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# How role-identity formation sustains Christian youth workers across four seasons of their careers.

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Degree of Doctorate in Practical Theology

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the careers of Christian youth workers in Scotland. I will show the value of these careers while outlining the challenges faced in sustaining them, explaining why I describe their development as haphazard. In response I introduce my concept of role-identity formation to show how Christian youth workers can be sustained across four seasons of their careers. Within this claim I will identify how their inner journeys of faith, values and beliefs and their outer journeys of skills, roles and activities are significant, affirming why the integration of these journeys is necessary for role-identity formation. Critically, I uncover a previously unidentified problem that Christian youth work, and consequently Christian youth workers, are falsely understood as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated and I will explain how this affects attempts to sustain them.

The flow of this thesis uses my metaphor of ‘exploring without maps’ which I locate within practical theology, defined as “Exploring the self, exploring the community, testing theological assertions, testing ecclesial assertions, generating new theological perspectives or correcting problems.”<sup>1</sup> Ward’s claim matches the flow of this work, as I begin in Chapter 1 reflecting on my own 30 year career in Christian youth work, revealing landmark issues which I then compare with the experiences of other Christian youth workers who have not been sustained. I broaden this context through the literature review in Chapter 2 and deepen the insights into sustaining Christian youth workers through interviews in Chapter 4, showing in Chapter 3 how they are supported by qualitative research and practical theology. Chapter 5 begins with a theological exploration of involvement and separation and continues with conversations between issues uncovered in Chapter 4 and insights drawn from Brueggemann, Peterson, Rohr, Root and Slee. These conversations create themes of taking time, holistic sense-making, relational formation and involved connections which shape the applications in Chapter 6. In that chapter I make proposals for how to sustain Christian youth workers, rooted in a four seasons framework which I argue fulfils the function of a map. I will show how this is supported by introducing a ‘way-of-being’ as a necessary concept, and why my specific proposal of ‘the way of the desert and the city’ is essential. Linking into this are

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<sup>1</sup> Ward, *Introducing practical theology*, page 155.

proposals enabling role-identity formation, formational mentors, growth spirals and involved connections and I will support their use by explaining how they were created and why they can sustain Christian youth workers. Ultimately, I contend the flow of work contained in this thesis supports my claim that role-identity formation can sustain Christian youth workers across four seasons of their careers.

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## Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

*Signature:*

*Printed Name:* Paul Harry Beautyman

# Chapter 1                      Context

## 1:1 Introduction

In this thesis I will show how role-identity formation enables Christian youth workers to be sustained across four seasons of their careers. I begin that process in this chapter by setting the context for sustaining CYWrS in Scotland, using the metaphor of ‘exploring without maps’ to describe the haphazard development of their careers across the country. Creating this metaphor results from an autoethnographic approach as I investigate significant events which supported my thirty-year career in Christian youth work and compare them with the experience of others that I have worked with who have not been sustained in their careers. Interrogating these comparisons, I will identify structure and relationships, power and control, identity, Christian community, reflective practice and theological reflection as landmark issues which affect the sustainability of Christian youth workers’ careers.

In this chapter I also claim a distinct place for my work, firstly by recognising that while related professions share similar situations the pressures faced by Christian youth workers require different responses. Secondly, the relevance of this thesis will be shown by explaining the benefits of a sustained career in Christian youth work. Finally, I claim that both the process and content of this thesis make a unique contribution, highlighting the process of rooting my research in the experience of myself and other Scottish-based Christian youth workers which then creates innovative content to sustain them.

To assist the reader, I now introduce and define key terms that are central to this thesis, along with abbreviations of terms I will repeatedly use.

## **1:2 Definition of terms and abbreviations**

### **1:2:1 Christian youth work (CYW)**

Definitions of work done by Christians with young people vary and the work of Canales (2006), Clyne (2020), Griffiths (2013), Mallon (2008), Mellstrom (2017), Pugh (1999), Shepherd in Nash and Whitehead (eds 2014) and Ward (1997) provide insightful explorations. This diversity has many roots and I contend it is shaped by different understandings of, and relationships between, the Christian faith, the character and purpose of Jesus in the gospels, secular definitions of youth work, the nature and purpose of the church and its relationship to the kingdom of God. Consequently, the aims of CYW are varied, ranging from serving or influencing young people, enabling them to make their own choices or leading and encouraging them to make an explicit Christian commitment and this diversity of values and aims contribute to terms such as youth ministry, youth outreach, Christian youth work, youth mission or youth evangelism. The common elements within CYW in this thesis are a commitment to engaging with young people by people who have a connection to a Christian community or church. I will use Christian youth work (CYW) unless I am directly quoting an author or interviewee as it is how I describe my own practice and I intend it to be a neutral term which affirms these different approaches.

### **1:2:2 Christian youth worker (CYWr)**

The breadth of values and practices described in CYW shapes titles for workers such as youth pastor, youth minister, youth evangelist, project worker or youth and families' worker, alongside Christians who work in secular youth work rather than an explicitly Christian agency. These roles are based on growing relationships with young people and representing the Christian values of their church or project so CYWrs are responsible for planning, leading and reviewing programmes that young people voluntarily participate in before enabling the young person to mature and develop their own responses. The age definition of young people is also flexible and different employers can include children and families. However, in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, it refers to the people between the age of 11 and 18

that the interviewee, author or I am working with. In this thesis unless I am directly quoting an author or interviewee, I will use Christian youth worker (CYWr), as it is how I describe myself but I also intend it to be a neutral term which affirms different job titles.

### **1:2:3 Career**

Within this thesis I define a CYWr's career more widely than their job or role. While affirming the need for personal and professional boundaries I unite the personal and professional aspects of their life, recognising that the interaction between both affects the long-term sustainability of their role. However, the simplicity of this two-stranded definition can unhelpfully lead to tension between them and does not accurately reflect the complexities within their relationships, CYW practice and roles. Therefore, I introduce the metaphor of a forest to describe a career. In this forest, each tree represents aspects of a CYWr's holistic life such as their personal relationships, different work roles within their job title, their beliefs and values or hobbies. Unlike a real forest, each tree is at a different stage of development as they are not all affected by one external weather system or a common progression through external seasons. In practice this might look like a forest with a healthy central tree representing a CYWr's job where all is going well. A neighbouring tree may not be, representing their marriage or significant relationship, or perhaps their faith. I describe this as a connected forest where all trees are affected by threats facing any single tree, which draws on the concept of under the surface mycorrhizal networks where trees communicate and live inter-dependently. I contrast this with an industrial view of a forest that plants trees solely for harvesting, which would lead to only focussing on the working role of a CYWr, or a competitive forest, where trees compete against each other for light and resources, which would lead to a more combative approach between elements of a CYWr's life.

### **1:2:4 Sustained career**

I define a sustained career as being enabled to continue in paid employment but resist including a set number of years. Instead, in this thesis 'sustained'

refers to a CYWr continuing through and beyond what they describe as a significant transition or crisis. Within this continuing I also expect a maturing understanding of their own inner journeys of values and Christian faith and their outer journeys of CYW practice.

### **1:2:5 Church**

‘Church’ refers to a congregation, a group of Christians in a local area who belong to a larger Christian denomination that usually have a building, clergy and members who share the leadership of worship, mission and discipleship. These congregations often work together to support CYW or employ CYWr, through informal partnerships or denominational structures. National denominations or regions also employ staff so I will use their full name, for example, the Church of Scotland, when referring to them. I also use the term ‘Christian community’ to describe a relational network of people around a Christian youth project or CYW within a church, which nurtures and supports CYW but does not fit the wider description of church I use above.

### **1:2:6 Tribe**

‘Tribe’ describes groupings of CYWr, gathered around similar theologies and CYW practice. These can centre on a denomination, promoting their distinctive Christian ethos, with employed staff working nationally and regionally alongside locally employed CYWr and volunteers. Other tribes relate to independent CYW agencies or charities that work alongside denominations, churches and projects, employing staff at a national and regional level to support local CYWr or volunteers. Less formal tribes also exist around festivals, training events or similar contexts. Membership can be formal, by agreeing to certain values and committing to agreed practices including a financial commitment while others are more informal and short-term. Most CYWr in my experience belong to more than one and involvement can bring advantages and disadvantages.

### **1:2:7 NCD**

New Charge Development is a church planting programme run by the Church of Scotland. When I worked in it from 2002 to 2009 it supported 32 churches, some planted on newly built sites on the edge of urban centres, some replacing existing congregations that had been closed and some in non-geographical sectors. It connects informally into church planting, Fresh Expressions and Pioneer Ministry networks.

### **1:3 The impact of a sustained CYW career**

In my experience, a sustained CYWr career can nurture and enable growth around and within the worker. Around them it can grow young leaders, develop volunteers, deepen the development of the Christian faith amongst young people, nurture their holistic development, build integrating relationships with the congregation, introduce innovation and new practices into mainstream church life and connect these churches more securely into the wider community. A maturing career can also enrich the inner life of a CYWr's own Christian faith and life-values. Conversely, a stuttering career can damage the development of young people, the congregation or project and the recruiting of committed volunteers. Internally such a career can also damage the faith, mental health and relationships of a CYWr.

### **1:4 'Exploring without maps'**

The defining metaphor for this chapter is drawn from a memory of sitting at my desk in the manse late one evening, preparing a report for the NCD review committee and reflecting on the challenges of setting up a new church for young people and their families. There were supportive people around in local churches, a national network of colleagues and a pile of reports describing related projects. However, as I sifted through my experiences, as I tried to translate stories of real peoples' lives into structured reports, I felt that I was exploring without maps, not knowing where I was going but intuitively certain of the way to travel, with a commitment to prayer, presence and partnerships. That approach led to me

creating a successful approach to youth work that flourished in Gilmerton NCD and later in Dunoon with the exp project.

As this chapter sets the context for this thesis, I return again to the theme of 'exploring without maps'. CYW has been my inspiring but challenging home for thirty years, it is where I have survived and thrived as a CYWr experiencing significant growth within and around me, but I have never had a map to guide my own development. Within me, my Christian faith has matured, my knowledge of CYW practice widened and my ability to support others in CYW has increased. Around me young people have lived fuller lives, some became Christians, a new youth project was set up and sustained after I left, churches and volunteers have been encouraged, a new church set up although it did not continue after my departure and numerous summer missions were supported into growth. In these respects, my life has been significant, but that has come at a cost as I have been challenged by long seasons of doubt in my faith, the strains of developing and sustaining volunteers and struggles with churches clinging to the past and unwilling to embrace new ways of working with children and young people. Added to these challenges were the difficulties of contact work with young people, supporting them to live in a complex world plus the challenges of those who wanted to follow the way of Jesus. Within myself I wrestled with how to be nurtured; as an introvert in a role that often values an extrovert image, as a Christian settled in the orthodox Christian faith but rarely resourced by the worship in most churches. I have been close to leaving my faith, my role as a CYWr, my ordained role as a minister. Yet somehow, despite the absence of a map, I continued and even thrived.

In contrast, I see the loss of colleagues from CYW despite a few examples of good practice for training and supervision, terms and conditions or volunteer development, effective CYW practice or pastoral support but these are not universally available. Their insights are too often locked into different CYW tribes, unavailable to CYWr in other tribes. Individual CYWr also have insights that they are not aware of themselves due to a lack of intentional

reflective practice and networks to share these insights with. Therefore, I characterise the development of CYWr's careers in Scotland as haphazard and I am convinced that some form of map, supported by advice, would have helped them travel well and navigate or avoid difficult issues.

I now affirm a similar research process into how to sustain CYWr's; to firstly travel without maps myself, to discover the terrain and identify important landmarks, to then reflect and learn and subsequently create the map and advice on basic approaches afterwards. This is phronesis, a practical lived wisdom, drawn from experience and then interrogated and interpreted with the intention to create new knowledge and then use it to transform practice. Therefore, this chapter retrospectively Interrogates the terrain of my CYWr career, identifying landmarks and uncovering basic approaches to sustaining it which I was not aware of at the time. I chose these specific issues as, firstly, I contend they offer a broad awareness of the issues facing CYWr's and, secondly, they resource my instinct that sustaining CYWr's is a formational process which draws on a wide range of sources. This research process is supported by Slee's conviction that research is a spiritual practice, with the call for researchers to be fully present, for "We are listening ...to self, to the other, to the literature, to the Spirit at work in each of these."<sup>2</sup> Slee writes of researching the spiritual life of women but I compare her comments to CYWr's, describing their lives as "A neglected site...we are cartographers of neglected landscapes, charting maps that have not been made, until now."<sup>3</sup>

## **1:5 Landmark issues**

### ***1:5:1 'Not starting work until 26'***

Claiming that my 30-year career in CYW has been shaped by long developments, I highlight not starting my first paid job until I was 26, when I was ordained by the Church of Scotland as their Missions' Advisor, co-ordinating volunteer-led mission teams. Prior to this my Christian faith and

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<sup>2</sup> Slee, *Women's faith development. Patterns and Processes*, page 18.

<sup>3</sup> Slee, *Women's faith development. Patterns and Processes*, page 17.

CYW experience as a teenager was rooted in my home church, then adventure was grafted into that faith by volunteering on mission teams for nine years. In those Christian communities I was invited, supported and mentored by CYWrS and found nurturing spaces to belong in, to grow in my faith and to discover, improve then exercise the gifts God had given me. This occurred alongside exploring and completing ministerial training before I was ordained as a minister and jointly employed as a CYWr in the Missions Advisor role. Despite starting my employment with two degrees, nine years of volunteer experience and newly ordained as a minister I now recognise my initial years in that role as an extended apprenticeship. I did the work of a national advisor in mission but although the staff I worked alongside were not CYW specialists they supported me pastorally, enabled me to work with churches and improved my communication and organisation. This coincided with increasing expectations of my work that slowly increased over the years as my abilities and experience improved. While I recognised at the time being invited, trained, encouraged, mentored and ultimately employed and ordained in retrospect I can see that the most important work done on me over these years was of being formed.

In contrast, I now know many CYWrS who have started work much earlier, some only in their late teens and this has led to problems. For some, too much was expected too early as they were not sufficiently trained while their employer did not have an effective CYW programme or were unsure how to proceed. I observe many churches becoming increasingly separated from young people and this has contributed to a widening range of tasks loaded onto a CYWr, ranging from nurturing young people (often covering children, families and young adults) in a congregation while reaching out beyond it. Inexperienced workers are often unable to challenge the difficulties of these remits or to provide better approaches. In Scotland due to the shortage of CYWrS, it is relatively easy to look experienced if one can stay in a job for several years. Unfortunately, such workers are often not well apprenticed, lacking a range of influences in the early years of their career and a lack of time to help them grow and mature. Therefore, the landmark issue uncovered by me not starting paid employment as a CYWr until 26 is not

when a CYWr should start, but how that starting should be prepared for and sustained afterwards with the correct balance of support and expectation. This points towards an understanding of sustaining CYWrs as an extended process.

**1:5:2 *'Instinctively I wrote.'***

The absence of a guiding map was most obvious during my early years in NCD. Despite guidance for my professional role, how that role impacted my personal life or my faith, or how my faith and personal life affected my professional role was less clear. During one struggle I instinctively wrote, starting a weekly journal that I still write. It was intentionally holistic as I deepened my awareness and sought out contradictions or connections between my CYW practice, Christian faith and my inner life of thoughts and emotions. Despite a busy schedule I made time to journal weekly and I began to sense different weight attached to certain events, conversations or encounters and in this growing awareness could discern more clearly insights and priorities. This learning shaped successful CYW practice which encouraged me to remain and, equally significantly in assessing the landscape of sustaining CYWrs, reflection became the posture in which I sensed God's guidance or wrestled with God's absence. In one season I uncovered I was approaching burnout, giving me the language to approach my line manager and take positive steps out of that crisis. While I increasingly valued the still space to think and not always rush at the time, I can now see that without knowing the term that I have come to value, I was becoming a reflective practitioner.

In contrast, I know CYWrs who have no deep understanding of what was going on in their lives and were therefore unable to be led or nurtured by God. While they might have responsibility for shaping programmes and plans, many did not develop the spiritual language to begin a dialogue with their church leaders, or to be aware of critical issues gathering under the surface and then respond to them. Equally, their leadership had not created the contexts where the intensity of such conversations could be mutually shared, among

clergy, staff or volunteers. Therefore, in assessing the landscape of sustaining CYWrS the landmark issue is not simply to start writing a journal but to ask how to help CYWrS regularly make sense of the conflicting challenges within their personal and professional lives. This potentially alters the perception of a CYWr from one who is only engaged with the outer work of programmes and activities into one additionally involved in the inner work of sense-making which then contributes to decisions about the shape of their outer work.

### ***1:5:3 'Conflict and Crisis'***

“This is not a church, and you are not the leader for this project.” I remember the shattering impact of this statement in an NCD review and how, in the subsequent discussion, I challenged the reviewer by affirming the approaches I was taking, the progress I saw and my own qualities as a minister and CYWr. It was a gruelling session and afterwards I walked to our local high school and chatted with the PE teachers. They were not Christians, but we got on well and I shared my frustrations with them. In that conversation I was gently affirmed as the school rugby coach, as a minister who had married two of them to other school staff, a CYWr running clubs and a pastor to the whole school community. I felt rebuilt, secured in my identity and enabled to carry on. Around these encounters I quietly resolved to no longer be dominated by church leadership that had presided over sixty years of church decline, which was the culmination for me of conflicts over decades with church leadership at local, presbytery and national levels.

Drawing on Ephesians 4 I increasingly understood that I had always been an apostle, called and equipped to work on the creative edge of God’s kingdom, but I valued the complementary functions of prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher so encouraged other churches, CYWrS and clergy to fulfil these roles alongside me. Consequently, in my outer life I increasingly committed to CYW practices that were rooted in what I believed was necessary to build Christian community with young people more than sustain congregations by trying to squeeze young people into their culture. This outer re-construction

was shaped by owning inner characteristics which I had previously side-lined as not fitting the typical image of a CYWr. I increasingly encouraged quiet and thoughtful times alongside high energy events, while recognising I was old enough to be a parent of the young people allowed me to step back more and leave spaces in leadership for them to grow into.

Experienced as an enriching season, I celebrated that I could still be a CYWr but I could fulfil more roles. For example, as a skilled communicator and speaker, I increasingly valued my ability to listen to young people and help them share their stories. In this re-shaping of my CYW practice as a leader I grew more confident as a trainer and mentor of volunteers, students and CYWrS which confirmed but reshaped my calling to be a CYWr. I can confidently state that the next 16 years, until I moved into my current training role, became the most fruitful season of my CYW career and the effectiveness of my leadership in that period was partly based on the convictions secured then. My outer label of CYWr did not change but how I practiced CYW and my own CYW identity was secured. In contrast, I have known CYWrS who faced similar crises around their leadership, the direction of CYW practice and their inner nurturing but they were not able to knit together their inner and outer lives and shape CYW around them. The challenges of integrating these tensions were too great for the worker or church, as the processes and relationships were not in place to work through conflicts. Consequently, they were not resolved into improved CYW practice or a deepened sense of calling. Therefore, in the landscape of sustaining CYWrS how to deal with conflict and crisis is important but I propose that the landmark issue is how CYWrS can create their own sustaining identity, which unites their personal identity with their given role.

#### ***1:5:4 'Time Off'***

I have always enjoyed time off from being a CYWr. Despite immersing myself in demanding roles hill-running, retreats or time with my family have helped me maintain clear boundaries between work and home life with a rhythm of withdrawal and engagement. Interrogating my CYW practice I realise that

withdrawal and engagement also shaped it as I wove together quiet reflective sessions with high-energy youth events and as a reflective practitioner I regularly withdrew after activities to think, read and pray before designing new approaches to re-engage with CYW practice. Reviewing my whole career, the same rhythm of withdrawal and engagement developed as I took a year break from CYW to study for a Post Graduate Certificate in Community Education and later started this DPT as I left my Church of Scotland role, a rhythm that has refreshed and inspired me. While I have come to value both rest and activity throughout my career, I realise that I instinctively created and adapted this rhythm, it was not something I was guided into. Initially it was shaped by my natural introversion and starting my first role while living by myself but was then nurtured by a growing understanding of myself based on the enneagram, a spirituality and personality development programme. So, while time off for CYWr's is important, as I set out the landscape for sustaining CYWr's the landmark issue is how CYWr's can create sustaining rhythms that integrate their personal and professional lives, allowing both to flourish.

In contrast I am aware of other CYWr's caught in the swirl of CYW practice who on the surface appear busy and influential, but eventually their careers end. I observe that the absence of cohesion weakens all aspects of their personal and professional lives as they have been unable to mature over time and then discover and integrate these three elements. The first is who God is making them to be, the second how their faith matures and grows and the third, how to lead effective CYW and navigate all the complexities involved with young people, volunteers, church leadership, programme content and organisation. I contend that not recognising the need for this cohesion or being unable to facilitate it is due to a lack of time and energy given to sustaining CYWr's as they, and CYW, are under-valued and the challenges they face are under-appreciated. Therefore, while time off is significant for sustaining a CYWr's career the landmark issue is how a CYWr can mature and integrate their inner and outer journeys.

### ***1:5:5 'Trusting the whispers of God'***

While driving in Argyll I once 'heard' an inner voice whisper to me "Released into life", a phrase I did not recognise. I began praying and journaling around it, discussing it with friends and family, reshaping my work practice before I made the decision after 26 years to leave my paid employment with the Church of Scotland. This was a difficult decision but one that has indeed led to life as I subsequently set up my own youth worker training business and began this DPT research. That whisper was one of the few times I believe God has spoken directly to me and each time has liberated me into significant changes in my CYW career, either confirming departures or securing commitments to remain. This active way of encountering God was different to my upbringing, theological training and early CYW career which secured my faith in a God who was settled and ordered, who was to be immediately believed and obeyed. However, in my CYW I increasingly felt distant from God in these traditional approaches, not sensing any presence of God in church structures or statements as I wrestled with the absence of God in my own spiritual life and the irrelevance of church life to young people's lives. I slowly valued my own experience, began praying more in silence and with symbols and gently affirmed my view that God was indeed absent to me and my lack of desire for God or unconfessed sin were not the causes. Supported by an Ignatian spirituality of lectio divina, retreats and spiritual direction that valued discerning and responding to God's Spirit I entered a wider and older appreciation of the Christian faith, nurtured especially by my spiritual director, reading Sittser (2007) and Foster (2004) and attempting to live the practices within them. While I valued the liberation of those decisions at the time, I now believe that God was calling me to believe that my trust of God was interwoven with God's trust of me. In the context of sustaining CYWr's, living into this truth has allowed me to initiate new CYW practices different to those embraced by local churches and continue living on the edge of the Christian congregations while remaining deeply rooted in Christian traditions.

In contrast, I know CYWr's who have struggled to bring together their external challenges of CYW practice, relating to churches or communities and the internal challenges of their own faith, beliefs and values. As explored by

Borgmann (2013), Fagg (2022) and Kenyon (2005) I am convinced that living creatively in the tensions between the structures and traditions of CYW and the lived experiences of young people is where CYWrS must exist. However, this is a challenging task, and I contend that most churches, their leadership and CYWrS are not equipped to do so. Therefore, in the context of sustaining CYWrS, it is important to help CYWrS hear the voice of God in their own experience. However, the landmark issue is how this listening can then mature their faith so that they can both confidently challenge and humbly submit to Christian communities that employ and support them.

### ***1:5:6 'All God's People'***

My CYW career has always been entangled with Christian communities. Dutifully attending church as a child with my family and excitedly working on summer mission teams as a volunteer launched me on a journey with God's people and since then my Christian life has been nourished in many Christian communities. I have been sustained by inspired preaching in Church of Scotland congregations, receiving the eucharist in Episcopal churches, sharing the joys and struggles of being a CYWr with colleagues at conferences or by compassionate friendships in a house group. As a leader I have been encouraged by creating new forms of worship that have enabled young people and those on the edge of established church to encounter God and explore their faith, or growing new Christian communities that became places of joy, hope, love and forgiveness. Undoubtedly Christian communities have also drained me when I have been repeatedly frustrated by the inwardness of many congregations, the resistance to change in church leadership groups and the institutional inertia of Church structures. I now see that navigating my relationships within and between Christian communities was what sustained me as I belonged to different Christian communities concurrently, discerning prayerfully how to live with the tensions of conflicting theologies.

In contrast, I know CYWrS who are employed to work for churches that do not sustain them, and their efficient work role masks an increasingly hollow inner life. In response some find a sustaining Christian community apart from the church where they work in relationship with young people, volunteers and

their employers but this can leave them feeling fragmented. Sadly, I have also known too many CYWrS whose personal lives are chaotic or damaged and there has not been enough general or specific support in their Christian communities to enable them to continue.

Over decades I have also observed, and led myself, training events that were mainly skills based for the worker rather than nurturing the relationships with volunteers or young people they were located in. For example, at a successful national training conference in Scotland for CYWrS, very few workers brought along their volunteers while many saw it as a retreat away from their church rather than an opportunity to strengthen relationships with their employing church. Therefore, in the landscape of sustaining CYWrS the landmark issue is not to simply insist for CYWrS to belong to a Christian community, but how the relational connections between different Christian communities work together to support and nurture that person. There is a need for a generous hospitality to nurture CYWrS by freeing them to mature within another tribe, if necessary, and to learn from their newly found discoveries. This points to understanding a CYWr as more than just an individual doing a job, but as a holistic Christian to be nurtured within and beyond Christian communities.

### **1:5:7 'Paying the bills'**

As a CYWr I have always been able to pay my bills as my salary has usually sat around the national average and has included pension, sickness and paternity benefits, travel and work expenses, the provision of accommodation or a manse and, for a short while, manse allowance. Including income from my wife who has worked full or part-time, we have been financially secure. In the context of sustaining my CYWr career, I affirm that this level of salary enabled me to transition from being a student into my first job and to remain in CYW despite the increased costs of raising two children. This description of my finances as a CYWr is not accurate however as in all my roles with the

Church of Scotland, while I have mostly done the work of a CYWr, I did so as an ordained minister and my pay was rated accordingly.

In contrast I know many CYWrs who were poorly paid and eventually unable to continue their role due to increased costs, an experience supported by the work of Kageler, Severe and Argeropolis (2020) which reinforces the impact of poor pay or terms and conditions in the causes and prevention of burnout. The surface issue for sustaining CYWrs is around pay which would help them remain in post when their living expenses increase. However, the landmark issue is to explain to funders and church leadership the significant impacts CYW can have and the complex challenges to enable it. This would include recognising and valuing the range of skills a CYWr requires to initiate, lead and develop CYW while also engaging with young people in varied contexts. Understanding these impacts, challenges and skills should improve holistic support for CYWrs and help to move away from short-term or part-time contracts with low levels of pay.

### ***1:5:8 'Creating my own resources'***

I have always created CYW resources, from summer mission games and activities through to designing a CYW model which became the basis of successful CYW in Gilmerton NCD and the eXp project in Dunoon. Reflecting on this I recognise that despite summer mission teams having a traditional approach to CYW, as a volunteer and then as a Missions Advisor I was always encouraged to be creative, to draw together my understanding of Jesus in the gospels with approaches from other CYW tribes mixed in with my own thoughts. As a new CYWr more experienced colleagues challenged but encouraged me to engage in discussion around practice or theology. This affirmation developed confidence within me to equip and guide others in their CYW practice or their Christian faith, either volunteers on teams, in local churches or in discussions about the Church of Scotland's approach to mission in regional and national committees. While I valued the free space to create at the time, in retrospect I can now see how that challenging

affirmation from colleagues strengthened my views on how CYW should operate.

In contrast I know too many CYWrS who have had not been affirmed and invited to present their views as they were expected to fit in with established approaches. Any requested input focussed on reports showing how effectively they were working within existing practices, not to critique or offer new approaches. As their thoughts and views were not sought, CYWrS retreated to an activist role. Similarly, when their frustrations were not acknowledged, or when they were left outside controversial discussions they did not mature through discussions and grow alongside more experienced colleagues while their colleagues and leadership did not benefit from their new insights. Therefore, as I interrogate the affirmation and permission-giving I received, in the landscape of sustaining CYWrS in Scotland the landmark issue is not primarily creativity but power and influence. This must be more than tokenistic involvement of a CYWr in a committee, it requires a climate of mutual appreciation by both leadership and CYWr, a willingness to learn and grow and mutually submit which enables both the church or organisation and the CYWr to mature and grow. Sustaining CYWrS cannot be done by simply focussing on the worker alone, as supervisors and leadership groups must also be helped to learn how to partner with CYWrS.

### **1:5:9 'Leaving'**

Over my career I have left four jobs, and on each occasion I remember not knowing what would come next but recognised a growing sense that my time in that role was finishing, a sense informed by tiredness but not controlled by it. I have never found leaving easy, based on an instinct that effective CYW takes time, and I often felt that I was more skilled at staying than leaving. Thankfully, the rightness of every departure was initiated or confirmed by unexpected but clear God-whispers. These whispers secured the certainty of leaving each specific job while securing that my sense of calling to be a CYWr remained, despite leaving a role.

