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THE EXPERIENCES THAT FORM AND SUSTAIN GENERATION Y
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATORS IN CATHOLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Bachelor of Arts (Education)

Bachelor of Education (Conversion)

Graduate Certificate in Mathematics Teaching

Master of Religious Education

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Education



School of Education

Fremantle Campus

February, 2021

Declaration

To the best of the candidate's knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by another person, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis is the candidate's own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institution.

Human Ethics. The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The research received human research ethics approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number 017041F.

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Date: February, 2021

Abstract

Students in Western Australian Catholic schools learn about Catholic beliefs and practices in the Religious Education Learning Area. In Catholic secondary schools, Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) are delegated responsibility from principals, to coordinate the teaching of this learning area's content. RECs are required to be committed Catholics who are active members of the Catholic Church. It is probable that RECs will increasingly be recruited from amongst Generation Y Catholics. For Catholic secondary school principals, recruiting religiously committed Generation Y Catholics into the position of REC will be challenging.

The primary aim of the research is to identify and describe the experiences that form and sustain Generation Y RECs. The research has two foci. Firstly, the RECs' personal and professional experiences where their Christian faith is formed and sustained are explored and described. Secondly, the research investigates how the RECs have been formed and sustained professionally. The study has social constructionism as its epistemology. Data was gathered by conducting two rounds of narrative interviews with eight RECs, with a year's interval between the first and second round of interviews. Thematic Narrative Analysis was used to analyse the data.

The research findings suggest that the Christian faith of most of the Generation Y RECs is formed and sustained through personal experiences in families, parishes and other Catholic communities. The faith and Catholic identity of several RECs were reinvigorated through professional experiences while they were employed as teachers in Catholic schools. This reinvigoration of faith consequently influenced them to pursue the position of REC. Experiences within professional networks, the support of school principals and Catholic Education Western Australia were described by most RECs as sustaining them professionally. The majority of RECs expressed a desire to progress to more senior leadership positions and a commitment to seeking out and engaging in professional and faith formation experiences. The findings of the study may inform the policies of Catholic Education Commissions and Catholic schools in Australia, in the areas of identification, recruitment and the formation of RECs.

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Glossary

Accreditation

Catholic education commissions in Australia have established accreditation processes to support teachers and non-teaching staff with their understanding of Catholic doctrine and the formation of their faith (National Catholic Education Commission, 2015b). The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) requires that staff employed in Catholic schools under its policy direction complete an accreditation process (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a). The initial step in this accreditation process is the completion of a one-day Orientation module followed by a six-hour module called Faith, Story and Witness, both of which must be completed in the first year of employment (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a). These modules are then followed by the completion of an accreditation process that is specific to an employee's role in a Catholic school, which must be completed within 5 years of commencing employment (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013). The CECWA (2013) has accreditation requirements for non-teaching staff (Accreditation to Work in a Catholic School), teachers of subjects other than Religious Education (RE) (Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School), RE teachers (Accreditation to Teach RE) and leaders of the RE learning area (Accreditation to Lead RE). To complete Accreditation to Lead RE, teachers employed in Western Australian Catholic schools must complete a formal study program of six tertiary units in RE and Theology and a three day in-service component at the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a).

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

The Commonwealth Government agency that defines and maintains national standards for teachers, principals and other school leaders employed in Australian primary and secondary schools (Australia Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2017a).

Catechesis

Instruction in the Christian faith where the learner is assumed to have existing Christian faith and that “presupposes that the learner is receiving the message as a salvific reality” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 68).

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia is comprised of the archbishop and auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Perth and the bishops of the Dioceses of Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, p. 3). The Bishops' Conference is responsible for Catholic education throughout Western Australia. To authorise and ensure the continued improvement of Catholic schools in Western Australia, the bishops issued mandate letters in 1981, 1993 and 2009 (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, p. 3).

Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia is the executive committee established in 1971 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia to ensure that Catholic education is enacted throughout the four dioceses of Western Australia. The Commission is comprised of up to 12 members who are appointed by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia. The members of the CECWA are responsible to the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia for overseeing the continuous development and improvement of Catholic schools in the four dioceses of Western Australia (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2019e). Five permanent committees are convened to assist the commission in its governance of Catholic education, in the areas of aboriginal community; audit and risk; Catholic education community; curriculum; and finance. A key function of the CECWA and its committees is to generate policy statements and review the operational work of its secretariat, the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 107).

Catholic Education Office of Western Australia

Between 1971 and 2014, the secretariat of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia was called the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA). The CEOWA negotiated on behalf of Catholic schools with the Western Australian state and Australian commonwealth governments regarding funding programs. The Executive Director of the CEOWA had delegated authority from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia to appoint principals in diocesan accountable schools (Pendal, 2008, p. 303; Poncini, 2018 p. 18). Through its diocesan offices in Perth, Bunbury, Broome and Geraldton, the CEOWA supported Catholic schools in Western Australia with school improvement advisors, subject area consultants, professional learning opportunities and through the

distribution of funding to diocesan accountable schools (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2019d).

Catholic Education Western Australia or the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia

The names of the secretariat of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia from 2015 until 2020. In this thesis, the terms *Catholic Education Western Australia* and *The Office of Catholic Education Western Australia* are used interchangeably to refer to the secretariat of the CECWA in the years 2015 until 2020.

Catholic youth ministry

Catholic youth ministry is a form of non-ordained ministry within the Catholic Church that seeks to evangelise children and adolescents (Ryan, 2020).

Composite school

A school that has both a primary and secondary campus.

Faith

Faith is a grace of God; that is, a gift, freely given to people of a “supernatural virtue infused by him” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2003, para. 153). For Catholics, accepting the grace of faith requires a person to intellectually assent to “the almighty Father as Creator; the Son as Lord and Saviour; and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier in the Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2003, para. 14).

Faith formation

Faith formation refers to the nurturing of person’s faith in Catholic communities. The faith formation of Catholic school community members is Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017, p. 9).

(to) Form

To influence a person and cause them to develop in a particular way (Collins English Dictionary, 2017).

Generation Y

Generation Y is comprised of people born inclusive of the years 1976 to 1993 (ABS, 2011, “Changing Times—World Events and Popular Culture”, para. 3).

Lay ministries

Offices and roles that the lay faithful legitimately fulfil in the liturgy, in the transmission of the faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church (John Paul II, 1988, para. 23).

Ministry

Historically the word “ministry” was used by the Catholic Church’s hierarchy to describe the participation of the ordained clergy in the sacred ministry (CCC, 2003, para. 1548). Following the publication of the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1976, the term was broadened to describe the service provided to the Catholic church by both ordained and lay Catholics (Ryan, 2020, p. 33).

Ministry of the Word

The use of words to proclaim the gospel in the same ways as Jesus (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 18).

National Catholic Education Commission

The national leadership structure of Catholic education in Australia that was created by and is responsible to the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The Commission develops and implements policy at the national level for Catholic education and supports the work of state and territory Catholic education commissions (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017).

Ongoing renewal of accreditation

As a condition of employment, all staff in Western Australian Catholic schools are required to complete a process of ongoing renewal to maintain their accreditation (Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth Teachers Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2012, 2015). In order to complete ongoing renewal of accreditation, teachers employed in Western Australian Catholic schools must complete 30 hours of accredited activities over a five-year period, with activities classified as either knowledge or faith formation (Catholic Education Commission

of Western Australia, 2013). A minimum of 15 hours of accredited activities for ongoing renewal must address the knowledge component of accreditation, which is defined as the “knowledge of the content of the Catholic faith and the pedagogical principles for transmitting it” (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a, para. 2). Any hours beyond the mandatory 15 hours of knowledge formation can be filled with additional knowledge hours or what CEWA describes as the faith component of ongoing renewal (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a). “The essential criterion for ongoing renewal in faith formation is a connection with Jesus Christ” through “opportunities for spiritual formation, reflection, [and] discernment” (Catholic Education Western Australia, 2018a, para. 6).

Personal experience

Any experience that occurs in the personal life of a participant that is unrelated to their employment in a Catholic school.

Principal

The leaders of Catholic secondary and primary schools in Western Australia who have the “ultimate responsibility, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, for every aspect of the Catholic school's ethos, life and curriculum” (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 94).

Professional experience

Any experience that is directly related to a participant’s employment in a Catholic school.

Professional learning

Formal and informal learning that assists teachers and educational leaders to acquire new skills, develop new insights into pedagogy and explore new or advanced understandings of content and resources (Dowling, 2012).

Religious Education

In Catholic primary and secondary schools in Western Australia, RE is both an academic subject and a form of the Ministry of the Word (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73; Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 78). It is a compulsory subject for all students who attend primary and secondary Catholic schools in

Western Australia “that needs to be the first priority in the Catholic school” (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, p. 62). The RE learning area has content mandated by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia that is concerned with the knowledge and understanding of the gospel as it is handed on by the Catholic Church (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009).

Religious Education Consultant

Catholic education offices in Australia employ Religious Education Consultants who are experts in the area of RE curriculum. These consultants provide RECs with expert advice in matters pertaining to teaching and learning resources, pedagogy, professional learning and the curriculum requirements of the Catholic Church and state government regulatory bodies (Buchanan, 2015).

Religious Education Coordinator

In Western Australian Catholic secondary and composite schools (combined secondary and primary schools), the position of REC is one of delegated responsibility from the Catholic school principal, who remains the “spiritual and temporal leader of the school” (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 1986, p. 2). RECs have delegated responsibility for coordinating the RE learning area and typically have the status of a head of learning area; however, some RECs are members of the senior leadership team of their schools. Some RECs also have delegated leadership of their school’s ministerial activities such as liturgies, retreats, pilgrimages and Christian service activities.

Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority of Western Australia

The state government agency that is responsible for Kindergarten to Year 12 curriculum, assessment, standards and reporting for all Western Australian schools (Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority of Western Australia, 2019).

(to) Sustain

To provide for or give support to (Collins English Dictionary, 2017).

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CC	Congregation for the Clergy
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CECWA	Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia
CEOWA	Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
CEWA	Catholic Education Western Australia
CYM	Catholic youth ministry
GRQ	General research question
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
PD	Professional development
RAL	Religion and Life
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Coordinator
SCSAWA	Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority of Western Australia
SNR	Spiritual but not religious
SRQ	Specific research question
SCCE	Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education
WA	Western Australia
WYD	World Youth Day

Chapter 1: The Research Defined

1.1 Chapter Introduction

In Western Australian Catholic secondary and composite (combined primary and secondary) schools, Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) are leaders of the Religious Education (RE) learning area in Years 7–12. In some instances, RECs also have delegated leadership of the ministerial aspects of schools such as liturgies and retreats. The RE learning area is an academically rigorous subject that can contribute to secondary graduation and university entrance requirements (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia [CECWA], 2009; Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority of Western Australia [SCSAWA], 2016). RE is also a form of the Ministry of the Word in which RECs lead RE teachers in providing students with a sense of the nature of Catholic Christianity and how Christians should live their lives (Congregation for the Clergy [CC], 1997). In Western Australia (WA), all RECs are lay people (Catholic Education Western Australia [CEWA], 2014). The CECWA (2004) mandates that RECs “shall be committed Catholics and shall give active Christian witness to Catholic beliefs” (p. 2).

In the next 10 years there will be a growing demand for RECs because of the planned establishment of new Catholic secondary schools and the probable retirement of RECs born prior to 1960 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016a; CEWA, 2016a). Committed Catholics who are members of the age demographic known as Generation Y will increasingly need to be appointed to the position of REC and be provided with professional and faith formation to sustain them once employed. Generation Y is comprised of people born between 1976 and 1993 (ABS, 2011). It is likely that identifying and recruiting religiously committed Generation Y Catholics into the position of REC and providing support that sustains them professionally will be challenging for Catholic education systems in Australia.

1.2 The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore and describe the experiences that form and sustain secondary and composite school RECs who are members of Generation Y. The faith and professional formation experiences of eight Generation Y RECs were explored to understand how they were formed as leaders of the RE learning area. Narrative research was used to explore how the Christian faith of the participating Generation Y RECs was initially transmitted to them and how their faith was nurtured in Catholic communities during their

childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. The participants' professional experiences from their periods of employment as RE teachers were also investigated as were the faith and professional formation experiences of the participants while employed as RECs.

1.3 The Research Problem

A problem exists for Australian Catholic education systems in planning how to identify, form and sustain members of Generation Y as RECs. In the coming years Catholic secondary school principals will need to appoint RECs who are committed Catholics who can confidently provide students with “knowledge and understanding of the gospel, as it is handed on by the Catholic Church” (CECWA, 2009, para. 62). It is likely to be increasingly challenging for Catholic secondary school principals to recruit teachers with the requisite faith formation to lead the RE learning area. The low level of religious practice among those who self-identify as Catholic in Australia is reflected among teachers employed by Catholic schools (Dixon, Reid & Chee, 2013; National Catholic Education Commission [NCEC], 2017). “For most staff, the Catholic school is their only regular experience of the mission and life of Catholicism” (NCEC, 2017, p. 11). Catholic education systems will need to take an intentional approach to identifying, recruiting and facilitating the faith and professional formation of teachers who have the potential to progress to become RECs.

RECs will increasingly be recruited from among Generation Y RE teachers. It is unlikely that a large group of Generation Y RE teachers will come to employment in Catholic schools with the commitment to the Catholic Church that is required to progress to the position of REC (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007). Most Generation Y Catholics have not had an apprenticeship in the faith through catechesis in the home and parish, and in general, do not live in a manner that fulfils the precepts of the Catholic Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 2003; CECWA, 2009; Mason et al., 2007). However, a small group of committed Generation Y Catholics exists in Australian society, who as adults give witness to their faith through membership of a Eucharistic community outside the Catholic schools in which they are employed (Dixon, 2013; McKinley & Webber, 2012). It may be that future RECs will need to be identified from among this group of committed Catholics and assisted with their professional formation.

In addition to the challenge of identifying future leaders of the RE learning area, Catholic education systems in Australia will need to develop processes to sustain RECs in their work. Sustaining Generation Y RECs will require the development and administration

of processes at the systemic and school levels that support RECs with the unique challenges of the position. For example, RECs employed in Western Australian Catholic schools lead learning areas that typically employ a large number of part-time teachers with no or minimal qualifications in secondary RE (Poncini, 2018). This potentially places demands upon RECs, in terms of facilitating teacher knowledge formation, that do not exist for other heads of learning. Further, “the REC tends to be a lonely position because it is counter-cultural” (Crotty, 2006, p. 792), in that it is one of a small number of leadership positions concerned with the religious aspects of the Catholic school. As religious leaders, RECs need to explain the Church’s universal position on moral and ethical issues to students, teachers and parents (Buchanan, 2015). The disengagement of many students, teachers and parents from the Catholic Church and RE learning can make this challenging (Poncini, 2018). When RECs are not supported adequately by Catholic education offices, principals and colleagues, it can result in them feeling overwhelmed, and lead to a high turnover in the position (Buchanan, 2015; Crotty, 2005; Fleming, 2002). Catholic education offices will need to develop processes to support Generation Y RECs through these challenges.

Catholic schools and educational systems will need to support the permanent faith and professional formation of Generation Y RECs. Church documents have long advocated that the faith and professional formation of RE teachers should be supported by Catholic educational institutions (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1977, 2007; Pius XII, 1957). Generation Y RECs will require theological knowledge and faith formation because the “transmission of the Christian message through teaching implies a mastery of the knowledge of the truths of the faith and of the principles of spiritual life that require constant improvement” (CCE, 2007, para. 26). It is also likely that Generation Y RECs will benefit from support to improve their capacity to lead the teachers who work in RE learning areas (Buchanan, 2013). Ranson (2006) describes the necessity for Catholic education systems to provide permanent faith and professional formation for RE leaders in Catholic schools:

[Religious leaders in Catholic schools] need to be identified who, as well as possessing administrative capacity, are also grounded in faith, possessing spiritual maturity, a vocational sensibility and the awareness of ecclesial responsibility. Such persons obviously don't come ready packaged! Such persons, identified as having this potential, require sustained formation and requisite education. Both focused theological and spiritual formation are required (p. 421).

This study focuses on both the personal and professional experiences that have formed and sustained the eight participants as RECs over the course of their lifetimes. The research examines the participants' personal experiences because experiences in Catholic communities, such as the family and parish, are likely to have a significant influence upon RECs' ability to lead the RE learning area as people of faith (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Neidhart, 2014). It is through personal experiences that they will have obtained much of their foundational knowledge of the Catholic tradition. Further, the receptiveness of RECs to faith formation experiences provided by schools and Catholic educational systems is likely to be contingent upon the personal experiences they have had as children and adolescents.

1.4 Research Questions

To investigate the research problem, one general research question (GRQ) and four specific research questions (SRQs) were developed. The GRQ for the research project is: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? The four SRQs are:

- SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area?
- SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC?
- SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?
- SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

The GRQ was created to investigate the personal and professional experiences that form and sustain Generation Y RECs. The literature review was guided by the GRQ and resulted in the development of the four SRQs. The SRQs were designed to explore the participants' experiences in the personal and professional parts of their lives and in turn provide data to address the GRQ. Specific research question one was developed to explore the personal faith formation experiences of the participants during childhood, adolescence and adulthood that have contributed to their faith development and their subsequent decisions to become RECs. Specific research question two focuses on the professional experiences of

the participants while employed as RE teachers that formed them professionally so that they felt sufficiently competent to progress to the role of REC. Specific research question three was created to explore how the Christian faith of the participants has been formed and sustained through their professional experiences while employed as RECs. Specific research question four was developed to identify and describe how the professional formation of the participants was sustained during their periods of employment as RECs.

1.5 The Significance of the Research

The research contributes to the knowledge of how members of Generation Y construct Christian faith or the feeling of certainty that the Christian God exists. It does so by building on the findings of previous studies that investigate the spiritual and Christian formation of Generation Y Catholics (Hackett, 2006; Mason et al., 2007; Rymarz & Graham, 2006). The research is the first narrative study, in a Western Australian context, to explore the Christian faith formation of Generation Y Catholics over the course of a lifetime. The research findings provide new insights into the personal experiences during which the faith of Generation Y Catholics is formed.

The CECWA and other Catholic education commissions in Australia may use the study's findings to inform the development of future faith and professional formation processes for RECs. Catholic education commissions have delegated responsibility from diocesan bishops to ensure that "those who are appointed as teachers of religion in schools...are outstanding in true doctrine, in the witness of their Christian life, and in their teaching ability" (Libreria Vaticana, 1983, canon 804). Pope Francis (2014) explains the need for Catholic education systems and schools to "invest so that teachers and supervisors may maintain a high level of professionalism and also maintain their faith and the strength of their spiritual impetus" (para.7). The research findings may be used by Australian Catholic education commissions to inform the planning of the identification, induction, faith formation and theological learning programs for RE teachers and RECs.

The research findings may assist Catholic school principals in identifying and recruiting Generation Y Catholics who are committed to the Church and who live a sacramental life (CCE, 2007, para. 15). Catholic schools need sufficient numbers of teachers, or a "critical mass", who are animated by the gospel and who live as committed Catholics, to maintain the ecclesiastical nature of schools (Gowdie, 2011, p. 324; Rymarz, 2010). The research findings could be used by principals to identify, recruit and promote prospective Generation Y

teachers who are likely to experience an ongoing deepening of their Christian faith and practice while being a member of a Catholic school community.

1.6 The Limitations of the Research

The scope of the study may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability as the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be applied to other contexts or settings. The focus of the research on a position of religious leadership and the faith formation required for this position will likely limit the transferability of the research to Catholic schools, Catholic education systems and possibly other faith-based schools and systems. There is likely to be limited transferability of the findings to faith-based schools that do not have a position equivalent to the REC. The research has a focus upon the support that RECs receive at a systemic level from CEWA while employed as RE teachers and RECs. This focus may limit the applicability of the research to Catholic schools in countries other than Australia that do not belong to an educational system that directs policy in areas such as leadership formation and accreditation. The research findings describe the personal experiences during which the Christian faith of the Generation Y RECs was formed as children, adolescents and young adults. This information may have limited application for understanding the faith formation of Catholics from other age demographics.

1.7 Thesis Outline and Chapter Summaries

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters, an overview of which are provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Thesis Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: The Research Defined
Chapter 2: Context of the Research
Chapter 3: Review of Significant Literature
Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods
Chapter 5: Findings
Chapter 6: Discussion of the Research
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 1 details the purpose of the research, the research problem, the GRQ and the four SRQs used to guide the study. The significance of the research and research limitations are also introduced. Lastly, an outline of the thesis's seven chapters is presented.

Chapter 2 provides a description of the context of the research project. Two dimensions of context are discussed. The first is an overview of the structure of Catholic education in WA. The second dimension of context discussed is the historical development of lay ministerial leadership in the Catholic Church, particularly the development of the REC position in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools.

Chapter 3 reviews research literature relevant to understanding the experiences that formed and sustained the eight Generation Y RECs. There are four sections in the literature review. The first explores personal experiences during which Christian faith is formed in the Catholic tradition and discusses the forms of religious belief that exist amongst Generation Y Catholics. The second section of the chapter discusses the professional formation experiences of RE teachers. Section three is focused on the permanent faith formation experiences provided to RE teachers and RECs. The final section of the literature review, section four, examines the professional formation experiences of RECs.

Chapter 4 describes the research design developed to explore the experiences that form and sustain Generation Y RECs. The chapter commences with an overview of the theoretical framework that was used to identify and describe the participants' experiences. A description of the study's interpretive framework and social constructionist epistemology is then provided. The chapter then progresses to discussing how the interpretive theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism influenced the choice of the narrative research methodology and qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the ethical requirements of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the study's findings. Four findings are discussed in this chapter, which are in turn supported by sub-findings. The findings address the four SRQs, which answer the GRQ. The findings are largely comprised of the language of the participants in the form of quotations extracted from interview transcripts and are organised using sub-headings.

Chapter 6 discusses the four themes derived from the research findings: Personal Experiences; Professional Experiences that Form RE Teachers; Faith Formation Experiences; and Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs. The themes address the GRQ: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences?

Chapter 7 reviews the research, offers six recommendations derived from the study's findings and themes and presents suggestions for future research. The recommendations propose policy initiatives that may be used by Catholic schools, universities and education systems in the future identification, recruitment and formation of RECs. Implications for future research into the faith formation of RECs are presented.

1.8 Chapter Summary

The main elements of the research project are introduced in this chapter. There are two foci of the research. First, the research identifies and describes the experiences that had formed the participants both professionally and as people of faith so that they felt sufficiently competent to progress to the position of REC. The second focus of the study is the identification and description of the professional experiences sustaining the participants in their work as RECs. Qualitative research methods were chosen to investigate the experiences of the participating RECs due to the researcher wanting to understand the experiences of the participants as they understood them. The research is significant because of the insights it offers into how Generation Y Catholics form their faith and because it provides knowledge that may be used by Catholic education systems and schools in the identification, recruitment and formation of RECs.

Chapter 2: Context of the Research

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The context of research refers to the setting in which the research is conducted (Saldaña, 2016, p. 171). Two contexts of the research are presented in this chapter (Table 2.1). First, the broader Catholic educational context in which the research occurred is explained. An overview of the leadership structure and curriculum of Catholic secondary education in WA is provided. The RE curriculum in WA Catholic secondary schools is described because RECs have delegated responsibility from principals for leading the programming and teaching of this content (CECWA, 2009, para. 43; Catholic Education Office of Western Australia [CEOWA], 1986). Second, the chapter provides an outline of the position of the REC. Given that RECs lead a learning area that is a form of the Ministry of the Word, the chapter provides a discussion of the historical development of both lay ministerial leadership in the Church and the position of the REC in WA Catholic schools (CECWA, 2009, para. 43; CEOWA, 1986; Paul VI, 1975). Finally, the chapter provides a description of the religious commitment that is required of teachers who occupy the REC role.

Table 2.1

Overview of Chapter 2: Context of the Research

2.1	Chapter Introduction
2.2	Catholic Education in Western Australia
2.2.1	The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia
2.2.2	The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia
2.2.3	The Office of Catholic Education Western Australia
2.2.4	Catholic school principals in Western Australia
2.2.5	Catholic schools in Western Australia
2.2.6	The curriculum of Western Australian Catholic schools
2.3	The Religious Education Coordinator
2.3.1	The development of lay ministerial leadership in the Catholic Church
2.3.2	The historical development of the position of REC
2.3.3	The role of the REC in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools
2.4	Chapter Summary

2.2 Catholic Education in Western Australia

The research project was undertaken within the Archdiocese of Perth, one of four Catholic dioceses in the Australian state of Western Australia. The other three Catholic dioceses in WA are Bunbury, Broome and Geraldton. Catholic education in the four dioceses is mandated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of WA. The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia is mandated by the Bishops to oversee Catholic education in the four dioceses. In turn, the responsibilities of the Commission are exercised through the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia (CECWA, 2009, p. 49). Religious Education is mandated by the Bishops' Conference to be taught as an academic subject in all Catholic schools and is compulsory for all students (CECWA, 2009, para. 62). Principals of Catholic secondary and composite schools delegate leadership of the RE learning area to RECs (CEOWA, 1986).

2.2.1 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Western Australia. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of WA is comprised of the archbishop and auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Perth and the bishops of the Dioceses of Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome (CECWA, 2009; CEWA, 2019a). In general, Catholic religious instruction and schooling are the responsibility of individual diocesan bishops, who oversee and regulate it in their own individual dioceses (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canon 804). However, the governance structure of Catholic education in WA is unique among Australian dioceses. The bishops of the four Western Australian dioceses "pool their authority into a single central commission" that directs a state-wide Catholic education system (Pendal, 2008, p. 340). Collectively they are responsible for Catholic education throughout the state. To authorise and ensure the continued existence of Catholic schools in WA, the bishops issued mandate letters in 1981, 1993 and 2009 (CECWA, 2009, p. 3). These documents highlight the place of Catholic education in the role of the Church's mission and delegate responsibility to the CECWA for the governance of Catholic schools in WA (Pendal, 2008). Figure 2.1 shows the geographical

locations of the four Western Australian Catholic dioceses of Bunbury, Perth, Geraldton and Broome.

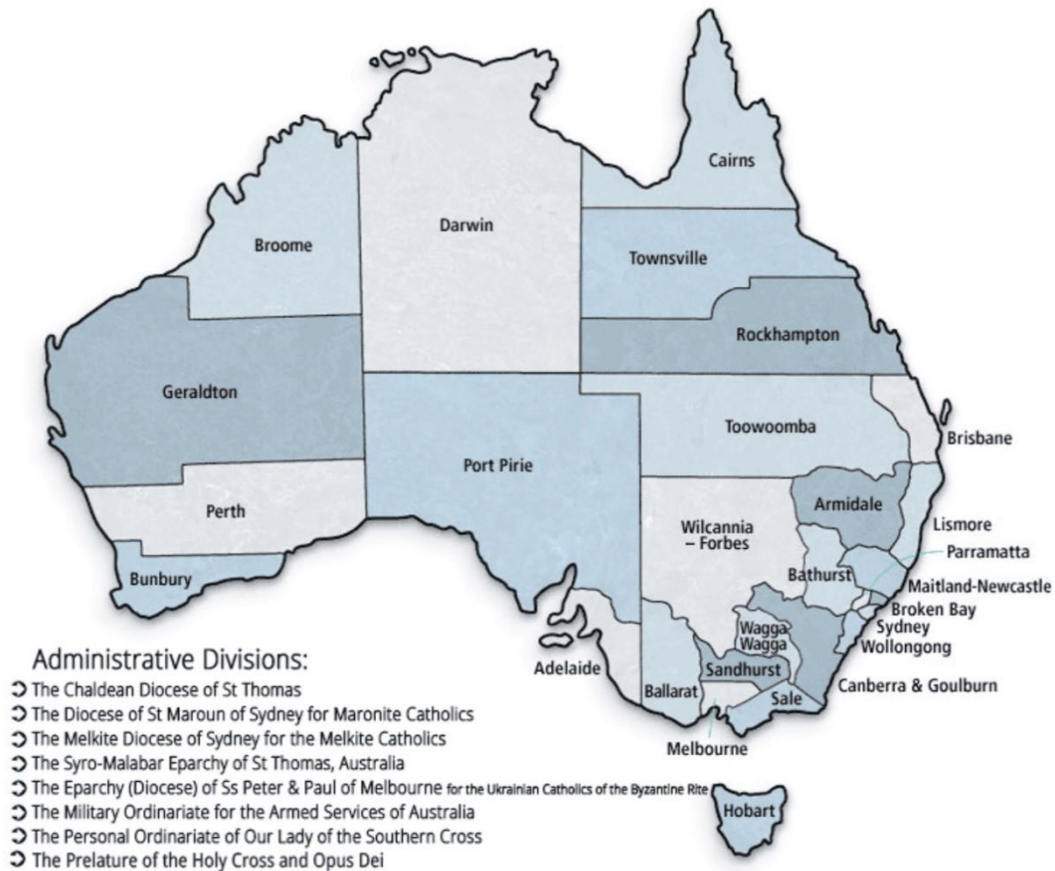


Figure 2.1. Location of the Catholic Dioceses of Western Australia (National Council of Priests in Australia, 2017).

2.2.2 The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia. The CECWA was established in 1971 by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of WA to ensure that Catholic education was enacted throughout the state (Tannock, 1979). The Commission is comprised of up to 12 members who are appointed by the Catholic Bishops of WA. The members of the CECWA are responsible to the bishops for overseeing the continuous development and improvement of Catholic schools in the four dioceses of WA (CEWA, 2019e). Five permanent committees are convened to assist the CECWA in its governance of Catholic education, in the areas of aboriginal community; audit and risk; Catholic education community; curriculum; and finance (CEWA, 2019e). The key function of the CECWA and its committees is to generate policy statements and review the operational work of the Office

of CEWA. In addition, the CECWA assists individual diocesan bishops with schools in their dioceses and makes provision for religious orders that operate Catholic schools in WA (CECWA, 2009, p. 3). The CECWA administers an educational system that in 2018 included 162 schools and 76,000 students (ABS, 2018, table 4).

2.2.3 The Office of Catholic Education Western Australia. The CECWA’s responsibilities are administered by the Office of CEWA (CECWA, 2009). Until 2014, the Office of CEWA was known as the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (Glasson, 2014). The Bishops’ Mandate (CECWA, 2009) describes the CEOWA as “the secretariat of the Catholic Education Commission”, which is directly responsible to the CECWA (para. 107). The Office of CEWA implements the policy decisions of the CECWA and negotiates on behalf of Catholic schools with state and federal governments regarding funding programs (Pental, 2008; Poncini, 2018). Through its diocesan offices in Perth, Bunbury, Broome and Geraldton, the Office of CEWA supports Catholic schools with school improvement advisors and subject area consultants.

CEWA (2019d) directly distributes funds to most Catholic schools in WA. These schools are referred to as “diocesan accountable schools” (CECWA, 1993, “Definitions”, para. 3). In addition, religious orders administer Catholic schools in WA that have governance structures independent of CEWA, and are referred to as “order accountable schools” (CECWA, 1993, “Definitions”, para. 4). Both diocesan-accountable and order-accountable schools in the four dioceses of WA come under the policy direction of the CECWA. In diocesan-accountable schools, the responsibility for the selection and appointment process for principals is delegated by the bishops to the Executive Director of CEWA (CECWA, 1993, “Definitions”, para. 3). In order-accountable schools, the appointment of principals is the responsibility of the “Congregation Leader or this may be delegated by the Congregation Leader to another authority” (CECWA, 1993, “Definitions”, para. 4).

2.2.4 Catholic school principals in Western Australia. The CECWA (2009) describes principals of Catholic schools in WA as having the “ultimate responsibility, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, for every aspect of the Catholic school's ethos, life and curriculum” (para. 94). Glasson (2014, p. 34) outlines the role of Catholic school principals in

WA as being concerned with enhancing and promoting a school's Catholic identity, the provision of gospel-based curricula and the development of the school as a faith community. All leadership roles within WA Catholic schools are delegated by the principal in the spirit of shared leadership (CECWA, 2009, para. 94). Although principals generally delegate leadership of the RE learning area to a REC, they maintain ultimate responsibility for providing effective RE in a Catholic school. As leaders of the RE learning area, principals require a significant grounding in faith and knowledge about the Catholic Church (Sayce & Lavery, 2010).

2.2.5 Catholic schools in Western Australia. Catholic schools in WA exist to contribute to the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ (CCE, 1997, para. 11). Pope John Paul II (1995) described Catholic schools as "places of evangelization, well-rounded education, inculturation and initiation to the dialogue of life among young people" (para. 102). The CECWA (2009, para. 26) mandates that all WA Catholic schools plan evangelisation in an explicit and systematic manner.

2.2.6 The curriculum of Western Australian Catholic schools. There are "nine learning areas in the curriculum of Catholic schools in Western Australian. The first is Religious Education" (CECWA, 2009, para. 61). The other eight learning areas prescribed by the WA state government are English; Health and Physical Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Languages; Mathematics; Science; Technology; and the Arts (SCSAWA, 2019). The Bishops of WA mandate that the principals of Catholic schools are to provide a distinctive curriculum through the integration of faith, culture and life (CECWA, 2009, para. 21). Practically, this provision means integrating gospel values into the learning experiences provided by all learning areas (CECWA, 2009, para. 65).

2.2.6.1 Religious Education in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools. In Catholic secondary schools in WA, RE is both an academic subject and a form of the Ministry of the Word (CC, 1997, para. 73; CECWA, 2009, para. 78). The RE learning area has both content and pedagogy mandated by the Catholic Bishops of WA, concerned with the knowledge and understanding of the gospel as it is handed on by the Catholic Church (CECWA, 2009). A mandate in the context of RE in Catholic schools refers to an official,

authoritative instruction or command from the Catholic Bishops of WA specifying what content must be taught and how it must be taught (CECWA, 2009; Collins English Dictionary, 2017). RE is mandated by the Bishops of WA to be “a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines” (CC, 1997, para. 53; CECWA, 2009, para. 62). In addition to being a scholastic discipline, RE “is a form of the Ministry of the Word in Evangelisation” (CECWA, 2009, para. 99). The CECWA (2009, para.64) describes the purpose of RE in Catholic schools under its policy direction:

[Religious Education] should prepare students who have had little or no family or parish religious experience, for religious experiences they may be exposed to in the future and to deepen the understanding of students who are receiving effective family and parish catechesis.

As a form of the Ministry of the Word in Evangelisation, RE content should not be “limited to a presentation of the different religions, in a comparative and neutral way, [because this pedagogical approach] creates confusion or generates religious relativism or indifferentism” (CCE, 2009, p.12). Religious Education is a form of the Ministry of the Word in Evangelisation when teachers provide witness to a living faith that invites students to discipleship and mission (NCEC, 2018, p. 15).

2.2.6.1.1 Religious Education in Years 7–10. In Years 7–10 in WA Catholic secondary schools, students aged 11–15 years experience the pedagogical paradigm of RE referred to as the educational approach or educational perspective (Rymarz, 2012). The educational approach places significant cognitive demands on students to learn specialist content knowledge, and advocates for the assessment of students’ knowledge and skills in a summative manner (Engebretson, Fleming & Rymarz, 2002, p. 11). The CECWA (2004) specifies that the teaching and learning of the content mandated by the diocesan bishops must be characterised by high expectations, engaged learning and focused teaching by all involved. Despite being an intellectual study of Catholicism, the educational approach does “not exclude the [incidental] faith formation dimension of Religious Education” (Buchanan, 2005a, p. 33). Holohan (1999) explained that because RE is a form of the Ministry of the Word and an activity of evangelisation in its own right, students are able to experience “moments of evangelization” or a deepening of their Christian faith during RE activities (p.

30). In such instances, it is appropriate for RE teachers to invite a prayerful response that assumes students have existing Christian faith (Holohan, 1999).

2.2.6.1.2 Religious Education in Years 11 and 12. In Years 11 and 12, students in WA Catholic secondary schools aged 15–18 years study the Religion and Life (RAL) senior secondary courses. In a similar manner to RE in Years 7–10, RAL is taught using the educational approach. The syllabi for the RAL courses were created by the SCSAWA, a secular curriculum authority administered by the WA state government (SCSAWA, 2014). Year 12 students can use the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) RAL course to contribute towards their university entrance score (SCSAWA, 2016). A General RAL course, that cannot be used as a tertiary entrance subject, but that does contribute to secondary graduation requirements is also offered to students. Both the ATAR and General RAL courses focus on the interplay between religion, society and individuals (Berlach & Hackett, 2012, p. 9). The RAL courses fall under the control of the SCSAWA Humanities and Social Sciences learning area (SCSAWA, 2014). As such, the RAL courses have an emphasis on students developing skills in source analysis, extended response writing and research skills (SCSAWA, 2014).

The RAL courses contribute cognitively as a form of evangelisation. (CECWA, 2009, para. 64; SCSAWA, 2016). The CECWA (2009) mandates that all RE in WA Catholic schools should provide students with knowledge of the “foundational Christian belief that Jesus Christ is Saviour, as well as the Christian promise of Salvation” (para. 64). The syllabi used for the RAL courses in Catholic schools may not “simply propose an abstract understanding of Christian beliefs” in the manner of a cultural studies approach, but should attempt to “foster critical reflection that leads to commitment to the Person of Christ” (CECWA, 2009, para. 99). To ensure that RAL courses in Catholic schools comply with the requirements of both SCSAWA and CECWA, the Office of CEWA produces curriculum support materials for RECs and RE teachers.

2.2.6.1.3 The distinction between Religious Education and catechesis. The Congregation for Clergy (1997) maintained that Catholic schools should clearly distinguish RE from catechesis. This distinction exists in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools. RE is an activity designed to impart knowledge about the Catholic faith to students who may

or may not have existing Christian faith, or a receptiveness to developing faith (CC, 1997, para. 73). Catechesis, however, is instruction in the Christian faith where the learner is assumed to receive the Christian message as a salvific reality (CCE, 1988, para. 68). Catholic schools in WA must provide students with an average of at least one hour per week of catechetical activities (CECWA, 2004, para. 5.2). Examples of catechetical activities include liturgies, prayer services, retreats and Christian service learning.

2.3 The Religious Education Coordinator

In WA, RECs have delegated authority from principals for leadership of the RE learning area (CEOWA, 1986). As leaders of a learning area that is a form of the Ministry of the Word, RECs are required to be committed Catholics (CECWA, 2004, para. 4.8; 2009, para. 62). In Western Australian Catholic secondary schools, RECs are almost exclusively lay people (CEWA, 2014, table “Teaching Staff, FTE”). Researchers propose that RECs provide a form of lay ministry for the Catholic Church (Buchanan, 2011; L. Crotty, 1998).

2.3.1 The development of lay ministerial leadership in the Catholic Church.

Historically, the word “ministry” has been used by the Catholic Church hierarchy to refer to the participation of the ordained clergy in the sacred ministry (CCC, 2003, para. 1548). The ordained or sacred ministry involves the delivery of the Ministry of the Word through the teaching of the gospel message and administering the sacraments of the Church to the faithful by members of the Church hierarchy who have received Holy Orders (Buchanan, 2011). Lay ministries are “offices and roles that the lay faithful can legitimately fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of the faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church” (John Paul II, 1988, para. 23).

Modern lay ministry began with the tentative encouragement of Pius XI for the Italian Catholic Action movement to collaborate with the apostolic hierarchy in the Catholic Church’s pastoral and evangelical mission (Pius XI, 1931). The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* described the laity as deriving membership of the apostolate through Baptism and through the power of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation (Paul VI, 1965b, para. 3). Pope Paul VI (1965b) explained that because the laity “live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world” (para. 2). The important fields of action for the work of lay apostolates are listed as “church communities, the family, youth, the social milieu, and national and international levels” (para. 9). Pope Paul

VI (1965b) did not specify the teaching of RE as a lay apostolate. However, he acknowledged that in some circumstances the Church hierarchy “entrusts to the laity the teaching of Christian doctrine” (para. 24). The term “lay ministry” began to be used by the Church hierarchy following the publishing of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, as a means of describing groups of lay people who serve the Catholic Church (Ryan, 2020, p. 33). Pope Paul VI (1975) describes the laity as “exercising a great variety of ministries according to the grace and charisms which the Lord is pleased to give them” (para. 73).

Buchanan (2011) posited that “an integral dimension of leadership in religious education requires the exercise of ministerial leadership” (p. 34). The demonstration of ministerial leadership is particularly evident for RECs in WA who have delegated leadership of both the RE learning area and their school’s ministerial activities. Buchanan (2011) noted that “the ability to foster lay participation in the liturgical life of the Church requires ministerial leadership” (p. 36). The term “ministerial leadership” is also an appropriate description for those RECs who are curriculum leaders, because RE is a learning area that is a form of the Ministry of the Word (CECWA, 2009, para. 43).

