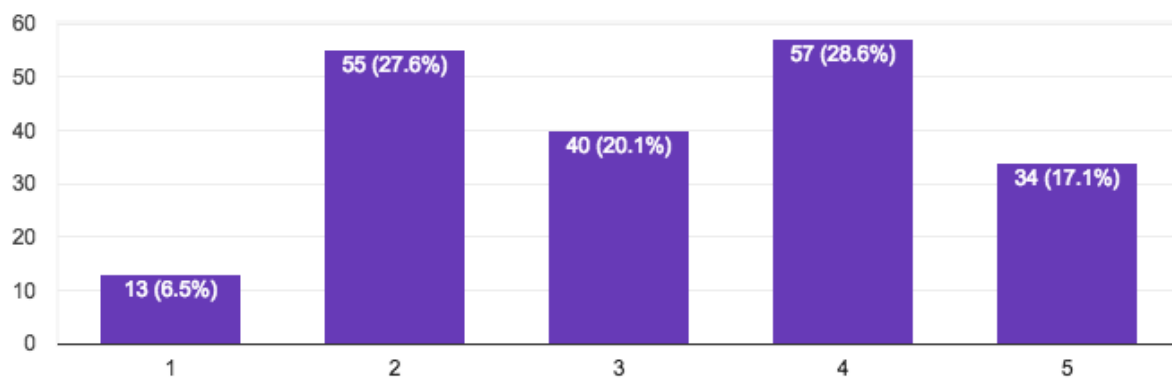
I'm finding that traditional answers are less helpful

198 responses



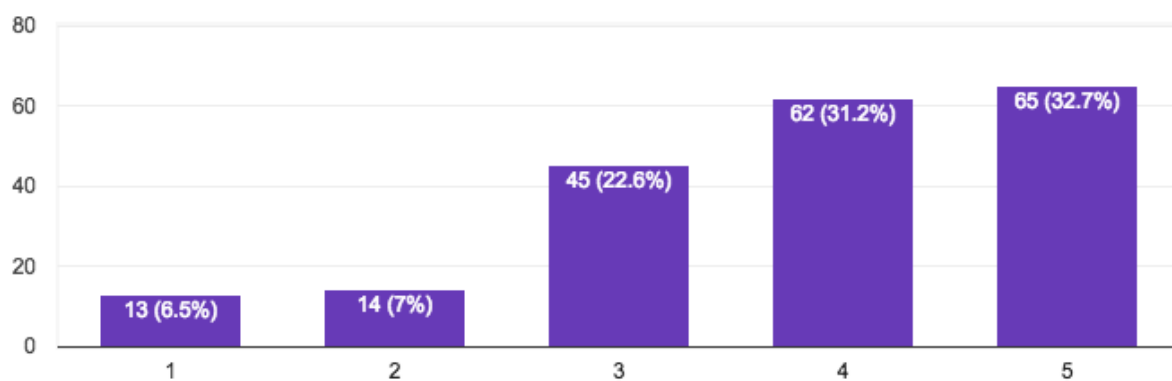
My passion or desire to serve as warrior, either for my own agenda, or for those of my church, social group or political party has diminished

199 responses



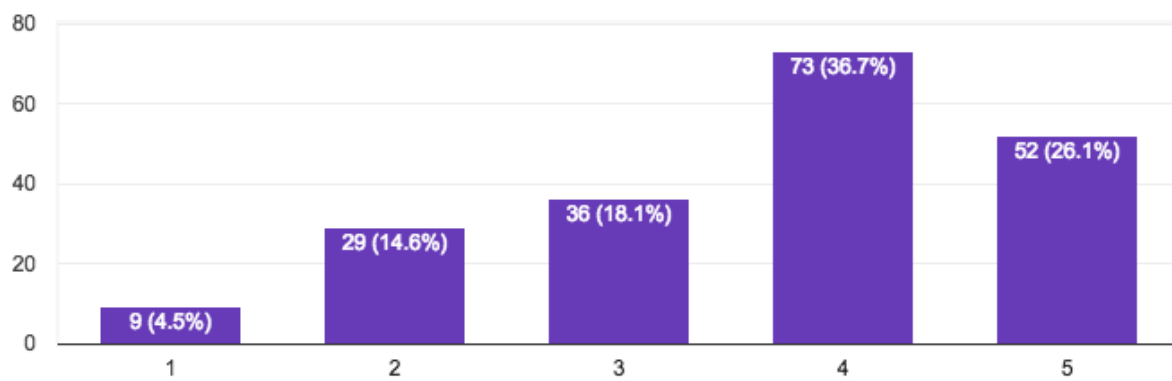
I experience a direct communion with God or ultimate reality

199 responses



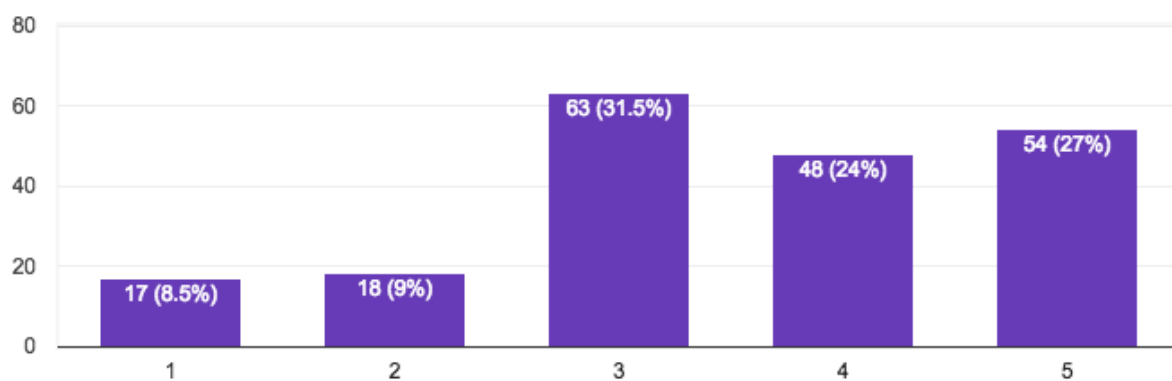
I am asking new questions, listening to fresh voices and/or reading books by people I've never heard of before

199 responses



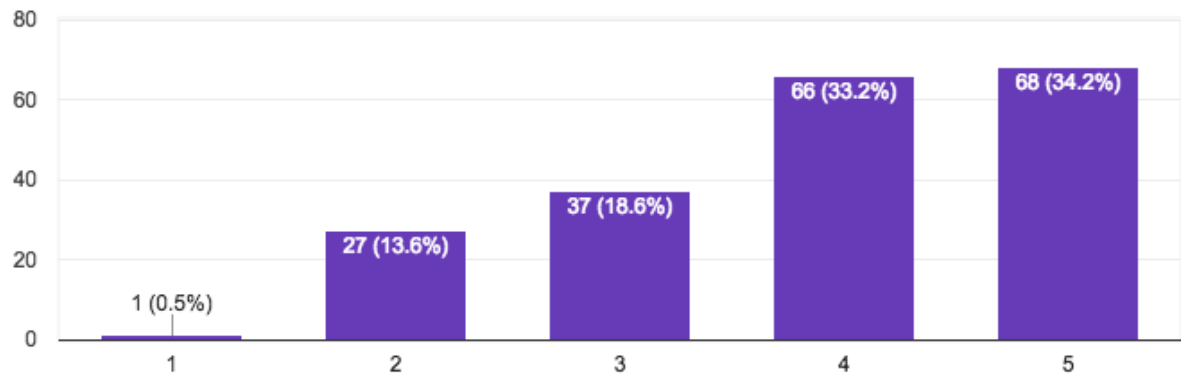
I am stepping out of power structures and traditional systems

200 responses



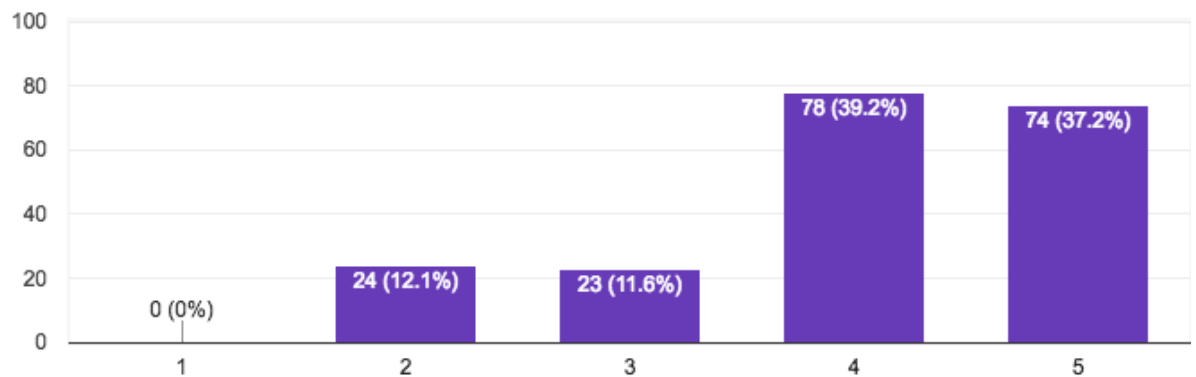
I am comfortable not having strong and final opinions about every issue, event, or most people

199 responses



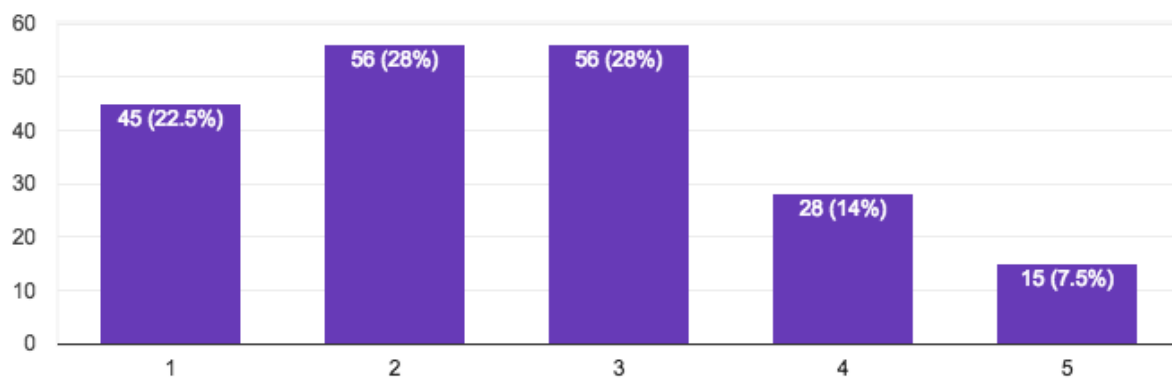
I am drawn to simplicity, risk, guidance, direction, and wisdom

199 responses



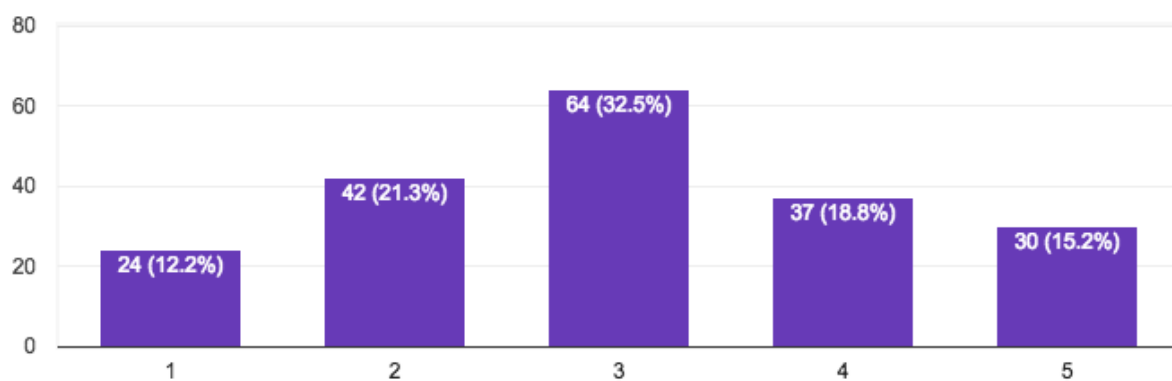
I sometimes feel marginalized, mocked or martyred in my community for my changing perspective

200 responses



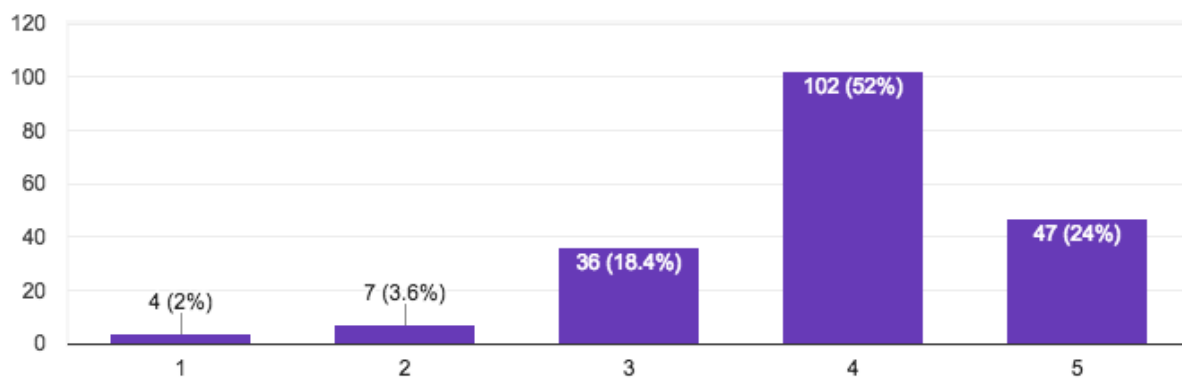
I disrupt systems more as a mystic instead of as a warrior