Over time I learned not just how to know when to leave, but how to leave well. I slowly understood that my practice benefitted from taking time to reflect on what had happened and adapt activities or approaches for future use. This also allowed me to prepare handover material for who was following me. My inner life also matured as I sat with hurts, disappointments or joys and explored how to grow through these experiences. Much of this work was relational, as I learned how to let go of successes and hand over what I had shaped to others, to forgive myself and others and to thank all involved. Equally I have learned how to receive public thanks when I would prefer to quietly slip away, and more costly, how to receive criticism that I felt was unwarranted, but it was helpful for the person to share. Reflecting on these departures I would argue that the Church of Scotland is sadly not a learning institution. Each of my jobs had a strong exploratory element yet, despite the significant commitment to paying my salary, my expenses and putting support in place for me, I was never formally de-briefed, and the learning I was gathering was lost.

In contrast I have known CYWr's who have left badly, with them and their employing church bearing grudges with a focus on hurts and mistakes and with guilt or disappointments unresolved. Consequently, issues were carried by the CYWr into their next role, if they started a new role at all while others left CYW entirely. For the churches there was often no mutual learning with the departing worker leading to a limited understanding of why their practice worked or failed which warped the next appointment, or even led to all CYW practice ending. Therefore, helping a CYWr know when to leave is important. However, the landmark issue here is how to leave well, with implications for both the CYWr and their employer and church.

## **1:6 What is distinctive about CYWr's**

In the landscape of sustaining CYWr's there are other workers who have similar tasks and issues, but I contend there are enough differences to merit

this focussed research on CYWrS. Like teachers, CYWrS can educate young people but most have no formal educational training, they have no compulsory continuing professional development or union membership nor do they operate in a team unlike teachers even in a small primary school. Alongside school guidance or pastoral staff, CYWrS can work with at-risk or isolated young people but are not guaranteed to have specific training or the support of a wider staff network that extends into related professions. Many CYWrS also mirror police or social workers by dealing with young people in distress but most have no formal training, recognised societal role or team back up that even hard-pressed police or social workers have some access to. Clergy are an obvious comparative role, as CYWrS usually have an emphasis on sharing the Christian faith but they have no clear identity within Church structures, and few have any authority dependent on their job title.

Relating to these or similar roles is part of most CYWrS' work, but unlike more clearly defined roles of medical professionals, chaplains and clergy they do not have specifically developed training and development pathways that recognise and support their distinctive role while keeping it connected with parallel professions. Compared to secular youth workers or Christians in secular youth work CYWrS also work with young people but their own personal faith is central to their role. As alluded to in the definition of terms above, there is no professional accreditation or uniform agreement on what CYW is and therefore what the agreed role of a CYWr is. Some tribes will value certain training, beliefs or practices in the Christian or secular worlds but these are not applied to all CYWrS so there is a lack of coherent identity. This undermines attempts to provide support and development pathways as values are varied, practices diverse and therefore sustaining approaches are fragmented. I therefore contend that CYWrS require dedicated research, to enable them to interrogate their own experiences and then create theologically shaped responses to sustain them.

## 1:7 Unique contribution of this thesis

Having argued that distinct research into how to sustain CYWrS in Scotland is required, I now propose that this thesis makes a unique contribution in three areas. Described in this chapter the first unique contribution is in perspective, which locates the research in my own life, through which I can explore and describe a sustained CYW career which began as a teenager and continued as a volunteer, then as a CYWr and now as mentor, researcher and academic. This is valuable as few CYWrS have developed in these roles over this length of time. I also have the skills to interrogate this experience and then use these insights to initiate other CYWrS to reflect. This connects to the second unique contribution of this thesis of focussing on the lived experiences of Scottish-based CYWrS. Chapter 2 will show and then describe the relevance of the absence of Scottish-based voices in this field of research as I am convinced that CYWrS must have the opportunity to be heard and the responsibility to speak out if they are to be sustained. These unique voices are explored in Chapter 4, where they uncover issues around four seasons in a career, growth spirals, role-identity formation and communal connections as being significant is sustaining CYWrS. The final unique contribution is a process, affirmed in Chapter 3, which places these newly uncovered insights from my own experience and that of Scottish-based CYWrS, into a theological conversation.

This is based on my lived experience that reflective practice and spiritual formation have strongly contributed to my sustained career, so in Chapter 5 I bring our experiences into dialogue with theological writers such as Root, Bonhoeffer, Peterson, Nouwen, Slee, Rohr, Borgmann, and Brueggemann. This creative process explores a practical theology of involvement and separation, rooted in the Trinity that challenges the critical misunderstandings of CYW as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated which undermine how CYWrS are sustained. When these conversations are completed, in Chapter 6 I offer the four seasons framework as a map and proposals regarding formational mentors, the way of the desert and the city as a way-of-being for CYWrS, role-identity formation, growth spirals and communities of involved connections. Therefore, in the subject of sustaining CYWrS in Scotland this

thesis provides a unique contribution to academia, church leadership and CYWrS themselves.

## **1:8 Summary and link to chapter 2**

This chapter set the context for sustaining CYWrS in Scotland, identifying landmark issues and providing the metaphor of ‘exploring without maps.’ It affirms that this thesis occupies a distinct place in relation to professions similar to CYW, is a relevant area of research and argues that its’ process and content makes a unique contribution. I connect this chapter into Chapter 2 by introducing Brueggemann (2007) who uncovers the process of orientation, disorientation and reorientation in the Psalms and describes this as the pattern of all divine-human relationships, stating “It can permit us to speak of ‘passages’, the life-cycle, stages of growth, and identity crises.”<sup>4</sup> It is my instinct that sustaining CYWrS is a formational process which draws on a wide range of sources, not a functional one focusing solely on skills, so Brueggemann’s insight introduces language which will become important in exploring how CYWrS are sustained. Therefore, in the literature review in Chapter 2 I will explain why the chosen books are located within and beyond CYW.

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<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms. Engaging scripture and the life of the Spirit*, page 3.

## Chapter 2                      Literature Review

### **2:1 Introduction**

In Chapter 1 I set the context for sustaining CYWrS in Scotland, drawing on my own experience to instinctively uncover landmark issues and to note the absence of a map to guide the process of sustaining them. In response this chapter expands the understanding of that context by investigating the literature around sustaining CYWrS. The first section outlines insights from current literature on sustaining CYWrS while the second includes literature relevant to sustaining CYWrS but drawn from beyond CYW, explaining why this is necessary and how it shapes the theological reflection of this thesis. I conclude by comparing these insights with the landmark issues from Chapter 1 and highlight the absence of Scottish-based voices before describing how this chapter drives the whole thesis forwards.

### **2:2 Literature on sustaining CYWrS**

Structure and relationships shape the immediate response to sustaining CYWrS. Here the report of Kageler, Severe and Argeropolis' (2020), an update on an earlier study by Kageler (2010) is foundational, supported by Aven (2003) and Strommen, Jones and Rahn (2001). It shows the causes of burnout in CYWrS in the US and UK as decaying relationships with supervisors, congregation, family and young people, spiritual dryness and organisational and financial struggles which lead to loss of confidence and feelings of personal inadequacy and gives clear actions to prevent burnout and aid recovery. These include suitable boundaries, sabbath rest, faith support and counselling within a supportive community to help affirm or re-affirm a calling to CYW. De Vries (2008) provides an equally comprehensive study of how to sustain youth ministry and the youth minister. He emphasises taking time to build structures which are based on, and nourished by, Christian values where the CYWr is supported by a pacer or referee to guide through processes and systems, a coach to enable personal progress and a commissioner from outside to lead an annual audit. Supporting this view, Hart (2014) raises the structural issue of boundaries while Nash and Whitehead

(2015) outline an organisational approach involving planning tools. However, noting that “We reproduce who we are”<sup>5</sup> de Vries’ emphasises that sustainability is enabled by maturing leaders. Drawing on Scazzero (2015) he argues that an emotionally healthy leader is self-aware and needs an emotionally healthy schedule to enable learning and growing around failure and success and he argues that a relationship with God not youth ministry activities must be central.

Echoing this, Dean and Foster (1998) highlight that the average life cycle of a youth worker was 3.9 years and as they insist that youth ministry is not work but a holy pursuit their theological approach, while rooted in experience, begins with the nature of God. Consequently, they propose that burnout can be combated with personal and spiritual resources through soul tending, a mix of listening for God and being stretched by God as they argue that “When we are used by God we are not used up.”<sup>6</sup> Aven (2003) develops this by questioning if a passion for God is enough to sustain a Christian youth worker and highlights the false indispensability of leaders. Similarly, Powell describes how she sustains herself in Christian youth ministry by living reflectively in awareness of the presence of God. She encourages youth ministers to be real and honest, to not compare themselves to others and to ask, “What is the pace God has made me to walk in?”<sup>7</sup>

Moving beyond structural and relational support is affirmed by a continued examination of CYW literature. I propose that Nash (2011) leads this approach by affirming the importance of confirming one’s own identity in sustaining growth. Valuing practitioners’ own theological reflection in a variety of roles she expands the potential identities of a CYWr and Hoskins’ chapter on the CYWr as a ‘Well Watered Tree’ develops this, supported by the work of Bickerton, Miner, Dowson, and Griffin (2014). Nash’ emphasis on spiritual resources summarises her approach, emphasising that discovering who you are and how to connect with God are the two main sustaining roots for

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<sup>5</sup> de Vries, *Sustainable youth ministry*, page 111.

<sup>6</sup> Dean and Foster, *The God-bearing life. The art of soul tending for youth ministry*, page 17/

<sup>7</sup> Powell, [3 questions every youth leader should ask themselves \(fulleryouthinstitute.org\)](http://fulleryouthinstitute.org)

CYWrs. Roberts and Fox (2015) expand on this call to live and work out of one's own gifts, advising the CYWr to never be jealous of another's spiritual journey, to celebrate small achievements and find a supportive mentor. Gough (2018) equally maintains that a sustainable youth ministry requires the right tasks and roles and bases them in a programme of teaching, worship, outreach and love which requires the CYWr to be a facilitator of others in a Christian community.

Leeson (2019) and Fagg (2022) provide contrasting perspectives on identity and remaining in CYW. Leeson began in youth ministry but is now settled in chaplaincy and remains a Christian. His research was "Born out of a sense of frustration in my own practice as a youth minister, specifically around issues of professional identity"<sup>8</sup> He highlights how sense-making was an inner dialogue, where he committed to listening to his own and other's stories, in an integrating process of social constructivism where truth was discovered in relationship and shared narratives. Similarly, Fagg writes as a Christian in youth work beyond the Church and examines why CYWrs leave the Church and move into secular youth work. He highlights the tension that rises between CYWrs called to be with young people but also to serve in the Church, as when these two elements of call came in tension many workers moved with the young people away from the Church. Therefore, Lesson and Fagg both emphasise the need for CYWrs to be supported in exploring their call and commitments, especially in times of crisis.

Gough (2020) continues to emphasise connections as a response to declining numbers of CYWrs. While affirming CYWrs' local community connections through mission he identifies their weakening links with other age groups within a congregation and losing the ancient pathways of catechesis and rites of passage as damaging. He suggests this is due to CYW being a young profession and therefore urges CYWrs and congregations to mutually connect in communities of service. Dean and Foster (1998) support this emphasis on

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<sup>8</sup> Leeson, *Mimetic youth ministry: An autoethnographic Girardian analysis of the subculture of youth ministry*, page ii.

the Christian community to sustain CYW and CYWrS, affirming that “Sustainable youth ministry is not the result of a superstar youth pastor but of congregational investment in young people”<sup>9</sup> Similarly Dean, Clark and Rahn (2001) note, the aim of youth ministry is to help all Christians live “Faithfully in the presence of young people.”<sup>10</sup> This communal work is backed up by investment in the CYWr through whole-life mentoring and accountability with soul friends who help provide de-habituation or rhythm breaking through sacred spaces, rituals, Sabbaths or holy leisure which create the space for reflective practice that discerns where God is active. This contemplative approach is supported by Yaconelli (2006) who draws on ancient Christian spiritual disciplines to argue for a communal approach to doing youth ministry where the CYWr, volunteers and young people mature together.

Regarding a sustained career, Friend (2022) specifically looks at difficulties in recruiting CYWrS and identifies a core problem as youth ministry being seen as second class compared to adult ministers. In response he argues for employers to value training and education which focusses on spiritual formation, discipleship and character as a supportive infrastructure to develop themselves and volunteers. Similarly, Lukabyo (2021) affirms the value of training for a relational CYW approach that integrated reflective practice, social sciences and church traditions within a “Transformative community”<sup>11</sup> of Christ and people. However, she identified the lack of trusted relationships between college and denominations and institutions as the main reason the programme did not continue. A similar study on the conflicting relationships between CYW students transitioning into their first job and their employers is explored by Griffiths (2013) while Kenyon (2005) opened up the impact of conflicts around different youth work values between CYWrS and employers. There are significant tensions within the challenges of training CYWrS as the work of Gough (2018) Bailey (2016) Talbot

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<sup>9</sup> Dean and Foster, *The God bearing Life. The art of soul tending for youth ministry*, page 19.

<sup>10</sup> Dean, Clark and Rahn, *Starting right. Thinking theologically about youth ministry*, page 19.

<sup>11</sup> Lukabyo, *Educating youth ministers in the Anglican diocese; John Kidson and the Youthworkers’ Course*, page 99.

(2022) emphasises that training should develop from Christian traditions and institutions. In contrast Ward (2017), Pimlott and Pimlott (2008), Roebben (2005) and Borgmann (1997) prioritise discerning God's presence in the world to shape CYW approaches and training programmes.

Investigating the importance of theological reflection to CYWrS, Hill's report *Theological Reflection in Youth Ministry* demonstrates that this reflection is important as the participants valued discernment of God's activity in the flux of young peoples' lives, through a process of adapting thought and practice. Although many participants felt such reflection was not valued by their supervisors her work reflects a growing emphasis on the importance of theological reflection for CYWrS, shown by this report being expanded into an article in the *Journal of Youth and Theology* by Hill, Apeland and Scanlan (2022). Nash and Whitehead (2014) also support reflective practice and theological reflection to equip CYWrS where, by interrogating issues in dialogue with practitioners, they affirm that learning has value for sustainability only when it is integrated into a CYWr's practice, a holistic approach emphasised in Robbins (2004).

Root and Dean's (2011) challenge for CYWrS to see themselves as theologians moves beyond individual sense-making, developing their role to help the Church understand youth ministry as a theological task. "We must begin to see ourselves (youth ministers) as not primarily youth ministry directors but as theologians who do constructive theology in the context of ministry with the adolescent population."<sup>12</sup> This requires youth ministers to be taught how to do theology in context, not just apply theological truths, even if this transforms Christian traditions and practices. Exploring and equipping this transformation is central to the work of Senter, Black, Chap and Nel (2001). Their dialogical style and the content of their book guides and encourages CYWrS to think theologically and critique the practice of CYW and churches. This work reflects Nel (2003) who writes persuasively of the need for youth

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<sup>12</sup> Root and Dean, *The theological turn in youth ministry*, page 39.

ministry to create its own theology, reflecting the character of God as relational and dialogic. He borrows from Tracy to affirm the need for integration, based in a commitment to learn from a wide variety of sources before discerning God's action.

There are therefore strong arguments supporting the view that theological reflection enables the sustainability of CYWrS. However, it is important to note developing tensions within this approach, such as whether current CYW experience or Christian tradition guides the process. Muchová and Štěch (2012) note that “Youth ministry today receives its inspiration from modern managerial and pedagogical methods but we should not forget that theology should be its basic framework.”<sup>13</sup> Talbot (2022) continues this critique requesting a “More objective theological starting point”<sup>14</sup> pointing to Scripture or a transcendent or confessional base rather than the praxis-theory-praxis model. Bailey (2014) initially emphasises that, “Youth ministers should engage, learn, perhaps re-learn, navigate and practice the complex art of continuous theological reflection”<sup>15</sup> but he continues to critique youth ministry as “Potentially un-tethering from the church and wider Christian tradition”<sup>16</sup> due to an over-reliance on youth ministry literature and not theology. He warns that youth ministry has been reduced to “Practice based on being like Jesus and youth minister as symbol”<sup>17</sup> which has lost its connection with the Christian tradition and uses a “Thin theology.”<sup>18</sup> In response, he draws on the work of Ward (1997), Dean (2004) and Root (2007) to define what the “Complex and nuanced practice”<sup>19</sup> of theological reflection by CYWrS must be. He argues for “A slowing down of the process of youth ministry; practice is explored frame by frame”<sup>20</sup> which should include the story-based approach of Swinton and Mowat (2006) within the reflective

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<sup>13</sup> Muchová and Štěch, *Sustainable youth ministry – Between human and divine*, page 15.

<sup>14</sup> Talbot, *Practicing theology in youth ministry: A critical evaluation of recent trends in North American youth ministry*, page 18.

<sup>15</sup> Bailey, *Living amongst the fragments of a coherent theology*, page 38.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, *Living amongst the fragments of a coherent theology*, page 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Living amongst the fragments of a coherent theology*, page 29.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Bailey, *Living amongst the fragments of a coherent theology*, page 28.

practice. He also values theological reflection as spiritual discipline as promoted by Ward (2008) and the result is a complex awareness of issues, as Geertz (1973) proposes, leading to youth ministers articulating, exploring and re-imagining their theology and tradition in a heuristic process. Scanlan (2020) supports Bailey's promotion of theological reflection by CYWr's "In the service of embodied youth ministry"<sup>21</sup> but critiques his work by arguing for the inclusion of Christological, missiological or ecclesiological frameworks rather than just the Trinitarian lens that Bailey uses.

This debate is enriched by the work of Ward (1996), (2008) and (2017) which has constantly equipped CYWr's to do theology in young peoples' contexts and cultures, but he critiques Root and Dean as being too limited in their theological aims and purposes, stating "Thinking theologically is not about reading books. Thinking theologically is the ability to make connections between God and life."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Davis, Pearson and Gapes' (2002) encourage youth ministers to do theology by integrating practice and classroom learning, not just thinking how to apply existing answers. Pimlott and Pimlott (2008) reinforce Nel's (2003) approach that developing a local theology is a key task for a CYWr through contextual theological thinking that integrates practice, Scripture (particularly the Psalms) and young peoples' experiences. Similarly, Roebben (2005) focusses on listening to and liaising with the spiritual insights of young people while Borgmann (1997) and (2013) asserts that a sustained CYWr must commit to learning from young people as the experts in their own lives. Theology is then created, he argues, when their songs, protests and loves are shared with a quest for truth in the mystery of God, revealed in creation, Scripture and Christ but this contextual approach is difficult as he questions "Is there any painless and invulnerable path to contextualisation?"<sup>23</sup> I conclude this section of the literature review by connecting theological reflection back into the Kageler, Severe and Argeropolis' (2020) report as Borgmann notes that "Youth workers are paying the price demanded by contextualisation .... loneliness, low estimation of the

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<sup>21</sup> Bailey, *Living amongst the fragments of a coherent theology*, page 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ward, *Introducing practical theology*, page 26.

<sup>23</sup> Borgmann, *When Kumbayah is not enough*, page 32.

work itself”<sup>24</sup> His argument that CYWrS need their own faith nurtured through supportive networks, continued training and opportunities to train others as part of their own professional development recognises that theological reflection is a draining but necessary part of sustaining CYWrS.

### 2:3 Literature from beyond CYW

The inclusion of literature from beyond CYW in this review is a positive choice and does not suggest a lack of insight within CYW writers. The choice reflects my commitment to sense-making through dialogue which is expressed in the participants’ comments in Chapter 4 and in the creative theological reflection of Chapter 5. By entering this dialogue, a maturing intellectual and theological development is affirmed within CYW which recognises a weakness in not yet having a cohesive understanding of sustaining CYWrS but is then confident enough to engage with theological contributions from other fields. Chapters 3,4 and 5 refer in more detail to these contributors but this section introduces the writers who are central to shaping this later work.

Working from the landmark issues uncovered in Chapter 1 initially leads to Erikson’s work (1994) on distinct stages in life, which contributes to understanding that CYWrS have seasons in their career, an insight supported by Sutcliffe (2021). Fowler’s work (1995) on faith development provides a language for a developing faith and opens up the view that progressions involve transitions, supported by Breen’s (2018) insights around kairos moments. The dialogues that emerged among the landmark issues between experience, culture and Scripture are supported by Scharen and Vigen’s view that “We profess a guiding, normative role for Scripture in Christian theology and ethics and we also acknowledge its’ enactment is interpretative and therefore contested ..in a dynamic spiral”<sup>25</sup> This spiral is rooted in their insistence that “All knowing is embodied knowing”<sup>26</sup> and Rambo’s understanding of remaining as the place where, “The Spirit...is witnessed in

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<sup>24</sup> Borgmann, *When Kumbayah is not enough*, page 30.

<sup>25</sup> Scharen and Vigen *Ethnography as Christian theology and ethics* page 78.

<sup>26</sup> Scharen and Vigen *Ethnography as Christian theology and ethics*, page 76.

and through the words and movements of those who remain.”<sup>27</sup> Literature around being sustained is therefore rooted in the tension between valuing Christian traditions and communities found in Perrine (2007) and Sittser (2007) and new and innovative understandings arising from experience, as described by Freeman and Greig (2007).

Understanding sense-making to be a central part of a supportive identity as a CYWr is shaped by Young (2006) and maturing this approach into theological reflection is supported by Fraser (1988) McChlery (2018), Stirling (2018) and Ward (2017) which culminates in Root (2014) affirming CYWrS as theologians. Subsequently, guidance for creating theological responses to sustain CYWrS is shaped by the work of Nouwen, Christensen and Laird (2011) on spiritual formation, Bruegemann’s (2007) concepts of orientation, disorientation and re-orientation, Peterson’s (1983) portrayal of Jeremiah and Rohr’s (2004) work on initiation rites although I critique his linear view of initiation by referring to Slee (2004).

## **2:4 The absence of Scottish-based voices**

The range of international contributors in this section underline the broadly consistent understanding of problems and responses to sustaining CYWrS. As I noted in my abstract, a more detailed study of sustaining CYWrS across countries would be valuable but this lies beyond the parameters of this research. However, Scottish-based CYWrS make little contributions in literature to this theme, and I echo Stirling’s assertion when faced by a gap between his lived experience and the available research that this is “Both a lack and an opportunity.”<sup>28</sup> I claim that this absence undermines the ability of CYWrS to be sustained, as I affirm the positive value of reflective sense-making and involvement in leadership discussions in my own experience in Chapter 1, a claim supported by the interviewees in Chapter 4. Such absence also weakens their churches or projects who do not benefit from the kind of theological reflection demonstrated in this thesis. The loss of experienced

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<sup>27</sup> Rambo, *A Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 93.

<sup>28</sup> Stirling, *Deep silences. A spiritual autoethnography. Reclaiming inner space and silence as a locus of the sacred*, page 81.

CYWrs as role models in theological reflection also prevents less experienced CYWrs from seeing that this could be part of their development. However, the input from interviewees in Chapter 4 and my own contribution clearly shows that CYWrs in Scotland can engage in theological reflection. This claim is supported by the following work, written by CYWrs within Scotland. Firstly, I point to the doctoral studies of Clyne (2020), Paget (2022), Fraser (2023), and the unsubmitted research of Darlow. The writing of Mallon (2003), (2007) and (2008) shows how CYW can challenge and change the practice of both a denomination and local congregations while Clyne (2011, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020), McMeekin in Nash and Whitehead (2014), Mellstrom (2017) and Wilson (2009) are examples of reflection on CYW practice.

I propose that the absence of Scottish-based writers on this subject comes from a negligent under-valuing of CYWrs' theological abilities, consistent through local, regional and national networks. As one example I refer to the Ascend magazine produced by Church of Scotland's Ministries Council as part of the Ascend programme supporting employees of the Ministries Council. The magazines I researched from 2017 to 2019 all demonstrated that Scottish based practitioners could engage in theological reflection around sustaining staff and then write effectively. However, of the 62 articles written 48.5 were written by clergy, ten by lay people, one by a family worker, one by a deacon, and only one and a half written by CYWrs. This is an illustration of how theological reflection was not sought, or expected, from youth workers by their employers in the Ministries Council which in my experience is also true for CYWrs at the congregational or local level. I contend that underestimating CYWrs in this way is part of a culture that undervalues CYWrs and contributes to their dis-satisfaction, weakening their ability to remain. In contrast I refer to Dean and Hearlson (2016) who show how CYWrs have shaped and resourced theological education by integrating young people, youth work approaches and the resultant insights into theological colleges.

## 2:5 Summary and link into Chapter 3

Alongside Chapter 1 this literature review has expanded the understanding of the context for sustaining CYWrS. Both chapters affirm that structure and relationships, power and control, identity, Christian community, reflective practice and theological reflection are important, reinforcing them as landmark issues while this chapter also highlights the critical role of training. In contrast, Chapter 1 alone uncovers that sustaining CYWrS is an extended process, where leaving well and the need for cohesion is supported by the requirement to communicate the challenges and significance of CYW. Both chapters also introduce broader themes, as Chapter 1 recognises that the absence of a map for developing a CYW career is damaging while Chapter 2 alone points to the role of spiritual formation and the absence of Scottish based voices as being areas to explore.

The emerging dialogue between my lived experience in Chapter 1 and the literature in Chapter 2 has created a context for understanding how CYWrS in Scotland are sustained. Drawing on Slee's language, I affirm this is still "A neglected site"<sup>29</sup> so these insights require to be compared against a larger group within Scotland. Engaging with CYWrS to interrogate these issues will uncover wider issues and challenge the absence of Scottish-based voices by developing the interviewees and I as skilled practitioners, able to engage in theologically robust research which contributes to new knowledge around sustaining CYWrS. In this process we will therefore become "Cartographers of neglected landscapes, charting maps that have not been made, until now."<sup>30</sup> The process of how to do this will be explained in Chapter 3 'Research Methods and Methodology' and the results outlined in Chapter 4 'Findings'.

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<sup>29</sup> Slee, *Women's faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3 Research Methods and Methodology

### 3:1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the research methods and methodology required to compare the insights of Chapters 1 and 2 against a larger group of CYWrS, as prescribed in Chapter 2. Working with this research group I will construct theologically robust research which contributes to new knowledge around sustaining CYWrS, in a journey of “Practical wisdom (phronēsis) and creative imaginative possibilities (poiesis).”<sup>31</sup> The background of this journey was moving into and out of the covid lockdown in Scotland and a massive structural re-organisation within the Church of Scotland. Subsequently many CYWrS, churches and youth projects were weakened and still require renewed leadership to grow and move forward. I will contend in Chapter 4 that sustaining CYWrS enables a variety of growth so discovering how to sustain and guide them is critical. To shape this approach I draw on Nouwen’s comment that “If there is any hope for the Church in the future, it will be hope for a poor Church in which its leaders are willing to be led”<sup>32</sup> and his assertion that “Strenuous theological reflection will allow us to discern critically where we are being led.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, this chapter will provide secure methodological foundations for the research that drives Chapter 4 ‘Findings’, Chapter 5 ‘Theological Reflection’ and Chapter 6 ‘Applications’. Engaging in this work I support Denzin and Lincoln’s claim that research requires the researcher to approach “The world with a set of ideas, a framework (ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) which are then examined (methodology) in specific ways.”<sup>34</sup> Explaining my approach is the core of this chapter but I begin by firstly defining my own habitus, how I engage with the world as a researcher.

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<sup>31</sup> Bennett, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 2.

<sup>32</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, page 64.

<sup>33</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, page 65.

<sup>34</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page 16.

### 3:2 Habitus

My lived experience has shaped the intention and methods of this research. Raised to accept authority as a child and teenager in my home and church, my early work experience followed this pattern where I easily accepted the guidance and instruction of my employers. My Christian faith was rooted in orthodox beliefs, but I was rarely inspired by endless words in undergraduate theology classes, worship services or church committees. Instead, I preferred to be actively engaged in mission projects or working with young people, valuing orthopraxis (or right practice) over orthodoxy (or right belief). In these contexts, phronesis increasingly came through weighing inherited truths against new experiences before creating my own ways of practice or belief, echoing the work of Pettie (1992). Constructing a sense-making process which transforms practice has therefore been an effective approach for me and it now contributes to the research processes and intention of this thesis. Despite this self-knowledge, I have often under-valued my own voice as I believe it has not enabled the change I wanted to see. This frustration has continued through six years of study and writing around the theory and practice of practical theology, and I have often been tempted to abandon this DPT and return to my previous CYW role, to connect again with CYWrS, communities, churches and young people.

Through these difficulties I have been inspired to remain with the slow process of creating new knowledge in this thesis by the work of Rambo (2010) and Stirling (2018). “Standing in the Lower Ninth with Deacon Lee”<sup>35</sup> describes Rambo’s time in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. ‘Standing in’ real situations of trauma and ‘standing with’ those involved, not just on the streets but with their suffering became Rambo’s theological stance as she affirms that “Spirit meets spirit in the depths.”<sup>36</sup> These ‘depths’ are where the unifying Spirit of God remains, uniting Father and Son and hesitant disciples where “The power to remain”<sup>37</sup> develops and then creates signposts

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<sup>35</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 16.

<sup>36</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 180.

<sup>37</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 111.

“For faithful living”<sup>38</sup> which “Aim at shaping a way of being in the world.”<sup>39</sup> Her ability to translate such traumatic experiences into transformative literature inspires me. Equally, Stirling’s work in hospital chaplaincy drives me on, with his language of “Descenders” and “Spiritual artists”<sup>40</sup>. These are descriptions of colleagues who had the courage to descend into the pains of their profession and from there create new responses, an approach I seek to emulate. Consequently, this research journey begins in reflexivity but is located within a fuller understanding of qualitative research which then connects into practical theology.