2.3.2 The historical development of the position of REC. The position of the REC came into existence in Australia in the early 1980s to support principals in the ministerial leadership dimension of the Catholic secondary school (Buchanan, 2011; L. Crotty, 1998; Dowling, 2011). The position evolved as diocesan systems of schools were established and a transfer in ministerial leadership was occurring from members of religious orders to lay leaders (Crotty, 2005). Buchanan (2006) believes that as the position of the REC developed in the 1990s, there was a lack of clarity about what the role encompassed. RECs continued to have responsibility for the ministerial aspects of Catholic schools, such as organising liturgies and retreats, while increasingly becoming curriculum leaders (Bezzina & Wilson, 1999). By the early 1990s, RECs had begun to exercise leadership for developing programs, policies and pedagogies in RE, with Australian dioceses starting to mandate the educational approach to teaching RE (Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 1993).

2.3.3 The role of the REC in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools. In 1986 a handbook was produced by the CEOWA that clarifies the nature of the REC’s role in WA Catholic secondary schools (CEOWA, 1986). The position of the REC is described as one of delegated responsibility from the school principal, who remains the “spiritual and

temporal leader of the school” (CEOWA, 1986, p. 2). The CEOWA (1986, p. 9) specifies that RECs have delegated responsibility for coordinating the RE learning area. Most RECs in WA are members of the educational middle management structure of Catholic secondary schools and typically have the promotional status of a head of learning area (CECWA, 1992). As a head of learning area, a REC in WA is responsible for ensuring that the RE content mandated by the Bishops of WA is taught with the same systematic demands and rigour as all other learning areas (CC, 1997, para. 65; CECWA, 2009, para. 62). RECs are concerned with curriculum development and planning, and with supporting and assisting the professional development of RE teachers. As middle leaders, RECs are expected to model excellence in teaching practice. In WA, RECs provide ministerial leadership through their participation in the Ministry of the Word, their promotion of a school’s Catholic culture and by living as Christian witnesses (Buchanan, 2011, p. 35; L. Crotty, 1998, p. 10). In addition, some RECs in WA have delegated leadership of their school’s ministerial activities such as liturgies, retreats, pilgrimages and Christian service activities.

2.3.3.1 The religious commitment expected of RECs by the Catholic Education

Commission of Western Australia. The CECWA (2004) mandates that teachers of RE and therefore RECs “shall be committed Catholics and shall give active Christian witness to Catholic beliefs” (para. 4.8). The religious commitment expected by the Catholic Church of Catholics is defined in the *Precepts of the Catholic Church*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2003, paras. 2041–2043) describes the four precepts as the indispensable minimum of religious practice that is required of Catholics and as such can reasonably be expected to be observed by RECs. Catholics are required to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, confess their sins at least once a year through the sacrament of Reconciliation and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least once during the Easter season. Catholics are also obliged to observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church and assist with the material needs of the Church, according to an individual’s ability to do so (CCC, 2003, paras. 2041–2043). In addition to the *Precepts of the Catholic Church*, RECs are expected to display religious commitment by having a manner of life and stated beliefs in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church (CECWA, 1992, para. 5.1.2).

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the context of the study. Two dimensions of context are discussed. The first dimension of context is the structure and leadership of Catholic education in Western Australia. The overview explains that the Bishops of WA lead Catholic education and delegate governance to the CECWA, which in turn has the Office of CEWA as its secretariat or executive arm (CECWA, 2009). Catholic school principals have responsibility for the appointment of RECs and maintain ultimate responsibility for providing effective RE in Western Australian Catholic schools (CEOWA, 1986). The second dimension of context presented is the historical development of lay ministerial leadership. This discussion is provided because the position of the REC is one of educational and ministerial leadership (Buchanan, 2011). As ministerial leaders, RECs are required to be people of Christian faith who demonstrate this faith through regular worship and who have a manner of life consummate with Catholic teaching (CECWA, 2004).

The next chapter presents a literature review. It provides a discussion of literature concerning how Generation Y RECs are formed and sustained. Literature is reviewed that examines experiences during which the faith of Generation Y Catholics is formed, to understand how personal experiences prepare RECs for their role leading the RE learning area. Second, the chapter discusses the professional experiences, while working as RE teachers, that form RECs. It is while working as RE teachers that RECs are likely to have developed much of their specialist content and pedagogical knowledge that allows them to lead the RE learning area. Third, research is reviewed that explores how Catholic schools and education systems support the permanent theological knowledge and faith formation of RECs. Lastly, research literature is discussed that examines the experiences that sustain RECs professionally.

Chapter 3: Review of Significant Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the understanding of experiences that form and sustain Generation Y RECs (Table 3.1). A GRQ was created to investigate the research problem and guide the review of the literature: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? Following a review of the relevant literature, four SRQs were created to guide the exploration of the GRQ:

SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area?

SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC?

SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

There are four sections in the chapter, each of which corresponds to a SRQ. Section one provides a review of literature that describes what Christian faith is and how faith is formed in the Catholic tradition. In addition, literature that examines the forms of religious belief and practice that exist among Generation Y Catholics is reviewed. This section of the literature review resulted in the creation of SRQ1. The second section of the chapter influenced the formulation of SRQ2 and reviews literature that relates to the experiences that form RECs professionally while they are employed as RE teachers. The review of literature in section three resulted in the creation of SRQ3. This section of the literature review focuses on Church documents and research that discusses the permanent faith formation of teachers in Catholic schools, especially as this applies to RE teachers and RECs. Research into faith formation initiatives organised by Catholic schools and Catholic education offices is reviewed. Lastly, section four presents a review of literature that pertains to the professional experiences that sustain Generation Y RECs in their work. Literature is reviewed that examines the professional relationships and processes that support RECs in their work and the experiences where RECs develop their capacity as leaders. This section of the literature review influenced the development of SRQ4.

Table 3.1

Overview of Chapter 3—Review of the Significant Literature

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3.2 Section One: The Christian Faith of Generation Y RECs

Religious Education Coordinators employed in WA Catholic secondary and composite schools are required to be people of Christian faith in the Catholic tradition (CECWA, 2009, para. 62). For Catholics, belief in the existence of the Christian God and a personal adherence and assent to this truth is referred to as Christian faith (CCC, 2003, paras. 143, 150). Faith is a grace of God; that is, a gift, freely given to people of a “supernatural virtue infused by him” (CCC, 2003, para. 153). For Catholics, accepting the grace of faith requires a person to intellectually assent to “the almighty Father as Creator; the Son as Lord and Saviour; and the

Holy Spirit as Sanctifier in the Church” (CCC, 2003, para. 14). In the Catholic tradition the terms “faith”, “Christian faith” and “Christian belief” refer to an individual’s acceptance of the divine grace of faith and their free assent to the supernatural truths that God has revealed (CCC, 2003, paras. 143, 150).

3.2.1 The formation of Christian faith in the Catholic tradition. In a theological sense, Christian faith in the Catholic tradition must be formed through social experiences with other believers within Catholic communities. The necessity for formational experiences to occur in Catholic communities is due to the Church understanding itself as God’s sacrament (CCC, 2003, para. 774). The Catholic Church is “the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible organisation through which he communicates truth and grace to all” people (CCC, 2003, para. 771). Schillebeeckx (1963, p. 61) describes the Church as a sacrament, resulting in it being grace realised in institutional and apostolic form. As the institutions that communicate God’s grace, Catholic Church communities must support and nourish the faith formation of individual Christians (CCC, 2003, para. 181). Catholic communities where people experience the grace of God with other Christians include communities such as the family and parish.

Theologians have attempted to explain why social experiences within Catholic Church communities are integral to the formation of Christian faith. O’Meara (2007) explains that Jesus, in his ministry, made gathering in community, or today what is called church, central to being his follower. The social nature of humanity was taken up into a special plan and empowerment of God. Schillebeeckx (1963) asserts that it is within the experience of ritual in the presence of other believers that Catholics receive God: “Grace is made visible for us in the Christian life itself of the faithful members of the Church and comes forward to meet us, within this life, offering itself to us” (p. 72). Ratzinger (2006) describes the necessity for faith to be formed in community, in part, because other believers “bestow their own certainty on us” (p. 101). Church communities provide a network of reciprocal dependence, which at the same time is a network of mutual solidarity, where Christians sustain each other in their faith (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 101). As people of faith, teachers who occupy the REC position will have had their faith formed through social experiences within Catholic Church communities.

3.2.1.1 The sociological understanding of faith formation. In a sociological sense, religious expression does not consist primarily of interaction between a lone individual and a

god, but is anchored in social groups (Stark, 2017). The sociological understanding of faith formation is limited from a Christian perspective, in that it excludes the possibility that people have faith as a result of their choice to respond to God's grace. Sociologists view faith as a "subjective reality" or a socially constructed belief that is learnt as a truth in the course of socialisation and internalised by an individual as being a reality (Berger & Luckmann, 2011, p. 67). As a subjective reality, belief in a supernatural god can only be maintained if religious believers experience regular interactions with a community of fellow committed adherents who confirm the correctness of religious beliefs (Berger & Luckmann, 2011). This is because an individual's confidence in religious explanations is strengthened to the extent that others express their confidence in these explanations (Stark, 2017, p. 47). Berger and Luckmann (2011) use the term "plausibility structure" to describe the specific social base required for a religious believer to maintain confidence in supernatural belief (p. 155). Catholic Church communities such as the family, parish, and Catholic school serve as plausibility structures through which Christian faith is formed and sustained.

The formation of Christian faith is understood by the researcher from a Catholic perspective. Faith is accepted as resulting from a person's acceptance of God's grace, and in turn is nurtured through experiences with other believers in Catholic communities. Sociological analysis of faith formation serves to provide insights into how regular social experiences with other adherents encourage people to accept religious belief.

3.2.1.1.1 Belonging before believing. Religious belief is often shaped in a linear form of belonging, behaving and—last—believing (Stark, 2017; Winseman, 2007). A strong sense of belonging to a faith community is associated with adult conversion experiences, or those experiences where a person adopts religious belief and the practices of a religion after leaving parental supervision (Stroope, 2012). Weyers and Saayman (2013) believe that adults who are considering joining a religious community will typically develop a sense of belonging to a community before choosing to accept the beliefs proposed by the religion. Initially, experimental participation in a welcoming faith community occurs, while social bonds are formed. As people are drawn socially closer to groups within a faith community they are more likely to conform to the norms of this group, including accepting the religious beliefs

and practices that members of the community hold (Everton, 2015, p. 3; Stroope, 2012, p. 273).

The development of supportive relationships within the social networks of faith communities plays an important role in the development of religious belief (Stroope, 2012, p. 273). Stark (2017) finds in numerous studies that when people have strong social connections within a religious community, they will typically conform their religious belief to that of the members in the social network, rather than risk damage to their interpersonal relationships within the religious community. Conversely, if a person's social connections within a religious community are weak, they are less likely to adopt and maintain religious belief (Everton, 2015). Generation Y Catholics who practise their faith as adults are likely to have a strong sense of belonging to a religious community and be members of social networks containing people who share the same beliefs. This sense of belonging is most likely to occur in faith communities that are welcoming, engaging, and provide opportunities for social relationships to develop (Winseman, 2007, p. 41).

3.2.1.2 Faith development theory. Psychological development theory has been used to explain how individuals develop religious belief, particularly Christian faith. Fowler (1981, 1991) and Westerhoff (1976) believed that the acquisition of faith is a process that requires individuals to pass through multiple stages of faith development. Both theorists were influenced by Piaget's constructivist theory and advocated that the acquisition of faith is a meaning making process with relatively universal and sequential characteristics among all people (Fowler, 1981, 1991; Westerhoff, 1976). Westerhoff (1976) acknowledges the uniquely supernatural basis of Christian faith, stipulating that faith is a gift from God that "can be inspired within a community of faith, but it cannot be given by one person to another" (p. 23). Fowler's definition of faith is not restricted to the Christian understanding of accepting divine grace. Instead he advocates that faith encapsulates a "person's sense of realities and ideas to which they are committed, and through which they make meaning" (Francis, 1999, p. 232).

Fowler's theory of faith formation has been criticised as being overly linear and inadequate as a theory to explain the individual nuances of the development of religious belief (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992; Parker, 2006). Further, the theory is relatively inattentive to the processes of transformation in faith formation (Jardine & Viljoen, 1992). Jardine and Viljoen (1992, p. 84) challenge Fowler for not giving adequate consideration to the

theological aspects of faith development, specifically that grace is a gift from God with a transformative power that transcends cognitive development. The researcher accepts that cognitive development influences an individual's ability to comprehend the intellectual concepts associated with accepting Christian faith. However, the process of forming Christian faith is not assumed by the researcher to be a linear process that is tied to stages of cognitive development.

3.2.2 The spirituality and faith of Australian Generation Y Catholics. The faith of Generation Y Catholics is influenced by the tendency of many people in Australian society to continue to identify with a religion while in practice adopting a personalised spirituality (ABS, 2016b; Bellamy, Mou & Castle, 2004). Mason et al., (2007) describe the choice of a personalised spirituality by many Generation Y Catholics as indicative of a “period effect”, or a cultural change that has occurred during “late modernity...from the early 1960s until the present” (p. 155). In the post Second Vatican Council Church, most Australian Catholic children and adolescents have not been formed religiously through their membership of a strong and cohesive Catholic sub-culture that facilitates their movement toward adult forms of faith expression (Rymarz, 2010). Most Australian Generation Y Catholics have little concern for adhering to orthodoxy in belief or to the doctrinal and moral teachings of their church (Mason et al., 2007). However, research indicates that a small group of committed Generation Y Catholics exists who practise an orthodox Catholic faith as adults (Dixon et al., 2013; McKinley & Webber, 2012).

3.2.2.1 The spirituality of Generation Y. As adults, many members of Generation Y in developed Western nations focus on the pursuit of their own spiritual journey without the benefit of affiliation with an institutional religion (Arbuckle, 2016; Florey & Miller, 2008). Smith and Snell (2009) describe this group of people as “spiritual but not religious” (SNR) (p. 295). People who are SNR accept the existence of a supernatural or transcendent entity or entities and assume that benefits can be gained from this belief (Smith & Snell, 2009; Stark, Hamberg & Miller, 2005). In general, members of Generation Y who are SNR believe that all religions are the same at their core and that spiritual individuals have an understanding of the essence of true spirituality; in contrast to adherents of traditional religions who are considered to be exclusivist (Bennett, 2015; Mercadante, 2014). Many members of Generation Y who are SNR prefer to think of their beliefs as unique and a product of their own individual

questioning and exploring, rather than coming from a religious tradition (Beaudoin, 1998; Jensen & Arnett, 2002).

3.2.2.2 *The religious beliefs of Australian Generation Y Catholics.* Most Generation Y Australians who self-identify as Catholic hold highly personalised and eclectic religious beliefs (Bellamy et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2007). In 2005, Mason et al. (2007, p.150) conducted research into the spirituality of Generation Y Australians via 91 extended interviews and 1,272 telephone surveys. The researchers also conducted 347 interviews with a control group of adults born between 1946 and 1974. Although two thirds of the Generation Y participants espoused Christian-derived beliefs, such as belief in the existence of God, in general they displayed a highly individualistic view of religion (Mason et al., 2007, table 6).

Study participants who self-identified as Catholic had little concern for orthodoxy, consistency among beliefs or adherence to the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Catholic Church (Mason et al., 2007, p. 159). The religious beliefs of the Generation Y participants closely reflected those of participants in the control group born between 1946 and 1974. Mason et al. (2007) conclude that a highly individualistic view of religion “applied not just to Gen Y but to their parents as well” (p. 156). The eclectic religious beliefs of Australian Generation Y Catholics may not be a result of a failure of parents to transmit their religious belief and practices to their children. Instead, it may be that Generation Y Catholics have adopted the individualistic spirituality advocated by their parents.

3.2.2.2.1 *Generation Y Catholics who have post-critical belief.* Models for describing religious belief are a useful means of understanding the prevailing form of Christian belief among Australian Generation Y Catholics (Hutsebaut, 1996, 2002; Wulff, 1991). Hutsebaut (2002) believes that religious attitudes are characterised by four cognitive styles of theodicy, or ways of vindicating or rejecting God’s existence: literal belief, external critique, relativist belief and post-critical belief. External critique involves rejection of a religion’s beliefs and any social utility attached to its involvement in society. Relativist belief entails a person rejecting the supernatural claims of religion, while remaining receptive to the social benefits that religions can provide (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 196). Literal belief is characterised by a person having literal acceptance of the supernatural beliefs proposed by a religion: “On each question of faith, one single, exact, certain, and unchangeable answer should be given”

(Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 195). Post-critical belief is faith in a transcendent god and acceptance of a religious interpretation of reality in which the transcendent is not considered literally present but is represented symbolically (Hutsebaut, 2002, p. 77).

Post-critical believers often continue to identify with a religious tradition and selectively accept the teachings of their religion. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p. 197) describe post-critical believers as having an essential openness and receptivity to religious practices. However, for Catholics who have post-critical belief, practices such as the Eucharist and Benediction are not viewed as literal experiences of God but rather a symbolical representation or a sign that refers to the transcendent. Post-critical believers “live with other religious traditions, knowing that the other tradition is trying to say, in a different way, something about God or the transcendent” (Hutsebaut, 2002, p. 77). Post-critical belief may be the dominant form of Christian faith among Australian Generation Y Catholics.

3.2.2.1.2 Religiously committed Australian Generation Y Catholics. There is a small group of religiously committed Australian Generation Y Catholics who as adults participate regularly in parish communities and who have strong social networks within Catholic Church communities (Dixon et al., 2013; McKinley & Webber, 2012). McKinley and Webber (2012) describe this group in their narrative research exploring the religious identity of 23 religiously committed Generation X and Y Catholics. All participants were baptised Catholics born between 1967 and 1987 who attended Mass on most Sundays and had faith in the existence of the Christian God. McKinley and Webber (2012) found that the most significant influences on the participants’ faith formation was having parents who were highly religious, who “practise their faith” and “involve religious practice in family get-togethers” (p. 332). Additionally, all the participants were members of Catholic communities beyond the family and parish, which “were essential in supporting them to live a Catholic life” (McKinley & Webber, 2012, p. 330). The participants in McKinley and Webber’s (2012) study are representative of a sub-group of Catholics from Generations X and Y who as adults live according to the precepts of the Catholic Church.

3.2.3 Personal experiences where the faith of Generation Y Catholics is formed.

Research suggests that the formation of faith leaders in Catholic schools is strongly influenced by their personal experiences during childhood and adolescence (Belmonte &

Cranston, 2009; Neidhart, 2014). It is likely that personal experiences as children are the strongest influence on the faith formation of Generation Y Catholics (Bengtson, Putney & Harris, 2013; Flynn, Mok & NSW Catholic Education Commission, 2002). The community in which most Catholics are first taught about Christianity and how to live as a person of faith is the family (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982). Although there are people who come to Christian faith initially as adults, most members of Generation Y in Australia who have Christian faith were initially transmitted this faith as children and adolescents (Hughes, 2007). Research suggests that young children have spiritual experiences that may influence their receptiveness to developing Christian faith (Coles, 1992; Hay & Nye, 2006). For Catholics, the parish is a community that is strongly associated with the development of faith (John Paul II, 1979). It is a community where social networks of faith-filled people are formed and where Catholics experience the Eucharist. The faith formation of some Generation Y Catholics is influenced by experiences in Catholic schools and other Catholic communities such as Catholic youth ministry (Engebretson, 2014; Hughes, 2007).

3.2.3.1 *Spiritual experiences as children.* Spiritual experiences may influence children's receptiveness to developing religious belief (Coles, 1992; Hay & Nye, 2006). Research has investigated children's perceptions of their interactions with a perceived transcendent or supernatural force that is beyond or outside nature, whether understood as a God or a divine essence (Coles, 1992; Hay & Nye, 2006; Stark et al., 2005, p. 7). Coles' (1992) research suggests that an active spiritual sense is visible among most children from a young age. Further, a spiritual sense is equally evident among children who come from religious families and those who do not. Hay and Nye (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with Generation Y children aged 6–10 years, to explore the children's perceptions of the themes of "awareness-sensing", "mystery-sensing" and "value-sensing" (p. 65). Most participants were found to possess an acute consciousness, or a heightened perceptiveness concerning others, the social world and God, which the researchers term "relational consciousness" (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 108). Hay and Nye (2006, p. 115) describe most of the children as having an awareness of being in relationship with God, including most of the children who had not experienced socialisation into a particular religious tradition.

3.2.3.2 Faith formation experiences with parents. In the Catholic tradition, the community where children are typically first transmitted the beliefs and forms of worship of the Catholic Church is the family (CC, 1997, para. 122; CECWA, 2009, para. 52). John Paul II (1988) explains that it “is within their families that children need to have their first experiences of Church”, if they are to develop faith (para. 26). Research shows that the strongest influence upon the development of Christian faith in adulthood is a person having highly religious parents who engage in conscious transmission of their religious beliefs (Bader & Desmond, 2006; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Hoge, et al., 1982). Those who adopt the supernatural religious beliefs of their parents are also likely to have parents with belief homogeneity, or a similar level of religiosity (Hoge et al., 1982; Myers, 1996).

Parents who are highly religious and who have emotionally close relationships with their children are more likely to transmit their religious faith than are highly religious parents who do not have a close emotional bond with their children (Bader & Desmond, 2006; Bengtson et al., 2013; Myers, 1996). Bader and Desmond (2006) found that the “greater the attachment of parents to their children, the more importance children place upon religion” (p. 321). Bengtson et al. (2013) conducted the *Longitudinal Study of Generations*, which investigated the transmission of religious belief from parents to offspring over several generations. The researchers concluded that regardless of the generation to which a child belongs, “close parent–child bonds are more conducive to religious socialisation, and in the absence of close parent–child bonds, this transmission effect is less likely to occur” (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 78). Religious belief is likely to be transmitted when both parents are highly religious, intentionally transmit their faith, have a comparable level of religiousness and where a nurturing relationship exists between the offspring and at least one parent.

Research indicates that parental influence is the most significant influence on the faith formation of Australian Catholics (Flynn et al., 2002; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; McKinley & Webber, 2012). Hayes and Pittelkow (1993) investigated the influence of the family environment and parental religious commitment on the Christian beliefs of a sample of 1,084 Australian adults. The researchers found that parental influence is the prime predictor of acceptance of Christian faith among adults (Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993, p. 755). Specifically, the researchers conclude that the dominant influence in faith development is having a mother with Christian faith; there is also a significant, albeit secondary, effect of the father having Christian faith. Flynn et al. (2002) propose that as the influence of Catholic communities such

as the parish, youth groups and social networks declines, “parental influence, together with the influence of the Catholic school appear largely to determine whether they [offspring] grow up Christian or Catholic” (p. 240). Similarly, when parents have an individualised spirituality, their offspring are inclined to adopt a similar type of spiritual belief (Mason et al., 2007). Parents are the most significant influence on Generation Y Catholics’ understanding of their Christian faith and how they should live as a person of faith.

3.2.3.3 *The faith formation experiences of Generation Y Catholics within parish communities.* Literature on how experiences within parish communities influence faith formation is reviewed because the parish community traditionally is a community where Catholics receive catechesis, or instruction in the Christian faith (John Paul II, 1979, para. 67). A parish is a “definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church” (CCC, 2003, para. 2179). The CECWA (2009) explains that “after the family, the parish is the Christian faith community children and young people need for their religious development” (para. 79). The parish serves a catechetical function by teaching children what the actions and words used in the liturgy mean and by providing opportunities for participation in the Eucharist and other sacraments.

3.2.3.3.1 *The faith formation of Generation Y Catholics who regularly experience the Eucharist.* Research shows that Catholics who regularly experience the Eucharist in a parish are more likely to accept the Catholic Church’s teaching on divinity and morals than are Catholics who are not regular Mass attenders (Dixon, 2013; Dixon et al., 2013). Dixon (2013) used the 2011 *National Church Life Survey* data to examine “Mass-attending Catholics ... beliefs about the Trinitarian nature of God, the Virgin Birth, Transubstantiation, the bodily resurrection of Christ and their attitude to morality” (p. 446). Catholics who regularly attend the Eucharist in a parish are described as a highly committed group who generally “display a high level of orthodoxy” in terms of their acceptance of Church teaching (Dixon, 2013, table 2). Despite a decrease in the number of Mass attenders over the period 1996–2011, the level of orthodoxy, or agreement with Church teaching, among Eucharist attenders remained constant during this period (Dixon, 2013, p. 455). Dixon (2013, p. 452) notes that his analysis does not clarify the direction of causation between regular Eucharist attendance and orthodox

belief. That is, it is unclear whether Eucharist attendance results in orthodox belief or whether having orthodox belief results in people attending the Eucharist regularly.

Eucharist-attending Catholics aged 15–34 years in 2011 displayed a lower level of agreement with Catholic Church teaching on faith and morals than did Eucharist-attending older Catholics (Dixon, 2013). Dixon (2013) adjusted the 2011 *National Church Life Survey* data on the attitudes of Eucharist attenders in a logistic regression analysis. He reports that “significant variation by age emerges; older attenders tend to hold more orthodox views” than younger attenders (p. 450). For example, younger Catholics who regularly attended the Eucharist were found to be less likely to accept the Church’s teaching on the bodily resurrection of Christ and the doctrine of transubstantiation than were those Eucharist attenders aged over 34 years. Eucharist attenders under the age of 34 who held orthodox belief were more likely to be “born in non-Western countries” (Dixon, 2013, p. 450).

Rymarz and Graham (2006) researched the belief and religious practice of Generation Y adolescents who regularly attended the Eucharist in parish communities with their families. The researchers investigated the religious identities, beliefs and practices of these young people who were identified as belonging to core Catholic families (Rymarz & Graham, 2006). Core Catholic youth were defined as 14 and 15 year old adolescents who regularly attended the Eucharist with at least one parent and who had involvement with the Catholic Church in addition to attending the Sunday Eucharist (Rymarz & Graham, 2006, p. 374). The study shows that Eucharist-attending Generation Y Catholics are less inclined to accept Church teaching on divinity than are older Catholics who regularly attend the Eucharist. Rymarz and Graham (2006) found the study participants to have a limited understanding of Catholic practices and a selective acceptance of Church doctrines. When interviewed, most of the core Catholic youth experienced difficulty in answering questions about how the teachings of the Catholic Church informed their lives and they struggled to describe Christ’s divinity in terms of Catholic orthodoxy (Rymarz & Graham, 2006, p. 378). The study participants understood Catholic Church teaching in very general terms.

Generation Y Catholics who regularly attended the Eucharist as children and adolescents are few (National Centre for Pastoral Research, 2019). They are not representative of the wider population of Generation Y Catholics in Australia, most of whom did not attend Mass regularly as children and adolescents (Dixon et al., 2013). In adulthood, many Generation Y Catholics who did attend the Eucharist regularly as children ceased doing so when they moved out of home (Hughes, 2007). Hughes (2007) explains the attendance

pattern of Generation Y Christians who were regular attendees at religious services as children with their parents:

Many young people attend Church as children but drop out through their teenage years. Others drop out in their twenties. The decline in attendance is related partly to personal freedom and personal decision ... It has been suggested that some young people return as parents with their young children. However, the figures from the National Telephone Survey showing much lower levels of attendance in the 25 to 44 age group suggest this is not happening much at all. (p. 151)

3.2.3.4 Experiences as students in Catholic schools. Research suggests that Catholic schools can play a role in the formation of students' Christian faith (Hughes, 2007; Rymarz & Cleary, 2018). While religious belief and behaviour are "declining amongst students in Catholic schools ... this decline may be less significant than for the population of young people as a whole" (Rymarz & Cleary, 2018, p. 14). Hughes (2007) believes that attending a Catholic school helps students to understand the Catholic faith and "to some extent, to believe in God" (p. 188). The impact of attendance at a Catholic secondary school upon the behaviour and religious practice of children and adolescents is relatively weak compared with the influence of socialisation experiences with parents (Flynn et al., 2002; Hughes, 2007; Rymarz & Cleary, 2018). The attendance of children and adolescents at regular religious worship is strongly associated with parental membership of a religious congregation (Bengtson et al., 2013). Catholic schools are likely to have a minimal influence upon student attendance at the Eucharist in a parish community, due to their limited capacity to influence parental behaviour.

Research suggests that belief in God was widespread among Australian Generation Y Catholics when they were students in Catholic schools; however, this belief was not necessarily reflected in religious practice (Flynn et al., 2002; Hughes, 2007) Flynn et al. (2002, p. 252) found that 86% of Year 12 students who attended Catholic schools in the 1990s believed in God; however, only 37% reported that they tried to base their lives on the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. In instances where religious commitment touched their lives more personally and challenged them directly, the students were reported as being ambivalent towards Christian teaching (Flynn et al., 2002). More recently researchers found that while students in Catholic schools are receptive to Christian belief, they are more

inclined to reject a Church teaching when it impacts directly upon their lives (Rymarz & Cleary, 2018).

3.2.3.5 The influence of Catholic secondary school attendance on students' Catholic identity. Many Generation Y children are likely to have constructed their Catholic identity based on their experiences in Catholic schools (Casson, 2011; Engebretson, 2014). This is because for the majority of Australian Catholics—both parents and children—the Catholic school is the only experience of Catholicism they have (Engebretson, 2014, p. 13). Casson (2011, p. 210) found that for students who attend Catholic secondary schools, disassociating Church-going from Catholic identity is commonplace. However, despite “rejecting the need to attend church, participants were not rejecting a Catholic identity, but were rejecting what they viewed as the older generation’s perceptions of a Catholic identity” (Casson, 2011, p. 211). Most of the Catholic secondary students in Casson’s study were found to have constructed a Catholic identity “using various resources provided by the Catholic school but it was not an identity defined by the Catholic Church” (p. 215). It is likely that a redefining of what it means to be Catholic has occurred among many Australian Generation Y Catholics.

3.2.3.6 The faith formation of Generation Y Catholics through experiences in Catholic youth ministry. Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) is a form of non-ordained ministry within the Catholic Church (Paul VI, 1975). Paul VI (1975) describes non-ordained ministries as groups “which are able to offer a particular service to the Church” (para. 73). Young people who work in CYM typically provide this service to the Church through their evangelising of young people (Hart, 2014). Hart (2014) describes CYM as providing direct ministry to young people through formation programs and large events, training leaders in parishes, collaborating with other diocesan agencies and participating in wider ecclesial events such as World Youth Day (WYD). In a similar manner to RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools, those who work in CYM are increasingly focused on the new evangelisation of those young people who are disconnected from the life of the Church (Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference [ACBC], 2009).

RECs who have experienced working in CYM are likely to have a passion for exploring and living their faith (Lunney, 2010, p. 20). The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference (2009) describes people who work in CYM as spiritual leaders who seek to

cooperate with God's grace. It is probable that as spiritual leaders, people who work in CYM have well-formed Christian faith, participate in Catholic parish communities and come from religiously engaged families (Hughes, 2016). They will almost certainly have a thorough intellectual understanding of the Catholic tradition. Fleming (2002) describes the suitability of teachers who have worked in CYM for the position of REC:

[Some RECs] had extensive experience in youth ministry and parish work. These experiences gave prospective RECs a personal and professional interest in the role that was more akin to the extension of a religious vocation. RECs with this background were attracted particularly to the faith dimensions of the role because faith dimensions were a critical part of their own lives. (p. 177)

3.2.4 The influence of personal experiences on the formation of Generation Y

RECs. The current review of the literature shows that faith formation experiences as children are the most significant influence upon members of Generation Y becoming committed Catholics as adults (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2007). Research suggests that adults who live as committed Catholics develop their faith during personal experiences arising from their family backgrounds, Catholic school education, and experiences in parishes and other Catholic communities (Fleming, 2002; Neidhart, 2014). Belmonte and Cranston (2009, p. 302) found that it is during childhood that most Catholic school principals are likely to have been imbued with the Catholic faith and learn much of their knowledge of the Catholic tradition. It is likely that this is also true of Generation Y RECs. However, the literature review located minimal research examining the faith formation of RECs over the course of a lifetime (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). To provide knowledge of how personal experiences influence the faith formation of Generation Y Catholics and address the GRQ, SRQ1 was formulated. It explores how Generation Y RECs' personal experiences from childhood, adolescence and early adulthood contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area.

3.3 Section Two: Professional Experiences of Religious Education Teachers

Most RECs progress to their positions after periods of employment as RE teachers (Buchanan & Hyde, 2006). As early career RE teachers, it is probable that RECs learn much of the content and pedagogy of RE by working with and observing more experienced teachers

(Hackett, 2006, p. 240). It is likely that during their employment as RE teachers, many RECs enter into informal mentoring relationships that assist their professional learning (Engebretson, 2014; Topliss, 2017). In WA, most RECs commence their initial study of RE and theology while employed as RE teachers, to complete CEWA's Accreditation to Teach Religious Education (CEWA, 2018a; Hackett, 2006). Research shows that in most Australian dioceses there is a small number of RE teachers who desire to progress to become RECs (Buchanan, 2018; Crotty, 2006; Fleming, 2002). Dioceses in Australia have implemented processes to identify future leaders, which may have implications for the identification and formation of future RECs (Canavan, 2007). Identification as a future leader can engender a sense of self-confidence in teachers that they are suited for educational leadership, and can provide the impetus to commence professional learning to achieve this career progression (Canavan, 2007; Ranson, 2006).

3.3.1 Undergraduate qualifications of beginning Religious Education teachers.

Church documents advocate that RE teachers should have formal qualifications and specialist knowledge in RE and theology (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education [SCCE], 1982; CCE, 1977, 1997): for example, "With appropriate degrees, and with an adequate preparation in religious pedagogy [RE teachers] will have the basic training" (SCCE, 1982, para. 52). Although such an expectation has been expressed repeatedly in Church documents, research suggests that most beginning RE teachers in Australia do not have an undergraduate qualification in secondary RE or theology (Hackett, 2006; Rymarz & Engebretson, 2005). RE learning areas in Australian Catholic secondary schools are "often dependent on the willing co-operation of teachers with no formal academic qualifications in a relevant discipline at tertiary level" (Franchi & Rymarz, 2017, p. 10). In a Western Australian context, Hackett (2006) found that 77% of beginning RE teachers "did not have a tertiary qualification in RE" (p. 165). However, 55% of the beginning RE teachers were found to have completed the study requirements for Accreditation to Teach Religious Education, which requires the completion of three undergraduate units in RE and theology (Hackett, 2006, table 5.9: "Progress towards Accreditation to Teach RE"). The remaining 45% of beginning RE teachers had not completed any study of RE or were in the process of completing the three units required by CECWA for Accreditation to Teach Religious Education (CECWA, 2013). Many RECs in WA begin teaching RE without having an undergraduate degree in secondary RE or theology (Poncini, 2018, table 4.3). As beginning RE teachers, many RECs will have

relied “upon their personal and religious backgrounds to respond to specific RE curriculum demands” (Hackett, 2007, p. 3).

3.3.2 Mentoring experiences of early career Religious Education teachers.

Mentoring can provide RE teachers with the cognitive and emotional support required to deal with the challenges of being an early career teacher (Topliss, 2017). Cognitive support involves mentors assisting early career teachers to become active learners who aim to improve their classroom practice with the intention of improving student learning (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Cognitive support is not restricted to advice on how to develop instructional skill but involves mentors providing direction for mentees on how to assimilate into the professional expectations of their teaching position (Shanks, 2017). This can also involve direction in relation to which professional learning opportunities to participate in, and mentors modelling for mentees how to work collaboratively. Emotional support involves mentors assisting teachers to manage the stress and frustration associated with early career teaching (Topliss, 2017). Mentors can provide emotional support by providing advice, encouragement and affirmation when challenging and stressful situations arise. Alred and Garvey (2000) believe that emotional support provided by mentors helps mentees to deal with the inevitable stresses that arise as a beginning teacher. The emotional support of mentors can help early career teachers develop self-confidence and knowledge about their own abilities (Watt & Richardson, 2011).

Research shows that early career RE teachers benefit professionally from interactions with mentors who have expertise and enthusiasm for the RE learning area (Topliss, 2017, p. 188). Engebretson (2014) believes that for competent RE teachers, mentoring is an important part of their work: “The newer [RE] teachers readily seek mentors and the more experienced exercise mentorship for the less experienced” (p. 125). Mentors will only be able to provide cognitive support for early career RE teachers if they are conversant in RE content and pedagogy themselves. Topliss (2017) reports that most of the primary early career teachers who participated in his study received minimal or no feedback in the area of RE. The requirement for primary teachers to be conversant with the content and pedagogy of multiple learning areas results in the training in RE and theology, for most primary teachers, being limited to accreditation requirements (Poncini, 2018, table 4.3). This may suggest that few teachers employed in Catholic primary schools have adequate knowledge about RE to

provide mentoring in this area. No research could be located that explored the mentoring experiences of early career secondary RE teachers.

3.3.3 The identification of Religious Education teachers as future RECs. The leaders of Catholic education systems may need to identify Generation Y Catholics they believe are suitable to progress to the position of REC. Increased identification of future RECs is likely to be necessary because of the small number of teachers who apply for school-based RE leadership positions in most regions throughout Australia (Buchanan, 2018, p. 68). Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) explain the need to identify future RECs:

Most of the participants in this study were not initially actively seeking to become RECs. Rather, they were approached in various ways and after consideration decided to take up the offer and opportunity ... A number of ramifications of this finding can be considered further. It seems that the need to invite teachers to take on the role of REC supports the idea that in the wider society and in Catholic schools the number of individuals who are prepared to take on a visible religious leadership role is limited. (pp. 194–195)

Identification of early career teachers as future educational leaders can engender in them a sense of confidence that they are sufficiently competent to progress to educational leadership (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017). Canavan (2007) believes that identification of future educational leaders should be viewed as the initial step in leadership formation, as opposed to being coupled with recruitment, where a teacher is deemed ready for promotion to leadership. Fink and Brayman (2006) recommend that the identification of future leaders should be accompanied by direction on the type of professional learning that needs to be completed to allow progression to leadership.

Scholars propose that effective identification of future leaders of Catholic schools should be done in a formal and coordinated manner (Canavan, 2007; Ranson, 2006). Ranson (2006) believes that “succession planning for school leadership needs to take into consideration three primary strategies of identification, education and formation” (p. 421). In Ranson’s view, Catholic education systems should actively seek to identify future faith leaders “who, as well as possessing administrative capacity, are also grounded in faith, possessing spiritual maturity, a vocational sensibility and the awareness of ecclesial responsibility” (Ranson, 2006, p. 421). Canavan (2007) believes that the intentional approach

used to identify future leaders in the Archdiocese of Sydney has seen a steady stream of teachers moving through the various career stages to senior leadership positions.

The *Leaders for the Future* program was developed by the Archdiocese of Sydney to identify future educational leaders (Canavan, 2007). To create interest in leadership among younger teachers, a letter was sent by the Executive Director of Catholic Education to all teachers under the age of 30 years employed in the archdiocese. Teachers who could “imagine themselves as school principals at some future time” were encouraged “to register for an information session to learn more about school leadership” (Canavan, 2007, p. 69). Two hundred and sixty-five teachers attended the information session.

The identification of future leaders was linked to professional learning. All those teachers who self-nominated for the program commenced a leadership program that was the equivalent of one master’s unit. Of the 265 teachers who participated in the original program, 90 graduates of the program nominated to be part of a continuing leadership formation group (Canavan, 2007, p. 74). The identification approach used by the Archdiocese of Sydney recognised that leadership attributes are not fixed but can be developed over time with targeted professional learning experiences and the proper support (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2017a).

An intentional approach to identification that is accompanied by direction in relation to professional learning seems to have implications for RECs. Some early career RE teachers who are committed Catholics do not have formal qualifications in RE or theology (Hackett, 2006; Poncini, 2018). They may perceive themselves as not sufficiently qualified to progress to become RECs. Identification may provide the impetus for these teachers to perceive themselves as future leaders of the RE learning area and to engage in professional learning to enable this career progression (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014).

3.3.3.1 The identification of RECs who have experience in Church organisations.

Identification of committed Catholic teachers to lead the RE learning area may prove difficult because of the decline in religious practice among teachers in Australian Catholic schools (NCEC, 2017). Catholic education systems may need to initiate processes “to identify and facilitate the training of teachers who can be identified as already possessing a strong sense of religious commitment” (Rymarz, 2010). Some authors suggest that Catholic education systems could identify future leaders from among Catholic teachers with experience working in other Church organisations (Hart, 2014; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). Rymarz and

Belmonte (2014) propose that teachers with a strong background “in previous roles in youth movements and who are looking to continue this role in their educational careers” (p. 198) could be identified as future RECs. Hart (2014) contends that educational and ministerial pathways for Catholic youth ministers should be developed to enable them to serve the Church for longer periods of time. A possible pathway could be RE teaching and leading the RE learning area.