197 responses



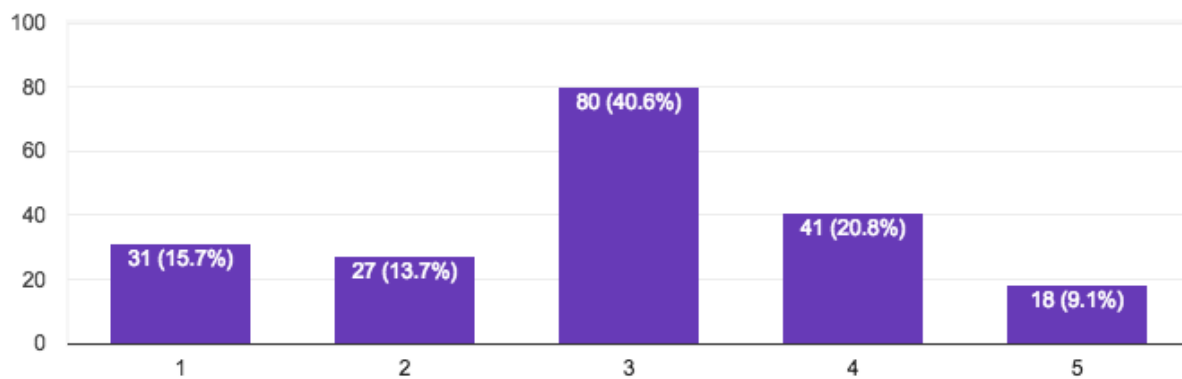
I find myself listening more and defending less, thinking more broadly and less rigidly

196 responses



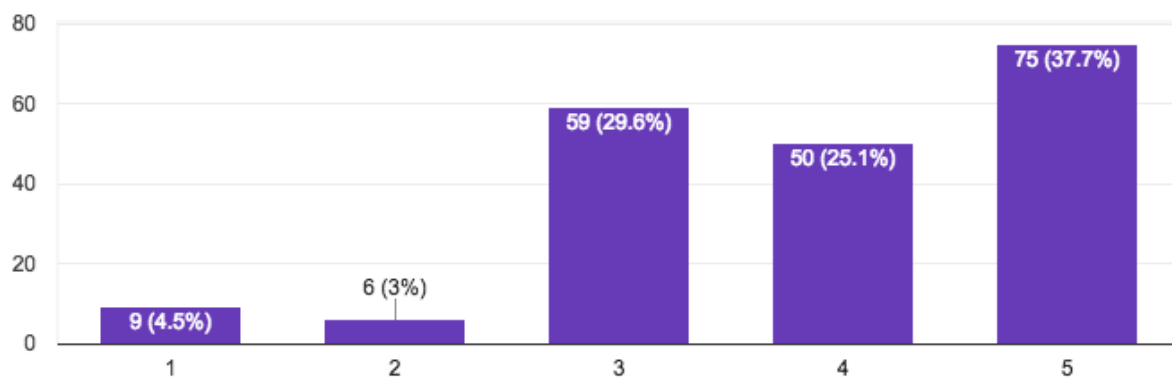
I feel invited, but also reluctant, to make room for painful parts of my story, people who are different, and beliefs beyond those of my own group

197 responses



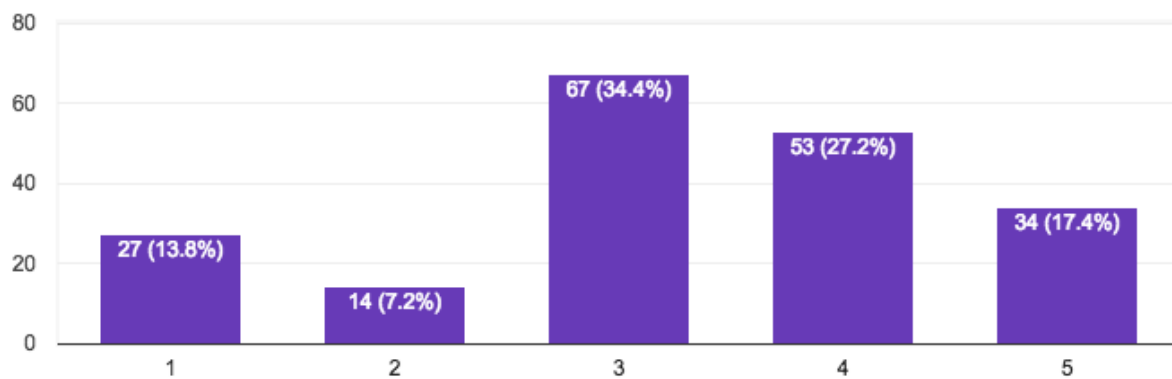
I hear and follow a still, small voice in my soul and know it to be a deeper voice of God

199 responses



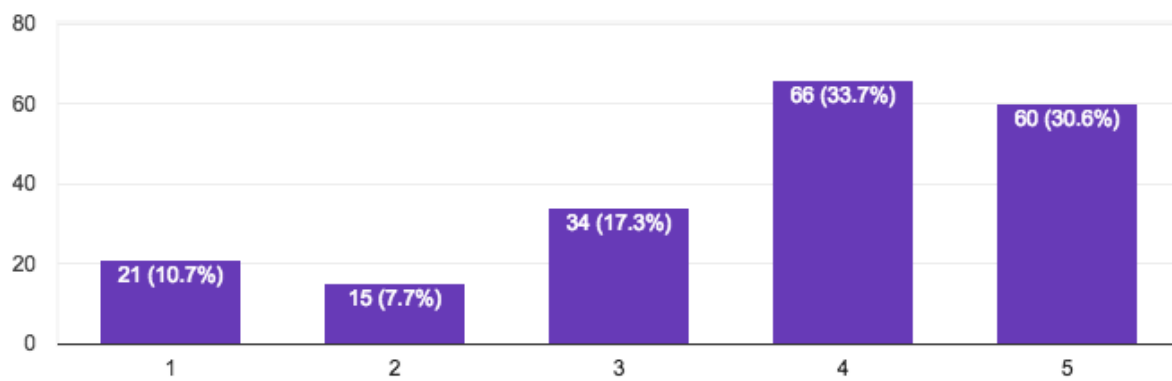
I am trying to figure out how to honor my traditions as I realize my truth has been partial, and limited by my own experiences

195 responses



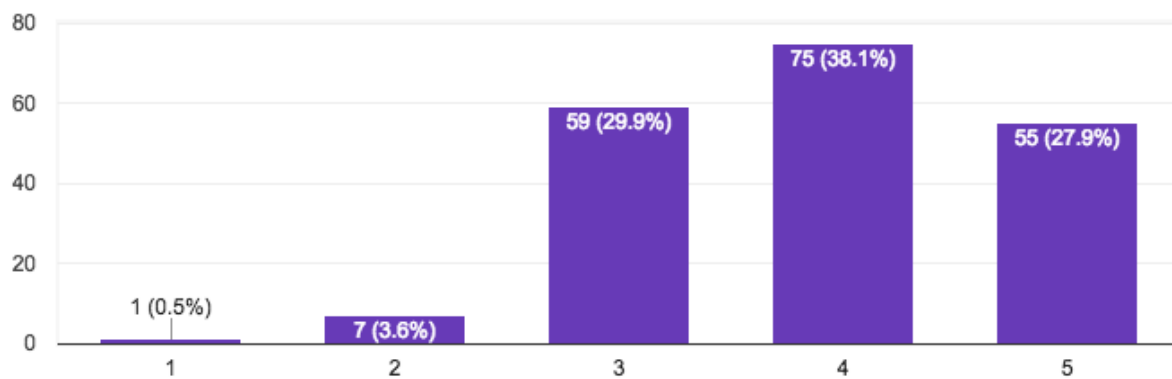
I am asking questions or thinking thoughts that others might worry are heretical or inappropriate

196 responses



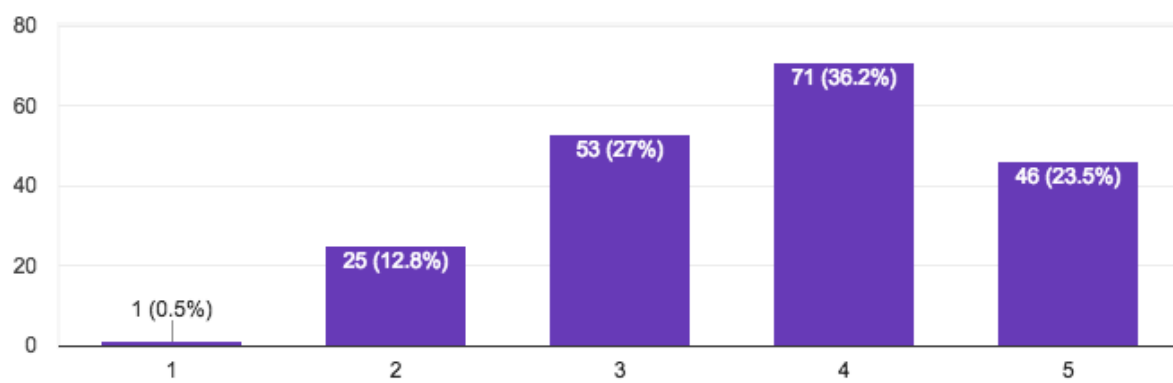
I am influencing my communities through my compassion, openness, grace, courage, and joy, rather than my...or through traditional power structures

197 responses



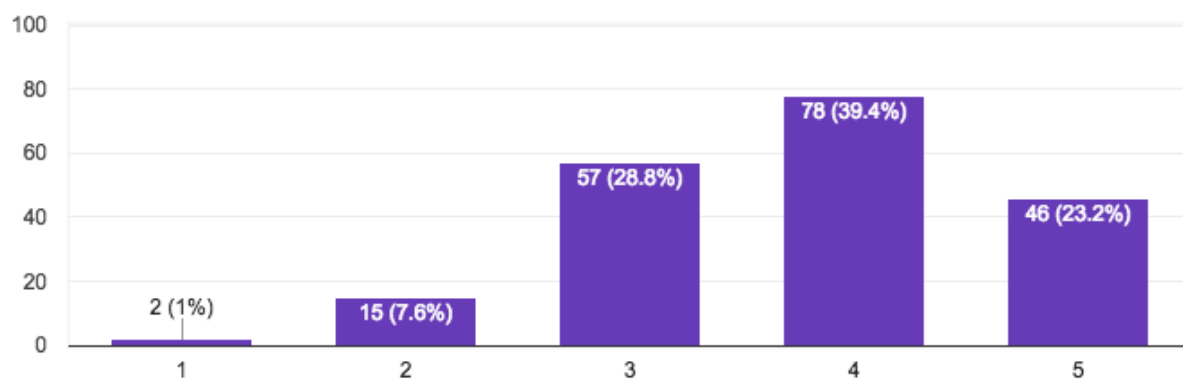
I am able to acknowledge the weak, confused, and wounded parts of myself and incorporate them into my life

196 responses



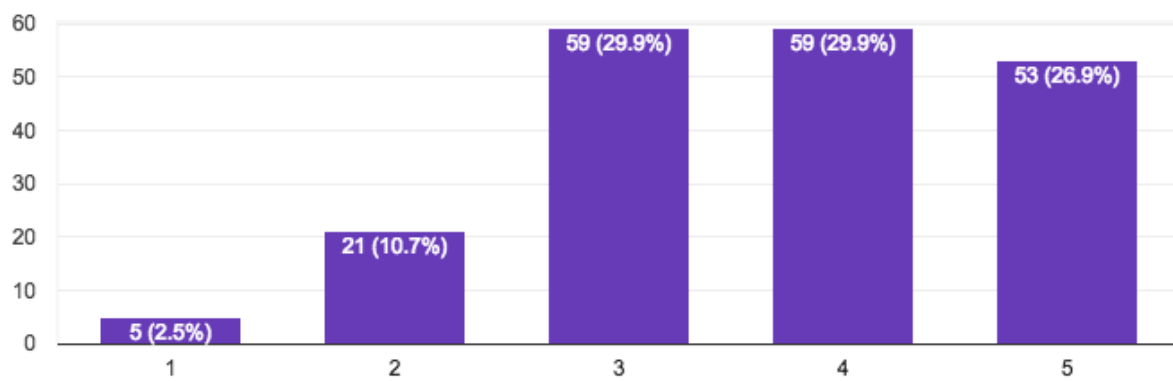
I celebrate more and judge less, ponder more and analyze less, feel more grateful and less anxious

198 responses



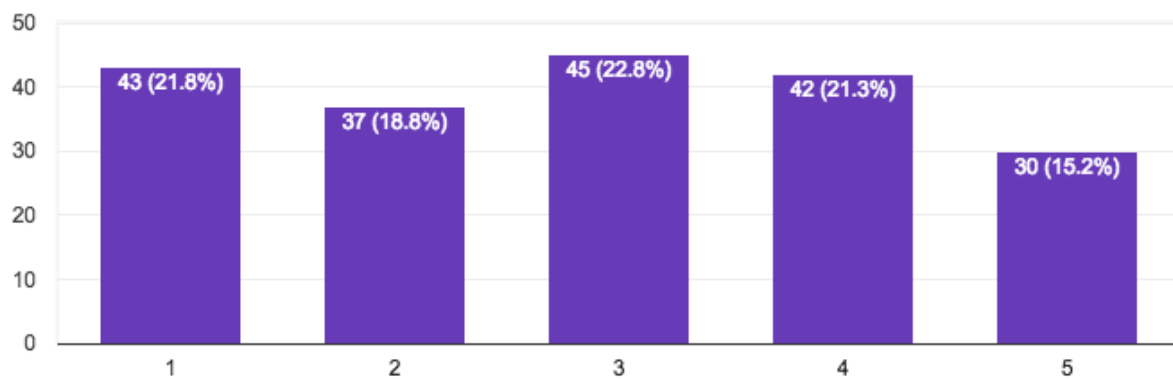
My understanding of creeds and norms is changing as I discern a quieter and deeper voice within myself

