

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON COMMUNITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OLDER
PEOPLE LIVING IN RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES**

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Abstract

This research investigates community from the perspective of older people living in care homes. There is limited literature about the experiences of older people from the viewpoint of older people themselves, and the literature that is available tends to focus on quality of life as a whole. These earlier studies identify that community is an important part of quality of life; however, what this means for older people is not explored in depth. Using data from older people living in four care homes, the research identifies six zones of community: the care home, the view from the window, the local area, the nation and the world, creation, and another dimension. The analysis of the findings in each zone draws on a range of disciplines, and the theological reflection builds on several approaches, including liberation theology, sacramental theology and eco-theology. The thesis argues that right relationships lead us towards shalom within and across all the zones of community. Each data chapter focuses on a different aspect of shalom, namely hospitality, freedom, living in harmony with creation, and being drawn by wisdom into right relation across a range of dimensions. This thesis:

- builds on earlier studies that identify the importance of community by exploring what community means for older people;
- proposes a model to understand community from the perspective of older people living in care homes;
- develops a theological understanding of community in this context;
- makes practical recommendations regarding community and care homes.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

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The Author

My professional background is in Speech and Language Therapy. I completed a BSc in Speech Pathology and Therapy at De Montfort University in 1994. I worked clinically as a Speech and Language Therapist from 1994 until 2012, initially with a mixed adult and paediatric caseload, before specialising in work with children. From 2012 to the publication date I have worked part time in leadership and management positions within the NHS.

I was accredited as a local preacher in the Methodist Church in June 2007. I completed an MA in Contextual Theology at Luther King House Educational Trust in November 2015, which included a dissertation about adult Christian learning in the church.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

When my neighbour moved to a care home, I perceived that her connection to the wider community had ceased, and this troubled me. Several years later, my MA dissertation subject was adult Christian learning in the church, and as part of this the congregation engaged in a whole church learning experience where we considered how we could be church in our local community. This culminated in us offering to lead a 'Songs of Praise' service in a local care home, and an ongoing partnership between the care home and the church ensued. Through this partnership, the community network that some older people were a part of was strengthened, and new connections were created for others. However, on reflection it occurred to me that we were quick to 'do to' older people, rather than beginning by listening to what older people want. I wondered how often this was the case. Alongside this, another encounter caused me to consider how older people in care homes access their local communities. While queuing for lunch in a supermarket café, I noticed a gentleman in a wheelchair who was being supported by a carer wearing a uniform from a local care home. I was disturbed by her interaction with him, which was so concerning that it provoked two other members of the public to intervene. After much deliberation, I contacted the local safeguarding team, but commented that I was concerned that reporting the incident may lead to the care home deciding to reduce trips out from the home. The safeguarding team did investigate, and, as part of their investigation, commented on the importance of links to the wider community. Through this and other experiences I became interested in community within and beyond care homes. I hypothesised that moving to a care home reduces connections to the wider community and that some of the valuable functions of community would no longer be fulfilled. I also hypothesised, based on past workplace experiences, that listening to older people would lead to recommendations about how to develop community links beyond care homes. I recognised that it was important to listen to older people, to learn about their perceptions of community and what is important to them, rather than focusing on what other people think might be important for older people. I also recognised that

approaching this from a theological perspective would provide a rich understanding of community while also providing a theological rationale to underpin practical recommendations. My fieldwork was completed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this thesis is not about community in the light of the pandemic. However, as I was writing the thesis during this pandemic, I will make references to it. My research captures a moment in time prior to the pandemic which will not be recovered, but the value of my research is that it highlights the importance of community, and stands as a challenge that must be addressed within the new normal in which we now live.

In this chapter I provide background information about the context of the research, an analytical framework, an outline of the method, an overview of the findings and an introduction to the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

The PhD was funded by Methodist Homes (MHA). MHA is a Christian charity providing services and accommodation for older people in Britain, including residential care homes. MHA describe how they support people by, "...creating opportunities to age well in caring and supportive communities" (MHA, 2014, p. 2). This research will have an impact on informing future practice in MHA homes as recommendations are made about communities within and beyond the home.

The research is also of wider national interest. The Public Service and Demographic Change Report (House of Lords, 2013) highlighted that the UK population is ageing, and considers how the needs of an ageing population can be met. There is a call for reform of social care for older people (NHS Confederation, 2021). The Department of Health and Social Care recently published a white paper proposing reform of health and social care (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). However, the implications of this are unclear. MHA is one organisation

lobbying the government for change, including involving older people in the co-design of care (MHA, 2021a).

The value of community is recognised through regulatory bodies. Care Quality Commission (CQC) documentation relating to Adult Social Care Services, downloaded in July 2021 gives the following example of outstanding practice:

The service is an important part of its community. It develops community links to reflect the changing needs and preferences of the people who use it (Care Quality Commission, n.d., pp. 67-68).

This research provides an understanding of how care homes can translate these principles into practice and what the impact of this is for older people. The social isolation and separation caused by lockdowns during the pandemic has further highlighted the importance of community connections for people living in care homes.

A feature of this research is that it primarily focuses on the voices of older people. Bowers et al. state that

older people's voices within the literature...are subdued, or represented or illustrated through other people's experiences and perspectives (carers, care workers, families, professionals). Very little comes directly from older people themselves (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 16).

Giving older people a voice in relation to their experiences is vital:

Until older people are positioned as authors of knowledge about themselves, rather than the objects of knowledge by experts, the goal of addressing older people's rights and well-being, of extending inclusion and reducing exclusion will remain elusive (Vera-Sanso et al., 2014, p. 208).

This research listens to older people and makes recommendations based on this, while also recognising the limited generalisability due to the small sample size.

1.2 Analytical framework

This research gives older people a voice about their community experiences, analyses their experiences, and brings this into dialogue with theology in order to gain a theological understanding of community and to consider the theological implications in terms of recommendations for practical application. This has the potential to lead to transformation of community experiences for older people. This framework is based on Green's theological spiral, which he states has much in common with the Pastoral Cycle developed by liberation theologians in Latin America (Green, 2009, p. 18). Graham, Walton and Ward (2010) and Green (2009) comment on how the Pastoral Cycle was developed in Latin America, building on work by Catholic workers in Europe. They describe how the process of the cycle includes practical engagement, analysis, theological reflection and action (Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, pp. 188-190; Green, 2009, p. 18). This structured approach matches my natural style as well as meeting my desires to begin with the voices of older people and for the research to be transformative.