3.3.4 The study component of Accreditation to Teach Religious Education. It is likely that for most RECs the study component of Accreditation to Teach Religious Education is the first formal study they have completed in RE content and pedagogy (Hackett, 2006, p. 165). Franchi and Rymarz (2017) describe the necessity for RE teachers to engage in the systematic study of doctrine. This offers the theological “raw material for creative engagement ... as well as providing the core knowledge necessary for the teaching of Religious Education” (p. 10). Freathy, Parker, Schweitzer and Simojoki (2016) assert that competence as a teacher requires the acquisition of highly differentiated and university-based knowledge in a learning area’s content knowledge as well as knowledge on teaching practice. Although it does not provide the same level of professional learning as an undergraduate degree, accreditation serves to provide RE teachers with some of the university-based knowledge required to teach RE (Buchanan & Hyde, 2006). Beginning RE teachers in WA have been found to perceive that accreditation is an important part of their professional learning (Hackett, 2006, p. 175). Research also shows that RECs perceive that RE teachers benefit from completing accreditation requirements:

The religious education coordinators emphasized the importance of teaching staff who had gained accreditation to teach religious education. This was considered to be a significant factor in the successful implementation of the religious education curriculum and an essential element within the educational paradigm associated with a Catholic school curriculum. (Buchanan & Hyde, 2006, p. 24)

3.3.5 The influence of experiences as Religious Education teachers in the professional formation of RECs. The review of the literature shows that RECs’ experiences while employed as RE teachers significantly contribute to their professional formation and influence their decisions to become leaders of the RE learning area (Fleming, 2002; Rymarz

& Belmonte, 2014). It is while employed as a RE teacher that most RECs learn the content, pedagogy and leadership skills required to lead the RE learning area (Buchanan & Hyde, 2006; Engebretson, 2014; Hackett, 2006). As early career RE teachers, many RECs complete their first study of RE and theology as part of accreditation requirements, and engage in mentoring relationships (Engebretson, 2014; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Further, many RECs first perceive themselves as suited to progress to become an educational leader while employed as a RE teacher (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017). The review of research literature in section two of this chapter resulted in the formulation of SRQ2. This SRQ investigates how professional experiences as RE teachers influence RECs to become leaders of the RE learning area.

3.4 Section Three: The Permanent Faith Formation of RECs

The leaders of Catholic schools and Catholic education systems are obliged to provide experiences intended to form the theological knowledge and faith of teachers (CCE, 2007, para. 26). The ongoing participation in theological knowledge and faith formation activities within a Catholic school community is referred to as permanent formation (SCCE, 1982, para. 19). In WA, all teachers in Catholic schools are required to participate in theological knowledge and faith formation activities to maintain their Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic school (CEWA, 2018a). These activities are intentional in that they are purposefully organised with the objective of facilitating teachers' faith or theological knowledge formation (NCEC, 2017, p. 5). In addition to experiencing intentional knowledge and faith formation activities, working as a RE teacher or REC in a Catholic school can contribute to the faith formation of teachers (Convey, 2012; Hackett, 2006).

3.4.1 The necessity for Religious Education teachers to partake in permanent formation. The necessity for planned faith formation to be provided for lay RE teachers was stipulated by Pope Pius XII (1957) and reiterated by Pope Paul VI (1965a, b). Pope Pius XII (1957) explained that members of lay apostolates, such as those who instruct others in the Christian faith, need systematic faith formation, "from the organisations of the lay apostolate itself" (para. 41). In Pius XII's view, lay apostles, need to be assisted in having a greater knowledge of the faith and a deepening of spiritual life (Pius XII, 1957, "Summary of Conclusions", para. 26). He believed that if a lay apostle "is to share his faith with others, the apostle must find his strength in the word of God and in the liturgy" (para. 26). Paul VI

(1965a, b) reiterates the necessity for those who provide Christian education to also provide formation for lay teachers. The *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* explains that faith formation for members of lay apostolates should be an ongoing process that requires continuous religious experiences in Catholic communities (Paul VI, 1965a).

The continuous faith formation required of RE teachers in Catholic schools is described by the SCCE (1982) as a “permanent formation” (para. 69). A teacher’s “religious formation does not come to an end with the completion of basic education; it must be a part of and a complement to one’s professional formation” (SCCE, 1982, para. 65). Religious formation also involves lay Catholics who work in Catholic schools participating in the liturgical and sacramental life of the school (CCE, 2007, para. 26; SCCE, 1982, para. 40). Moreover, the permanent formation of teachers in Catholic schools should extend to “reading periodicals and pertinent books, attending conferences and seminars, participating in workshops, assemblies and congresses, making appropriate use of periods of free time for formation” (SCCE, 1982, para. 69).

The SCCE (1982) describes one responsibility of the Catholic school as the “solicitous care for the permanent professional and religious formation of its lay members” (para. 79). Religious formation is particularly pertinent for RE teachers and RECs: The “transmission of the Christian message through teaching implies a mastery of the knowledge of the truths of the faith and of the principles of spiritual life that require constant improvement” (CCE, 2007, para. 26). For RE to be both an academic learning area and a form of evangelisation, schools have a responsibility to assist RE teachers in “strengthening professional skills, but above all, at highlighting the vocational dimension of the teaching profession [and] promoting the development of a mentality that is inspired by evangelical values” (CCE, 2007, para. 27). Buchanan and Hyde (2006, p. 27) explain that the permanent formation of lay Catholic educators is intended to be a well-developed process where spiritual growth and religious knowledge are in harmony. The experiences provided to teachers for the purpose of theological knowledge and faith formation should be differentiated as appropriate to the needs of groups of teachers and leaders. Groups of teachers “have specific professional identities, with their peculiar features, that should be taken into account during training” (CCE, 2014, “Places and Resources for Teacher Training”).

3.4.1.1 The challenges of permanent formation. The permanent formation of lay teachers in Catholic schools and the evangelisation of professional life represent significant

pastoral challenges (Francis, 2013, para. 102). Participation in parish communities is declining among those who teach in Australian Catholic schools (NCEC, 2015a, p. 3). In Australian Catholic secondary schools, 61% of teachers identify as Catholic; however, of this group, approximately 25% are engaged in regular worship in a Catholic parish outside of their school experience (NCEC, 2017, p.11). To meet the challenge raised by declining religious practice among teachers in Australian Catholic schools, it is necessary for leaders of Catholic school systems and principals of Catholic schools to invest time and resources so that teachers are supported in maintaining their faith and spiritual impetus (Francis, 2014; NCEC, 2015a, p. 3).

3.4.2 Faith formation programs administered by Catholic education offices. There is a limited formal literature on the formation needs of individuals and the effectiveness of formation programs administered by Catholic education offices (NCEC, 2015b, p. 5). The faith formation programs reviewed in this thesis are initiatives introduced by Catholic education systems in Australia that have been the subject of research. Research is reviewed that examines residential retreat-style programs and a pilgrimage experience. In Australia, Catholic education systems provide faith formation as a component of the accreditation process and, in some dioceses, as a component of leadership formation (Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2016; Gowdie, 2011; NCEC, 2015b).

3.4.2.1 Residential retreats administered by Catholic education offices, religious institutes and Catholic schools. Residential retreats are facilitated by Catholic education offices, religious institutes and Catholic schools for the purpose of facilitating the faith formation of teachers (Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2006; Graham, 2011). Attending a retreat requires people to withdraw from structures, routines and socially imposed systems of life and participate in a temporary faith community (Ribbe, 2010). Catholic retreats traditionally involve participants spending a series of days or weeks in a community engaging in asceticism, prayer, silent contemplation and penance (Newberg et al., 2018, p. 265). Since the 1960s, a communitarian form of retreat has developed in the Catholic Church with an emphasis on community building and interpersonal exchanges, often culminating in the celebration of the Eucharist (Hughes, 2016, p. 7). This review of the literature suggests that

the communitarian style of retreat is the predominant form of retreat experienced by teachers employed in Australian Catholic schools (Bracken, 2004; Gowdie, 2011; Graham, 2011).

Retreats may be an effective way for teachers in Catholic schools to renew their spiritual capital (Graham, 2011). Grace (2010) defines spiritual capital as the “resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition ... that provide a sustained sense of mission, purpose and hope” (p. 119). Increasingly, the renewal of teachers’ spiritual capital may require faith formation experiences in temporary communities as a result of the weakening of the matrix of family and parish that in the past provided renewal opportunities (Grace, 2002). Residential retreats may be an effective form of faith formation activity due to the sense of camaraderie and community that can develop among participants and the resulting preparedness to participate in faith sharing activities (Bracken, 2004).

3.4.2.1.1 The Diocese of Parramatta: Wellsprings. *Wellsprings* was a faith formation program for teachers and educational leaders that involved a five-day residential retreat component. It was created by the Diocese of Parramatta in 1991 and remained operational in 2004. Bracken’s (2004) research of participant experiences during *Wellsprings* found that the residential nature of the program encouraged participants to come to know one another and to develop relationships of care, acceptance and trust. The establishment of a temporary faith community was described as encouraging interpersonal dialogue in small groups with most participants feeling confident to share experience, and “explore deep questions about their own spirituality and beliefs” (Bracken, 2004, p. 177).

Wellsprings did not occur in isolation but was connected to other faith formation activities. Bracken’s (2004) research into the faith formation experiences of those who attended *Wellsprings* found that participants valued the organisers’ efforts to understand their previous involvement in formal spiritual formation programs. Sensitivity to the teachers’ life experiences, background and professional experiences in Catholic schools informed the planning of the retreat’s spiritual formation activities (Bracken, 2004). Following the retreat experience the organisers attempted to maintain contact with as many teachers as possible to inform them of other faith formation experiences they could participate in. Ongoing faith formation opportunities were communicated to *Wellsprings* participants in a newsletter and

through private correspondence. The busyness of school and family life meant that some participants did not return for follow-up activities; however, many participants did.

3.4.2.1.2 The Diocese of Lismore: The spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola.

A retreat program for school leaders in the Diocese of Lismore, based on the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, was created to renew teacher spiritual capital (Graham, 2011). St Ignatius' spiritual exercises were chosen with the intention of creating "contemplatives within daily life and so address the great spiritual estrangement experienced in our times" (Graham, 2011, p. 33). The core elements of the retreat program were described as providing a conceptual basis for spiritual formation in the Ignatian tradition. During the first term of two consecutive years, all parish school executive members engaged in a two-day retreat that was intended to deepen their sense of vocation. Graham (2011) researched and described the experiences of teachers who participated in the retreat program during 2007 and 2008. He reported that attendance at the retreats enriched the participants' interior faith lives and spiritual journeys (Graham, 2011, p. 34). Within the participants' descriptions of their retreat experience, themes emerged that reported that the retreat experience enhanced the participants' self-knowledge, self-acceptance, commitment to reflection and the development of a more prayerful life. The research provides evidence that participants "experienced a deeper engagement with the purposes of Catholic education as a result of the retreats" (Graham, 2011, p. 34).

3.4.2.1.3 The Archdiocese of Brisbane: The Catching Fire Project. Gowdie (2011)

examined the effect of the *Catching Fire Project* on teachers' faith formation. The project was a faith formation initiative for Catholic school teachers facilitated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane that contained a retreat component. The program was based on the core faith formational elements prescribed by the archdiocese of embracing the person and vision of Jesus, building communion with God and others and engaging in Jesus's mission in the world (Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2006, p. 17). The faith formation activities in the *Catching Fire Project* were facilitated through three distinct programs aimed at experienced classroom teachers, school leaders and staff deemed to have the "potential to animate the spiritual life of the school community" (Gowdie, 2011, p. 161). The programs were conducted as two-and-a-half day, live-in retreats or as non-residential activities over

separate days, with the leadership formation program having a planned encounter with homeless people.

The research found that for the Generation Y participants, personal meaningfulness had far more influence on the sustainability of spiritual formation experiences than did other factors, including system compliance (Gowdie, 2011, p. 366). Teachers who were members of Generation Y called for “authentic witness—a person they can trust; a story they can believe in; experience that speaks to them” (Gowdie, 2011, p. 366). The research concludes that the post-modern worldview of many Generation Y Catholics dictates that if the “primacy of personal authenticity is not respected, it is highly unlikely that there will be any openness to what follows. Conversely, if personal authenticity is respected, there is likely to be increased openness to what is on offer” (p. 366). Gowdie (2011) recommended that Catholic education systems should develop “a contemporary approach to spiritual formation” that is both faithful to the evangelising mission of the Church and relates to the individual's professional and personal world (p. 374).

3.4.2.1.4 The Archdiocese of Perth and WA regional dioceses: The Galilee Program.

The Catholic Institute of Western Australia created the *Galilee Spiritual and Faith Formation Program* in 2016 to provide teachers and educational leaders with opportunities for prayer, reflection and learning (Scharf, Hackett & Lavery, 2020). The initial full program occurred over two years, had 15 participants from teaching, school leadership and tertiary education backgrounds and included a residential retreat component. The program consisted of eight weekend gatherings. Participants commented favourably on the opportunity that the program gave them to reflect on and deepen their own spirituality and faith, and to enhance their confidence “to nurture and lead faith formation” (Scharf et al., 2020, p. 15). Scharf et al. (2020) found that the existence of a reoccurring temporary faith community and the formation of social relationships encouraged the participants “to share, develop and grow in faith and spirituality with a like-minded group” (p. 14).

3.4.2.1.5 Catholic Head Teacher Retreat in the United Kingdom.

Traditional, contemplative Catholic retreats with extended periods of prayerful silence, interspersed with faith sharing can affirm the faith of participants with existing Christian belief (Nagy, 2018, p. 50). Repeated participation in contemplative retreats can lead teachers to be “increasingly

tioned to the quest for spirituality, opportunities for prayer” and participation in religious life (Ouellette, Kaplan & Kaplan, 2005, p. 184). Friel (2018) reports a strong perception among participants at the *British Catholic Head Teachers’ Retreat* that experiencing the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola was as an effective means of renewing spiritual capital (Friel, 2018, p. 91). Many of the head teachers reported that working with a spiritual guide enabled them to pay attention to God’s personal communication that was not possible in the normal structures and routines of life. The retreat provided necessary spiritual sustenance; a “topping up” of spiritual capital (Friel, 2018, p. 89).

3.4.2.2 Pilgrimages. Pilgrimages are an example of a faith formation experience organised by Catholic education systems in Australia (Capets, 2018; CEWA, 2019c). In a similar manner to retreats, pilgrimages require teachers to remove themselves from the structures and social interdependence of their normal existence (Coleman, 2002, p. 356). Turner and Turner (1978) conceptualise the sense of solidarity, equality and community spirit that is created in pilgrimage communities using the Latin term *communitas*. A sense of *communitas* is central to creating an environment where pilgrims feel comfortable to participate in communal worship and faith sharing.

Pilgrimages differ from retreats in that they involve a journey, typically a period of temporary asceticism, experiences at sacred places and acts of religious devotion (Pieper & Van Uden, 1994). Participation in a pilgrimage can serve as a rite of confirmation for teachers with existing Christian faith (Loveland, 2008). In a rite of confirmation, there is no transformation from a nonreligious position to a religious one; rather, existing belief in God and the Church becomes affirmed and strengthened (Pieper & Van Uden, 1994, p. 103).

3.4.2.2.1 Archdiocese of Sydney: Pilgrimage to Rome. The temporary faith community created during a pilgrimage experience of teachers from the Archdiocese of Sydney led to a renewal of the pilgrims’ spiritual capital (Capets, 2018; Grace, 2010). Capets’ (2018) research examined the pilgrimage experience of 45 educators who travelled on a pilgrimage to Rome for the canonisation of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. During the pilgrimage a sense of *communitas* was created among the pilgrims through shared experiences of difficulties of travel, temporary asceticism and the “experiences of the divine in prayer, worship, story-telling and the sacred sites of the saints” (Capets, 2018, p. 5). The

teacher pilgrims were provided with a Christian frame of interpreting reality, which “allowed for refreshment and deeper confidence in one's faith” (Capets, 2018, p. 7). Capets (2018) describes the pilgrims as returning “home and to their schools equipped and revitalised to share their faith with their students, colleagues and families” (p. 6).

3.4.2.2.2 World Youth Day. A modern form of pilgrimage that some younger RE teachers and RECs are likely to have attended is World Youth Day (WYD). Despite lacking the historical authority of longer established pilgrimages and not taking place at a noted sacred site, WYD is promoted by the Catholic Church as a pilgrimage (Rymarz, 2007, p. 388). Research shows that some Catholics with existing Christian faith who attend WYD report a greater personal commitment to their Catholic faith immediately after the event (Rymarz, 2007; Singleton, 2011). The temporary faith communities created at WYD where young people are “with others sharing the same faith” can reinforce the permanent plausibility structures underpinning the participants’ faith in their everyday lives (Singleton, 2011, p. 67). Rymarz (2007) reports that after experiencing WYD, many participants claim to have “a greater personal commitment to their religion, whereas in the past it was something that they associated with at a more external level, often as an aspect of the family culture” (p. 392). Many WYD participants also reported an increased desire for a closer relationship with God and an increased sense of Catholic identity (Mason, 2009; Singleton, 2011).

3.4.3 Faith formation for accreditation. Accreditation policies for the faith formation of RE teachers are founded in the Church’s vision and its canon law (NCEC, 2009, para. 4). Canon law requires that those who are appointed as teachers of religion in Catholic schools are outstanding in true doctrine, in the witness of their Christian life and in their teaching ability (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canon 804). More broadly, all teachers employed in Catholic schools “are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life” (canon 803). The NCEC (2015b) explains that accreditation processes have been established by Australian dioceses for the purposes of supporting teachers with their understanding of Church doctrine and the formation of their faith. For RE teachers and RECs who work in Australian dioceses, accreditation “is a long standing and pervasive expectation, characterised more by formal study programs but now complemented increasingly by formative dimensions” (NCEC,

2015b, p. 4). The NCEC (2009) describes the necessity for RE teachers and RECs to acquire an expert knowledge of the Catholic tradition and to experience faith formation opportunities:

Teachers in Catholic schools contribute, through their teaching and example, the efforts of the school to harmonise faith, culture and life. This requires that they have particular knowledge and skills. Teachers of religious education, as well as those leading Catholic schools require additional professional competence in scripture, theology, religious education and faith formation and a developed sense of confidence in their delivery. Therefore the dioceses across Australia have for many decades developed accreditation policies for the teachers in Catholic schools. These policies are founded in the Church's vision and its canon law. (p. 1)

The CECWA has developed accreditation processes for RE teachers working in Catholic schools in the four dioceses that come under its policy direction (CECWA, 2013). As a condition of employment, all teachers in Western Australian Catholic schools are required to complete a process of ongoing renewal to maintain their Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School (Roman Catholic Archbishop of Perth Teachers Enterprise Bargaining Agreement 2012, 2015). As part of the process of ongoing renewal, all teachers in Western Australian Catholic schools are required by CECWA to complete 30 hours of accredited activities over a five-year period, with activities classified as either knowledge or faith formation (CECWA, 2013). A minimum of 15 hours of accredited activities must address the knowledge component of accreditation, which is defined as the “knowledge of the content of the Catholic faith and the pedagogical principles for transmitting it” (CEWA, 2018a, para. 2). Any hours beyond the mandatory 15 hours of knowledge formation can be filled with what CEWA describes as the faith component of ongoing renewal (CEWA, 2018a).

The faith formation activities that are to be provided by schools as part of ongoing renewal activities assume that teachers have a well-formed Christian faith (CEWA, 2018a): “The essential criterion for ongoing renewal in faith formation is a connection with Jesus Christ” through “opportunities for spiritual formation, reflection, [and] discernment” (CEWA, 2018a, para. 6). Moreover, faith formation provided as part of accreditation activities should be a reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world (NCEC, 2017, p. 19).

3.4.3.1 The limitations of providing faith formation experiences as part of accreditation. Scholars caution that faith formation as part of an accreditation process is inadequate on its own to support teachers in sustaining their faith formation (Bracken, 2004; Gowdie, 2011; Hackett, 2007). In part, this limitation occurs because accreditation requirements are generally characterised by formal study programs and have less of an emphasis on providing faith formation experiences (NCEC, 2015b, p. 4). In WA, as little as 15 hours of faith formation activities over a five-year period can be provided by schools to complete ongoing renewal to maintain accreditation (CEWA, 2018a). Hackett (2007) believes that the faith formation of RE teachers should be about inspiring growth in Christ-like qualities and that such formation requires strategic planning that goes beyond mandatory accreditation requirements. Bracken (2004, p. 143) cautions against faith formation for large groups of teachers during school professional learning days. He observes that external facilitators generally do not know teaching staff or the diversity of faith and knowledge formation that exists, resulting in these sessions not catering for more faith-filled teachers (Bracken, 2004, p. 143). Gowdie (2011) believes that accreditation sessions designed for large groups of teachers will typically focus on knowledge rather than faith formation and are “predicated on an approach that does not presume faith” (p. 47). There may be a preference for leaders in Catholic schools to provide knowledge formation during ongoing renewal sessions, rather than faith formation, because of a perception that many teachers are not comfortable engaging in faith formation activities.

3.4.4 Formation for faith leadership. Research identifies that school principals are foremost faith leaders who participate in the broader mission of the Church (Neidhart, 2014; Neidhart & Lamb, 2016). This perception is perhaps also true of RECs, who as middle or senior leaders occupy one of the few positions in Catholic schools explicitly concerned with religious leadership. More broadly there is a need for leaders in Catholic schools to perceive themselves as faith leaders. The CCE (2013) describes leadership in Catholic schools:

For those who occupy positions of leadership [in Catholic schools], there can be a strong temptation to consider the school like a company or business ... School leaders are more than just managers of an organization. They are true educational leaders when they are the first to take on this responsibility, which is also an ecclesial and pastoral mission rooted in a relationship with the Church’s pastors. (para. 26)

Neidhart and Lamb (2016, p. 51) observe that the role of principals as faith leaders in Australian Catholic secondary schools has grown as Catholics have become estranged from other Church communities. Principals and other faith leaders in Catholic schools require a deep personal faith commitment and a preparedness to bear witness to gospel values and religious practice (Neidhart, 2014, p. 150). Generation Y teachers who aspire to lead as RECs may require assistance in developing their knowledge, skills and personal faith response to take up the challenge of leadership in a Catholic school. To address the challenge of forming future faith leaders, Catholic education systems in Australia have sought to develop formal programs that strengthen Catholic school identity and support the formation of faith leadership (Gowdie, 2011).

3.4.4.1 *The integration of faith formation into leadership programs.* Researchers have advocated that faith formation programs should be integrated into general leadership programs administered by Catholic education offices (Bracken, Dean & Gowdie, 2016; CEWA, 2019b; Gowdie, 2011). Grace (2010) proposes that Catholic education systems should develop “formation programmes which help leaders be Catholic witnesses for Christ and not simply professional deliverers of knowledge and skills as required by the secular state and the secular market” (p. 125). Gowdie (2011) recommends that “spiritual formation be explicitly integrated into induction and succession processes, strategic renewal and leadership frameworks” (p. 372). Strategies for linking leadership learning with faith formation might include “opportunities for guided reading; opportunities for reflection and spiritual direction” and “retreat experiences with other leaders to dialogue on issues associated with faith and religion” (Buchanan & Chapman, 2014, p. 684). The primary purpose for employing these strategies would be to facilitate the formation of future faith leaders who have the confidence and capacity to lead a faith community. A possible consequence of integrating faith formation into general leadership programs is that formation for faith leadership will be seen by aspiring leaders “as a critical pathway within leadership development programs” (Bracken et al., 2016, p. 10).

3.4.4.2 *RECs as facilitators of teachers’ faith and theological knowledge formation.* Research indicates that the organising and leading of knowledge and faith formation sessions is a role that is often delegated by principals to RECs (Buchanan, 2005b; Dowling, 2012). In WA, this role likely encompasses providing knowledge and faith formation for RE teachers

and, in some instances, larger groups of teachers. Researchers comment on the challenging nature of facilitating formation for colleagues as a result of the variable knowledge and faith formation that exists among teachers (Buchanan, 2005b; Grace, 2010). Buchanan (2005b) found that the REC's role of leading knowledge formation for RE teachers "is a challenging one because religious education teachers have diverse and varying levels of competencies in terms of expertise and understandings about faith issues and knowledge in religious education" (p. 74). Grace (2002) explains the difficulties that exist for teachers leading faith formation activities for colleagues. He comments that a teacher being a personal faith witness is one thing but being a source of spiritual inspiration for other teachers is quite another. Professional and highly competent RE teachers and RECs may feel less confident to lead in this area (Grace, 2002). The role of facilitating knowledge and faith formation for teachers falls outside the responsibilities of RECs employed as curriculum leaders.

Those who lead the knowledge and faith formation of teachers should do so in a manner that conforms to the norms and expectations of the local bishop (SCCE, 1982, para. 59). It is possible that a faith-filled, well-intentioned teacher could lead a theological knowledge or faith formation session without the knowledge of Church doctrine and Catholic spirituality required to do so (Grace, 2002). To prepare facilitators of knowledge and faith formation, the Archdiocese of Brisbane has developed training for those who perform this role in Catholic schools (Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, 2018). The training consists of a four-day program completed over the course of one year that develops the skills and attitudes associated with being a facilitator of faith formation within a teacher's school (NCEC, 2015b).

3.4.5 The faith formation associated with teaching in a Catholic school. Teaching RE and working as a REC in a Catholic secondary school can lead teachers to further explore their faith, and in some instances engage in personal faith formation experiences (Cook, 2001; Hackett, 2006, 2010). Many newly employed teachers attempt to conform their personal behaviour to the culture of the school in which they are employed. This is an example of workplace socialisation, or "the process by which novice workers learn the norms and values of the occupation" (Evans, 2010, p. 183). Ideally, the culture with which newly employed RE teachers in a Catholic school attempt to conform is characterised by faith, hope, love, moral and social formation and the fulfilment of talents according to Catholic principles (Grace, 2010, p. 117). Researchers also describe the culture of Catholic schools as

influencing the faith and religious practice of long-term teachers (Convey, 2012; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014).

3.4.5.1 *The faith formation associated with teaching Religious Education.* Research suggests that a personal conversion or a deepening of Christian faith can occur during employment as a RE teacher. Hackett (2006) researched the personal and professional responses of recently appointed RE teachers to the demands of implementing a new RE curriculum. The teachers in the study identified that faith, witness, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge were all essential for a person to be an excellent RE teacher (Hackett, 2006). The research reports that some teachers developed “a sense of their own calling to teach as a person of faith” (Hackett, 2007, p.16). Excellent RE teachers require “spiritual integrity and apostolic zeal and a commitment to ongoing professional and faith formation in teaching Religious Education as a vocation” (Hackett, 2007, p. 315).

Rymarz and Belmonte’s (2014) narrative research into the life experiences of RECs in Catholic schools suggests that working as a RE teacher is a period of significant faith formation for some RECs. For one of the younger participants in that study, Kylie, the experiences of her early adult life made it possible for her to develop Christian faith. Kylie described herself as having a nominal connection to the Catholic Church throughout her childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. She had experienced minimal catechesis in her family and parish as a child. It was only when she found employment in a Catholic secondary school, teaching RE, that she felt encouraged to explore and then deepen her faith (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014, p. 198). Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) describe the experiences in Kylie’s life that corresponded to her faith development and journey to becoming a REC:

Working in a Catholic school ... corresponded with other major changes in her life such as getting married, having children and moving to a small country town. Close to her new home was a church and Kylie, who was now working in a Catholic school teaching Religious Education, made the decision to join the worshipping community. (p. 198)

Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) explain that Kylie’s experience of working as a RE teacher was a period of faith development that strongly influenced her decision to become a REC. Other RECs in the study are described in a similar manner, as experiencing a slow

progression to religious leadership that mirrored their employment as RE teachers in Catholic schools.

3.4.6 Sustaining the faith formation of Generation Y RECs through ongoing professional experiences. Catholic education systems seek to sustain the faith of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools by providing permanent faith formation experiences as a condition of employment (NCEC, 2015b). Teachers and leaders in Catholic schools “have a right to expect that, within the ecclesial community...groups and associations of lay Catholic educators, will help to awaken them to their personal needs in the area of formation” (SCCE, 1982, para. 63). The faith formation provided for RE teachers and RECs in Catholic schools occurs through intentionally organised experiences such as retreats, pilgrimages and accreditation (Gowdie, 2011; Graham, 2011). The decline in religious practice among the wider Catholic population means that the experiences organised by Catholic schools and Catholic education systems are likely to become increasingly influential in the formation of Catholic school leaders (Neidhart, 2014; Neidhart & Lamb, 2016). Knowledge of experiences that provide effective faith formation is particularly pertinent in relation to the formation of leaders who are explicitly concerned with faith leadership. However, there is a small body of literature on the effectiveness of faith formation initiatives administered by Catholic education offices (Bracken, 2004; Gowdie, 2011; NCEC, 2015b). The review of literature in section three of this chapter resulted in the creation of SRQ3. Specific research question three explores how the faith formation of Generation Y RECs is sustained through their ongoing professional experiences.

3.5 Section Four: Professional Experiences that Sustain RECs

Section Four of the literature review suggests RECs are sustained by supportive professional relationships and experiences that improve their leadership capacity (Crotty, 2005; Fleming, 2002; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). Research indicates that the most significant professional relationship for an REC is with their principal (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Buchanan, 2015). Professional relationships with people who are external to their school and who understand the challenges of the REC position are also important. RECs have been found to value relationships with RE curriculum consultants from Catholic education offices, mentors and fellow RECs in professional networks (Buchanan, 2013, 2015; Crotty, 2005; Long & Hemmings, 2006). Professional networks are identified in the literature as

sustaining RECs in two ways. First, professional networks can function as communities of practice where RECs learn together about how to lead the RE learning area; and second, networks encourage the development of personal relationships upon which RECs can draw for support (Buchanan, 2013; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992). The literature review suggests that many RECs have a desire to develop their competency as educational leaders and do so by partaking in postgraduate study and other professional learning (Buchanan, 2015; Dowling, 2012).

3.5.1 The support of principals. In WA Catholic schools, principals delegate responsibility to RECs for leadership of the RE learning area and in some instances other ministerial aspects such as retreats, liturgies and Christian service learning (CECWA, 2009; CEOWA, 1986). The principal remains the “spiritual and temporal leader of the school” and continues to exercise overall leadership of the RE learning area (CEOWA, 1986, p. 2). The CECWA (2009) describes the principal as leading a Catholic school’s “development as a faith community, as well as the outcomes of its curriculum, including the Religious Education program” (para. 94). To support RE learning areas and consequently RECs, principals need to place “great importance on leadership of the learning area; staffing; time allocation; timetabling; resource provision; professional learning; and evaluation and improvement processes” (NCEC, 2018, p. 19).

Principals can support RECs by displaying shared leadership of the RE learning area in a way that is visible to members of a school community (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Crotty, 2006). Belmonte and Cranston’s (2009) case study of Catholic school principals found that for RE to be perceived as an area of priority in a school, religious leadership should not be overly focused on the REC position. The researchers propose that a shared leadership approach should be developed between senior leaders and the REC and it should be clear to students that the RE learning area is a “particular responsibility in a leadership sense of the principal” (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009, p. 310). Further, principals can display shared leadership of the RE learning area by recruiting and employing well-prepared teachers of RE and through providing existing staff with “opportunities for growth in knowledge and faith” (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009, p. 306). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) contend that “there appears no more explicit transmission of a principal’s religious leadership than teaching a religious education class” (p. 306). Crotty (2005) finds that supportive principals maintain ultimate responsibility for leadership of the RE learning area. Supportive principals negotiate

for “members of the executive to share responsibility for some religious dimension in the school while honouring the distinctiveness of the REC position” (Crotty, 2006, p. 45). Crotty (2005) believes that principals should demonstrate shared leadership of the RE learning by publicly promoting RE as central to the mission of the school: “Students perceive religion to be unimportant if the principal and executive do not promote it” (p. 55).

When school principals are overly deferential to RECs in matters concerning RE, RECs can feel their responsibilities are overwhelming (Buchanan, 2018; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). Principals will defer to RECs on religious matters when RECs are “perceived to be better prepared for religious leadership” and more credible to staff and students in this capacity than principals themselves (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009, p. 310). In Rymarz and Belmonte’s (2014) narrative study, principals, in the main, were perceived by the participating RECs to be supportive. However, instances in which the participants perceived a lack of support “gave some RECs a sense of vulnerability, as if they were too responsible for religious leadership in the school” (p. 195). One participant commented that being the focal point of religious leadership was difficult and could result in a feeling of being the “God person”, or the staff member responsible for all matters religious in a Catholic school (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014, p. 195). The feeling of vulnerability of some RECs when they perceive they are the foremost faith leader in a Catholic school affirms the importance of a principal and other senior leaders maintaining shared leadership of the RE learning area (CECWA, 2009, para. 94).

RECs feel supported by principals who understand the challenges and complexities of the REC position. The position can be lonely because it is explicitly in the religious domain and counter-cultural in the sense that RECs are called on to explain and defend Catholic Church teachings that are contrary to the beliefs of many students and teachers (Crotty, 2006, p. 792). Buchanan (2013) found that RECs feel supported in their work when they perceive that their principals communicate their understanding of the challenges and complexities of the role. A REC in Buchanan’s (2013) research described her sense of isolation when senior leaders did not display an understanding of the centrality of the position to the school’s mission: “Members of the leadership team just don’t get the intricate demands of the role ... and they certainly don’t understand the significance of the religious dimension of the school” (p. 130). Principals can display support for RECs by providing informal mentoring and regular meeting opportunities, including RECs in staff selection and supporting their professional formation with time release to complete postgraduate study (Buchanan, 2013, 2018).

3.5.2 The support of Catholic education offices. In Australian diocesan education systems, much of the support for RECs is provided by Catholic education offices rather than by individual schools (Buchanan, 2015; Crotty, 2005). Research shows that RECs value the support of Catholic education offices (Belmonte & Rymarz, 2017; Buchanan, 2018). In WA, the Office of CEWA supports RECs by organising REC Network meetings, making available the expert advice of RE curriculum consultants, providing professional learning opportunities and offering academic scholarships for the tertiary study of RE and theology (CEWA, 2018b, 2019b). In addition, the Office of CEWA supports RECs by producing teaching and learning resources that contain the learning content mandated by the Bishops of WA (CECWA, 2009).

3.5.2.1 The teaching and learning resources provided by Catholic Education Western Australia. The Office of CEWA produces curriculum support materials that contain the content mandated by the Bishops of WA. These materials are intended to support RECs and RE teachers in producing teaching and learning programs. Research shows that the curriculum support materials provided by the Office of CEWA to be used in RE teaching and learning programs are not viewed favourably by some RE teachers, RECs and principals (Berlach & Hackett, 2012; Poncini, 2018). Berlach and Hackett (2012) reported that teachers of the inaugural ATAR RAL course in 2010 perceived the curriculum materials provided by the CEOWA as “less than ideal” and that they came “from a needs analysis conducted in the mid-90s” (p. 13). Further, “at a network meeting of Religious Education Coordinators, the ... issue of lack of professional resources was extensively debated” (Berlach & Hackett, 2012, p. 14). Poncini (2018, p. 278) found that principals and RE teachers believe that the RE curriculum support materials provided by the Office of CEWA for students in Years 7–9 need to be reviewed. Many of the religious educators who participated in the research project “described the RE curriculum as outdated” (Poncini, 2018, p. 278). One of the Catholic school principals interviewed for the research project “argued that they did not believe the current Units of Work highlighted the essential knowledge to be taught in RE” and “recommended the need for a review of the RE curriculum that drives change consistent with other learning areas” (Poncini, 2018, p. 279).

3.5.2.2 The support provided by Religious Education curriculum consultants. Australian Catholic education offices employ RE curriculum consultants who provide expert

advice to RECs in relation to curriculum matters (Buchanan, 2015). Buchanan (2015, p. 97) describes RE curriculum consultants as religious and faith education experts who help RECs remain up to date with current resources and curriculum initiatives pertaining to the discipline of RE. Research shows that RECs view favourably the support they receive from RE curriculum consultants (Buchanan, 2015; Long & Hemmings, 2006). Long and Hemmings (2006) researched the support that RECs received in the Diocese of Parramatta in their first year of employment. Beginning RECs were supported by RE consultants who provided guidance on professional development, teaching and learning resources and curriculum. Most of the RECs interviewed for the study appreciated the consultants' expertise during their transition into the position. Conversely, some RECs feel their support is diminished when regional offices do not have RE consultants or when regional consultants are perceived not to be involved with RECs (Crotty, 2006. p. 793). Buchanan (2015) reports that RECs prefer receiving support from consultants with expert knowledge in RE and theology. This preference exists because an important aspect of the REC's role is conveying the Church's official position on moral and ethical issues in a language accessible to the diverse range of members of school communities. Buchanan (2015) explains the role of consultants in supporting RECs to articulate the Church's teaching correctly:

The religious education leaders needed the support of the religious and faith education experts at their respective Catholic Education Offices. Some leaders were concerned about ensuring that they did not misrepresent the Church's universal position on certain moral and ethical issues. They felt that support and clear advice from their Catholic Education Office gave them the confidence to communicate with accuracy the Church's view in a way that was meaningful and sensitive to the members of the school community they were serving. (p. 97)

3.5.3 Participation in professional networks. A group of teachers or educational leaders working together to enhance the quality of professional learning and to strengthen capacity for improvement of student learning is a form of professional network (Katz & Earl, 2010, p. 28). The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2017b) explains that professional networks “foster social capital across the jurisdiction or school, and provide structures for individuals to seek help from others” (“What Are the Best ways To Develop Future Leaders?” para. 5). Professional networks can be formal or informal. A formal professional network is purposefully established by an authority with an established hierarchy

and defined roles for members (Pyrko, Dörfler & Eden, 2016). An informal professional network is one in which professional connections are initiated at the discretion of individuals within and between institutions to further learning and to provide and receive personal and professional support (Carmichael, Fox, McCormick, Procter & Honour, 2006, p. 226).

3.5.3.1 REC networks that function as communities of practice. Professional networks can function as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) describe a community of practice as a group of people “who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Members of a community of practice have social relationships related to learning and on that basis interact to learn with each other (Wenger, 1998). Engaging socially is the fundamental process by which members learn. A community of practice can emerge spontaneously or organisations can cultivate their existence; either way, a community of practice is characterised by its members negotiating competence in the context of idiosyncratic practice over time (Pyrko et al., 2016; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Research shows that professional networks comprised of RECs can function as communities of practice in which RECs learn how to lead the RE learning area (Buchanan, 2013, 2015; Fleming, 2002). Buchanan (2013) describes an example of how RECs learn together in a professional network:

The participants perceived opportunities to network with each other as mutually beneficial as they were exposed to a range of ideas that they could draw upon through the sharing of such ideas. These ideas can be adjusted and adapted to fit individual school contexts. The experience of adapting ideas can also be relayed back to the network and contribute to improvement and advancement ... [Networking] enables them to share ideas and learn alternative ways of leading various issues associated with their role from a broad range of people. (p. 131)

The teaching and leadership practices of RECs can benefit from participation in professional networks when members work together to investigate how academic and theoretical knowledge can be translated into practice (Dowling, 2012, p. 27).

3.5.3.2 Professional networks that blend personal and professional relationships. Research suggests that the social relationships formed in networks can be important for

sustaining teachers in their work (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Niesz, 2007). Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) propose that professional networks that engage and sustain an educator's interest and commitment blend rather than differentiate between personal and professional interactions. The social aspect of networks can be an important ingredient in establishing a climate of trust and support because it enables members to know and appreciate one another as people. Niesz (2007) believes that "by making the context for professional development one of interpersonal connection and interaction, networks foster the commitment of time, energy and perhaps something of ourselves" (p. 606). Professional networks with an emphasis on interpersonal connection and interaction are likely to foster the commitment of members to learning within the network.

REC networks have been found to facilitate social interactions that can foster supportive professional relationships (Buchanan, 2013; Crotty, 2006; Fleming, 2002). Fleming (2002, p. 215) found that REC networks serve to provide opportunities for experiencing the support and friendship of colleagues who understand the demanding nature and complexities of the REC position. Belmonte and Rymarz (2017, p. 93) concluded that a key aspect of better supporting RECs, who are also principals in small Catholic schools, is to provide them with opportunities to discuss concerns and to develop supportive networks. In WA, RECs are members of the Office of CEWA REC Network, which has around 50 members (CEWA, 2016b). It is also possible that smaller informal networks of RECs exist.

3.5.4 The development of leadership capacity through postgraduate study. Studies show that RECs value postgraduate study that develops their leadership capacity (Buchanan, 2013; Dowling, 2011). Crotty (2006) observes that some RECs prefer to study educational leadership as opposed to RE or theology at postgraduate level. This preference may result from a perception among RECs that "graduate study in RE/theology limits their educational competence", unlike educational leadership qualifications (Crotty, 2006, p. 793). In Buchanan's (2013) research into what RE leaders perceive as effective support from schools and school systems, many of the participating RE leaders desired learning how to lead through continuing education at the postgraduate level. The RE leaders "did not want their experience of continuing education simply to be an accumulation of skills and knowledge with little connection to their growth and development as leaders in religious education" (Buchanan, 2013, p. 127). Some of the participants identified a desire to learn how to lead other teachers: "Leading in religious education requires some form of leadership

development that fosters skills in leading members of the school community in a way that builds leadership capacity amongst staff members” (Buchanan, 2013, p. 128).