197 responses



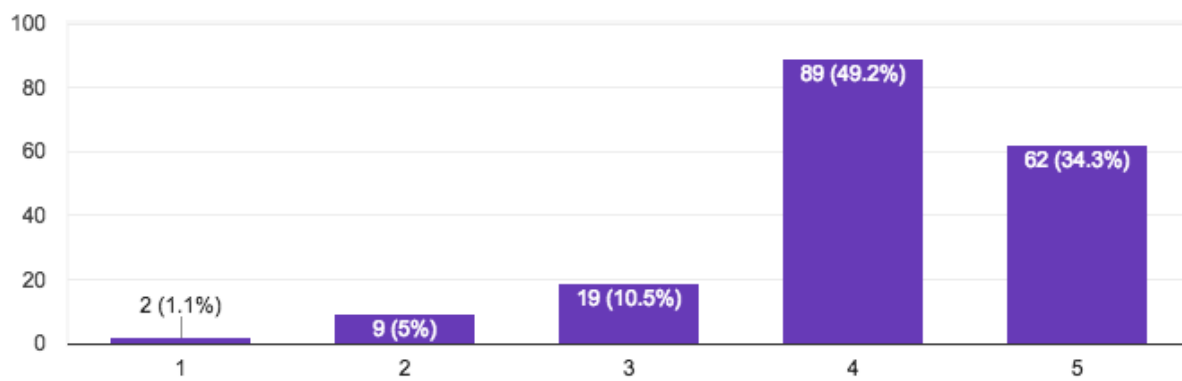
I am concerned that something shifting in me may offend people important to me

197 responses



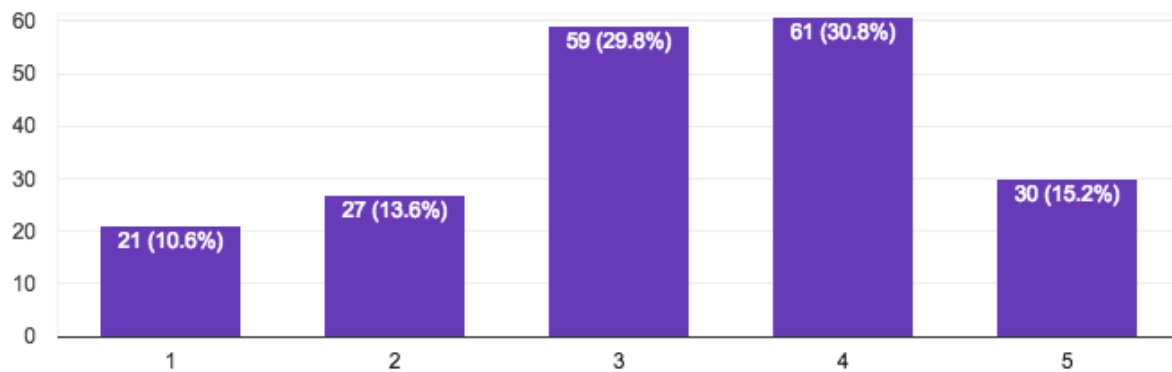
As I engage the world I am more open to those who are different, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies

181 responses



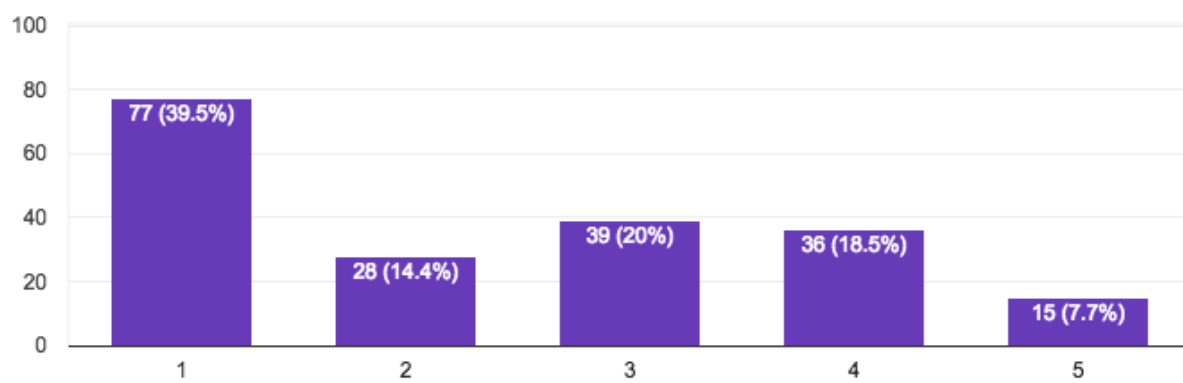
I am asking questions, less to find answers for myself, and more to prompt reflection and wonder in others

198 responses



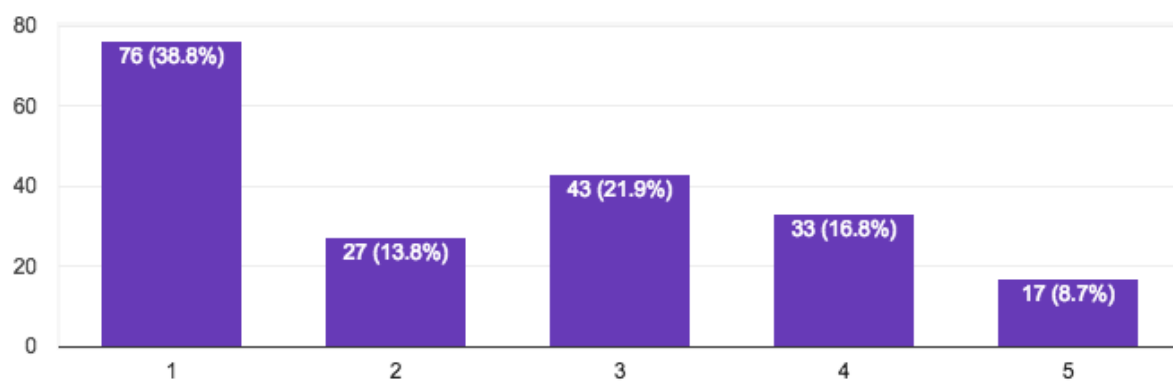
I continue to worship with my faith family, but no longer feel like I'm growing spiritually

195 responses



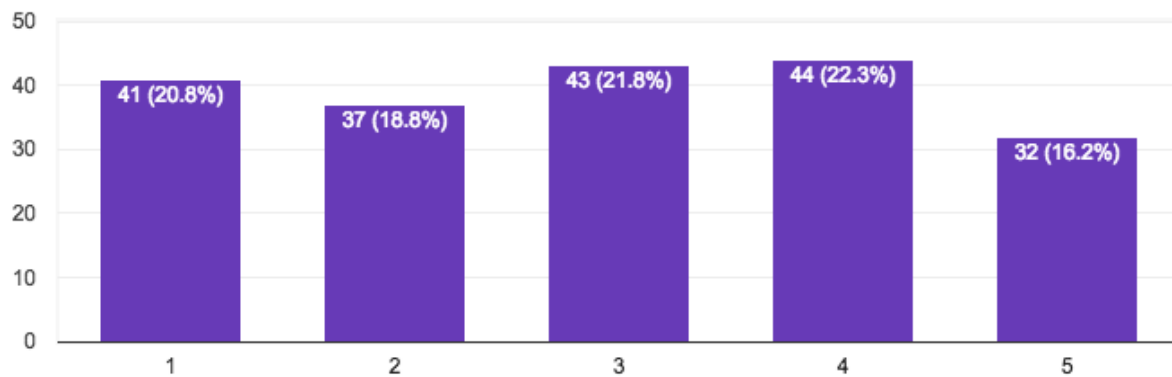
I am wondering if the foundational assumptions of my life still make sense

196 responses



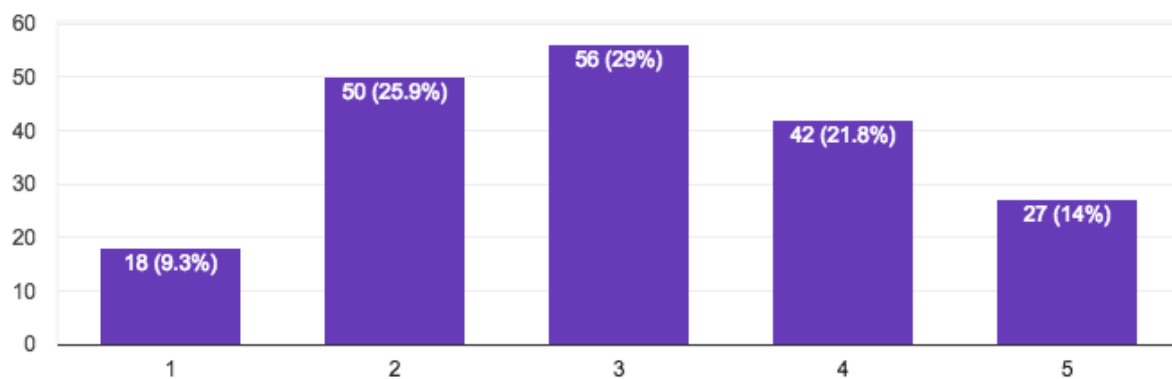
I am living differently as I discern a new Mystery

197 responses



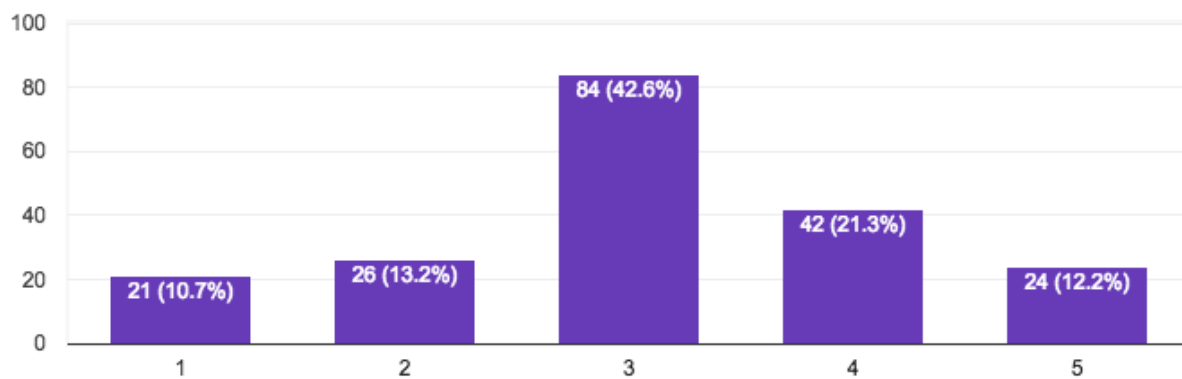
Traditional enemies look less so and I feel less aligned with traditional allies

193 responses



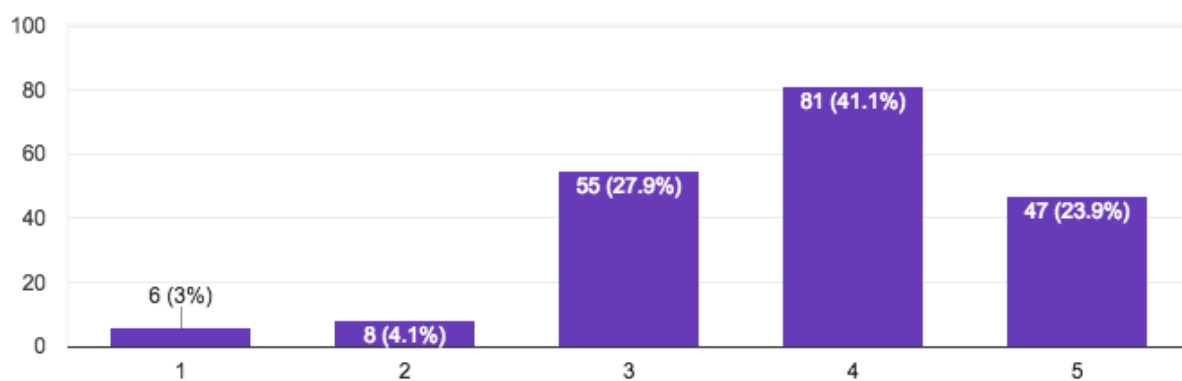
I am trying to sort out what still feels certain and what seems less clear

197 responses



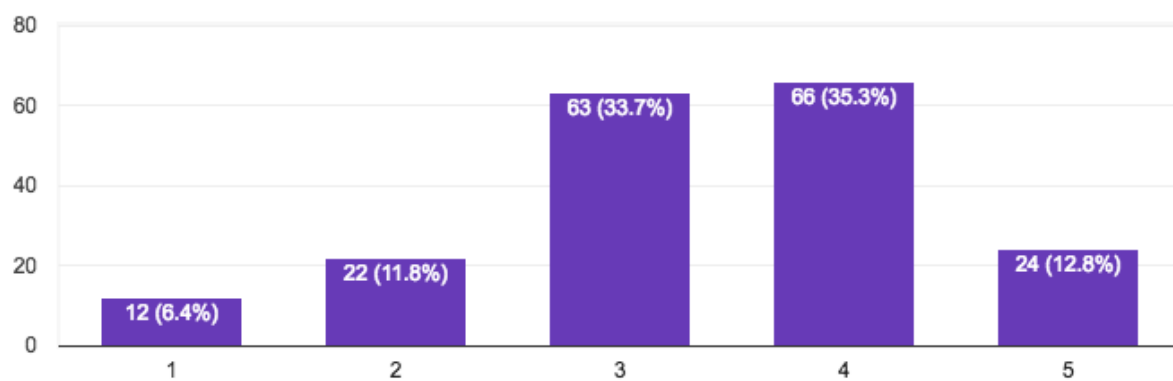
I am able to integrate the painful parts of my story along with the harmonious parts