Green's theological spiral begins with experience, then exploration of the situation, followed by theological reflection, leading to a response, creating a new situation which can then be explored; the spiral then continues (Green, 2009). In relation to my own research, development of a new situation will be dependent on how people respond to the research findings I present and is beyond the scope of the thesis. However, engaging in this process has affected my personal relationships with people in care homes, and I have aimed for larger scale transformation as I have disseminated my findings at conferences and church meetings.

Based on this framework, the following research goals were identified:

1. To identify older people's perceptions of their current community networks in terms of structure and function within and beyond their care home;
2. To analyse these findings drawing on relevant disciplines;

3. To bring the data and analysis into dialogue with theology;
4. To make practical recommendations which have the potential to transform situations.

1.3 Outline of thesis

In this chapter I introduce the research background, analytical framework and research goals.

In chapter two, I explore the literature relating to this area. Chapter three provides an overview and evaluation of the methodology. Chapter four summarises the results and introduces a geographical model of community incorporating several community zones. In chapters five to eight I argue that right relationships contribute to shalom in each of the different zones. The data chapters are based on these zones and are organised as follows:

- Chapter five relates to community within the care home, and I demonstrate how relationships contribute to the creation of hospitable environments.
- In chapter six I argue that supporting older people to engage with windows on the world, including rooms with a view and links to the local area, the nation and the world, contributes to freedom in the community.
- In chapter seven I argue that right relationships are required in order to live in harmony with creation.
- In chapter eight, as I explore another dimension, I argue that wisdom leads us towards right relationships with ourselves, with God, with others and with the world in which we live.

In each of these chapters, I present the data in the form of a dialogue between myself and the participants. The data includes their taped comments during interviews and informal un-taped conversations and observations. I then draw on a range of disciplines to analyse the data before developing my argument through theological reflection.

In chapter nine I draw conclusions and discuss potential areas of transformation arising from the research as I reflect on aspects of good practice revealed by the research and how they can be developed further.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical overview of the literature relating to the research question. The review highlights how my research relates to earlier studies pertaining to older people, community and care homes. I will demonstrate how the literature has been used to formulate a framework for exploring community, which in turn forms the basis of this enquiry. I will also outline theological literature which can be considered in relation to older people and community. This is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis, and further literature review is woven throughout the data chapters.

2.2 The fourth age

As my research relates to older people living in residential care homes it includes people who, according to MacKinlay's definition, are in the fourth age. MacKinlay defines the fourth age as "the age of frailty, dependency and being in need of care" (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 11). There is very little research from the perspective of older people at this stage of life. This may partly be due to perceived challenges of interviewing people who are very frail (Fowler-Davis, Silvester, Barnett, Farndon, & Ismail, 2019, p. 1). It may also reflect cultural attitudes to older people, as it may be assumed that other people are better placed to speak on their behalf. Bowers et al. comment that other people often make the decision for older people to move into care homes, suggesting that older people's lack of voice contributes to lack of control over decisions that are made concerning them (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 34).

2.3 The voices of older people

Although there is limited literature from the perspective of older people, there is some, which I was able to build on. Albans and Johnson listened to the voices of older people in care homes, as heard by chaplains. They did not specifically explore community, but the importance

of community was highlighted in some of the 'testimonies of age' (Albans & Johnson, 2013, pp. 77-135).

There is some literature about quality of life, which includes the voices of older people, and highlights that community and relationships are important to older people. In assisted living facilities, certain domains were identified by older people as contributing to quality of life, including psychological well-being, independence, social relationships, meaningful activities, care, comfort, cognitive function, sleep, food, connectedness to community outside the facility, physical function, religion/spirituality, physical environment, safety and security (Ball et al., 2000, p. 312). One study relating to care homes demonstrates that a sense of self, the care environment, relationships and activities were important to older people (Tester, Hubbard, Downs, Macdonald, & Murphy, 2004, p. 212). In another study, older people and carers identified the following areas of importance: personalised support and care, meaningful relationships, personal authority and control, meaningful daily and community life, personal identity and self-esteem, home and personal surroundings (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 7). These studies identify that community is important, but as it is not the focus of these studies it is not explored in depth.

Earlier studies, which include the voices of older people alongside family members and carers, have explored relationships in care homes. The development of reciprocal relationships has been highlighted as a factor that contributes to a positive experience of community (Davies, 2003, pp. 233-234). Brown-Wilson highlighted the value of reciprocal exchanges to further encourage community participation (Brown-Wilson, 2009, p. 185). Reciprocal relationships are regarded as contributing to a sense of community (Brown-Wilson, Davies, & Nolan, 2009, p. 1041). Terms including 'relationship centred care' (Nolan, Brown, Davies, Nolan, & Keady, 2006; Tresolini & the Pew-Fetzer Task Force, 1994) and 'relational care' (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 121) represent approaches to care that advocate the development of

reciprocal relationships. Although acknowledging that reciprocal relationships are important for communities in care homes, these earlier studies do not fully explore who older people perceive to be part of their networks or what functions these relationships fulfil. Where these studies focus mainly on the community within the care home setting, my research builds on these studies by considering the structure and function of community in greater depth and exploring community connections beyond the care home.

2.4 Biological factors

There are several biological factors which may contribute to overall frailty as people age (Bagley, Davis, Latimer, & Kipling, 2011, p. 29; Cox et al., 2014, pp. 30, 32, 61-62). It is beyond the scope of this research to consider these diseases, except to acknowledge that the associated symptoms may adversely affect social participation. It is noted that, within care homes, interaction may occur less for those who are frail or cognitively impaired (Evans, 2009, p. 75), although this observation is not explored from the perspective of the older people themselves. While my research only includes people with capacity to consent, I do include older people who are frail and, in doing so, ascertain their perceptions about community. Their insights add to the observations made by others.

2.5 Reluctant communities

One barrier to community formation within care homes is that residents have not chosen their need to live in a home. Mowat found that care homes are 'reluctant communities' in that the residents would rather not be part of that community. She emphasised the role of chaplains in supporting and building community both within the care home and in the wider community (Mowat, 2014, p. 31). Her research was from the perspective of chaplains rather than residents.

2.6 The wider community

The value of community networks beyond care homes has been recognised in the literature.