As curriculum leaders, RECs may also benefit from developing their capacity as instructional leaders. This form of educational leadership focuses on leading the improvement of teaching practices and student learning outcomes through the use of observation, feedback and data analysis (Hattie, 2013). The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2017a) affirms the importance of instructional leadership in improving student learning outcomes: “School leaders make the greatest impact on the progress and achievement of learners by using their educational expertise and management skills to focus the efforts of everyone in the school on improving the quality of teaching and learning” (para. 13).

3.5.4.1 The study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education. To lead the RE learning area, RECs must complete Accreditation to Lead Religious Education (CEWA, 2018a). The study component of this accreditation requires the study of six tertiary units approved by the Office of CEWA with at least two of these units completed at master’s level (CECWA, 2013, p. 18). Knowledge provided in the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education is largely concerned with providing RECs with a greater understanding of scripture, Church teaching, RE pedagogy and religious leadership (Catholic Institute of Western Australia, 2020). The units accredited by the Office of CEWA are generally not concerned with other elements of educational leadership such as instructional leadership, strategic planning, financial management or curriculum leadership. RECs are the only heads of learning area employed in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools who are required to complete the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education (CECWA, 2013).

3.5.5 Experiences of mentoring and coaching as middle leaders. Research into the professional formation of educational leaders shows that leadership mentoring can be beneficial (Buchanan, 2013; Service, Dalgic & Thornton, 2016). Service et al. (2016) researched the perceptions of deputy principals on the effect that mentoring by an experienced principal had on their educational leadership capacity. The researchers report that mentoring characterised by professional conversations, observation and improvement-oriented feedback is a powerful tool to enable aspiring leaders to improve their leadership

practice (Service et al., 2016). Mentoring that crosses academic, personal and professional boundaries has the potential to support RECs in their work and encourage professional and personal growth (Buchanan, 2013; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) reported that RECs who participated in their narrative study “mentioned the importance of significant mentors in their lives” (p. 196). Buchanan (2013) found that experienced RE leaders perceived they were supported “when being mentored by lecturers who understood the complex dimensions of their role and mentored in a manner that ... understood the bigger picture of where these participants were coming from” (p. 126). O’Neill and Glasson (2019) examined the effectiveness of coaching in the *CEWA Experienced Principals’ Program*. Many participants in the program “derived great value from a coaching relationship that moved off script from a skills-oriented discussion ... to more personal issues, especially the role’s adverse impact on health and wellbeing” (O’Neill & Glasson, 2019, p. 902). Informal and formal mentoring or coaching relationships may have a role in the preparation of experienced RECs for more senior leadership positions.

3.5.6 The significance of professional experiences that sustain Generation Y RECs.

The literature review suggests that professional experiences that sustain RECs are significant for two reasons. First, RECs are sustained in their position through interactions with people, both internal and external to their school, who support them in dealing with the challenges of leading the RE learning area. These interactions usually occur in the context of supportive relationships with people who understand the complexity and challenges of the REC’s position, such as principals, RE curriculum consultants and fellow RECs (Crotty, 2005, 2006; Long & Hemmings, 2006). Second, RECs appear to be sustained professionally by engaging in experiences that improve their capacity to lead the RE learning area and prepare them for more senior leadership (Buchanan, 2013). Section four of the literature review suggests that RECs attempt to improve their capacity for leadership by undertaking postgraduate study with a focus on leadership, engage in mentoring and coaching experiences, and learn in professional networks with other RECs (Buchanan, 2013, 2018; Fleming, 2002). Following the review of literature in section four of this chapter, SRQ4 was created. The intention of this SRQ is to explore how the professional formation of Generation Y RECs is sustained through their ongoing professional experiences.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a review of the literature that examines how Generation Y RECs are formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences. The chapter is divided into four sections. The literature reviewed in section one suggests that the Christian faith of Generation Y Catholics is formed predominantly during personal experiences that occur in childhood (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hoge et al., 1982; Hughes, 2007). The literature reviewed in section two indicates that it is during employment as RE teachers that many RECs develop the knowledge of RE content, pedagogy and management skills that enables them to become leaders of the RE learning area (Buchanan & Hyde, 2006; Hackett, 2006). Section three provides a review of Church documents and research literature discussing how Catholic education systems and schools support the permanent faith formation of RECs (CCE, 2014; Gowdie, 2011; SCCE, 1982). Limited research into “the effectiveness of formation programs” administered by Catholic education offices could be located in the literature (NCEC, 2015b, p. 5). Finally, the literature reviewed in section four discusses how RECs are sustained in their work through professional experiences (Buchanan, 2015; Crotty, 2006; Fleming, 2002). Four SRQs were created following the review of the literature in this chapter. The SRQs correspond to the literature reviewed in the four sections and were formulated to explore the GRQ.

The next chapter describes the research design and methods used in this study to explore the experiences that formed and sustained the eight Generation Y RECs who participated in this research. A description of the study’s qualitative research methods and a rationale for the choice of these methods is presented. The chapter provides a discussion of the project’s narrative research methodology and the processes used for data gathering and analysis. Chapter 4 concludes with an explanation of the ethical considerations in the study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter describes the research design developed to explore the experiences that form and sustain Generation Y RECs. The chapter begins with an overview of the project's qualitative research design and a review of the GRQ and the four SRQs. A description of the research project's theoretical framework and social constructionist epistemology follows. The chapter then progresses to discussing how the research's interpretive theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism informed the choice of methodology and research methods. The methods used for gathering and analysing data are then presented. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the ethical requirements of the study. An overview of the chapter is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Overview of Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

4.1	Chapter Introduction
4.2	The Research Design
4.2.1	Research questions
4.3	The Theoretical Framework
4.3.1	Epistemology
4.3.2	Theoretical perspective
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4.4	Site and Research Participant Selection
4.5	Pilot Interviews
4.6	The First Round of Interviews
4.6.1	The questions used in the first round of interviews
4.6.2	Conducting the first round of interviews
4.6.3	Recording and transcribing the first round of interviews
4.6.4	Member checking of the first round of interviews
4.6.5	Analysis of the first round of interviews
4.7	The Second Round of Interviews
4.7.1	The questions used in the second round of interviews
4.7.2	Conducting the second round of interviews
4.7.3	Recording, transcribing and member checking of the second round of interviews
4.7.4	Analysis of the second round of interviews
4.7.5	The creation of themes
4.8	Ethical Considerations

4.2 The Research Design

The research design refers to the entire process of research from conceptualisation of the problem to the writing of research questions, data collection, analysis, interpretation and the report writing strategy (Creswell, 2013). This research project is concerned with exploring how Generation Y Catholics are formed and sustained as RECs. A qualitative research design with one GRQ and four SRQs was created to explore the research problem.

4.2.1 Research questions. The GRQ developed to address the research problem is: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? Following a review of literature discussing the professional and faith formation of RECs, four SRQs were created to provide direction in the gathering of data to answer the GRQ. The four SRQs are:

- SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area?
- SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC?
- SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?
- SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

4.3 The Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the structure to define how a researcher will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically approach a research project as a whole (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Creswell (2013) believes that it is necessary for a researcher to articulate a theoretical framework that explains the pathways linking the key factors in a research project. A theoretical framework generally comes from an existing philosophical orientation and “is likely to influence the researcher’s whole approach to doing research” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 42). Squire et al. (2014, p. 96) believe that a coherent theoretical framework for conducting a qualitative research project should situate the

epistemological approach; specify the research methodology—the method of collecting or co-constructing data; and describe the analytical model.

4.3.1 Epistemology. Epistemology is a “theory of knowledge that is concerned with understanding how knowledge is defined, valued and prioritised” (Walter, 2010, p. 12). Snape and Spencer (2003) posit that a research study’s epistemology “concerns the ways in which knowledge is acquired” (p. 14). In choosing an epistemology for a study, the researcher accepts assumptions about the knowability of social reality and the relationship between the researcher and the reality being observed (Bryman, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research project has social constructionism as its epistemology.

4.3.1.1 Social constructionism. Social constructionism is an epistemology that understands all meaningful reality as socially constructed (M. Crotty, 1998). M. Crotty (1998) describes social constructionism as assuming that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 31). Proponents of social constructionism do not believe that meaning making is exclusively an activity of the individual’s mind. Rather, people are assumed to see the world in a meaningful fashion and are able to construct meaning because they view it through lenses bestowed upon them by their experiences of culture (Galbin, 2014). Social constructionism is an epistemology that presupposes “the generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). Berger and Luckmann (2011) propose that the social construction of meaning occurs “with the very first phases of socialisation and continues to unfold throughout the individual’s existence in society” (p. 180). Social constructionism was chosen as the study’s epistemology due to the researcher assuming that the RECs have been formed and sustained through social experiences and that they have understood these experiences through the language, communication and social processes bestowed upon them by their cultural context. In addition, the researcher desired to understand the faith and professional formation experiences of the RECs as they understood them. Social constructionism was deemed to be the most suitable epistemology to guide the research process in order to gain this understanding.

4.3.1.2 Qualitative research design. A qualitative research design was developed to explore the GRQ. The term qualitative research “refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data ... people’s own written or spoken words or observable behaviour” (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015, p. 18). The choice of a qualitative research design was influenced by three considerations. First, a qualitative research design is appropriate for exploring RECs’ social experiences in their families, parishes and other Catholic communities where their faith and professional formation has occurred (Rossman & Rallis, 2016, p. 5). The design enabled an exploration of formational experiences from over the course of participants’ lifetimes. It also permitted the researcher to interpret the subjective meanings they give to these experiences (M. Crotty, 1998). Second, the choice of a qualitative research design made possible an enquiry that was inductive, from the ground up, rather than using a research process handed down entirely from a theory (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The research was guided by the research questions rather than being committed to a preordained process. A qualitative research design enabled the research and interview questions to be refined as data were gathered and new insights emerged. Third, a qualitative research design is appropriate for a descriptive study (Taylor et al., 2015). The experiences that formed and sustained the RECs are described in detail and presented in the research findings in the language or voice of the RECs. The extensive use of the participants’ natural language provides the reader with “evidence about the everyday lives of research subjects and the meanings they attach to their experiences” (Elliott, 2005, p. 17).

4.3.2 Theoretical perspective. A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance of a research project that provides a context for the research process and a grounding for its logic and criteria (M. Crotty, 1998). The choice of theoretical perspective should be compatible with the epistemological assumptions adopted by the researcher. Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke (2004, p. 65) describe the adoption of a theoretical perspective as serving to provide a consistent paradigm for qualitative researchers to see and interpret social reality. The selection of a theoretical perspective will in turn direct the choice of methodology and methods used in a research project. The interpretive theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was chosen for the study because the researcher wanted to understand the participants’ experiences and subjective meanings as they understood them.

4.3.2.1 Interpretive inquiry. In attempting to understand human behaviour and phenomena, research with an interpretive theoretical perspective should attempt to rationally interpret the subjective meanings of those being studied (Bryman, 2012, p. 712). The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey contributed to the development of interpretive research by proposing that in human enquiry there was a need for *Verstehen*, or understanding of a person's lived experience, in addition to *Eklaren* or objective knowledge (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 7). Max Weber introduced interpretive inquiry into sociological thought (Corbetta, 2003 p. 21). Weber (1968) viewed the scientific method as applicable to both the human and natural sciences. However, he maintained that sociology is "a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation" (Weber, 1968, p. 3). Weber advocated for an enquiry approach based in *Verstehen* to be used in the human sciences, or an approach that attempts to understand a person's subjective meanings (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 40).

Interpretive inquiry, or interpretivism, is represented through the different perspectives of hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Schwandt, 1994). All these forms of interpretivism hold "that social reality cannot be simply observed, but rather needs to be interpreted" (Corbetta, 2003, p. 28). Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2013, p. 30) explain that the proponents of interpretivism argue that it is not possible to understand why people do what they do, without attempting to understand how people interpret and make sense of their world. Researchers using an interpretivist theoretical framework "explore the social world through the participants and their own perspectives" and "explanations can only be offered at the level of meaning rather than cause" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 23). The form of interpretivism chosen as this study's theoretical perspective is symbolic interactionism.

4.3.2.1.1 Symbolic interactionism. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was developed by George Mead and his student Herbert Blumer (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 42). Mead stressed that to understand another individual's motivation for behaving in a certain way an observer has to consider situations from the point of view of the actor and the subjective meanings actors assign to their actions (M. Crotty, 1998). Schwandt (1994) describes symbolic interactionism as a sociological theory that assumes people "confront a world that they must interpret in order to act rather than a set of environmental stimuli to which they are forced to respond" (p. 124). The gathering and analysis of data in the research

project was informed by symbolic interactionist assumptions about the nature of reality and personal agency. For example, RECs are assumed to inhabit a social world that is one of intersubjectivity, interaction, community and communication, as opposed to a world of controlling social forces and hegemonic struggle (Neuman, 2014). RECs are understood to be autonomous and reflexive individuals who have personal agency in the construction of meaning.

Blumer's (1969) postulates of symbolic interactionism were used to understand the RECs' experiences. RECs are assumed to act towards things on the basis of the meanings they have for them. Second, the attribution of meaning through the use of symbols is accepted as being a continuous process. The attribution of meaning for symbolic interactionists is continuous because people are assumed to be dynamic and active human beings who construct, modify and piece together meaning in an ongoing process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Third, the process of making meaning for RECs is assumed to occur in a social context and to be anchored in the cultural world. The research employed symbolic interactionism to identify, interpret and describe the formational experiences that the participating RECs believed influenced them to become leaders of the RE learning area. The assertion that "interactionist explanations reflect the point of view of the author" was the basis of the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the RECs' formational experiences (Denzin, 2004, p. 84).

4.3.3 Methodology. The term methodology refers to the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods of data gathering and analysis (M. Crotty, 1998). Interpretive research requires the use of methodologies that allow the researcher to interpret the subjective meanings of those being studied (Bryman, 2012). Interpretive methodologies are characterised as inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analysing the data (Flick et al., 2004, p. 9). Narrative research—sometimes called narrative inquiry, is the methodology used to identify and describe the experiences that formed and sustained the participating RECs.

4.3.3.1 Narrative research. In narrative research, the life experiences of a person or a small group of people are investigated and described (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Narrative research uses stories as data and, more specifically, a person's

interpretation of their life experiences to create a narrative that has a beginning, middle and an end (Merriam, 2009). Bold (2013) describes narrative researchers as being “interested in the events that have happened in people’s lives and the way in which people have responded” to these events (p. 6).

The research used the biographical approach to narrative research (Denzin, 1989). A researcher using this methodology asks participants to produce biographical stories in an interview or to write about their personal experiences (Riessman, 2008, p. 6; Squire et al., 2014, p. 7). Miller (2000) explains that the biographical approach is used “where the area of interest is either the effects of change across time, historical events as these events have impinged upon the individual, or his or her movement along their life course (p. 3).

The type of biographical approach used was a personal experience story. In this type of narrative research, an individual’s social interactions in multiple life episodes are interpreted and described (Creswell, 2013). The life episodes of the participants from childhood, adolescence and adulthood were explored. The personal experiences of the RECs as children and adolescents were particularly influential in the formation of their Christian faith. Research literature on faith formation suggests that experiences as children and adolescents are the strongest influence on the decision of people to have religious belief and engage in religious practice as adults (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Hoge et al., 1982). All of the Generation Y RECs who participated in this study had personal experiences prior to being employed in a Catholic school that influenced their faith development and subsequent decisions to become and remain RECs. The study participants also had professional experiences while working as RE teachers prior to being employed as RECs that formed them professionally. Narrative research was chosen as the research methodology because the:

story of how a person came to be a REC in a contemporary Catholic school is one that lends itself to an examination that is not confined to single events or experiences but needs to be seen in the frame of an entire life. (Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014, p. 193)

4.3.4 Methods. A research method is a technique or established practice used to gather or analyse data to test a hypothesis or answer a research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1). Corbetta (2003, p. 13) explains that as the technical instruments of the research process,

methods should align with the choices of epistemology and theoretical framework. The narrative research methodology used in this project is interpretivist and requires the use of data collection methods where interaction occurs between the researcher and study participants. Narrative research typically uses methods that have a flexible format and that encourage extended responses from participants (Riessman, 2008, p. 19). Semi-structured narrative interviewing was the method used to collect data.

4.3.4.1 Narrative interviews. A narrative interview is a form of semi-structured interview in which participants are encouraged to provide in-depth description about experiences from over the course of their lifetimes (Squire et al., 2014, p. 102). As a form of semi-structured interview, the narrative interview has an informal, flexible format and is similar to “a conversation, a discourse between speakers, rules of everyday conversation apply: turn taking, relevance, and entrance and exit talk” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). Morris (2015) suggests that when conducting a narrative interview, an interviewer should allow the interviewee a great deal of discretion in how they answer questions. This approach was taken by the researcher. The participants were encouraged to speak at length about their individual experiences that may have influenced the development of their identities (Corbally & O’Neill, 2014, p. 7). Riessman (2008) observes that in narrative research with a small sample, investigators will often “conduct multiple interviews with the same person” to learn about a process or “identity construction” (p. 22).

Two rounds of narrative interview with an interval of one year were used to gather information. Conducting a second interview served three purposes. Firstly, a second interview allowed a fuller exploration of any experiences that the interviewees may have felt were not adequately explained in the first interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviewing on two separate occasions acted as a check on the credibility of the research. Secondly, the two interview transcripts served to verify information regarding professional experiences using more than one source (Morris, 2015). Thirdly, a second round of interviews enabled the researcher to further explore the categories that emerged after the first round of interviews.

4.3.4.2 Data analysis. Data analysis in interpretative research has as its focus the construction of concepts from the data that are used to answer the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). Riessman (2008) identifies the most common methods used to

analyse written narrative data as structural, dialogical or thematic analysis. The method of data analysis used in the research project is thematic analysis, also known as thematic narrative analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Squire et al., 2014).

4.3.4.2.1 Thematic analysis. Thematic narrative analysis uses language “as a resource for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data” (Riessman, 2008, p. 59). Thematic narrative analysis focuses on the content of the experiences of the narrators and their reflections on these by searching for themes in the narrative data (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). Themes are reoccurring ideas that capture something important about the data in relation to the research question and represent some level of patterned response of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006. p. 82). When used in narrative research, “thematic analysis focuses on themes that develop across stories, rather than just on themes that can be picked out from [individual] stories” (Squire et al., 2014, p. 8). Thematic narrative analysis was used to produce four themes that address the SRQs and guided the discussion in Chapter 6.

4.3.4.2.2 Coding. The four themes created were the outcome of data analysis using coding. Coding involves the identification of phrases, sentences or paragraphs from interview transcripts that are interpreted by the researcher as addressing a SRQ (Creswell, 2013). Saldaña’s (2016) codes-to-theory model of data analysis and Miles, Huberman and Saldaña’s (2014) method for coding data segments for category and theme development were the models used to guide the coding process and creation of themes. These models use an interpretive lens guided by intuitive inquiry and research questions (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) believes that qualitative researchers often analyse written texts with the intention of developing themes: “A theme can be an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection” (p. 15).

When coding interview transcripts, each phrase, sentence or paragraph identified as addressing a research question is allocated a representative label or code. Codes are “labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 62). The process of ascribing codes involves the researcher interpreting what data are relevant to answering the SRQs and what are not. Saldaña (2016) refers to the initial allocation of codes as “first cycle coding” or “initial coding”, and proposes

that this process should be repeated during several readings of the transcripts until all the sections of text deemed relevant to the research questions have had codes attributed to them (p. 68).

Pattern coding was used by the researcher to aggregate first cycle codes with similarly coded data into meta-codes or categories (Miles, et al., 2014). When using thematic narrative analysis, the categories created from pattern coding are subsequently grouped into themes for the purposes of further interpretation and discussion (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 100). Categories are aggregated into themes when the researcher believes that some commonality unifies the categories (Saldaña, 2016, p. 202). Saldaña’s codes-to-theory model is presented in Figure 4.1.

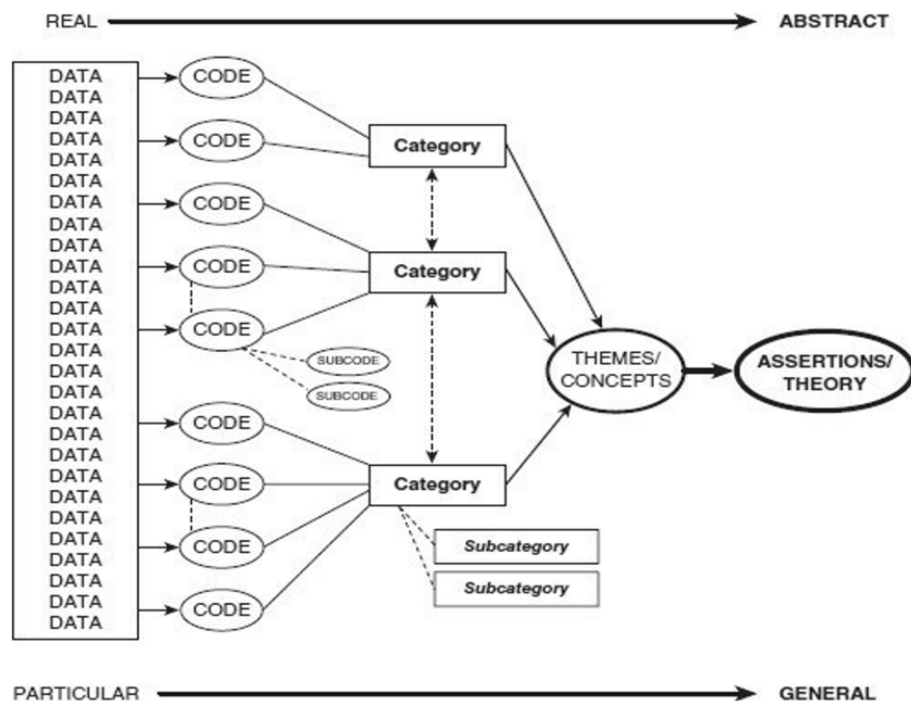


Figure 4.1. Saldaña’s Codes-to-Theory Model (Saldaña, 2016, p. 14).

4.4 Site and Research Participant Selection

All the participating RECs were born between 1976 and 1993 and are members of the age demographic to which the ABS refers as Generation Y (ABS, 2011, “Changing Times—World Events and Popular Culture”, para. 3). At the time of the first interviews all participants were employed as RECs at Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Perth in WA. Four of the RECs had delegated responsibility for the RE learning area and some ministerial aspects of their schools and four RECs were employed as heads of the RE

learning area. Between the first and second rounds of interview, several participants progressed to become deputy principals. At the time of the first interviews all the RECs had been employed in their position for at least one year.

Ethics approval was granted by the University of Notre Dame Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Appendix C) and the Executive Director of CEWA (Appendix D) to use purposive sampling to select participants for the research project. Chain referral sampling was the form of purposive sampling used to identify and recruit the participants. In using chain referral sampling the researcher identifies “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 129). The identification of participants commenced when a request was made to the REC of the school at which the researcher was employed, for referrals to other suitable RECs. This REC was not a participant in the study; however, he did participate in one of the pilot interviews. He was familiar with the study’s methodology, use of semi-structured interview and draft interview questions, and could communicate the nature of the research project to potential participants. Being a member of CEWA’s REC Network, he was able to recommend suitable participants. All RECs employed in Western Australian Catholic secondary schools are members of this professional network, which has a membership of around 50 RECs from Catholic secondary schools (CEWA, 2016b).

A referral to two potential participants was received by the researcher. These RECs were telephoned by the researcher and during these conversations a description of the research project’s purpose, methodology and draft interview questions was provided. One of the RECs expressed an interest in participating in the study. Following the REC’s expression of interest, a request was made to their principal for permission to conduct the research. The principal was provided with a Principal’s Information Sheet (Appendix E), Principal’s Consent Form (Appendix F), Participant’s Information Sheet (Appendix G) and Participant’s Consent Form (Appendix H). After signed consent was provided by the principal to commence research, the referred REC was provided with a Participant Information Sheet and a Participant Consent Form, which were signed and returned by email. Following the interview with this participant, chain referral sampling was used to recruit more participants, with the initial participant being asked to refer any other RECs that may be interested in participating in the research. This process of chain referral was repeated to recruit the remaining participants.

Eight RECs were recruited to participate in the research project. The sample size for the research was small because narrative studies focus on gathering extensive biographical

information about the life events of an individual or a small group of people (Riessman, 2008). Narrative interviews with eight participants allowed the researcher to capture detailed descriptions of biographical experiences during which the participants had been formed and sustained as RECs. The choice of a sample of eight RECs allowed for the possibility of one or two RECs withdrawing from the study between the first and second round of interviews.

4.5 Pilot Interviews

An anticipated field issue prior to commencing the research was the limited experience of the researcher in conducting interviews. Narrative interviewing poses considerable challenges for the novice interviewer (Morris, 2015; Squire et al., 2014). Some of the challenges of narrative interviewing include eliciting extended responses from unresponsive participants; learning how to deal with unexpected participant responses and behaviours; constructing questions that generate extended responses; and learning how to deal with sensitive issues that arise during interviews (Riessman, 2008). Creswell (2013) recommends that novice researchers engage in a pilot project to gain some initial experience in interviewing. Merriam (2009) explains the importance of pilot interviewing:

Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions. Not only do you get some practice in interviewing, but you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need rewording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place. (p. 95)

The challenges of gathering data were in part resolved by undertaking two pilot interviews. The first interview was with a REC who is not a member of Generation Y. The second pilot interview was with a Generation Y REC who was not a participant in the study. The pilot interviews were only conducted after receiving ethics approval from the University of Notre Dame Australia HREC, from the Executive Director of CEWA and from the RECs' principals.

The pilot interviews served as opportunities to test the draft interview questions and obtain feedback from the interviewees on the suitability and effectiveness of questions. The questions used in the first round of interviews were formulated after completion of the two pilot interviews. The decision to provide the RECs with the interview questions two weeks prior to the interviews was made based on the suggestions of both participants in the pilot interviews.

4.6 The First Round of Interviews

The first round of interviews with the eight RECs took place during April, May and June of 2018. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. Five of the interviews occurred in person at the Catholic secondary schools at which the RECs were employed. Three participants were interviewed by telephone. One REC who was interviewed by telephone worked in a Catholic secondary school in regional WA and it was not possible for the researcher to travel to conduct the interview in person. Two RECs who worked in the Perth metropolitan area expressed a preference to be interviewed by telephone. Both the participants had a preference to be interviewed at night while they were in their own homes, rather than dedicate time during a work day to the interviews.

4.6.1 The questions used in the first round of interviews. The main foci of the questions used in the first round of interviews were the personal and professional experiences that had formed the participants as RECs, prior to their employment in the position. In addition, several questions were also asked about the participants' professional and faith formation experiences while employed as RECs. The RECs were emailed a list of the interview questions approximately two weeks prior to their interview. The interview questions used in the first round of interviews are provided in Appendix A.

4.6.2 Conducting the first round of interviews. The interviews began with the researcher summarising the purpose of the research and the questions that were going to be asked. The RECs were then asked to describe their role and how long they had been in their position. This question was intended to provide the researcher with an understanding of the responsibilities their position encompassed and to allow the participants to begin the interview by answering a relatively straightforward question. In the first two narrative interviews an open-ended generative question was then asked: Can you describe how you became a REC? The RECs who participated in the first two interviews were hesitant when answering this generative question, perhaps because of its general, open-ended nature. The interviewees asked for more direction on what was being asked by the researcher. A contextual explanation was provided, which allowed them to consider any personal or professional experiences that they felt influenced their decisions to become RECs. The

hesitant responses provided by the RECs were unexpected; the two participants in the pilot interviews had answered the generative question at length.

In the remaining six interviews, the generative question was asked only after three specific questions had been asked in relation to the RECs' personal and professional experiences. As in the first two interviews, the first question was asked about their role description. The participants were then asked a question that focused on their faith formation experiences during childhood and adolescence. Following this question, they were asked to describe their professional experiences while employed as RE teachers that they believed had influenced their decisions to become RECs. Starting the interviews with three specific questions seemed to provide the participants with clarity that the researcher was interested in obtaining information about both the personal and professional experiences that had influenced them to become RECs. The generative question followed the first three specific questions and was answered in detail by most participants.

The participants were given complete discretion to answer the questions as they chose and were not interrupted by the researcher. At the conclusion of an answer, the researcher occasionally used probing questions to further explore a participant's response. A probing question involves asking interviewees to elaborate or explain an answer in an attempt to obtain more clarity and detail on a particular topic (Morris, 2015, p. 3). Each interview concluded with the researcher thanking the participant and providing an explanation of the process for transcription, member checking and ensuring anonymity in published findings.

4.6.3 Recording and transcribing the first round of interviews. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy by the researcher by comparing each audio recording with the transcription. Minor alterations were made by the researcher to ensure that what was recorded in the transcripts represented what had been said in the interviews. The interview transcripts were printed on A3 paper for future analysis.

4.6.4 Member checking of the first round of interviews. Member checking, or a researcher taking ideas back to research participants for their confirmation and comment is an effective technique for establishing credibility (Charmaz, 2006; Guba, 1981). Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe credibility in interpretive research as not "focusing on a real reality,

out there ... the focus has moved to establishing the match between the constructed realities of respondents and those realities as presented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders” (p. 237). Member checking served to ensure that what was contained in the transcripts was an accurate depiction of how the RECs understood their experiences. The participants were emailed the interview transcripts that had been checked for accuracy by the researcher, asked to comment on what was recorded and encouraged to make additional comments. The participants were also offered the opportunity to discuss the transcript in a telephone call. Several participants requested points of clarification be added to the transcripts from the first round of interviews and two participants requested information be removed that they believed may identify them. All participant feedback was incorporated into the transcripts.

4.6.5 Analysis of the first round of interviews. The analysis of the first round of interviews occurred concurrently with data collection. As the first interviews were read, coded and memos written, the researcher interviewed other participants. Conducting the data analysis and collection concurrently enabled the researcher to consider the answers provided in the first interviews and think about strategies for data collection in future interviews (Miles et al., 2014, p. 62). For example, after analysis of the first two interviews, the order of the questions was altered slightly and at the start of interviews the researcher provided a more detailed explanation of the purpose of the study.

4.6.5.1 Reading and listening to the interviews. After participant feedback had been incorporated, the transcripts from each interview were read by the researcher on two occasions while listening to the audio recordings. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe “repeated reading of the data and reading the data in an active way searching for meanings, patterns and so on” as necessary if a researcher is to familiarise themselves with the data (p. 87). While listening to and reading the interview transcripts the researcher commenced writing analytical memos.

4.6.5.2 Analytical memos. An analytic memo is a piece of writing that documents a researcher’s reflections and thinking processes about the data (Miles et al., 2014, p. 88). Analytic memos were written during the initial two readings of the transcripts and during the

coding process. Memos were recorded on the A3 interview transcripts and on a separate handwritten document.

Three types of analytical memos were recorded. The first form recorded the researcher's perceptions of participants' tones of voice and conversational manner that could not be ascertained from reading the interview transcripts. For example, one of the participants had a very dry sense of humour that was difficult to detect from reading the transcripts. Intermittently, statements were made by this participant that were sardonic and laced with irony, but could potentially be understood as serious for a reader who had no knowledge of the participant's conversational manner. Memos were written noting occasions on which the participant provided ironic answers; references to the use of irony are made in Chapter 5. A second form of analytical memo that was written contained ideas for possible future categories or themes that had not been apparent to the researcher prior to the interviews commencing. For example, a diverse number of professional experiences were reported that had, as their main point of commonality, interactions with other RECs. It was noted in multiple memos that this interaction might be a category of ways in which RECs were sustained professionally. The third form of memo contained brief comments about experiences the researcher believed were interesting but that seemed to be unique to individual participants. Some of these unique experiences are reported in Chapter 5.

4.6.5.3 Coding the first round of interviews. The coding of the first interviews employed an inductive, exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulae or algorithms being applied to guide analysis (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). The initial codes were not predetermined but rather were created after reading the interview transcripts. The researcher formulated codes that represented phrases, sentences and brief paragraphs in the interview transcripts that were interpreted as providing information that addressed the SRQs. The sections of text that were coded were the basis of the quotations used in Chapter 5.

4.6.5.3.1 First cycle coding of the first round of interviews. First cycle coding occurred concurrently with data collection. The codes created were predominantly process codes or codes that describe behaviours and experiences of a participant (Miles et al., 2014, p. 89). The observable actions that were coded were behaviours and experiences that the researcher

interpreted as forming or sustaining the RECs. Experiences that were similar across multiple transcripts were coded, as were responses that were unique to individual participants.

When a section of text was represented by a code, it was first highlighted and annotated with a descriptive phrase written in the column of the paper transcript. An abbreviated code of no more than five letters was then created to serve as the code for later categorisation. For example, CRECN was a code created to represent text in the transcripts that described collaboration in the RECs' networks. Personal experiences as altar servers were coded as PEAS. In the first cycle of coding, over 40 codes were created from the eight interview transcripts.

To facilitate future classification of categories and themes, the first cycle codes were placed in a codebook created using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The codebook contained a definition of each code, the abbreviated form of the code, the text segments to which codes were assigned and a tally by participant of how many times the code was identified. Recording codes in a codebook provided an analytic opportunity to organise the codes into major categories and subcategories. This data management technique also provides a comparative list when working with multiple participants (Saldaña, 2016, p. 27). The codebook served as a guide to identify how often codes occurred across participants; however, it was not used as a quantitative means of classifying codes into categories. Creswell (2013) explains the limitation, for interpretive researchers, of categorising codes using a codebook:

Counting [codes] conveys a quantitative orientation of magnitude and frequency contrary to qualitative research. In addition, a count conveys that all codes should be given equal emphasis, and it disregards that the passages coded may actually represent contradictory views. (p. 17)

Contradictory views and experiences were often grouped together within the same code. For example, some participants recounted intermittent experiences in a parish as a child while others described regularly attending the Eucharist in a parish. Despite the varying influence these experiences had upon the participants' faith formation, in the initial coding all text that discussed experiences of the Eucharist as children (EEC) received the same code. In subsequent readings during first cycle coding, subcodes were developed where codes were believed by the researcher to be too broad for later categorisation: "A subcode is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 91).

For example, in the instance of Eucharist attendance, LEEC was created as a subcode to represent limited attendance at the Eucharist as a child.

4.6.5.3.2 Pattern coding of the first round of interviews. After the first cycle coding had been completed, coding categories were created during a second cycle. The method of second cycle coding used was pattern coding. Pattern coding of the first round of interviews enabled the researcher to create categories across multiple participants.

Seven categories were created from the coding of the transcripts from the first round of interviews. Categories are a type of meta-code composed of codes with repeating ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 138). The categories were created by classifying together first cycle codes that the researcher believed represented similar conceptual ideas. For example, the codes that described experiences where the participants’ faith was formed as children and adolescents were grouped into the category of “Experiences as a child or adolescent that have influenced faith formation”. The creation of categories after the first round of interviews laid the groundwork for cross-case analysis and the creation of themes (Miles et al., 2014, p. 79). The seven categories that were created were all applicable to multiple RECs. The categories created after the first round of interviews through the aggregation of codes are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Categories Created After Pattern Coding in the First Round of Interviews

Category Number	Category Description
1	Experiences as a child or adolescent that have influenced faith formation
2	Experiences as an adult, prior to becoming an REC that have influenced faith formation
3	Professional experiences as an adult that have influenced faith formation
4	Experiences of professional learning
5	Experiences of support from senior leaders
6	Experiences of systemic support
7	Experiences within professional networks

Some codes were deemed to address the SRQs but not placed in one of the seven categories because they were perceived as experiences that were unique to one or two

participants. Saldaña (2016) describes the relevance of codes unique to one or several participants:

The unique instance of a code that appears just once and nowhere else in the data corpus, or a code that appears just two or three times across different cases or time periods, may hold important meaning for generating a significant insight in later analysis. (p. 25)

Many of the codes attributed to either one or two participants were personal experiences that influenced faith formation. Some of these unique experiences are reported in the findings as the researcher believes that they provide insights into how participants were formed as RECs.

4.7 The Second Round of Interviews

The second round of interviews occurred during May, June and July of 2019. Four participants were interviewed in person and three were interviewed by telephone. One participant from the first round of interviews chose not to participate in the second round. As with the first round of interviews, the participants were provided with the interview questions around two weeks prior to the interview. In general, the interviews in the second round were shorter than those in the first round, lasting on average around 45 minutes.

4.7.1 The questions used in the second round of interviews. The questions created for the second round of interviews had as their main focus the professional experiences that sustained the participants while employed as RECs. Several interview questions were created to further explore the seven categories developed after the first round of interviews. All RECs were asked questions in relation to the following professional experiences: the challenges they had experienced since the first interview; any experiences where they believed they had been supported professionally; the experiences that they believed had improved their capacity as educational leaders; and experiences of faith and professional formation during the period between the interviews. Three participants who had progressed to senior leadership positions during the interval between interviews were asked an additional question in relation to how they believed their work as a REC had prepared them for their current position. The questions used in the second round of interviews are provided in Appendix B.

4.7.2 Conducting the second round of interviews. The second interview began with the question: Can you tell me what has happened with your work since we last spoke? This was intended as a general opening question; however, several participants offered detailed descriptions of their work and professional experiences. These descriptions were particularly extensive in the responses of the three participants who had progressed to senior leadership positions. The interview questions that followed focused largely on professional experiences that had occurred during the interval between the two interviews; however, there was scope for the RECs to refer to faith and professional formational experiences that had occurred prior to the first interview.

4.7.2.1 The withdrawal of a participant. One REC chose not to participate in the second round of interviews. This REC gave permission for the information provided in the first interview to be used in the research findings. No additional participants were recruited when the participant withdrew from the research project. Although the breadth of data collection was reduced by the withdrawal of the participant, the researcher felt confident that the second round of interviews with the remaining seven participants resulted in detailed descriptions of personal and professional experiences being gathered (Riessman, 2008).

4.7.3 Recording, transcribing and member checking of the second round of interviews. In a similar manner to the first round of interviews, the second round of interviews was conducted by the researcher and recorded on a digital recording device. As individual interviews were completed, they were transcribed by a professional transcription service and then read several times by the researcher while listening to the audio files. Once the researcher was satisfied that a transcript was accurate, it was sent to the participant for member checking. Following member checking, participant feedback was incorporated into the transcript. The transcripts were then read again while listening to the audio files and analytical memos were written

4.7.4 Analysis of the second round of interviews.

4.7.4.1 First cycle coding of the second round of interviews. Phrases, sentences and brief paragraphs that were interpreted by the researcher as being represented by one of the seven categories created after the first round of interviews were highlighted and the category

abbreviation written in the column next to the text. In addition, new codes were developed when the researcher interpreted a section of text as containing information that addressed a SRQ, while seemingly not fitting into a category created from the analysis of the first round of interviews. In several instances, simultaneous coding was used during the first cycle coding of the second round of interviews. Miles et al. (2014) describe simultaneous coding as “the application of two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum” to reflect multiple meanings (p. 72). For example, when RECs described a professional learning experience offered by CEWA, it was coded using the two existing categories of Experience of Systemic Support and Experience of Professional Learning.

4.7.4.2 Second cycle coding of the second round of interviews. The second cycle of coding employed pattern coding to categorise the new codes created in the analysis of the second round of interviews. Some of the newly developed codes were reassessed and grouped into the seven categories created during the analysis of the first interviews. In addition, two new categories were created from the new codes produced in the coding of the second interviews. The two categories created after the analysis of the second interview transcripts are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Categories Developed After the Pattern Coding of the Second Round of Interviews

Category Number	Category Description
8	Experiences of career advancement
9	Experiences of professional formation as a leader

4.7.5 The creation of themes. The nine categories created after the conclusion of coding the second round of interviews were classified into four themes. Two assumptions guided the creation of themes. First, categories were grouped into a theme when the researcher perceived commonalities that unified the categories into a broader unit of information (Saldaña, 2016, p. 202). Second, themes were created with the intention that they capture something important about the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). The researcher considered how different categories may combine to form an overarching theme that addresses a research question. Each theme that was created

responds to one of the SRQs. The four themes created from the analysis of data are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

The Four Themes

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1. Personal Faith Formation Experiences as Children and Adolescents
 2. Professional Formation Experiences as RE Teachers
 3. Faith Formation Experiences as RECs
 4. Professional Formation Experiences as RECs
-

4.8 Ethical Considerations

In February 2017, an application was made to the University of Notre Dame HREC for a low-risk ethical review of the proposed research project. In March 2017, unconditional ethics clearance was granted by the HREC to commence the research. The study's HREC reference number is 017041F. Initial unconditional approval was granted for the project for the period March 2017 to March 2020 (Appendix C). During this period, an annual ethics report was provided to the HREC. In February 2020, an application was made to the HREC for an extension to the research project's ethics approval. An extension to the unconditional approval was granted by the HREC until December 2020.