197 responses



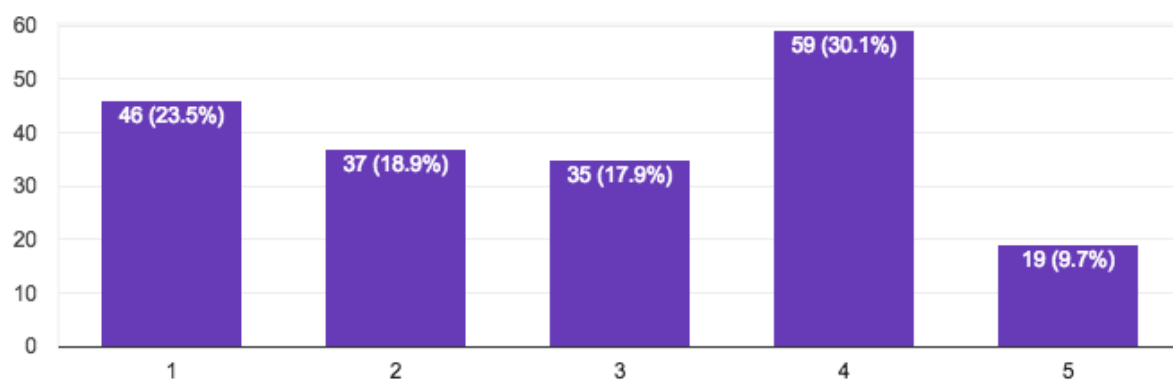
I am heard, even as I am quieted; transformational, even as I am shut out

187 responses



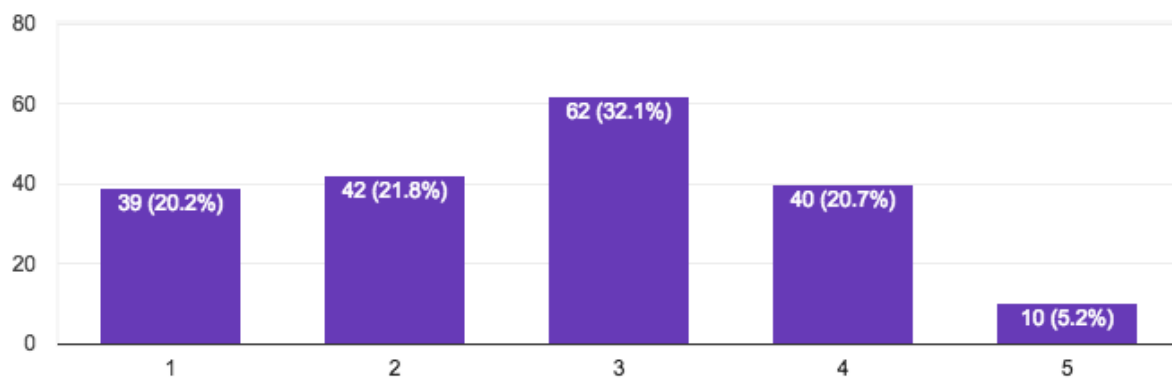
I feel lonely on my spiritual path

196 responses



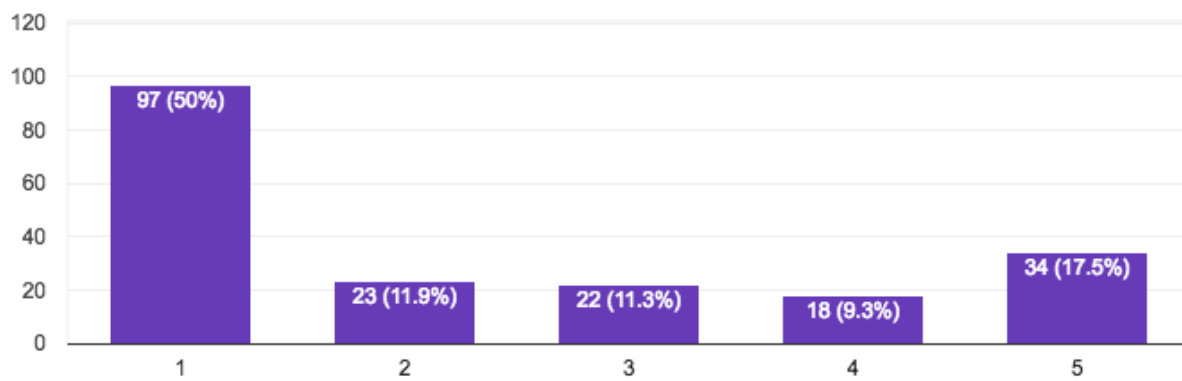
I am wondering if I should stick with what I know, or explore new ideas I once thought were wrong

193 responses



I have left a traditional faith community to seek spiritual nurture in untraditional places

194 responses



RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

I conducted 14 interviews with pilgrims in the Second Half of Life. The following pages include each of the interview transcripts I completed.

Interview #1
Female, Catholic Religious, 68yrs, Ohio

Background

I grew up Catholic in upstate New York. I entered the convent at the age of 18 years old. I left the convent at the age of 19 years old. I had decided to be a nun when I made my First Communion. I had been indoctrinated early by nuns. I felt called then, and waited all my life to join the convent. I entered the convent at 3pm and knew by 5:30 I had made a mistake. I had alienated my family when I made this choice, so they made me dead to them. All my friends had gone to college. The convent was more like being in the marines than about God. We lived in silence for twenty-three hours, slept on an army cot, sat in straight back chairs. We were forbidden to read, even the Bible. The sisters read our mail. It took me a year to get out. There were twenty of us young eighteen year olds. Life in the convent was very militaristic, like boot camp. It was the late 1960's and there was a revolution going on. I wanted to be a part of that revolution. Protesting the war is where Jesus would be. In the convent, we couldn't eat in public. I was a young rebel. The nuns were very relieved when I left. I was not though. My parents had burned my clothes. I never spent another night in their house. My sister told her friends I had died. I had no resources. I had spent my whole life looking forward to being a nun. It was such a loss.

My sister got very sick and died. When she died, I inherited my mother. I had to take care of her, so I brought her to Cincinnati, because the cost of living was 42% less than where she had been living with my sister. Unfortunately, there was not much reconciliation with my mother. Our relationship went from bad to worse. We were not a religious family. My parents thought I was extreme. I became a hippie. I had a national merit scholarship, waitressed, I babysat autistic kids. I dropped out of school and work for two years and worked in a Benedictine kitchen. I learned all about monastic life and loved it. I was in a rural community after living in the city. The brothers were getting old and needed a girl to take care of them. I got to sit in on lectures. I learned to cook, how to milk a cow, make yoghurt. I loved praying the office. I would have become a woman monastic, but they told me no women did that. Two years was enough time with them. They sent me to Catholic University with a young monk. I spent time at their monastery in Washington, DC. I went to vespers and ate supper with the community for one semester on Sunday afternoons. The Catholic church was in midst of Pentecostal revival. I met crazy new Christians. In that group, I met an older man who knew Latin. I fell in love with him and married him. We are still close friends. This was my second profound experience. I got married to him at 3pm with no ritual. We were married by the Justice of Peace. He was in the priesthood and he waited three years to get dispensation from the Church. He didn't get it, but we married anyway. He left the priesthood. But I knew in two hours I really wanted to be a nun. I wanted to do missionary work. He loved me, but I was bored. It took me five years to get out of the marriage. We separated. I didn't want to break his heart, but then he fell in love with someone else.

I became a single person looking for community. I decided to make my own private vows. I taught and lived in a cloistered community, and then finally found a community in Green Bay WI that I could join. I met a woman at a retreat house, who had also made

private vows. I continued to live in Washington, DC and went to Wisconsin for community meetings. I stayed in Washington, DC and taught until my sister died. Then I brought mom to Cincinnati. She died two months later. Mother said to me, "Why couldn't you have died instead of your sister?" I had no religious community in Cincinnati, but my best friend was here. She helped me find a nursing home for my mother. I thought I could get hired by Catholic High School to teach. I sold my condo in Washington, DC in 2006 and bought a house in Cincinnati. I had some money from that sale, so I didn't have to go back to work right away. I developed kidney disease. I decided to do volunteer work. It was better than teaching

Current

I started volunteering in 2006. I was part of a literacy program. Now I'm working at Christo Rey, a new kind of Catholic school. Its mission is to lift the urban poor out of poverty in one generation. I found it in the Catholic News. I have a lot health problems so I can't work there. Instead I volunteer three mornings a week. In the afternoons, I take my dog for therapy visits at a nursing home. I have a good life. I do yoga and therapy.

What do you long for?

I am a religious person with one other person, my best friend. She's married. I belong to two parishes, but don't go to either one because of the patriarchy of the Catholic Church. They make me angry. I miss the rhythms of monastic life. I try to pray lauds, vespers and sometimes compline. I live a somewhat monastic life. I've spent time at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota for summer retreats. I would like to join a group that does centering prayer. I like Bible study. I belong to a women's group that meets eight times a year, monthly for two and a half hours. We pick a theme for the year and take turns presenting. We pray together using music, scripture, and Lectio Divina. I don't miss communion. I experience Eucharist in a variety of Emmaus ways. I take dinner to a young twenty-eight-year-old mother of twins once a month. That is communion. I went to WomenChurch which is led by ordained Catholic women priests. They are ordained, but not connected to the tradition of the Church. There is no reflection on scripture. It felt too experimental. It feels like hippie church, consecrating beer and pretzels. So, I don't go to WomenChurch. I like Quakers a lot. I like to pray with Quakers. That's what I mean by centering prayer. I read the scripture for the day and listen to online homilies. I write a lot. I have a good spiritual director. I want to stay under the radar of bishop.

I want to participate in WomenChurch, but I don't like the Cincinnati version. I'm a theologian. It's hard for me when people don't know the Church's tradition and don't draw on it. We don't need to make up our own songs, at least not until we know the ones we've inherited. I love Walter Bruggeman. I want to be connected to a traditional community that's not patriarchal. I want the best of the tradition. I'm interested in learning more about Cynthia Bourgeault, and the mystical tradition. I'm fed up and against the institutional Church. I believe in meditation, having a spiritual director, but I also believe in experiencing the divine presence directly. I am comfortable receiving communion from a non-Catholic.

Spiritual practices I would like to participate in:

Centering prayer in a group.

Some celebration of feasts and seasons like Pentecost.

I get fed by other rituals. There was a winter Solstice bonfire at Centennial barn. I threw my journals into the bonfire.

I like the way Celtic spirituality rituals are tied to natural rhythms.

I believe the Christian tradition is deep enough so we don't need to go outside of it.

I like the Farm Church format, but also need more, for example, Ash Wednesday. I would like to give ashes out in public. I would like more scripture study. I like praying and being challenged by texts. I like St. John's Illuminated bible with icons. It lets the icon speak to you, like a visual Lectio Divinia

Thoughts about Rhythm, Ritual and Rule

The traditional vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are about Power, Sex, Money. These need to be in any rule. The rule needs to address social action, tithing and living in community. I am an activist and a contemplative

Interview #2
Female, No Church Affiliation, 66 years, Ohio

Background

I grew up with a Christian identity, but with no formal church allegiance. Both my parents had grown up Catholic, but had started to pull away. I am the product of two people who loved each other, but had begun the process of falling away from Church. I was not raised in Church, but they raised me with a Christian identity. They taught me right and wrong, we ate fish on Friday, celebrated Easter traditions like hunting for eggs and Christmas. But we were more pagan-like, a ritual of culture more than a ritual of religion. They instilled in me the morality of the Church, without the hypocrisy of Church. They talked a lot about the hypocrisy of the Church. We were free to choose what we wanted, but they were "done". I attended a Church of Christ congregation in a rural area of Indiana. I took myself there because my friends were going there. I went there when I was nine to eleven years old. It was pleasant enough, but I saw people acting differently in church than they did day to day. I saw them gossiping and then acting pious and that was problematic for me. It confirmed what my parents said about the hypocrisy of the Church. I stopped attending because it didn't resonate with me. My own adolescence was coming on. I always worked, babysitting, and I got into other things. During adolescence, I gravitated toward Catholic kids. Membership in the Catholic church was dropping. The grounds on which the Catholic church sat had been donated by my great-grandparents. My Catholic friends and parents were urging and summoning me to enter the fold. But it didn't resonate because my mother had hang-ups about being a good enough Catholic. I couldn't do that, be a good enough Catholic. I would visit on occasion - midnight mass at Christmas, the sunrise service at Easter - but I did not become a member or attend actively. I went on with life. I graduated from high school and went to college. I was the first generation of women in my family to go to college. The civil rights and women's movements were underway. I had been a good girl, but distrustful of institutions. They had done a lot of damage. I had no blind allegiance like I felt I was encouraged to have by my family and school. During college, I was focusing on getting school paid for and getting through. I was looking for meaning in life, but did not seek it out in church. NOT AT ALL!

I graduated and moved to Cincinnati. My parents had moved overseas with a business venture. My dad was incarcerated in Greece briefly. It was a very scary time for our family. My brothers and I were on our own. I was the youngest, but probably the most confident in terms of navigating systems, even though I distrusted them. I organized the State Department to help get my parents home and healed. The roles were reversed in our family. The kids took on the task of nursing our parents back to health. It was a very lonely and transformative time in my life. It helped me sift through what is and isn't important.