Joan Erikson states:

Something is terribly wrong. Why has it been necessary to send our elders “out of this world” into some facility so remote in order to live out their lives in physical care and comfort? (J. Erikson, 1998, p. 118)

She articulates the potential exclusion from wider society due to the move to a care home.

Bowers et al. found that being part of the local community was important to older people (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 43); however, this was not explored in depth. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation comments that while there are some examples of good practice, and care homes are willing to engage with local communities, there is often a lack of support from local communities and “many care homes feel like ‘islands of the old’, isolated from families and the community at large” (Owen & Meyer, 2012, p. 64). My research builds on these earlier studies by specifically exploring how older people perceive their connections beyond the care home.

The literature shows that older people’s involvement in the wider community may have reduced prior to moving to the care home (Oldman & Quilgars, 1999, p. 375), and that economic factors may have contributed to this (Vera-Sanso et al., 2014, p. 201). Gilleard and Higgs assert that institutionalised ageism and cultural attitudes negatively affect older people, contributing to marginalisation (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, pp. 59-64, 139). Finally, psychological development may affect how people engage in community as they grow older. Tornstam’s theory of gerotranscendence suggests that older people become increasingly selective about relationships and desire times of solitude (Tornstam, 2005, pp. 188-189).

2.7 A framework for investigating community

Prior to exploring community from the perspective of older people, it was necessary to identify a framework for investigating community structure and functions.

In order to investigate the structure of community I drew on principles from two approaches:

- Social network analysis.
- Identification of communities based on common characteristics.

Social network analysis considers the relationships that people form and the networks that exist between individuals and groups. It developed as a way of understanding communities (Gilchrist, 2009, p. 50). This approach allows for an individual's links with other people to be identified and information about the nature of those relationships to be gathered. I also drew on the idea that these networks may be based around common characteristics, such as geographical place, interest and identity, or other shared characteristics (Gilchrist, 2009, p. 21). I combined these approaches to construct a framework to investigate the structure of community within the interviews. The development of the framework is explored within the methodology chapter. As the concept of place emerged as being important to the participants, I ultimately used a geographical model (Rowles, 1978, p. 168) to form the basis of my analysis. I expand on this as I discuss the results in Chapter 4.

As well as finding out about the structure of people's communities, I wanted to investigate which functions of community are important to them and what the potential benefits of community might be. I hypothesised that community might give people a sense of identity and companionship, and that there might be benefits not only for individuals but for society as a whole. I turned to social capital theory to explore this further. Vorhaus explores the use of the term 'function' in relation to social capital, suggesting that one way of analysing function can be to focus on 'identifying beneficial effects' (Vorhaus, 2014, p. 189). This informs my use of

the word 'function' within my research. I explore some potential benefits of community rather than explaining the effects or analysing them further in terms of social capital theory.

Social capital theory shows the benefits of social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Putman, 2000) and is associated with wellbeing (Siegler, 2014, p. 2). Social capital is "the value added through networking processes, and resides within the web of ties and linkages that we call community" (Gilchrist, 2009, p. 11). Scrivens and Smith classified social capital into four areas:

- Personal relationships
- Social network support
- Civic engagement
- Trust and cooperative norms

(Scrivens & Smith, 2013, pp. 19-20)

Positive functions of community can be found within each of these areas, as outlined below.

Personal relationships, as an aspect of social capital, concern the "structure and nature of people's personal networks" (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 21). Benefits of good personal relationships include a sense of belonging and wellbeing (Siegler, 2014, p. 6), where strong and weak ties are both important (Granovetter, 1973). My research identifies the range of relationships people have, and what these mean to the participants.

Social network support relates to how people feel supported (Siegler, 2014, p. 8). This is considered beneficial for health and wellbeing (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 26). Weiss proposed that wellbeing requires specific types of relationships, that people might value each type of relationship differently, and that this might change throughout someone's life. These relationships provide different types of social support. The six types of relationship provision he outlines are: attachment, social integration, opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of worth, a sense of reliable alliance and the obtaining of guidance (Weiss, 1974, pp. 23-25). A

sense of attachment gives people a sense of being at home (Weiss, 1974, p. 23). Weiss's relationship provisions are well established and his hypothesis has been validated with a range of different groups across the lifespan (Walker O' Neal, Mancini, & Degraff, 2016, p. 3). Community is also important for spiritual growth and development (Coleman, 2004, p. 112); spiritual support should therefore be considered another aspect of social network support.

Civic engagement relates to positively influencing your own community through activities such as volunteering, political involvement and working for the good of the community (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 28; Siegler, 2014, p. 11). This is considered important for wellbeing and developing a cohesive society (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 30).

Trust and cooperative norms relate to levels of trust and willingness to help each other, which again is associated with wellbeing (Siegler, 2014, p. 14). Behaviours built on this benefit people in the community, particularly when trust extends beyond those we know well, and includes a reasonable level of trust in strangers, which is sufficient to allow cooperation (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 34).

These areas of social capital cannot be fully separated; however, they do provide a useful starting point from which to explore positive community functions, which I will do in the next chapter.

The literature does highlight potential negative effects of community and strong social capital. One example of this is where there is strong bonding capital in the absence of bridging capital. Bonding capital strengthens the links within a group, leading to strong group identity, but without bridging capital providing links to other groups can lead to sectarianism and ethnocentrism (Putman, 2000, pp. 22-23). I did not ask participants about the negative

elements of community, but it was helpful to be aware that being in community is not always a positive experience.

2.8 Theology

I built upon a number of theological approaches and themes in order to explore community from the perspective of older people. I will introduce these in relation to the themes of the research; however, they will be explored in more depth within the data chapters. I will consider:

- Creation
- Models of community
- Older age and community
- Wellbeing and community
- Spiritual growth in community

2.8.1 Creation

Theological approaches to creation include sacramental theology, eco-theology and Indigenous spiritualities. Theologians such as McFague (1993), Ruether (1992) and Moules (2015a) explore these themes. Theology in this area includes our relationship with God and with elements in the natural world and with the earth as a whole. These relationships are within our community structure and form part of our community experience. These theological approaches provide a basis for considering the relationships with creation described by the participants.