### 3:3 Reflexivity and autoethnography

My research journey gained its initial energy through reflexivity which validated my personal experience as a source of insight and learning, echoing the view that engaging in practical theology is about being “Rooted, changed, lost and claimed”<sup>41</sup> in “A journey of change and transformation.”<sup>42</sup> This journey was driven by a desire to understand my own experience and an instinct that the stories I was tentatively exploring could be helpful to others. This instinct was supported by discovering Walton’s work on autoethnography where she states that constructing stories “will enable deeper perceptions to emerge”<sup>43</sup> either by constructing or revealing reality. This became my experience as the slow process of growing awareness which surrounded my journaling led to a more insightful understanding of my CYW experiences. I found that my inner journeys of emotions, beliefs and faith and my outer journeys of CYW practice affected each other and could not be fitted into self-contained boxes. I argue that Behar understands this inter-relationship as a strength not a weakness in research when she proposes that autoethnography can “discover the deep conjunctures that inform any effort to know the world beyond the self.”<sup>44</sup> This claim underpins my conviction

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<sup>38</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 16.

<sup>39</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and trauma: A theology of remaining*, page 48

<sup>40</sup> Stirling, *Deep silences. A spiritual autoethnography. Reclaiming inner space and silence as a locus of the sacred*, Introduction.

<sup>41</sup> Bennett, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 7.

<sup>42</sup> Bennett, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 8.

<sup>43</sup> Walton, *Writing methods in theological reflection*, page 5.

<sup>44</sup> Behar, *Ethnography and the book that was list*, page 23.

that my own reflective writing is not a self-centred approach that limits this study to solely affirming my own experiences as the definitive source of wisdom. Instead, it uses one's own experience to connect and draw out the experiences and understanding of others in what Behar describes as a "project of emancipation."<sup>45</sup> This intention for autoethnography to enable transformation is a strong motivation for me to claim it is a valid research methodology for my thesis, especially as Walton affirms that its' "impact is intended to extend beyond the academic environment."<sup>46</sup>

In Chapter 2:4 I highlight the absence of Scottish-based voices as significant and seek to correct it through this thesis. I contend that this process of including excluded voices must begin with hearing and valuing my own voice, locating that within a flow of "listening and seeing, of speaking, and of acting."<sup>47</sup> This approach opposes "sterile research"<sup>48</sup> in favour of value-centred research where these values are rooted in and uncovered within the sharing of stories, including the researcher's own stories. Therefore, I support that their view that "autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research,"<sup>49</sup> viewing the use of my own experiences as a strength not a weakness. However, the individual researcher is always held and understood within community, as Behar writes, "my voice was part of a mosaic of voices, which in time would create a vigorous and unsettling interdisciplinary intellectual movement."<sup>50</sup> Finally, I affirm autoethnography as a research method in this thesis because of its' commitment to connection, where its' worth is found in helping the reader make credible connections into their experiences and then are enabled to take action or, as Walton writes in adapting the work of Denzin (2008), "to make a response."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Behar, *Ethnography and the book that was list*, page 16.

<sup>46</sup> Walton, *Writing methods in theological reflection*, page 7.

<sup>47</sup> Graham, *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to practical theology*, page 194.

<sup>48</sup> Ellis, C, Adams, T. and Bochner, A. *Autoethnography: An Overview*, page 274.

<sup>49</sup> Ellis, C, Adams, T. and Bochner, A. *Autoethnography: An Overview*, page 274.

<sup>50</sup> Behar, *Ethnography and the book that was list*, page 35.

<sup>51</sup> Walton, *Writing methods in theological reflection*, page 9.

In one example, after being employed by the Church of Scotland in various roles since 1993, I began my DPT in 2017 and reflexive writing helped me explore my relationship with the Church until I decided to leave in 2019 and start my own youth worker training business. Part of that decision-making process was this piece of writing 'Torn by loyalty and love', comparing my deteriorating relationship with a frail Church to an imaginary encounter with my dying father.

## **Torn by loyalty and love**

*After his latest fall and loss of functions,*

*My Dad lives in his memories.*

*His skin-and-bone body too still,*

*Too thin.*

*Our hands are clasped lightly,*

*Resting on the clean bed sheet.*

*This is not how he should be,*

*Lying in this antiseptic place.*

*The doctors say the end is close (they don't say he's going to die).*

*In this too silent place*

*I ache for our past.*

*He was my home,*

*He was my adventure,*

*He was my compass,*

*Now he is my anguish.*

*In the hurly burly of children around his bed*

*He tires easily,*

*Confused by familiar faces in unfamiliar fashions.*

*'Which one are you?' he asks them too often.*

*He becomes bitter and demanding,*

*Liking the idea of his grandchildren*

*But not their bustling reality.*

*I am stranded in the middle,  
Urging my children to speak more slowly,  
Helping my Dad to remember them,  
To listen to them,  
Wanting him to love them  
As I know he loves me.*

*I sneak a look at my watch and worry about my responsibilities to my children.*

*They need me to give them a lift to...  
I can't even remember their friends' names  
and I know that annoys them.*

*I'm tired.*

*I need to leave him.*

*But not yet,*

*Not yet.*

*Not while I can still hold our love  
in his weakening hand.*

Through reflexive writing I gained more confidence to explore questions about my identity and the challenges in sustaining CYWrS, as I moved from being a face-to-face CYWr to a researcher “Adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection...(someone who) reads widely and understands

research is an interactive process.”<sup>52</sup> Through this change I affirm Mazzei and Jackson’s promotion of self-awareness to embrace the complexity and contextuality of knowledge which requires “A constant, continuous process of making and un-making.”<sup>53</sup> This approach to research echoes Nouwen’s (2011) view of spiritual formation as a creative process requiring the skills of discernment and articulation, to draw out meaning or significance and help the participants create new resources, for as Slee notes, researchers “Are listening ...to self, to the other, to the literature, to the Spirit at work in each of these.”<sup>54</sup> In this listening I have also learned to recognise my own influence and power, the weight given to my views by others due to my age, gender, education, length of career and seeming confidence which may prevent others from contributing.

Therefore, I seek to value all the voices by balancing a confidence in my own experiences with an openness to new ideas from thinkers and writers, Christian tradition and other CYWrS. As I engaged with more of these voices in setting the areas for discussion, coding the responses and reflecting theologically I became more aware of my biases. I am sometimes reluctant to engage in conflict, preferring superficial agreements and I often distrust external sources of authority, unthinkingly agreeing with individuals who clash with power structures in churches or organisations. Therefore, while acknowledging the insights of this self-awareness, interrogating the experiences of CYWrS now requires engaging more fully with qualitative research, the discipline reflexivity and autoethnography is located in.

### **3:4 Qualitative research**

In this section I will explore why qualitative rather than quantitative research is the most suitable research base for this thesis. Quantitative research fits into a positivist ontology which claims that reality can be objectively known, data can be measured and expressed in numerical values and experiments or

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<sup>52</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page 12.

<sup>53</sup> Mclemore-Miller, *The Wyllie-Blackmore Companion*, page 4.

<sup>54</sup> Mclemore-Miller, *The Wyllie-Blackmore Companion*, page 18.

surveys must be repeatable. This does not fit with my intention to explore and uncover CYWr's experiences, to interrogate their meanings and from them create new insights. These intentions fit within qualitative research as it seeks to understand perceptions, described by Denzin and Lincoln as "Attempting to make sense or interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them."<sup>55</sup> Comparing CYWr's experiences therefore values the complex subjectivity of peoples' lives over simplistic objectivity so qualitative research is well suited to the task as it is "A situated activity that locates the observer in the world."<sup>56</sup> Through my own CYW experience and my research journey I have discovered that initial insights are rarely tidy and choosing too early to favour neat answers over rambling responses prevents the uncovering of insights that can enable transformative understanding. Therefore, I connect with Silverman's assertion that "Doing qualitative research is in many respects no different than doing everyday life: it is complex and sometimes downright chaotic"<sup>57</sup> I am equally drawn to Brouard's comments that research on participants must not simply be an "Intellectual appropriation, but a capacity to inhabit the principles ...in their work"<sup>58</sup> . I commend this commitment to connection in research, agreeing that "It is an embodied practice rather than a universal set of normative tenets to be adhered to."<sup>59</sup>

This view is supported by Swinton and Mowat (2006) who reject a reductionist approach and claim that appearance and depth are not the same, as critical reflection through a deep excavation of issues allows for and enables complexification. Similarly, Bennet et al (2018) reject a positivist approach in favour of a constructivist ontology which "Assumes that what is called reality is socially constructed so that people make the meanings that create the world. The researcher's task then becomes to enquire into these meaning-making processes themselves."<sup>60</sup> Silverman's view that "If you are

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<sup>55</sup> Mclemore-Miller, *The Wyllie-Blackmore Companion*, page 18.

<sup>56</sup> Denzin and Lincoln *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page 10.

<sup>57</sup> Silverman, D. (2022) *Doing Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, page 15.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 140.

<sup>60</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 142.

concerned with exploring people’s life histories ...then qualitative methods may be favoured”<sup>61</sup> also supports locating my descriptive and interpretative research process within qualitative research, as he affirms that qualitative research is well equipped for “Understanding how people perceive things or respond to situations.”<sup>62</sup> As I secure this work with CYWr’s in qualitative research I am particularly grateful to the assertion of Bennet et al (2018) that “If qualitative research is fundamentally concerned with meaning making processes it is academically unjustifiable to maintain silence about the spiritual meanings people place upon experiences.”<sup>63</sup> A holistic ontology and epistemology is central to my work and this includes affirming the spiritual aspects of sustaining CYWr’s. My final reason for placing this thesis within qualitative research lies in its commitment to phronesis, a practical transformative wisdom, as the basis of research where learning is generated around a problem or a practice in a “Theory - practice nexus.”<sup>64</sup> Supporting this I value qualitative research’s commitment to transform not merely inform, as it is “A moral, allegorical and therapeutic project”<sup>65</sup> which seeks to enable “Inquiries that can provide a moral authority to move people to struggle.”<sup>66</sup>

### 3:5 Practical Theology

This research on comparing CYWr’s experiences is also located in practical theology, as “Practical theology and practical theological research begins, proceeds by, and ends - in practice.”<sup>67</sup> I go further, however, by supporting Ward’s assertion that practical theology is not about producing academic papers, books or even training “It is about changed lives.”<sup>68</sup> This approach is consistent with Root’s view of Bonhoeffer’s theological reflection which “Weaves together youth work, attention to concrete experience and

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<sup>61</sup> Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, page 18.

<sup>62</sup> Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, page 21.

<sup>63</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 149.

<sup>64</sup> Higgs, Titchen, Horsfall, and Bridges, *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching: Living Research*, page 5.

<sup>65</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page xvi.

<sup>66</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page 1.

<sup>67</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 57.

<sup>68</sup> Ward, *Introducing practical theology*, page 167.

commitment to the revelatory nature of God's continued action in the world through Jesus Christ." <sup>69</sup> Knowledge is therefore accessed by paradoxically weaving together thick descriptions of life and un-weaving these lived experiences. This contrasts with three theological approaches I explored but decided were not suitable for this research. Constructive narrative theology values stories but gives primacy to scripture rather than experience as the starting point for reflective practices which then broaden theological insights into the world. Corporate theological reflection values connected Christian communities but again the identity and expression of Christian community not human experience is placed at the core of theological reflection as it seeks to define the church's life, witness and worship. Lastly, canonical narrative theology affirms the centrality of Scripture in shaping Christian identity but places that above rather than alongside culture.

Against these three approaches I draw on feminism and post-positivism which employ new ethnographic techniques to value and explore how fluid meanings enable complexification. This hermeneutic approach is supported by Brown as it seeks to "Discern and respond to the transforming activity of God within the living text of human action"<sup>70</sup> where the term 'researchers' is replaced with 'interpreters' or 'inquirers'. This understanding of knowledge draws on mutual critical correlation to enable the conversation between experience and revelation, a theological approach that begins in crisis where questions are asked about theory-laden experiences and practices. These questions are then taken to Christian texts leading to a critical conversation between practice and Christian tradition. Hermeneutical theology is a helpful addition here as it proposes there is no neutral or objective knowledge, for all knowledge is interpretative and accessed via dialogue or conversation where "We encounter the living Christ in the church-community (*Gemeinde*) ...not constituted in institutional operations or even liturgical practices but in the shared life of persons in relationship."<sup>71</sup> This idiomatic and creative understanding is consistent with Root's critique of using theology in CYW as a

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<sup>69</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, page 8.

<sup>70</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, page 3.

<sup>71</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, page 46.

“Turn solely to traditions and doctrines”<sup>72</sup> and instead echoes his conviction for “The concrete and lived experience of young people as the location for encounter with God.”<sup>73</sup> Collating these different theological insights, I now claim what Colledge describes as “Dialogic mutual critical correlation”<sup>74</sup> as my approach for this research.

### **3:6 Relationship between practical theology and qualitative research.**

I support the view of Swinton and Mowat (2006) that drawing together practical theology and qualitative research should be based on conversations that involve hospitality, conversion and critical faithfulness. In hospitality, practical theology should welcome qualitative research and be challenged by its insights. For conversion, qualitative research should undergo a process of conversion, to be used for God’s redemptive purposes within the Church and the world. Critical faithfulness encourages faithfulness to the Spirit’s guiding in working with qualitative research methods. They argue that adopting these values would therefore give qualitative research “The potential to become a useful tool for... analysing and reflecting theologically on complex situations.”<sup>75</sup> I do have sympathy with their critique of quantitative research’s scepticism about accessing objective truth which, they claim, “Stands in uneasy tension with the theological assumption that truth is available through revelation.”<sup>76</sup> However, while valuing their position to root their research in God’s activity, I am dubious about their placement of reflection on Church practices as the opening context for their book *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* as this risks locating God’s activity too narrowly in Church practices, with pre-conceived notions of how God acts. Therefore, I want to affirm the view of Bennett et al (2018), which promotes social sciences’ prioritising of human experience as the crucible for meaning making before these practices are explored to reveal beliefs, as they write “Biblical texts and traditions were

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<sup>72</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, page 11.

<sup>73</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Colledge, *Grounding Theology in Experience*, page iv.

<sup>75</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, page 73.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

generated in and from practice.”<sup>77</sup> Discovered truths for them must then be enacted not systematised as orthopraxis is prioritised over orthodoxy where “Praxis is the primary criterion of truth.”<sup>78</sup>

Reflecting on these concerns, I hold seemingly opposing views; that truth can only be created and understood within human lives, but I also affirm God’s independent existence as a source of truth and love. Therefore, I support Swinton and Mowat’s proposal for a mutual critical correlation - referring to Pattison (1989) - as a way for both practical theology and quantitative research to engage in “Critical and potentially transformative dialogue.”<sup>79</sup> I do not accept their Chalcedonian position that theology always has primacy over knowledge in qualitative research, but I agree on this being “An interpretative enterprise”<sup>80</sup> where truth is “Emergent and dialectic”<sup>81</sup> in a process that serves the kingdom of God. Their description of this is similar to a conversation between friends, “Between the Christian tradition, the social sciences and the particular situation that is being addressed”<sup>82</sup> which fits my understanding of what is required to test the findings of Chapters 1 and 2. Affirming this relationship between practical theology and qualitative research, I will now show how it shapes the research design then the research methods chosen within this thesis.

### **3:7 Research**

#### **3:7:1 Research Design and Plan**

I recognise the concern raised by Bennet et al that feminist research might falsely be understood as “Imprecise, emotionally charged and biased”<sup>83</sup> so consistency with the discipline of qualitative research is required if this thesis is to be coherent and robust. Therefore, the flow through the chapters echoes the work of Swinton and Mowatt (2006) who argue that research of a

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<sup>77</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 73.

<sup>78</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 85.

<sup>79</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, page 74.

<sup>80</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, page 89.

<sup>81</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, page 94.

<sup>82</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, page 80.

<sup>83</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 136.

specific situation must allow for complexities, which I outline in Chapters 1 and 2. They then insist on an excavation of those complexities which I begin in this chapter and explore more fully in Chapter 4. Following this excavation they promote intentional theological reflection, a searching for God which I produce in Chapter 5. Within this flow I emphasise a dialogical approach of questioning and dialogue, initiated by listening to my own experience which then helps me listen to and understand the interviewees' experience. These insights will then be brought into further dialogue in Chapter 5:4 with Rohr's views on initiation rites, Slee's views on faith development, Peterson on longevity in the story of Jeremiah and Root on Bonhoeffer's role-identity as a youth worker. This hermeneutic process is supported by the view that "While we profess a guiding, normative role for Scripture in Christian theology and ethics we also acknowledge its enactment is interpretative and therefore contested ...in a dynamic spiral"<sup>84</sup> with culture and lived life, as the process continues into Chapter 6 'Application', reflecting their guidance that insights gained must loop back into revising practice. The flow of this dialogical process is supported by Ward's description of practical theology as "Exploring the self, exploring the community, testing theological assertions, testing ecclesial assertions, generating new theological perspectives or correcting problems."<sup>85</sup>

Within this process, Mockler argues that authenticity in qualitative research is assured by authenticity in research design, which requires "Congruence between the researcher's own way of seeing and being in the world and the enactment of the research"<sup>86</sup> This occurs when the choice of methods is "Linked fundamentally to the way in which the researcher approaches central questions of ontology and epistemology and the adoption of related research paradigms"<sup>87</sup> as shown in this diagram.

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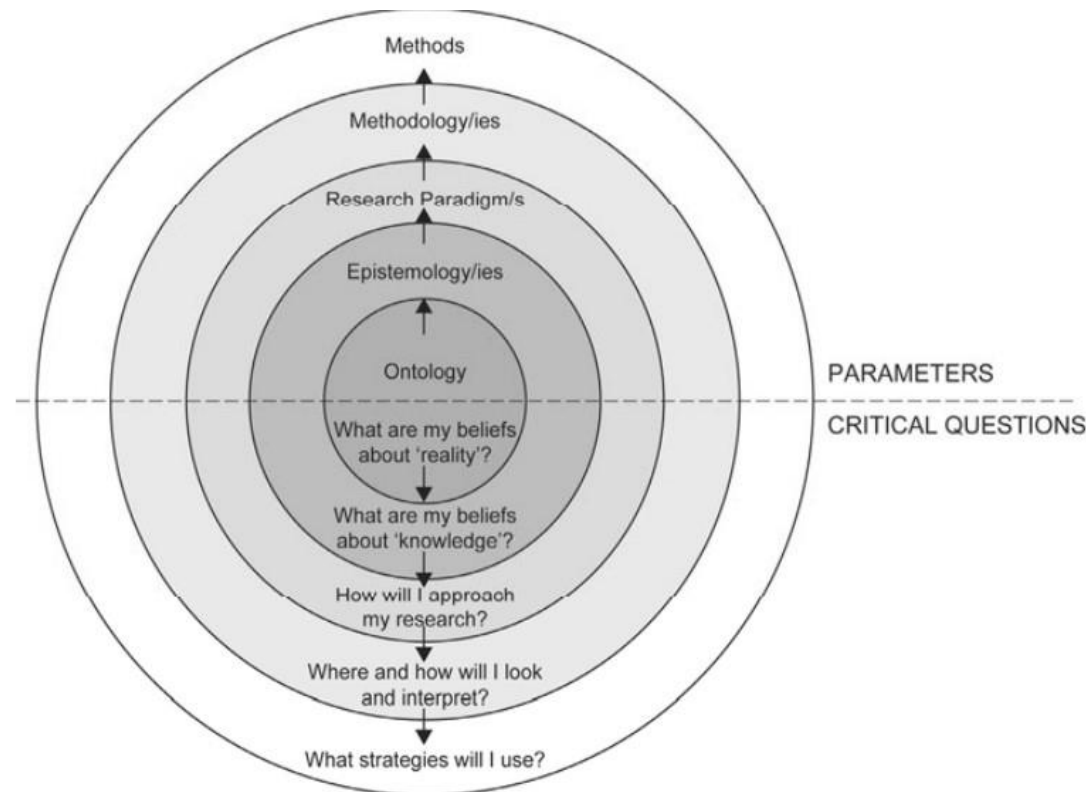
<sup>84</sup> Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian theology and ethics*, page 78.

<sup>85</sup> Ward, *Introducing practical theology*, page 155.

<sup>86</sup> Higgs, Titcher, Horsfall, and Bridges, *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching: Living Research*, page 159.

<sup>87</sup> Higgs, Titcher, Horsfall, and Bridges, *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching: Living Research*, page 160.

**Diagram 1 Mockler: Ontology, epistemology, research paradigms, methodologies and methods.**



My ontological values are rooted in post-positivism’s acknowledgement of an objective reality known and interpreted through the complexities of human living. Therefore, the ontological basis of this thesis is rooted in validating the multi-layered experiences of CYWrS where their lives are affirmed as the prime locus for engaging with reality. However, I also affirm ubuntu values where an individual’s existence only makes sense when it is inter-related with others. This approach is supported by Bennett et al (2018) who affirm that, “The best kind of practical theology research emerges primarily out of practice and communities of practice”<sup>88</sup> which affirms my research being rooted in the lives of active CYWrS. Drawing from these experiences, I affirm my epistemological base that knowledge is uncovered only by exploring the inter-connected significance and meaning to attached them, valuing feminism’s emphasis on holistic approaches and embodied learning which

<sup>88</sup> Bennett, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 3.

work alongside liberative and kingdom-based theologies. This requires hermeneutic, idiomatic and phenomenological processes to uncover and interpret the experience of CYWrS and then to construct meaning and new resources, drawing on ethnographic methods based in qualitative research. This approach centres on Logan's assertion that "We do not understand meaning until we have told the story"<sup>89</sup> echoing Radford's (2019) emphasis on the power of real-life stories and the work of Bons-storm (1996). Drawing on Silverman's insistence that "Research methods are not neutral...they reflect a commitment...to a particular model of how the world works"<sup>90</sup> I will now outline how my research methods develop from this research design.

Silverman continues that "You should choose a method that is appropriate to what you are trying to find out."<sup>91</sup> Within the context of sustaining CYWrS, this interview stage is focussed on comparing the experiences of CYWrS with the issues raised in Chapters 1 and 2. Shaped by these issues I decided to explore their experiences of transitions, change or growth and ask what helped them. Responding to interviewee's comments I then interrogated how their identity was more important than decision making in sustaining a career before uncovering what their identity was and how it was formed. This was followed by exploring issues raised from my own experience, using those insights to explore their experiences and definitions of growth and how it was enabled before investigating the lack of a secure pathway in CYW. Consequently, I wanted to hear how, as experienced CYWrS, they might help the next generation of Christian youth workers to enter and stay in that sector. Woven around all these areas I sought to find out implications for CYW practice, for management, supervision and support and the impact on their faith and relationship with God. Acquiring this knowledge required processes to construct mutual learning relationships between myself and the interviewees, to create "An interpretative community of practice with shared understandings"<sup>92</sup> which could enable us all to uncover, describe and explore

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<sup>89</sup> Logan, *Ordained ministry of women in the Church of Scotland: the first forty years*, page 23.

<sup>90</sup> Silverman *Doing qualitative research*, page 11.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, page 3.

their experiences, to draw out meanings then analyse and identify connections or disconnections before creating new insights for practice.

Consequently, as I claim that meaning is constructed in human experience but not understood until it is interpreted, I chose methods that allowed time for listening and interpretation, including reflection time within and between sessions which involved guided conversations not surveys where "The agenda ... would be more open."<sup>93</sup> My input was to set the context and parameters of the subject and to keep conversation flowing, reflecting Brown's support of the hermeneutic approach which seeks to "Discern and respond to the transforming activity of God within the living text of human action"<sup>94</sup> and researchers are replaced with interpreters or inquirers. I contend that these relational connections strengthen this research, resisting mining people solely as data- sources and instead viewing them as agents in their own transformation, an approach supported by Behar's comment that ethnographic research requires "Identification and connection rather than distance, difference and otherness."<sup>95</sup>

### **3:7:2 Research methods**

I was initially drawn to methods in action research, a "Theologically informed processes ....to enable Christian communities to reflect upon their identity, mission and communal life."<sup>96</sup> with its emphases on transformative and democratic participation through local connections in the whole research process from design, interviews and analysis. I value the view that, "Observation cannot be divorced from participation"<sup>97</sup> and the subsequent commitment to using "A set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world."<sup>98</sup> However, after reflection I did not adopt these methods. Firstly, in noting the limited time

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<sup>93</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 144.

<sup>94</sup> Mclemore-Miller, *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to practical theology*, page 112.

<sup>95</sup> Behar, *Ethnography and the book that was lost*, page 23.

<sup>96</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 145.

<sup>97</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 31.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

available to me, I decided to prioritise information gathering over the longer process of transformation, which I decided would then be best served by engaging with more CYWrS with a range of experience and views. This required drawing them from a wider geographical area, rather than one local community. Secondly, my initial plan was to use interactive group workshops but due to covid related limitations on group gatherings I instead chose zoom-based group discussions, supported by individual interviews, describing them all in this writing as research events. The detailed plans can be found in Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

Before the first group session I set the parameters for the discussion by reflecting on my own experience and shared these as written discussion starters. Conversations around broad topics were intentionally chosen to validate their experiences and encourage them to uncover theologically rich understandings which would then help me to develop new forms of sustaining practice for CYWrS. This idiomatic approach echoes Meek's assertion that, "Oral history (is) different from documentary history, it tells less about events and more about what they mean (to the interviewee)." <sup>99</sup> After this data generation in the group discussion I felt frustrated by the relatively small group of participants and wished I had more time to engage with a wider range of CYWrS. However, the drive to engaging more deeply with this sample group was provided by Silverman's comment that, "It is better to celebrate the partiality of your data and delight in the particular phenomenon that it allows you to inspect hopefully in detail...the best research says 'a lot about a little.'" <sup>100</sup>

Encouraged by this, I then coded the transcripts by repeatedly re-reading them and watching the zoom recordings before identifying common themes in their responses then choosing the statements that best illustrated these themes. Contrary to my view that decision-making was a central theme in sustaining a career I noted the developing concept of identity among the

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<sup>99</sup> Meek, *Gay and bisexual men, self-perception and identity in Scotland, 1940 to 1980*, page 78.

<sup>100</sup> Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, page 138.

interviewees. Instead of simply noting this I recognised that qualitative research affirms “The possibility of turning aside from a main train of enquiry to pursue something more interesting and perhaps more relevant.”<sup>101</sup> I therefore used this insight to shape my questions for the subsequent one-to-one interviews with each interviewee, grateful that “The research process itself creatively generates wisdom.”<sup>102</sup> In-between the first group session and my interviews I also asked the interviewees to journal their thoughts, inviting them to share these in the interviews. These interviews were semi-structured so despite sharing the same questions with each interviewee the conversations flowed in different directions. The final group session included no discussion starters but my pre-planned areas for discussion were adapted by including themes arising in the individual interviews which I drew into the conversations.

By choosing these methods I rejected the following qualitative methods as not suitable for my research. Participant observation suited my purpose as it values the everyday life of the subject’s world. However, as I wanted to connect with more youth workers to give myself a greater opportunity to uncover their issues, I did not have the time to visit and enter their contexts. The use of a case study seemed ideal for my research as the emphasis is not to learn skills but to help practitioners form their own insights from their own experience. It intentionally bridges experience and practice into reflection and theory by channelling a complex or large issue into one person’s experience which is then explored from different viewpoints. However, I found it difficult to design a case study that covered enough issues, and I became increasingly aware that my research required uncovering more issues and reaching more CYWrS. Lastly, using an experiment looked helpful as it could isolate individual factors and observe their effect in detail. However, as I had not yet identified the causal factors in extending the career of a Christian youth-worker, I decided it would be difficult to control them. There were also moral and organisational issues around the manipulation of human

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<sup>101</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 175.

<sup>102</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 32.

experience at a deep and sustained level to test theories that I decided were not ethically or logistically possible.

### 3:7:3 Research Analysis

Behar insists that data analysis is a “Hermeneutical process undertaken without statistical outcomes in mind.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, in my practice I repeatedly listened to and watched the interviews of the two group discussions and eight interviews, defined as research events. That time-consuming discipline connected me deeply into the conversations and corrected the transcripts generated by the University of Glasgow’s zoom facility, creating approximately 20 to 30 pages for each research event. To analyse each event, I printed off these transcripts and placed them on a wall in my office, rereading and colour-coding them. This coding allowed me to identify and link common themes or isolated insights, guided by connections the interviewees made or by my own instinct. Chapter 2 recognises this thesis is researching a new area, so it was important to ensure that this research was not just a discussion of existing information. New material was therefore sought by accessing the experiences of Scottish-based CYWr’s not referred to in literature or shared by the interviewees before in a research context. This commitment is based in Lincoln and Guba’s work, (1985) affirming that the validity or trustworthiness of insights in qualitative research can be assured through credibility, auditability and fittingness in contrast to the validity, reliability and generalizability of results in quantitative research. Confirming this is especially important for my data which was gathered and analysed during covid lockdown, as “Participant data and study findings during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly from behavioral (sic) interventions, should be interpreted with caution.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Behar, *Ethnography and the book that was lost*, page 23.

<sup>104</sup> Cardel, Mannasse and Krukowski, *COVID-19 Impacts Mental Health Outcomes and Ability/Desire to Participate in Research Among Current Research*, page 2272.