We got our parents back on their feet. My brothers and I had met in Cincinnati, even though we hadn't grown up here, because we needed each other to take care of our parents. We went in different directions after our parents were settled. I began to bury myself in my work. I started my Doctorate studies. It was a way to hide and insulate

myself from the rest of world, like a shroud, to give myself time not to get intimately involved with anyone. There was no church then. There was searching and seeking, mostly through psychotherapy.

In my late 20's I met my husband and got married. We were very solid for 30 years. More to satisfy him and his parents, I went to his Episcopal church. He's African-American. The church was in Evanston, OH. Everyone in that church was high yellow. I was active in the Episcopal church. For me it was Catholic lite. I began filling in those blanks from childhood, but was not fully committing to a church structure which had a lot of toxicity. I was baptized there because it was important to my husband's family. It was a ritual this community did, and I went along. I knew in my heart of hearts that the Creator of all this wonder around us did not care if I got sprinkled with water. I was cool with it. They were good people. I had no deep spiritual experiences there. I went through their confirmation process after baptism. I couldn't wrap myself around it, but I went through the process to satisfy the people there. I went to church and taught Sunday school. I could be counted to put food together. My husband was involved in Vestry. But we fell away a few years after my son was baptized. My husband and I were always struggling to fit in as a mixed-race couple. It affected our involvement in worship. We both had broken out of our tribe, and religious communities are tribal in nature. That community was its own tribe. and we had broken out of our tribes of origin. I didn't feel like I ever fit in. There was a lot of racial mixing in that community, so religious identity was also part of the picture. It was more that it was the way I dealt with religion my whole life. I put my toes in water, but never married it. I would put myself in the position of helping and volunteering, then I'd resent it and move on.

After that, I buried myself in work, and marriage, and family. I was always seeking, reading. I did lots of psychotherapy, off and on. It was my way of making sense of things. I gravitated to groups of friends pondering the meaning of life. Those organic interpersonal relationships have always given me more than church. By this point in my life, I was now in mid-life. My son was moving along and heading to adulthood. My marriage was becoming more difficult. We finally got divorced after 30 years of struggle. Life was kind of a blur when my marriage was disintegrating.

Present

I am not at all close to being affiliated with Church. But I'm more spiritually connected than ever before, maybe because of the suffering in my life. My husband and I are friends again. He had an accident. My son stepped in to help him. My mom and I helped too. It's a period of healing we've all entered. It's restoring our relationships on a more honest level than when we were legally bound. We are in the final stage of my husband's healing. He was unable to walk for 18 months.

The surgeon finally told me this last healing process was crucial, so we brought him to our house to care for him. He's walking now. It was a really rich experience to facilitate his healing and make some peace with a person who has been in our life for 30 years. Just this past summer I went back to church to seek something spiritual. I had no room for church earlier, but even trying it now, it never rang my bell.

I have a very clear inner connection to something sacred. I'm not sure where it came from, but I'm glad it's there. I inherited a God awareness from my family. They believed in God, but said to me "that bible is just a bunch of stories". I believe the bible is sacred, but not in a way that God isn't. I believe in the text of nature. The regeneration of life in nature tells me about God. I am spiritual but not religious. I'm less "done" because I've never really been in the Church. I can't be in Church with its hierarchy. I'm spiritual in my heart. I have a deep sense of the sacred.

In this stage of my life - I will be 66 years old in January. I'm in the last quarter of my life - I feel like what I need to do is try to live with as much authenticity and integrity as I can. I try to be decent and good to people, myself and earth. As a parent, I want to leave good stuff behind for my son. Some material thing is only a small part of it. I want to leave him with peace about our relationship. I want to wrap up business with people. There is not room for church. The struggle of women is a global community thing. It is painful to watch in this country. Will we have more authenticity? Trump, Weinstein, Charlie Rose... it's everywhere. What will we do about it?

I don't know about this dimension we are in. Is there only so far we can evolve? Can our soul outgrow this dimension and then go to a new dimension to seek a new level of growth?

I see God everywhere. I knew God was present when I could help kids learn to read. I knew it was God's grace at work. I was there to witness it and facilitate it. It was such a spiritual thing to see a kid open up to a whole new world through reading.

I participate in seasonal celebrations with other spiritual people at a place called Serpent Mound. I'm doing spiritual direction with a group of mixed religious folks in my community. I'm feeling a need to move closer to town. I'm in too remote a place. I will need to find a new way to live out my spiritual life when I move.

Interview #3
Female, 60 years, Presbyterian, Ohio

Background

I grew up Presbyterian in Michigan, living next door to the manse, so the Church was my pseudo family. I saw church from the inside and the outside. The pastor had a son my age and we were close friends. I saw church as faith development, and organization, and a structure. My experience was positive on all dimensions. I felt emotionally safe and nurtured. The teaching was age appropriate in a meaningful way. Faith was the foundation of my family, my extended family, and my neighborhood. It was the core of who I was and how I navigated my life. My youth group offered freedom to be emotionally vulnerable, to explore faith without judgment. I had relationships with adults who were active in their spiritual lives. Mission trips were foundational. We took small trips to a church 3 hours away. When I went on mission trips as a parent to faraway places I saw how they were more meaningful. Even so, my church built a strong formational foundation in my younger years. It helped me become involved in meaningful ways. I taught classes with an adult. I worked in the nursery. When I was old enough, I became a leader. I was engaged enough to be a leader, and this was nurtured and valued in me. I feel grateful for that care.

I joined Young Life in high school. By ninth grade I went to Young Life camps. It was more evangelical and less traditional than my home church. This allowed me to expand beyond my tradition and explore my faith. Young Life was peer oriented and fun. The leader relationships were more collegial. They were not my parent's age. They were college kids, just ahead of me in formation. It allowed me an emotional release at a time when my life had emotional intensity. I could question, doubt, play. I could be my undefined self. It was ok to be a teenager. I feel sad that in the Baby Boomer generation there were opportunities like this available, and now I see so fewer teens doing this. The kids today have more choices to do other things. Back then it was more fun to go to youth group than stay home with three TV stations.

When did things begin to shift in your faith journey?

Quite early. By the time I had graduated from high school, six of my friends had died. Then by college I lost two uncles and a grandfather. My boyfriend's mother had schizophrenia, and was hospitalized three times. Another friend had bipolar psychosis. So, I had to navigate my faith into adulthood more quickly. During this time, my faith continued to be my core guiding light. I remained in the traditional church as a primary source of faith development. My understanding of faith is highly shaped by my traditional healthcare training, and colleagues who were my mentors. I had to deal with more vulnerability and pain in the world because these parts of a person's life are shown more often to professionally trained healthcare providers. My world was socially narrowed to people who had professional training or whose life experience gave them skills and capacity to be comfortable with emotional vulnerability. What I'm learning at age sixty, is that I didn't ever really live as an adult in what is often described as the First Half of Life. So, I have difficulty connecting with people who are in that place because

it's so foreign to me. I have little tolerance for bullshit. I connect easily with pastors because they're healers.

My husband and his partners are entrepreneurs and we recently attended a conference for award winning business entrepreneurs. I typically struggle with corporate culture because I experience many corporate professionals as bullshitters. But these leadership people, in companies who had grown through an entrepreneurial process, were refreshing to me. It was further confirmation that I connect with people who can do deep work. I learned there are corporate people who can do deep work.

Where are you in your relationship with the Church?

I'm trying to heal from when my daughter destabilized into bi-polar disorder and I did not get the support I needed from a church I had been with for so long. I felt abandoned and betrayed. I helped to create a holistic healing non-profit organization in partnership with my church as part of my work to help more people walk alongside those in deep struggle. My close relationship with my pastors is helping me heal those feelings of betrayal, and reconnect with the church in a deeper way. My two pastors are also on pathways of their own spiritual growth, within the church, but not limited by church traditions.

A pivotal stage in my journey with church beliefs was learning the BodyTalk System [healing modality] which was inter-spiritual and interfaith. My primary instructor is a Presbyterian pastor familiar with my spiritual traditions. The instruction was standard BodyTalk training and she could answer my questions about how this process connected to my Christian perspective. I took a course on consciousness, and looked at the concept of the Trinity from all major religions. When I saw the concept of Father/Son/Holy Ghost in all major religions, using diverse language to describe a common concept, and not limited to teachings of specific religious traditions, it created a paradigm shift for me. I started thinking of specific teachings out of a religious tradition as an expression of a more central and shared spirituality. After that class, I participated in a spiritual transformation group that allowed me to explore a more experiential dimension of spiritual development, including bodywork and other resonance based modalities, like drumming. I discovered that the dimension of the divine (some of us call God) was living within me and not external to me. I began to tune into that energy (some call the Holy Spirit), and embrace the innate wisdom it provided, that instructed my intuition. As I grew in this capacity, including a transformation into experiencing the world in those dimensions unknown to me previously, I began to live into a greater presence of God on an ongoing basis that could no longer be separated from everyday experiences. I began to receive divine downloads that the Bible calls prophecy. I have an inner knowing about priorities, about what is coming in the future to prepare for, when I need to let go, etc. Based on this practice of surrendering to a greater power and living with conscious attention, I started to experience my ego moving out of the way, rather than making a head decision to move my ego out of the way. This integration of head, heart and gut brain allowed my heart to connect to a greater power and lead from that perspective. This is when I began to step forward in faith. It is a process of living my faith from an inner knowing. I'm tuned into a greater power that is leading me. It does not make logical

sense and is at times inconsistent with the priorities of others in my community. I'm having to be courageous to keeping tuning into myself. I'm trying not to be stubborn and stuck, when I know from my inner knowing that I need to walk into something, even when it results in rejection and abandonment. My relationship with my God is of higher priority than human relationships. It helps me to be connected with other pastors. I continue to explore a non-dualistic approach on the continuum of spiritual expression. This allows me to participate in my faith tradition from a non-dual perspective.

Being introduced to a non-dual perception was key to me. AND I had other Christian mentors in the non-dual field who helped me integrate this non-dual perception with my tradition. I brought to my faith community what I thought was missing there by creating our holistic healing non-profit, which is an interfaith organization.

My deep level connections with members of my congregation are focused primarily on staff and the board members of our holistic healing space. My relationships with others are too often superficial. I also need to navigate boundaries with those who want healing from me. So I need to get nurturing relationships from other places. I can stay in my home congregation because my two pastors are preaching/leading from this larger perceptive field. As they are being transformed as leaders I connect with them, but some of the other church members can't. It is sometimes hard to be on our women's retreat because my transformation is so large that I can't always connect with others anymore. At times, we are not in the same spiritual space any more.

Are you lonely on your Spiritual Path?

I can feel lonely in the congregation at times. But I feel connection with specific people within and outside of that community. I am more aware when I feel lonely in a spiritual community and ask, "What do I do with it? Do I choose to stay or leave?"

What do you still long for?

As far as the congregation at church, my needs are being met by small group of people. I would like a larger tribe, and a greater number of people to embrace the opportunities we offer through our healing space.

Worship still feels meaningful, and is a gathering of people for discussion and reflection for continued growth. Bible study in the traditional church is not working well for me. My current struggle is that I'm continuing to grow and transform. I couldn't stop it. I'm being perceived by some members of the congregation that I'm demanding that things move to meet my needs that aren't aligned with others. I know how to meet people where they are in time-limited professional work. But outside of my work, I need more balanced, reciprocal and collaborative relationships. I'm struggling with ways to collaborate. The gap is getting bigger. I'm getting connected with others through holistic healing networks like BodyTalk, kundalini yoga, reiki shares, etc. The healing space practitioners are good partners. I am still feeling a void, but it's fuller than it would otherwise have been without creating our healing space.

Interview #4
Female, 75 years, Baptist, Virginia

Background

I grew up in a Baptist church. Since the cradle, most of my time has been spent in fairly conservative congregations, but not hard core. I was baptized when I was twelve years old. I belonged to the youth group, went to Sunday school and church, because that is what my family did. My father was very active. He was a deacon. My earliest memory of Sunday School or VBS was "God Loves You". It's a great first memory. I always wanted to be baptized. I had to wait. I was so anxious. I remember that day. I was nervous and excited, and thinking, "Now I'm really saved!" In my first church as a child, I sat in the balcony without my parents. When it came time for communion, I remember saying to mom, "Oh, they serve refreshments," because I didn't know what it was. I wasn't supposed to take communion until I was baptized. It was kind of forbidden, but I got it anyway. I remember thinking "When I get baptized I will be able to do that". In my early years, I was in a different church. My parents were big Baptist leaders in church. I was in youth group, we had revivals. I loved revivals. It was so emotional. I remember praying that God would not call me to be a missionary, because I did not want to go China. I felt emotional and in touch with God. I had a good youth group experience.

One experience began to make me think in a different way. My parents were not very conservative, even though they grew up in a church that didn't play cards, drink, etc. I had very conservative grandparents. When I was about 13ish, I had a sleepover with girls from church. In Sunday School the teacher had told us it was wrong to kiss and hold hands. Someone in my class started crying because she thought she was evil. I remember thinking the Sunday School teacher was wrong. The conservatism in church didn't pass to me. My Catholic friends could not have communion. I liked Catholicism because they had confession and could be saved that way. But after my baptism, I didn't need confession, even though I thought it was a good idea.

I don't remember much about my teenage years in youth group. I remember we went to church on Wednesday nights and Sundays. My dad was very involved.