2.8.2 Models of community

The literature review highlighted that older people are potentially marginalised from their communities. To counteract this, it is helpful to consider models of community that aim to

draw people into relationship. Feminist theologians are amongst those who explore such models of community. One way this is envisioned is in the structure of community as a web of non-hierarchical relationships. Miller-McLemore uses the concept of a living human web, asserting that all within the web must be empowered to speak (Miller-McLemore, 1996, p. 21). She highlights the value of cooperation and the presence of God as people meet together (Miller-McLemore, 1996, pp. 22-23). Grey also uses the image of a web as she longs for right relationships between God, humankind and all creation, and states: “the web of life is creation, sustained by God’s love” (Grey, 2003, p. 123). These images provide a theological foundation for considering community structure as including relationships with God, each other and the whole of creation. God is revealed as being present and active within community. Although I do not use the metaphor of a web as my main image of community, I do refer to the underlying principles, and my understanding of community is based on the interconnectivity of the whole of creation, including the creator.

The doctrine of the Trinity is also used in relation to community (Moltmann, 1993) and has been developed and debated by several theologians. This will be a fruitful field for theological reflection when I explore relationships in community.

The images of the web of community and the Trinity as community illustrate the value of right relationships within a community structure, based on love, equality and justice, and how they are initiated by God. These right relationships are at the heart of shalom, and these concepts will form part of my theological framework. The positive functions of community are fulfilled by people being in right relation with each other. In the data chapters I will build on these ideas as I theologically consider what right relationships look like in a range of contexts.

2.8.3 Older age and community

Reciprocity in relationships and being able to make a difference are important elements of being part of community; however, older people experience challenges to this, due in part to marginalisation and frailty. I will consider areas of theology which may be explored in relation to these experiences of older people.

The potential marginalisation of older people leads me to consider literature relating to liberation theology (Gutiérrez, 2001). Although liberation theology is associated with liberation of the poor in Latin America, Gutiérrez comments that liberation theology goes beyond this context, and relates to all who may be marginalised, including the elderly (Gutiérrez, 2001, p. 23). Older people may need to be liberated from ageism and oppressive community structures. Although this oppression is not necessarily borne out of financial limitations, and those living in care homes may have more material assets than those who work there, marginalisation may relate to physical frailty, powerlessness, lack of freedom to make connections or poverty of social connectivity. This contrasts with biblical principles regarding the treatment of older people and their place in the community (Meador & Henson, 2000). This will be considered later in relation to themes of marginalisation and belonging.

Recognising that older people move to care homes as a result of frailty and increasing disability, I also build on literature relating to a vulnerable God and disability (Eiesland, 1994). Although this literature is not specifically about older people, many of the insights can be reflected on in relation to older people and disability. Swinton comments that disability theology has traditionally focused on caring for the poor and weak; however, Hauerwas takes a deeper approach (Swinton, 2004, p. 4). Hauerwas challenges the medical model of disability, stating that “the disadvantages that result from most handicaps derive more from our society’s prejudices than from the handicap itself” (Hauerwas, 2004a, p. 171). Swinton suggests that although Hauerwas does not include the voices of those who are profoundly

disabled, he changes the emphasis to consider the perspective of those who are disabled, considering the social construction of disability and emphasising the role of community (Swinton, 2004, pp. 4-5, 8). The insights gleaned from a social model of disability may have some relevance for older people who have disabling diseases. Older people moving to care homes have differing levels of dependence, and I will refer to work by theologians such as Vanier and Vanstone who explore dependence and interdependence (Vanier, 1979; Vanstone, 2020).

While writing the thesis, Jean Vanier's abuse of women became known (L'Arche, 2020; L'Arche International, 2020) and it is difficult to read his work with this in mind. However, I made the decision to reference his work, because it is important in the development of thinking and practice in relation to community.

2.8.4 Wellbeing and community

A positive experience of community is associated with wellbeing. This includes a sense of general wellbeing, health, identity and feeling at home.

Theology relating to mental health, illness and dementia has been explored by Swinton (2000a, 2000b, 2012). My research does not include people with dementia, and Swinton's work on mental health is not exclusively about older people; however, his work can be considered in relation to older people and wellbeing.

The theme of identity has been discussed by theologians including Rohr and Swinton (Rohr, 2012, pp. 4-5; Swinton, 2014). These theologians highlight the role of relationships as part of identity formation. I will build on this work as I explore how older people perceive their identity.

Home, as a concept, encompasses several components. The move to a care home may invoke images of refuge, transplantation and exile, which can be explored theologically (Basson, 2005, p. 12; W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 77; Brueggemann, 1976, pp. 22-23) in relation to the concept of home. Eco-theologians comment about the earth being our home (Fischer, 2009, pp. 91-92; McFague, 1993, p. 102). The concept of home appears in all the data chapters.

2.8.5 Spiritual growth and community

Some theologians focus on spiritual growth in later life. Although this thesis is not primarily concerned with spiritual growth, the community can support spirituality and the effects of spiritual growth are relational.

Coleman comments that older people may question their faith and that being in relationship with people could be a source of support during times of questioning (Coleman, 2004, pp. 107-108, 112). Missine describes how older people may take time to 'take care of unfinished business' with others and with God (Missine, 2004, p. 122) while Schachter-Shalomi considers the importance of being reconciled with God and with each other (Schachter-Shalomi, 1999, p. 72). Story telling is one way of making sense of and being reconciled with the past (MacKinlay, 2004, p. 80) and making peace with the past is part of how we can prepare for death (Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 1999, p. 37). Spiritual growth may include growth in wisdom (King, 2004, p. 125) and flourishing even when physical and cognitive abilities decline (King, 2004, p. 141; Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1997, p. 260). Ongoing learning may also be part of spiritual growth (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1997, pp. 36-37).

MacKinlay provides a model of spiritual tasks of ageing, at the centre of which is ultimate meaning in life. Tasks of ageing relating to this include having hope, intimacy with God, self-transcendence and finding final meanings through growth in wisdom (MacKinlay, 2017, pp. 120-121). She discusses how spiritual growth benefits from supportive relationships

(MacKinlay, 2006, p. 79) and outlines the value of being part of a worshipping community (MacKinlay, 2017, pp. 170-171).