Credibility in my research is provided when insights introduced by the participants resonated with their experiences and provoked thick data in response. This was confirmed by ‘light-bulb’ moments when myself or some of the participants individually or collectively affirmed the uniqueness of a comment or insight, especially when it had the potential to initiate change in understanding or practice. Auditability is shown by a clear research process which I have explained above, rooted in the work of Mockler (2011), Bennet et al (2018), Denzin and Lincoln (2013), Swinton and Mowat (2006) and Silverman (2016). Finally, fittingness covers applications being consistent and relevant to the lived practice of participants. This was illustrated in the research where material introduced by me or generated within the research events uncovered material and insights around sustaining CYWrS that was new for both myself, and the interviewees. The liveliness of our interaction and the amount of material gathered strongly suggest to me that the methods chosen achieved the fittingness sought by Lincoln and Guba.

### **3:8 Impact of covid**

The study *Survey findings of the impact of COVID-19 on researchers*, accessible here<sup>105</sup> explored the impact of covid on research, mental health and future careers and the concerns raised apply to my research as the research events and my analysis were conducted during covid lockdown. I have already noted above in Section 3:7:2 how covid affected my research choices. Expanding on those decisions, I intended to gather CYWrS in one location and use sketches, maps and diagrams as non-verbal tools to develop relationships and support conversations in exploring issues and uncovering meanings, guided by my own experience of facilitating groupwork and advice from the Oral History Society, available here.<sup>106</sup> Instead, after discussions with my supervisors I adopted these workshops into group discussions on zoom. While I regretted the loss of face-to-face encounters and the use of these creative tools, I accepted the view of McIntosh in Higgs (2011) that the aim of creativity in qualitative research is not to create a great piece of art

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<sup>105</sup> [Survey findings of the impact of COVID-19 on researchers – UKRI](#)

<sup>106</sup> [Advice - Oral History Society \(ohs.org.uk\)](#).

but to uncover and express meaning in a balance of aesthetics and substance. Recognising my lack of experience in using zoom for groupwork as opposed to my longer experience of facilitating face-to-face groupwork I particularly focussed on repeatedly ‘asking the second question’, a pastoral technique I have developed to make space for the other person to develop their responses to any opening question. I contend that the lively involvement of all interviewees in every research event, through their full conversations and insightful responses, showed that my research methods were not critically damaged by these alterations.

One positive impact of using zoom was the almost full attendance of all eight interviewees in all research events. The only exceptions were one participant who was unable to take part in her follow up interview and another participant unable to take part in the second group discussion, both due to busy timetables. This high level of involvement supports the view of Englund, Sharman and Strang (2022) and specifically King (2022) who noted that “Students viewed adjusted research methods (principally the adoption of online interviewing) positively ....as they facilitated increased recruitment.”<sup>107</sup> Referring to conducting research during covid lockdown, Jeyapalan, James, Gardner, Lothion-Roy, Mongan and Rutland (2023) identified the importance of discovering what can “Help reduce stress and promote adaptive coping mechanisms during stressful times”<sup>108</sup> echoing the concerns of Harrop, Bal, Carpenter, and Halladay (2021). Jeyapalan et al highlight the impact of autonomy, positive emotion or resilience and affirm that “By making a decision, the students and academic supervisors had time to adapt, thus reducing stress and enabling time for positive emotions to form”<sup>109</sup> which reflected my own experience of support from my supervisors. My own mental health was not heavily impacted by the lockdown as my research was at the stage of requiring me to intensely focus on the transcripts and I enjoyed the space and time to delve deeply into that

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<sup>107</sup> King, *A fascinating time to be involved with research*, page 672.

<sup>108</sup> Jeyapalan, James, Gardner, Lothion-Roy, Mongan and Rutland, *Impact of COVID-19 on student attainment and pedagogical needs when undertaking independent scientific research*, page 97.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

analysis. Doing this at home allowed me to keep connected with my family and engage in my usual self-care routines while being on paid furlough from my other part-time jobs reduced potential tensions around finance. To close this section on the implications of covid on my research, I affirm that no ethical issues in my research regarding myself or the interviewees were altered by covid lockdown.

### 3:9 Participants

I support the view that hearing un-heard voices is a powerful driver in qualitative research as it can excavate deeper issues, raise questions and empower the speakers. This “Perspective of the interacting individual”<sup>110</sup> underpins feminism’s standpoint epistemology where those most deeply involved in an issue are best equipped to deal with it. Therefore, in this research I deliberately chose experienced CYWrS who had not been published or involved in doctoral research before. In making this decision I recognised that “Members of the group might not be representative of a larger population”<sup>111</sup> but accepted that as a cost of involving informed participants “Drawn from those having most interest in the topic being investigated.”<sup>112</sup> I drew on my experience of working in CYW in Scotland for almost 30 years to invite CYWrS whom I knew were committed to sustaining CYWrS and had themselves experienced long-term careers. I sought an equal mix of male and female participants but due to availability I ended up with five males and three females.

Participants were chosen from a range of CYW backgrounds and theologies, and all were actively involved in CYW and based in Scotland, apart from one now based in England but who had trained and worked in Scotland. I define them as competent practitioners, referring to Schön’s statement that, “Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit

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<sup>110</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, page xvi.

<sup>111</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 31.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

a kind of knowing-in-practice.”<sup>113</sup> The choice of participants was also influenced by Merton’s critique in Nouwen (1994) that the main threat to trainee priests’ spiritual life was not the unexamined life but their tame or un-lived lives. Consequently, as I wanted CYWrS who could access their experiences and then be able to weigh, examine and evaluate them before engaging in discussion with others, all the interviewees were known to me. I was aware this might affect their comments so while I was convinced each one had a settled confidence in their own views, in facilitating the research events I focussed on issues that arose only from within those conversations and not from previous experiences we had shared. Recognising this was a new area of study and a new experience for the participants I sought to prepare them, but not direct their thoughts, by sending an introductory letter, found in Appendix 4. A summary of non-identifiable information on the participants can be found in Appendix 5.

### **3:10 Ethics**

This section will provide a brief outline of the ethical issues and responses raised by my choice of research methods, methodology and participants. It rests on a successful ethics application process through the University of Glasgow, described here

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/arts/research/ethics/ethicspolicy/> but I now affirm that “the researcher (is) not only the research instrument but the person responsible for ethics and the protection of those that volunteer to take part in research.”<sup>114</sup> Drawing on the work of Silverman (2022), Denzin and Lincoln (2016) and the British Educational Research Association I now highlight general ethical issues related to qualitative research.

Informed consent requires a transparent and understandable approach where all participants clearly understand the purpose of the research, how they will be involved, possible risks and harms and how their views will be represented

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<sup>113</sup> Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, page 8.

<sup>114</sup> Iphofen and Tolich, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research ethics*, no page number but found at [Sage Research Methods - The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics \(gla.ac.uk\)](https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/ethics/)

within the thesis, including data protection, and if credit is to be made to them. Closely connected to this is confidentiality, where the participants must decide on how much of their identity, if any, is revealed. Within this lies an awareness of coercion, both in recruiting participants and working with them in group sessions or interviews. Here the participant must at all times be free to participate or withdraw their involvement. Wrapped around these concerns is care for the participants, especially as “In using personal experience, autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate others.”<sup>115</sup> The ‘Research participants’ invitation letter’, found in Appendix 4, outlines my responses to these issues.

Beyond these general issues I note the advice in qualitative research to “be alert for something different, something challenging and something special about every research encounter.”<sup>116</sup> Within this research all the participants were known to me, I had even worked with some of them, but I wanted people who I was certain could contribute within the limited time and using online consultations. I was therefore aware this power dynamic might influence their responses, but I sought to avert this by ensuring that they knew I did not benefit from any response they made and validated all their responses, encouraging the participants to draw from each other what was significant without relying on me to lead the conversations. I also offered time for reflection between the two group work sessions and the individual interviews to give time and space for the participants to reflect on their responses before I moved onto analysis of the data. Taking time in this way also served as a crucial link into care for the participants. I was certain that we probably be exploring sensitive issues around their faith, close relationships, self-identity and values so it was important to ensure they had sufficient pastoral care. Working online meant we did not have informal conversations before and after sessions, but I started and ended each session with a reminder that they should have pastoral support available, or that I

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<sup>115</sup> Ellis, C, Adams, T. and Bochner, A. *Autoethnography: An Overview*, page 281.

<sup>116</sup> Iphofen and Tolich, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research ethics*, no page number but found at [Sage Research Methods - The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics \(gla.ac.uk\)](http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/research-methods/the-sage-handbook-of-qualitative-research-ethics)

could provide contacts if required. No-one requested this additional support but as the groupwork sessions and interviews progressed, issues deepened and I was increasingly aware of the challenges raised by Punch (2016). He introduces the theme of the researcher as a virtuous person, challenging my earlier perception that the researcher was a passive leader of conversations. I found this insight was significant as it increased my desire to care for the participants and consequently to produce work that would benefit them or other colleagues in future. In parallel to this care of participants also I draw on the view of Bergold and Thomas to affirm that a qualitative researcher is a demanding but rewarding role “which calls for considerable courage and willingness to swim against the current, and, possibly, to put up with disadvantages. The diversity of requirements and roles demands from the researcher very different competencies and skills, and a high degree of flexibility and reflexivity”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, as I became more aware of the participants’ and my own experiences of searching for self-identity, bereavement and faith struggles self-care became an important ethical consideration. In response I continued my regular self-care programme balancing work, study and family life while also writing reflexively on these identity issues.

### **3:11 Summary and link into Chapter 4**

In this chapter I have provided methodological foundations to compare the insights of Chapters 1 and 2 against a larger group of CYWrS and create new knowledge around sustaining CYWrS. This process begins in reflexivity and is then rooted in qualitative research and practical theology which supports the choice of participants and the use of group discussions and one-to-one interviews as my research methods. Noting the impact of conducting research during a covid lockdown the academic rigour of this work is provided as I respond to the guidance of Lincoln and Guba (1985) showing how the process has credibility, auditability and fittingness. Consequently, I claim that the

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<sup>117</sup> Bergold, J. and Thomas, S. *Participatory research methods: A methodological approach in motion*, page 13.

findings now explored in Chapter 4 are theologically robust and consistent with the discipline of qualitative research.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### 4:1 Introduction

My experience In Chapter 1 and the literature review in Chapter 2 affirmed a congruence of issues surrounding how CYWrS are sustained in Scotland, while both highlighted distinct issues. A central concern was the lack of a map to guide and sustain CYWrS, so in this chapter I will describe the results of engaging with eight CYWrS in Scotland to become “Cartographers of neglected landscapes, charting maps that have not been made, until now.”<sup>118</sup> Behar comments that “As ethnographers we are expected to travel somewhere...with the commitment to bring back a story”<sup>119</sup>and the group discussions and interviews resulted in many stories, which I now distil into four findings. The first is that role-identity formation exists, is significant for sustainability and is achieved by integrating inner journeys of values, faith and character and outer journeys of roles, tasks and relationships.

The second finding follows, that a career in CYW consists of distinct seasons, with each season involving inner and outer journeys. Remaining with seasons, the third finding notes that each season has different barriers and bridges to growth while the fourth affirms that moving from one season to the next requires intentional processes described as growth spirals. I will conclude by making the central statement of this thesis, that role-identity formation in their inner and outer journeys allows CYWrS to be sustained through the four seasons of their careers.

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<sup>118</sup> Slee, *Women’s faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 17.

<sup>119</sup> Behar, R. (2003) *Ethnography and the book that was lost*, page 22.

## **4:2 Role-identity formation exists, is significant for sustainability and is achieved by integrating inner and outer journeys.**

Role-identity formation was not named explicitly by interviewees, but the term is created to crystallise what sustained their careers. It weaves together a Christian faith, personal values and professional practice, described as, “Figuring out how you work and having space to be you....who God made you to be in your identity.”<sup>120</sup> It describes a self-understanding robust enough to face the challenges in developing a CYWr’s career but also sufficiently flexible in responding to the wide range of professional and personal issues CYWr’s have to negotiate. For example, while discussing starting a career many of the interviewees agreed with one interviewee that as a teenager he was, “Passionate about working with young people and passionate about Jesus ....and that had a had an impact on ...the career that I would pick.”<sup>121</sup> However, the relative simplicity of initiating a career is contradicted by the challenges all the interviewees faced in their personal life around health, faith, bereavements and relationships, echoed by this interviewee who described her experience as, “A sort of perfect storm, ...my marriage had broken down, my parents moved, so I’d moved and had been in a job that was .. soul sucking ....it just took every last bit of me that I had.”<sup>122</sup>

Sadly these challenges were often faced in isolation as I contend even young CYWr’s were seen as experienced Christians and therefore better able to cope. Living in a pressurised place between young people’s issues and church orthodoxy, the faith of CYWr’s’ was often challenged, captured by the comment that, “Who I thought God was has died a couple of times and then a new, the real God has been resurrected.”<sup>123</sup> This research revealed CYWr’s putting significant pressure on their own faith, shown by one who spoke of wrestling with how to live a life with young people that was “Full of love and full of grace and full of forgiveness, where it’s not just a duty but it’s a

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<sup>120</sup> B, GD 1.

<sup>121</sup> C, DG 2.

<sup>122</sup> D, GD 1.

<sup>123</sup> C, GD 5.

joy.”<sup>124</sup> While reflecting on her CYW practice, one interviewee similarly realised that “I can learn more about God who is seeing the beauty in you and that changes me,”<sup>125</sup> showing that living in the intersection of their life and the lives of young people was a complex but creative process.

Alongside this, muddling through changing job roles, navigating changing relationships with volunteers or maturing through conflicts with church leadership, forming a robust but flexible role-identity was helpful as no single job title stood out amongst “Overlapping or sometimes stacked labels”<sup>126</sup> leading to different expectations “That’s always been difficult to work out and manage.”<sup>127</sup> All the interviewees affirmed that surviving this draining challenge of CYW practice required purpose and passion. While only one interviewee explicitly spoke of his sense of vocation, as a Christian in a secular CYW setting, and there was no agreed definition of ‘call’ among the interviewees, I contend that their sense of commitment is best expressed as a call, summarised in one statement that, “When you’ve got that sense of calling and a real depth to the reason why you’re doing something, then you stay through those times.”<sup>128</sup> To secure this sustained commitment through role-identity formation I highlight the importance of this insight, “I think some of it comes down to character... my calling. “It’s that daily ‘Here I am’”<sup>129</sup> which emphasises the significance of both character and choice.

Consequently, I oppose the view that a static identity sustains a career, instead affirming that role-identity *formation* is an ongoing process of integrating inner and outer journeys. Valuing one interviewee’s insight of her long CYW career as a “Long garbled story,”<sup>130</sup> I use her description of “The internal journey of me”<sup>131</sup> to capture the depth required to sustain a career.

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<sup>124</sup> B, GD 2.

<sup>125</sup> E, GD 3.

<sup>126</sup> F, GD 1.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>129</sup> A, GD 2.

<sup>130</sup> E, DG 1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Role identity formation is complex, takes a long time to build and is “A continual journey of discovering who you are”<sup>132</sup> or “Uncovering of who I am,”<sup>133</sup> where both point to an identity that is deep-rooted and given. The inference of identity as gift echoed the interviewees’ view that God had gifted them their identity as a CYWr so this formation was fiercely relational, between God and the individual. The multi-stranded nature of formation is reinforced by my affirmation that integrating the outer journey of improving practice with the inner journey of personal growth is necessary, as “Maturity in practice only comes as *you* mature in practice.”<sup>134</sup> Spiritual direction was therefore a valuable resource to enable this integration, as interviewees recognised that challenges were not simply professional or personal but were also spiritual. Spiritual directors or mentors supported CYWrS through a “Conversation where it just helps you figure out what you think you know”<sup>135</sup> in a discipling process of prayer, honesty, time and trust.

An understanding of both journeys and the ability to integrate them was critical as progression in the outer and inner journeys was often not matched, where a gain in outer skills and experience occurred in parallel with a faith crisis. Conversely, a time of growing faith could occur at the same time as failing practice. Achieving this integration was supported by a commitment to reflective practice which can be initiated in different contexts. For one interviewee interrogating classroom learning and practice was “The start of it all”<sup>136</sup> into becoming a CYWr who rooted networking into his practice until this became “His heartbeat”<sup>137</sup> and defined his role-identity while another process of reflection is shown by the interviewee who stated, “How you engage with the world changes who you are .... that changes how you understand God.”<sup>138</sup>

The individual and tailored nature of this process was situated within Christian community, where formation required more than simply attending

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<sup>132</sup> A, GD 2.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> E, Interview.

<sup>135</sup> B, Interview.

<sup>136</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> E, Interview.

Sunday morning worship. Experiencing God's love in his congregation through difficult times inspired one interviewee and shaped his CYW practice, as he affirmed, "I don't know if I would have been able to learn that, if the church I'm at didn't give me the grace that it did when I was in those places,"<sup>139</sup> an approach under-pinned by pastoral care "To have space to deal with your messes."<sup>140</sup> Another interviewee faced different challenges to secure his identity through theological struggles so "Having safe places to discover that and to work through"<sup>141</sup> was important. One comment illustrates the need for a multi-faceted Christian community, as an interviewee emphasised how making important decisions began for him "As the initial God / gut feeling"<sup>142</sup> but was nestled in "Lots of prayer around that from the church family."<sup>143</sup>

Discovering how to relate to their church as staff members was also significant, as one interviewee described how a trusted relationship with his church leadership secured a fruitful role-identity. This began by writing his own job description involving "Whatever I get passionate and excited about ....but I need to discern with them .....to create an environment of excellent youth work."<sup>144</sup> This nurturing relationship allowed him to develop into an enabling role as "The journey I've been on has helped me so much that I want to see it repeated ...because I don't necessarily see that that's happening in other places."<sup>145</sup> The most effective line management for role-identity formation moved beyond improving performance into nurturing the worker's holistic life, as one interviewee affirmed, "I feel valued and also to realize that you're progressing as well"<sup>146</sup> This affirmation of role-identity was also a significant source of energy, "To shape your ministry in the image of who God made you to be is massive... the way that God's given you passion."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> B, Interview.

<sup>140</sup> B, GD 2.

<sup>141</sup> A, GD 2.

<sup>142</sup> H, GD 1.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> A, Interview.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> C, GD 2.

<sup>147</sup> B, GD 2.

In summary spiritual direction, reflective practice, Christian community and trusted employers help form role-identity. This centres around formation in character and relationships with others and God rather than simply information around a role or skills. Role-identity formation matures over time and often goes unobserved but manifests itself in times of crisis or decision-making. This multi-faceted process raises questions about whether the CYWr, their line manager, mentor, Christian community or someone else is responsible for integrating these different elements, either in a crisis or in regular rhythms.

### **4:3 A career in CYW consists of four seasons.**

My insight that there are four stages in a CYWr's career is drawn from the interviewees' descriptions of their lives. These stages refer to a CYWr's career not their biological age and are now named beginning, early, middle and late. While identifiable inner and outer impacts cluster within each stage the parameters of each stage are porous, as influences and impacts flow between them. Movement to the next stage can be gradual or sudden but does not occur after a fixed period nor does it automatically proceed after a promotion or acquisition of a new job title but requires transitioning through a growth spiral. These stages, explored in Chapter 4:5, are therefore best identified as seasons, reflecting organic and relational processes of growth, nurture and maturity. Each season is rooted within the previous one and consists of sub-seasons with intertwining outer and inner journeys; the outer of skills, roles, tasks and relationships and the inner of CYW beliefs, values, Christian faith and character.

#### *4:3:1 Beginning Season*

This season provides a secure base where a Christian faith is initiated, the world of CYW is experienced as good and people have opportunities to develop and share basic youthwork skills. Within this season the 'securing' sub-season mostly occurred as a teenager, as one interviewee described, "I had a Christian upbringing, I went to church, I was encouraged."<sup>148</sup> However,

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<sup>148</sup> E, GD 1.

another interviewee who became a Christian in his late 30's and trained aged 40 described a similar process in leading Scouts as "God laying foundations for the future that He knows all about. I haven't a scooby."<sup>149</sup> This inner journey is about feeling secure and at home in the CYW world, with a fledgling faith in God being nurtured through clear guidance from significant leaders. The outer journey is seen more clearly in the second sub-season of 'starting'. Participating in CYW continues as the individual is given limited experiences of leadership, while they develop as a reliable and enthusiastic member of a church or youth project which refutes the idea that growth only develops around a person in the next three seasons. Instead, appropriate growth can be expected and nurtured in each season.

All interviewees recognised this beginning season but most comments about starting their careers were about the early season. This gap is significant as, I suggest, it shows CYWr's are not encouraged to see their own personal development as valuable. There is a learned utilitarian identity where what the CYWr does is more important than who they are as, in the interviewees' understanding, their career started with training or their first job. I propose this corresponds to a flawed functional image imposed on CYWr's which is supported by understanding learning as something given to them by others. This cuts them off from the practical wisdom and self-confidence available within their own experiences to sustain themselves. The interviewees' lack of insight into this season also contributes to their admission that they do not fully understand how to start developing young leaders.

#### *4:3:2 Early Season*

In the early season the individual develops leadership experience amongst their peers in a familiar place, either in their own church or part of a larger CYW tribe but they also begin exploring the wider world of CYW and questioning the certainties of the beginning season.

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<sup>149</sup> H, GD 1.

The 'playing with pals' sub-season consists of an outer journey where they are increasingly dependable and commit to the CYW practices and faith of their Christian tribe. The linked inner journey flows from the securities of the beginning season, as one interviewee looked back at this stage and wryly observed, "When I hit 18, 19, 20 I could teach anybody anything because I knew all the answers."<sup>150</sup> Their growth is in impacting other young people around them by using a more informed CYW practice and a stronger faith, modelled to them by their leaders and Christian community. The 'skilling and training' sub-season enables growth in people by widening their youth-work skills and giving more responsibilities, often in a different context but still with clear supervision and support. A key development is identification of leadership potential leading to training with a CYW agency or college in a wider network where "Other folks had gone ahead"<sup>151</sup> providing a deeper understanding of Christian faith, youthwork practice and theory. Experiencing wider patterns of CYW and questioning the certainties of the beginning season marks this growth. "If you're willing to have those conversations and to step out .....discomfort was a big part of it."<sup>152</sup> This process of constructive deconstruction is challenging for the individual and for their employing church or project as it requires a varying proportion of control between the institution and the learner which eventually strengthens the practice of both. As leadership is increasingly identified and resourced the individual can move towards the 'Middle' season.

#### 4:3:3 *Middle Season*

Drawing on the wider range of experiences, skills and maturity gained in their early season the interviewees become employed workers and made significant impacts in their 'mark-making' sub-season. They challenged established practice and beliefs, before creating their own approaches and then committing to a specific place, role, faith in God and set of youth-work practices. This became the 'intertwined commitment' sub-season if their church or employer responded positively, committing to supporting them and

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<sup>150</sup> A, GD 4.

<sup>151</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid

their work which enables further growth. While there was little difference in the programmes run by interviewees through the different seasons, the ‘mark-making’ sub-season sees significant impacts enabled by the worker, who is now wiser in choosing best practice, more skilled in applying that practice and has stronger convictions in creating new approaches. One interviewee described how young people “Invited me to be part of their lives”<sup>153</sup> leading to a deepening CYW shown as, “Growing people in terms of their faith journey ... helping people figure out their identities and who God's made them and where their giftings are.”<sup>154</sup> The worker moved increasingly from being guided by others to guiding others, firstly by identifying opportunities and then initiating organisational change by shaping volunteers, colleagues and leaders.

Growth can now become repeated and natural not just an isolated development based on a charismatic individual or significant event, referred to by one interviewee as a “Fruit tree harvest.”<sup>155</sup> He continued that his experience affirmed how it “Might take a while to start but once .... it's embedded well and it's built, it will bear its fruit in season every year because the infrastructure is in place.”<sup>156</sup> These growing impacts must not mask the cost to those involved, as one interviewee insisted, “You can't live off the rocket fuel of being a pantomime horse forever...you have to have some depth to you”<sup>157</sup> which for him was rooted in a wrestling faith in God. What was being revealed here was the need for a commitment to exercise wisdom where external growth must be buttressed by internal growth. This buttressing is rooted in a double awareness of life within and around the CYWr, as one interviewee noted “Until you invite it, you won't see it until you want to see.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> A, Interview.

<sup>154</sup> B, Interview.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid

<sup>156</sup> Ibid

<sup>157</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>158</sup> A, GD 4.

The second sub-season of intertwined commitment is illustrated by one interviewee when he and his wife and family moved into the community after being promoted from a part-time to a full-time role with wider responsibilities, a larger team and an increased salary. He observed “That became the real period of enabling growth because my life became intertwined with the church very quickly.”<sup>159</sup> A mutual agreement with the church leadership on CYW methods followed, based on trust in the worker. To sustain CYWs in this season it is important to recognise that these significant outer growths are often accompanied by parallel inner struggles marked by loss, bereavements or declining physical energy which were significant for every interviewee. Another interviewee’s account of remaining committed to CYW after family breakdowns and leaving a difficult job revealed the reality and intensity of these internal journeys as she describes how “The transition (came) with a bit of darkness to come out with a bit of light.”<sup>160</sup> This involved honest dialogue with God and a mentor and, before settling into her new role, affirming the conflicting emotions of intertwined commitment as she stated, “I’m back here doing it and I still love it and it’s still hard.”<sup>161</sup> While outer and inner journeys become richer and more costly the middle season prepares CYWs to mature into the ‘Later’ season. It does so by securing them in well-resourced contexts where their growing wisdom, compassion and skills can grow CYW by enabling others.

#### *4:3:4 Later Season*

In the later season the worker may still fulfil the mark-making role of the middle season, but their impact expands into a wider enabling role. The ‘enabling locally’ sub-season refers to growth enabled within their church or project while ‘enabling beyond’ sub-season refers to equipping beyond their local situation into wider contexts either while still rooted in a local role or employed in a regional role. This equipping critically includes influencing and contributing to decision-making, where CYWs can become leaders of

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<sup>159</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>160</sup> D, GD 1.

<sup>161</sup> D, Interview.

churches or projects, alongside or in place of clergy who often dominate leadership in these sectors.

The ‘enabling locally’ role critiques the image of a CYWr who leads every activity, described by one interviewee as requiring “Enough depth of discipleship in the team that we had enough people who could also disciple so that not all the work fell on me.”<sup>162</sup> There is a clear commitment to CYW as an evolving communal process, as another interviewee emphasised, “It’s what you’ve grown together as a community of people”<sup>163</sup> which matured into trusted delegation. To enact these intentions interviewees required access to influence church leadership decisions which countered the concept that CYWrs should only focus on direct work with young people. However, it was clear that a single intervention was not sufficient as sustainable development in CYW requires the CYWr “Looking to repeat the process.”<sup>164</sup> As emphasised in the middle season, outer growth in this season was only possible when buttressed by inner growth. The value of reflective practice to develop this inner growth was shown by one interviewee who insightfully opened up what his inner journey looked like. He emphasised how his work role and personal identity were constantly in flux, which required a constant “Figuring out”<sup>165</sup> of changing understandings of his faith and tasks. This required appreciation and insight of this change so that he could give to others the trust and responsibility that had helped him grow. Awareness of God was also valued, defined by him as “Keeping my eyes open to where God might be”<sup>166</sup> so that God could develop his practice.

While all interviewees affirmed this commitment that “Maybe we do all come to this stage where we want to share this supposed wisdom,”<sup>167</sup> I suggest that the limited research material for this season shows that while several

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<sup>162</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>163</sup> E, GD 3.

<sup>164</sup> A, Interview.

<sup>165</sup> B, Interview.

<sup>166</sup> A, Interview.

<sup>167</sup> H, GD 1.

interviewees had reached the outer journey of enabling, they had not been helped to reflect on their inner journey and then share that hard-earned wisdom. Only two interviewees spoke at length of enabling beyond their local context while rooted in it but even these limited examples reinforce the impact of maturing a CYWr's career to this point.

Chinwag was a popular training event in a small town which sustained CYWr's by integrating rest and reflection away from their local work with conversations and relationship building activities. Supported by the Rank Foundation it worked with secular and Christian youth projects and churches to resource youth work across Scotland. One interviewee was a CYWr in the town and he helped organise Chinwag to provide youth workers with "A safe space, a trusted space, an experienced space."<sup>168</sup> as he believed it was "Crucial ...for every worker to have someone or some folk alongside who ...get it ....so that a younger less experienced worker does not at any point feel alone."<sup>169</sup> Drawing on his long CYW experience and his own personal life he emphasised that this was for "Crisis situations and even when stuff's going really well ...to have somebody to celebrate about that with."<sup>170</sup>

Another interviewee built up a Christian youth ministry in a local church. Working through the 'mark-making' and 'enabling within' sub-seasons they had secured a "Basis for supporting any growth that might happen.... the depth of relationship and infrastructure we needed to be able to support any growth that might have happened."<sup>171</sup> Growth was established through church and community connections and the worker recognised that growth required dialogue with partner Christian agencies who had valuable insights and resources. Therefore, they worked with Young Life and Reign College as organisations that fitted the church's values, combining academic training and discipleship development using placement-based learning. This led to local volunteers studying youth ministry, including one who was now a staff

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<sup>168</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> B, GD 3.

member. From these partnerships the church now resourced youth ministry across neighbouring churches, sending out students to churches “Making a network across (the presbytery) ...in terms of youth ministry setup and training.”<sup>172</sup> This example shows the benefit of church leadership and CYWr’s learning and working together.