During college, I belonged to no church and went to no church. I went to school in Fredericksburg, VA. I never hooked up with a religious organization. I didn't think about church, or God, and I didn't miss it. I believed, but I didn't think about it. Then I got married in my home church from my teenage years. I moved with my husband, who was Methodist, to Blacksburg, VA. We joined a Baptist church, but didn't go. After a year there, we then moved back to Northern Virginia. After we had kids we started going to church again, and I loved it. We were very involved. We started a young adult class. My husband taught it. We were there five years. Then we moved to Vienna VA. People in the church I left said, "Go to Vienna Baptist." Those were very formative years. I attended there from age twenty-eight until now, fifty years. I was very involved as my children were growing up. I taught Sunday School. I was a deacon. I was involved in everything. My children grew up there. I remember being on a women's retreat in my 30's and asking questions like, "Was Mary really a virgin?" An older woman said to me "As you get it

older, these questions become less important." Larry Matthews, the pastor during that time, had a group where we visited people, and then did verbatims about our visits, and learned from them. I belonged to a parents of teens group. I was in a good Sunday School class for young couples. I started that again. It was a season of good spiritual growth and emotional growth for me. I followed along behind Larry, who was 10 years older than me. I learned a lot about my spiritual life and prayer. Those were years for psychological and spiritual growth. I did everything there was to do. It was a very open church. You could be in the same group with very conservative members, and also be with others who were more liberal. I remember talking with one of the deacons on my team. I said to her, "I read that book "Left Behind". I said that it was nuts. She said "That's what the bible says." I told her "You know what a heretic I am." I evolved into someone who began to be not such a literal believer, and there was room for that. I had a lot of friends there, and had been there long time. I evolved to be less concerned with whether Mary was a virgin, or Jesus rose from tomb. I was exposed to the other gospels and other authors. Then I began to see, "It's not as simple as what I was told when I was little. It's not true that some people who believe go to heaven and others go to hell." It began to evolve that it was ok to be unsure and not believe everything. I was aware of Fowler's stages of spiritual development. I read a lot, many books like, Meeting Jesus Again for First Time by Marcus Borg. I read Keating, on Mindfulness, and The Dark Night of Soul by Gerald May. I began to get more exposed to C.S. Lewis, Merton, Rohr. My church did Myers-Briggs for all of us together. There was a lot of exploring in those years. I learned you could evolve in your faith without having to leave your church. Vienna Baptist had space for many people.

After Larry left, the church hired someone very conservative. He came from a church with no women deacons. It was not a good choice. In that time, my friend Myra started a spiritual direction group. She had taken the spiritual direction course at The Shalem Institute. By then Larry had left. I was in her first spiritual direction group. Then I started my own group three to four years later. I still meet with the group I started with. We have been doing it for fifteen years.

The sermons got stupid. They were like being in a 5th grade Sunday School class. The music got bad. The Deaconate, and other important spiritual groups, faded away. They hired a second pastor. He wasn't a good preacher. My friends left. I wasn't interested enough in what was happening there to give up Sunday with my beloved. So, I stopped going. I still meet with my spiritual direction group. I read books, go on silent retreats. In my business [as a psychotherapist] mindfulness is a big thing in the psych world. I incorporated that into personal life. I pray in a whole different way, without words. I don't hate the church. I don't go anywhere else. I only have a feeling of nostalgia. Most of the people I care about are gone. I'm not connected to the staff. I paint with friends from church once a week. The women's group meets, but I don't go because I don't want to give up another night. They also have book club I don't do.

What do you still long for?

I don't spend a lot of time thinking about what I long for. Perhaps I could be interested in something else, but I don't know what it would be. I don't really miss communion. I love

taking communion at the rail, but in the Baptist church it's different than the way the Catholics and Episcopalians serve it. I don't really miss it. It was not part of my tradition to think of it as a sacramental space to meet God. It was more of a service to others. I have nostalgia for the way things used to be, like Christmas Eve. I began to cry my first Christmas Eve with nothing to do, no kids or grandkids. My beloved, Greg, was not interested in Christmas Eve, but he did go with me and it was good. I don't miss it a lot now. Church meant a lot to me. But now, I'm interested in being with people who are where I am. The Cynthia Bourgeault books sound interesting. A group of women is meeting and they take a woman in the Bible and talk about her. It's at night and doesn't appeal to me. I'm beyond studying women in the Bible. The staff at church is young so they can't offer the kind of experience I want. My spiritual direction group meets that need more than anything else. Those women are where I am. We've done all that other stuff, and organized stuff and it's tiresome. Spiritual nurture involves someone offering it and me showing up. I don't want to have to be the creator of the group. A friend of mine is in the same place I am, but she loves music. She goes to a church with a fabulous music program because she's a singer and music is very important to her. Nature is interesting, but I haven't thought about sacred nature rhythms. Ritual is very powerful, in whatever way you do it.

I miss the marking of important occasions. That's what I love about funerals. I don't have rituals I do, but I believe rituals are important. Rituals from church (baptism, communion, Christmas Eve, laying on of hands for new deacons), that, I always loved. So, I miss ritual. But I can't say I miss THAT ritual.

My beliefs are very different. They are tied up with not knowing. They are not so black and white. I like giving people space to sit with mystery. The Bible is a metaphor for how God works in the world, rather than, "This is history."

We need new rituals when we move into Second Half of Life, and out of church. Every January/February I get together with other therapists. We talk about what we are going to do for the coming year, what is our intention. I think marriage rituals need to be more inclusive, tied to a broader theology. I do not want to be part of the stupid argument over gay people. I don't even want to fight for it.

Interview #5
Female, 55 years old, Methodist, Ohio

Background

I lived on a farm and did not go to church regularly. I went to church with grandparents. I always knew there was God. In 7th grade we moved to the suburbs. My dad decided to go to church, so we went to a Methodist church. It was a good fit for us. It had young families, kids the same age as us, children's programs. The pastor was the same age as my parents. I remember the social stuff like Sunday School, being with other kids, youth group, and retreats. I also went to confirmation. I had never been baptized. I learned what the sacraments meant. We had a guest pastor preaching and I got that warm feeling, like Wesley. I knew God was there. That experience affirmed a lifelong "knowing" about my intuition/gut feeling of God. I had a sense of something bigger. Confirmation was a very meaningful event for me.

I went to a Methodist college. After college, I really didn't go to church much. I was busy partying and self-medicating with alcohol. Most of my friends were Catholic, who grew up in Chicago. I went to Mass with them on Sat night. I liked the ritual of the Catholic church even if I didn't understand it. It was always the same liturgy. I knew what was going to happen. It was an old beautiful church, dark, gothic. It felt holy/sacred to me.

Then I moved to Virginia for work. I hooked up with a Methodist church there. I went when I could. I had one weekend off a month. It had people my age. It was a good fit. It had a female pastor. I was working shift work as a brewing supervisor for Budweiser. While I was working there, I made good money. I traveled a lot, and went around the world. Traveling opened my eyes. It taught me people are pretty much the same. We want to laugh, have kids, be in love, dance, play music, have sex, etc. Traveling made me realize other religions have validity. It reminded me of when I saw the movie, O God, when George Burns, as God, says, "You can call me God, Buddha, Allah. They all have the same validity." I thought of "the Force" in Star Wars. Something clicked. Christianity isn't the only way to God.

After a while I quit that job. I felt called to the medical field. I went to x-ray school at the age of thirty-eight. It was truly a spiritual calling. I heard a still small voice calling me to this new field. I ignored it. I said, "I can't do this." But as soon as I said "yes," everything fell into place. I got into the flow. I got the money I needed and everything worked out. After x-ray school, I met my, now, ex-husband. We found a church together. He was from the Church of Christ. It was too old-fashioned for me. It had no women pastors. I had been the only woman in my field for a long time, so don't tell me I can't do something because I am a woman. That pissed me off. I ended up back at the Methodist church. He liked it too. It was a good fit for him. We became certified lay leaders, Sunday School teachers, we served on many committees, as trustees, and on the Pastor-Parish Relations committee.

I did not experience conflict between my wider perspective and traditional Church because I over-focused on what made my husband happy. I gave away my power. So,

when he got esophageal cancer, our church family, our friends and our family really got us through it. I really drew on my faith for the first time. I would be in tears and panicking, and then I would feel a warm feeling come over me. I knew someone was praying for me. I knew we'd be ok. It was a real comfort. My husband made it through cancer, and then decided he was called to be a pastor. The Methodist church can issue you a local license. He went down that path and they gave him a small church that had had no pastor for two years. They had five members for Sunday School, no running water or air conditioning, etc. The church had been built in 1865. It was his first church. I became the pastor's wife, but it wasn't me. I was supporting him and his call. The conference added second church to his call, and he became the pastor of a two-point parish. The second church was larger, and more modern.

During this time, we were in and out of counseling. I found out he'd been having affairs. I confronted him and started divorce proceedings. I was his fourth wife. He lied to the District Superintendent and said he had stopped the affair. I told her the truth. She protected me financially. He came after my money when we went to court. He blamed me for the divorce. I had gotten married at forty-four years old. The divorce was rough. It was not until I was away from him, that I realized how depressed and empty I felt. I had been married for ten years. I divorced him two years ago. I again went to church for support. I went back to my previous Methodist church. They had a woman pastor, my age and single. I think my pastor is gay and can't come out. She came to court with me, and really supported me.

I am still connected with that church. I travel a lot with my job, so I am not there as much as I had been. A lot people in that church are leaving. The pastor I was close to moved. The congregation is not willing to make changes, so it doesn't do much for me anymore.

The hospital I worked for offered to let me take Healing Touch. I began to think of things as energy. It reminded me of "the Force". Thinking about my spiritual life through the energy lens has changed my experience of church. I don't care about things, like gay marriage. Faith is about LOVE, and moving to a higher vibration. I have issues with church around this idea of energy. In addition, the church is so patriarchal. It doesn't honor the divine feminine. I'm seeing it more and more now.

What do you long for?

I would like to be part of a spiritual gathering that honors this way of understanding energy. I believe we have psychic abilities. I go to new age shops because I feel more connected to those people. They are more about energy and vibration. They do not have dogma attached to it. It's not like a church you can meet with very week. I may take a class, but that's it. They don't have small group types of things. It seems like a lot of women our age or younger, are kind of the sandwich generation. We are taking care of parents, as well as our children and grandchildren.

My ideal rhythm would be a gathering every other week, because I work weekends and I work the night shift.

I love to meditate. I haven't gotten into that practice as much as I would like. I use angel cards and a Tibetan singing bowl to clear energy. I also like being out in nature. That is when I'm really connected to God, when I'm hiking or taking long drives.

I miss communion. Because it's such an ancient ritual, it's the same no matter what denomination you're in. One thing we all have in common is communion. The symbolism of the body and blood remains important to me. When I talk about Love in terms of vibration, Christ is the epitome of agape love. He gave his body and blood for me. The language used at communion, "The Presence of God given in love for you" also resonates with me. The word "God" resonates, but at the same time it also feels very patriarchal. Where is the divine feminine in that? I want God language that works, like Universe, Higher Power, etc. I don't like how we've moved away from the natural rhythms of the world, like the full moon and the equinoxes. When I realized Machu Picchu had been built according to the stars, I knew that they had wisdom we don't have anymore.

Music is very important, and it's universal. In the Amazon rainforest, we danced all night to the drum and pipe whistle they played. Simple chants are meaningful. They are in the same vein as drumming. The Bible is not the only sacred text! I would like to learn more about the Gnostic Gospels, and I would love to read Cynthia Bourgeault. I'm in this new frame of mind since the election. I have never written or called representatives as much in my entire life. I see things being taken away, and I'm fighting for it. I feel there is wave of feminine energy rising up and it's going to keep coming! The tide is coming. We have finally woken up. We are finally angry enough and we are saying "no more."

Personally, I like group Lectio because it's not just talking. But then I also want a group prayer with touch, holding hands. I don't mind the group reflection. I am an "Extrovert" off the chart on Myers-Briggs. I like ending with chanting and blessing.

I also want more festivals and gatherings connected to natural rhythms like the new moon, and the equinoxes. I want to do something different at this gathering, than what we do for weekly worship. I want a ritual about letting go, maybe hanging our intentions on a tree, and burning what we are letting go of, etc.

Jesus is still very important to me. The whole calendar is built around his life. Jesus is the ultimate expression of agape love. Jesus gives us something to aspire to. I like Jesus language. I like "walk to Emmaus" kind of language. That is agape love and makes Jesus real. It is not necessarily from Scripture. I'm questioning, at this stage, the denominations who say you have to believe in Christ to go to heaven. I believe in God incarnate. I know other ancient religions have a virgin birth. Were we really doing something new? It is not a coincidence that we celebrate Christ's birth around the winter solstice. Jesus is who we are supposed to be as we live into our sacred truth.

I would like community meals, creativity and making something. I would like SoulCollage studio.