Fowler draws on work by a range of scholars including Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson to explore phases of faith development, stating that “[e]ach stage represents a widening of vision” (Fowler, 1981, p. 274). Not all people reach stage six, the final stage of faith development. This stage is ‘universalizing faith’ and is characterised by love and justice without regard for self-preservation (Fowler, 1981, pp. 200-201). Fowler’s model is not specifically aimed at faith development in older people, nor, as Mackinlay comments, did he interview people in the fourth age of life (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 71). Additionally, although there is some research support for the idea of sequential stages of faith development, Parker suggests that it is not adequately demonstrated. He highlights research affirming sequential development in the early years, but determines that the findings relating to adult faith development are not conclusive (Parker, 2010, pp. 244-246).

2.8.6 Shalom

The theme of shalom emerged from my theological reflection on the data, and I draw on work from theologians including Brueggemann (1976), Swinton (2000a), and Woodley (2012). Although their work is not all specifically based on the experiences of older people, it provides helpful insights when considering shalom in relation to older people living in care homes.

Yoder draws on passages including Isaiah 32:16-17 to demonstrate that justice is an integral part of shalom (P. B. Yoder, 2017, p. 14). He uses Isaiah 14:10-13 and 8:11 to illustrate how justice includes social justice, sharing of resources and right relationships., and Isaiah 10:1-2 to comment on the importance of ‘just’ laws (P. B. Yoder, 2017, p. 17). The theme of justice arose from the data, and is particularly explored within chapter 6 in which I demonstrate that right relationships and just laws are part of justice.

2.9 Summary

Although previous literature provides a helpful background, I found little about how older people living in care homes perceive their current community networks. This includes their perceptions about who is in their network and the functions that networks fulfil. While aspirations for quality of life indicated that community was important, this did not include specific exploration of structures within and beyond the care home or the functions of community. My research adds to the limited body of literature by considering these additional points and reflecting on them from a theological perspective. The theological literature outlined above provides a starting point from which to theologically consider community from the perspective of older people. This includes recognition that community includes God and the whole of creation. It also recognises the potential changes in community faced by older people, the role of community in supporting wellbeing, and the communal dimension of spirituality. I build on the literature about shalom as I consider it in terms of community for older people.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to investigate how older people living in care homes view their community networks, I carried out fieldwork in four care homes. I visited each home once a week for six months, engaged in participant observation and interviewed four older people in each home. A summary of the homes and participants can be found in Appendix A. I will now examine the methodological process including recruitment of care homes, development of the method, the pilot, ethical considerations, and reflections on the fieldwork. This will include reflections on the effects of the research on the participants and myself, and theological reflection on the methodology. Finally, I will discuss the analysis of the data.

3.2 Selecting the care homes

Challenges recruiting care homes to research has been noted in the literature (Cyhlarova, Clark, & Knapp, 2020; Ellwood et al., 2018). Ellwood et al. had a recruitment rate of 5.3% despite including homes from a network of homes considered to be 'research ready' (Ellwood et al., 2018, p. 6).

I recruited one home where I had a personal connection. I was unable to further recruit homes without an introduction to the home manager by a professional with whom they had a trusted relationship, and I used personal contacts to secure introductions. Small scale studies are limited in the number of variable factors that can be explored. Nevertheless I was able to ensure that the homes varied in terms of ownership, care provision and to a lesser extent, location, which provided potential for diverse community experiences. I used purposeful sampling within each home to gather data from people with a range of community experiences.

In terms of care provision, one home had a 'dementia wing' and there was limited, organised mixing between the residents in the wing and other residents. Another provided residential, nursing and dementia care and residents were not segregated. Two homes had mixed residential and nursing care; one was mostly residential, the other mainly provided nursing care. I excluded homes which only provided nursing provision as I anticipated that residents in these settings would be less likely to be able to participate in the research due to higher frailty levels.

Two care homes were MHA homes, and two were privately owned with no formal affiliation to faith groups.

Homes were recruited in rural and semi urban areas of northwest England. One home was located on the outskirts of a large market town, and another on the edge of a small village. One home was centrally located within a large agricultural village. The final home was in a seaside town, where several residents had retired to prior to living in the care home. These did provide varied community experiences. However, none of the homes were in urban areas or areas of ethnic diversity, which does affect the generalisability of the findings.

There are challenges to achieving ethnic diversity in research with care home residents. This is partly due to lack of diversity amongst care homes, with recent statistics stating that 90.7% of care home residents in England are white (NHS Digital, 2022), and other researchers identifying that despite using specific strategies to include BAME participants, representation remains low (Cyhlarova et al., 2020, p. 6). Further research to specifically understand the community experiences of older people from ethnic minority groups within and beyond care homes would be beneficial.

It is worth noting that although it was not a criterion for inclusion, all four care homes had current ratings of good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission at the time of carrying out the research.

3.3 Research design

I used qualitative and ethnographic methods including interviews and participant observation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; May, 2011, pp. 134-136, 161-190) as negotiated with the care homes.

3.3.1 Participant observation

In each home, in conjunction with the care home management, I began by identifying the best way of carrying out participant observation. I anticipated that this may be through working alongside the activity coordinator or the chaplain, acting as a volunteer, or simply being present in the home and participating in everyday routines. In all the care homes, it was agreed that I would be present in the home and participate in whatever was occurring in the communal areas.

May comments that when interviews are combined with participant observation the researcher can gain a richer understanding of a person's experience; information gleaned from interviews may be inaccurate for several reasons, and interview information alone does not take into account any surrounding circumstances of which the interviewee is not aware (May, 2011, p. 158). While this is true, this research aimed to find out about what participants perceive. I was aware that, although my observations may be helpful, these observations should not overpower the voices of the participants. Even if their perceptions were different from how I might perceive their reality, their perceptions are valid and I wanted to ensure that the research reflected this. Nevertheless, the participant observation did provide background information, which I referred to in the interviews and used to triangulate data and highlight

differences. I kept a reflective journal, which as Walton suggests, encouraged reflexivity as I reflected on the observations and interviews (Walton, 2014, pp. 49-50), as well as providing a place to record observational and untaped data. I visited each care home on a weekly basis for half a day for six months. I varied the day and the time of day that I visited so as to experience different aspects of the community within the care home. I was present when family and friends visited for special events in the home, during services led by chaplains and visiting churches, and during organised activities. I was also present when there were no activities planned, and the communal areas were quiet. I observed some mealtimes in passing, but two of the care homes had strict rules protecting mealtimes for the sake of the dignity of the residents. Despite this, I did receive permission to return to one of these homes and participate in a mealtime. I did not accompany residents if they went out of the care home, nor did I participate when they privately received visitors, although some visitors did participate in activities in the communal lounge. My observations were therefore predominantly of the communal aspects of community within the care home, with some observations of links to the wider community provided through visitors. However, I felt that this was sufficient; my presence in more intimate meetings would have altered interactions more than my presence in communal activities, and would have been too intrusive. My presence in the communal lounge did affect the dynamics of the community as I interacted with residents and facilitated interaction between residents.