In July 2017, permission was provided by the Executive Director of CEWA for the study to commence in Western Australian Catholic schools. The CEWA reference number for the study is RP2017/33 (Appendix D). The Executive Director of CEWA specified that prior to commencing the research, permission should be obtained from the principals of Catholic secondary schools at which the RECs were employed. The principals of schools where the research occurred were contacted by email and provided with a Principal's Consent Form and a Principal's Information Sheet explaining the purpose and methodology of the research. Written permission was obtained from the principals of all participants prior to commencing interviews.

Participant confidentiality was a fundamental goal of the research. Pseudonyms are used to de-identify the participating RECs in Chapter 5 and identifying information such as a participant's parish and school name are not reported. Although unlikely, it is possible that participating RECs could be identified circumstantially in the research findings because of

the limited number of RECs in WA. There are approximately 50 Catholic secondary and composite schools in the state, with each having one REC (CEWA, 2016b). A smaller group of RECs was born between 1976 and 1993. Many RECs in WA are likely to know each other through network meetings and through attending other professional development together. The National Health and Medical Research Council (2015, para. 3.1.14) explains that in such circumstances, participants should be informed about any potential to be identified in the published findings of the research. In the initial meeting and through the Participant Information Sheet participants were informed that while highly unlikely, the possibility exists that they could be identified in the research findings.

The independent nature of the research was explained to participating RECs and perceived conflicts of interest were made explicit. Participants were informed that the researcher is employed as a secondary RE teacher in a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Perth and that he has knowledge of the RE curriculum used in the Catholic dioceses of WA and the professional support provided for RECs by CEWA. They were assured that the researcher had no professional or personal relationships with the principals or staff at the Catholic schools where the participants were employed.

Participants were also informed that the research was independent of CEWA and was in no way intended as a judgement on the suitability of participants for the position of REC. Specifically, they were assured that the research was not intended as an assessment of how participating RECs complied with CEWA's requirement that they be actively committed Catholics. The Participant Information Sheet explained that because the research was being undertaken in Western Australian Catholic schools, the Catholic Bishops of WA and the Executive Director of CEWA would be provided with an executive summary of the study's de-identified findings.

The Participant Information Sheet explained that all participating RECs were free to withdraw from the research at any time with no prejudice for doing so. Participants were also informed that if they should so request, all information they provided would be permanently deleted and not used in the research. The Participant Information Sheet explained the complaints process that participants should follow if they had a concern about the ethical conduct of the research.

4.8.1 Storage of recordings and interview transcripts. The digital audio recordings of the interviews contain name-identified data. During the study, the researcher stored the

audio recordings of interviews on a password-protected memory device. A digital copy of the interview transcripts was kept by the researcher on the same memory device as the audio recordings. A second electronic copy of the audio recordings and electronic interview transcripts was kept on a password-protected memory device by the researcher as a data backup. A paper copy of the interview transcripts was also kept by the researcher in a locked cupboard in the researcher's house when not in use.

The research supervisor had digital copies of the audio recordings and the interview transcripts that remained in a secure location in the University of Notre Dame Australia's School of Education, Fremantle for the duration of the study. After the thesis has been examined and the findings published, the interview recordings, which contain identifiable data, will be permanently deleted. The de-identified data contained in the digital transcripts will be securely stored for five years at the School of Education, Fremantle. At the end of the five-year period the digital transcripts will be permanently deleted.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the study's research design. A description is provided of the qualitative research design that was developed to address the research problem and answer the GRQ. An outline of the research project's theoretical framework follows that describes the epistemology of social constructionism and the interpretative theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The narrative research methodology used to collect, analyse and report data is then introduced. Narrative research was chosen as the study's methodology after the review of the literature suggested RECs have personal faith formation experiences as children and adolescents that influence their formation as leaders of the RE learning area (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Bengtson et al., 2013; Hoge et al., 1982; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). A description of the data gathering method of narrative interviewing is then presented and a rationale is offered for the choice of this method. This presentation is followed by a description of the use of thematic analysis in narrative research and a discussion of the two models of data analysis that were drawn upon for theme creation (Miles, et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). A summary of how data were gathered and analysed during the two rounds of narrative interviews is then provided. Finally, the research project's ethical considerations are presented.

The next chapter presents the study's findings. Chapter 5 is structured around the four research findings and sub-findings that answer the four SRQs. Each finding is comprised largely of the language of RECs in the form of quotations extracted from the interview transcripts. The quotations are organised under the findings and sub-findings formulated to address the four SRQs.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings. It is organised in four sections, with each describing one research finding and the supporting sub-findings. The four findings and sub-findings are presented largely in the language of the RECs in the form of quotations extracted from the transcripts that were produced from the two rounds of narrative interviews. Each finding answers a SRQ.

The first section of the chapter presents Finding One, which addresses SRQ1. Finding Two is then presented, which addresses SRQ2. The presentation of Findings Three and Four follows, with these findings addressing SRQ3 and SRQ4, respectively. The four findings presented in this chapter answer the GRQ: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? The chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings. An overview of Chapter 5 is provided in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Overview of Chapter 5: Findings

5.1	Chapter Introduction
5.2	Finding One: The Unique Personal Experiences of the RECs Influenced Their Decisions to Become Heads of the Religious Education Learning Area
5.2.1	Sub-finding 1.1: The unique personal experiences of the RECs, during childhood and adolescence, influenced their decisions to become heads of the Religious Education learning area
5.2.2	Sub-finding 1.2: The unique personal experiences of the RECs during adulthood significantly influenced their decisions to become heads of the Religious Education learning area
5.2.3	Summary of Finding One
5.3	Finding Two: The RECs' Professional Experiences While Employed as Religious Education Teachers Were a Significant Influence in Their Decisions to Become Leaders of the Religious Education Learning Area
5.3.1	Sub-finding 2.1: Some RECs experienced a deepening of their Christian faith while working in a Catholic school that influenced them to become RECs
5.3.2	Sub-finding 2.2: The majority of RECs perceived that their professional formation as Religious Education teachers occurred predominantly through informal professional experiences with other teachers in their schools
5.3.3	Sub-finding 2.3: The RECs have differing views on how completing Accreditation to Lead Religious Education contributed to their professional formation
5.3.4	Summary of Finding Two

- 5.4 Finding Three: There was Inconsistency in the Professional Experiences Provided by CEWA and Schools to Assist RECs in Sustaining Their Faith Formation
 - 5.4.1 Sub-finding 3.1: Some RECs' experience of faith formation is limited to activities provided by schools for ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic school
 - 5.4.2 Sub-finding 3.2: Some RECs experience multiple, voluntary faith formation activities organised by their school, CEWA or themselves
 - 5.4.3 Sub-finding 3.3: Some of the RECs believe that faith formation for leaders of the RE Learning Area requires a more planned approach
 - 5.4.4 Summary of Finding Three
 - 5.5 Finding Four: There was Variety in the Professional Experiences That Sustained the RECs
 - 5.5.1 Sub-finding 4.1: All the RECs engaged in professional learning opportunities that sustained their professional formation
 - 5.5.2 Sub-finding 4.2: All the RECs believed that the support of their school principals sustained them professionally
 - 5.5.3 Sub-finding 4.3: All the RECs were sustained professionally, to varying degrees, by the support of CEWA
 - 5.5.4 Sub-finding 4.4: Most of the RECs were sustained professionally through experiences in sub-networks of RECs
 - 5.5.5 Sub-finding 4.5: Some of the RECs believed that working as a REC formed them professionally for more senior leadership positions
 - 5.5.6 Summary of Finding Four
 - 5.6 Chapter Summary
-

5.2 Finding One: The Unique Personal Experiences of the RECs Influenced Their Decisions to Become Heads of the Religious Education Learning Area

Finding One addresses SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area? For the purposes of the research project, a personal experience is understood as any social interaction that is not directly related to paid employment in a Catholic school. In the first interview, the eight participants were asked to describe personal experiences during their lives that they believed had influenced them to become RECs. The participants were also asked to describe personal experiences where their Christian faith had been formed as children, adolescents and adults. This question was asked because the Catholic Bishops' Conference of WA mandates that "teachers of Religious Education shall be committed Catholics and shall give active Christian witness to Catholic beliefs" (CECWA, 2004, para. 4.8). Faith formation experiences were deemed to be a likely influence on participants' decisions to become RECs.

All the participants described personal experiences as children, adolescents and adults that influenced their faith formation and, in turn, their subsequent decisions to become RECs. Some RECs described regular faith formation experiences in multiple Catholic communities

throughout various stages of their lives. Other participants recalled periods when they were not actively involved with Church communities. Over the course of their lives, all the participants described themselves as maintaining Christian faith and a Catholic self-identity. Finding One suggests that the personal experiences of the participants significantly influenced their decisions to become RECs and that influential personal experiences were unique to each REC. The evidence to support this finding is explained through two sub-findings.

5.2.1 Sub-finding 1.1: The unique personal experiences of the RECs, during childhood and adolescence, influenced their decisions to become heads of the Religious Education learning area. It was during personal experiences as children and adolescents that all the participants were first transmitted Christian faith and when they developed a sense of Catholic identity. Their Catholic faith and identity made it possible for them to authentically teach RE and lead others in the RE learning area as committed Catholics. Much of the knowledge the RECs had of the Catholic tradition, upon which they drew to lead the RE learning area, was also obtained through personal experiences in childhood and adolescence. The personal experiences that influenced the progression of the participants to the position of REC occurred in Catholic communities such as families, parishes, Catholic schools and CYM.

5.2.1.1 *The transmission of Christian faith from parents.* All participants described having their Christian faith transmitted to them by one or both of their parents and perceiving themselves as being Catholic since early childhood. Anne's comment that she was of "Catholic faith from birth, childhood, and being part of the Catholic Church is something I've always known", is representative of all participants' experiences of faith development and formation of self-identity as Catholics. Several participants described having two practising Catholic parents who taught them Catholic beliefs and practices. Bernard said, "when I was a kid, I was brought up in the faith by my parents, had really strong experiences from my parents". Matthew recalled growing "up in a really good practising Catholic family"; similarly Anne said, "my parents and my family are very strong in their faith".

Several participants described their fathers as having no or limited influence upon their faith formation as children and adolescents: "He wasn't overly interested in it" (Hector),

“dad’s not Catholic” (Jane) and “he wasn’t very much of a faith influence on my life at all” (Marian). These participants recalled how their mothers were the people who initially taught them about Christian beliefs and who modelled Catholic practices within a parish community: “Mum took me to church when I was a kid” (Hector) and “Mum was a practising Catholic and did take us to church every week when we were kids” (Marian).

5.2.1.2 Experiences of faith formation within parish communities as children and adolescents. The participants had a diverse range of experiences in parish communities as children and adolescents. Most of the participants regularly attended a parish community with their parents as children and adolescents. Some of the participants and their family members were involved in parish ministries: “We never missed Mass and we served when we were at Mass, whether it was for myself and my brother as altar servers, or Mum and Dad. Dad was acolyting and mum was always reading or Eucharistic ministering” (Matthew). Hector recalled, “I was an altar server at church, mum was in the choir, so church was always a part of life”. Bernard attended a rural parish where the priests displayed a vibrant pastoral ministry, engendering a sense of community among the parishioners: “I had fantastic experiences from parish priests that I was involved with in terms of being able to see them as just real, genuine men who took interest and concern”.

Marian recalled her experience of attending a parish with her mother as a child and adolescent: “The parishes that I’d been brought up with ... were elderly priests, boring homilies, really old people attending, and I was the young one”. After leaving school Marian “got involved with the parish at the university and then after that ... I just stopped going altogether. Still had faith ... but just didn't go to Mass regularly”.

Several RECs described not regularly attending a parish community with their family during their childhood and adolescence. All of these participants described at least one of their parents as identifying as Catholic and in one instance both parents were described as having a strong Catholic identity despite not being members of a parish community. For these RECs, Catholic identity and developing Christian faith were not necessarily associated with parish membership. Anne described her experiences in a parish as a child and adolescent:

You know, my parents were Catholic but not practicing in the sense of going to Church ... So, church attendance wasn't a big thing. So, we were Catholic in all our values and our beliefs and we'd do the sacraments. But in my early years, it

wasn't necessarily about church attendance because my parents were more concerned with how to provide for the family. (Anne)

Jane explained that while she had perceived herself as being a Catholic from early childhood, her family were not members of a parish or any other community within the Catholic Church for most of her childhood and adolescence. She described receiving the sacraments but having little other involvement with a parish as an adolescent: "It's quite strange; though I grew up as a Catholic ... but sort of stopped going to church after Confirmation". Although Jane sporadically attended a parish during her childhood years, she described her family as continuing to have a sense of Catholic identity and a receptiveness to Church teaching: "There's actually still that faith connection. We didn't stop going because we were anti-religion. It just sort of became an extra thing you had to try and fit in". She observed that her membership of Catholic communities other than her family commenced in early adulthood after being employed in a Catholic school: "I really got engaged with my faith [after] becoming a Catholic school teacher".

5.2.1.3 Experiences while attending Catholic secondary schools as students. Six of the participants did not believe that their experiences while attending a Catholic secondary school influenced their faith formation or their decisions to become RECs. Four of these RECs did not refer to their schooling experiences when asked about their faith formation or personal experiences that influenced their career progressions to becoming leaders of the RE learning area. Anne and Marian made brief comments about their attendance as students at secondary schools when asked about their personal experiences. However, neither participant believed that their schooling influenced their decisions to become RE teachers or RECs: "I went to a Catholic high school for two years and then when we moved back to Perth I actually went to an Anglican school" (Jane) and "I didn't go to a Catholic school, I went to a state school" (Anne). Nigel and Bernard believed that their experiences as students in Catholic education strongly influenced their decisions to become RE teachers and later RECs.

The Catholic identity and worldview of Nigel were shaped by his experiences in Catholic education as a student. His own positive experiences as a student were a significant influence in him becoming a RE teacher: "I attended Catholic schools, I've had about 20 solid years of Catholic education as a student. I think it probably makes quite a bit of an effect that I have spent my days in Catholic education". He did not refer to Catholic schooling as an influence upon his faith formation; however, he described Catholic education and

Catholicism more broadly as “part of my identity”. He noted that attendance at a Catholic secondary school and university meant “that I understand the benefit of such a system as Cath-Ed”. He was influenced to work in a Catholic school because of his perception as a student that it was an environment where people engaged in meaningful work, observing that “it's how I contribute really, it's how I serve”.

Bernard explained that his experiences while attending two Catholic secondary schools influenced his faith formation and his decision to become a teacher in a Catholic school. Attending a Catholic secondary school was described as, “developing your faith, particularly in the older years”. Two faith formation activities that Bernard identified were a Kairos retreat and a Christian service-learning program for Year 11 and 12 students. He recalled the Kairos retreat as being, “fantastic for me personally, to get the opportunity to develop my faith, and stick with my faith as well”. His experiences attending the retreat as a secondary school student influenced him to maintain an involvement with the Church by working as a facilitator of Kairos retreats after leaving school:

And in Year 12 I was lucky enough to be part of a retreat at school. It was run by a group of American young adults who'd just completed their last year at schooling over there and had come over to run this retreat, it's pretty popular in WA. It's called Kairos. Yeah, I was lucky enough to be one of the kids who were on the very first Kairos retreat in WA ... And then, because I enjoyed that experience so much, I got the opportunity to run three or four of those retreats ... in the two years post me finishing Year 12. (Bernard)

In addition, Bernard described incidental interactions with teachers as influencing his decision to become a teacher in a Catholic school. These interactions occurred in conversations during classes and through experiences where he was encouraged to become a teacher:

The staff and people who taught me as a kid, gave me sort of the encouragement or the impetus through their example to be a teacher in itself ... My favourite teachers were the reason I became a teacher, they made me realise I needed to become a teacher. (Bernard)

5.2.1.4 Experiences as children and adolescents within Catholic communities other than the family, parish and Catholic school. There was considerable variety in the

experiences that participants had as children and adolescents within Catholic communities other than the family, parish and Catholic school. Three of the participants recalled regularly attending a variety of Catholic communities as children and adolescents. Some of these communities included youth groups, ministry teams, prayer groups, charismatic communities and temporary retreat communities. Most of the participants who belonged to communities other than the family, parish and Catholic school considered these communities to have had a significant influence on their decisions to become RECs. Laurence commented, “I definitely remember, you know, going to prayer meetings and things like that a lot more from the age of 10 onwards with my mum. So, that had quite a large impact on me”. In addition, he attended a Catholic youth group “that was sort of meeting fortnightly, just talking about the faith”. Matthew joined a CYM team after leaving school: “I did that throughout my uni degree for four years and I suppose that was a big part in my formation”. Five participants did not describe having influential experiences as children or adolescents in Catholic communities outside the family, parish and Catholic school.

5.2.1.5 Periods of questioning and doubt. Several of the participants briefly described periods during their late adolescence in which they questioned their faith. Hector recalled a period in his life where he, “sort of drifted off a little bit from my faith and after I moved out of the home, I lost a bit of my faith”. Similarly, Laurence said that, “you could say I was a practical atheist through many of those teen years”. Those participants who questioned their faith, and in some instances spent periods away from the Church, often had experiences that led them to return to parish communities. For some, it was the experience of working as a teacher in a Catholic secondary school.

5.2.2 Sub-finding 1.2: The unique personal experiences of the RECs during adulthood significantly influenced their decisions to become heads of the Religious Education learning area. There was variety in the personal faith formation experiences of the participants during their adult years, defined here as any personal experience that occurred after they were 18 years of age. Personal experiences as adults that influenced the participants to become RECs occurred in youth ministry teams, at a Catholic university and

in parishes. One participant described an experience of personal tragedy that influenced her decision to become a teacher and ultimately a REC.

5.2.2.1 Experiences working in Catholic youth ministry. Prior to being employed in a Catholic school, two of the participants were members of CYM teams during their late teens and early twenties. Matthew believed that his work for a CYM team as a young adult was a significant influence on his decision to become a REC and upon the approach he took to teaching and leadership in the RE learning area. The CYM team with which he worked used contemporary teaching and learning practices to evangelise young people, such as the integration of mobile technology and activities that Matthew described as having an “entertainment engagement factor”. For example, the ministry team developed an application for “iPhones that has the daily Mass readings and reflections every day on that, plus videos and things like that”. He explained how the contemporary approach he used while working in CYM continued “to feed into my journey and what I can then witness towards the students as well ... So, I suppose to try and employ that in my teaching as well”. In the view of Matthew, the skills he learnt in CYM closely aligned with the skills required to be a REC. First, he commented that it was necessary to embrace teaching and learning “innovation, and don’t just keep doing what we’ve always done because you’ll get the same results”, in the sense of students not readily engaging with RE. Second, he believed that experiences of “communicating or learning to work with a team” were collaborative skills required to lead a group of teachers in the RE learning area.

Bernard explained how working as a facilitator of Kairos retreats for students in Catholic secondary schools was important in sustaining his faith in his late teens: “So, the idea was, when Kairos was introduced here, to WA ... if any other school in WA or elsewhere wanted to have a Kairos, it needed to be instigated by the school” [that Bernard had attended as a student]. Having experienced the Kairos retreat as a student in Year 12 he was asked by the leaders at his former school to facilitate retreats for upper secondary students in WA and other parts of Australia: “One of the brothers ... was mates with another brother over in Adelaide and he invited us over to give it to them. So that was the best experience for me as a 19, 20-year-old kid, to help do that”. He valued the experience of retreat coordinating because of the connection it provided him with the Church and with other young Catholics: “That was really good for me to develop my faith at that young, early age, and just keep with it, because around that age sometimes the tendency is to lose a bit of

faith”. Bernard’s comment that young people can “lose a bit of faith” when they leave school seems to be a reference to young people no longer having involvement with Church communities, as opposed to being a judgement that young people stop believing in the existence of God.

5.2.2.2 Interactions with faith-filled people. Some participants described experiences with people they perceived to be faith filled, or individuals who reflected “a Christ-like presence and a Christ-like love to others”, as an important influence on their decisions to become RECs (CECWA, 2009, para. 18). Two participants believed that interactions with Catholic priests influenced their decisions to become RECs. In both instances, the priests’ approach to the pastoral dimension of their ministry was identified as influencing their own style of leadership of the RE learning area. Anne explained that “a priest was another core reason why I probably felt quite comfortable going into the REC role”. The priest’s example of interacting with people in a pastoral and caring manner that gave witness to Christian beliefs was a significant influence on Anne: “He is the person that I aspire, I hope that I am to the students that I’m with every day”. Bernard had interactions with two parish priests who influenced his own style of leadership. He described one parish priest as “another really strong role model in my life”.

5.2.2.3 An experience that prompted questions about meaning and purpose. Marian described the experience of a teenage sibling being diagnosed with a serious illness as having a significant influence upon her decision to pursue a career in teaching and to ultimately become a REC. At the time of her sibling’s diagnosis she was in her early twenties and working in another industry. After the diagnosis, Marian developed a sense of doubt about the meaningfulness of her paid employment and began to discern how she should live to find meaning and purpose in life. Marian described this experience:

She got diagnosed ... My mum took leave from work, so she was at the hospital for seven months. So, all of that process, I suppose for me, was a huge shake up to what was this life all about? What was I doing? Did I find meaning in my work? Was I satisfied? I thought, no, something's telling me that I just can't go back there.
(Marian)

Upon considering what type of work would provide her with a sense of meaning and purpose, she decided that teaching and working with young people would fulfil her yearning: “There had been something in me that had always wanted to be educating in some capacity”. Marian left her job and enrolled in a graduate diploma in education: “So that particular year, I suppose for me, was again re-finding a meaning and purpose in my life after what had happened so tragically”.

5.2.2.4. Experiences at universities that formed participants’ Christian faith and influenced their decisions to become RECs. Anne identified experiencing a deepening of her Christian faith during the time she attended a Catholic university. Prior to attending the university, she had intermittent experiences in a Catholic parish, had not attended a Catholic school and did not describe having regular experiences within Catholic communities other than her family. Anne had a strong Catholic identity as a child and adolescent that was transmitted to her from her parents. She observed that despite not being connected with a parish she had Christian faith when commencing study at university.

The university she attended served as a place in which the Catholic beliefs that had been transmitted by her parents could be further formed. The explicitly Catholic outlook of the university administration and the acceptance of Catholic beliefs by many students and lecturers provided an environment where Anne was encouraged to explore and further form her Christian faith. Experiences at a Catholic university strongly influenced her decisions to become a RE teacher and later a REC. Anne described the formation of her faith while attending a Catholic university:

I think I consciously made the decision that there's something more that I wanted. And that was due to just all the wonderful positive experiences ... it was the first time I had got to courses and really explored the faith in a lot more deeper and meaningful way. Also, some really good role models, lecturers, and even the people I encountered, and even the values ... It was just something that really resonated with me. And then as a result ... that's when I decided to have my Confirmation. Because at that point I hadn't been confirmed. (Anne)

The study of theology at university influenced Laurence’s faith formation and his decision to become a RE teacher. He recounted that he “always had an attraction to truth, philosophy and wisdom”. Despite this attraction, he described himself as “a practical atheist”

at the time of commencing study at university. The study of theology contributed to what he termed an “intellectual conversion”, or a developing intellectual acceptance of the Christian view of reality, with initially no change occurring to his personal behaviour to reflect this view. He noted that the heart conversion, or spiritual and behavioural conversion, “came, I suppose, more in my mid-twenties and it's still ongoing”:

I remember, I enrolled in a theology unit, so I was about 18 or 19 I think at the time, and I didn't really know what theology was properly at that age. Anyway, I enrolled in this unit and, I remember ... I think he's a Marist Brother. He was taking the unit and I remember just absolutely consuming what I was being taught. It was like I had, as if you're starving and you're just stuffing your face with food, it was exactly that but with knowledge ... I thought wow, people actually teach this. And I remember, yeah, that was something that sort of ignited the fire. (Laurence)

The “fire” to which Laurence referred was his passion for teaching RE to secondary students.

5.2.3 Summary of Finding One. This section presents Finding One: The unique personal experiences of the RECs influenced their decisions to become heads of the RE learning area. The participants were found to have had a diverse range of personal experiences that influenced the formation of their Christian faith and their decisions to become RECs. There was some commonality in the faith formation experiences of the participating RECs as children and adolescents. For all participants, their Christian faith was initially transmitted to them by their parents. Most participants had at least one parent who regularly attended the Eucharist and to varying degrees, all the participants had some faith formation experiences in parish communities as children and adolescents.

As adults, the personal experiences that influenced the participants to become RECs varied considerably. There was a group of RECs who had regular faith formation experiences in multiple Catholic communities during their late teens and twenties. These experiences strongly influenced the formation of their Christian faith and their decisions to become RE teachers and ultimately RECs. Other participants described themselves as continually maintaining their Christian faith and Catholic identity throughout their late adolescence and early adulthood while having minimal experiences within Church communities. For these participants, personal experiences at university, interactions with faith-filled people and

employment in a Catholic school were experiences that influenced their decisions to become RE teachers and subsequently RECs.

5.3 Finding Two: The RECs' Professional Experiences While Employed as Religious Education Teachers Were a Significant Influence on Their Decisions to Become Leaders of the Religious Education Learning Area

Finding Two is presented in the following section. SRQ2 is addressed by this finding: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC? All the participants had periods of employment as RE teachers in Catholic secondary schools, prior to being employed as RECs. For several participants, faith and theological knowledge formation experiences while employed as RE teachers reinvigorated their Christian faith and influenced their decisions to become leaders of the RE learning area. Most of the participants had experiences while employed as RE teachers where they were identified by leaders in their schools as future RECs. Identification engendered a sense of confidence in the participants that they were sufficiently competent to progress to a position of educational leadership. The possibility of future career progression resulted in some participants engaging in professional learning opportunities that included mentoring, postgraduate study and leadership training. The evidence to support Finding Two is explained through the presentation of three sub-findings.

5.3.1 Sub-finding 2.1: Some RECs experienced a deepening of their Christian faith while working in a Catholic school that influenced them to become RECs. RE in Catholic secondary schools is a form of the Ministry of the Word and as such the ongoing formation of Christian faith is necessary for RE teachers to authentically teach the content mandated by the Bishops of WA (CEWA, 2009). In the first round of narrative interviews, participants were asked to describe the experiences of faith formation provided by their schools and CEWA while they were employed as RE teachers. This question was asked because faith formation experiences were deemed by the researcher to be a likely factor to have influenced the participants' decisions to become RECs. In general, when asked to describe their experience of theological knowledge and faith formation as RE teachers, the RECs discussed activities that were organised by schools to assist them in maintaining ongoing renewal of

accreditation. The participants also recounted experiences of prayer, liturgy and interactions with faith-filled staff members.

5.3.1.1 The reinvigoration of faith while working in a Catholic school. Three of the participants described employment in a Catholic school as reinvigorating their Christian faith and sense of Catholic identity. These participants recalled having periods of time away from Catholic communities during their adolescence and early adulthood, while still maintaining Christian faith and perceiving themselves to be Catholic. Hector believed that interactions with staff members who were faith filled gave him the confidence to explore his own faith during the period he was employed as a RE teacher: “I feel, you're around good people who are willing to provide the opportunities to build your faith”. He described why he believed the Catholic secondary school that employed him as a RE teacher had contributed to the reinvigoration of his Christian faith:

It's a positive faith environment. We come in here and we say a prayer before we start each day and we have a Mass every Thursday morning and we have a staff departmental prayer every Friday. You're interacting with faith a lot and it's something that's encouraged, whereas out in the big wide world at the moment, it's almost a dirty word in some circles. It's a really positive environment where your faith can be nurtured. (Hector)

For Marian, interactions with the chaplain at the Catholic secondary school where she was first employed as a RE teacher significantly influenced her decision to join a parish community: “It wasn't until I started work ... that there was a particular priest who was the chaplain of the school that really influenced the way that I saw faith, and I was drawn to hear more from him”. Marian made the decision to commute in a “30-minute drive on a Sunday morning to go and listen to his homilies ... to actually join his parish community”. She became “quite involved in that particular church, as a result of his influence”.

Employment in a rural Catholic school as a primary teacher influenced Jane to join a rural parish community. She commented that for RE teachers in a small, rural Catholic school, joining the parish community, or at least attending Mass intermittently, were expectations from senior leaders: “I think as an adult I sort of just, moving to a country town where you're actually there, if you work in the Catholic school and don't go to church on the weekend ... You get looked at a little bit funny”. Despite initially attending the parish, in part

due to a perceived obligation to do so, she found a sense of community and a desire to further explore her faith: “It sort of just, by going back it just reinvigorated it for me”.

5.3.1.1.1 The diversity of faith formation among Catholic staff members. Some participants commented on the diversity of faith formation of Catholic staff members within their schools. Most participants believed that the senior leaders in their schools were faith-filled people who were prominent faith leaders. However, observations were also made by the participants that religiously committed Catholics appeared to be a minority among teachers generally and possibly among RE teachers: “Not all Catholics and Catholic schools are on the same page about how Catholic faith should be expressed in the school and in the classroom ... A majority of the staff are living quite secular lives” (Laurence). Anne perceived that some staff viewed the religious part of a Catholic school as the concern of RE teachers and other teachers explicitly involved in the ministerial aspects of the school: “I think there can be a challenge within a school in the staff in that they go, ‘but that's religion, that's your job. That's your job’. And I'm like, ‘No! No that's not just my job’”. Matthew observed that it was possible that the lack of formation may extend to many part-time RE teachers, who were perhaps, “teaching it [RE] because they ticked Catholic on the census”.

5.3.1.2 Intentional faith formation experiences provided by Catholic schools and Catholic Education Western Australia. For the purpose of the research, an intentional faith formation experience is understood as an activity intentionally created by a Catholic school, Catholic Education Office or religious order for the purpose of facilitating the formation of a teacher's Christian faith. The intentional faith formation activities recounted by most of the participants, while working as RE teachers, were those that were compulsory for the whole teaching staff at their secondary schools. These experiences were typically provided on professional learning days, to satisfy CEWA's requirement that teachers attend 30 hours of knowledge and faith activities over the course of five years to maintain ongoing accreditation (CECWA, 2013). No participants described attending an intentional faith formation experience that they believed was specifically developed for RE teachers: “I think we've got a long way to go in terms of proper formation for RE teachers” (Laurence).

5.3.2 Sub-finding 2.2: The majority of RECs perceived that their professional formation as Religious Education teachers occurred predominantly through informal professional experiences with other teachers in their schools. Informal professional experiences are defined as experiences that occur through employment in a Catholic school but that are not part of formally organised professional learning implemented by a school, the Office of CEWA or an education provider such as a university or Catholic institute. All the participants described informal professional experiences during their employment as RE teachers that influenced their decisions to become RECs. Informal professional experiences that formed the participants while they were employed as RE teachers include their opportunities for initial employment in the RE learning area, experiences of learning with colleagues and identification as a future REC by a principal or another senior leader. Experiences of undergraduate study at university are described within this sub-finding because the participants' undergraduate academic qualifications influenced what informal professional formation they participated in while employed as RE teachers.

5.3.2.1 Undergraduate training. The undergraduate study in RE or theology that the participants completed prior to being employed as RE teachers varied considerably. Two participants had completed an undergraduate qualification in secondary RE teaching or theology prior to commencing employment in a Catholic secondary school as a RE teacher. Laurence described his experience of undergraduate study:

I was doing my Bachelor of Education in Primary, but I didn't finish that degree, and then I left, and then went and studied theology ... I was discerning the priesthood while I was doing my Bachelor of Theology and I got to the end of the degree and I thought, "well, things haven't really progressed in that area. So, I'll just go and do a Dip Ed and see how that goes". And immediately, before I had even stepped foot in the classroom, I was just studying about teaching RE. Yeah, something just kind of clicked and it felt right. But yes, it's a calling. (Laurence)

Matthew completed a specialist secondary RE teaching degree after originally commencing study in physical education. He had taken the opportunity to complete a double major when this was suggested to him by a university lecturer:

I suppose it started back for me in uni really. So, I did a Bachelor of Health and PE [physical education], and I had a major in RE as well. Which I kind of stumbled

across really because the university, with their philosophy, theology and ethics, said to me that they were going count that towards a RE major. So, I just picked up a couple of extra units, which got me a RE major. I thought, oh this is alright. (Matthew)

Three of the participants were secondary-trained teachers with a minor study area in RE. Nigel related his experience of being offered employment as a specialist RE teacher: “My minor was Religious Education; I was offered to teach ATAR RE ... I took the opportunity and my experience in teaching RE, gave me a real interest for head of department in a RE capacity”.

Some participants had not undertaken any study in RE or theology at the time of being employed as a specialist secondary RE teacher and did their initial study as part of CEWA’s Accreditation to Lead Religious Education process. Bernard was a primary trained teacher who was presented with the opportunity to work as a specialist secondary RE teacher in a rural Catholic composite school. He said that, “I’m a primary school trained teacher, but in the last three years, I taught at a secondary campus ... I went to uni as a, doing primary school teaching. I didn't do any of my religious units”. Working in a rural composite Catholic school that had a primary and secondary school on the same campus facilitated Bernard’s identification and recruitment into the position of secondary RE teacher.

5.3.2.2 Initial employment as a Religious Education teacher. After completing their undergraduate degrees, most participants did not initially consider seeking employment as a specialist secondary RE teacher. Most participants were influenced to become RE teachers due to the greater opportunities for employment that existed in the RE learning area, compared with their major areas of undergraduate study: “When I decided to become a teacher, my intention was to be a languages’ teacher with a specialisation in Italian. But when I finished my degree, there were limited opportunities to be a full-time Italian teacher” (Marian). Hector described his move into the RE learning area from physical education as prompted by the practicalities of obtaining full-time employment. He was employed as a part-time physical education teacher when an opportunity to become a full-time secondary RE teacher presented at his school. Hector’s principal approached him and initiated a conversation about the possibility of him teaching secondary RE. He remembered his

decision to become a RE teacher: “‘Do you want to teach RE?’, I thought, ‘Oh, I’m a Catholic and I went to a Catholic school’, and I didn’t mind RE so I thought, ‘Okay’”.

Although he began his teaching career in primary education, Bernard came to believe he was suited to teaching secondary RE after being identified and recruited into the position temporarily by his school principal. His recruitment was possible as his school was a composite, kindergarten to Year 12 school. He recalled his experience of becoming a specialist secondary RE teacher in a rural Catholic composite school:

There was a stage three years ago when I was a year six teacher and I’d expressed interest if needed, to be a secondary school teacher, give it a go for a year. At our school, we were in a position where that’s possible, due to the rural area that we’re in. I was teaching predominantly religion and a bit of English. I did a good job, apparently. And so, the principal said, “I’d love you to stay on at the secondary campus and see where we head from there”. (Bernard)

At the time of commencing the position as a specialist secondary RE teacher, Bernard had not completed any study in RE or theology. However, he was deemed suitable by his principal to work as a secondary RE teacher. He was a highly competent primary school teacher, was actively involved in the town’s Catholic parish and had taken personal initiative in organising the ministerial aspects in the primary years of the composite school. Once employed as a secondary RE teacher he commenced CEWA’s accreditation requirements and later progressed to become the REC at the same school.

5.3.2.3 Opportunities for promotion to the position of REC. Some participants had experiences as RE teachers that influenced them to perceive that greater opportunities for their career progression existed in the RE learning area than in other learning areas: “I suppose RE is something where you can fast track [your career] if you’re lucky enough that you’ve got good support networks around you and things like that, to be able to go through the system pretty quickly” (Matthew). Matthew’s observation that, “good support networks” are necessary for career progression was a reference to the necessity to be supported by a competent REC and principal.

Two factors influenced the participants’ perceptions that greater promotional opportunities existed for them in the RE learning area than in other learning areas. First, the numbers of specialist teachers in RE faculties was reported by all participants as being

considerably smaller than in other subject areas: “When I started, we had no RE department, every teacher taught multiple subjects, we didn't have specialist teachers” (Jane). Matthew described the small number of specialist RE teachers in his school: “RE often cops the non-full-time RE teachers, that [is] you get your phys-eder that has one class of RE or your maths teacher, that’s their load filler”. It is likely that part-time RE teachers would be less inclined to aspire to career progression in a learning area in which they had spent minimal time teaching, which would limit the pool of potential applicants for REC positions. Second, unlike all other heads of learning areas, an expectation of CEWA is that RECs be actively involved in a parish community (CECWA, 2009). Bernard identified that his active membership of a parish community and knowledge of the liturgy and other Catholic practices meant he was one of the few teachers who could take on the role of leading others in the ministerial aspects of the school. He initially took leadership initiative in his school’s ministerial activities to support other staff who did not have the same level of knowledge of Catholic practices:

As someone who was a part of the parish quite strongly up there, I saw gaps in little bits and pieces that some of the staff were delivering to the students. Especially if they were planning Masses and what not, or liturgies, or reconciliation services, or any type of things in terms of getting the priest in, as a special guest. So, I took a few steps and measures in that two, three years at the end of my time there to start helping the other primary staff, and this was just something that ended up being natural. (Bernard)

All the participants were specialist RE teachers who were actively involved with parish communities when they progressed to become RECs. They were members of a small group of teachers who had the necessary professional and faith formation to progress to become a head of the RE learning area.

5.3.2.4 Identification and recruitment by principals. Most of the participants were influenced to become RECs through experiences where they were identified and recruited into the position by their principal or by another senior leader in their school. Prior to being identified as future RECs, some participants had not considered that they were suitable to perform the role. The initial identification as a future REC was often followed by encouragement that helped participants further develop a sense of confidence to pursue professional formation opportunities: “In all honesty, if it wasn't for my current principal and

the current deputy principal, it's probably something I wouldn't have considered" (Anne). Jane and Hector were identified as future RECs by principals of the schools in which they were employed while working as RE teachers. Hector recalled that when his principal identified him as a future REC, she said the first step in the process of career progression was to commence study towards a master's degree:

There was a principal we had here for one year, who's now pretty high up in Catholic Education. I had a personal setback and she said, "I consider you to be someone who would be a good REC one day". I thought, "Oh, okay". I hadn't really thought about that, but she said to get cracking with my master's, and so I did. (Hector)

Jane described her principal's pragmatism in appointing two staff members to the position of REC:

I sort of fell into the position by chance, quite strangely. Working at a small school where there's 10 staff. Someone goes on leave; someone has to do the job. So, I was really lucky in that I had a principal who sort of went, "Do you want to give it a go?" And two of us actually shared the position for the first year, we were both the same four or five years experienced teachers. (Jane)

A Catholic secondary school principal contacted Marian to recruit her into a recently advertised REC position: "I had the principal contact me and say, 'look, it would be great if you could apply' and I said, 'Look, I'm really not that interested', and then she said, 'Well, I really would like you to consider it'". After being encouraged by the principal to apply for the position, Marian did so and was successful in being appointed to her first REC role. She remembered that although being identified as a future REC gave her confidence to apply for the position, a sense of self-doubt still existed in the ensuing period before commencing the appointment: "I got very anxious about it. Didn't know if I'd made the right decision—moving schools and moving into a leadership position".

5.3.2.5 Professional learning experiences within Religious Education learning area faculties. Learning the curriculum, content knowledge and pedagogy required to be a RE teacher was in part facilitated for the participants by more experienced RE teachers and in some instances their RECs. Jane believed that this was due to there "not being much professional learning out there that is based around our courses and the content" and the

absence of a wider network for RE teachers: “Unless they have connections at other schools, they become very reliant on their head of RE”. Laurence explained that professional learning often occurred in learning areas because the accreditation process could not possibly be differentiated to cater for each individual’s professional learning requirements:

You do your accreditation through CEWA or whatever, but you don't actually learn how to answer difficult moral questions that students quite often will ask. The nature of how to answer those questions, you're not taught that ... where are they going to get that formation from? (Laurence)

The most common form of professional learning within learning areas that was described by the participants was learning through mentoring experiences, or what one participant referred to as coaching.

5.3.2.5.1 Experiences of mentoring and coaching. Several participants described receiving regular mentoring and encouragement from other more experienced staff members that they believed contributed to their professional formation. Mentoring is the process of a person providing advice over a period of time, especially help and advice related to their job (Collins English Dictionary, 2017). It is a transfer of knowledge from a person perceived as having a high level of expertise to an individual who is perceived to have a lesser level of expertise.

Three participants described receiving mentoring from their REC and two participants recalled having a mentoring relationship with another experienced teacher. The participants who described mentoring experiences were all identified by their mentor as being suitable to progress to become a head of the RE learning area. The mentoring experiences recounted by the participants involved professional conversations on curriculum and teaching strategies, as well as ongoing encouragement. All the participants who described mentoring relationships believed a high level of mutual respect and trust existed between them and their mentor.