APPENDIX B

Synthesized Descriptions of the First Half of Life

- A. **Ego Building:** Persons in the First Half are struggling to build a strong ego structure, one sufficient to engage relationships, expectations, and personal needs. They are learning to stand apart from others and to develop a personal identity. They ask: Who am I? What do I believe and value? How can I exert myself to make space for my ideas, become valuable in others' eyes, and feel good about myself?
- B. **Learning Rules and Values:** Persons in the First Half are learning, obeying, and struggling with rules and values. They ask: What does my world ask of me? What does God expect of me? What is the *right* way to believe, act, and relate? What is the *wrong* way to believe, act, and relate? Whose rules do I live by when groups don't agree? Can I live by these rules? How do I respond when I or others do not live rightly?
- C. **Acquisition:** Persons in the First Half are establishing an identity, a home, skills, knowledge, material wealth, standing in the world, and security. They ask: What does success look like for me and those around me? How will I acquire what I need and what others expect of me?
- D. **Social Standing:** Persons in the First Half are learning to relate with others competently, gain influence, and be respected. They are learning to adapt, sacrifice, and become what is expected in order to become successful in their primary social groups. They ask: What do people expect me to say, do, and become? Am I competent, valuable, and successful in their eyes? Do I fit? How do I gain influence, power, and status?
- E. **Categorizing Dualism:** Persons in the First Half are sorting actions, people, groups, beliefs, and pretty much everything else into up or down, right or wrong, friend or foe, righteous or evil, with me or against me, for us or against us. They resist risky ambiguity, doubts, mystery, humbling, magic, troubling paradox, and loss of control. They ask: Who is good and who is bad? What is praiseworthy and what is not? What do I support and what do I condemn? What is truth and what is heresy?
- F. **Conventional:** Persons in the First Half are seeking to meet the expectations of society and significant identity groups. They are adapting to conditions imposed by their environments. They take on, with little or no questioning, cultural and institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices. They ask: How should I live to fit in well and be accepted by people and groups important to me? How do I stand firm and defend our (true) way from heresy and wrong thinking?

Synthesized Descriptions of the
Transition Between First to the Second Half of Life

- A. **Prompted:** People bumping into the transition from the First to Second Half are being prompted to act, relate, think, and see themselves differently. They are finding it more difficult to fit their life experiences into old perspectives and patterns. They increasingly ask bigger questions and see beyond the simple either-or of their past way of thinking. Someone is summoning them toward transformation. They are also being nudged by life circumstances. They are slowed or stopped by struggles of illness, loss of loved ones, retirement, less physical strength and stamina, and cultural marginalization. They are bone weary of the “rat race.” They discover that they finally have enough power, stuff, and status. They ask: Is this all there is? How do I fit this loss (inconsistency, feeling, mystery, etc.) into what I’ve been told to believe and how I’ve been expected to live? What do I do now without my life partner (child, friend)? What am I going to do now that I am retired? Now that I can no longer perform like I used to, what’s next? What happened to my drive for more? Why does less suddenly look so much better? Something shifted in me: What now?
- B. **Appealing:** People bumping into the transition from the First to Second Half increasingly yearn for life with less need to always have to be right or clear, defend “their” groups, accumulate, compete, and influence. They yearn to slow down, relax boundaries, ponder more, learn to think non-dualistically, and divest. They yearn to rest into listening more and fighting less, wondering more and resisting less, believing more broadly and less rigidly. They need to speak into their new questions and tentative answers. They resonate with fresh voices of wise and often marginalized sages, mystics, and elders. They ask: Is it okay to not toe the line? What if I gave myself permission to entertain heresy (according to my group)? I wonder what my life would be like if I didn’t have to keep competing? Could it be that I am done and ready for a new chapter in my life, a gentler, more gracious, accepting, open, and wonder-filled life? How might I engage this new thing in my life? What changes do I need to make to keep this process alive? Who could I back away from and who could I spend more time with? What could I listen to, read, and study now? What groups might help this process? What groups might hinder this process?
- C. **Frightening:** People bumping into the transition from First to Second Half face daunting challenges. They begin to entertain questions about the rightness of their thinking and that of their groups. They increasingly question the very foundational assumptions of their lives. They ask unacceptable questions and think heretical thoughts. Things they were sure about become increasingly unstable and fluid. Their enemies look less so and their allies feel more threatening. Part of them resists the transformational shifts. They are loath to risk hard-fought-for security, success, and status. They resist an invitation to make

room for painful parts of life, people who are different, and beliefs beyond those of their own groups. They resist offending those important to them. They fear questioning core dogma and risking eternal security. They ask: Are these questions okay to ask? If I can no longer sort things into what is right and wrong, then what will I believe and who will I trust? What can I still be sure of and what is up for grabs? If I can't be sure about "this" then what can I be sure of? Can I handle a world that is riskier, more powerful, and mysterious than I thought? How can I feel so drawn to risking so much and yet feel so afraid? Should I stick with what I know or explore these feelings and heretical ideas? Is it worth risking my friendships, status, and positions? Should I stop thinking this way? Can I?

Synthesized Descriptions of the Second Half of Life

- A. **Post-Egoic:** Persons in the Second Half discover meaningful life beyond self-image, role, power, prestige or possessions. They no longer have passion or desire to serve as warrior either for their own agenda or for those of their groups. They are ready to step out of the way of power structures, struggles, and systems. They ask: Why have I been so uptight about so many things? What am I trying to prove and to whom? What will it look like to live non-defensively, non-combatively, and non-anxiously?

- B. **Expansive:** Persons in the Second Half are able to hear more, include more, and accept more. They are able to receive what they avoided in the First Half: painful parts, alternative perspectives, and people who are different. They humble themselves; acknowledge their weak, confused, and wounded parts; and incorporate them into their life. They discover and cherish alikeness where they didn't see it before. Ideas, things, and people can now simply delight them, sadden them, and truly influence them. They ask: What can I learn from this memory (wound, person, situation, idea)? How can I honor my own traditions while knowing our truth has been partial, limited by our own experiences? What will I encounter today and how will it delight, humble, and grow my soul?

- D. **Non-Dualistic:** Persons in the Second Half shift perspective from either/or dualistic thinking to one comfortable with paradox, mystery, and both/and. They do not have strong and final opinions about everything, every event, or most people. They celebrate more, judge less. They ponder more, analyze less. They are grateful more, upset less. They ask: How will I be surprised today? What new mystery will I experience next? In what way is this world more unified than I ever dreamed possible? What boundary I formed before will I see dissolve and how will it open my horizon even farther? How will I rest into this wondrous sense of Oneness I am experiencing more and more?

- E. **Mystical:** Persons in the Second Half know “a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence.”¹⁵² They experience a “direct subjective communion with God or ultimate reality.”¹⁵³ They hear and obey a still, small voice of the soul, a deeper voice of God. They surrender their creeds, rationality, and norms as they discern this quieter and deeper voice within them. They are drawn to simplicity, risk, guidance and direction, and wisdom. They ask: How can I reduce the noise of my life that has been drowning out this quieter, subtler voice? Please, mind, can you trust enough to listen to this deeper Soul within? How can I further relax the hold of creeds, dogmas, voices, groups, and traditions that keep me from hearing and obeying this deeper voice? How do I live now that I am discerning this new Mystery? How can I experience more wonder, joy, and peace I now know and cherish?
- F. **Activist:** People in the Second Half continue to engage the world but now from their superconscious perspective. They now receive painful parts along with harmonious parts. They are now open to those who are different, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies. Being freed from egoism and dualism, their response is compassion enriched by joy, sadness, and acceptance. They are able to spend and be spent in quiet and profound love and justice. Being freed from grasping for power and competition—while empowered by deep inner knowing—they engage turmoil and injustice without being engaged by it. They disrupt systems not as warriors, but as mystics. They are marginalized, mocked, and martyred (literally and figuratively). Yet they influence their communities through their compassion, openness, grace, courage, and joy. They are heard, even as they are quieted; attractive, even as they are repelled; and transformational, even as they are shut out. They ask questions, but now less to find answers for themselves and more to prompt reflection and wonder in others.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Mystical.”

¹⁵³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Mystical.”

¹⁵⁴ To keep this summary brief, I have heavily synthesized Nyhuis descriptions. For the complete descriptions, see pages 39-46 in his dissertation.

Synthesized Descriptions of the Dissonance

Between First Half of Life Churches and Baby Boomers

- A. First Half Churches continue to learn, obey, and struggle with rules which honor convention.

Transitioning Boomers are being prompted to act, relate, think, and see themselves differently from the way they did before.

- B. First Half Churches continue to define the right way to believe, differentiating themselves from other churches and faith traditions, and viewing their own beliefs as truth and those that differ as error.

Transitioning Boomers ask bigger questions and increasingly see beyond what have become limiting and narrow perspectives of their First Half of Life.

- C. First Half Churches continue to dualistically sort actions, people, groups, and beliefs into right or wrong, with us or against us. They continue to resist risky ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox.

Transitioning Boomers increasingly yearn for life and community with less need to always be right or clear, to defend “their” group, to accumulate, compete, or influence. They yearn to rest into listening more and fighting less, wondering more and resisting less, accepting more and rejecting less, celebrating mystery more and seeking simple answers less.

- D. First Half Churches continue to stand firm and defend the way handed down to them. They resist loosening boundaries between themselves and “others.”

Transitioning Boomers increasingly resonate with fresh voices of wise and often marginalized sages, mystics, and elders who don’t fit expectations and standards of their church. They are drawn to entertain what their church might define as heresy. As Boomers shift into the Second Half of Life, their boundaries become more porous. They become increasingly open to relate with and receive from those who were once categorized as “others.”

- E. First Half Churches take on and defend, with little or no questioning, most of the institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices they inherited from their faith tradition and previous generations. They resist deep change.

Transitioning Boomers explore deep changes needed to adjust to an emerging way of seeing. They borrow freely from “others.” The inherited values, perspectives, and beliefs of their churches, those that once sustained them and helped them grow, now become confining and negotiable.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Nyhuis, 73-74.

APPENDIX C

A Cautionary Tale

When I began this research, I was serving as an associate pastor in a program sized, upper middle class, well educated, congregation. In my role there I created and led spiritual formation experiences for all ages. Young parents responded to my family ministry programs. My retreat offerings, quiet days, discipleship groups and other contemplative offerings attracted a lot of interest, particularly from Second Half of Life folks, including people beyond the walls of the congregation. I was a Second Half of Life pastor ministering successfully to Second Half of Life pilgrims. In the Fall of 2016, I began a weekly gathering specifically for this population using Cynthia Bourgeault's books and spiritual practices. The Second Half of Life members responded with deep gratitude. Joan, one of the women whose story I share at the beginning of this dissertation, told me it was the first program she'd participated in for more than 10 years that nurtured her spiritual work. This congregational experiment in Second Half of Life spiritual formation informed the work of my dissertation. I imagined that the findings of my dissertation would inform how I continued to offer meaningful spiritual nurture to Second Half of Life members in my congregation. I also hoped my work in the congregation, and the findings of my dissertation, could offer a model other congregations could learn from. It did not turn out that way.

I served under a First Half of Life Rector, uncomfortable with conflict, anxious to keep his congregation happy, and fully invested in a First Half of Life paradigm.¹⁵⁶ He worked hard establishing his identity, growing his family and building his career. He was deeply committed to structure, rules, creeds and canons, and very attached to the

¹⁵⁶ See description from Nyhuis dissertation in Appendix B.

hierarchical order of the church. As the senior pastor, he took his role very seriously. He worked hard to support me and my ministries. He believed an important part of his job involved mentoring me. He struggled when I did not respond to his coaching the way he hoped. Over time his frustration over how to supervise me grew. It came to head one Sunday morning in the Fall of 2016. I had preached a sermon that made him very anxious. He expressed his fear that I had upset a member of the vestry and asked me to delete a section of my sermon before the next worship service. I challenged his assumption that I should change my sermon because it made someone uncomfortable. When he demanded that I change my sermon, I agreed, but expressed concern about being able to preach inside his box going forward. Later that week, in our supervisory meeting, I asked to be removed from the preaching schedule. I did not want him to be concerned I would preach a sermon he found disruptive, and I did not want to be asked again to change my sermon in the middle of the worship day.

In response to my request he invited a member of the Bishop's staff to mediate our next meeting. In preparation for this meeting I prayed about the most faithful way to love and respect this Rector, honor my call, and retain my integrity. The Spirit reminded me of an old Celtic story about a King and an Abbott.

A prince of Northumbria had grown up and been educated on the western shore of Scotland, by the monks of Iona. When the prince became King, he sent for a monk from Iona to come to his land on the eastern shore of Scotland, and teach his people about Jesus. Aidan came. When he arrived, the King offered the monk any land he desired to build his monastery, including the choicest land next to the castle. The monk, desiring both connection to the King, but also independence, asked to build his monastery on an island off the coast that was connected to the mainland at low tide, but cut off during high tide.

The King agreed and built the Abbey on Lindisfarne. The relationship between the King and the Monk was deep, loving and very respectful. The Monk always knew

he served at the King's discretion. The King trusted the Monk to work as the Monk felt led by God.

Over time the King noticed how the Monk walked throughout the Kingdom, ministering to the people of the land. The King believed the Monk would be able to do this work with greater ease if he had a horse and didn't need to walk, so the King gave the Monk the best horse from his stable. The Monk graciously accepted the gift and rode the horse out into the land. The next time the King and the Monk met, the King noticed the Monk did not have the horse. "What happened to the horse?" the King inquired. "I gave it to a man whose horse had died and needed a horse to farm his land," the Monk replied.

The King was livid. "You gave my best horse to a farmer?!" the King bellowed. "But, I thought it was my horse," the Monk replied. "Did you not give it to me? To use as I felt led?" At the Monk's question, the King fell quiet. Finally, after a long silence, the King responded. "You are right. Once I gave you the horse, it was yours. I am sorry I questioned you. Forgive me." The Monk forgave the King. They remained dear and trusted partners in the Lord's service, until death parted them years later.¹⁵⁷

The meeting with the person from the Bishop's staff was awkward and hard. I listened for an opening to share the Spirit's story. When one came, I offered it and when I finished I turned to the Rector said, "I am the Monk. I serve at your discretion, and I respect your position. Can you trust me to do the work you've invited me here to do?" He did not respond. Six months later I was released from my position.

I share this as a cautionary tale to highlight the challenges involved in working from a Second Half of Life paradigm in congregations primarily focused on First Half of Life ministries and led by First Half of Life leaders. Nyhuis names this challenge in his dissertation "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life" when he speaks of the dissonance that can develop between First Half of Life Churches and Baby Boomers Transitioning into Second Half of Life:

¹⁵⁷ David Adams. *Aidan, Bede, Cuthbert: Three Inspirational Saints*. (London: Society for Promoting of Christian Knowledge: 2006), 50-52. Paraphrased version of the story.