As the outer journey expands so the inner journey must deepen. The Chinwag enabler now works as a Christian in secular youth work projects which has matured him, as he explains “It’s challenging me and it’s growing me in ways that ...will benefit others....it’s not all about me.”<sup>173</sup> He has a trusting relationship with God, expressed as, “If God said to me tomorrow ‘You’re moving’ I’d have a wrestle with Him. But ....experience tells me the plan’s right, His plan’s right, I’m comfortable”<sup>174</sup> as the certainty of his inner journey is rooted in an openness to moving on, and a self-understanding of “Being nomads in transition.”<sup>175</sup> He also values Christian community, which provides “Growth through those relationships ...and conversations about belief and faith and all different perspectives”<sup>176</sup> while validating “‘Jesus at the centre’ ....you know that that would be the commonality in those in those relationships.”<sup>177</sup>

Gaining significant experience, skills and knowledge in a long career however does not always equate with a settled inner journey. One interviewee’s remaining was rooted in denying any sense of arrival in her theology by insisting “I’m still working on that.”<sup>178</sup> and arising from this was her lively critique of the Church, as she insisted “We’ve spent so long arguing about who is allowed in and who’s not allowed in that we’ve lost the pursuit of love,”<sup>179</sup> a critique which fuels her developing CYW practice.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> H, GD 5.

<sup>174</sup> H, GD 1.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> H, GD 1.

<sup>177</sup> H, GD 5.

<sup>178</sup> E, Interview.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

To close this section, while I use the language of seasons it is tempting to use terms that are more person-centred. Novice, apprentice, journeyman and master craftsman describe a progression I recognise in myself and other CYWrS and it sits well with a long development, where skills mature slowly in partnership with others in the same field. Similarly, I see similar merit in the terms I discussed in a conversation around spiritual formation with Scott Brennan on March 1, 2023. He describes stage 1 as the student (roughly till 25) where learning begins, stage 2 the householder (roughly 25-48) when career, property and relationships are established, stage 3 as the mentor (roughly 48-72) which passes on experience and wisdom and investing in the next generation. The final stage is the guru (roughly 72 to end of life) when a person renounces worldly cares and focuses on their spiritual connection.

However, I resist using these or similar labels as they can too easily contribute to a static, hierarchical and individualistic system, where ‘senior’ CYWrS teach ‘junior’ CYWrS and progression is tagged to biological age. This contrasts to the view supported by the interviewees that sustaining development is much more communal, where CYWrS need “To be vulnerable....in a cyclical learning thing where it's not just the paduan sitting at the feet of the master, it's ‘Let's journey together.’”<sup>180</sup>

#### **4:4 Each season has barriers and bridges to growth.**

##### *4:4:1 Beginning: bridges and barriers*

Interviewees agreed that the most significant barrier in this season was the lack of opportunity for, and investment in, young people, as the sources that nourished them were disappearing, especially “The missions, the camps....that playful experimental space doesn't exist for young people.”<sup>181</sup> Even if these experiences did exist, one questioned the quality of current CYW, asking “Our future leaders, how well are they receiving before they

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<sup>180</sup> A, GD 4.

<sup>181</sup> F, GD 1.

start giving?”<sup>182</sup> Located within increasingly limited and isolated CYW bases, many young people are also not exposed to the thought-provoking connections into other CYW tribes. The high number of short-term job contracts in CYW hindered this by preventing long-term relationships developing with young people and with other CYWs. Therefore, it was common for a closed loop to develop in this season where ill-advised churches and inexperienced CYWs did not know how to develop effective CYW. All interviewees affirmed that solutions should be long-term and relational, so young people could experience, “Being seen, being moulded, being mentored ....informally.”<sup>183</sup> I emphasise that this requires choosing effective CYW practices which include intentional leadership development, “Because ....when you start to take on that responsibility, the natural consequence is you grow”<sup>184</sup> which required “Good, clear structures and opportunities for young people so they do not fall off a cliff when they reach 56”<sup>185</sup>

#### 4:4:2 *Early: bridges and barriers*

While CYW agencies provide training in Scotland for interns and volunteers the relatively small under-graduate pathway “To feed them into”<sup>186</sup> was identified as a barrier by all interviewees, although this may be due to seven out of the eight interviewees having degrees covering a range of youth-work, community work and theology courses. They valued these courses, summed up by one who stated that his education had “Changed my attitude to everything.”<sup>187</sup> Questioning the certainties of acquired CYW information in the beginning season became a path to practical insights as, “We started to put it back together again in a biblical context. An amazing process and painful and awkward.”<sup>188</sup> As an experienced youth-worker he reflected on this experience and discussed how it could be adapted for future training. He described that the format should be, “Not quite a pic’n’mix approach to

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<sup>182</sup> A, GD 2.

<sup>183</sup> E, GD 1.

<sup>184</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>185</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>186</sup> D, GD 3.

<sup>187</sup> H, GD 5.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

training, but it could be tailored ...certain aspects could be standard things that everybody did and then other things would vary.”<sup>189</sup> His comments capture a CYW career as a sense-making journey to be nurtured, uniting the inherited truths of CYW practice, the Christian faith with the emerging insights of fledgling CYWrS.

In employment, the imbalance in salaries, terms and conditions with jobs similar to CYWrS was emphasised by one interviewee, commenting that school leavers who wanted to work with young people would receive higher salaries in social work and teaching. There was also broad recognition that support for workers in their first post was inconsistent and they were often overwhelmed by unrealistic job descriptions, as one interviewee admitted about being a CYWr, “I’m not entirely sure it’s something that I would be an advocate for because it is so difficult having to fight for so many things.”<sup>190</sup> I am convinced that intentional leadership development is critical in maintaining the flow through seasons, but it is not a skill or approach all CYWrS own, as one interviewee confessed “I don’t know that I’m very good at identifying the youth leaders to begin with.”<sup>191</sup> Similarly, developing young leaders can challenge a CYWrS’ self-esteem, as one interviewee asked, “How willing are we to abdicate responsibility or to move out of the way or almost make yourself obsolete for the promotion of others?”<sup>192</sup>

There are clear bridges over these barriers and a common approach consists of having the structures that people can step into and regularly allowing people “To step up into places of responsibility to see if it’s for them”<sup>193</sup> which resulted from an emotional willingness “To call out the gold in you”<sup>194</sup> based on having the insight and skill to “See something that they see that not even you do”<sup>195</sup> This included a commitment to try and fail, with failure being

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> A, GD 4.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

experienced as an opportunity for learning and growth especially in the communal element of ‘playing with pals.’

Prioritising the identification of character before skills was emphasised, as one interviewee constantly asked his church, “How do we really develop the character of the people that we see leadership gifting in and who want to move forward?”<sup>196</sup> This approach to developing staff from volunteers was valued by many, as one interviewee described, “Really good appointments have been the people that have ....come up through an organization into an employed role ...within an organization that has invested in those people.”<sup>ii</sup> This was not favouritism but arose out of a broad commitment to developing volunteers and young people. Developing this approach to younger workers and volunteers marked a CYWr transitioning from the middle to later season but this required support for their own developing role-identity and a recalibration of what success meant for them and their employers.

#### *4:4:3 Middle: bridges and barriers*

All the interviewees blamed low pay as “Churches don’t really want to pay properly for quality work”<sup>197</sup> which could not support them financially and they described CYW as an under-valued profession as “Nobody else sees that it’s valid.”<sup>198</sup> “Overlapping or sometimes stacked labels”<sup>199</sup> led to different expectations that were difficult to work out and manage while unrealistic expectations and poor support from their employers contributed to workers leaving and not developing. Inadequate under-graduate training also contributed as, “A lot of the skills that I needed going into youth ministry were not covered in the degree.”<sup>200</sup> This contributed to choosing ineffective models of CYW practice that did not meet the requirements of their employer or the needs of young people, which were exacerbated by moving into and out of covid lockdowns. Despite their long experience many CYWrS lacked an

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> G, GD 5.

<sup>198</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>199</sup> F, Interview.

<sup>200</sup> B, GD 3.

understanding of how to start up new CYW and not simply maintain what exists, so creating and sustaining CYW in lockdowns caused stress and discouragement.

Similarly, exclusion from control and the absence of promotion pathways frustrated many interviewees, as one interviewee recounted hearing this comment about his participation in a meeting about the direction of his church, “Why is he doing this? He’s just the youth worker.”<sup>201</sup> Clashes with church leadership over conflicting expectations was a recurring theme, echoing the work of Kenyon (2005) who explored the tensions around professional National Occupational Standards in Youth Work in England and unclear or opposed church approaches. The absence of pastoral care affected many workers, sharpening my concern of how well CYWrs receive the covenantal love that they are expected to share with young people. In a recent mentoring conversation, another CYWr stated sadly that “We grow slowly but are expected to act quickly” which reinforces my contention that as inner and outer journeys travel at a different pace, having someone who understands and can enable both is critical.

Many CYWr’s careers end at this season, due to unresolved personal or professional conflict, or the slow accumulation of burdens leading to burnout. The lack of supported transition into the later season was caused by the lack of role-models or support to guide them and access not being granted to leadership. Some are promoted to a regional role and accept these wider responsibilities along with increased pay, yet this is not always helpful as it is often a very different role from what they have worked in previous years and have not been prepared for. I also suggest that simply being employed in a regional role does not guarantee outer impact if their inner life has not progressed through the previous seasons. I contend that the lack of CYWrs maturing into the later season is a critical flaw in sustaining CYWrs. Firstly, role models who can inspire CYWrs in previous seasons by showing that

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<sup>201</sup> C, Interview.

progression is possible are lost and, secondly, their knowledge and skills to guide churches, youth projects and CYWrs disappear.

### *Bridges*

The most consistent response for remaining in this season was growing with others, which required “A place of sending, sanctuary, supporting”<sup>202</sup> in a broad-based support “That might not just be other youth workers, that might be family, that might be other friends, that may be church that may be ...very fluid.”<sup>203</sup> Crises were accepted as integral to a CYWr’s experience but people who “Teach you how to bounce”<sup>204</sup> would help them “To live through it, and that’s where the resilience comes from.”<sup>205</sup> Managing the changes in personal and professional life was increasingly relevant, “To articulate and communicate that well”<sup>206</sup> so that one interviewee could “Bring boundaries into a situation where they haven’t previously existed.”<sup>207</sup>

Again, pastoral care and faith development were agreed as central, for “If you can’t learn to love yourself, you’re not going to last, and I think faith maturity is massive in that.”<sup>208</sup> This emphasis among the interviewees in promoting a positive experience rejects the common view that burnout is inevitable and might even be a badge of honour. Responding to the issue of ‘promotion’ to regional roles highlights the importance of discerning God’s guidance. This must be practiced regularly over the years by the church or employer and the CYWr to assist in important decisions. The question of whether all CYWrs should progress to this later season is important but lies beyond the scope of this thesis but I would argue that there should be ways to promote CYWrs within their local context, to reflect their increased skills and abilities.

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<sup>202</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> A, GD 4.

<sup>205</sup> H, GD 5.

<sup>206</sup> B, GD 3.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.4:4 Late

##### *Barriers*

Growing new leaders was challenging for interviewees yet I contend that the critical absence of these beginning experiences is due to the lack of CYWr's maturing from the middle into this later season. This takes time and reflection, reinforcing the need for long-term intertwined commitment as interviewees recognised that, "To take people through the next generation it's actually a lot of work."<sup>209</sup> requiring specialist knowledge and support as "The amount of infrastructure that's needed, it's huge ...to do it safely, to do it properly"<sup>210</sup> and was often missing. These experienced CYWr's lacked guidance and personal experience of mentoring others, sadly summed up in this comment, "I'm just wondering how you do that? How do you set the framework for younger newer workers to be able to do that self-discovery of 'Who am I?' and therefore have an inner confidence and the resilience?"<sup>211</sup> The absence of an intentional framework to support and guide is a critical flaw.

##### *Bridges*

Understanding that developing young people "Is just a pain sometimes and it's just not talked about"<sup>212</sup> means caring for the person who is developing young people rather than purely developing the performance of a CYWr. As a line-manager of staff and volunteers, one interviewee noted that "We bring our whole selves to our job and that at times can just weigh really heavy on people."<sup>213</sup> Another highlighted the personal cost, stating "I don't think anybody will ever become an experienced youth worker just with great stuff"<sup>214</sup> and support through transitions was affirmed as transitions became "More significant to me the older I've got."<sup>215</sup> Even for workers in the late season this remained a life-sharing process as "Every Paul needs a Timothy,

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<sup>209</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>210</sup> F, GD 1.

<sup>211</sup> H, GD 1.

<sup>212</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>213</sup> E, GD 3.

<sup>214</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>215</sup> E, GD 1.

Moses needed Aaron ”<sup>216</sup> that required a community, as one interviewee emphasised “What helps me now as a worker in staying in the game...is having people like people like you (*hand signal including all the interviewees*)”<sup>217</sup> in “A safe space, a trusted space, an experienced space.”<sup>218</sup> All affirmed that appointing a worker must not be the conclusion as effective CYW required “Growing into the idea of building a team,”<sup>219</sup> “A team that wants to stay”<sup>220</sup> and this continued into access to the control that shaped their church or project, described as “Opening up that table at the top of an organization.”<sup>221</sup> Within this dialogue churches “Need to go through an education process before they’re allowed to employ anybody.”<sup>222</sup>

#### 4:5 Growth Spirals

My own experience and the interviewees’ comments show that progressing into new seasons is possible. However, these progressions do not naturally occur after a set time-period or by gaining a new job title, so progressions are inconsistent as opportunities to progress are either not provided, understood, recognised or enabled. I contend that a growth-spiral between seasons is required to enable this.

A growth spiral is a created concept, which I first glimpsed in reviewing my own progressions and was given more weight by listening to the interviewees’ similar experiences. I propose that it is a process allowing progression from one season to the next through four movements of receiving, breaking, creating and settling. These movements apply both to the inner journeys of faith, values and beliefs and the outer journeys of skills and practice. In the receiving movement the individual is nurtured and encouraged, where they enjoy a sense of security and conviction. The breaking movement follows as the individual is challenged or even broken as the certainties of the receiving

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<sup>216</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>217</sup> E, GD 3.

<sup>218</sup> H, Interview.

<sup>219</sup> H, GD 5.

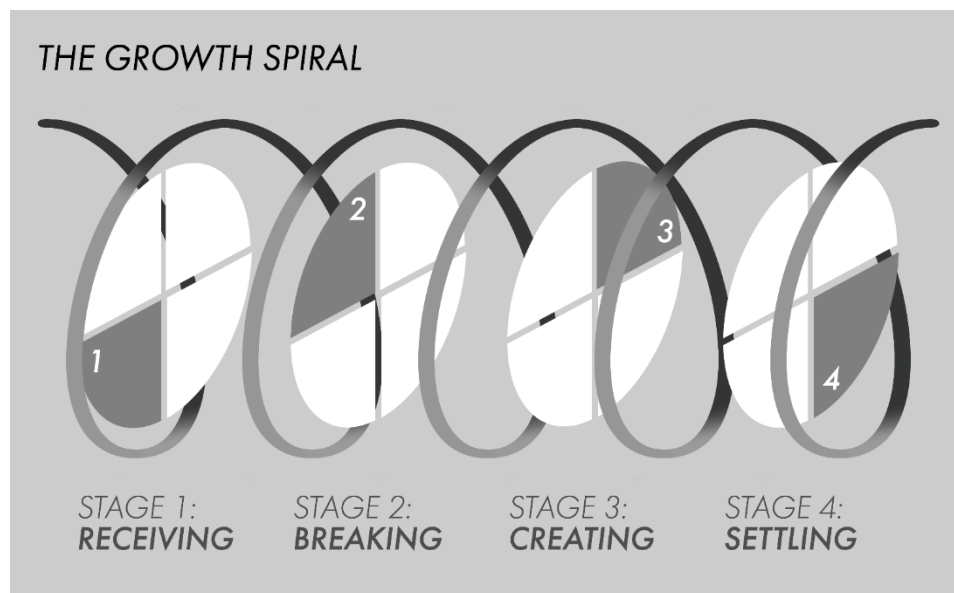
<sup>220</sup> G, GD 5.

<sup>221</sup> A, GD 4.

<sup>222</sup> H, GD 5.

movement are dismantled, either by positively encountering new ideas or enduring difficult experiences and relationships which lead to despair and confusion. Within the creating movement, the individual works through the conflicts that have arisen by losing the certainties of the receiving movement and enduring the challenges of the breaking movements. Successfully completing this movement is marked by the creation of beliefs, concepts or practices which might be uncovered within existing sources or be completely new innovations. In the settling movement, these new creations are integrated into a settled practice which moves the individual forward into a new season.

**Diagram 2 Growth Spiral**



As an example of a growth spiral, one interviewee's comments illustrate how she moved from her early into middle season. The spiral began when as a teenager she received concepts of youth work that were "About being fun and entertaining."<sup>223</sup> These certainties were challenged in a breaking movement through her CYW training, as she learned "No, it's about learning informal education"<sup>224</sup> which was based on empowering young people. This was followed in a creating movement as she had, "To rethink and re-

<sup>223</sup> E, GD 1.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

understand my whole mode of doing this youth-work thing so it's not the entertainer"<sup>225</sup> and she focussed on the question, "How do you empower other people?"<sup>226</sup> The settling stage followed as she started her first job firmly committed to informal education and enabling volunteers and staff.

My contention is that what she moved through instinctively should be an explicit pattern to help all CYWrS develop and grow between seasons. This complements the work done enabling growth within seasons as failure to do so leads either to blocked or rushed progressions. In a blocked progression, frustration or boredom increase as maturing wisdom and skills in one season are not allowed to flourish into the next season, which can seem tantalisingly close. The blockage is caused by an inability to delegate or poor development pathways. Conversely, in a rushed progression, a CYWr is overwhelmed or burned out when they are pushed too early into the next season, which is caused by a lack of suitable candidates for promotion or an over-estimation of the CYWrS abilities by themselves, their leaders or employers.

Complicating this, most progressions were staggered and the simplicity of the example above should not obscure the reality that CYWrS' inner and outer journeys are complex, as one interviewee noted, "You might grow in skills in this area, but actually you still feel like you're at stage one here."<sup>227</sup> This complexity is rooted in a context of constant change, which is integral to being a CYWr, a young person and to the practices of CYW itself. "There's a progression to all this as a person"<sup>228</sup> one interviewee insisted, capturing the sense that a CYWr was constantly developing, of "Rebuilding yourself over a short period of time"<sup>229</sup> in a view which echoes the creation of a role-identity.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> E, GD 3.

<sup>228</sup> C, GD 5.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

These personal changes occurred alongside young people who themselves were “Careering through... potentially one of the most emotionally difficult changes of their lives.”<sup>230</sup> In response all interviewees affirmed they worked “In communities that are needing to adapt to those changes”<sup>231</sup> and that CYW practice “Is always an evolving thing.”<sup>232</sup> While this constant evolution of practice drove a need to learn the honest assessment of one interviewee “That doesn't mean it's a comfortable thing”<sup>233</sup> was well supported. Indeed, even after a twenty-year long career, one interviewee affirmed, “I feel that I'm still in that transition. I don't think I've landed.”<sup>234</sup> Within this constant ebb and flow, navigating unrecognised growth spirals enabled the interviewees to avoid being stuck but to mature into a new season of growth without drifting in struggles, questions and uncertainties.

One CYWr instinctively or subconsciously navigating a growth spiral, without knowing they have done so, does not negate my argument that enabling a growth spiral takes time and insightful guidance, recognising the view of one interviewee that, “The tipping point was a really slow one and not one that I saw because it didn't happen in a linear way.”<sup>235</sup> Structural enabling occurs when the CYWr remains within one Christian tribe or denomination, where there are established rhythms of reflection and pathways for progression. Occasional enabling is a situational response when a CYWr responds to a specific situation by searching out limited guidance or advice. Crisis enabling is a fire-fighting response when a CYWr is overwhelmed and at risk, and they either seek support or support is provided. Relational enabling arises out of long-term mutual commitments with a mentor and holistically integrates their inner and outer journeys. I contend that all these enabling responses are significant as they provide the complimentary awareness, insight, resources and accountability required to enable growth.

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<sup>230</sup> F, GD 1.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> G, GD 1.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> E, GD 1.

<sup>235</sup> E, GD 3.

#### 4:6 Summary and link into chapter 5.

In this chapter I have shown that role-identity formation exists, is significant for sustainability and is achieved by integrating inner and outer journeys. I continue that a career in CYW consists of distinct seasons and each season includes inner journeys consisting of values, faith and character and outer journeys consisting of roles, tasks and relationships. I have explained how each season has barriers and bridges to growth and concluded by showing that growth within seasons must be complemented by intentional growth spirals which enable growth within and between seasons. I conclude that role-identity formation in their inner and outer journeys allows CYWrS to be sustained through the four seasons of their career.

As the processes of moving through the seasons is usually haphazard, I assert in Chapter 6 that the four seasons approach needs to be supported by a cohesive way-of-being or rule of life. Therefore, in Chapter 5 I will propose ‘The way of the desert and the city’ as a theologically coherent paradigm that will support its’ application as a way-of-being to sustain CYWrS in Chapter 6, supporting my view that theological reflection is “A critical, interrogative enquiry into the process of relating the resources of faith to the issues of life.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Graham, Walton and Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, page 6.

## Chapter 5                      Theological Reflection

### 5:1 Introduction

Reflecting theologically on the findings of Chapter 4 is consistent with the flow of practical theology I referred to in Chapter 3, as “Exploring the self, exploring the community, testing theological assertions, testing ecclesial assertions, generating new theological perspectives or correcting problems.”<sup>237</sup> New theological perspectives will now be generated as I introduce my insight that falsely understanding CYW and CYWrS as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated critically undermines their sustenance and contributes to the inconsistent development of CYWrS in Scotland. In this chapter I will challenge these misunderstandings by creating conversations between them and the findings of Chapter 4, resulting in four themes to underpin the sustaining of CYWrS. These conversations will be prefaced by my articulation of a Trinitarian-shaped theology around involvement and separation. Finally, I will introduce a new paradigm of ‘The way of the desert and the city’ to link this theological reflection into the applications to sustain CYWrS presented in Chapter 6.

### 5:2 Inconsistent development of CYWrS is based on a false understanding of CYW

My position that sustaining CYWrS is undermined by misunderstanding CYW and CYWrS as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated has developed through my own experience and the research events described in Chapter 4. When misunderstood as short-term, CYW is seen as something that can be achieved in short bursts of activity; a few hours a week, over months or at most a few years and there is no understanding that to grow, CYW requires many hours per week, consistently through the year and over decades. The importance of this lengthy process also undermines the fixed misunderstanding where CYW is purely understood as the application of a fixed Christian message locked into Christian or Church traditions using fixed methods which are squeezed into established and unchallenged CYW

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<sup>237</sup> Ward, *Introducing practical theology*, page 155.

traditions. In this misunderstanding there is little, or no, recognition given to either the continued revelation of God in Christ within the world or to new methods of CYW, often accessed through reflective practice. The functional mistake leads to CYW being focussed on events and programmes to achieve goals that match the measurable values of the church or organisation. There is minimal appreciation here of CYW as a relational process, where transformation is nurtured within long-term and committed relationships in deep not superficial Christian communities. Finally, in the isolated misunderstanding CYW is placed, or allows itself to be placed, on the periphery of Church life. Here there is little recognition of the need for inter-generational youth work where young people and adults mutually interact in all aspects of a Christian community or church.

These misunderstandings create damaging consequences as CYWrS are then employed in roles which are also short-term, fixed, functional and isolated. While working in this way can achieve immediate effects, it rarely achieves the significant impacts in the outer and inner lives of CYWrS described in Chapter 1. When these misunderstandings shape both CYW and CYWrS, I will outline in Section 5:4 how they consequently damage the sustaining of CYWrS. These misunderstandings must therefore be corrected if CYWrS are to be sustained, and I will show in the four conversations how this is to be approached. I propose that this corrective work is rooted in a theological exploration of involvement and separation.

### **5:3 Theology of involvement and separation**

In chapter 3 I affirmed my research approach as “Dialogic mutual critical correlation.”<sup>238</sup> This theological exploration enables that approach by providing a bridge between the findings of Chapter 4 and the applications of Chapter 6, ensuring that the applications will then be theologically secure and therefore potentially useful to national and local churches and academic institutions. What I am exploring began as an extended growth spiral in my

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<sup>238</sup> Colledge, *‘Grounding Theology in Experience’* page iv.

own experience, but the main impetus for focussing on these themes lies in recognising the tensions of similar experiences of involvement and separation in the interviewees' experiences described in Chapter 4. In my own career the increasing absence of God's transforming presence in my CYW practice did not connect with the fleeting glimpses of God in my inner life and neither seemed to connect with what I heard taught in church around God's active involvement. Defining my faith negatively as a faith without miracles, I struggled to feel sustained. Despite this struggle, in my outer life I persevered and remained in demanding roles, slowly learning to trust my instincts, to speak out and shape CYW practice that often thrived around me in young people, volunteers, staff, churches and communities. In my inner life I felt I was being re-formed, consistent with who I had been but liberated from some traditions and beliefs while becoming rooted at the same time into older Christian traditions. In my self-reflection, involvement and separation became important themes to help me describe and make sense of my career. For example, I committed to being involved in the lives of young people, staff and volunteers by creating Christian communities for them where they could share their lives, yet I often felt separate from the established Church. I also fleetingly sensed the involvement of the guiding Spirit of God in my decision-making but usually sensed that God was separate from my work.

Working through a process of reflection I held together these conflicting experiences of God's absence and presence, learning to accept both as true even if they were also painful and contradictory. I can now contend that in withdrawing from my experience God was making space for me to grow, by trusting me, calling me to trust in return before creating growth in me and through me. I therefore argue that enabling CYWr's to understand and engage with this space-making God, through their experiences of involvement and separation, is critical in sustaining them.

This claim requires a dual engagement, firstly, in an assurance of God's involvement through immanence or incarnation in transforming experiences

of divine love, mercy, forgiveness, judgement or guidance. Secondly, it affirms experiencing the separateness of God through transcendence or crisis. In this relational absence the opportunity to despair must be affirmed before one can grow in trust and faith in God, discovering the truth that God trusts people to live out their gifts and calling. This challenging approach to being sustained centres on bringing a CYWr's holistic life into an encounter with the full nature of God. Here I define God's nature as a creator beyond the initial creation of the world into a continued presence, through Christ as the God-incarnate redeemer and saviour who is mediated to humanity through the Spirit, a relationship which is offered within Scripture and the worship, fellowship and sacraments of the Church. Reflecting the relational emphasis of this thesis I also affirm that this seeking and connecting God is involved in sacramental relationships with humanity beyond the Church where every relationship or experience, including all aspects a CYWr's inner and outer journeys, can become a place to encounter God.

Complementing this divine involvement is a separateness where God is experienced as distinct or different to the created order. Here God's separateness may be encountered as inspirational holiness where divine love, mercy or justice raise expectations of what the human experience can be, expanding a CYWr's personal life and professional practice. However, God's holiness can also be encountered as mystically bewildering through the dancing interplay of divine absence and presence in prayer, worship or spiritual formation which reinforces the distant otherness of God. Remaining consistent to my Christian hope, I place Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the centrality of Jesus Christ at the core of this complexity as he states that the "Christian faith is not an idea, it is, at its core, first and finally, a person"<sup>239</sup> However, my experience of being sustained has often been enriched and challenged by human relationships and Christian community, so I extend the theological foundations of involvement and separation beyond Bonhoeffer's Christological affirmation into a commitment that God is most fully known as a relationship, as a Trinity.

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<sup>239</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 182.

Claiming that God-as-Trinity is a series of relationships between Father, Son and Spirit I assert that the internal nature of God is an eternal movement of connection and separation. This theology of involvement and separation therefore draws on a God whose identity is an on-going flow of persons-in-relationships, where both 'person' and 'relationships' are indistinguishable as there is no person without a connection to another and no values that are fully realised apart from relationship to another. These connections continue in the external nature of God-as-Trinity, as God relates to humanity through the work of the Father creating the world, the redeeming work of the Son and the sustaining work of the Spirit. In all these connections there are potential stretches of separation caused by sin, suffering or misunderstanding.

In this thesis I have committed to experiential, relational and story-based approaches to sense-making and understanding by using group work and interviews, and in exploring and retelling my own story. In order to keep this theological exploration consistent with that approach I now use the synoptic gospels' accounts of Jesus' baptism as a lens to examine the dynamics of a Trinitarian-shaped understanding of God. Here Jesus was sustained and guided through the challenges of his mission in the world in relation to his Father, but in the gospels these struggles were not reduced to conceptual language. Instead, they were enfolded in an experience located amongst crowds of people around the Jordan River, centring on a relationship with John the Baptist. The baptism event expressed the relationships between the blessing Father and the blessed Son, the sending Spirit and the sent Son which in turn became a re-told story eventually canonised into Scripture.