Matthew remembered his first REC and mentor as, “just awesome at empowering us and challenging us along the journey”. He recalled, “my REC did a lot of shoulder-to-shoulder with myself and the other key members of the team. So that was probably the number one influence that I had”. The REC made a considerable effort to facilitate the professional formation of the RE teachers in the learning area he led. He identified Matthew along with two other RE teachers as future RECs. These teachers were encouraged by the

REC to apply for RE leadership positions at other schools. While Matthew's REC wanted the RE teachers to develop themselves professionally to progress their careers, he also emphasised the importance of Matthew and the other RE teachers contributing to RE leadership in the wider CEWA system:

So, I suppose it was those conversations that he continually had with myself, [and the other two RE teachers], who are now all RECs, about that sense of, okay well we've got something going really well here. Now we need to be able to take this and use this model in other areas and you three are probably the best to do it. We had those constant conversations. He was pretty keen on pushing myself and a couple of others ... the three main Year 12 teachers to see how we could contribute to the system a bit more. (Matthew)

Nigel believed he was formed professionally through the mentoring he had experienced as a RE teacher: "I've been very blessed because I've always had mentor teachers around me". He was mentored by a senior teacher who he described as a doctor of theology and an expert in the RE learning area. He said his mentor was "someone that I've always really been very close to spiritually and religiously" and who "has been a very important person throughout Catholic education in WA". A significant part of his professional formation as a REC occurred through mentoring: "He coached me through the whole idea of leading curriculum in a RE capacity".

5.3.2.5.2 Experiences of receiving encouragement. Encouragement from his first REC and mentor helped Laurence develop a sense of confidence that he was suited to become a leader of the RE learning area. He recalled how the process of learning to become a REC was initially challenging and that he experienced considerable self-doubt about his suitability for the position. He described his initial self-doubt, identification as a future REC and the encouragement he received to progress to become a leader of the RE learning area:

I kind of felt a bit like Jeremiah being called. I just felt totally inadequate, and I had to learn a whole new skillset, which I now have, and now see that I'm very much suited to the role. But yeah, at the time, it was like a real stretching. And so, was there anything? The only thing that was leading me to it, I think, was the idea that was planted in my mind by the first REC I worked under ... so he eventually just

slowly, day by day, basically or week by week kept trying to convince me that I should be a REC, and then I decided to give it a crack. (Laurence)

None of the participants described a formal mentoring process existing at their school or being aware of a mentoring process for early career secondary RE teachers in WA. All participants who engaged in mentoring did so at their own discretion and with a mentor of their choice.

5.3.3 Sub-finding 2.3: The RECs had differing views on how completing Accreditation to Lead Religious Education contributed to their professional formation.

All the participants had completed CEWA's Accreditation to Lead Religious Education process, with most commencing the process while employed as RE teachers. Teachers in WA Catholic schools with line management for any aspect of the RE learning area must complete this accreditation. To do so a teacher is required to study four undergraduate and two master levels units in RE or theology that have been accredited by CEWA, and attend an in-service course (CECWA, 2013). In addition, as ongoing renewal to maintain this accreditation, RECs must complete a total of 30 hours of theological knowledge formation and faith formation activities over a five-year period (CEWA, 2018a). The completion of ongoing renewal hours for Accreditation to Lead Religious Education was reported by most participants as occurring during professional learning activities provided by schools for all teaching staff.

Although most of the participants completed the initial process of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education while working as RE teachers, some started and completed this accreditation after commencing employment as a REC. For three participants, the Accreditation to Lead Religious Education process was their first study of RE or theology. Jane described her experiences of studying RE and theology: "I went to university, didn't do any RE and then did my accreditation units as an adult". The other participants reported having completed some accredited units as part of their undergraduate degrees.

There were varying perceptions among participants of how completing Accreditation to Lead Religious Education contributed to their professional formation as a leader of the RE learning area. Views ranged from the belief that Accreditation to Lead Religious Education exists as a compliance mechanism that has minimal influence on professional formation of RECs to the belief that it serves as a good starting point for professional learning. Several participants observed that the process contributed to their formation as RE teachers but that it was not a significant influence on their formation as an educational leader.

Matthew remembered his experience of completing Accreditation to Lead Religious Education as repetitive and not focused on the knowledge and skills he believed were practically required for educational leadership. He was a teacher who enthusiastically embraced ongoing professional learning and had completed CEWA leadership and talent identification courses, which he described as, “just awesome programs”. In contrast, he described studying the RE and theology units accredited by CEWA as repetitive and as not contributing to his formation as a leader. He described his experience of completing the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education:

I went through and did my Accreditation for Leadership. I was just sick of writing about the difference between catechesis and religious instruction. I found that every assessment was exactly the same and working through, I did a Grad Certificate in RE. I haven't finished my master's yet, I've done six units, and I don't really have any desire to finish it at the moment because to be honest, I've learnt nothing in it because it's all exactly the same. I don't feel that it's the best investment of my time at the moment. (Matthew)

Matthew's sense that Accreditation to Lead Religious Education was repetitive may be in part due to him having completed an undergraduate qualification with a major study area in secondary RE teaching.

Laurence commented that Accreditation to Lead Religious Education is the minimum professional learning that a REC should complete: “The Accreditation to Lead Course was all right; that is the short wham, bam, there you go and now you're a leader”. He believed that a greater level of ongoing professional formation was required for RECs than what was provided by schools as part of CEWA's ongoing renewal hours: “I mean, is it ongoing formation for leaders? I don't know. Not really”.

The accreditation process was observed by Jane as being an additional requirement placed upon teachers aspiring to become RECs that did not exist for teachers desiring to be promoted to other head of learning area roles. She acknowledged that RECs were typically well assisted financially in completing accreditation through CEWA scholarships and in some instances by funding from individual schools: “I did my master's while doing it, so I was well supported”. Despite the financial support that existed, she questioned the equity of CEWA's accreditation process, particularly for those RECs who do not intend to progress to a more senior leadership position:

I understand entirely why we need Accreditation to Lead in RE, but you're suddenly going, well all people that are becoming RECs need to have started their master's and have done RE level units and completed them. Which I understand, but you're creating again that separation between RE and other middle leaders as heads of learning. (Jane)

Jane's comment was not a suggestion that those aspiring to become RECs should not be required to complete Accreditation to Lead Religious Education. She was supportive of the process and believed that it had provided her with much of the content knowledge she taught in upper school RE courses and was a good starting point for the professional formation of aspiring leaders of the RE learning area. Her comment was a statement that the requirement to complete Accreditation to Lead Religious Education or equivalent postgraduate study in a specialist area should be extended to all heads of learning.

5.3.4 Summary of Finding Two. This section presents Finding Two: The RECs' professional experiences while employed as RE teachers were a significant influence on their decisions to become leaders of the RE learning area. All participants described varied professional experiences while employed as RE teachers that they believed influenced their decisions to become RECs. These experiences occurred from the time when the participants commenced their university degrees until when they were promoted to lead the RE learning area.

There were some commonalities in the participants' professional experiences as RE teachers. Employment in a Catholic school provided all participants with the opportunity to have interactions with faith-filled Catholics. For several participants these experiences contributed to their faith formation and consequently influenced their decisions to become RECs. It was while working as RE teachers that most participants were identified as future RECs and received encouragement to pursue this position, either by their principal or by their head of learning area. Identification as a future educational leader was a significant influence on most participants' decisions to become RECs. It provided the participants with a sense of self-confidence that they were suited for the position of REC and the impetus to begin CEWA's Accreditation to Lead Religious Education process. Mentoring experiences while employed as RE teachers contributed to the professional formation of most of the RECs.

5.4 Finding Three: There was Inconsistency in the Professional Experiences Provided by CEWA and Schools to Assist RECs in Sustaining Their Faith Formation

Finding three addresses SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences? Most of the faith formation experiences recounted by the participants, from their period of employment as a REC, were those activities organised by schools for all teaching staff as ongoing renewal hours for CEWA's Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School (CECWA, 2013). Experiences in temporary communities such as pilgrimages and retreats were also described by two participants as sustaining their faith formation. One participant recounted numerous voluntary faith formation activities that he had experienced within his school community, while employed as a REC, that he believed had contributed to his ongoing faith formation. Faith formation experiences were described by the participants as predominantly organised by individual schools, which may account for the inconsistency in activities experienced by the RECs. The evidence to support Finding Three is discussed through three sub-findings that describe the professional experiences that sustained the participants' faith formation while employed as leaders of the RE learning area.

5.4.1 Sub-finding 3.1: Some RECs' experiences of faith formation were limited to activities provided by their schools for ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. Several participants described their experience of faith formation as limited to activities that occurred during staff professional learning days. These activities generally constituted several hours over the course of a year. The faith formation activities they experienced were those provided for the wider teaching staff and, in general, were not differentiated for RE teachers or RECs. In some instances, the faith formation activities were organised by the participants themselves.

The limited time some participants dedicated to professional experiences concerned with faith formation was attributed to the busyness of the REC position. Anne commented that "as to the faith component, like I said, usually it's limited to, unfortunately, to when I have to do accreditation hours". Her position was a combination of head of the RE learning area and head of ministry. She was responsible for organising faith formation activities for teachers: "I organised more accreditation workshops within the school this year". Despite her

role in facilitating faith formation for other teachers, it was challenging for her to have time away from work to dedicate to her own faith formation:

It's a little bit more difficult for me to sort of maybe go on leave or take some time to do my own faith, apart from what I need to do for my accreditation because the role is just so demanding. (Anne)

Hector's faith formation experiences were limited to the ongoing renewal of accreditation activities provided to all teachers. He explained that the demanding nature of his role meant that he had not engaged in other faith formation opportunities since becoming a REC:

That's not because the school hasn't allowed me or anything. It's probably because I haven't been proactive enough, to be honest. There's one thing I always feel in this role at the moment. I feel like I'm always busy and I probably don't give myself enough time to say, "Okay, what's out there? What can I do?" (Hector)

Jane explained how she had experienced minimal faith formation as part of her employment as a REC. When asked to discuss her experiences of faith formation, she reflected that, "I don't know if I've necessarily experienced a purely faith-professional learning anywhere where I'm going to develop my own faith". Jane was responsible for organising the faith formation activities for the staff at her school. She observed that it was difficult for her to participate prayerfully in the faith formation experiences that she organised: "I think the challenge for that is I run them and I plan them ... I'm the one that is running around making sure that everything happens properly. So, I'm not in that prayerful space".

Jane believed that the leadership of her school would support her undertaking faith formation opportunities during the school term: "I think if I applied to go to something I would get a yes, and I would be supported". However, she noted that she was responsible for finding her own faith formation opportunities and that this could be difficult: "It would be up to me to find an opportunity". She added that there was "not a lot of faith formation from CEWA". Jane believed that identifying faith and knowledge formation opportunities organised by external providers posed difficulties for RECs. She described how events such as conferences were often promoted several months prior to the event when a request for leave to attend such an event had to be made the previous year:

The thing I find really challenging with faith professional learning, faith conferences and things like that—they get their information out really late ... Like that's not great in terms of me being able to go ... Because you're going to need time off school and reasonable time in advance to be able to organise [yourself to attend] conferences. (Jane)

5.4.2. Sub-finding 3.2: Some RECs experienced multiple, voluntary faith formation activities organised by their school, Catholic Education Western Australia or themselves. Several participants described attending faith formation activities that were voluntary, often additional to the ongoing renewal process and in some instances organised by the RECs themselves. Nigel recounted a variety of faith formational activities he had experienced within his school community: “There's been lots of different things happening in Faith and Mission that have been used by the school to develop the faith formation of the staff”. The Catholic secondary school in which he was employed was operated by a religious order that had a continuing involvement in the life of the school: “Priests have come and visited where we have had formation provided by them”. Intermittently, the priests “run the Sacrament of Reconciliation” for staff. As the school’s REC, Nigel had taken the initiative in organising a study group in the first semester. The study group “looked at *Laudato Si* from Pope Francis. We broke it down and we looked at the summary text. Then we engaged in discussion”. He clarified that, “it was a voluntary staff group, but it did count towards our accreditation”. He commented that his “own faith formation has been promoted and developed” through experiences within his school.

Experiences within temporary communities were described by two RECs as sustaining their faith formation. As part of his induction to the position of REC, Bernard attended a retreat organised by the religious order that operates his school: “I was lucky enough, my principal sent myself over to the hermitage in New South Wales, for four days during the busy term”. He described experiencing “an excellent retreat program”. The removal from the daily routine of his school to a retreat community meant he, “got time to connect more with who I am and what my role is into the future. So that was wonderful”.

Marian attended a month-long pilgrimage. The pilgrimage involved travelling to Israel for four weeks with a group of teacher pilgrims to visit the holy sites of Christ’s ministry. The annual pilgrimage had a large number of applicants and was selective. It was described by Marian as, “a sort of external thing ... a program with the Catholic Education Commission”.

She said that she applied and that her principal supported her by allowing her to, “go off school for two weeks, and then it was two weeks of school holidays”. As an experience concerned with faith and knowledge formation, the pilgrimage was described by Marian as “probably the only thing that has assisted in my development as a REC ... That made a massive difference to making connections over there”.

5.4.3 Sub-finding 3.3: Some of the RECs believed that faith formation for leaders of the Religious Education learning area requires a more planned approach. Faith formation was viewed by some participants as a largely private concern because of the lack of planning of faith and theological knowledge experiences for RECs. Jane commented that beyond attending accreditation activities, the ongoing faith formation of RECs was largely left to individuals to organise, with minimal support and guidance at a systemic level. She believed that a planned approach by CEWA would be beneficial in supporting the personal faith formation experiences that RECs have in Catholic communities other than their school. The faith formation activities she had participated in since becoming a REC were experiences she described as being “found through my parish”. She felt that other RECs may not be adequately supported at a school and systemic level in regard to faith formation opportunities: “You’re wanting these people to be faith-filled people, but you’re leaving it to them to find all of that themselves”. Jane compared the paucity of faith formation opportunities provided for RECs with the opportunities that existed for Catholic school principals. Sardonicly, she commented that she was, “very much looking forward to hearing from the principals after their 10 days of the Camino”.

Hector and Marian believed that RECs would benefit from planned experiences aimed at forming them as faith leaders. Since becoming a REC, Hector perceived that he had increasingly been perceived to be “one of the leaders of the faith aspect of the college”. He offered that his “faith has always been there”, but the difference since becoming a REC was that he was now considered a model Catholic who had expert knowledge of the Catholic tradition: “It is a bit scary and daunting, because I haven't always been that person”. The phrase “I haven’t always been that person” refers to the participant not being a faith leader within their school community prior to becoming a REC. Hector said he would “love to do more faith formation stuff” that was specific to faith leaders: “You need faith leaders in the school, and you need to draw upon the people who are already doing it”. Marian believed that more could be done at a systemic level to assist RECs with their formation as faith leaders.

She suggested a formal faith leadership program that was modelled on existing leadership programs with a planned series of activities, presenters and a time allocation during term time:

So, I think there really needs to be an identified program for, okay, well these are our future leaders, but there needs to be this Catholic component in there that is part of their development ... I know there has been the overall leadership programs at the moment, but it would be great to have a faith leadership program. (Marian)

5.4.4 Summary of Finding Three. This section presents Finding Three: There is inconsistency in the professional experiences provided by CEWA and schools to assist the RECs in sustaining their faith formation. For some of the RECs, faith formational experiences were limited to the activities organised by their school as part of CEWA's ongoing renewal to maintain Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. This amounted to two or three hours a year of experiences that were intentionally created for the purpose of facilitating the faith formation of the wider teaching staff. In contrast, one participant recounted numerous voluntary faith formation experiences offered by his school, in which he had participated. The RECs' personal initiative in pursuing faith formation opportunities seemed to have an impact on the variety and amount of experiences in which they participated. Several participants acknowledged that it was difficult for them to attend faith formation experiences as part of their employment as a REC because of the busyness of their position and the limited opportunities offered at a systemic level.

5.5 Finding Four: There was Variety in the Professional Experiences that Sustained the RECs

Finding Four addresses SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences? There were some commonalities in the experiences that sustained the participants professionally while employed as RECs. Most RECs experienced professional learning through postgraduate study and by providing theological knowledge and faith formation sessions for other teachers. A point of commonality among all participants was the importance of supportive personal and professional relationships for sustaining them in their work. Supportive relationships occurred with principals, fellow RECs and RE curriculum consultants. Some of the RECs

who progressed to become deputy principals believed that working as a REC provided experiences that prepared them for more senior leadership. Finding Four consists of five sub-findings that identify and describe the experience that sustained the RECs.

5.5.1 Sub-finding 4.1: All the RECs engaged in professional learning opportunities that sustained their professional formation. Postgraduate units in RE or theology had been completed by all the participants. Several of the RECs had also completed educational leadership training and one participant had taken on additional employment responsibilities to assist her formation as an educational leader. Most of the participants had provided professional learning for other RE teachers and in some instances for the wider teaching staff.

5.5.1.1 Postgraduate study. At the time of the second interview, all the RECs had completed a minimum of four undergraduate and two master's level units in theology and RE as part of CEWA's study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education (CECWA, 2013). One REC had completed a graduate certificate in RE and four said that they had completed a master's degree in either RE or educational leadership. Two participants commented that completing a master's degree served to support their professional formation as an educational leader.

Marian completed a master's degree while working as a REC. She believed that it was a reasonable expectation, on the part of CEWA, for RECs to undertake postgraduate study as part of the accreditation process: "If you're expecting kids to be lifelong learners, then you need to be willing to continue your learning ... you don't just stop and do your degree, and then that's it". In her view, most principals of Western Australian Catholic secondary schools also had an "expectation that if you wanted to progress in leadership you had to have a minimum of a master's degree". Marian commented that many aspiring leaders employed in WA Catholic schools had completed master's degrees in RE from the same Catholic university. She suggested that this may result in an intellectual conformity among future leaders: "If everyone does the same study, and the same master's at the same uni, you're going to get all the same types of people".

5.5.1.2 The professional formation of RECs through leadership training. Most of the participants had no experience of educational leadership or talent identification programs

administered by the Office of CEWA. When asked in a probing question to describe their experience of CEWA's leadership training, the participants made the following replies: "Not really. I haven't really found a lot of it myself from CEWA" (Laurence); "no leadership wise, no I've not had that opportunity. No" (Anne); "I know there's your Aspiring Principal's Course, I haven't done any of them or anything like that" (Hector); and "The leadership one I've done was my Accreditation to Lead" (Jane). Nigel explained that he had experienced, "nothing outside of the professional learning portal that CEWA provides".

The exceptions were two participants who discussed educational leadership training they had undertaken. In his first year of working as a REC Matthew completed a leadership course administered by CEWA that he considered to have helped him develop as an educational leader: "I thought that was just an awesome program and I must admit I got lots and lots out of that. So that was a really, really good investment in a program that I was involved in". Recently he was nominated to participate in CEWA's talent identification program. He described this program as "a rewarding process of learning more about myself and my strengths and my weaknesses as a leader". The main benefit of the program for Matthew was helping him to identify, "what I could continue to focus on, to develop" to "become a more effective leader". Marian commented that she had attempted to broaden the scope of her professional learning beyond postgraduate study to prepare herself for "future prospects and future leadership opportunities". She felt that it was important, "to do a Catholic Ed program, but I also want to have some diversifying parts of my portfolio". She did not specify what leadership courses she had completed.

Marian explained how she had actively pursued additional employment responsibilities that she believed would assist her professional formation as an educational leader. These responsibilities included being "appointed the justice contact" for the religious order that operated her school, and co-authoring the content "for a new secondary pastoral care resource". Marian's initiative in seeking out new employment responsibilities was in part motivated by her desire to develop her leadership capacity beyond the RE learning area: "I was very conscious about being labelled as just a RE person".

5.5.1.3 RECs as providers of professional learning. Providing professional learning for teaching staff served as a means of professional formation for some of the participants. Matthew recalled how presenting to staff on professional development days compelled him to reflect upon his own teaching practice and understanding of theological content: "If I'm going

to present on some core theological content on a PD [professional development] day or something like that, if I don't present it well, then I'm certainly going to turn staff off". He believed that teachers are a discerning and critical audience that demand well prepared professional learning: "There's that pressure I suppose to make sure that when we do something, it's good".

Hector described how the opportunity to present professional learning to other teachers helped him develop a sense of self confidence as an educational leader:

The new principal is really supportive and really keen on us providing PD from within, so I offered a PD last day of last term, on engaging the RE student, where people could sign up and come along. So, running that was a really good experience as well. I didn't put my hand up [initially] because I lacked that confidence. (Hector)

Laurence took the initiative of organising a professional learning workshop for teachers on the Church's teaching on sexuality. He perceived this was an area of Church teaching that was poorly understood by RE teachers and the wider teaching staff: "What I realised is, my teachers aren't formed. And where are they going to get that formation from?" He believed that teachers need knowledge on how to answer questions students pose on contemporary issues, such as marriage and same-sex attraction: "I thought, well, the teachers need a PD on this. And so, I thought, well, I'm going to run it. So, I did". The reception he received from RE teachers and the school's leadership was generally positive with many, "thankful to have been given direction on how to handle specific questions".

5.5.2 Sub-finding 4.2: All the RECs believed that the support of their school principals sustained them professionally. The support of principals for the RE learning area and RECs personally and professionally was deemed by all the participants to be necessary for them to perform their role effectively. In general, the RECs believed their principals provided this support: "My principal has been very supportive, so I've been very lucky" (Marian); "so, at my current school, I have an extremely supportive principal who was a previous REC himself, so he understands the challenges, and he is behind me all the way" (Laurence); "I probably feel even more supported now with the change of principal ... she's been really proactive. She offered to obviously help support me whenever I've needed it" (Anne); "the new principal is really supportive" (Hector); "pretty much backs me on

everything, and that makes my role really, I suppose, influential” (Matthew); “I've worked for some excellent principals in terms of, faith was important for them and for where they saw the direction of the school going” (Jane); and “I've been very grateful for, again, for the good people that I have around me at the school, from senior staff” (Nigel).

5.5.2.1 Principals providing financial support for the Religious Education learning area. Having a principal who supported the RE learning area financially and with resources was important to Matthew: “I think probably any time financially, with budgets or those practical things, I always have been very significantly supported, pretty much anything I've asked for I've got, which has been positive”. He described approaching the principal of his school to take “students to Sydney to attend the Australian Catholic Youth Festival”. Despite being a last-minute decision on his part, “at no stage did the principal make it hard or difficult. So, the school took a bit of a hit on it and I certainly felt really supported in that”.

5.5.2.1.1 The appointment of specialist secondary Religious Education teachers by principals. Hector commented that principals can practically demonstrate support for the RE learning area and RECs, by appointing full-time specialist secondary RE teachers. He described his belief that this is one area where he could be better supported by his principal:

I still have reservations about the first learning area quote, because sometimes I think if we're going to be serious about it, we need to do a lot more. That could be as simple as trying to find more specialised RE teachers. I don't know, maybe there's not enough out there. I'm not sure. I guess a frustrating part is, I don't know if other schools are in the same boat, where we have sometimes other specialist teachers plugging gaps in RE ... I don't want it to get special treatment, I just want it to be like every other subject. (Hector)

5.5.2.2 The need for principals to challenge RECs. Laurence stressed that a principal's support should extend beyond encouragement and affirmation to establishing an expectation for continual professional improvement. He explained how his principal challenged him

professionally and encouraged him to use data to seek constant improvement in student learning:

Do I still feel supported? Yeah, absolutely. But supported in a way that, they're not just going to sit there and pat you on the back and say, "Hey good job, keep going". They're going to challenge me and say, "You know what, you're doing a great job but here's the gap and we want to work with you to do what's best for our students".
(Laurence)

5.5.2.3 The principal choosing to have the REC as a member of the school executive.

Two participants were members of their school executive which was the most senior leadership group in their schools, usually comprised of the principal, deputy principals and business manager. The other heads of learning areas in their schools did not have this status. The RECs who were members of their school's executive had responsibility for both the RE learning area and leadership of the ministerial aspects of their schools, such as retreats and liturgies. Jane was employed in a metropolitan Catholic secondary school and Bernard was the REC at a kindergarten to Year 12 Catholic composite school in rural WA. Bernard described his position as only "the second person who has a role from K-12, other than the principal" and that "this gave them influence within the school". He perceived that his presence on the school's executive reinforced for students the status of RE in the school: "The leadership team here, they always acknowledge that RE is our first subject, and that our ministry side of things is the most important". Jane believed her membership of her school executive meant that as the head of RE she had considerable influence on the direction of curriculum in the school:

The benefit of being a member of the school executive is that if something needs to change within the school, I will actually have that ability to sit on my executive and bring that up in conversation. But then a head of learning, just like the head of maths or the head of English they don't necessarily. (Jane)

As part of her position, Anne also had responsibility for the RE learning area and the ministerial aspects of her school. However, unlike Bernard and Jane, she was not a member of her school's executive. She commented that at her school, "there's no one from a RE point of view on the senior leadership team ... You know, like RE is valued but not enough to be valued to be part of the SLT [Senior Leader Team]".

5.5.2.4 Principals' management of the REC workload. Hector perceived that his workload extended beyond the confines of academic leadership, in a manner that was not typically the case for other heads of learning. He was employed as the head of the RE learning area and had no official role in leading ministerial activities. Intermittently, he was delegated responsibility for organising ministerial activities such as pilgrimages, retreats and liturgies:

I feel like it just gets delegated to me, some of it. Some of it I embrace ... because we are in a Catholic school and we're dealing with a learning area that's not only curriculum but it's also ministry, it's also the Catholic dimension as well. I feel like that comes with the territory a little bit. (Hector)

Anne discussed how she was gradually delegated additional leadership and administrative duties that made her position unreasonably demanding. Initially, she was employed as a head of ministry, with no curriculum leadership. A year later she was asked by her principal to take on additional curriculum duties that were offset with what she subsequently came to believe was an inadequate time allowance. Anne explained how her workload grew:

So, I took that on, the head of ministry position and then they split the head of RE ... So one looked after Years 7, 8 and 9 and the other one looked after 10, 11 and 12. So, within probably two years, one of them gave up the role and they simply asked if I would take that on ... And so that was, I was always okay with that ... then the 10, 11 and 12 REC gave up the position as well. Instead of really re-advertising again, it just sort of came under my care. I don't know how it did, but it did. (Anne)

The position evolved into a joint head of ministry and head of the RE learning area with Anne also teaching four RE classes and having a Homeroom. Declining enrolments at the school meant that the principal was reluctant to divide the positions and employ both a head of ministry and a head of the RE learning area. The increasing workload resulted in Anne "being tired, stressed, trying to keep up with everything". At the time of the first interview she felt that she was, "not always supported and I think that is shown with my workload".

Shortly before the second interview a new principal was appointed to the school. Anne met with the principal and said to her, "I think you should split it [the curriculum and ministry components of her role], to do it justice". The principal agreed: "After speaking with

her, I sort of had aired my concerns about the load. She's been really proactive ... It's nice now to have, I guess when you've got that extra support”.

5.5.3 Sub-finding 4.3: All the RECs were sustained professionally, to varying degrees, by the support of the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia. The RECs had differing views on the degree to which they were sustained through the support of the Office of CEWA. While the participants' views on the benefit of CEWA's REC Network varied, the support of RE consultants was reported by most participants as important in sustaining them professionally. At the time of the first interview in 2018, most participants believed that the teaching and learning materials provided by the Office of CEWA to support RECs and RE teachers were inadequate.

5.5.3.1 Meetings of the Catholic Education Western Australia REC Network. All participants attended CEWA's REC Network meetings held on three or four occasions a year (CEWA, 2016b). The purpose of the network meetings was generally described by RECs to be the dissemination of information, as opposed to being for the purpose of RECs networking with one another. Some participants viewed the network meetings as beneficial, while others were critical of what they perceived as the overly didactic nature of the meetings. The formation of collaborative relationships with fellow RECs was perceived by most participants to be a beneficial aspect of attendance at the CEWA REC Network meetings.

The RECs described varying viewpoints in relation to the meetings. Some RECs valued them: “The network meeting just provides another level of encouragement” (Anne) and “those network meetings are so valuable” (Bernard). Other participants were critical of the meetings when the emphasis was on providing information in an extended lecture format: “Half a day it's someone lecturing at you about a topic. And then a few notices, and then that's it” (Marian); and “what they're presenting really could just be sent in an email” (Laurence). Hector described presentations as “lasting all day, so there was no time to network”. Jane commented, “I think there's a challenge in what they choose to fill them with at times”.

5.5.3.1.1 The interactions between RECs at the Catholic Education Western Australia Network meetings. Most of the participants described their interactions with other RECs as

the most beneficial aspect of the CEWA Network meetings. Marian described the most productive meeting that she had attended occurring when the RECs “shared things that they were doing in their different departments around WA. So, we could actually get a taste of, okay, what are you doing? ... They're things that I can take back to my school that I can implement”. In the view of Anne, talking to the “other staff at the network meetings and building those relationships is part of, you know, helping you to keep up in that particular role”. She added that, “I just don't think it happens enough”. Hector commented that although the meetings were called network meetings, minimal networking occurred between the RECs: “It would be nice to say all right, have a chat amongst your table for 10 minutes, not two minutes, 10 minutes ... That's what networking is”. Matthew said that the “REC days are solid, they're not too bad, mostly because of the networking that goes on”.

5.5.3.2 Catholic Education Western Australia’s support with teaching and learning materials. Most participants expressed the view that they were not supported adequately by CEWA with regard to RE teaching and learning support materials. Matthew emphasised that he made minimal use of the Year 7–12 resources produced by the Office of CEWA. He said that the resources were, “not at the forefront of pedagogy and instruction”. It was his view that the resources provided by CEWA “are useless in my classroom. They’re 1980s-style teaching, like its let's sit the kids in rows and work through worksheets”. Another participant was critical of the student resource called *Come Follow Me* that was provided by CEWA for secondary students in Years 7-10 (CEOWA, 2007). The resource was described by the REC as “the world's worst textbook and the only time I think you ever open it is if you need a relief for a relief lesson”.

Other RECs believed that not enough student learning materials were produced by the Office of CEWA: “I don't think there is a lot of support, definitely in terms of materials, there's hardly anything” (Laurence). In general, Hector was very positive about the support he received from CEWA; however, he said, “I think the one area that could be improved, I mean, the resources”. Marian said that RE teachers would benefit from CEWA producing teaching and learning resources for upper secondary RE courses, in addition to the teacher background notes currently produced: “The general stuff that we get from the CEO [the Office of CEWA], for example, is they give us teacher modules and background reading, but that doesn't give us anything to use in the classroom”. Marian expressed a sense of frustration

at the time she had to dedicate to producing curriculum materials: “I constantly feel like I'm always doing resources”.

5.5.3.3 The support of Religious Education consultants. Most of the RECs described experiences where they received advice and support from CEWA RE consultants. The Office of CEWA employs RE consultants who provide RECs with advice about RE curriculum, teaching and learning content, the requirements of SCSAWA and upcoming events. Consultants were valued by the RECs for the support and expertise they provided and the responsive manner in which this occurred. Bernard said the support of the CEWA RE consultants had been, “completely invaluable, especially the correspondence we get”. The support of RE consultants was deemed important by Anne: “He [the CEWA RE consultant] just provided anything that I've ever required or needed or support, or you know advice, I've always had that”. This sense of being supported by RE consultants was shared by Hector: “I feel like if I need something, that the consultant and the team that I talk to are pretty helpful”. Nigel observed that “the RE consultant at the CEO, has been great, in including me in the network meetings, correspondence and certain opportunities”.

5.5.4 Sub-finding 4.4: Most of the participants were sustained professionally through experiences in sub-networks of RECs. The sub-networks described by the participants were generally comprised of members of the CEWA REC Network. One participant described having membership of a sub-network comprised of RECs who worked in schools operated by the same religious order. Sub-networks of RECs are often comprised of four to eight members.

Laurence explained how his personal relationships in a small network of RECs sustained him professionally:

RECs across the board, they tend to have their little groups that they've formed with each other. There's about six or seven other RECs that I kind of bond with and we are forever emailing each other and supporting each other. (Laurence)

The REC network provided Laurence with opportunities to “just bond and talk about the role”. Working in a rural Catholic secondary school, Bernard appreciated connections to “other people in similar roles to me at schools, particularly in Perth, who I've got links to”. Anne was a member of a sub-network comprised of RECs who taught at schools operated by

the same religious order. She described this group as, “my only sub-group ... people I guess I'm most comfortable with”. The ability to obtain advice and support with resources from other RECs was important for Matthew: “In your smaller groups I suppose ... the actual RECs themselves, we share everything, we're in constant communication. You'll see emails flying back and forth from everyone, sending stuff through really quickly, which is great”. Jane had also “networked with the heads of RE at a few different schools” and Nigel said, “I'm also on several mailing groups which exist between the RECs where they send information to each other”.

Collaboration between RECs in sub-networks, as opposed to the wider CEWA REC Network, was a cause of frustration for Anne. She felt that there was a reluctance for some RECs to collaborate with one another outside of their immediate sub-network or what she termed as “sub-groups”. The observation was made by Anne that the Office of CEWA had “tried to put everyone on a team on Microsoft where we can sort of all network together ... I don't really feel like it's really taken off”.

5.5.4.1 *The challenges of developing sub-networks for beginning RECs.* The suggestion was made by two participants that forming relationships and collaborating in sub-networks could be challenging for younger RECs when they first commenced the position:

I was lucky in a sense that, because I'd been in Catholic Education for a quite while, I kind of knew who to contact...If you were plain, smack bang new in the role, there's no support given to you as a beginning REC. (Marian)

Jane remembered having a sense of trepidation when she attended her first REC Network meeting: “I was 24 and I'm sitting there going: Oh, there's all these 50 and 60 year olds who I don't know”. Initially, as a young REC, she felt it was difficult to develop relationships and collaborate with other RECs: “You come to your first meeting and yes, you meet them, but do you really know them to be able to go, ‘I have a quick question’” While she had subsequently formed collaborative relationships with other RECs, she felt that CEWA could do better at “connecting new RECs when they come into the role”.

5.5.4.1.1 *Mentoring access for beginning RECs.* Three participants believed that the difficulties beginning RECs had in forming collaborative relationships could be ameliorated by the creation of a voluntary mentoring or coaching system: “I would love to see the concept

of a new REC is appointed they can buddy up with a school, the closest school to them ... The REC that's 20 minutes down the road. If you have questions, ask them" (Jane); "I still think, also, as a beginning REC, there could be a lot more done in terms of mentoring access to the system" (Marian); and "I think what leaders need is someone like a coach or a mentor" (Laurence).

5.5.5 Sub-finding 4.5: Some of the RECs believed that working as a REC formed them professionally for more senior leadership positions. Some of the participants believed that employment as a REC prepared them professionally for senior leadership. This view was expressed by Marian, Jane and Matthew, all of whom progressed to become deputy principals during the interval between the two rounds of narrative interviews. Marian and Jane identified the combination of leading both curriculum and ministry as preparing them for the varied demands of senior leadership: "I had a year of curriculum, just curriculum and then I built on it, so I was adding the skills of the liturgies and the Masses. I think it was good for my formation" (Marian); and "So, I think I'm in a bit of a privileged position to other people who come through ... where they might have sort of followed a real curriculum line. I think in terms of the ministry side of it" (Anne). Matthew explained how working as a REC prepared him for the demands of senior leadership, due to the requirement to work with staff from a variety of subject areas for whom RE was not their first subject area:

I think one of the beauties of REC, is you're working with so many staff across so many different areas and faculties within the school ... It's something that causes you to actually have to be out, observing in classrooms, going and seeing teachers, giving up more time to meet with them before and after school to have those conversations. Get into their classes and have discussions with the kids, what are they learning? So, you know that the staff are in the right direction. (Matthew)

5.5.5.1 Opportunities for career progression. In addition to the three participants who progressed to deputy principal positions, several other participants were ambitious and desired to progress to senior leadership. These participants did not want to progress to more senior positions hastily. Hector said, "I am sort of ambitious". He considered that "when the time is right, whenever that would be, if a deputy principal position came up, I would put my hat in the ring". Bernard made the comment that, "there is a pathway for me into a senior

leadership position, but there is no way at this stage of my life that I could care less for that”. Laurence was not ambitious but was open to progressing to a more senior position if he felt called by God to do so: “I always think like, I didn't really, in a sense, choose to be a head of RE. I was really led there by God. And I think that it would have to be the same sort of deal”.

5.5.6 Summary of Finding Four. This section presents Finding Four: There was variety in the professional experiences that sustained the RECs. Most participants described supportive personal and professional relationships that sustained them in their work. These relationships were held with their principals, RE curriculum consultants and fellow RECs in small, informal professional networks. The RECs described how they believed they were supported, to varying degrees, by the Office of CEWA with teaching and learning materials. Professional learning through postgraduate study, leadership training and with fellow RECs in small sub-networks served to sustain the RECs professionally and prepared some of the participants for more senior leadership positions.

5.6 Chapter Summary

The research findings are presented in this chapter. Each finding addresses a SRQ and describes the participants’ experiences from four different contexts where they were formed and sustained as RECs. Finding One addresses SRQ1 and provides a description of how the personal experiences of the Generation Y RECs from childhood, adolescence and adulthood contributed to their decisions to become leaders of the RE learning area. Finding Two addresses SRQ2 and describes the participants’ professional experiences while employed as RE teachers that influenced their decisions to become leaders of the RE learning area. Finding Three addresses SRQ3 and describes how the faith formation of the Generation Y RECs was sustained through their ongoing professional experiences. Last, Finding Four discusses how the Generation Y RECs were sustained professionally, and in doing so addresses SRQ four. Collectively the four findings answer the GRQ: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? The next chapter discusses the four themes created from the research findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion of the Research

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the four themes created from the research findings. The themes are Personal Experiences, Professional Experiences that Form RE Teachers, Faith Formation Experiences and Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs. The themes address the GRQ: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? Table 6.1 outlines the structure of the chapter, beginning with a synopsis of the research findings and their relationship to the themes that were developed. A discussion of the four themes and a chapter summary follow.

Table 6.1

Overview of Chapter 6—Discussion of the Research

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Synopsis of the Research Findings
6.3 Discussion of the Research Themes
6.3.1 Theme One: Personal Experiences
6.3.2 Theme Two: Professional Formation Experiences as Religious Education Teachers
6.3.3 Theme Three: Faith Formation Experiences
6.3.4 Theme Four: Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs
6.4 Chapter Summary

6.2 Synopsis of the Research Findings

Four research findings were identified based upon the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the two rounds of narrative interviews with the eight RECs. The research findings were further explained through the use of sub-findings. The research findings are grouped according to the four SRQs:

SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area? (Finding One)

SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC? (Finding Two)

SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences? (Finding Three)

SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences? (Finding Four)

In turn, these findings address the GRQ: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences?

6.3 Discussion of the Research Themes

The four research themes address the GRQ by identifying and describing the experiences that formed and sustained the RECs in their work. The first theme is Personal Experiences. This theme discusses the RECs' personal experiences from childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. A discussion of how the participants' faith was formed through personal experiences and how their faith formation influenced their decisions to become RECs is presented. Theme Two, Professional Formation as RE Teachers, describes the experiences that contributed to the participants' professional formation that occurred during their period of employment as RE teachers. This theme also provides a discussion of the factors that appear to limit the number of RE teachers who wish to progress to become a REC. Faith Formation Experiences is the third theme. It provides an insight into the faith formation activities experienced by the participants while they were RE teachers and RECs, as facilitated by their schools and the Office of CEWA. The final theme is Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs. The foci of this theme are twofold. First, a discussion is provided of the experiences during which the participants believed they had been supported in their work so that they could fulfil their role competently. Experiences that sustained the RECs in their work included interactions with principals, fellow RECs and CEWA RE curriculum consultants. Second, this theme describes the professional learning experiences that formed the RECs as educational leaders and prepared them for more senior leadership roles.

6.3.1 Theme one: Personal experiences. Personal experiences during childhood and adolescence were the most significant influence on the faith formation of the RECs. Previous research shows that the formation of Catholic school principals as faith leaders occurs predominantly in personal experiences during childhood when they are imbued with Christian faith and the traditions and practices of the Catholic Church (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). McKinley and Webber (2012) describe religiously committed Australian Generation Y Catholics as being raised in Catholic families "where the practise of the Catholic faith was

paramount” (p. 329). The findings of this research project suggest that the formation of the participants as faith leaders was contingent upon their personal faith formation experiences in childhood and adolescence. All the RECs were transmitted Christian faith as children. Most had experiences in multiple Catholic communities as children and adolescents and perceived themselves as having faith from early childhood.

