

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**JOURNEYING WITH GOD:
Spirituality and participation in faith related activities
among Catholic youth in Whangarei**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy in Social Work

in the Social Policy and Social Work Programme, School of Health and
Social Services at
Massey University

Trudy Mary Dantis

2008

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the spirituality and participation in faith-based activities of young Catholics in Whangarei, New Zealand. Six youth aged 16-17 years have shared their experiences in several areas of Catholicism such as religious attendance, Catholic identity and Catholic faith, morals and values, peer group socialisation and religious commitment. Using a qualitative mixed-methodological approach with the underlying philosophical stance of interpretivism, the intent of the study is to discover ways in which these young Catholics integrate their faith into their daily lives and make meaning out of it. It also compares the religious beliefs and values of Catholic youth in Whangarei to those reported worldwide.

The findings reveal many similar themes to those from international studies. Although all of the participants in this study possessed a distinct sense of ‘spirituality’ and being ‘Catholic’ was a very important part of their identity, not all of them seemed to consider it practical to live out their Catholic beliefs. Similarly, although they did not face any insurmountable challenges in practicing their faith in daily life, only a few of them had strong convictions about their faith and, like their peers in other countries, only a few could concretely list the core Catholic beliefs. Concepts of moralistic therapeutic deism were found to affect half the participants while nuances of moralistic relativism were also prevalent. Results also showed a growing disinterest in attending Mass, participating in the sacrament of Confession, leading an active prayer life, being a part of church youth activities and some difficulty in finding similar peer group support. Overall, the findings presented in this thesis suggested that the participants involved in the study could be separated into two groups on the basis of their differing spiritual levels and commitment to the Catholic faith

The findings suggest a need for Catholic youth in Whangarei to be supported in their spiritual development in order to help them grow in their Catholic faith. Accordingly, the main recommendations are for community-based services such as providing a variety of youth programmes/groups to engage young people and finding ways to facilitate the secure engagement of youth in a dialogue about their faith and religion, in order to spiritually encourage, nourish and sustain them at whatever stage they might be at.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my supervisors, Tracie Mafileo and Andrew Trlin, under whose guidance I began this thesis. I thank them for their expert advice all throughout and their patience and perseverance in helping me complete it.

I would also like to thank all the youth who willingly gave their time and efforts to be a part of this study and shared their personal experiences with me. Many thanks also to Fr. Tom O'Connor- the parish priest of Whangarei, Mrs. Madeleine Armstrong- the principal of Pompallier Catholic College and Andrea Cook for their invaluable assistance in conducting the research for this project.

I cannot end without thanking Alwyn, my husband, and my family, on whose constant encouragement and love I have relied on during the course of this thesis. I could not have done it without them.

I dedicate this thesis to all young people on their spiritual journey as they seek for truth. I sincerely hope that they will find the answers they are looking for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION	1
RESEARCH QUESTION	2
RATIONALE FOR UNDERTAKING THIS PROJECT	3
DEFINITION OF TERMS	4
THE ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS	4
CHAPTER TWO	
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
INTRODUCTION	7
CONCEPTUALIZING SPIRITUALITY:	8
Catholic Spirituality:	8
A Catholic Maori Spirituality	12
THEORISING YOUTH SPIRITUALITY	13
Theories on Faith Development	14
Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory	14
James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory	14
Wilber’s Spectrum Model of Development	15
STUDIES ON YOUTH SPIRITUALITY	16
Overseas Research	17
Australian and New Zealand Research	22
ISSUES ARISING FROM RESEARCH	25
A confused Catholic identity:	25
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism	27
Unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices	29
Deteriorating commitment to the faith	29
Inability to find similar peer group support	31
CONCLUSION	32

CHAPTER THREE	
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	33
INTRODUCTION	33
THESIS OBJECTIVES	33
RESEARCH METHOD	34
Qualitative Research	34
The search for a theoretical perspective	35
RESEARCH DESIGN	37
Participant selection and recruitment	37
Access to participants	38
DATA COLLECTION	39
The Interview	39
The Interview Guide	41
Data processing	42
Limitations	42
ETHICAL ISSUES	43
Informed consent	43
Maintenance of Confidentiality	44
Researcher bias	44
DATA ANALYSIS	45
CONCLUSION	46
CHAPTER FOUR	
CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY AND BELIEFS	48
INTRODUCTION	48
PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTION	48
SPIRITUALITY	49
CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND CATHOLIC FAITH	52
CATHOLIC SPIRITUAL PRACTICES	57
PERSPECTIVES ON GOD	59
CONCLUSION	63
CHAPTER FIVE	
RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION IN FAITH RELATED ACTIVITIES	65
INTRODUCTION	65
ATTENDING MASS	65
ATTENDING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE SACRAMENTS	69

PARTICIPATION IN FAITH-RELATED ACTIVITIES	70
RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT	74
CONCLUSION	78
CHAPTER SIX	
CATHOLIC PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE	80
INTRODUCTION	80
LIVING THE FAITH	80
MORALS AND VALUES	82
MORAL DECISIONS	88
PEER GROUP SOCIALISATION	91
CONCLUSION	95
CHAPTER SEVEN	
CONCLUSION	96
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	96
RESEARCH FINDINGS	97
Catholic Spirituality - Beliefs and Practices	97
Participation in Catholic Activities	98
Integrating the Catholic faith in daily life	98
COMPARISON OF FINDINGS TO STUDIES WORLDWIDE	99
A confusing Catholic identity	99
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Moralistic Relativism	100
Unwillingness to participate actively in faith practices	101
Deteriorating commitment to the faith	101
Inability to find similar peer group support	102
TWO CONTRASTING GROUPS	102
Group 1	103
Group 2	103
IMPLICATIONS, NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	106
Recommendations	107
FURTHER RESEARCH	108
<u>APPENDIX 'A'</u>	
INFORMATION SHEET	110

<u>APPENDIX 'B'</u>	
LETTER TO THE PARISH PRIEST OF THE CATHOLIC PARISH OF WHANGAREI	113
<u>APPENDIX 'C'</u>	
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	115
<u>APPENDIX 'D'</u>	
MUHEC APPROVAL LETTER	120
<u>APPENDIX 'E'</u>	
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM	121
<u>APPENDIX 'F'</u>	
AUTHORITY FOR THE USE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS	122
<u>APPENDIX 'G'</u>	
<u>NOTES ON CATHOLIC LAY MOVEMENTS FOLLOWING VATICAN II</u>	123
<u>The Focolare</u>	123
<u>The Opus Dei</u>	124
<u>The Catholic Charismatic Renewal</u>	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	126