3.3.2 Interviews

3.3.2.1 Aim of the interviews

The aim of the interviews was to support the participants to identify:

- the structure of their current community networks;
- what was important to them in terms of functions of community and to what extent these were fulfilled through their community networks.

Because I was concerned that any theological reflection would be my reflection on their experiences without attention to their own theological perspective, I aimed to gather some theological insight by asking participants who expressed a Christian faith about favourite Bible passages and hymns. This would have been adapted if participants expressed other belief systems.

3.3.2.2 Interview principles

Liamputtong suggests that using interview proxies may be helpful when interviewing older people with communication difficulties who may tire easily; however, she also acknowledges that this is not best suited to gaining subjective information (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 101-102). I did not use interview proxies because I wanted to gather subjective information, to hear directly from the older person, and to empower them to express themselves using communication strategies as appropriate. I also considered the use of conjoint interviews, as they can help people remember things that otherwise might not be mentioned in an interview (Liamputtong, 2007, pp. 102-104). However, I was concerned that this could overpower the voice of the older person and the emphasis could be taken away from what the older person perceives as being important. Nevertheless, participants were given the option of being accompanied during the interview if they preferred. This only occurred for part of one interview.

Challenges to older people living in care homes in expressing their aspirations for their lives include 'imbalance of power' and 'low expectations' for themselves (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 5). My methodology sought to address this by providing a framework to explore aspirations; I asked participants to rate functions of community in terms of importance, and then discussed whether they were fulfilled. This allowed the opportunity for thoughtful reflection. Unfulfilled important functions highlighted potential areas for change.

Wenger states that interviewing people who are in their 80s and 90s and frail “calls for an approach which is sympathetic to the physical and mental energies of the respondents” (Wenger, 2002, p. 261). I kept this in mind while carrying out face to face interviews, using my clinical skills by using communication strategies flexibly within the interview process. I incorporated use of visual strategies where appropriate, including referring to photographs and objects on display. The interviews were designed to elicit qualitative information and to enable the participants to share their perceptions.

3.3.2.3 Interview schedule and techniques

The interview consisted of two parts, both of which were semi structured and drew on different communication strategies, reflecting the type of information I was aiming to elicit.

Mind Maps and structure of community

The first part of the interviews aimed to explore perceptions of the structure of community networks. I planned to use a Mind Map at the beginning of most interviews, in order to introduce the concept of community and disclose information about myself. The Mind Map was useful as a way of structuring the process and facilitating recall of information; one memory led to another, similar to the Mind Mapping creative processes described by Buzan (Buzan, 2010, p. 38). I structured the Mind Map into three branches: people, places and interests. I chose these three areas because communities of place and interest provide a basic framework for understanding community structure. People are linked to places and interests, but I anticipated that having ‘people’ as a separate branch may initiate recall of a wider range of people not necessarily strongly linked to places or interests. I anticipated that the branch relating to interests would lead to discussions about politics, organisations and interests where the participant did not necessarily have direct contact with people, but which formed a connection to wider communities. I did consider having 'spirituality' as a separate branch, but

expected that spirituality would be addressed when we discussed functions of community networks and identified what is supportive of spirituality.

As part of the process, I asked about past community networks as well as current community networks; I felt that this would support the participants to reflect on which networks were still part of their structure as well as changes that had occurred. The Mind Map about past networks was used to form the basis of a discussion about current networks. In some cases, a second Mind Map was created to reflect current networks. I was not aiming to find out about every relationship that a person had experienced within their community structure – this would have been unrealistic and unlikely to be factually accurate. I was aiming to establish an overview of the places, interests and people that were significant to each participant.

Talking Mats™ and functions of community

The second part of the interview format used some principles from Talking Mats™ to focus on functions of community. Talking Mats™ is a communication tool that enables people to express themselves by placing picture symbols under a choice of three different headings on a mat. The person chooses which heading best describes how they feel about the particular entity represented by the picture symbol and places the symbol under the appropriate heading. Benefits of Talking Mats™ include supporting people to express both negative and positive views as well as structuring conversations. One study of frail elderly people with communication difficulties concluded that Talking Mats™ are useful for people with and without communication difficulties (Murphy, Tester, Hubbard, Downs, & Macdonald, 2005, p. 106). It should be noted that Murphy is a co-director of Talking Mats™ and may be biased in her recommendation of the tool. The study suggests that advantages of using Talking Mats™ with people without communication difficulties include maintaining interest and taking time to explore each area without losing focus on the overall topic (Murphy et al., 2005, p. 105). In another study with frail elderly people, relating to quality of life, different strategies were used

with different participants. Talking Mats™ were only used with some of the participants; some of the remaining participants had a guided conversation interview and others with cognitive difficulties had shorter interviews combined with observation. (Tester et al., 2004, p. 212). I opted to use a similarly flexible approach within this study, matching the strategy and length of interview to each participant. I chose to use Talking Mats™ because I wanted to ask people about a range of apparently unrelated functions of community. I perceived it to be a tool that would enable me to ask about a large number of functions and quickly ascertain what was important to people.

I used 'important', 'not important' and 'so-so' as headings on the Talking Mat™. I typed statements relating to different functions of community suggested by the literature. Talking Mats™ in its pure form uses communication symbols which are placed on the mat. I decided not to use symbols because all the concepts we were discussing were abstract and I felt that symbols would distract from this without necessarily adding anything to the process. However, the underlying principle of sorting information in a visual way is a useful one.

This second part of the interview primarily focused on functions of community, but also included exploration of the importance of different aspects of community structures. The process enabled a broad range of functions to be discussed, and the nature of the interviews allowed participants to articulate additional functions that were important to them. During the interview the functions and structures rated as important by the participant were discussed, exploring whether they were fulfilled or not, and how they were fulfilled. The aim was not to quantify responses in terms of level of importance, but to find out how these functions were fulfilled and whether there were any important areas that were not fulfilled.