Previous research recognises that RE teachers obtain much of their knowledge about the Catholic tradition as children and adolescents and that they draw on this knowledge to teach RE (Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Hackett, 2010). Hackett (2010, p. 5) terms the knowledge of the Catholic tradition, learnt through living as a person of faith, “experiential content knowledge”. The experiential content knowledge that the participants learnt in childhood and adolescence during personal experiences in families, parishes and Catholic schools contributed significantly to their formation, first as RE teachers and then later as RECs. As early career RE teachers, the participants drew upon their experiential content knowledge to teach the Year 11 and 12 ATAR RAL courses. Several participants taught these courses prior to commencing formal study in RE or theology.

It was during personal experiences in the family, parish and other Church communities that the Catholic identity of the RECs was formed. Arbuckle (2013) believes that people have a multiplicity of identities and that “Catholic identity” is one way that people can choose to self-identify or to perceive themselves (p. 23). A Catholic self-identity is normative, in that Catholic identity relates to norms, or standards of behaviour, belief and morality established by the Catholic Church (Arbuckle, 2013). All the RECs described having formed a Catholic self-identity from personal experiences in childhood and adolescence; however, the Catholic norms to which the participants conformed as children varied. For example, two participants formed their Catholic identity despite not regularly attending the Eucharist as children. The influence of family on the formation of the participants’ Catholic self-identity was very strong. All the participants described their parents as providing them with their initial experiences of the Catholic Church through socialisation in the home, and most were provided additional experiences in a parish community.

The importance of personal experiences in the formation of the RECs as leaders of the RE learning area should not be underestimated. Their initial faith formation as children made it possible for the RECs to fulfil CEWA’s mandate that they teach RE as people of faith (CECWA, 2009, para. 62). The receptiveness of the RECs to faith formation activities as RE teachers and RECs is largely contingent upon what faith formation they had experienced

prior to employment in a Catholic school (Bracken, 2004). In addition, for some of the RECs, knowledge of Catholic spirituality acquired during personal experiences in childhood and adolescence enabled them to lead the faith formation experiences of their colleagues.

6.3.1.1 Faith formation experiences in families during childhood and adolescence. A body of research literature indicates that the strongest predictor of people holding religious beliefs and participating in religious practice as adults is having religious parents who engage in the intentional transmission of religious belief (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hoge et al., 1982; Milevsky, Szuchman & Milevsky, 2008). The influence of religious parents who carried out intentional religious socialisation was apparent in the childhood experiences of most participants. Six of the RECs described themselves as experiencing religious socialisation from at least one highly committed Catholic parent. Three RECs described both their parents as educating them in the faith. As children and adolescents, most RECs reported belonging to committed Catholic families who regularly attended a parish community.

Research shows that mothers have the most significant familial influence on the adoption of religious belief by their adult offspring and that this is especially the case with mothers who have a close emotional bond with their child (Bengtson, et al., 2013; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993). Australian research suggests that the dominant influence on the acceptance of religious belief and participation in religious practice as an adult is a person having a mother who engages in intentional transmission of her religious belief to her children (Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993). The influence of mothers in faith formation was particularly evident for three of the participants who described their fathers as nominally Catholic but ambivalent towards living and transmitting their faith. For these participants it was their mothers who taught them about the Catholic faith and provided them with experiences in a Catholic parish.

Two of the RECs experienced a conversion or deepening of their Christian faith as young adults. As children, they did not have parents who displayed a high level of involvement with a parish, nor did they attend Catholic schools or have experiences in other Catholic communities. Their minimal experiences in parish communities were perhaps consistent with the prevailing experience of Australian Generation Y Catholics (Hughes, 2007; Mason et al., 2007). Both these participants described how their attendance at a parish community as children and adolescents was intermittent and revolved around receiving the sacraments: “So, church attendance wasn't a big thing. So, we were Catholic in all our values and our beliefs and we'd do the sacraments”. Despite only intermittently attending a parish,

both the RECs described themselves as remaining receptive to the Catholic tradition, having a Catholic identity and Christian faith during their childhood and adolescent years.

Casson (2011) posits that some younger Catholics who are not members of Eucharistic communities construct their Catholic identity through a process of “bricolage” (p. 208). That is, they use the available cultural knowledge to piece together their Catholic identity and belief as opposed to having a wholly normative identity and belief that conforms to the expectations stipulated by the Catholic Church. Most Generation Y Australians who constructed a Catholic identity as children, did so with knowledge of the Catholic tradition that was obtained in experiences in Catholic schools and with parents (Mason et al., 2007; Neidhart, 2014).

A preparedness to bricolage a Catholic identity from sources other than parish communities is evident in the experiences of two participants. Although one of the participants obtained ideas of what constitutes Catholic identity and belief through experiences in a Catholic school, parents appear to be the dominant source of information about the Catholic tradition for these RECs as children. One of the RECs observed that while she did not regularly attend a parish during childhood, “we were Catholic in all our values and our beliefs”. It was the RECs’ experiences with parents that introduced these participants to Catholic beliefs and prepared them for a fuller exploration of their faith as young adults. For one of these participants, this exploration and engagement with her Christian faith occurred while attending a Catholic university; for the other it was employment in a rural Catholic school that promoted her engagement with the Catholic Church.

6.3.1.2 Experiences as students in Catholic schools. Most of the RECs did not report their experiences as students attending Catholic schools as influencing their faith formation or decisions to become RECs. Research suggests that attendance at a Catholic secondary school as a student has a weak influence on people’s adoption of religious beliefs and practices as adults, in comparison with the influence of parents (Bengtson et al., 2013; Hoge et al., 1982). This is not to suggest attendance at a Catholic school has no influence on students’ adoption of Christian belief and acceptance of Church teaching. Hughes (2007) observes that attending a Catholic school helps students, “to some extent, to believe in God ... and understand the Catholic faith” (p. 188). This was discernible in the schooling experiences of one REC in this

study. Catholic schools may have had some influence on the other RECs' faith formation; however, schooling experiences were generally not described as a strong influence.

The REC in question believed that the Catholic secondary schools he attended as a student provided, "opportunities for developing your faith, particularly in the older years". Flynn et al. (2002) believe that some students have faith formation experiences in Catholic secondary schools that reinforce the socialisation they receive in the family and parish. This is reflected in the experiences of the REC. He came from a family with two parents who were practising Catholics and described having "really strong [faith formation] experiences from my parents". He came to the Catholic schools he attended with a receptiveness for catechetical activities and participated in Christian service and retreat experiences as a person of faith. In the sense of reinforcing experiences in the family and the parish, the participant's schooling experiences influenced his faith formation.

Experiences as a student in a Catholic secondary school strongly influenced this participant's decision to become a teacher in a Catholic school and later a REC. He was effusive about his schooling experience and had a very strong sense of attachment to the two Catholic secondary schools he attended. The participant came to be employed first as a teacher and later as a REC at one of the Catholic schools he attended as a student. He described his interactions with teachers as significantly influencing his decision to become a teacher in a Catholic school: "They gave me the encouragement or the impetus of their example to be a teacher".

Some of the teachers at the Catholic secondary school that this participant attended served as role models that he aspired to emulate. A role model is a person that an individual respects and from whom they consciously or unconsciously assimilate meanings (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). Rymarz and Belmonte (2014, p. 194) believe that teachers can provide students with a very strong example of what it means to be a teacher in Catholic school. The REC was unequivocal that the example of his teachers influenced his own career path: "My favourite teachers here were the reason I became a teacher". The example, or role model that teachers provided for this participant would seem to have occurred in an unintentional manner through incidental interactions, espousal of belief, demonstration of instructional competence and the modelling of positive relationships. He believed he was provided with a clear example by his teachers of what it means to be a competent teacher in a Catholic school and as an adult, he aspired to emulate this example.

6.3.1.3 Experiences in Catholic youth ministry. Two RECs who participated in this study had periods during their late adolescence and early adulthood when they worked in CYM. For both of these participants, their initial involvement in youth ministry occurred prior to them being employed by Catholic schools. Rymarz (2019) observes that young Catholics who choose to work for Catholic Church organisations that are concerned with evangelisation will typically have “high levels of religious commitment” (p. 446). Previous research has found that RECs with a personal history working in CYM come to their position with a strong sense of mission to serve the Catholic Church and more specifically a desire to evangelise young people (Fleming, 2002; Rymarz, 2019). This sense of mission is apparent in the experiences reported by the two participants with histories in CYM. These RECs had a professional interest in the role that was more akin to the extension of a vocation (Fleming, 2002).

The findings of the research suggest that those who work in CYM have professional formation experiences that prepare them for leadership of the RE learning area. RE teachers with a background in CYM are likely to have engaged in what Pope John Paul II refers to as the “new evangelisation”, or the evangelisation of young people who are disconnected from the life of the Church and no longer actively live their faith (ACBC, 2009; John Paul II, 1990, para. 2). Catholic youth ministry groups often work in this capacity in Catholic schools as an external provider of retreats and faith and justice activities (ACBC, 2009). To engage young people, the incorporation of mobile technology, social media and other digital media into instruction strategies is commonplace among CYM groups (Hart, 2014). The use of instructional strategies with an emphasis on contemporary pedagogy and technology, used in CYM, is likely to have applications for teaching and learning in secondary RE learning areas.

6.3.1.4 Faith formation in welcoming Catholic communities. Several RECs described the influence of experiences in welcoming Catholic communities in their faith formation. Catholic educational institutions should strive to create, “a positive and supportive climate” in which “interpersonal relationships [should] be based on love and Christian freedom” (CCE, 1988, para. 103). Researchers propose that a welcoming and hospitable environment in a faith community is a necessary precondition for the evangelisation of people who as adults have a weak connection to a religious tradition (Stark, 2017; Winseman, 2007). The intellectual acceptance of religious belief is generally preceded by a person being welcomed

into a religious community and developing strong social connections within that community (Weyers & Saayman, 2013).

Feeling welcome and belonging to a Catholic community preceded the deepening of the Christian faith of one of the RECs. Although she was a baptised Catholic who had attended a parish intermittently as a child and adolescent, the first time that she had felt a sense of belonging to a Catholic community was when she attended a Catholic university. While studying for her undergraduate degree she made strong social connections with faith-filled students and staff. These people, whom she referred to as “role models” were the catalyst for her to further explore her faith. She explained that, “due to just all the wonderful positive experiences ... I consciously made the decision that there’s something more that I wanted”. The experiences of the REC at university influenced her to receive the sacrament of Confirmation as a young adult.

6.3.1.5 Periods of absence from Church communities. Two of the participants described periods during their lives when they had no involvement with Catholic communities. In having a period of absence from the Church, these participants are perhaps reflecting the typical experiences of Generation Y Catholics who belong to Mass-attending families as children, most of whom stop having involvement with parish communities as young adults (Hughes, 2007). Many Generation Y Catholics who stop attending a parish community as adults do so because of a sense of ambivalence towards the Catholic Church, rather than through a sense of antagonism (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). A sense of ambivalence was evident in the viewpoints of these two RECs, both of whom described their periods away from parish communities as a result of disinterest, rather than antagonism towards the Church. While disconnected from the Church, both participants continued to self-identify as Catholic and have faith.

For these RECs, absence from Church communities did not extend to questioning the existence of God. One REC made the comment that during his period away from a parish community he felt that his personal, “faith was always there”. The RECs’ spiritual belief during their periods of absence from Church communities had similarities with the spirituality of people who can be described as “spiritual but not religious” (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 209). The participants described themselves as maintaining belief in God but at the same time feeling no need to be involved with a parish community to give witness to their belief. However, unlike many people who are SNR, the participants did not believe that their

spiritual beliefs were unique and a product of their own individual questioning (Beaudoin, 1998); rather they described their beliefs as coming from formational experiences in Catholic communities.

The two participants who described periods of absence from the Church were atypical of Generation Y Catholics, in that they chose to return to Catholic communities as adults (Hughes, 2007). The most significant factor influencing the return of the participants to a Eucharistic community was their employment in a Catholic school. In a sense, the experience of working in a Catholic school as a RE teacher served as a bridge back to a parish community. It was through working in a Catholic school that the participants came to experience a welcoming faith community and developed relationships with teachers who were committed Catholics. Experiences in Catholic schools encouraged their faith and influenced them to conform their personal behaviour to the expectations of the leaders in their schools.

6.3.2 Theme two: Professional formation experiences as Religious Education teachers. The participants' professional experiences while employed as RE teachers significantly influenced their decisions to become RECs. Experiences that contributed to the professional formation of the participants as RE teachers were generally unplanned and occurred through the course of their employment in a Catholic school. For example, the initial progression to work as a RE teacher occurred for most participants through the opportunities that present for committed Catholics in the RE learning area. An experience that was common to most participants was being identified as a future leader of the RE learning area. Identification as a future leader engendered in the RECs a sense of self-belief that they were suited to educational leadership, resulting in them taking greater initiative in their professional and faith formation. For several participants, a significant influence on their professional formation during their period of employment as a RE teacher was mentoring from a more experienced teacher.

6.3.2.1 Opportunities for initial employment as a Religious Education teacher. Most of the participants in this study became RE teachers because of employment opportunities that existed in the RE learning area. For example, one REC candidly said that, "I felt that RE was a bit more of a secure pathway in terms of being able to find a job". The participants' experiences of increased opportunities for employment as RE teachers appeared to be related

to their personal faith commitment and the preparedness of principals to recruit potentially quality RE teachers even if they do not have qualifications in secondary RE or theology.

At the time of applying for their first position, most of the participants were highly sought after by Catholic school principals because of their ability to teach RE as people of faith. The CECWA mandates that RE teachers be committed Catholics who should attempt to foster in students, “the kind of critical reflection that leads to commitment to the Person of Christ” (CECWA, 2009, para. 99). The NCEC (2015a) observes that staffing RE learning areas with committed Catholics is challenging because of the decline in parish involvement in Australian society, which is reflected among teachers employed by Australian Catholic schools. The participants’ experiences suggest that principals first aim to appoint RE teachers who are committed Catholics, with a secondary consideration being an applicant’s area of undergraduate study. This strategy may be pursued because principals are conscious of maintaining a “critical mass” of committed Catholic teachers, or a group of teachers who can animate the Catholic nature of their schools (Gowdie, 2011, p. 111; NCEC, 2015b).

The preparedness of principals to recruit RE teachers with qualifications and teaching experience in other learning areas may be a result of the small number of graduate RE teachers in Australian dioceses who have specialist undergraduate qualifications in secondary RE or theology (Franchi & Rymarz, 2017; Rymarz & Engebretson, 2005). Research shows that Western Australian Catholic secondary schools employ a small number of secondary RE teachers who have completed an undergraduate degree in secondary RE or theology (Hackett, 2006, p. 165). As RE is a compulsory subject for all students in WA Catholic secondary schools, principals need to provide teachers for the same number of RE classes as other major learning areas such as English and Mathematics (CECWA, 2009). In contrast to the high demand for specialist secondary RE teachers, the supply of beginning RE teachers with undergraduate qualifications in RE or theology remains low (Poncini, 2018, table 4.3). Despite this, principals need to employ competent specialist RE teachers, who as well as being committed Catholics have enough personal knowledge of the Catholic tradition to teach RE using the educational approach (Rymarz, 2012).

The experiences described by some of the participants suggest that principals display a pragmatism in recruiting competent teachers from other subject areas. Principals seem to recruit teachers with qualifications and experience in other learning areas, who have personal knowledge of the Catholic tradition and who express an interest in teaching RE. This breadth of teaching background was the professional background of several of the RECs in this study

as beginning RE teachers. Principals' recruitment of beginning RE teachers with study and employment backgrounds in other learning areas may be done with an expectation that these teachers will complete accreditation requirements once employed (CEWA, 2018a).

6.3.2.2 *The small number of Religious Education teachers who aspire to become RECs.* Several participants commented that only a small number of RE teachers aspired to become RECs. Previous research similarly identifies a small number of applicants for REC positions in other Australian dioceses (Crotty, 2006; Fleming, 2002; Long & Hemmings, 2006). Crotty (2006) posits that the small number of teachers who wish to progress to become RECs is a result of the position being viewed as “counter-cultural” due to it being in the religious domain (p. 792). This was the view of two participants who described an initial reluctance to become RECs because of a sense of trepidation about progressing to becoming one of the faith leaders in their schools. This feeling existed despite both RECs being active members of parish communities who had completed master’s degrees in RE. One of these RECs commented that he felt the weight of responsibility of faith leadership because of the small number of teachers at his school who participated in an explicitly religious leadership role. Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) term this reluctance to progress to religious leadership as a fear of becoming “the God person in the school”; that is, the staff member in the school who is perceived as having responsibility for all religious matters (p. 195). This concern about leading in the religious realm in a Catholic school may be difficult to address. Archbishop Costelloe (2013) comments that Australian Catholic schools exist in “a society and culture which seeks to relegate religion to the private sphere” (p. 13). The pervasive societal view that religious belief and practice should be a private matter may create a sense of wariness in some teachers about occupying an educational leadership role that is explicitly in the religious domain.

The RECs appeared to have a largely unacknowledged role as providers of professional learning that may limit the appeal of the position for some RE teachers. The requirement to assist RE teachers with their professional learning exists because RE learning areas generally have the largest number of teachers, many of whom are part time and who have not completed academic study in the area (Crotty, 2005; Hackett, 2006; Rymarz & Engebretson, 2005). The RECs who discussed their experiences of assisting the formation of RE teachers in their learning area generally accepted that teacher formation was a necessary part of their work that was not being fulfilled elsewhere. To lead the professional learning of RE teachers

requires a leader who has expert knowledge of the Catholic tradition and is confident in presenting to colleagues and encouraging change in their teaching practices. For some teachers who are aspiring to a middle leadership role, the facilitating of staff professional learning would likely seem more onerous in RE than in other learning areas.

Teachers employed in WA Catholic schools who have line management or responsibility for RE must complete the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education (CEWA, 2018a). RECs are the only heads of learning area required to complete this level of accreditation, which has a study component of six tertiary units, two of which must be studied at master's level (CECWA, 2013). The requirement to complete the study component may deter some RE teachers from aspiring to the position of REC.

An accreditation process that requires different levels of academic study for teachers who occupy the same promotional level raises questions of equity (Buchanan, 2018). One of the RECs commented to this effect when she said that having different postgraduate study requirements for staff at the same promotional level seemed unreasonable to her: "You're creating again that separation between RE and other middle leaders as heads of learning". The REC acknowledged that the completion of tertiary units for the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education is partially supported by CEWA scholarships, while observing that the cost of units is not entirely funded. The participant seemed unaware of other scholarships funded by groups within the Church external to CEWA, some of which provide full payment of fees (Knights of the Southern Cross Western Australia, 2020). The Accreditation to Lead Religious Education is a compulsory condition of employment that remains a personal responsibility for RECs to fulfil. RE teachers may feel encouraged to progress to the position of REC if accreditation requirements were treated as a condition of employment and supported by schools with time release and full payment of tuition fees.

6.3.2.2.1 The perception of future career progression when employed as a REC. There was a sense among the participants that once employed as RECs, opportunities existed for career progression into more senior leadership positions. This was the viewpoint of one REC who was unequivocal that, "I can definitely see that there is a pathway for me into a senior leadership position". The participants' perception that career progression opportunities existed for RECs is at odds with previous findings that other middle leadership positions are promoted more readily than RECs (Crotty, 2005; Fleming, 2002). The opportunities for promotion to senior leadership are perhaps evidenced by the three participants who

progressed from the position of REC to deputy principalships during the interval between the interviews.

6.3.2.3 Identification as future RECs. Several of the participants in this study were identified by a leader in their school as a future REC. Identification can be the first step in professional formation for leadership because it encourages teachers to perceive themselves as future leaders (Canavan, 2007; Ranson, 2006; Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017). The effect of identification upon teachers' self-perception as future leaders was reflected in the experiences of several participants in this study, whom prior to being identified as future RECs had considerable self-doubt in regard to their suitability for the position.

Researchers propose that the identification of future educational leaders should be accompanied with direction on the type of professional learning that should be undertaken to help this progression to leadership (Canavan, 2007; Fink & Brayman, 2006). This was evident in the experience of one REC who described his identification as a future REC and encouragement to commence professional learning. His principal advised him to commence the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education and suggested he undertake a master's degree in RE. He remembered the experience of being identified as a future REC and feeling encouraged to engage in professional learning in the ensuing conversation: "She said to get cracking with my master's, and so I did".

Most of the RECs who participated in this study were identified and offered professional formation advice informally through the initiative of a leader at their school. The exception to this was one REC who was nominated for the CEWA talent identification program by his principal. This REC believed that the CEWA talent identification program was a, "rewarding process of learning more about myself and my strengths and my weaknesses as a leader and where I could continue to focus on, to develop". Research suggests that the identification and formation of future educational leaders is most effective when it is done in formal programs coordinated by education systems (AITSL, 2017a; Canavan, 2007). The development of a formalised approach to the identification of RECs may be a means of encouraging more teachers to aspire to the position.

6.3.2.4 Recruitment by principals into the position of REC. Several participants recounted experiences of being personally contacted and recruited by principals into the REC

position. Fleming (2002, p. 251) reports that Catholic school principals in the Archdiocese of Melbourne were inclined to recruit individuals into the role of REC without using standard processes for selection and recruitment. While none of the participants in this study described principals bypassing standard selection criteria, there was a sense that principals actively encouraged applications and recruited candidates for the REC position. Several participants recalled how they were contacted by principals from other schools and strongly encouraged to apply for positions. One REC described a principal's preparedness to recruit two teachers to share the REC position in a part-time capacity. He did so to allow them to, "just to sort of get a taste" to see if they felt suited for the position. The active recruitment of RECs by principals may be a reflection of the difficulty that principals have in staffing this position.

6.3.2.5 Mentoring relationships. Research shows that early career RE teachers benefit from mentoring experiences with mentors who have expertise and enthusiasm for the RE learning area (Topliss, 2017). This was apparent in the experiences of some of the participants, for whom mentoring relationships provided emotional support and facilitated their professional formation. All the mentoring relationships described by the participants followed the traditional mentoring model of an experienced teacher advising an early career teacher on how to improve their practice (Pask & Joy, 2007).

The participants who entered into mentoring relationships did so voluntarily and with a mentor of their choice. Brown (2001) believes that mentoring relationships are likely to be more effective if the choice of mentor is left to the mentee, rather than being imposed as part of a formalised process. The ability to choose their own mentor resulted in the participants selecting mentors with whom they had an existing supportive relationship. For example, one participant chose to be mentored by his then REC in large part because he enjoyed the mentor's company, respected him and valued his expert knowledge in the RE learning area. For most of the RECs, mentoring in the content, pedagogy and leadership knowledge of the RE learning area seems to have been successful because of the relational trust and personal rapport that existed between the mentors and mentees.

Early career RE teachers benefit professionally from mentoring that encompasses both the affective and cognitive domains (Topliss, 2017, p. 164). Topliss (2017) describes two of the fundamentals of mentoring as the provision of direct learning experiences and emotional support. Both these fundamentals of mentoring were evident in the experiences of those RECs who engaged in mentoring relationships. One REC described how his mentor provided

“shoulder-to-shoulder” instruction, by explicitly teaching and modelling how to competently teach RE. Being explicitly taught the content and pedagogy, by a mentor who had a high level of expertise in the RE learning area, was a significant influence on the formation of this participant as a RE teacher and REC.

Mentors provided emotional support to the RECs by listening to concerns, offering advice and encouraging the participants to aspire to become RECs. One REC described his mentor’s encouragement, “day by day, basically or week by week [he] kept trying to convince me that I should be a REC, and then I decided to give it a crack”. In some instances, this encouragement was accompanied by advice on how to achieve career progression and repeated affirmation that the participants were suited to become RECs.

6.3.3 Theme three: Faith formation experiences. The third theme, Faith Formation Experiences, describes and interprets the RECs’ experiences as teachers in Catholic schools that influenced the development of their Christian faith. Faith formation experiences are discussed that are intentionally organised by Catholic schools and the Office of CEWA. Some faith formation experiences recounted by participants were organised by their schools to assist teachers in maintaining their ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. The participants’ role as presenters of theological knowledge and faith formation is also discussed. In addition, this theme contains a discussion of how membership of a Catholic school community contributed to the faith formation of some participants.

6.3.3.1 *The reinvigoration of faith while working as a Religious Education teacher.* Some RECs experienced a deepening of their Christian faith while employed as RE teachers in Catholic schools. Research shows that teachers with existing Christian faith can find that the experience of working in a Catholic school contributes to the formation of their Christian faith (Convey, 2012; Gleeson, O’Gorman & O’Neill, 2020). From a sociological perspective this is an example of workplace socialisation, where the behaviours deemed necessary to perform an occupational role are adopted by workers (Evans, 2010). From a Catholic understanding, the effect of working in a Catholic school on a teacher’s faith formation should not be interpreted in such a reductionist manner. In the Catholic tradition, the deepening of faith involves accepting the grace of God that is nurtured by experiences in a community of fellow believers (CCC, 2003, para. 181). Employment in a Catholic school can provide teachers with regular experiences of the liturgy, prayer and ritual along with

interactions with faith-filled teachers. These experiences may influence teachers to engage with their faith through personal experiences outside their school community. Rymarz and Belmonte (2014) found that teachers who become leaders of the RE learning area often experience a gradual progression to faith leadership that influences them to, “take more responsibility for their faith journey” (p. 197). This seemed to be reflected in the experiences of one of the RECs in this study. Over time, he demonstrated a propensity to take more responsibility for his faith journey. He described how this occurred:

I think through this role; I think it was always there. I think through this role and when I got back into the environment at Notre Dame ... I think I was led back to the Mass and the faith. Then obviously being here, which is a faith-based environment, that's really just made my faith a lot stronger and allowed me to learn more.

Several RECs described how their study of theology increased their knowledge of the Catholic tradition and consequently influenced a deepening of their Christian faith. The study of theology provided these RECs with a greater understanding of the intellectual dimension of Catholicism. Stark (2017) believes that an intellectual understanding of the beliefs proposed by a religion is necessary for a person to accept these beliefs as a reality: “Religion is first and foremost an intellectual product, and ideas are its truly fundamental aspect” (Stark, 2017, p. 28). One of the RECs described the influence of studying theology upon his faith formation: “I suppose the intellectual conversion was there and the heart conversion came, I suppose, more in my mid-twenties and it's still ongoing”. The intellectual conversion to which he was referring was a change in his understanding of reality and the acceptance of Christian belief, without necessarily a change in his personal behaviour occurring (Lauder, 2012).

6.3.3.2 Faith formation activities organised for RECs. The intentional faith formation activities experienced by the RECs appeared to be largely limited to activities for ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. In addition to ongoing renewal activities, one REC described a pilgrimage experience sponsored by the CECWA, and

another described a retreat experience organised by his school as part of his induction to the position of REC.

Researchers suggest that faith formation for leaders in Catholic schools should be planned and where appropriate integrated into leadership programs and supported with time release (Bracken et al., 2016; Gowdie, 2011). This was not evident in the experiences of faith formation reported by the RECs. Faith formation was accepted by the RECs to be a largely personal responsibility. The participants were unaware of faith formation experiences organised at a systemic level for those working as RECs. If such opportunities existed, they had not experienced them. There was no acknowledgement that the faith formation opportunities provided for RECs were different from those provided for other teachers in a Catholic school. The comment by a REC that, “I don't know if I've necessarily experienced a purely faith-professional learning anywhere where I'm going to develop my personal faith”, summed up most of the participants' experiences of faith formation while employed as heads of the RE learning area. The limited faith formation experiences of the RECs seemed at odds with Church documents that stress the importance of the Church's educational institutions facilitating faith formation opportunities for those who provide religious instruction (CCE, 2007; Paul VI, 1965a; SCCE, 1982).

6.3.3.3 Experiences of knowledge formation as part of ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. All the RECs had experienced theological knowledge formation as part of CEWA's ongoing renewal for Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic school (CECWA, 2013). A minimum of 15 hours of accredited activities that address the knowledge component defined as the “knowledge of the content of the Catholic faith and the pedagogical principles for transmitting it” must be completed by teachers over a five-year period (CEWA, 2018a, para. 2). Any hours beyond the mandatory 15 hours of knowledge can be filled with what CEWA describes as the faith component of ongoing renewal (CECWA, 2013).

In general, the RECs did not believe that the ongoing renewal activities provided by schools contributed to their theological knowledge or faith formation. There seemed to be three main reasons for the RECs having this belief. Firstly, ongoing renewal activities involved only a small time commitment compared with other forms of professional learning in which the RECs participated, such as the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education, leadership training or time spent with a mentor. From a faith formation

viewpoint, the participants understandably associated their faith formation with their personal prayer life and parish communities. This is because for the RECs, personal faith formation experiences in parishes and families were regular occurrences; whereas faith formation for ongoing renewal was likely to require less than three hours per year. Secondly, many of the ongoing renewal activities for teachers were organised by the RECs themselves. The experience of instructing teachers in knowledge about the Catholic tradition was not likely to be formational for RECs when working as presenters, particularly if they presented the same session multiple times. Thirdly, activities for ongoing renewal of the knowledge component of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School were created predominantly at the school level for all teaching staff. Most participants observed that theological knowledge formation as part of ongoing renewal of accreditation was typically not tailored specifically for RE teachers or RECs. In general, the RECs described ongoing renewal sessions as employing a generic approach to knowledge formation that did not take into account specific professional identities and existing knowledge of those attending the session.

6.3.3.3.1 Differentiation of learning in activities for ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic school. One REC was critical of the lack of differentiation in activities provided for ongoing renewal of Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. Differentiation in an educational context is the creation of learning experiences intended to build on people's different levels of existing knowledge (Hattie, 2013). The Congregation for Catholic Education (2014) identifies the need for teachers to have differentiated theological knowledge formation activities. The document *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* explains that teachers in Catholic schools have specific professional identities, with peculiar features, that should be taken into account during training (CCE, 2014). One participant observed that this differentiation had not been her experience of knowledge and faith formation sessions provided by her school. She said that ongoing renewal activities were designed by schools to be understood by the "majority of staff, not your staff that are possibly more faith filled". Providing knowledge formation without taking into account teachers' existing knowledge can result in those teachers with a greater level of theological knowledge perceiving formation activities as compliance driven and of little benefit for them professionally (Dowling, 2012).

It is perhaps understandable that the leaders of Catholic secondary schools should opt for a generalised approach to ongoing renewal sessions. Catholic schools have limited

resources, expertise and motivation among staff to provide differentiated learning. The Office of CEWA and individual schools may be able to provide differentiated learning for RECs and other teachers in religious leadership through partnerships with Catholic institutes and universities. This is not to suggest the use of one-off external presenters is the panacea that will meet all REC's professional and faith formation requirements. Researchers question the benefit of having one-off speakers who do not know staff, present without prior collaborative planning and do not attend to any follow up (Bracken, 2004, p. 143; Bracken et al., 2016, p. 10). However, it may be that universities and Catholic institutes can offer a variety of ongoing faith and knowledge formation for groups of RECs that can also be used to satisfy ongoing renewal requirements.

6.3.3.3.2 The REC as a facilitator of faith and knowledge formation. Most of the RECs who participated in this study provided theological knowledge and faith formation for the teaching staff at their schools as part of ongoing renewal for Accreditation to Teach in a Catholic School. These sessions were typically a presentation to a group of staff, although one REC described presenting to the entire secondary teaching staff. Buchanan (2005b) believes that RECs providing professional learning for teachers is challenging because of the high level of knowledge of the Catholic tradition required by a presenter to do so. One REC explained the pressure he felt when presenting to the staff in his school:

If I'm going to present on some core theological content on a PD day or something like that, if I don't present it well, then I'm certainly going to turn staff off. So, there's that pressure I suppose to make sure that when we do something, it's good.

A challenge for the participating RECs in presenting theological knowledge or faith formation sessions to large groups of staff is the unreceptive attitude of some teachers towards these sessions. Research shows that teachers value professional learning that they perceive as relevant to their own teaching practice and that is focused on improving their pedagogical and content knowledge, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning (Dowling, 2012; Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis, 2005). The experiences of two of the RECs suggest that some teachers employed in Catholic schools may struggle to connect the relevance of activities provided for ongoing renewal with their own teaching practice. For these teachers, learning theological knowledge or participating in faith formation is perceived as either peripheral or entirely irrelevant to their teaching practice. Engaging teachers in

theological knowledge and faith formation is challenging for RECs when disinterested staff are compelled to attend.

Despite experiencing the challenges posed by organising and presenting faith and theological knowledge sessions, most of the RECs embraced this aspect of their work. There was a perception that most teachers benefited from theological knowledge formation and that there were limited opportunities for staff to engage in this learning. One REC said that the requirement to provide knowledge formation was particularly important for RE teachers: “What I realised is, my teachers aren’t formed. And where are they going to get that formation from?” Although the RECs were in general motivated to fulfil this role, there seemed to be little formal acknowledgement by principals of the time-consuming nature of leading staff professional learning and faith formation.

Two questions arose from the REC role as a facilitator of knowledge and faith formation. The first is the question of equity for RECs employed only as curriculum leaders. Presenting knowledge and faith formation for the wider teaching staff is not explicitly related to the leadership of the RE learning area. The second is the question of what training a teacher needs to present knowledge and faith formation to colleagues. Bracken et al. (2016) propose that Catholic education systems should develop “programs that develop teachers to co-lead spiritual formation and animate others within school communities—these would be structured programs that allow personal development, confidence and capacity building” (p. 10). Formal programs may serve to assist teachers to lead the knowledge and faith formation of colleagues in a manner that conforms to the norms and expectations of the local bishop (SCCE, 1982, para. 59). In the dioceses of WA, the facilitation of knowledge and faith formation is an area that is unregulated and has no accreditation process.

6.3.3.4 Pilgrimage experience. One REC described a four-week pilgrimage experience in Israel as having a significant influence on her theological knowledge and faith formation. The pilgrimage experience served as a rite of affirmation of faith for this REC, where her existing faith was strengthened (Capets, 2018; Pieper & Van Uden, 1994). To attend the pilgrimage, the REC left her employment as a teacher for four weeks and lived with other pilgrims in a temporary faith community. During the pilgrimage she visited the sacred locations associated with Jesus’ ministry and was provided with a Christian frame of interpretation by living with fellow pilgrims. Capets (2018) believes that the immersion in a temporary faith community and the experience of sacred locations can result in pilgrims

returning “to their schools equipped and revitalised to share their faith with their students” (p. 7). This belief was evident in this REC’s description of her pilgrimage experience. She recalled that the pilgrimage experience provided her with “stories and experiences that I could bring back to the classroom”.

Pilgrimages appear to be very worthwhile faith formation experiences that are difficult for schools and Catholic education offices to facilitate because of the expense involved. Pilgrimages are formational in part because they allow pilgrims to experience sacred locations. They are also conducive to facilitating the affirmation of pilgrims’ faith because the experience of a temporary faith community encourages the development of social connections among pilgrims that engender a sense of solidarity (Pieper & Van Uden, 1994). This sense of solidarity and camaraderie appears to be prominent in faith communities when members enjoy equality and respectful relationships (Capets, 2018; Turner & Turner, 1978). Singleton (2011) observes that temporary faith communities provide “encouragement, religious instruction, community and religious experiences [that] can motivate already religious youth to increase their religious practice” (p. 67). The expense of pilgrimage experiences may mean that these experiences can only be offered to a small group of people. The development of temporary faith communities that have similar social characteristics to pilgrimages, such as live-in retreats at which community members meet regularly, enjoy each other’s company and receive religious instruction, are suggested by researchers as a more practical way to provide faith formation (Gowdie, 2011; Scharf et al., 2020).

6.3.4 Theme four: Professional experiences that sustain Generation Y RECs.

Theme Four, Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs, provides an interpretation of the experiences during the course of their employment as RECs that sustained the participants in their work. The experiences that sustained the RECs shared some commonalities. Most of the RECs had interactions with their principals, fellow RECs and RE curriculum consultants that sustained them in their work. Several participants also discussed how they were sustained by developing their capacity as leaders and by achieving career progression.

6.3.4.1 The support of principals. The RECs were sustained by the personal and professional support of their principals. Supportive relationships between principals and

RECs were characterised as involving a positive personal rapport. The RECs perceived their principals as supportive when they displayed an interest in the RE learning area and provided regular meeting opportunities. Supportive principals were described by the RECs as sharing leadership of the RE learning area.

6.3.4.1.1 Personal and professional rapport with principals. Those RECs who enjoyed a friendly rapport with their principals felt supported in their work and had a sense that they could speak with their principal in an honest and informal manner. Researchers suggest that an amicable personal relationship between a REC and their principal is necessary for RECs to feel supported professionally (Buchanan, 2018; Crotty, 2005, 2006; Fleming, 2002). Having a personal rapport with their principals was important for the RECs in this study because of the confidence it provided that their concerns were listened to and, where appropriate, acted upon by principals.

Buchanan (2018) found that RECs feel supported when principals show interest in the RE learning area and offer encouragement. The importance of principals displaying an interest in the RE learning area was evident in the experiences of some of the RECs in this study. Several RECs perceived their principals as displaying this interest in the RE learning area when they made themselves available for regular meetings. One REC compared the interest displayed in the RE learning area by two principals she had worked with:

[The principal has] been really proactive. She offered to obviously help support me whenever I've needed it and I've had, to be truthful, I've had more conversations with her in the last two terms, than I've probably had with my last principal in that whole entire time that I worked with her. So, I feel, yes, I've definitely been more supported this year compared to previous years.

A positive rapport may also allow a greater degree of honesty on the part of principals when discussing the RE learning area with RECs (Crotty, 2005). The findings indicate that principals are likely to be forthright, express constructive criticism of the RE learning area and challenge RECs to improve student learning when relational trust exists. For example, one REC commented that his principal challenged him to use data to improve student learning. He was receptive to this challenge because he knew the principal's motivation was to improve student learning and his capacity as a RE leader. As a result of the principal challenging him, the REC developed his capacity as an instructional leader (Hattie, 2013). He

became confident in his ability to analyse test and exam results, in identifying areas where content had not been grasped and in providing feedback to students.

6.3.4.1.2 Principals' shared leadership of the Religious Education learning area. RECs feel supported in their work when principals publicly display shared leadership of the RE learning area (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Buchanan, 2015; Crotty, 2005). The term shared leadership does not refer to principals sharing the administrative oversight of the RE learning area or making leadership decisions within the learning area. Rather, Belmonte and Cranston (2009) describe principals' shared leadership of the RE learning area as having the following features: a preparedness on the part of principals to share power with teachers and middle leaders; and principals supporting appropriate leadership initiatives and publicly promoting RE as central to the mission of the Catholic school. One REC commented that his principal shared leadership of the RE learning area by including him in decision making and supporting his leadership initiatives: "He [the principal] is behind me all the way, supports my decisions, gives me a decision-making role, for example, in terms of the staff we employ". All of the RECs described their principals as being confident leaders of the RE learning area who promoted the subject area as central to the mission of their schools.

6.3.4.1.3 Principals' recruitment of specialist Religious Education teachers. The RECs felt sustained in their work when principals employed academically well-formed, full-time specialist RE teachers. Church documents have long advocated that teachers of RE should have formal qualifications and specialist knowledge in the area (CC, 1997; SCCE, 1982). Franchi and Rymarz (2017) describe the systematic study of doctrine as providing the theological "raw material" to develop "the core knowledge necessary for the teaching of Religious Education" (p. 10). Specialist RE teachers are more likely to have obtained this core knowledge than are part-time teachers, through the study of a degree in RE or theology (Fleming, 2002). In addition, RE teachers' understanding of content knowledge may also come from experiential content knowledge, or the knowledge of RE content that comes from living as a person of faith (Hackett, 2010). The RECs in this study felt supported when principals appointed specialist RE teachers who had a personal understanding of RE content and who were able to use teaching and learning strategies to communicate this information. There was a sense among the RECs that the appointment of specialist RE teachers also served as a visible display to students and parents that RE had the same academic rigour as other

subjects. Further, it is probable that the appointment of specialist RE teachers lessens the requirement of RECs to facilitate professional learning for teachers in the RE learning area.

Despite the RECs wanting more specialist RE teachers, the experiences of the participants suggest that RE learning areas remain staffed by many non-specialist and part-time teachers. The RECs, however, were not particularly critical of principals on this issue. There seemed to be an understanding that recruiting teachers with the requisite professional and faith formation to become a specialist RE teacher was challenging.

6.3.4.1.4 Principals' management of RECs' workloads. One of the RECs who participated in this research project described how she intermittently felt overwhelmed with an excessive workload. She had been delegated responsibility, from her principal, for leadership of both the RE learning area and the ministerial aspects of her school, such as liturgies and retreats. Several studies show that when the REC position encompasses leadership of both the RE learning area and ministerial aspects of a school, the person occupying this position is likely to feel overburdened and unable to fulfil their duties adequately (Buchanan, 2013; Crotty, 2005; Fleming, 2002). This was apparent in the experiences of this participant. The REC's feeling of being overburdened was compounded by her not being a member of her school's executive. This resulted in her working without having a clear teaching or administrative team to which she could delegate tasks relating to the ministerial aspects of the school.