I therefore claim that human experience is the place to encounter God, confirming relationships as a conduit for understanding God. I also highlight the subsequent stage of entrusting meaning to stories of relational spaces, divine to human and human to human, which are the creative nexus of my theological approach. This approach is informed by incarnational theology but

rejects any tendency to flatten God's revelation solely to that which is knowable through horizontal human relationships or the physical world. Equally, my commitment to embracing separation draws on a theological exploration of contemplative experiences of the risen and exalted Christ but leans away from any suggestion that God's glory is only revealed apart from the created world in some spiritual realm. Instead, it draws on a unifying concept in Riddell's understanding of God's holiness as both separation and commitment. He argued in *Threshold of the Future* that in the Old Testament God's holiness focussed on distinctive separation while in the New Testament, in the person of Christ, it focussed on distinctive commitment. His stance emphasises God's holiness as commitment, but this theology of involvement and separation rejects any competitive duality within the being of God, as either involved or separate. Instead, it claims that holding both in tension, in belief and practice, becomes the context for experiencing a sustaining encounter with God.

Choosing the Trinity to shape this theology of involvement and separation is neither trivial nor simplistic. I support Sexton's views that "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the way in which it shapes the rest of Christian theology and practice are of enormous significance."<sup>240</sup> I am also aware of his contention that "The doctrine of the Trinity is not understood or appropriated consistently"<sup>241</sup> and am grateful for his helpful overview of the contested views that surrounds it. While acknowledging the risk of over-simplification, the main separation is between classical and social (or relational) classical understandings the Trinity. The classical understanding is anchored in the findings of the Council of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) but Holmes argues that these statements are "A successful attempt to state theologically the things the churches had always tacitly assumed in their worship,"<sup>242</sup> that Jesus and God the Father were worshipped in early Christian worship practice. He wryly continues that, "The church always knew how to speak to God. Yet it took four centuries or so to work out how to speak about God in

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<sup>240</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 207.

<sup>241</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 13.

<sup>242</sup> Holmes, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 31.

ways that were compatible with this.”<sup>243</sup> In making this claim he proposes that in the classical understanding of the Trinity “We cannot reason analytically about divine reality.”<sup>244</sup>

Countering this view is the social or relational understanding where human relations can be inspired by or imitate the relation of the three persons of the Trinity. Sexton describes how Moltmann first used this understanding to “Address fundamental concerns in the world by both identifying God with and inextricably linking God to the world’s affairs”<sup>245</sup> Sexton describes the flow of this thought continuing through writers such as Leonardo Boff, Volf and Grenz, “Building on Barth’s explicit relocation of the doctrine of the Trinity as central to the systematic enterprise.”<sup>246</sup> My understanding that God-in-Trinity is a series of relationships, that the Trinity does not have relationships between the persons, but that the nature of the Father, Son and Spirit are best understood as relationships, allows me to emphasise the importance of connected relationships over individual persons. To defend this, I am drawn to the work of Fiddes (2001). He argues that this social understanding invites and draws humanity in to participate in the relations of the Trinity. I therefore confirm that relationships can only relate, so description (in a classical understanding) of the Trinity is a shrinking misunderstanding and misuse of God’s nature. Sexton shows, however, that there has been a current response from those holding to a classical doctrine of the Trinity, which instead emphasises “divine simplicity.”<sup>247</sup> He highlights the work Barnes and Ayres, Anatolios and Coakley but emphasises the contribution of Molnar and Kirby alongside Vanhoozer and, finally, Holmes noting that this controversy “Has spanned the spectrum of the Christian tradition.”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Holmes, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 33.

<sup>244</sup> Holmes, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 36.

<sup>245</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 14.

<sup>246</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 15.

<sup>247</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 15.

<sup>248</sup> Sexton, *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, page 16.

This theology has robustly arced from my experience into the nature of God, specifically the Trinity as expressed in Jesus' baptism, and now demonstrates its flexibility by rooting back into human experience. It affirms that any sustaining encounter with God always occurs at the pace of deep human or human-divine relationships rather than superficial relationships or credal confessions alone. These are described in Rohr's rite of passage transitions from surface to deeper truths, Slee's pattern of awareness and Peterson's shechem rhythms which all root humanity into a relational connection with themselves, their world and their God. This theological arc is completed in connections where humans make any stand apart from attitudes or activities which are inconsistent with God's values, through evangelistic proclamation or in the prophetic protests of the Simple Way of Shane Claibourne which are consistent with a long tradition of Christian social justice. Equally, the completed arc may create spiritual practices of solitude, silence or contemplation or any practice that breaks from human-centred activity and opens people up to a God beyond human understanding. There is no separation in this theology of prayer from proclamation or protest as all spring from the same engagement with an involved yet separate God. Similarly, a sustaining encounter with God is experienced not in Bonhoeffer's institutional or credal Kirchen but in his Gemeinde, church-as-community, where his settled composure, place-sharing and story-sharing echo Yaconelli's commitment to the honest intimacy of a beloved community. In these encounters the space-making God creates opportunities for the growth of faith, understanding and commitment, summarised in Bonhoeffer's concept of "response-ability"<sup>249</sup> and Rohr's insistence that this is "God's great gamble and our great responsibility."<sup>250</sup>

Driven by this theology of involvement and separation, I will now create conversations with the research findings of Chapter 4, connecting insights from Peterson (1983), Rohr (2004), Root (2014) and Slee (2004) with the flawed understandings of CYW as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated.

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<sup>249</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 108.

<sup>250</sup> Rohr, *Adam's Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 21.

The theological themes arising from these conversations will subsequently shape the practices described in Chapter 6 to sustain CYWrS.

## 5:4 Conversations

### 5:4:1 Not short-term sustenance but four seasons in a CYWrS career

Short-term sustenance develops from the flawed understanding of CYW as short-term and is therefore not prioritised within a CYWr's busy timetable or short-term contract. If support happens at all it is brief and infrequent, focussing only on achieving visible and short-term results. Un-surprisingly in this context a CYWr can become worn out and their career is usually brief and ineffective. In contrast, the relational dynamic of the theology of involvement and separation complements the view that a career can develop over four seasons, where space and time are required to enable growth and change, an approach I now root in Peterson's work on Jeremiah.

Describing Jeremiah as a "A towering life terrifically lived"<sup>251</sup> Peterson's portrayal of his long life offers an insight into what a life sustained across seasons looks like, showing it must be relational and not task driven. His study does not prove that four seasons exist, but it does show how a life develops and changes over time, consistent with CYWrS' four seasons. Similar to the beginning and early seasons, Jeremiah's call in Jeremiah Chapter 1 verse 5 emphasises the gift of being known, consecrated and given through God's initiating firstness. The doubts affirmed in Chapter 1 verse 6 are responded to in Chapter 1 verses 11 to 13, where God's reassurance is given in the boiling pot and almond branch visions. This secures Jeremiah's purposes and faith, but they are then used by God to call him into a longer relationship and a significant role. This equates to wrestling with values and approaches in the early season before the mark-making sub-season of the middle seasons is entered and the CYWr commits to one approach or location. Significantly for Peterson, this development was anchored into a relational

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<sup>251</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 203.

dialogue with God, a relationship that was initiated by the gift of God's disturbing and reassuring presence and Jeremiah's subsequent human effort. Growing from this relationship, Jeremiah's increasing influence parallels the middle and later seasons, which echoes Peterson's insistence that "Our life is for others. That is the way creation works."<sup>252</sup>

However, as Jeremiah's life of theological and political conflict matures Peterson notes the parallel difficulty of sustaining a "Depth-memory awareness"<sup>253</sup> of God's initial call, which echoes the hidden challenges of middle and later seasons. In response he emphasises the concept of 'shechem' to underpin Jeremiah's on-going consistency. 'Shechem' means to rise early in preparation for a journey and for Peterson it was this daily inner persistence, as "He rose to be with his Lord. That (was) the secret of his persevering pilgrimage"<sup>254</sup> In doing so "Jeremiah learned to live persistently toward God" because he had come to know "that God lived persistently toward him."<sup>255</sup> This persistence was anchored in a wrestling relationship with God, especially described in Jeremiah Chapter 15, verses 15 and 17 to 18 where Peterson notes that directing these complaints to God is significant as "The moment these things are set in relationship to God something begins to happen."<sup>256</sup> This response begins with God's call to turn from the complaints and leads to a subsequent promise to restore Jeremiah as a covenantal relationship was restored, as Peterson emphasises that sustaining a calling in these later seasons must result from transforming encounters with God, where "Prayer is not so much the place where we learn something new, but where God confirms anew the faith to which we are committed."<sup>257</sup> Sustained in this way Jeremiah's life matures through contradictions; in his external life he engages in increasingly influential confrontations even if his official role is limited and his internal life deepens, even if that involves doubt. Peterson affirms this lengthy maturing process as one where,

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<sup>252</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 43.

<sup>253</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 44.

<sup>254</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 114.

<sup>255</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 117.

<sup>256</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 103.

<sup>257</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 106.

“Intentions must mature into commitments if we are to become persons with definition, with character, with substance.”<sup>258</sup>

Valuing this insight, I claim that CYWrS will only mature through seasons when both their inner and outer journeys are nurtured, drawing on Peterson’s statement that, “Truth is inward; we must experience within ourselves that which we profess. Truth is social: we must share with others what we profess”<sup>259</sup> However, a recent comment from a CYWr that “We grow slowly but are expected to act quickly” expresses a dichotomy where inner and outer journeys exist within one person at the same time, but growth is not necessarily matched. The inner journey can be a struggle while the outer journey is smooth and vice-versa, but it is in this “Anguished, joyous human pilgrimage”<sup>260</sup> that a CYWr must be sustained. Therefore, I reject any simplistic progression which leans towards promotion and seniority through failure and into success. Drawing on Slee’s critiques of faith development models based on logical and linear progressions I support her view that stages are not finally resolved but may be fluidly revisited. This describes my own and the participants’ experience where growth occurs by “Embracing and assimilating the impasse”<sup>261</sup> but raises the challenge of knowing when and how to intentionally push on and when to pause or revisit issues. This knowledge is partly received as the “Gift of God given to those who will seek God in doubt and fear”<sup>262</sup> and in Slee’s balancing affirmation that “This sense of gift and grace does not cancel out the initiative of the self.”<sup>263</sup>

The Trinity in Jesus’ baptism offers a complementary theological resource to affirm growth across seasons. It does so firstly by showing Jesus’ baptism not as a moment of static blessing and sending but as one maturing movement amongst many. As his journey moves from relative privacy into the crowds at

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<sup>258</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 164.

<sup>259</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 91.

<sup>260</sup> Brueggemann, *Praying the psalms. Engaging scripture and the life of the Spirit*, page 2.

<sup>261</sup> Slee, *Women’s faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 112.

<sup>262</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 151.

<sup>263</sup> Slee, *Women’s faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 134.

the Jordan, Jesus' life is deepened by listening to the Father and blessed by the presence of the Spirit before he obediently changes location and moves into the wilderness. This wilderness experience is a hidden season of weakness and hunger, where his faith in God is both challenged and nurtured before he moves onto his public ministry. This union of his inner and outer journey is sustained by a discernment of God's guidance, hearing one voice among the many and then having the courage to respond. Taking time for this discernment into action process must therefore be a regular pattern in sustaining CYWrS across four seasons and will be further outlined in Chapter 6.

### **5:4:2 Not fixed sustenance but growth spirals**

Understanding CYW as fixed is unhelpful as it does not leave room for engaging with complexity and leads to sustenance that is also fixed and flawed, which merely repeats existing truths and so blocks the possibility of growth leaving CYWrS frustrated or under-equipped. Against this, the theology of involvement and separation is a creative process which developed from one of my own extended growth spirals, supporting my view that CYWrS must be supported to engage with the changing circumstances of their inner and outer lives. This critical engagement may then become a growth spiral to help them mature from one season to the next. I develop this by pointing to Rohr's work on male initiation rites, noting that there is work to be done contrasting male, female and non-gender specific initiation processes. However, his work is relevant here as he identifies and explores theological dynamics that I can transfer into growth spirals. He states that all insights which enable growth are received through initiation rites and that human effort only uncovers the truth that life is ultimately a gift, but without the effort this gift lies hidden. Consequently, formation is sustained through a commitment to both human effort and in the resultant acceptance of gift. This holistic dynamic is captured in his affirmation that, "We are approximately one-third nature, one-third nurture and one-third free choice."<sup>264</sup> Rohr's view captures the thrust of this thesis that sustaining

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<sup>264</sup> Rohr, *Adam's Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page xii.

CYWrs is about supporting them to live, not creating neat theological arguments, as one CYWr noted in a conversation with me, “It’s not about theodicy it’s what you do with the chaos that transforms you.”

I therefore contend that sustaining CYWrs is enabled by navigating growth spirals, either proactively in a retreat or responding to issues that rise in their inner and outer journeys. Drawing on the growth spirals model presented in Chapter 4, this section provides theological roots to support growth spirals which connect into a holistic awareness of all that is happening in a CYWr’s life. ‘Receiving’ is the first movement of a growth spiral, which requires the individual to be secured into a community to be sent from and to return to as “Without a group, nothing goes very deep or lasts very long in the spiritual life.”<sup>265</sup> Here love, security and a trusted faith in God are experienced within shared lives but movement into a new season of maturity is only owned after a growth spiral is embarked on. Therefore the ‘Breaking’ or second movement is required to break down normal routines and support structures, as “Nothing original emerges from business as usual.”<sup>266</sup> This may occur unexpectedly through a life crisis, or sought within a retreat, but both will involve some sense of loss or suffering as “All great spirituality is about what we do with our pain.”<sup>267</sup> Growth can then be experienced beyond the received securities which nurture the receiving movement when the ‘breaking’ movement matures into the ‘Renewing’ or third movement of a growth spiral. This movement requires a liminal space beyond normal routines and values where God can grow the new identity of initiates through struggle, as Rohr describes an initiate who “Broke through in what felt like breaking down.”<sup>268</sup>

In these intimate moments, encounters with God challenge previous inherited truths and the revealed relationship with God is complex and changing, both

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<sup>265</sup> Rohr, *Adam’s Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 34.

<sup>266</sup> Rohr, *Adam’s Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 135.

<sup>267</sup> Rohr, *Adam’s Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 35.

<sup>268</sup> Rohr, *Adam’s Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 3.

constructive and deconstructive but always seeking connection and growth. This dynamic relationship is again rooted in the return to community, reflected in the fourth or ‘Settling’ movement. Here the initiate’s new insights and status are recognised by the community, not dependent on the initiate’s achievement but as a grace paradoxically gifted after all the inner journey work. God is ultimately experienced as one who grows and then generously gifts a new identity to the initiate and then gifts this new life, through the initiate’s transformation, back to renew the community. In this way a growth spiral is the connecting process which allows individuals’ inner journeys to mature into new outer journeys creating seasons which can potentially benefit the wider community. Brueggemann proposes three movements which provide a more succinct understanding of the theological drivers in growth spirals but reinforce their relational postures when he states that “Our life of faith consists in moving with God in terms of:

- (a) Being securely oriented
- (b) Being painfully disoriented
- (c) Being surprisingly reoriented”<sup>269</sup>

I support Rohr and Brueggemann’s views and contend that growth spirals must be secured in relational experience, a view bolstered in Root’s work on Bonhoeffer. Reflecting on a pastoral encounter between Bonhoeffer and a young person, Root captures the theological core of a sustained and sustaining CYWr as he writes, “(Bonhoeffer) encounters the possibility of encounter with Jesus Christ through the concrete humanity of being this ten-year old boy’s place-sharer.”<sup>270</sup> In Bonhoeffer and the boy’s theological wrestling with pain, loss and hope I identify the creative holistic integration of a growth spiral, as Root describes Bonhoeffer being forced “To be nimble, to be a true theological thinker.”<sup>271</sup> Indeed, Root understands Bonhoeffer as a youth pastor and a talented thinker who created significant theology, “With young people on his mind,”<sup>272</sup> initiating what Root terms the theological turn

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<sup>269</sup> Brueggemann, *Praying the psalms. Engaging scripture and the life of the Spirit*, page 2.

<sup>270</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 66.

<sup>271</sup> <sup>271</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 67.

<sup>272</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 68.

in youth ministry. I propose this can and must be expected of every CYWr if they are to flourish.

Using Jesus' baptism as a lens for the exploring God-as-Trinity challenges any conception that growth is straightforward, supporting my view instead that growth spirals are necessary but challenging responses to significant issues. In the baptism narrative, trust and faith in God the Father are initiated within the Son by receiving the goodness of God in in the affirming blessing, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."<sup>273</sup> However, this deepening relationship is not a static statement of belief but fires the Son's obedience as the Spirit sends him into the wilderness, where the struggles experienced in the absence of God in the temptations mature into the action of Jesus' public ministry. In this intense series of encounters, I identify Brueggemann's orientation, disorientation and reorientation that define a growth spiral.

I therefore conclude that holistic sense-making enables growth spirals and subsequently sustains the growth of CYWr's. In contrast to a fixed sustenance, they enable the theological reflection and sense-making that nurtures CYWr's which importantly feeds into and shapes the wider Christian community.

### **5:4:3 Not functional sustenance but role-identity formation**

Functional CYW shapes a functional sustenance for CYWr's which focusses solely on enabling tasks and targets and leads to a superficial sustenance which denies the impact of CYW on the whole person, or a generic sustenance which does not reflect the specific needs of a CYWr.

Consequently, the CYWr becomes drained and often moves onto start again elsewhere in the same functional manner or departs the world of CYW entirely, without maturing into another season. The impersonal flaw in this approach is corrected by the deeply personal and formational nature of the theology of involvement and separation, which is rooted in my own

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<sup>273</sup> Matthew 3:17.

experience and supported by Jesus' experience in his baptism. From this I draw on the finding from Chapter 4 that it was the integration of both role and identity in an on-going process of formation which enabled the interviewees to continue. At this point I humbly claim a prophetic role for this thesis, proposing that sustenance for CYWr's must develop beyond a limited functional approach into a broader formational direction.

I claim that role-identity formation is a dynamic and layering process, not a static statement of a role or job-description and Peterson captures the dynamic inter-connectedness of sustaining both a role for God and a relationship with God by describing God's purposes for a well-lived life as "To live up to our creation, to live into our salvation."<sup>274</sup> Equally Rohr argues that the purpose of initiation is to "Know who you truly are (so) you can hold this fire without burning up and burning out."<sup>275</sup> I contend that this image of 'holding the fire' with its necessary mixture of risk and excitement describes a CYWr's experience of forming a role-identity. For the interviewees, the theological roots of this "Continual journey of discovering who you are"<sup>276</sup> were found in God as a sustaining presence who initiated this formational relationship. As one participant noted, "God moulded me in that way through work and through life."<sup>277</sup>

There was also a strong emphasis on the participants' responsibility to respond to the initiating action of God. The impact of this transformative process is seen in Root's description of Bonhoeffer's life, journeying from a non-church attending teenager to become a theologian in a process where, "He would become himself."<sup>278</sup> Root's work outlines how this integrating process continued throughout Bonhoeffer's life in his turbulent development as a pastor, theological thinker and youth minister. Similarly, my identity as a CYWr was confirmed through times of conflict and struggle, in a layering

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<sup>274</sup> Rohr, *Adam's return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 159.

<sup>275</sup> Rohr, *Adam's Return*, page 161.

<sup>276</sup> A, GD 2.

<sup>277</sup> A, GD 3.

<sup>278</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 36.

process where insights or issues were revisited as I continued in the same contexts, fusing role and identity which then enabled me to continue.

The dynamic and repetitive nature of role-identity formation is also profoundly relational, and Jeremiah's relational depth challenges any individualised view of role-identity, as Peterson argues "No-one who is whole is self-sufficient."<sup>279</sup> His insight that relationships were the context of God's call throughout Jeremiah's life supports this as he states that "Jeremiah was named and immersed in names"<sup>280</sup> which confirms human life as the "Region of being in which the human and divine would integrate."<sup>281</sup> Peterson confirms that "God is as real to a prophet as his next-door neighbour and his next-door neighbour is a vortex in which God's purposes are being carried out"<sup>282</sup> and it is this 'vortex', supported by Slee's emphasis on relationality as a process in faith development, that underpins my critique of individualised role-identity formation. On reflection I affirm that robust relational engagements were more important to sustaining the interviewees and myself than simply claiming an identity or title as these engagements actively created a sense of self and purpose that was both energised and energizing.

Minimising role-identity formation to a functional approach of granting a title or role is challenged by the intensely personal nature of Jesus' baptism as his human life was the visible setting where the purposes of God were repeatedly worked out. At the river his life was marked by the blessing love of the Father and so his future activity was called out from within a relationship with his Father. It is from this security he is challenged by the Spirit to move into the wilderness and his obedience is nurtured within a trusted relationship with the Spirit. Even in the desert, isolated and tempted, his life again becomes the locus for learning obedience and trust in his Father. It is within in these

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<sup>279</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 166.

<sup>280</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 26.

<sup>281</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 47.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

flowing movements that his relational identity is secured and integrated before he engages in the role of his public ministry. I conclude that holding this insight alongside the dynamic and repetitive nature of role-identity formation affirms relational formation as significant for sustaining CYWrS.

#### **5:4:4 Not isolated sustenance but involved connections**

CYWrS' support is weakened when it is based on a misunderstanding of CYW as isolated and functioning apart from the full Christian community. In this misunderstanding, a CYWr may be known to many but their support is limited to a small group or line manager. As a result, they may seek fuller support out-with their church and while this can strengthen their faith, relationships or CYW practice it can also lead to a deepening sense of inner fragmentation and outer isolation. This dis-location is critiqued by drawing on the theology of involvement and separation, with its foundation in the community of relationships in the Trinity, which underscores my contention that involved connections can provide the nexus of relationships for CYWrS to be sustained in.

Supporting this view, I draw on Slee's work on faith development which claims transformational relationships are not just between individuals or between an individual and God. I commend her critique of the "Lonely male heroes"<sup>283</sup> of Bonhoeffer, Merton, Ghandi and Martin Luther King, whom Fowler promotes, in favour of multiple relationships as the context for spiritual formation, as she emphasises that "Human relational ties are the primary context for development."<sup>284</sup> This insight caused me to revisit my own experience of sense-making that I had understood to be critical in sustaining me. In valuing the insights gained and commitments sustained through journaling, retreats and spiritual direction I had previously emphasised solitude and withdrawal. However, in falsely separating these processes from the relational connections that birthed the material and the relationships with a spiritual director and wise friends that guided my

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<sup>283</sup> Slee, *Women's faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 32.

<sup>284</sup> Slee, *Women's faith development. Patterns and processes*, page 22.

reflections, I had drifted into an ‘isolated’ mindset. I now affirm that maintaining involved connections supported by a theology of involvement and separation can become the context for a transformational encounter with God. Using the lens of Jesus’ baptism helpfully nurtures these involved connections by emphasising God-as-Trinity known through experience and relationships.

In Jesus’ baptismal narratives, the character of God as Trinity, as persons-in-relationship, is encountered firstly as an experience. The baptism narratives describe holistic experiences of God that are inarguably spiritual through the visions and voices Jesus encounters from the Father and Spirit, but these are socially rooted amongst John and the crowd. They are also physical, in the water of the Jordan and the desert dryness which hosted the temptations. The conclusion of this baptism event is not in receiving isolated spiritual insights in the desert however, but in Jesus’ return to live amongst people in Capernaum. It is only afterwards that these experiences were developed into a retold story which was then rooted into Scripture and distilled into historic Christian creeds. I support the valuable role of creeds and Scripture in sustaining CYWr’s formation, but I propose that holding to this experiential nature of the Trinity ensures that CYWr’s affirm communal experiences as the contexts for truly enabling an understanding of their own lives, their CYW practice and their faith. Equally, investing in all the pains and joys of sharing life with young people must be the place where God’s Spirit is first discerned and CYW insights understood, before portraying CYW practice as a set of abstract principles to sustain CYWr’s.

Nurturing involved connections is secondly encouraged by understanding the Trinity as a set of relationships. In the gospel narrative the Son is blessed, and the Father blesses, the Spirit sends, and the Son goes but the Father is then self-limited by dependence on the Son’s active obedience. Through mutual submission and service power is used compassionately, supported by trust and a loving recognition of the other which creates the spaces required for relationships to flourish. In the blessing-space between the Father’s

benediction and the Son's hearing, mutual love grows. In the waiting-space between the Spirit's command to go and the Son's response, mutual trust grows. These connections around the Father, Son and Spirit are therefore creative spaces that lead to transformation of the persons-in-Trinity and of the people they then interact with.

CYWr's' experience of connections can be different from this where too much space in supervision and support leads to feelings of drifting and abandonment while too little space leads to being micro-managed and feeling untrusted. In response I identify the value of active and sense-making spaces, spaces of healing and risk and growth. In these spaces CYWr's must be allowed to be themselves based on the Xhosa concept of 'ubuntu', loosely translated as 'I am because we are', and these involved connections with God can accurately echo the divine blessing-space or waiting-space within the Trinity. One participant emphasised the importance of sharing in "A safe space, a trusted space, an experienced space"<sup>285</sup> and this connects with a view of the Trinity as an enclosed and protected space, distinctively separate from humanity with an inner coherence that meets the needs of each member. By implication, if CYWr's are to resist isolation they will need that kind of nurturing space. However, the Trinity holds this inner security in tension with an external sharing as the baptism narratives result in Jesus' movement out into his ministry, via the wilderness. Consequently, involved support for CYWr's must resist over-emphasis on self-protection and should sustain them by enabling a simultaneous presence beyond their nurturing space. This theology places an individual CYWr securely within a network of relationships where the CYWr is never a fixed central point, as the persons of God in Trinity constantly flow around each other. Therefore, involved connections can sustain CYWr's by enabling them to navigate these relational spaces.

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<sup>285</sup> H, Interview.

## 5:5 The way of the desert and the city: a paradigm

To sustain CYWrS I commit to looping these theological conversations forward into practice. Therefore, I firstly propose ‘The way of the desert and city’ as a theologically coherent paradigm which can shape and support CYWrS’ inner and outer journeys, before using it later as a way-of-being in Chapter 6, alongside the other proposals required to sustain CYWrS.

‘The way of the desert’ values silence, withdrawal and isolation which draws on desert experiences in Scripture and is also rooted into Christian tradition, especially through monasticism. Sittser identifies that its driving dynamic occurs when “The solitary faces the full mystery of (their) inner life, in the presence of the invisible God,”<sup>286</sup> in a paring away process that is “Not the end but the means....The goal was inner transformation, especially ...in humility and charity (or love).”<sup>287</sup> I therefore use ‘the way of desert’ to describe a way of engaging deeply with life, echoing Maitland’s (2008) concept that silence is not merely an absence of sound but can become a place of presence, of new insights and experiences. As a metaphor, I propose that CYW practice as a ‘desert’ engages with young people far from their regular comfortable and familiar CYW settings in challenging experiences that reveal inner truths. Superficial activity or entertainment and the distractions of noise and busyness are removed, enabling an encounter with reality where the young people, CYWr and volunteers share the same challenges, in a life “Stripped of distractions.”<sup>288</sup> Yaconnelli (2006) describes this as a ‘beloved community’ and one example from my experience developed through a regular time in our weekly youth club where lives were shared in honest discussions. As a spiritual discipline for CYWrS’ inner journey, the way of the desert can “Lead us deeper into the mystery of God and the mystery of ourselves”<sup>289</sup> which becomes the necessary posture where a CYWr begins the

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<sup>286</sup> Sittser, *Water from a deep well. Christian spirituality from early martyrs to modern missionaries*, page 26.

<sup>287</sup> Sittser, *Water from a deep well. Christian spirituality from early martyrs to modern missionaries*, page 91.

<sup>288</sup> Sittser, *Water from a deep well. Christian spirituality from early martyrs to modern missionaries*, page 82.

<sup>289</sup> Hughes, *Cry of wonder*, page xiii.

process of being nurtured or guided by God. Jasper develops this, describing the desert as “A place of testing...a place of repeated rebellion and necessary renewal of the covenant bond between Yahweh and His people”<sup>290</sup> The silent desert therefore becomes a workplace of the soul, a transformational attitude that is about “Being so widened in our waiting that it changes our wanting. God is developing in us a living relationship with himself.”<sup>291</sup>

From my own experience I affirm that this spiritual formation is accessed through a lonely honesty which questions submitting to orthodox authorities in religion or CYW practice if one’s experience is different to those established truths. As I rejected fitting into existing structures where the experience of God was fixed and functional in favour of relating to God through creative prayer, journaling and the commitment that God was potentially to be found in every relationship I encountered, I was consequently enriched by a growing mutual trust between myself and God. This echoed the mutual self-giving in the Trinity where divine relationships are strengthened within the closed confines of the Trinity. The Trinity understood as the Father sending the Son into the wilderness and onto into his ministry also reflected my own growing impact as a CYWr, as I trusted God’s guidance in the desert of CYW practice and spiritual formation which resulted in my CYW practice impacting more young people at greater depth. Fuelled by this my emerging role-identity as both a CYWr and church leader enabled me to confidently shape leadership decisions and directions within churches, projects and presbyteries.

Consistent with the way of the desert as a CYW practice and a spiritual discipline, the way of the desert as practical theology involves withdrawal and emptiness as routes to cultivating awareness of the realities of human existence, of the world and of God before developing ways to confront and challenge those realities from a new perspective. A feature of this embodied

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<sup>290</sup> Jasper, *The sacred desert. Religion, literature, art and culture*, page 16.

<sup>291</sup> Miller, *Celtic daily prayer, book two*, page 1545.

theology is letting go of control, for example through fasting which helps reduce the power of desire, being in isolation which weakens self-importance and embracing obedience which undercuts pride. When the enacting of this theology is engrained within CYW practice and spiritual formation the way of the desert becomes a nourishing approach to sustaining CYWs by living within God's patterns of involvement and separation.