Discord, incongruous beliefs and attitudes, and lack of agreement do not come together. The parts remain separate. They cannot, even if they work at it, come together in harmony... Dissonant parts... do not resolve into one harmonious whole. They remain incongruous and unresolved. They do not blend perspectives, experiences, and ways of relating into one, even if both sides try to adjust and accommodate. If the dissonance continues, persons' voices are silenced. They part ways.¹⁵⁸

My spiritual path had led me beyond the boundaries, definitions and structure that offered the Rector security, order and identity. Our ministry values and how we expressed them had become “discordant”. The rector shared with a lay leader that he believed I wanted to be co-Rector. This was the only language and paradigm available to him to name the kind of collegial relationship I had invited him into. He didn't understand that this was like the Monk asking to be a co-King.

Another congregation with a flourishing ministry to Second Half of Life members, risks losing these members as a new, young Lutheran pastor seeks to establish himself as their leader. Under the previous pastor these Second Half of Life members had created a weekly gathering they called “Bring Your Own Theology”. In this group, Second Half of Life members explore spiritual practices from other traditions, read books challenging traditional interpretations of scripture and considered new ways of thinking about their faith. This group also serves as a place where members transitioning from First Half of Life to Second Half of Life can connect with those who have walked that path.

When the new pastor arrived, he suggested the group change their name from “Bring Your Own Theology” to “Bring Your Own Thinking”. Among the staff he expressed discomfort with this group, suggesting they were not bringing their own

¹⁵⁸ Nyhuis, “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life,” 75-76.

“theology”, but their own ‘heresy’. His dismissive and disrespectful consideration of these members does not allow him to extend hospitality to them as they seek to find a way to remain in a faith community whose traditions they have outgrown. It will be challenging for this group to continue to thrive with a leader hostile to their presence. If this group eventually dissipates, there will no longer be a community for members Transitioning into Second Half of Life to transition into, increasing the likelihood they will join the Done crowd.

My interviews with Second Half of Life Pilgrims confirmed that the ministries I had been offering in the congregation nurtured the spiritual lives of Second Half of Life pilgrims. I hoped to continue these congregational based ministries, and expand them based on new insights gained from the interviews. This is no longer possible. What I can offer to Second Half of Life pilgrims wanting to remain in their congregations, is a place to go for spiritual experiences that grow and nurture them. It has long been a part of the Church’s tradition for monastic communities and parishes to co-exist. In previous generations of the Church, pilgrims desiring a deeper commitment to their spiritual path left their congregations and joined monastic communities. Three of the Second Half of Life pilgrims I interviewed attempted that. Two remain in monastic communities, and one left. None of them report that their monastic communities facilitate their deeper spiritual growth. Rather, they experience them as First Half of Life institutions stuck in tradition, rules and structure. Despite these discouraging experiences, the model of parish-monastery partnership intrigues me. Could a new kind of monastic community, created with a Rhythm, Ritual and Rule for Second Half of Life pilgrims, partner with First Half of Life congregations? The intent would not be to attract members *away* from

the congregation, but instead to make it possible for these vital, wise mature members to *remain* in their congregations as Second Half of Life elders. Traditional monasteries with oblates offer this kind of relationship. Pilgrims attracted to the Rule of Life, the Rituals and Rhythms of a particular monastic community join as an oblate, participate in retreats and other experiences, but do not become residential members of the community. The Rhythm, Ritual and Rule offered through the Wisdom Monastic community at Tikkun Farm could serve the same function. It already does for a few members of my former congregation. One member of my former congregation, who participated in the Cynthia Bourgeault group I began in Fall 2016, continues to attend our weekly gatherings, now meeting in someone's home. Joan's schedule did not allow her to continue with that group, but she does attend Quiet Days on my farm, one of the components of Tikkun Farm's Rhythm, Ritual and Rule. Two other participants in the Cynthia Bourgeault group left the congregation when I did, but also continue to participate in the weekly gathering.

APPENDIX D

How I Got Here from There

By the time I enrolled in the DMin program at George Fox Seminary in 2007, “Rachel’s Table” had been growing for ten years, like a slowly gestating child in the womb of my heart. I envisioned creating a sacred space for people who would never enter the doors of a church. Rachel’s Table would offer unchurched people doors they would find familiar: coffee shop, restaurant, therapy office. Once inside they would discover a menu that offered food for the body as well as the soul, or meet a barista who could not only hear the special way someone wanted their latte, but also the longing of a soul for more meaning in life. In the therapist’s office they would discover a healer who knew that what really repaired a messy childhood was a heart that learned it was deeply beloved, and had always been. It was a version of an experience I had on my own faith journey again and again: being called to what I knew, in order to be led into what I did not know.

The trouble with Rachel’s Table was the vision for it kept growing and I had no idea how to birth it. I would describe it to people, draw pictures of what it would look like, and even drive to look at buildings where it might live. The unanimous response when I shared this dream was, “That’s going to cost a lot of money.” This deflating thought left me discouraged and stuck.

So, I made birthing Rachel’s Table my dissertation project. I would use this process to figure out the logistics of getting Rachel’s Table out of my heart and into the world. I identified my ministry problem as reaching the population of people who never walk through the door of churches. My solution was to create a community space that felt

familiar enough to enter into, where they could then discover the spiritual longing in all of us to be connected to the Love of God.

Two months after completing my course work, I met with my new expert advisor. Greg York had a heart for ministry and the skills to create a business plan. I poured out my vision for Rachel's Table, and Greg got to work asking me questions, helping me interview coffee shop owners, and therapists. He helped me build multi-page spreadsheets and figured out the key to making Rachel's Table financially sustainable.

And then Greg fell in love with me, and I with him. The joy of welcoming love into my life after nine years as a single parent consumed me, and also triggered me. The gift of a gentle partner created enough emotional safety that traumatizing memories of childhood abuse surfaced. As I focused on healing from this trauma and building a healthy relationship with a man living in another city, along with parenting a special needs child and working full time in ministry, Rachel's Table and my dissertation slipped into the background. But even in the background, Rachel's Table hovered, like a child desperate for attention and care.

As my relationship with Greg became an established part of my life, and my trauma story became integrated, Rachel's Table again called for my attention. Unfortunately, the joy I once felt about this project had diminished considerably. As I realized what launching such a multi-faceted enterprise entailed, I did not believe I possessed the administrative and business skills, or interest, necessary to launch what had once been my dream.

Instead, my dream continued to evolve. When it first manifested in my heart, I imagined reaching out to unchurched people, unfamiliar with their spiritual lives. By now

I had been a parish pastor for more than fifteen years with a focus on prayer, retreats and contemplative practices. This introduced me more and more to people on the other end of the spectrum—pilgrims deeply engaged in their spiritual life, and quickly growing beyond the resources and offerings of the traditional church that formed them. I realized that just as some people outside the church walls needed support discovering God and beginning a spiritual relationship, there were other people with deep and mature spiritual lives moving beyond the church walls, and wondering where to find a sacred community that could nurture their ongoing spiritual growth.

I brought my discouragement and apathy to prayer. I lamented that I did not want to be the CEO of a non-profit, focusing on administration and budgets. God responded, “Mary, I don’t want you to be the CEO of non-profit. I want you to be the spiritual leader of new monastic community. I want you to be a modern-day St. Brigid.”

Oh... the relief rushed through me. I knew how to do *that*. I knew how to create community, establish sacred rhythms and rituals, nurture spiritually mature people. I experienced joy imagining myself in this role.

Rachel’s Table once again flourished in my heart, but with an expanded vision to a larger community of spiritual pilgrims. The dissertation though, continued to languish. After investing three years in a long-distance relationship, Greg and I decided to marry and live in the same city. As I began looking for work in Cincinnati I imagined serving as an interim pastor so Greg and I could begin building Rachel’s Table together. Instead, I received a call to serve as an Associate Pastor in a busy, program oriented, Episcopal congregation. My new job and new marriage consumed my energy. Although my ministry continued to focus on spiritual formation with all ages, it was my contemplative

offerings—retreats, quiet days, discipleship groups—that thrived. I met more and more spiritually mature people grateful for space to do inner work with a leader who understood their longings.

A year after moving to Cincinnati, Greg and I moved to small farm near the city. The two barns, the milk house, and the farmhouse, had all fallen into disrepair. As we began creating a life there I prayed about what to name the farm. “Tikkun,” I heard God say. I knew that word, Tikkun. It was part of a Hebrew phrase “Tikkun Olam,” which meant “repair the world.” “Repair the buildings,” God continued, “and I will bring people here who’s lives need to be repaired.” It seemed like a new incarnation of Rachel’s Table, similar, but different. Two years after moving to the farm, we created a non-profit, by the same name, “Tikkun Farm” (www.TikkunFarm.com), to begin living into our mission to “Heal People, Repair Community and Restore Creation.” By this time, my dissertation had languished for so long, I considered just letting it go. Tikkun Farm had replaced Rachel’s Table as the ministry center outside the church I had imagined twenty years earlier. Although similarities existed between Tikkun Farm’s mission and Rachel’s Table, Tikkun Farm did not seem like the solution to my stated ministry problem, reaching out to unchurched people. In addition, growing Tikkun Farm as a non-profit, alongside my full time pastoral work spent all my energy. I couldn’t imagine diving back into my dissertation. But God could.

Over the years my ministry problem had changed. My primary call had migrated from the spiritual nurture of folks at the beginning of their faith journeys, to the spiritual nurture of mature pilgrims who had outgrown the churches that had formed them.

In 2016 George Fox sent out an invitation to a “Dissertation Studio” for DMin students wanting support completing their dissertations. Much to my surprise I found myself responding. “Could I really do this?” I wondered. After a thirty-minute conversation with Donna K. Wallace, the facilitator of the Dissertation Studio, Donna convinced me I could. I signed up. Donna introduced me to the work of Dr. Terry Nyhuis. He had just completed his dissertation on “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches and the Second Half of Life”. As I read his research, I realized he had found a name for the problem I kept bumping up against in my work with spiritually mature pilgrims - Second Half of Life. The folks who showed up for my Quiet Days and retreats were pilgrims in the Second Half of Life, and their spiritual growth had hit a plateau in their congregations. Some of them continued to participate in worship, but others had left. None of them were growing spiritually.

And neither was I. I too had outgrown the institutional Church. I showed up on Sunday and led the liturgy, participated in staff meetings, supported the church’s programs, but it no longer resonated with me. The words I spoke in worship, the Christian Church year rhythm of Advent, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, etc., the traditional interpretations of sacred texts, none of it connected with my spirit. I once had loved it all. Now I could not muster the energy to offer it to others.

A friend, one the spiritually mature pilgrims I had been spending more time with, introduced me to Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest, talking about faith in a new way. It was the second time her name had come up. It felt like a sacred nudge. I read her first book, *A Wisdom Way of Knowing*. It opened up a new path for my own sacred work. Next, I read her second book, *The Wisdom Jesus*. It changed my perception about Jesus’

life and what it meant to follow him. I began to integrate her work into my contemplative retreats and Quiet Days. The mature pilgrims who attended these events found her paradigm refreshing, as I had. In the Fall of 2016, when I began the Dissertation Studio, I also offered a weekly “Prayer and Prose” gathering, to not only read and reflect on Cynthia Bourgeault’s books, but to practice together her contemplative exercises. The response was small but powerful. All the Second Half of Life pilgrims I knew in the congregation showed up. After a few weeks, they remarked that it was first time they felt they were growing spiritually in years. We were onto something. We read through her first two books and were half way through her third book when my call at the Episcopal church ended in May 2017. The group requested that we continue to meet elsewhere to finish the book. When we finished Bourgeault’s third book, they requested that we continue to meet without a book.

When my call in the congregation ended, I prayed about what God was calling me into next. Farm Church was the resounding response. I believed God was calling me to gather people on my farm for a worship experience that nurtured Second Half of Life spiritual journeys. I wasn’t sure how to do this. When I gathered with the Prayer and Prose group for a second season we tried something new. Rather than reflect on a book together, I led them in group Lectio Divina. Sometimes we prayed with a poem, other times a text from a non-canonical Gospel, like Thomas, and other times with familiar biblical texts. The spiritual insights and sacred moments astounded us. I incorporated this practice into my Farm Church worship experiment.

A solution to my dissertation ministry problem of how to nurture the spiritual journeys of Second Half of Life pilgrims had begun to emerge. But I wanted more data. I

began Farm Church by creating a worship experience meaningful to me. Was this meaningful to other Second Half of Life pilgrims? I needed to ask them. Using Terry Nyhuis' descriptions of people fully transitioned into Second Half of Life, I created a survey to find a larger pool of Second Half of Life pilgrims. Two hundred people responded to my survey. I interviewed fourteen of them. From my interviews, I learned that Farm Church needs to be more than a worship service. Respondents long for new rituals, connected to traditional rhythms like the liturgical cycle, but also rituals connected to nature rhythms like the monthly full moon, and the winter Solstice. They want to read new theological material, like Cynthia Bourgeault, and discuss it. They want to gather for contemplative practices like Centering prayer. They want to meet other pilgrims in the Second Half of Life and build community with them through shared meals and other experiences.

By the end of my interviews I realized Farm Church was the beginning of the new monastic community God had asked me to be the Abbess of all those years before. It was emerging. And it offered a partial solution to the problem of where Second Half of Life pilgrims find spiritual nurture and continued growth on their spiritual path. They could find it at Tikkun Farm's Wisdom Monasticism.

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