Selection of functions of community networks

I drew on measurements of social capital as well as literature relating to spirituality and psychology to collate a list of positive functions, which I hypothesised may be found through community networks. I recognise that there may be other functions that are fulfilled through community; however it would not be possible to identify all potential functions. I considered the range to be broad enough, based on the literature, and I intended to be alert to additional functions identified by the participants during the research process. In addition to the statements relating to function, I also included statements relating to the structure of the networks.

I divided the functions into three main areas: wellbeing, reciprocity, and growth and development. While there is overlap between these areas, dividing the functions in this way supported the interview process. I intended to interview people with a range of communication needs and different levels of frailty, which would impact on the length of the interviews and the amount of ground covered. I was able to ensure that functions from each of the areas were included in each of the interviews, ensuring a range of themes were covered with each participant. Many participants commented on all the functions; this preparation meant that frail individuals could take part as far as they were able, covering something from each theme. I also had a fourth area, relating to structure, where I asked about the importance of connection to different areas of community in order to explore attitudes towards different aspects of the structure that would not necessarily have been covered during the Mind Mapping process.

Wellbeing

In this section, I drew on some of the relationships identified by Weiss (1974) as being important for wellbeing. Weiss asserts that when people are in relationships that provide attachment, people feel at home. They have a 'sense of security and place.' He states that one

of the features of 'social integration' is that it gives people a 'source of companionship'. Weiss also identifies that 'reassurance of worth' is important for wellbeing. He focuses on 'competence in a social role' as part of this. (Weiss, 1974, pp. 23-24).

The functions I included in this section were:

- feeling at home
- companionship
- reassurance of worth
- identity
- keeping your spirits up
- physical health.

I hypothesised that asking people about feeling at home may provide insight into the types of relationship that the participants experienced within the home. I anticipated that strong attachments would already have been identified when we talked about the structure of community. Asking about 'feeling at home' was an opportunity to consider strong attachments from a different angle, particularly relationships within the home.

People's roles and communities changing may have an impact on their identity; I therefore included this as an additional point. As depression may be prevalent in older people, I included 'keeping your spirits up' as a function of community; physical health is also included as it may be related to wellbeing (Cho et al., 2011, p. 6). I hypothesised that asking about physical health may also provide some insight into gerotranscendence (Tornstam, 2005, p. 188).

Reciprocity

Within this section, I considered examples of giving and receiving which have been identified as being positive for wellbeing or contributing to social capital. The functions that I included in this section were:

- having someone to rely on
- being able to get advice
- making a difference where you live
- making a difference in the wider society.

Weiss identifies the importance of opportunities to nurture others, being able to obtain guidance, and having people to rely on (Weiss, 1974, pp. 24-25). Social capital theory identifies this type of social network support as being valuable (Siegler, 2014, pp. 8-10). Social capital theory also values reciprocity in terms of civic engagement and people feeling they can make a difference, as well as the trust and cooperative norms which enable people to work together (Siegler, 2014, pp. 10-16). As nurturing others could be perceived as making a difference, I used the term 'making a difference' as a general function, leaving the interpretation of this to the participants. Interestingly some participants did perceive this function as nurturing others.

Growth and development

Within this section I included learning as well as psychological and spiritual development. The functions I included in this section were:

- learning
- opportunity to talk about end of life
- awareness of God's presence
- worshipping with other people
- talking about faith and doubts/questions
- being reconciled with the past

I did not directly ask about all the potential functions of community that were identified in the literature chapter; however, the broad themes were covered. For example, 'flourishing' is something that could be supported by relationships in community. Although I did not ask specifically about flourishing, examples of this might be seen through the other functions discussed. Similarly, I did not ask about growing in wisdom; however, growth in wisdom may include gerotranscendence, aspects of which are covered in the functions considered. I did not cover all the spiritual tasks of ageing, as outlined by MacKinlay (MacKinlay, 2017, p. 121). Notably, 'hope' was not covered as a separate function, although it was commented on by some participants in terms of hope for the life to come as well as looking forward to changing seasons.

Structure

I asked about the importance of aspects of community structure which I foresaw may not have been discussed in the first part of the interview:

- keeping connected to the past
- keeping connected to interests
- keeping connected to communities
- being connected to nature

This was useful and promoted wider discussion about the structure of community.

3.4 Pilot

I piloted the forms and the interview process with a friend, Maureen, who had moved to a care home approximately two years earlier due to physical frailty.

In order to support the process of gaining informed consent, I drew on my professional background to develop information sheets with and without picture symbols (Appendix B). Maureen preferred the forms with symbols, as she found these easier to follow due to poor

eyesight. I was aware that some older people may have found these forms patronising or perceived that I was implying that they had dementia. I was therefore cautious about using picture symbols, but recognised the potential benefits of them as a communication support that could strengthen the consent process.

At the beginning of the interview, I showed Maureen a Mind Map of my own community. She was able to see the outline and I told her what I had written as well as explaining the different ways I am connected to parts of the community. I drew an outline of a Mind Map using people, places and interests as the main branches and we began to talk about her network from the past using this framework. Initially she said that she didn't think she had anything of interest to say because her life had not been sociable – she was very shy and a loner. We began by talking about friends and family, which she found upsetting at times as she told me that most of them have died. Talking about interests led to talking about places and associated memories. I drew the Mind Map as we talked, and found this a useful tool to prompt me to follow up on areas as well as discussing new ones. The Mind Map was a support on which I could structure the interview.

We talked about a longer chronology than I intended; however, this was useful as her current community networks relate back to earlier parts of her life. When we talked about current networks, I used the Mind Map structure to prompt ideas about new people she has connections to and connections to the wider community. We also talked about different ways of keeping in touch with people.

When we started to talk about functions of relationships, I explained the rationale behind asking about them. I explained that they had been drawn from the literature, but that older people had not been consulted about these functions, and I was interested to hear her opinion. This explanation empowered me to ask about the range of functions as it gave a

justification for asking deep and at times apparently unrelated questions. It also gave her the status of interacting with what academics had written. I drew on the Talking Mats™ principle of rating information as important, so-so, or not important. I read out each card and she rated them in terms of whether they were important to her or not. I placed each card under the relevant heading.