Contributing to this REC's sense of feeling overburdened was the delegation of new responsibilities by her principal with no acknowledgement of these new duties reflected in her terms of employment. Additional responsibilities, such as leading staff accreditation, were accepted with a sense of resignation: "I don't think it was officially added ... I think things have just always slightly been added". Fleming's (2002) conclusion that the REC role "has grown in complexity [while] the time allowance has remained relatively constant", accurately describes the experience of this participant (p. 118). The REC believed that, "if I could have more time, I think that would be a big key thing". A time release that is consummate with the demands of leading both the ministerial and curriculum aspects of RE may ameliorate some of this REC's sense of feeling overburdened. It also appears that REC positions that combine leadership of the ministerial and RE curriculum aspects of a school come with sufficient leadership responsibility to justify membership of a school's executive.

As a member of a school's executive, a REC with this dual role will be more likely to receive an appropriate time allocation, and administrative and teacher support to complete both roles.

6.3.4.2 Supportive REC networks. Most of the RECs described how they were sustained both personally and professionally through experiences of collaboration in sub-networks of RECs. Previous studies suggest that RECs have a preference for learning in professional networks and appreciate the support and advice of other RECs (Buchanan, 2013; Fleming, 2002). It is evident that most of the participants in this study had a preference for networking in smaller sub-networks as opposed to the larger CEWA REC network. The sub-networks that the RECs formed provided access to supportive and critical colleagues who could be called upon for advice and guidance.

Several RECs described how the personal support and camaraderie they experienced within a small network of RECs sustained them in their work. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) proposed that professional networks that engage and sustain an educator's interest and commitment blend rather than differentiate between the personal and professional. The blend of personal and professional relationships was apparent in the networks of several of the RECs. The members of one REC sub-network, made up of around six people, were in regular communication and occasionally gathered socially to enjoy one another's company. The REC recalled that the members of his network had recently, "just had a night together ... to bond and talk about the role". Although several RECs felt strongly that their social relationships within networks sustained them in their work, one participant had limited experience of working in small networks. Despite wanting to network with other RECs, the participant had been able to do so only in a very limited manner. The need for external support remained for this REC and was obtained through her relationships with CEWA RE curriculum consultants.

6.3.4.3 The support of Religious Education curriculum consultants. Most RECs described experiences with CEWA RE curriculum consultants that sustained them in their work. Buchanan (2015) believes that the expert advice provided by RE curriculum consultants can help RECs "to feel confident that their religious education leadership in their schools was up to date and effective" (p. 197). The support of RE curriculum consultants is particularly important in sustaining recently appointed RECs in their work (Long & Hemmings, 2006). The importance of the support of RE curriculum consultants was discernible in the experiences of two participants who had been appointed as RECs less than

two years before the first narrative interviews took place. For example, one of the RECs described how he appreciated the support he had received from a RE curriculum consultant on how to write exams for the ATAR RAL course. This advice was offered in meetings that were not formalised but occurred at the discretion of the REC and the RE curriculum consultant. Some diocesan education systems in Australia have a formalised process for RE curriculum consultants meeting with RECs in their first year of employment in the position (Long & Hemmings, 2006). This may be an effective means of providing beginning RECs with expert support and advice.

6.3.4.4 The support of Catholic Education Western Australia with teaching and learning materials. Most RECs expressed the view that they were not supported adequately by CEWA in relation to the RE teaching and learning support materials with which they were provided. Those RECs who were critical of CEWA's resourcing of the RE learning area reiterated the concerns of RE teachers as reported in previous research involving WA Catholic secondary schools (Berlach & Hackett, 2012; Poncini, 2018). Several participants were particularly critical of the teaching and learning support materials provided for RE in Years 7–10. These comments were made at the time of the first interviews in 2018.

Teacher background resources for Years 8–10 RE, called *Come Follow Me*, were formerly provided to schools as a student resource either in hard copy or in electronic portable document format (pdf) (CEOWA, 2007). The hard copy and pdf text are still widely used in WA Catholic secondary schools as a student resource. One REC who still occasionally used this resource described it as “the world's worst textbook, the only time I think you ever open it is if you need a relief for a relief lesson”. The description of the student resource as a textbook is inaccurate but perhaps representative of how many RE teachers and RECs view the *Come Follow Me* resource. This view is somewhat unjustified given that the resource was created as a student resource to be used at the teacher's discretion, rather than as a mandated textbook (Poncini, 2018). The RECs who participated in this study had a preference for CEWA to produce teaching and learning resources that use contemporary pedagogy, integrate technology and require minimal adaption for use in classrooms.

Several RECs commented that the Office of CEWA could better resource the Years 11 and 12 RAL courses. A point of criticism was that only teacher background notes were provided by the Office of CEWA for the RAL courses, as opposed to resources that could be used by teachers in a classroom. However, unlike in the case of the Years 7–10 materials, no

RECs criticised the information in these teacher background resources and some commented that they found them useful when preparing their own student resources. The main concern expressed about the Years 11 and 12 RAL teacher background notes was the time-consuming nature of adapting them for use with students. One REC expressed this concern:

So, the general stuff that we get from the CEO [the Office of Catholic Education Western Australia], for example, is they give us teacher modules and background reading, but that doesn't give us anything to use in the classroom. So, then we have to go, read that, understand that, and say. "Right, how are we going to present this information to students?"

Perhaps it is difficult for RECs to purchase commercially produced teaching and learning resources that address the RAL content in the manner that a head of mathematics may be able to source a textbook or an online mathematics program that addresses the Australian Curriculum. The RE content that should be taught in WA Catholic schools is stipulated by the mandate of the Bishops of WA and the Years 11 and 12 curriculum requirements of SCSAWA (CECWA, 2009, para. 62; SCSAWA, 2016, 2019). Any commercially produced resource would need to take these requirements into account.

6.3.4.5 Formation for leadership. The RECs in this study were sustained by experiences that developed their capacity as educational leaders. The experience of working as a REC was deemed to have developed the capacity of the participants as educational leaders. This observation was made by the three RECs who progressed to deputy principal positions during the course of the study. There were divergent views among the RECs concerning how the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education influenced their ability to lead in the RE learning area.

6.3.4.5.1 Formation as an educational leader while working as a REC. There was a perception among most participants that the experience of working as a REC improved their ability as an educational leader. Although much of a REC's work is managerial and concerned with the efficient oversight of existing processes in RE learning areas, they are also required to display educational leadership (Dowling, 2011). Educational leadership for RECs includes trying to influence other teachers in the RE learning area to achieve goals, instituting curriculum change and improving student outcomes through the analysis of data

(Connolly, James & Fertig, 2019; Hattie, 2013). For most RECs, leading the professional formation of RE teachers is a necessary part of their educational leadership, because of the large number of unqualified teachers who work in the learning area (Crotty, 2005).

One of the participants explained how while working as a REC he learnt by trial and error how to lead staff and influence change in their teaching practices, with the goal of improving student learning. He believed his experiences working to improve teachers' pedagogy and content knowledge had prepared him for senior leadership. He described how his experiences working with teachers in the RE learning area prepared him:

I kind of had to learn that that wasn't building their capacity and wasn't long term thinking. So, then learning how to then change the way we were doing things from me giving you resources to me teaching you what success would look like for the students and then helping to co-construct what that should look like in their classes. So that really did prepare me, I suppose for this sort of role, because that's essentially what I do now.

The participant progressed to become a deputy principal in the interval between the interviews. His experiences as a REC provided him with an appreciation that educational leadership involved instituting change in teaching practices with the goal of improving student learning.

6.3.4.5.2 Formation as faith leaders while working as RECs. As one of the few leadership positions in a Catholic school that is associated with the religious domain, working as a REC provides preparation for the faith dimension of senior leadership in a Catholic school. The experience of working as a REC is not equivalent to the demands of a principal's faith leadership. RECs do not have the same personal expectation as principals in terms of school community profile, systemic compliance and ultimate responsibility for the effectiveness of a school's RE program (CECWA, 2009, para. 94). However, research shows that principals who have fulfilled the role of REC, "acknowledged a comfortable transition into the religious leader[ship] of the school" (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009, p. 303).

This comfortable transition is likely due to both roles requiring a high level of theological literacy and personal faith formation (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Neidhart, 2014). It could also be related to the shared challenges in the positions. An example of a shared challenge is the regular interaction of both principals and RECs with students, parents

and occasionally teachers who see little value in the RE learning area (Poncini, 2018). The dominant culture in Australia is generally ambivalent towards religion and this is reflected in the views of some parents who send their children to Catholic schools (Hughes, 2007). In this social climate, both RECs and principals need to have the confidence to unequivocally explain Church teachings that may be perceived as counter-cultural by some members of Catholic school communities. One REC explained her experience of the counter-cultural nature of leadership as a REC:

And sometimes it can come through in staff as well, you know? Sometimes you can hear it from parents and sometimes you can hear things from staff. Like, for example, with the whole issue with same-sex marriage. Such a very sensitive, such an emotional issue, but staff, non-RE teachers, just remembering that they are in a Catholic school. Because that can quite undermine, obviously, what we're trying to do. And that makes it hard.

The discussion in the previous paragraphs is not intended to suggest that RECs should be automatically identified as future principals or receive priority for promotional positions over middle leaders from other learning areas. Several of the participants in this study did not aspire to become principals and it is possible that some RECs do not have the personal disposition required for the position. It is important, however, to acknowledge that formation as a faith leader is essential for those who aspire to become principals of Catholic schools. Researchers suggest that faith leadership is learnt in a similar manner to other forms of leadership, such as instructional leadership, through formal study and occupational experience (Gowdie, 2011; Ranson, 2006). It cannot be assumed that a teacher can lead in the religious realm because they have a strong personal faith formation. It is likely that principals who have worked as RECs will initially be more self-assured in providing leadership for a Catholic school community than principals who have not previously held a position that involved explicit religious leadership.

6.3.4.5.3 The study component of Accreditation to lead Religious Education. Most RECs expressed the view that completion of the study component of Accreditation to Lead Religious Education had a minimal influence on their capacity to lead other RE teachers. One of the RECs who had progressed to become a deputy principal in the interval between the interviews strongly criticised the accreditation process as overly repetitive and providing little preparation for senior leadership. Although some RECs were not overly critical of the study

component, there was a prevailing view that Accreditation to Lead Religious Education is not sufficiently focused upon leadership formation. This view may stem from the emphasis on theology and RE content in most of the accredited units, rather than educational leadership within the religious domain. Buchanan (2013) found that leaders of the RE learning area wish to engage in study that builds their leadership capacity. This desire was evident in the comments of participants in this study. One REC said that when he initially progressed to become a REC, he “had to learn a whole new skillset”. It may be that a greater emphasis on educational leadership in the units that can be studied for Accreditation to Lead Religious Education will provide this skillset.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a discussion of the experiences that formed and sustained the eight Generation Y RECs in this study who worked in Catholic secondary and composite schools in the Archdiocese of Perth. The discussion of the RECs’ personal and professional experiences is divided into four themes. The first theme of the research, Personal Experiences, focuses on experiences that occurred in the participants’ childhood, adolescence and early adulthood prior to their employment in a Catholic school. The second theme of Professional Formation Experiences as RE Teachers, describes the formative experiences of the participants from their initial employment in a Catholic school as a RE teacher to when they were first employed as a REC. Common experiences that formed the RECs when working as RE teachers were identification as future leaders, recruitment and mentoring. Themes Three and Four explain how the participants were sustained in their work while employed as RECs. The theme of Faith Formation Experiences describes how the RECs’ faith and theological knowledge formation were sustained through activities organised by their schools and the Office of CEWA. The experiences where the participants felt sustained or supported professionally in their work are discussed in the theme Professional Experiences that Sustain Generation Y RECs. This theme also provides a discussion of those experiences that improved the leadership capacity of the participants and prepared them for more senior leadership positions.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, a review of the research, recommendations and implications for further research are presented. Six recommendations are made in the areas of the identification, induction and leadership and faith formation of RECs. The chapter also provides a recommendation for the provision of teaching and learning resources for the RE

learning area. Finally, implications for future research into the faith formation of RE teachers and RECs are presented.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research, offers six recommendations arising from the study's findings and themes and presents suggestions for future research. The chapter begins with a description of the research problem and restates the one general and four specific research questions that were developed to explore the problem. A description of the research project's methodology and a summary of the findings and themes is then presented. Six recommendations are then offered for policy initiatives in the areas of the identification, faith formation and professional support of RE teachers and RECs. Finally, suggestions for future research into the faith formation of RE teachers and RECs are provided.

7.2 The Research Problem

A problem exists for Australian Catholic education systems. The low level of religious practice among Australian Generation Y Catholics is reflected among the teachers who are employed by Catholic schools (Dixon et al., 2013; NCEC, 2017). It is likely to be increasingly challenging for Catholic secondary and composite school principals to recruit Generation Y teachers with the requisite faith and professional formation to lead the RE learning area. In addition, Catholic education systems will face challenges in providing faith and professional formation that sustains Generation Y RECs in their position. The purpose of the research is to explore and describe the experiences that form and sustain secondary school RECs who are members of Generation Y.

A GRQ was developed to address the research problem: How is the professional and faith formation of Generation Y RECs formed and sustained through their personal and professional experiences? Following a review of literature that discusses the professional and faith formation of RECs, four SRQs were created to provide direction in the gathering of data to answer the GRQ. The four SRQs are:

- SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area?
- SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC?
- SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?

7.3 Methodology

The data were collected, collated and analysed using qualitative research methods. The research has as its epistemology social constructionism and uses the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The use of the narrative research methodology was an effective means of exploring the participants' faith and professional experiences from over the course of their lifetimes.

The collection of data occurred during two rounds of narrative interviews with eight Generation Y RECs who were employed in Catholic secondary and composite schools in the Archdiocese of Perth in WA. The first interviews occurred between March and May of 2018 and the second round of interviews between May and July of 2019. The interviews explored how the Christian faith of the participating Generation Y RECs was initially transmitted to them and how their faith was nurtured in Catholic communities during their childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. The participants' professional experiences from their periods of employment as RE teachers were also investigated as were the faith and professional formation experiences of the participants while employed as RECs.

7.4 Findings and Themes

Four research findings and four themes were created from the analysis of the interviews. The research findings suggest that all the RECs had personal experiences as children that formed them as people of faith and prepared them for a role leading in the RE learning area. However, the personal faith trajectory of the participants varied, with some participants having continued involvement in Catholic communities throughout their lives and others returning to the Catholic Church as adults. The findings and themes affirm the work of previous researchers who show that the experience of working in a Catholic school as a RE teacher can itself contribute to the formation of a person's faith (Gleeson et al., 2020; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). The findings and themes identify that the most significant factor that sustains Generation Y RECs in their work is supportive relationships with their principals, RE curriculum consultants and fellow RECs in professional networks. The research projects specific research questions, research findings and the corresponding themes and recommendations are presented in table 7.4.

Table 7.4

Overview of the specific research questions, corresponding findings, themes and recommendations

Specific Research Question	Specific Research Question Finding	Corresponding Theme	Corresponding Recommendations
SRQ1: How do the personal experiences of Generation Y RECs contribute to their formation as leaders of the RE learning area?	Finding One: The unique personal experiences of the RECs influenced their decisions to become heads of the RE Learning Area	Theme One: Personal experiences	Recommendation One: The creation of scholarship opportunities for students with experience in Catholic youth ministry
SRQ2: How do professional experiences as a Generation Y RE teacher influence one to become a REC?	Finding Two: The RECs' professional experiences while employed as RE teachers were a significant influence on their decisions to become leaders of the RE Learning Area	Theme Two: Professional formation experiences as RE teachers	Recommendation Two: The appointment of specialist RE teachers Recommendation Three: The production of teaching and learning resources for the Religion and Life courses
SRQ3: How is the faith formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?	Finding Three: There was inconsistency in the professional experiences provided by CEWA and schools to assist RECs in sustaining faith formation	Theme Three: Faith formation experiences	Recommendation Five: Training as facilitators of knowledge and faith formation Recommendation Six: The incorporation of faith formation into leadership programs
SRQ4: How is the professional formation of Generation Y RECs sustained through their ongoing professional experiences?	Finding Four: There was variety in the professional experience that sustained the RECs	Theme Four: Professional experiences that sustain Generation Y RECs	Recommendation Four: An induction process for RECs

7.5 Recommendations

Six recommendations drawn from the findings and themes of this study are now proposed. The creation of the recommendations was also influenced by research literature that addresses the identification and formation of leaders in Catholic schools. The recommendations have implications for the policies of Catholic universities and Catholic education commissions in the areas of the identification and professional formation of RE teachers. In addition, the recommendations may be adopted by Catholic education systems in Australia and Catholic universities to inform processes of identification, induction, faith formation and the development of RECs' leadership capacity. The recommendations have implications for possible future research into the faith formation experiences of teachers and leaders in Catholic schools.

7.5.1 Recommendation One: The creation of scholarship opportunities for students with experience in Catholic youth ministry. This recommendation arises from Theme One (Personal Experiences) and is intended to increase the number of beginning RE teachers who have both the requisite faith and professional formation for the position. Scholars have proposed the development of a mechanism to identify and recruit young Catholics with a history in CYM into working as RE teachers with the goal of enabling future progression to the position of REC (Rymarz, 2010; Rymarz & Belmonte, 2014). People with a history working in CYM are likely to have a personal faith formation concomitant with that mandated for RE teachers and RECs in WA Catholic schools (CECWA, 2009, para. 62; Rymarz, 2019). The creation of scholarship opportunities may result in more RE teachers with experiences in CYM progressing to become RECs.

The provision of scholarship opportunities could be made by Catholic universities in the form of part or full payment of tuition fees. It is recommended that scholarships be made available for students with a history in CYM who are commencing undergraduate study for the first time and to undergraduate students studying other specialities within schools of education. Prior to universities identifying and awarding scholarships, awareness would need to be raised among students and staff in Catholic secondary schools and universities about the existence of the scholarships. Students would then be encouraged to self-nominate for scholarship opportunities and selected based upon predetermined criteria.

7.5.2 Recommendation Two: The appointment of specialist Religious Education teachers. It is recommended that principals of Catholic secondary and composite schools appoint specialist RE teachers. This recommendation stems from Theme Two (Professional Experiences that Form RE Teachers). The primary purpose of this recommendation is to increase the number of RE teachers who have expert knowledge of the RE curriculum for Years 7–12 and who have the pedagogical skills to successfully communicate this information to students. A secondary consideration is that the appointment of specialist RE teachers will increase the number of teachers who have sufficient professional formation to progress to the position of REC. This recommendation is consistent with the expectation expressed in Church documents that RE should be taught by teachers who possess a thorough professional formation (CCE, 2007; SCCE, 1982).

Time working as a specialist RE teacher can contribute to an individual’s professional and faith formation (Hackett, 2007, 2010). Hackett (2006) observed that “the day-to-day experience of teaching is a challenging one and, if taken in the right perspective, can lead to professional growth” (p. 93). Further, regular professional conversations with fellow RE teachers and mentoring experiences with RECs can be powerful influences in teachers’ professional formation (Timperley, 2015). Professional interactions between RE teachers are more likely to occur in RE learning area offices comprised of specialist teachers, as opposed to in a model where most RE teachers are part time and dispersed around other learning areas. The appointment of specialist teachers does not guarantee that all RE teachers will possess a qualification in secondary RE or theology. However, it seems more likely for a specialist RE teacher to engage in the study of secondary RE or theology than it does for a part-time teacher who has the majority of their teaching in another learning area.

7.5.3 Recommendation Three: The production of teaching and learning resources for the Religion and Life courses. This recommendation is intended to support RE teachers and RECs in their programming and resourcing of the Year 11 and 12 RAL courses. This recommendation relates to Theme Two (Professional Experiences that Form RE Teachers) and Theme Four (Professional Experiences that Sustain RECs). At the time of writing in May 2020 the only resources produced by CEWA for the RAL courses were teacher background notes and teacher library guides. The production of resources for use by students in classrooms is largely the responsibility of individual RE learning areas. Teaching and

learning resources that require minimal adaption for use in the RAL courses could be produced by the Office of CEWA as a textbook or online resource.

The production of teaching and learning resources by the Office of CEWA for the RAL courses has several potential benefits. First, it will provide a degree of consistency across WA Catholic schools in terms of the quality of resources used to teach the RAL courses. Second, schools can be extended discretion regarding whether to use the resources produced by CEWA, as is currently the case with the use of resources produced for students in Years 7–10. This discretion is desirable as it serves to indicate the quality of the resources. For example, a reluctance on the part of RE learning areas to use resources produced by CEWA may indicate a need to refine and improve the materials. Third, research shows that the many beginning and part-time RE teachers in WA would benefit from using centrally produced teaching and learning resources (Rymarz & Engebretson, 2005). Resources produced by Catholic education offices that do not require adaption for use in the classroom can provide inexperienced teachers with the confidence that the content they are teaching is theologically correct. A centrally produced resource can also provide teachers with ideas for teaching and learning activities that use contemporary pedagogy.

7.5.4 Recommendation Four: An induction process for RECs. It is recommended that CEWA provide a formal induction process that is specific to RECs. This recommendation is intended to assist the transition of RE teachers into the position of REC. The recommendation arises from Theme Four (Professional Experiences that Sustain RECs). The experiences of the RECs in this research project align with research literature that suggests the initial period of employment as a REC can be stressful (Buchanan & Chapman, 2014; Fleming, 2002). Newly appointed RECs are likely to feel better equipped to fulfil their role competently if they receive an induction that provides information and advice about expectations, responsibilities, priorities and policies related to the position (Crotty, 2006; Long & Hemmings, 2006). RECs that work in WA Catholic schools are also likely to benefit from an induction process that provides an introduction to CEWA RE curriculum consultants, members of the RE and Faith Formation Team and experienced RECs from nearby schools. A formalised induction process would provide an opportunity for CEWA's expectations in relation to the programming and teaching of mandated content to be clarified and for SCSAWA programming requirements in Years 11 and 12 to be explained. Meeting with CEWA's RE curriculum consultants may also raise RECs' awareness that they can seek

future support and guidance from an external person who is an expert in the learning area. An induction could also provide information for those RECs who have delegated responsibility for the ministerial aspects of their schools. Further, during the induction process an informal approach could be taken to introducing beginning and experienced RECs with the intention of providing a potential networking contact.

7.5.5 Recommendation Five: Training as facilitators of knowledge and faith formation. It is recommended that CEWA develop a formation program for teachers who lead colleagues in theological knowledge or faith formation sessions. Such a program would ideally teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to be a facilitator of knowledge and faith formation within Catholic schools in WA. Training provided in this area could be acknowledged as a form of accreditation so that it is transferable when teachers move between schools. This recommendation relates to Theme Three (Faith Formation Experiences). Formation of those who lead faith and knowledge activities will serve as a form of regulation to ensure that presenters have the personal knowledge to present theological and pedagogical formation in a manner that faithfully follows the norms of the local bishop (SCCE, 1982, para. 59). Studies indicate that providing theological knowledge and faith formation to colleagues is challenging for teachers and that structured programs on how to do so are beneficial (Bracken, et al., 2016; Dowling, 2012). A formation program could be developed that introduces facilitators to the “attitudes associated with being a facilitator of formation” and that provides an introduction to the theological knowledge and pedagogy associated with adult learning (NCEC, 2015b, p. 9).

7.5.6 Recommendation Six: The incorporation of faith formation into leadership programs. It is recommended that faith formation experiences are incorporated into existing leadership programs administered by CEWA. This recommendation stems from Theme Three (Faith Formation). The primary aim of Recommendation Six is to assist future leaders in Catholic schools with their formation as faith leaders. A secondary aim is to ensure that formation as a faith leader is given the same status as formation in other areas of educational leadership such as curriculum, pedagogy and financial management (Bracken et al., 2016). The incorporation of faith formation into leadership programs would be intended to complement the existing intellectual study of Catholic models of leadership and Catholic

identity that exists in leadership programs administered by CEWA (CEWA, 2019c). Faith formation activities would be integrated with the intention of facilitating participants' "connection with Jesus Christ" through "opportunities for spiritual formation, reflection, discernment" (CEWA, 2016a, para. 6). Gowdie (2011, p. 335) observes that by connecting faith formation to broader leadership programs, aspiring leaders are likely to perceive faith formation as a core engagement and a professional responsibility, as opposed to an entirely personal matter. The aligning of faith formation with leadership programs may result in a greater number of RECs and other middle leaders with an explicitly religious leadership role being nominated by principals for these programs. The desirability of this was explained by one of the RECs: "I think it's really important to have a pathway there for people in the REC position, because you need faith leaders in the school and you need to draw upon the people who are already doing it."

7.6 Future Research

Catholic education systems would benefit from research into how intentional faith formation experiences can be structured so that they engage younger teachers with the intention of encouraging them to further explore their faith in personal experiences. This might be done by researching individual faith formation initiatives that exist in WA and describing their influence on the participants. The influence of the Catholic school as a faith community is also an area that requires further research. Knowledge of how Catholic school communities can create welcoming faith-filled environments that engage teachers in their faith and connect them with other Catholic communities would be beneficial. As was the case with two participants in this study, the Catholic school community may increasingly serve as the bridge or social connection back to other Catholic communities for future young RE teachers and RECs.

7.7 Conclusion

This study describes various personal and professional experiences that formed and sustained eight Generation Y RECs working in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Perth. The researcher has attempted to understand REC experiences as understood by the study participants. During this process it became apparent that the participants' personal experiences, where their faith was formed as children and adolescents significantly influenced their capacity to lead RE learning areas. It was as children and adolescents that all

the participants developed their experiential content knowledge that allowed them to teach and lead as people of faith. However, it is evident from the life histories of several RECs in this study that progression to religious leadership for some RE teachers will be a gradual process. Not all future RECs will arrive at schools with the faith and professional formation to progress to the position. For some RE teachers and possibly RECs the faith formation experienced as a teacher in a Catholic school will be a significant influence in their journey to leading the RE learning area.

This research has provided descriptions of some of the challenges of working as a REC and the ways that schools and Catholic education systems help sustain RECs in their position. Although the RECs had unique views on how they were sustained in their work, an area of commonality among all the participants was the belief that supportive relationships sustained them in their work. A sense of professional improvement and in some instances career progression were also important factors sustaining the RECs. Perhaps the most significant characteristic shared by the RECs was their sense of vocation and belief in the contribution of their work to the missions of their schools, and more broadly the Catholic Church.

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Appendices

Appendix A

First Interview: Questions and the Corresponding Research Question

- a. Can you describe your role and how long you have been in the position? (RQ 1)
- b. How did you initially become a person of Christian faith? (RQ 1)
- c. Can you describe how you became a REC? (RQs 1, 2)
- d. Throughout your life, what are the personal experiences where your Christian faith has been formed? (RQ 1)
- e. How has your Christian faith been formed during professional experiences while you have been employed in a Catholic school? (RQs 2, 3)
- f. Can you describe the personal experiences during your life that have influenced you to become a REC in a Catholic secondary school? (RQs 2, 3)
- g. Can you describe the professional experiences during your life that have influenced you to become a REC in a Catholic secondary school? (RQs 2, 3)
- f. What are the main challenges of your position? (RQs 3,4)
- h. How are you supported in meeting these challenges at a school and systemic level? (RQs 3,4)

Appendix B

Second Interview: Questions and the Corresponding Research Question

- a. Can you tell me what has happened with your work since we last spoke? (RQs 3, 4)
- b. Can you describe some of the challenges you have faced in your work? (RQs 3, 4)
- c. How have you been supported in dealing with these challenges? (RQs 3, 4)
- d. Can you describe any experiences or relationships that sustain you in your work?
(RQs 3, 4)
- e. Can you describe any faith formation experiences you have attended since we last spoke? (RQ 3)
- f. How has the experience of working as a REC changed you personally and professionally? (RQ 4)
- g. How do you feel working as a REC prepared you for your new role? (RQ4, this question asked to participants who had progressed to a more senior leadership role).

Appendix C

University of Notre Dame, Australia Ethical Clearance



19 Mowat Street (PO Box 1225) Fremantle WA 6959
+61 8 9433 0555 | enquiries@nd.edu.au

27 March 2017

Professor Chris Hackett & Mr Dirk Gleghorn
School of Education
The University of Notre Dame Australia
Fremantle Campus

Dear Chris and Dirk,


Reference Number: 017041F

Project Title: "The personal and professional experiences that influence Generation Y Catholics to become Religious Education Coordinators."

Thank you for submitting the above project for Low Risk ethical review. Your application has been reviewed by a sub-committee of the university's Human Research Ethics Committee in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, updated May 2015). I am pleased to advise that ethical clearance has been granted for this proposed study.

All research projects are approved subject to standard conditions of approval. Please read the attached document for details of these conditions.

On behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee, I wish you well with your study.
Yours sincerely,


Research Ethics Officer
Research Office

cc: A/Prof Dianne Chambers, SRC Chair, School of Education

Fremantle Campus: 19 Mowat Street, Fremantle WA 6959
Sydney Campus: 141 The University of Notre Dame Drive, Sydney NSW 2008

Fremantle

19 Mowat Street | Fremantle WA 6959

ABN 69 330 643 210 | CRICOS Provider Code: 01032F

nd.edu.au

Appendix D

Catholic Education Western Australia Permission to Commence Research

10 July 2017

Mr Dirk Gleghorn
3 Athel Road
WOODLANDS WA 6018



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Dear Mr Gleghorn

**THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCE GENERATION Y
CATHOLICS TO BECOME RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATORS
CEWA REFERENCE RP2017/33**

Thank you for your completed application received 12 June 2017, whereby the primary aim of this study is to identify and describe the personal and professional experiences that influence Gen Y Catholics to become RECs.

I give in principle support for the selected Catholic schools in Western Australia to participate in this valuable study. However, consistent with Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA) policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the individual principal and staff members. A copy of this letter must be provided to principals when requesting their participation in the research.

The conditions of CEWA approval are as follows:

1. A final list of the Catholic schools you wish to participate in this research project is to be provided to CEWA before you can approach each school.
2. As your research project is being conducted for longer than one year, a completion of annual reports as well as a final report are to be forwarded to CEWA.

Responsibility for quality control of ethics and methodology of the proposed research resides with the institution supervising the research. CEWA notes that the University of Notre Dame Australia Human Research Ethics Committee has granted permission for the duration of this research project (Reference Number: 017041F).

Any changes to the proposed methodology will need to be submitted for CEWA approval prior to implementation. The focus and outcomes of your research project are of interest to CEWA. It is therefore a condition of approval that the research findings of this study are forwarded to CEWA.

Further enquiries may be directed to Jane Gostelow at gostelow.jane@ceo.wa.edu.au or (08) 6380 5118.

I wish you all the best with your research.

Yours sincerely



Appendix E

PRINCIPAL'S INFORMATION SHEET

The Experiences That Form and Sustain Generation Y Religious Education Coordinators

Dear [REDACTED]

Permission is requested from you to conduct the research project described below at [REDACTED] College.

What is the project about?

The aim of the research is to explore how Generation Y (Gen Y) Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) believe their personal and professional experiences over the course of their lives have formed and sustained them as religious leaders in Catholic secondary schools. To understand why Gen Y Catholics are drawn to a position of religious leadership in a Catholic secondary school, the proposed study will investigate the life experiences of RECs that have nurtured or formed their Christian faith. The study will also examine how the Christian faith and professional growth of RECs have been sustained while they have worked as RECs.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Dirk Gleghorn and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle. The research supervisor is Professor Chris Hackett, Associate Dean (Religious Education).

What will the research involve?

If you provide consent for this study to commence at [REDACTED] College, the REC at the College will be contacted by email and provided with a Participant Information Sheet which describes the methodology and research goals of the study. The Participant Information Sheet will also provide an explanation of what RECs are required to do in order to participate in the research. A Participant Consent Form will then be provided to the REC if they express interest in participating in the research.

The information beneath is a summary of what the REC will be asked to do if they choose to participate in the research:

- They will be asked to participate in two, one-on-one interviews that will be audio-recorded. There will be an interval of eighteen months between each interview.
- The two, one-on-one interviews will last between forty five minutes and one hour.
- In the interviews, the participants will be asked questions that are intended to elicit extended responses. The questions will relate to the personal and professional experiences that have led them to their current positions of religious leadership and the experiences in their lives where their Christian faith has been formed. The interviewer will encourage the participants to provide in depth information about experiences from their childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- The interviews will be conducted at [REDACTED] College or if the participants prefer, by telephone or Skype. Interviews will be conducted at a time negotiated by the participants and the researcher.
- After the transcript for each interview is produced, participants will be provided with a copy and asked to provide critical feedback on the accuracy of what has been recorded.

Are there any risks associated with RECs participating in this project?

Participant confidentiality is a fundamental goal of the research project. To achieve this, the participants in the research will be given pseudonyms in any published material and identifying information such as parish and school names will not be reported. However, the possibility exists that some of the participants and the schools they are employed at, could be identified by readers of the published findings. The study's small sample of eight to ten participants, means it is possible that a reader who is familiar with Western Australian Catholic secondary schools, may be able to identify participants and their schools by the experiences they recount.

What are the benefits of the research project?

It is probable that the findings of the proposed research will inform the recruitment practices of Catholic secondary school principals. The research will identify the personal and professional experiences of Gen Y Catholics that are associated with a personal religious conversion or a deepening of religious belief. This knowledge may be used by principals to identify prospective RE teachers who might experience a deepening of their religious faith and practice by being a member of a Catholic school community.

The findings of the study may also inform the faith formation policy of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia and possibly, other Catholic Education Commissions in Australia. It is likely that the findings of the research will give an insight into what constitutes a meaningful faith formation activity for Gen Y Catholics and assist in the future planning of these activities. The research findings will potentially contribute to the knowledge of what professional experiences and faith formation activities sustain Gen Y RECs in their positions and assist in their development as leaders in Catholic schools.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw consent for the research to occur at [REDACTED] College at any time, without discrimination or prejudice. If you withdraw consent, any information provided by a participant from your College will be erased.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

Information gathered from participants will be held in strict confidence. This confidence will only be broken if required by law. During the study, only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the audio-recordings of the interviews and the digital and printed interview transcripts. Once the study is completed and examined, the audio-recordings of the interviews will be deleted. The interview transcripts will be de-identified and stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle for five years. After 5 years the electronic interview transcripts will be deleted and printed interview transcripts will be shredded. The final report of the study will be published as a thesis and a journal article. A summary of the research findings will be provided to the principals of the Catholic secondary schools that had a REC participate in the study. The Executive Director and the Director of Religious Education at Catholic Education Western Australia will also be provided with a summary of the study's findings.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

After the research has been examined, you will be provided with a summary of the study's findings by email. You will also be provided with an invitation to meet with me to discuss the study's findings.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me by telephoning [REDACTED] or by emailing [REDACTED]. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor, Professor

Chris Hackett by telephoning [REDACTED] or by emailing [REDACTED] My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

What if I have a concern or complaint?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame Australia (Reference Number: 017041F) and has received in principle support from the Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia (Reference Number: RP2017/33). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact The University of Notre Dame's Ethics Officer on 9433 0943 or by emailing research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

How do I provide consent for this research?

If you are happy to provide consent for this research to occur at [REDACTED] College please sign both copies of the attached consent form, keep one for yourself and email the other copy to me at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Dirk Gleghorn

Appendix F

PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT FORM

The Experiences That Form and Sustain Generation Y Religious Education Coordinators

- I give consent for the research project to occur at [REDACTED] College.
- I have read the Principal's Information Sheet provided and I have been given a full explanation of the purpose of this research project and what is involved in the interviews.
- I understand that if the REC at [REDACTED] College chooses to participate in the study he or she will be interviewed on two occasions and that the interviews will be audio-recorded.
- The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained possible risks that may arise as a result of participation in the interviews and how these risks will be managed.
- I understand that I may withdraw my consent for the research project to occur at [REDACTED] College at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information provided by the REC will be treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required by law.
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published, provided no identifying information is disclosed about participants or [REDACTED] College.

Name of principal			
Signature of principal		Date	

- I confirm that I have provided the Principal's Information Sheet concerning this research project to [REDACTED], explained what providing consent for this research involves and have answered all questions asked of me.

Signature of researcher		Date	
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Appendix G

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Experiences That Form and Sustain Generation Y Religious Education Coordinators

Dear [REDACTED]

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The aim of the research is to explore how Generation Y (Gen Y) Religious Education Coordinators (RECs) believe their personal and professional experiences over the course of their lives have formed and sustained them as religious leaders in Catholic secondary schools. To understand why Gen Y Catholics are drawn to a position of religious leadership in a Catholic secondary school, the proposed study will investigate the life experiences of RECs that have nurtured or formed their Christian faith. The study will also examine how the Christian faith and professional growth of RECs have been sustained while they have worked as RECs.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Dirk Gleghorn and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle. The research supervisor is Professor Chris Hackett, Associate Dean (Religious Education).

What will I be asked to do?

If you consent to take part in this research project, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the tasks you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

The information beneath explains what you will be asked to do if you choose to participate in the research:

- You will be asked to participate in two, one-on-one interviews that will be audio-recorded. There will be an interval of eighteen months between each interview.
- The two, one-on-one interviews will last for between forty five minutes and one hour.
- In the interviews, you will be asked questions that are intended to elicit extended responses. The questions will relate to the personal and professional experiences that you believe have influenced you to become a REC and the experiences in your life where your Christian faith has been formed and sustained.
- The interviews will be conducted at your place of employment, or if you prefer, by telephone or Skype. Interviews will be conducted at a time negotiated by you and the researcher.
- After the transcript for each interview is produced, you will be provided with a copy and asked to provide critical feedback on the accuracy of what has been recorded.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

Participant confidentiality is a fundamental goal of the research project. To achieve this, all participants in the research will be given pseudonyms in any published material and identifying information such as parish and school names will not be reported. However, the possibility exists that some of the participating RECs and the schools they are employed at, could be identified by readers of the published findings. The study's small sample of eight to ten RECs, means it is possible that a reader who is familiar with Western Australian Catholic secondary schools, may be able to identify RECs and their schools by the experiences they recount.

What are the benefits of the research project?

It is probable that the findings of the proposed research will inform the recruitment practices of Catholic secondary school principals. The research will identify the personal and professional experiences of Gen Y Catholics that are associated with a personal religious conversion or a deepening of religious belief. This knowledge may be used by principals to identify prospective RE teachers who might experience a deepening of their religious faith and practice by being a member of a Catholic school community.

The findings of the study may also inform the faith formation policy of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia and possibly, other Catholic Education Commissions in Australia. It is likely that the findings of the research will give an insight into what constitutes a meaningful faith formation activity for Gen Y Catholics and assist in the future planning of these activities. The research findings will potentially contribute to the knowledge of what professional experiences and faith formation activities sustain RECs in their positions and assist in their development as a leaders in a Catholic school.

What if I change my mind?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without discrimination or prejudice. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be permanently deleted.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

Information that you provide in the interviews will be held in strict confidence. This confidence will only be broken if required by law. During the study, only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the audio-recordings of the interviews and the digital and printed interview transcripts.

Once the study is completed and examined, the audio-recordings of the interviews will be deleted. The interview transcripts will be de-identified and stored securely in the School of Education at The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle for five years. After five years the electronic interview transcripts will be deleted and printed interview transcripts will be shredded. The final report of the study will be published as a thesis and a journal article. A summary of the research findings will be provided to the principals of the Catholic secondary schools that had a REC participate in the study. The Executive Director and the Director of Religious Education at Catholic Education Western Australia, will also be provided with a summary of the study's findings.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

After the research has been examined, you will be provided with a summary of the study's findings by email. This email will also provide an invitation for you to meet with me to discuss the study's findings.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact me by telephoning [REDACTED] or by emailing [REDACTED]. Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor, Professor Chris Hackett by telephoning [REDACTED] or by emailing [REDACTED]. My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

What if I have a concern or complaint?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Notre Dame, Australia (Reference Number: 017041F) and has received in principle support from the Executive Director of Catholic Education Western Australia (Reference Number: RP2017/33). If you have a concern or complaint regarding the ethical conduct of this research project and would like to speak to an independent person, please contact The University of Notre Dame's Ethics Officer on (+61 8) [REDACTED] or by email at research@nd.edu.au. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and will be fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

How do I sign up to participate?

If you are happy to participate, please sign both copies of the consent form, keep one for yourself and email the other to me at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Dirk Gleghorn

Appendix H

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Experiences That Form and Sustain Generation Y Religious Education Coordinators

- I agree to take part in this research project.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet provided and have been given a full explanation of the purpose of this research project and what is involved in the interviews.
- I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interviews will be audio-recorded and the content of the interviews transcribed.
- The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained possible risks that may arise as a result of the interviews and how these risks will be managed.
- I understand that I do not have to answer specific questions if I do not want to and may withdraw from participating in the project at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information I provide will be treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.
- I agree that any research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name or other identifying information is not disclosed.

Name of participant			
Signature of participant		Date	

- I confirm that I have provided the Participant Information Sheet concerning this research project to the above participant, explained what participating involves and have answered all questions asked of me.

Signature of researcher		Date	
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