The second approach, 'the way of the city', provides the necessary counterbalance to the 'desert' by emphasising involvement. The 'way of the city' values conversation, conflict and community. In Scripture this is particularly emphasised through the vibrant life of early church in Acts 10-28 as it developed in in Caesarea, Lystra, Athens, Jerusalem, Iconium, Tyre, Antioch and Rome. However, the 'city' does not require an urban setting but instead "Focusses upon justice and shalom in all human relationships and social structures"<sup>292</sup> in what Foster describes as the 'Social Justice Tradition' that developed into Christian tradition especially through the Quakers.

As a metaphor, the 'city' in CYW practice is a way of being distinctively involved, offering a Christian presence in secular settings and a distinctively different approach to CYW within churches that challenges their existing approaches and values. One example from my CYW experience was a weekly Friday night club, a regular encounter of young people and volunteers through dialogue and activities which sometimes verged on chaos but consistently created opportunities for all of us to share our lives. Integrated into spiritual formation, the way of the city can be illustrated by my own spiritual development which matured increasingly into silence and away from institutional church but was initiated and supported by spiritual directors and my line manager. As in the Trinity, they were supportively present but also gave me enough direction and space to allow me to develop my own way of living and believing. Consequently, I was also nurtured by Christian communities when my role-identity as a teacher and educator matured

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<sup>292</sup> Foster, *Streams of living water*, page 119.

through this integration of practice and spiritual formation, I was more able to resource leadership training in churches, projects and under-graduate training for CYW students.

To ground this way of the city into a practical theology I draw on the work of Fraser (1988), who began his ministry as a worker-priest, and affirm the theological process as contextual, communal, conversational and critically creative as he wrote “We are the Body of Christ: Christ will create new Gospel-events through us.”<sup>293</sup> Making theology that sustains CYWrS arises from real life issues and must then offer transformation of those experiences to provide “An alternative theological basis for dealing with the situations”<sup>294</sup> in a polyphonic approach where a “Conflicting and raucous collection of voices”<sup>295</sup> is a strength.

In holding together both the way of the desert *and* the city I insist that any competitive duality between desert and city approaches weakens the sustaining of CYWrS. Although externally very different they both develop honest awareness of God, self and the community and drive that awareness into transforming confrontations, however challenging that is for the individual and Christian community. Critically, I hold that integrating them is an approach rooted in Scripture, Christian tradition and my own experience. Supporting this I point to Scripture, where the solitary visions of Saul in Acts 9 Peter in Acts 10 were encountered alongside conversations and conflicts in communities. Similarly in the anchorite tradition, hermits were often not completely isolated as their oral history passed on the sayings that flowed from working with an Abba and as they learned to love and live in a “Vast network of relationships”<sup>296</sup> which attracted followers to their spiritual and physical asceticism, their faith and wisdom. Equally, my own experience of being sustained as a CYWr required a constant inter-reaction of the involved

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<sup>293</sup> Fraser, *Doing theology as the people's work*, page 68.

<sup>294</sup> Fraser, *Doing theology as the people's work*, page 71.

<sup>295</sup> Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography*, page 217

<sup>296</sup> Sittser, *Water from a deep well. Christian spirituality from early martyrs to modern missionaries*, page 87.

and distinctive patterns of my CYW practice and spiritual formation. I therefore claim that to be sustained, CYWrS must engage deeply with young people while offering a distinctive Christian lifestyle within that encounter, commit to and receive from their secular and Christian communities and attend to their own spiritual formation. By so integrating the distinctiveness of the desert and the involvement of the city the sustenance required for CYWrS to flourish will be enabled.

## **5:6 Summary and link into chapter 6**

In this chapter I engaged in a conversational theological process, locating it in a theology of involvement and separation. I brought my claim that misunderstanding CYW and CYWrS as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated undermines the sustaining of CYWrS into dialogue with the findings of Chapter 4 around role-identity formation, four seasons in a career and growth spirals. This process created themes of taking time, holistic sense-making, relational formation and involved connections that will shape the practices of sustaining CYWrS described in chapter 6. I have shown that the way of desert and the city is a theologically coherent paradigm which can hold these themes, becoming a unifying and creative tool to shape the practices required to sustain CYWrS as “Compassionate action is both the purpose of and the test of knowing.”<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Reason, *Action Research as Spiritual Practice*, page 17.

## Chapter 6 Applications

### 6:1 Introduction

The previous chapters of context setting, literature review, research methods, research findings and theological reflection provided insights into sustaining CYWr's and now flow into this chapter, supporting the view that "Praxis is the primary criterion of truth."<sup>298</sup> Consequently, in this chapter I will support my claim that role-identity formation enables CYWr's to be sustained across four seasons of their careers. I will achieve that by using the themes of taking time, holistic sense-making, relational formation and involved connections developed in Chapter 5 to introduce the 'Four Seasons Framework' as a map which describes the landscape of a sustained CYWr's career and provide five inter-connected proposals which will enable CYWr's to navigate this landscape. The first proposal affirms a way-of-being described as 'The way of the desert and the city', supported by the second proposal for a network of formational mentors. This network will use the third and fourth proposals, promoting role-identity formation and growth spirals, as complimentary tools to facilitate 'The way of the desert and the city'. The final proposal roots all this sustaining work in Christian communities for pastoral care, training and education, leadership and formational mentoring.

### 6:2 Four seasons framework as a map

In Chapter 5 I argue that recognising there can be four seasons in a CYWr's career refutes the misunderstanding of CYW and CYWr's sustenance as short-term, insisting that taking time is one element in sustaining a CYWr's career. The research participants affirmed this flow of four seasons while lamenting the absence of a clear career structure or progression in CYW, as the absence of a map was noted in Chapter 1. I maintain that this understanding of four seasons is a theologically robust approach that informs career development by providing progression for a whole person. Therefore, it must not be misunderstood and shrunk solely into functional roles or stages of promotion

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<sup>298</sup> Bennet, Graham, Pattison and Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, page 85.

where progression is based only on length of service or increased age. Instead, progression can only occur by moving through growth spirals and the proof of progression will then be in the impacts in a CYWr's, inner and outer journeys as described in this framework.

The motivation to develop this approach amongst CYWr's lies in expanding what they see as possible in each season and that there can be a deepening progression into a sustained career. This starts in their beginning season when the possibility of growing into an early skilling and training season of their career is shown, then to see that after training a career is practical as they move into their middle season, then that a career can be sustained which allows them to mature into the later season when they can more fully nurture others. Line managers and church leaders will be more supportive of this long approach of taking time when they are helped to understand that it leads to different growth in each season and a CYWr maturing through each season enables others behind them. Investing in one CYWr, based on the proposals in this thesis, can therefore lead to growth in the impact and numbers involved in CYW, including growing their own staff.

Chapter 4 described in detail the marks and impacts and the barriers and bridges to developing through each season. This framework summarises that information, serving the purpose of a map by offering a static overview of a landscape which highlights its main features. 'Inner journey' refers to a CYWr's own faith, values or beliefs, 'outer journey' refers to their practice while 'marks' are features that define that person and 'impacts' are the effects they have on other people.

Diagram 3 Four Seasons Framework

Season	Beginning		Early		Middle		Late	
Sub-seasons	Securing	Starting	Playing with pals	Skilling and training	Mark-making	Mutual commitment	Enabling locally	Enabling beyond
<i>Inner journey marks</i>								
CYW beliefs	Feeling secure in CYW world	Connecting with leaders	Growing belonging within one tribe while exploring others	Growing confidence in one's own skills	Satisfaction and challenges of making a difference	Strong sense of connection and commitment to a role, practice and place	Satisfaction through enabling others	Satisfaction through understanding oneself as an enabler
Christian Faith	Loyal and literal		Experimenting and challenging		Owning and committing		Blessing and letting go	
Relational focus	Me and people like me		Groups like me and how they relate to other groups		Groups we create together		Other people	
<i>Inner journey impacts on</i>								
Young people	Sharing as peers makes them feel safe and confident		Accompanies them to open up and experiment		Provides space to question and mature role models to guide		Provides guidance to help them into adult maturity	
Local Christian community	Encourages church by reflecting its ethos and values		Increasingly involved and supportive, but asking questions		Challenging established structures and offering new approaches		Influencing and shaping policy and practice	
Wider community	Positive involvement in youth activities		Increasingly involved and supportive, but asking questions		Challenging values with new approaches		Integrating Christian and community policies and practices	
<i>Outer marks</i>								
Skill levels	Learner		Novice	Journeyman	master craftsman		Teacher	
Roles w/ volunteers	Receiver		Learning participant		controller of a team		Mentor of controllers	
Roles w/ young people	Alongside		Supervised leadership while alongside		in charge of projects			
<i>Outer journey impacts</i>								
Young people	Improves peer group by being present		Develops group by their increasingly skilled interventions		Nurtures and develops them		Develops the structures around young people to nurture and develop them	
Local Christian community	Enthusiastic involvement		Beginning to support leadership and represent its values		Carrying heavy burdens in leadership that impact widely		Develops the structures to help whole church grow	
Wider community	Enthusiastic involvement		Influencing community groups by representing church values		Supporting and positively challenging community activities		Shaping integrated church and community activities	

Using this framework to sustain CYWr's firstly requires the individual to be accurately located in a season, to then allow the correct level of expectations to be set for themselves and the relevant supports provided by their employer or leaders to enable them to mature. This locating process will take time to explore and interrogate both impacts and marks by listening to the individual themselves, their Christian community, their leaders, young people and volunteers. I recognise that this framework and language can only initiate the process so further resources will be required, shaped by the experiential, relational and story-based values of this thesis and therefore including reflective sessions within a CYW practice setting, journaling and open conversations. These methods must challenge reducing this process to one person filling out a questionnaire by creating a fuller picture of the person, setting the scene for a more rounded set of season-specific supports.

The next stages of analysis and action both start from noting the CYWr's location in the framework. Once the voices have all been heard, my experience of mentoring CYWr's suggest that the individual will not fit neatly into one season, as they may be in the beginning season in one aspect of their life but in the early season in another, which echoes the proposal in Chapter 1 that a CYWr's career is more like a forest of trees than one single tree. Analysis therefore clarifies these different 'trees', experienced by the CYWr as established or growing commitments, before prioritising them. However, understanding the map is not the same as travelling on the land it represents, so analysis of what has shaped the CYWr must lead to action which develops the CYWr's inner and outer journeys. This dynamic process centres on creating their own 'way of the desert and the city', described in Section 6:3 and based in the communities described in Section 6:7 which requires an experienced supported by formational mentor, explored in Section 6:4

### 6:3 The way of the desert and the city

This proposal has matured through my thesis, initially glimpsed in Chapter 1 when I uncovered that my instinctive rhythms of withdrawal and engagement had helped sustain me. Chapter 5 consequently proposed ‘The way of the desert and city’ as a theologically robust paradigm and I now describe how it can function as a way-of-being before showing how to help CYWrS create and maintain it. I define a way-of-being as a holistic way of living that integrates the inner and outer journeys of a CYWr, concurrently nurturing their Christian faith, CYW practice and personal relationships. It is a communal and reflective approach, that must be flexible to work in different contexts, robust to respond to challenges and simple enough to be maintained. As a way, it is inspired by McAlinden’s (2015) proposal for a spirituality to sustain priests, so it is not an exclusive list of the supports a CYWr requires, instead it outlines foundational patterns which other resources can be added into. With a similar intention to a rule of life used by monastic communities, it seeks to be a trellis or framework around which a Christian life flourishes but to avoid this being reduced to a static list of instructions I prefer the term way-of-being.

To set up and maintain a regular rhythm of both desert and city approaches within a CYWr’s inner and outer journeys each CYWr must be helped to be responsible for their own development, and this will best be supported by an additional group to the communal or ‘city’ aspects explored below. Described as a ‘formational group’ in 6:7:4 it will engage in communal practice, so it is necessary to define relational values for its successful set-up and running. Issues such as confidentiality, frequency of attendance, agreeing how to listen, speak and comment must all be agreed. These will be supported by organisational issues such as the duration and location of sessions, and how participation ends. Ensuring agreement will be facilitated by the formational mentor but I affirm that all methods in this way-of-being should be experiential, relational and story-based, consistent with the methods and insights of this thesis.

The desert ways of solitude and withdrawal in their inner journey would involve spiritual disciplines such as retreats, lectio divina and journaling. These established disciplines increase awareness of the issues faced by stripping away distractions and opening up new ways of engaging with God. Enabling this for CYWr's requires clearing and holding dedicated time, so their line managers need to be convinced that this kind of internal work is critical to sustain their CYWr. The CYWr's themselves must be helped to work through misunderstandings that they do not need to engage in this kind of work or that they do not have the spiritual ability to do so. This would be helped by the formational mentor having a CYW background and using illustrations or examples from CYW, which can be done by reflecting in or immediately after CYW events to validate their own experiences and initiate reflection. In their outer journeys 'the desert' would mean working apart from established CYW projects or churches by engaging in activities such as school chaplaincy, detached work or sharing work with a secular youth agency or group. This engagement is incarnational, where the incarnation is defined as how God remained human in Jesus, not just how God arrived.

Consequently, the CYWr must be enabled in a remaining that must be long-term, committed and involved. From these experiences, supporting the CYWr to honestly engage in reflective practice that critiques inherited CYW practices, requires a Kingdom of God approach which affirms that insights can be found within and beyond established CYW practices, in secular and Christian work. This uncovering, exploring and subsequent discerning process should shape both the practice and life of the CYWr so it should be supported by the formational mentor and group.

The city ways of conversation, conflict and co-operation now need to be nurtured in CYWr's inner journeys. They require CYWr's to engage with views different from their own, to be involved in communal worship and spiritual disciplines rooted in living within Christian community, such as accountability and confession. These, and similar, disciplines challenge the need for CYWr's

faith to always be intellectually coherent and morally correct, especially when relating to young people. Whether this pressure is first placed on them by their employers or church or arises from within themselves as they wrestle with the complex issues arising from CYW practice, the result is often a superficially secure faith with no space or language to express their own doubts or questions. When consistently stressed their faith will either dry up or crack, ultimately becoming unable to sustain their outer CYW practice. Therefore, finding people and places to enable engaged dialogue is necessary to create the environment where their values and faith can mature and grow. In their outer journeys 'the way of the city' requires robust interaction with churches and community agencies, which requires discussions around values and practice before agreeing how to work in partnership. As CYWr's seek to find practice that neither always colludes or conflicts, these creative tensions can become ways to initiate new practice that draws on a wide range of influences, remaining faithful to Christian tradition while being open to supporting good practice wherever it may be found. This challenges the role of a CYWr as simply a busy activist by requiring them to connect widely while being faithful to Christian roots, to have strong relational skills with adults, to be organised and to discern God's presence in church and community.

Drawing on my own experience described in Chapter 1 and the research participants' experience in Chapter 4 I contend that the integration of desert **and** city approaches is vital as both are required to sustain their professional role and personal identity across the range of contexts that CYW operates in. This is not just addition however, where separate elements co-exist in isolation. Instead, integration of both approaches forges new insights or practices that helpfully fuse together a CYWr's role and identity in a dynamic process that is often paradoxical. This paradox requires CYWr's to commit to the concept explored by Rohr (2004) that spiritual formation is at the same time a gift from God and the result of human graft. CYWr's may hold to a position of either God's gift or human graft being the most important in sustaining CYWr's, often common in their beginning and early seasons, but my research journey has convinced me that sustained CYWr's are nurtured when both positions are embraced. Initially this can mean an almost mechanical

commitment to practices of the desert and city being programmed into a diary or calendar, especially the practices that are less natural to a particular CYWr, until they become rooted into their rhythms of personal and professional life. A maturing role-identity is then received as gift when the ways of desert and city no longer operate in parallel but are integrated, when as Nash describes, the “Multiple guests and voices”<sup>299</sup> meet together in a process that is “Best done both consciously and continuously.”<sup>300</sup>

While I affirm his view that every CYWr must work out their own Christian faith I commend my theology of involvement and separation. Explained in Chapter 5, it is rooted in Christian tradition, is robust enough to connect with the challenging outer journey experiences of CYWrS and flexible enough to respond to the varied issues they face in their inner journeys, so it is a concept well-matched for sustaining CYWrS. It proposes that a secure faith and strong self-identity is nurtured in places where God is clearly present but also where God withdraws or is sensed as absent, in crisis and doubt. Conflicts will always occur when CYWrS truly operate in this congested way of the desert and the city, for example when being consistent with their church’s beliefs and practices is challenged by what they discern God doing amongst young people in their youth group or when their personal convictions increasingly clash with the views of their church or community.

In this experience, similar to the breaking stage of a growth spiral, I am convinced that sustainability is enabled by being supported to live through these tensions by finding their own way-of-being, which acts as a centre of gravity. In this integrative process, whether through reflective practice or spiritual formation, I affirm Rilke’s advice, quoted in Smith and Merz (2015) to, “Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart, and try to live the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a foreign language. Do not search for answers which could not be given now because you would not be able to live them. Live the questions now. Perhaps

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<sup>299</sup> Nash, *What theology for youth work?* page 27.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

then, someday in the future you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.”<sup>301</sup> Operating patiently, persistently and prayerfully out of this centre of gravity, out of this posture, answers are not necessarily found but ways to live are enabled, role-identities are formed until a CYWr might live what Peterson described as a life of “Angular integrity.”<sup>302</sup>

Integration must not become equated with confusion, however, where desert and city approaches are jumbled into a never-ending list of tasks. Healthy boundaries are required to prevent burnout and there is a need for discernment and wisdom to be aware of stresses and to consequently make wise decisions. In practice this theology of involvement and separation asserts that the spaces where God is experienced as absent, through questioning, crisis or doubt, are valuable and not to be avoided. The role of formational mentors, explored below in Section 6:4 is critical here to ensure that CYWrS are not abandoned in their crises. However, I hold to my view that it is in these spaces that God creates opportunities for the growth of faith, trust, conviction and calling which are central to sustaining a career.

## **6:4 Formational mentors**

I define a mentor as a more experienced worker guiding another less experienced worker in the same role or area of work. A CYW mentor can refer to their own life or practice to help other CYWrS explore their own experiences and uncover issues they might not have been aware of. This can lead to the mutual creation of helpful practices, again shaped by the mentor who can draw from deeper resources in themselves and other CYW tribes. In doing so trust is instilled within the other CYWr which helps them feel encouraged, supported and less isolated.

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<sup>301</sup> Rilke, in Smith, and Merz, *Moments to remember. Ignatian wisdom for aging*, page 36.

<sup>302</sup> Peterson, *Run with the horses*, page 31.

### **6:4:1 Definition of formational mentors**

I claim that sustaining a CYWr's career requires an additional new role of 'formational mentor'. CYWrs usually have a diverse and overlapping range of influences in their personal life, Christian faith and CYW practice from within their family, friends, CYW tribe, local church and employer. These voices can coalesce into cohesive support for the individual but often fragment into conflict within and around them so creating a cohesive way-of-being as described in Section 6:3 is important, a task I contend is best supported by a formational mentor. I draw on my own experience of developing 'the way of the desert and the city' as my way-of-being to illustrate this. It was shaped and nurtured by my father-in-law who at different times has been my team leader, line manager, support worker and unofficial spiritual director. He does not have specific skills in CYW so has often directed me toward other supports but his spiritual maturity, wisdom around issues of church leadership and mission allied to his care for me has enabled me to grow through my crises. I would now identify him as a formational mentor and this role was critical in sustaining me.

A formational mentor must have experienced and understood their own formation and be familiar with the disciplines of spiritual formation, reflective practice, good employment practices and leadership or line management. It could therefore be argued that they do not need to be CYWrs themselves, but I am convinced that personal knowledge of CYW practice is helpful for reflective practice or spiritual direction as it can assist in highlighting issues or making connections that would otherwise be missed. I also affirm that one mentor consistently present through the seasons of a CYWr's career develops the trust and insight necessary to work through growth spirals, and based on this the mentor can help the CYWr assess if a growth spiral is leading into a new season or a return to deeper experience of that same season. Whether they are CYWrs or not, formational mentors must be confident enough to draw on the best support from the most suitable source, and I recommend Scazzero (2015) for leadership, Breen (2018) for discipleship, Nouwen (2011) and Rohr (2004) for spiritual formation and Leach and Patterson (2015) for pastoral supervision. This mentoring relationship

will be most effective when it is located within a CYWr's formational mentoring group, described in Section 6:7:4.

#### ***6:4:2 Development of formational mentors***

Formational mentors should be in their later season, giving time for the required formation of their own role-identity in their inner and outer journeys which is a necessary resource in nurturing others. Identifying these CYWr's and encouraging them to become formational mentors expands the pool of experienced CYWr's in this season, providing inspirational role models to encourage more CYWr's to progress through prior seasons. Recognising CYWr's as resourceful trainers and mentors who are not solely reliant on outside support from clergy or similar professions will also strengthen the whole CYWr sector by minimising the draw into those related roles. Conversely, when mature CYWr's are lost or not developed the remaining CYWr's are mentored by less experienced colleagues, who are less able to sustain others and a downward spiral develops.

I affirm the importance of peer support but identify this loss of elders as critical, echoing Rohr (2004). I support his view that access to power too early without receiving it from elders is dangerous as it weakens spiritual maturity when men are expected to mentor when they have not first been mentored. This is the experience of many CYWr's whom I argue are isolated and given too much responsibility too early in their career, which drains them and means they can only offer shallow guidance to others. I therefore claim that there must be no mentoring without being first mentored, echoing Rohr's warning of young initiates gaining access to power without struggle or without community connections, so I consequently reject the abdication of responsibility for discipleship to a single CYWr, which is explored in Section 6:7 below.

### **6:4:3 Network of formational mentors**

Formational mentoring for CYWrS is a multi-faceted task, requiring self-awareness and a commitment to growing one's own inner and outer journeys. I affirm the work of Dennistoun (2018) around the role of formational supervisors in training ministers and, while I argue that formational mentors have a stronger accompanying function and will be less embedded in an institutional system, any formational mentoring network should draw on her insights. Apart from her work, in my experience very few people in CYW are developing this so I propose that a network of formational mentors must be created. Initially these could be drawn from experienced CYWrS who understand the pressures of CYW, who value the approaches outlined in this thesis and have the desire to serve the next generation of CYWrS.

While I affirm that everyone involved in CYW has a responsibility for supporting CYWrS, including fellow CYWrS, I hold that not every CYWr should automatically become a mentor. Reflecting my earlier commitment that progression through four seasons in a career is not based on age or seniority but is a maturing process, developing into the 'later' season would be rooted in identifying the relevant marks of growth in their inner and outer journeys and a sense of call affirmed by peers and their Christian community. I particularly identify these qualities in the interviewees for this thesis, and re-engaging with them by offering to support their development as CYWr mentors would root this research back into their practice. The process should follow the journey of Scottish healthcare chaplaincy over the last 20 years, which began with a group of chaplains recognising the worth of their role yet highlighting variable standards within it and the lack of resources to equip them. Over time and after working with related professions in their field of health care, they identified core values and standards which shaped training supported by assessment and accountability processes. The result has been a better-skilled workforce more able to respond to the needs of those they work with. Within CYW in Scotland, a parallel approach should begin by creating a peer-moderated network of CYWr mentors. They would agree core values and standards to shape approaches that support CYWrS, drawing on

this thesis but open to other sources, with a progression based on the Lothian Model in chaplaincy, which is accessible here.<sup>303</sup>

Echoing this process would separate out what supports are best provided by the CYWr's own Christian community, what is provided by line management and what is then provided through this network of formational mentors. Mentors in this network would operate beyond a self-imposed threshold of training, committing to mutual accountability and their own ongoing formation of their inner and outer journeys. To guide this set-up phase of the network I recommend drawing on Youthlink Scotland, Community Learning Development Scotland, The Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education and Social Enterprise Academy Scotland. The final stage of connecting CYWr's into this network is a challenge as the statutory context which the NHS operates in is lacking from CYW in Scotland where the range of theological approaches, denominations and employers makes enforcing a universal approach impossible. Operating without authority I therefore anticipate that the quality of support and subsequent recommendations from CYWr's involved would initially validate this network.

## **6:5 Role-identity formation**

In Chapter 5 I concluded that role-identity formation underpinned by relational formation counters functional sustenance for CYWr's. This functional mindset develops from short-term and fixed misunderstandings which provide rigid and clearly defined support for CYWr's. Such rigidity can be prized as certainty but, in my experience, it is not sufficient to respond to the rigorous challenges in a CYWr's inner and outer journeys. In contrast, while embracing formation takes more time and involves sense-making, this formational process develops the robust flexibility required to enable growth across and within four seasons. The opportunity to develop this integrative approach amongst CYWr's lies in convincing them of its practical applications, how it leads to a longer and more fruitful career. Communicating these

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<sup>303</sup> ([NHS spiritual-care-matters-an-introductory-resource-for-all-nhsscotland-staff.pdf](#) page 20.

benefits to line managers or church leaders will also provide the necessary support for securing the funds, resources and time to enable this approach.

To help identify role-identity formation in a CYWr I return to Rohr's description of initiation, to "Know who you truly are (so) you can hold this fire without burning up and burning out"<sup>304</sup> Therefore the signs of a CYWr engaged in role-identity formation are a person operating well in both their inner and outer journeys. The complementary connectedness of these journeys embraces difficulties and challenges in each, but healthy formation enables each to nourish and not damage the other. This can also be measured as impacts, consistent with the Four Seasons Framework, where positive impacts on the lives of others is the fruit of healthy formation. Ultimately such formation allows the CYWr to mature through the seasons of their career, rooted in a developing sense of their own calling or vocation. I know from my experience that the enneagram is a valuable tool in discovering and growing personal identity, but I also recognise the worth of Myers-Briggs, especially as described by Francis, Hancock, Swift and Robbins (2009). In contrast, weak role-identity formation results when stresses in either the inner or outer journey damages the other journey. Weak formation also creates negative impacts such as a critical spirit, defensiveness or poor relationships and an inability to continue responding creatively to challenges and crises. The consequence of this is an inability to mature through the seasons or continue in their career.

### ***Enabling role-identity formation***

Locating this formation within a healthy Christian community ensures that formation is modelled as repeated and relational, providing a rhythm of living through depth creation and depth awareness for all God's people. Depth creation and depth awareness contrast with superficial approach to being a CYWr, which rests on all the flaws of being short-term, fixed, functional and isolated. Depth creation occurs through immersive living, in CYW practice that commits to engaging fully with young people and a wide enjoyment of

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<sup>304</sup> Rohr, *Adam's Return. The five promises of male initiation*, page 161.

personal life beyond work. Depth awareness follows in worship, conversations or shared experiences which value the at times incomplete, conflicting and puzzling aspects of CYW practice and human relationships. In Chapter 4, participants described how fusing all aspects of their life and CYW experience together had sustained them by creating an irresistible sense of call or vocation in simply being themselves, or the person God was making them to be. They were not consciously aware of how this formation process worked, underlining the haphazard development of CYWrS. In contrast I now outline two integrative approaches of spiritual formation and reflective practice that develop role-identity formation in CYWrS. Both are necessarily connected but I suggest that spiritual formation mainly nourishes personal identity while reflective practice mostly resources the role.

Spiritual formation, which uses spiritual disciplines guided by spiritual discernment, provides the relational and repeated rhythms to enable integration. As Nouwen writes, they become places or stances of awareness where, “The movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms ....reunites us with God, each other and our truest selves.”<sup>305</sup> I confirm that the call of Christ to ‘Follow me’ is foundational for CYWrS to respond to and must precede sharing the same call with young people. Supporting this response in CYWrS is challenging as younger workers are expected to lead when their faith is still maturing, and older workers often face significant crises but are not expected to share their struggles. This is not an argument against youth-workers sharing their own faith, but I propose the responsibility for faith sharing and discipleship should be shared by the whole Christian community, not just one individual.

In turn this allows the space and time for a CYWr to develop their own faith through celebrations or crises without having to simultaneously carry the full weight of developing the faith of young people. This approach again critiques the flawed misunderstanding of CYW, CYWrS and CYWr sustenance as short-term, fixed, functional and isolated and I have noted in recent years a move

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<sup>305</sup> Nouwen, *Spiritual formation. Following the movements of the Spirit*, page xvi.

towards retreats for CYWr's inner journeys being valued as much as training for their outer journeys. Foster (2014) is a helpful resource for this as he respects the ancient wisdom of spiritual disciplines but writes as a layperson in a style and language that I know is valued by many CYWr's. Developing this approach also prepares CYWr's to become formational mentors for others as they share their experiences and resources.

Alongside spiritual formation I emphasise the importance of reflective practice, highlighting the work of Ballard and Pritchard (1996) on the pastoral cycle. Echoing Freire and Freire's views of education, I affirm that if reflective practice is to sustain CYWr's it must deepen awareness of situations, as "An experiment in bringing out the truth"<sup>306</sup> and be an active and forward-looking process, that seeks "To unveil opportunities for hope."<sup>307</sup> Like spiritual formation, this approach critiques understanding CYW and CYWr's as short-term, fixed and functional and I contend the major challenge here is around informed leadership. Most CYWr's I have encountered over decades have been able to develop their awareness, discuss insightfully and create renewed practice. However, too many line managers and leaders of CYWr's in Scotland lack the knowledge, skills and appreciation of reflective practice to develop their staff. Therefore, those responsible for leading CYWr's should either become trained in reflective practice or delegate this role to skilled CYWr's. They also have a critical role in changing the perceptions of CYWr's, as most are not expected to produce theologically rich and relevant insights that can shape CYW practice in their church or project. There are limited but effective gatherings of CYWr's in Scotland who engage in reflective practice so, like spiritual formation, they should be encouraged and enabled as formational mentors to develop other CYWr's to both reflect and then speak out to shape CYW practice.

To resource this approach among CYWr's I draw on the Youthscape report *Theological Reflection in Youth Ministry* which supports my experience in

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<sup>306</sup> Freire and Freire, *Pedagogy of hope: reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed*, page 1.

<sup>307</sup> Freire and Freire, *Pedagogy of hope: reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed*, page 4.

researching this thesis, that CYWrS value theological reflection, want to find people and spaces to engage in it and seek stronger connections between academia, CYW practice and church leadership. Nash (2007) offers a helpful summary of theologies for youth work, beginning with theologies from above which apply truths from Biblical, doctrinal or denominational traditions and from below, which rise firstly from context and may lead to a focus on liberative actions. He stresses that all theologies are valid and urges CYWrS to actively be engaged in discerning what works best for them. However, I support his recommendation of an integrative theology for youth work which “Must invite guests and voices to the discussion table” and which is “Always evolving.”<sup>308</sup>

This means that more should be expected of every CYWr, not to over-burden them but to understand their theological reflection as something that sustains them and resources the wider Christian community. What Root writes of Bonhoeffer, that “A central way to understand Bonhoeffer is as a pastor to youth and / or as a talented thinker who constructed some of the most creative theological perspectives of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with young people on his mind”<sup>309</sup> should be expected of every CYWr, even if I do not expect many of us to reach Bonhoeffer’s heights of insight or wisdom. A particular challenge to CYWrS engaging in theological reflection is the non-book culture and dyslexia among many, which could be supported by using more podcasts, with the Fuller Youth Institute podcasts’ format a helpful example. These should offer a dialogue between practitioners and academics in discussions which connect culture and theology through self-reflection, an approach which gives CYWrS confidence to create, to speak out to and resource CYW.

Through recent discussions with hospital chaplains, I have recently become aware of pastoral supervision which offers a weaving together of spiritual formation, reflective practice and theological reflection. I propose it should be explored to see how it fits alongside this emphasis on spiritual formation and reflective practice for CYWrS.

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<sup>308</sup> Nash, *What theology for youth work?* page 27.

<sup>309</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as youth worker*, page 3.

**6:6****Growth spirals**

In Chapter 5 I describe how holistic sense-making through growth spirals works against the misunderstanding of CYW and CYWr's sustenance as fixed. Based on the Four Seasons Framework I contend that navigating growth spirals enables the CYWr to mature through and between seasons. Opportunities for rooting this approach into CYWr's practice firstly lies in helping them recognise and affirm their own questions and struggles that provide the raw material for this process. The next opportunity is in affirming CYWr's strengths as problem solvers and showing them that growth spirals enable maturity and longevity. Line managers and church leaders will be more likely to encourage this process when they are made secure enough to encourage a CYWr to mature through their growth spirals and then make space to welcome their new knowledge back into the church or project.

Integrating this approach into CYWr's experience begins with the 'receiving' stage which is achieved through creating stability and security in their personal and professional lives. Stability requires dependable routines and relationships while security provides supports in times of difficulty or crisis. Overall, there must be an emphasis on receiving more than giving so, in their CYW practice they must experience what they understand as success and have their role validated. In their inner journeys, they must also receive the love and acceptance of a Christian community which affirms and builds up their faith and reinforces a positive understanding of themselves as a CYWr.

The second 'breaking' stage must occur proactively and reactively in methods that are experiential, relational and story based. Proactively, breaking is achieved through regular reflective practice which enables awareness of conflict and change and then identifies how existing patterns of thought, practice and belief are no longer congruent, especially where inherited CYW practices no longer work in current contexts. Within holistic spiritual direction, disciplines such as Sabbath, solitude or fasting can open up new

experiences of God or unlock insights that create dis-continuity with existing patterns of belief or action. This literal dis-integration also occurs in unexpected crises of faith, belief or self-understanding where the CYWr feels unable to proceed. For CYWr's this can occur in their role when their faith is challenged by issues arising in their life or the lives of young people that are either not dealt with by their church or tradition, or their own approaches challenge their church or tradition. A related tension common to CYWr's is when, in their personal identity, their faith develops beyond a literal expression that they are expected to teach to young people beginning a Christian faith journey. A reactive response, involving the same tools of reflective practice and spiritual direction, must now sensitively hold the CYWr to keep uncovering the specific issues emerging in the crisis. Living without certainties in this stage is draining so it is important that as a CYWr works through their dis-integration they are wisely supported, to help them let go of previous certainties and discover deeper insights to nurture and guide them.

In the third stage, new practices or beliefs are created out of the uncertainties of the breaking stage. The process requires time to ponder, create or uncover new insights that lead to more effective practices, clearer self-understanding or a richer faith which enable the CYWr to move into another season or work more fruitfully within the same season. This experimental stage can be frustrating as new insights are repeatedly trialled and tested so the CYWr needs to be affirmed that that they are on a path towards maturity. Leadership must be patient and not force a quick resolution which prevents the slow maturing of insights. As in every stage of a growth spiral, while the individual must take responsibility for the work, the role of Christian community is critical and must provide the compassionate locus for the CYWr to take risks and experiment.

These processes develop into the fourth and final stage of 'settling', where new insights are rooted in and around the life of the CYWr. They must learn to trust that this growth spiral has been more than just randomly trying out new ideas but is a robust process of discernment within themselves with the

support of a formational mentor and a Christian community. Consequently, they must now take ownership of their renewed identity and insights and make a committed stance in their practice and beliefs. While they still need support, this stage stands in contrast to their 'receiving' stage as they now give more than they receive, for example by taking on more demanding CYW practices or developing others more than themselves. In turn the Christian community must be ready to receive the hard-earned insights and be shaped by them.

## **6:7 Communities of involved connections**

My view in Chapter 5 that involved connections challenge the isolated misunderstanding of CYW supports this proposal that sustaining CYWrS must be rooted in Christian communities for pastoral care, education and training, leadership and formational mentoring. These involved connections are the contexts in which the previous proposals in this chapter must be rooted. The driver to develop this approach amongst CYWrS lies in showing how Christian communities can support them to thrive, as many CYWrS can feel isolated or experience damaging relationships within their churches. Church leaders and line managers will also support this approach when they see how developing positive relationships in these communities enable a CYWr's career to continue.

### **6:7:1 Pastoral care**

Involved connections can sustain CYWrS by balancing involvement and separation in their Christian community or church. For example, too much involvement in worship or other church activities by them in their working role can leave little space to grow in their personal identity as a Christian and can lead to burnout. Conversely too little involvement in Christian community or worship as they are involved with youth-centred activities can discourage them. Finding the correct balance is therefore challenging but I maintain that sustaining CYWrS in isolation is not possible, even if it is simpler for hard-pressed line managers or mis-informed congregations.

Instead, I reaffirm that the energy to sustain CYWr is stored in the bonds of relationships around them so pastoral care based on committed, covenantal love must be at the core of how a Christian community sustains a CYWr. Such care would extend to any family or close personal relationships around the CYWr and must not be dependent on their work performance. Equally, a CYWr growing through four seasons requires a developing dialogue with God, however that is expressed. This must be sustained by their employer in finding resources that nourish the developing CYWr even if they are sometimes sourced from beyond their congregation or Christian tradition. Maintaining a mutually nurturing dialogue with their CYWr reduces conflicts and improves their pastoral relationship. It is important that integration of role and identity are involved in these conversations so both aspects must be valued, which requires commitments and boundaries to be supported. For a CYWr, their commitments and boundaries in personal and work life should be modelled by the Christian community around them and supported by their mentor. I am convinced that lived expressions of sacrificial love expressed in dedicated service by volunteers and fellow staff to young people or of hospitality through invitations to dinner shape CYWr more than a mission statement. Equally, all staff and volunteers in a Christian community must agree and demonstrate healthy boundaries between work and home, modelling these to the CYWr. In doing this, the CYWr understands that both what they do in their role and who they are in their identity are important.

### **6:7:2 Education and Training**

Committing to involved connections with training institutions, church leadership groups and management committees or wherever people have responsibility for sustaining CYWr, is necessary to convince them to engage with and invest in these proposals. Supported by Davis' (2007) emphasis on a growing maturity of the CYWr role, this will develop as CYWr are supported to confidently make their voices heard in the three following areas. The first is in advocacy to organisational and denominational leadership about the importance of sustaining CYWr, by showing the benefits of a sustained career and the bridges and barriers to enabling that. The task here is not solely to gain resources which support CYWr but to expand the range of people who

will advocate for sustaining CYWrS within leadership groups. Based on this, the second area is in shaping the strategy and directions on how to sustain CYWrS. This will include shaping the frequency and content of resourcing programmes or events, making connections with training agencies and promoting education at pre-degree, undergraduate and Masters' levels. The third area is for CYWrS to be increasingly involved in the delivery of all these resources, alongside other providers, not just as mentors but also as trainers, resource writers, lecturers, policy makers, line managers and retreat leaders. This three-stranded approach will be difficult to implement with the current financial and organisational challenges facing many churches, denominations and youth projects. I therefore support Lukabyo's view that, "Those that train youth ministers today need to consider how to work well within institutions and denominations to build trust."<sup>310</sup>

Involved connections require this quality of relationships between all concerned to drive this change, a mutual task for CYWrS, church leaders and academics; for CYWrS to show they can engage in rigorous theological work and difficult decision-making processes, for church leaders to respect and learn from the views of CYWrS and academics and lastly for academics themselves to allow insights from CYWrS and church leaders to shape the content and format of their courses. Nurturing these relationships will continue the theme of relational formation that lies at the heart of this thesis, an approach that is strengthened when methods are experiential, relational and story based. This will mean learning, decisions and theology being made within CYW contexts as well as in a meeting room or classroom, with an emphasis on mutual and equal sharing by all involved. Ultimately, the validation of this process will be in more CYWrS' entering the beginning season of their careers and an increasing number continuing through their early, middle and late seasons.

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<sup>310</sup> Lukabyo, *Educating Youth Ministers in the Anglican Diocese; John Kidson and the Youthworkers Course*, page 100.

### 6:7:3 Leadership

Intentionally developing CYWrS through these involved connections requires a willingness over time to adapt the power dynamics between church leadership and a CYWr. In the beginning or early seasons, the emphasis will be on the existing leadership guiding but as the CYWr matures there must be more of a dialogue between existing and emerging leadership. This can be achieved by a commitment to mutual learning in reflective practice, which begins by encouraging a CYWr or trainee to engage with different CYW tribes and then share their views and continues by validating everyone's contributions in making decisions around CYW. This expectation from an early stage that CYWrS should prepare and present theological reflections on their CYW practice and holistic experiences must replace the frequent conflicts between CYWrS and leadership that often emerge at this point, drawing on the work of McChlery (2018) around communal and congregational discernment.

Successfully managing these transitions in the CYWr / leadership relationship will enrich both the CYWr and the church's leadership and encourage the CYWr to remain into their middle and later seasons, seasons that can have a significant impact on the life of a Christian community. This will be particularly helpful when CYWrS are enabled to explore experiences that might be described as either failing or not working. These explorations can clash with a fixed misunderstanding of CYW practice, limited either by their own experience or the strictures of their CYW tribe or leadership which defines what should happen. Supporting emerging CYWrS to experiment, learn and apply new methods can be threatening to existing leadership but, in my experience, often leads to growth. Leadership of the Christian community therefore has a responsibility to give time and resources to enable this progression, and to value the necessary spiritual formation, reflective practice and good employment practices that underpin a CYWr's development. As CYWrS are often peripheral to leadership decisions it is particularly important that their growing formation is recognised, affirmed and responded to as new insights into CYW practice, church practice or their own calling by God can all refresh and enable the growth of the wider

Christian community, when it is valued as part of a communal discernment process.

#### **6:7:4 CYWr's formational group**

This group is deliberately placed after the preceding communities, emphasising that they have the primary responsibility for rejecting the isolated approach to sustaining CYWr's. The purpose of this group is to ensure that all elements proposed in this thesis are being undertaken, a process enabled by formational mentors who understand the four seasons framework and the role of relational formation, the way of the desert and city, role identity formation and growth spirals in navigating it. This process begins with discerning what season the CYWr is in, analysing what supports are needed to nurture their centre of gravity and ensuring they are being provided. If they are not being provided elsewhere, then this group would create them.

A confident humility is critical here, confident enough to know what must be provided within the group but humble enough to know that the CYWr's local communities are the main contexts for developing their inner and outer journeys. The methods must be relational, experiential and story based where the mentors enable and facilitates the group to build trust, unlock insights and enrich relational formation as each CYWr commits to being mentored while also mentoring others. Creating these productive relationships independent from the local Christian communities will take time to develop but they are critical, especially when valuable connections with their local Christian communities are lost when they move jobs. Involvement in this group will be important to CYWr's as it is focussed on them, while their employers will value not needing to do all the work of sustaining their CYWr by themselves.

## 6:8 Summary

In contrast with the haphazard development I noted in Chapter 1, I have now supported my claim that role-identity formation enables CYWrS to be sustained across four seasons of their careers, firstly by introducing the Four Seasons Framework as a map which describes the landscape of a sustained CYWrS' career and then making proposals which will enable CYWrS to navigate this landscape. I confirm that 'the way of the desert and the city' as a way-of-being is the core into which the other proposals must be connected as they are delivered concurrently and consistently. The breadth of work required for a network of formational mentors using role-identity formation and growth spirals to facilitate this way-of-being, in partnership with Christian communities, is considerable and this reinforces my objection to CYWrS' sustenance being short-term, fixed, functional and isolated. I am convinced that the insights and evidence of previous chapters provide rigorous support for refuting these views and implementing the proposals in this chapter.

## Conclusion

The central claim of my thesis is that role-identity formation allows CYWrS to be sustained through the four seasons of their career. In summarising this as an integrative process, I note MacLaren's comment of "Finding a new simplicity on the far side of complexity"<sup>311</sup> as I recount the tangled journey of reflexivity, interviews, analysis, supervision sessions and my constant struggle to write which was required to reach and then support that claim. However, I can now confidently state that this thesis makes a significant contribution to the knowledge and practice of sustaining CYWrS.

As I reflect on this journey, I conclude that when more is enabled within CYWrS more can be expected of them, and ultimately more benefits are experienced around a sustained career in CYW. Expecting more of CYWrS does not mean expecting them to do more of the tasks they already do, leading to an ever-increasing work list and usually burnout. Instead, it means expecting them to do more than simply leading activities and to engage in reflective practice and practical theology. This would lead to new insights in their inner and outer journeys which they can then share, in a humble confidence, with their leadership groups, churches, denominations, support agencies and academic institutions. This altered expectation requires a change of perception of what it means to be a CYWr, by CYWrS themselves and those who train, resource, support and employ them. I refer to the work of Dean and Hearlson (2016) which I discovered just prior to submission. It describes how youth ministry can positively impact theological education and while their work is based in America, I claim the processes and lessons learned could easily be transferred to the Scottish context but only if this work was expected of CYWrS and they were encouraged to contribute in this way. Therefore, Scottish-based CYWrS shaping theology, policy and then practice could and should be replicated at local, regional and national level as one impact among many of a sustained CYW career.

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<sup>311</sup> MacLaren, *A generous orthodoxy*, page 73.

I find myself challenged by this conclusion to expect more of CYWrS. It drives me to work the words of this thesis into the lives of CYWrS, primarily by developing a network of formational mentors within my training business alongside pursuing my fledgling academic career. To support myself through this growth I will resource my own way-of-being by joining the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education.

## Future areas of research

As issues were uncovered throughout my research journey, I made decisions about what I would and would not explore. My research journey began by seeking to understand how I and other CYWrS had been sustained so I decided to focus on the interrogation of newly uncovered material described in Chapters 1, 2 and 4 and the subsequent theological conversations with that material described in Chapter 5. My decisions to reject certain areas were therefore mainly made by prioritising a deeper examination of uncovered material over broader comparisons with related subjects. I therefore now note the following areas I rejected and identify them as valuable areas of future research.

The first cluster of areas I prioritise would begin with comparing my findings on sustaining CYWrS with similar professions such as clergy, secular youth workers, teachers, chaplains and social workers. This would be complemented by comparing findings with CYWrS, youth pastors or youth ministers from different theological traditions and CYW tribes. Linked to these two areas would be a study of any differences in sustaining CYWrS in Scotland and other countries. Within these three areas, I would suggest asking what the differences are, why they are different and what could be learned to sustain CYWrS in Scotland.

The second area I recommend for research is exploring what follows on from the later season, or if this season is a terminus. Reflecting on my experience for this thesis, after the development over four seasons of my CYWr role I am now beginning a new role in CYW as a mentor, trainer and educator which overlaps with that first role. In a second 'beginning' season I secured my identity as a trainer and learnt alongside peers within my career as a CYWr. The 'early' stage then followed as I improved my skills by learning from more experienced colleagues. Leaving my CYWr role I am now 'making a mark' in my 'middle' season as an academic and mentor. This validates my view that a

CYW career has different trees which mature at different speeds, but I would still value a study of what, if anything, follows on from the later season.

The final area I commend for further research is exploring why there is an absence of theological writing by Scottish-based CYWrS compared to other countries, which is especially apparent within the *Journal of Youth and Theology*. I have described why this absence is significant and affirm that Scottish-based CYWrS can make significant contributions, as I emphasise in Chapter 2's literature review and the input of interviewees in Chapter 4. However, I recognise that the role of CYWr in Scotland is still a young profession and propose it is caught in a negative spiral where little is produced by CYWrS, so little is requested or enabled and, in turn, even less is produced. My instinct is that this spiral is passively enabled by the dominance of clergy in shaping ecclesial and academic practices, by under-resourced line-managers and over-worked CYWrS who do not see the value of taking time to reflect theologically and an anti-intellectualism and anti-professionalism among some CYW tribes in Scotland.

## Appendices

### Timetables and notes for research events

- 1: June group discussions
- 2: July one-to-one interviews
- 3: September and October group discussions
- 4: Research participants' invitation letter
- 5: Non-identifiable information on the participants

### Appendix 1      2021 June group discussions

Theme                      'Exploring the Issues'.

Programme

9:30                      zooming in      Welcome and introductions.

Thank you for sharing with me, especially I am thankful for your companionship as I seek to walk between academia and on the ground work with young people. This ground is where my heart lies, and I hope the work in this process and when it ends will encourage and support many CYWrS. June 11 is Feast of St Barnabas, the encourager and defender. Reminders of how we will work together; neither seek to cause nor take offence, we are all sharing our experiences today not trying to win arguments, GDPR, withdrawal from the process and pastoral support. Reminder that the zoom meeting will be recorded (transcription is imaginative!) and invitation to photograph and send on any sketches or notes from discussions.

Consent forms all in and ticked and signed.

Start zoom recording.

9:40      Session 1      Sharing our journeys in Christian youth work

introductions

Participants share a time of transition, defined as change or growth, in their Christian youth work career, either positive or negative. Questions to prompt discussions, 'What helped you?' What views of themselves, God, church or the role of a worker were impacted?

10.30 Break

10.40 Session 2 Input by Paul around stages and then discussion (notes in chat function around agree / disagree/question / add?)

11:30 break

11:40 Session 3 'Way of the desert and the city' themes presented by Paul then discussion (record notes in chat function around agree / disagree/question / add?)

What helped you understand your transitions better? What understandings, practices or activities have changed?

Invite participants to write or make a closing statement that sums up what they have explored, discovered or begun to question about their transitions

12:30 Session 4 Next steps

Outlining journaling, interviews and second workshop (details to be on Google classroom)

Pick dates.

Closing comments - GDPR, withdrawal from the process and pastoral support, invitation to photograph and send on any sketches or notes from discussions.

Thanks to participants.

12:45 Close discussion

## Appendix 2: July one-to-one interviews

### Settling in

Thanks for involvement. One hour today to 1 hour 15. Remind participants of pastoral support, right to withdraw, confidentiality, use of these recordings for my own research and not shared by me at workshop. Anonymity required? Start zoom recording.

### Introduction

In our June 11 workshop the issue of identity as a CYWr was significant 'It's just who I am' one participant said. It seemed more important than decision making as enabling growth but perhaps it is part of decision-making, as CYWrs take their identity into different situations like how they stay in post or how their identity changes and then feel unable to stay but need to hold to that new identity. I would like to explore today issues around your identity a CYWr, what one participant described in the workshop as 'the internal journey of me'.

**Question** You shared at the workshop that your changing identity / role as a Christian youth worker (insert their individual story) was significant.

### Discussion

~ What were your different identities in your own words? Formal titles or self-designated by you?

~ How were these identities created and changed?

~ Did you take on, discover or uncover your identity

~ As you reflect on your change of identity, what are the implications now for your understanding of your;

Youth work practice?

Management / supervision / support?

Faith and relationship with God?

~ Is there anything else you want to add?

Stop recording

## Endings.

Thanks, reminder of support, date and format of second workshop (practical responses)

### Individual stories

**P** All of LYPP! walking with selective mute on beach, “You’ve got a year”, or crisis of young peoples’ lives, “I had to learn” - how?

**J** Your 18 months, how did you rage at God, after 18 months, God brought you back in

Psychology student to CYWr, married to single, regional worker to local to regional, rural to urban, change bringer, school contactor, doer of new things, I can’t do this anymore, fundraiser, one who learns on the go,

**C** How did you ‘wrestle’ at Newton Mearns as a new CYWr “I can’t imagine a version of myself...”, what were all the identity-factors in that “Slow spiral down”, student, church worker, Iona programme leader, community meals, Crossroads senior youth worker, leaving Crossroads and Iona - similar notes but a different song - explain that!

**EK** Worker to manager at LYPP,

**EM** Leaving H2O, how did you do that, “I am a plate spinner at the best of times”, CYWr but now C who is a YWr, ‘EM from H2O’ do you need a gap between yourself and your role, leaving to and from H2O, school youth development worker, SEA facilitator (not tutor!), mentor of new H2O staff, nomad, unexpected God-chatterer, tapestry worker,

**R** “Probably the hardest personal transition I’ve been through is when it changed from being something I’m building to something of maintaining, I think, for me, I was just like this is, this is not, who I am and actually what do we do at this point”

**M** Being knocked down several times but youth worker “This is who I am.”

**A** “The transition to me is noticing the change to like, I think in how do you actually affect change in a whole church like, how can you raise the profile of young people within the whole church and I think as times went on, I think I realized that if you want to make change really happen, change

happens from not just like in your wee silo of people, but it actually happens from the top, so I think one thing that I did over the last couple years is more transition into leadership for the whole church and that's kind of like becoming an elder of the church and then also doing stuff that's not strictly just youth work anymore, and to help to almost bolster the profile of young people, I think, as I've been in and about making more key and strategic decisions for the future”

## Appendix 3: September and October group discussions

Theme 'Exploring the issues'

Programme

### Morning

9:30 / 1.00            zooming in    Welcome, , introductions (more fully later)  
 Thanks again. For taking part and shaping my thoughts. Today's questions arose from the first group discussion and your interviews. Reminders of how we will work together neither seek to cause nor take offence, we are all sharing our experiences today not trying to win arguments, GDPR, withdrawal from the process and pastoral support. Reminder that the zoom meeting will be recorded (transcription is imaginative!) and invitation to photograph and send on any sketches or notes from discussions.  
 Start zoom recording.

### Questions

1        Reflecting on my own experience, growth can be inner or outer. Inner growth in determination to remain, faith, love or knowledge, skills. Outer numerical or results / targets of your church or organisation.  
 On these definitions, when have you enabled growth? (no false modesty!) Not just participate in it but actually cause it?  
 How?  
 What else caused growth?  
 How has that changed / increased over time?

### Note to myself

Don't mention 'How important is long haul to achieve growth in and around the worker?' and see if longevity is mentioned.

BREAK

2 A common theme in interviews and workshops was the lack of a secure pathway in CYW, from arrivals to staying to 'leaders growing leaders'.

How can we as experienced CYWrS help the next generation of Christian youth workers to enter and stay in this sector?

How do we get the right person? To invest in?

And for staff further along the path?

What else needs to happen?

11.30 / 3.00 Thanks and goodbye

## Appendix 4: Research participants' invitation letter

Paul Beautyman, 59 Alexander Street, Dunoon, PA23 7BB  
 xxxxxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

Dear,

I am writing to invite you to be part of my PhD research. My question is "How do Christian youth workers in Scotland make sense of transition points in their careers?" I will work with 6 youth workers at different stages of their youth work careers. There is a lot of compulsory information attached so please contact me if you want to discuss anything. If you want to proceed please sign and return the consent form.

### Programme

- June 11. Workshop # 1 'Exploring the Issues'.
- August. Journaling and interview, either face to face to or on zoom
- September. Workshop # 2 Follow up on material from interviews

### Covid Implications

As face-to-face workshops are not possible, we will use zoom, following up to date guidance on zoom security supplied by the University of Glasgow  
<https://uogopenresearch.wordpress.com/2020/03/19/coronavirus-advice/>.

The meeting will be hosted by a colleague, and I will lead the discussions. I will send you the discussion material prior to the workshop. Outline of the workshop is below.

### Journaling, workshops, interviews

Journaling is a process to write your thoughts and reflections in a notebook. Workshops are discussion-based led by myself, with voluntary contributions from the participants. In interviews I lead you in a series of questions, prepared after the first workshop.

**Risks and benefits.** This research will potentially explore difficult seasons in your own personal and professional life, questioning your Christian faith or

youth work practice. This will be done sensitively but as your participation is voluntary you are free to withdraw at any time, for as long as you wish. However, as the research will uncover new insights into what sustains us as Christian youth workers you will hopefully be encouraged and inspired.

**Confidentiality and use of information.** All material will be stored safely on a pass-word protected personal computer, used only for my research and not shared with any third party. After your interview you will be given a written transcript which you may use at the second workshop. Your journal is confidential and you will only share what you choose from it. All information not used directly in my thesis will be destroyed on completion of my research. All data will be anonymised and it can be used for my research and publication purposes without further reference to yourself. If you wish to withdraw from this process you must do so before the data is anonymised, 6 months after the final interview. Interview transcripts/ diary entries will be cut and pasted into larger archive documents and the original versions deleted. If you have GDPR concerns you will be asked to provide proof of identity. For more information go to <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/gdpr/gdprrequests/>.

**How we will work together.** In workshops we will seek to neither cause offence or take offence and respect the vulnerability of fellow Christian youth workers as we share honestly and openly. I will use my experience to help us work in a way that benefits us all. If information is disclosed that presents as a safeguarding issue, I would follow national PVG guidance. I encourage each of you to inform a trusted colleague, line manager or minister that you are involved in this research in case you need extra pastoral support or go to <https://www.seemescotland.org/>

**Expenses.** I offer no expenses or financial incentives to take part in this research. However, if travel costs prevent you travelling to Dunoon for the second workshop please contact me.

**Length of contact and your availability**

Workshops will last one day, journaling in-between the workshops will vary, from ten to twenty minutes a day or an hour a week. Interview will last between one and two hours.

### **Supervision**

If you have questions at any time about this research that you cannot direct to me contact my supervisors;

Anna Fisk [Anna.Fisk@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Anna.Fisk@glasgow.ac.uk)

David Jasper [David.Jasper@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:David.Jasper@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thanks,

Paul

## **Appendix 5: Non-identifiable information on the participants**

The eight participants consisted of 3 females and 5 males. Seeking CYWrs with experiences of transitions and a developing career, one of the participants had been employed for under 5 years, two for 10 to 15 years and five for over 15 years. They worked in different settings; one managing a secular community youth project, one managing a Christian community youth project, two serving in local churches (one independent and one Church of Scotland), two working as youth advisors for different denominations at a regional level (although one job-shared that task with serving in a local church) while two had left their CYW roles, with one now working in a Christian social care agency and another working part-time jobs in a secular community development agency and a young carers' charity. These roles also mirrored the diversity of Christian theology explored in Chapter 1:2:1, ranging from an explicit evangelical commitment, through serving all young people but drawing on a clear Christian ethos to working in a strictly secular role but acknowledged and affirmed by their employer as Christians. The age profile of the participants ran from one aged 20-29, four aged 30-39, two aged 40-49 and one aged 60-69.

# Bibliography, referencing system and research events.

## Referencing system

Bibliography and all references use the Harvard system.

[Quick guide to Harvard referencing \(Cite Them Right\) | Library Services | Open University](#)

## Bible

NRSV Bible is used unless otherwise specified.

## Research events

### Group discussion dates and interviewees' involvement

- |   |                                |                |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | June 10, 2021 (morning)        | D, E, F, G, H. |
| 2 | June 10, 2021 (afternoon)      | A, B, C.       |
| 3 | September 24, 2021 (morning)   | B, D, E.       |
| 4 | September 24, 2021 (afternoon) | A              |
| 5 | October 1                      | C, G, H        |

### Interviews

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| A | July 1, 2021   |
| B | July 1, 2021   |
| C | July 1, 2021   |
| D | July 2, 2021   |
| E | July 2, 2021   |
| F | July 2, 2021   |
| H | August 4, 2021 |

### Footnoting Format

For example;

B, Interview means interview with interviewee B.

C, GD 1. means interviewee C in group discussion 1.

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