There were other times within the interview when she struggled to find the word she wanted to say. This part of interview did not rely on her word finding ability and it appeared to be a relief to her that she could express herself without the barrier of word finding difficulties. I had initially assumed that all the functions would be important, albeit to varying degrees, so it was useful to see that some functions were not at all important to her. I took the pile of cards that she had rated as important, and we talked about where these functions were fulfilled in terms of relationships. She felt that they were mostly fulfilled, through specific friends who came to visit and a member of the care home staff.

At the end of the interview process, as she looked at the full page of Mind Mapping, Maureen commented that she often says that her life has not been interesting, but perhaps it has been. Seeing a page full of information was affirming. She talked more during this process than during our usual conversations, and my visit was significantly longer than usual. Although there were times during the interview when she became upset while remembering people who had died, the interview did give her the opportunity to talk about these people and to express her grief. During the interview, she became more confident with her answers and her body language became increasingly open and positive.

I did not tape record this pilot, and realised later that I had not remembered the full extent of the conversation, despite having the Mind Map as a prompt. This highlighted to me the importance of recording the process as well as completing the Mind Map.

The pilot highlighted that what a participant says may be different from how others perceive their experience. Maureen said that she was not previously involved with people in the village where she lived; however, she also told me a story about an interaction with a neighbour who lived a few houses away from her. Based on knowing her before she moved to the home, my perception was that she was involved with people, but this was not how she perceived those relationships. She also told me that she does not talk to any of the other 'inmates'; however, this was different from what I had previously observed. I had observed her responding to a lady who was very confused by reaching out to her, holding her hand and smiling in a way that was full of kindness, dignity and compassion.

The pilot demonstrated that, through the interview process, I was able to gather information about previous and current community networks. I also found out which functions of relationships are currently important and whether they were fulfilled within the current community network. I discovered that there may be a difference between my perception and what the older person perceives to be occurring. While I need to acknowledge this, and may explore potential reasons for these differences, I also need to remember that my aim is to hear and value their perspective. The importance of observation and multiple interviews became apparent as I sought to gather rich data. Communication support through visual materials was beneficial during the pilot, but I recognised that this was likely to vary between participants. I also learned that I needed to be wary of projecting my assumptions about the participants onto the participants. I anticipated that I would find this easier with people that I did not know, but realised that I needed to guard against a reticence to probe due to oversensitivity about potential vulnerability.

Overall, the pilot demonstrated that the method was fit for purpose on this occasion. I also gained insights that would support the research process.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Prior to carrying out the research, I gained ethical approval from the University of Manchester and MHA. Ethical considerations include the validity of the research as well as dignity and welfare of the participants (George, 2016, p. 616). Issues pertaining to validity of the research will be discussed later in the chapter, following an exploration of flexibility within the interviews.

The following areas were addressed to protect the dignity and welfare of those involved in the research process, including the care home organisation, the staff and the participants.

I held an initial meeting with the care home manager and relevant staff members prior to carrying out research in each home. The activity coordinator was present in three of the homes and the chaplain was present in the MHA homes. I also met the owner of one of the private care homes. We discussed the research and its implications for the home. I provided an information sheet, and the managers gave written consent for me to carry out the research, including commitment from them to support the research process and to ensure additional support was available for participants should this be required. I discussed safeguarding procedures with MHA and was aware of safeguarding procedures in all the homes. I provided feedback about the research to care home staff throughout the process (within the bounds of confidentiality).

During the research process, I provided information about the research to prospective participants and asked them to give informed consent. Cohen, Manion and Morrison outline some complexities of obtaining informed consent from those who are vulnerable, including the need to ensure that the participants fully understand the implications of participating and do not feel coerced (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 80). I took care to ensure that the research process was communicated in the most appropriate way, and that information was

shared as fully as possible using the following methods. I discussed an information sheet and consent form with each participant prior to interviews taking place, and made participants aware that they could withdraw at any time and that they could decline to answer any of the questions in the interviews. I explained that the final thesis will be publicly available. The information sheet also included details of who to contact if there were any questions or concerns about the research. Due to the insights gained during the pilot I gave participants the choice of using consent forms and information sheets with or without visual symbols.

While the process had the potential to be a positive, empowering experience for residents, I was aware that this may not always be the case. Talking about past community networks could be a source of emotional distress as the participants remembered people they had lost or had regrets about the past. However, I was also aware that some participants may find it helpful to have the opportunity to talk, remember, and be reconciled to the past. The pilot demonstrated the possible emotional impact of the interview process.

I took care to address the potential vulnerability of older people living in care homes by making it clear that they had control over their involvement in the research, while also empowering them to participate. I was aware that people may feel vulnerable if they feel like they have had choices removed from them in the past, particularly if it was not their decision to move to the home. They may feel like they don't have control over their current situation and fear reprisal if they do not participate. The participants were living in a closed social environment and this, combined with their dependency on others, added to their potential vulnerability. I aimed to make it clear that they had full control over participation and how the research was conducted. During the consent process, as well as gaining consent, I gave the participants control over when and where the interview would take place, and who would be present. I constructed the interviews in such a way as to reduce imbalance of power by

sharing my own story, and to empower the participants to tell their stories (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 13).

The data has been managed in accordance with the University of Manchester requirements. Tapes, interview transcripts and questionnaires are kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only I have access. Electronic data was anonymised and is kept on a password protected device. Tapes and transcripts will be destroyed once the PhD has been awarded. Pseudonyms have been used for people, places and care homes.

3.6 Selecting participants

3.6.1 Scope

I aimed to interview people with a range of experiences of community. However, I only included people with capacity to give informed consent. This relates to the ability to understand and process information, understand consequences, consider the benefits and risks and communicate a decision (Meulenbroek et al., 2010, p. 58). I sought support from the care home managers, activity coordinators and chaplains in relation to this, as well as using my own judgement to confirm capacity based on responses to questions during the consent and information sharing process. I also decided to exclude people with a diagnosis of dementia. According to the Department of Health, although diagnosis of dementia is improving, many people living with dementia do not have a diagnosis. It is estimated that the majority of people living in care homes do have a form of dementia (Department of Health, 2015, p. 13). I thought that people with a diagnosis of dementia may have more advanced dementia and require a range of different methodological approaches. I was also not confident in my own skills in conducting research with people with advanced dementia. I do recognise that people with dementia do not constitute a homogenous group, and acknowledge that some of the participants may indeed have had undiagnosed dementia. Future research listening to the

voices of people with a diagnosis of dementia would be helpful in gaining insight into their experiences.

3.6.2 Selection Process

The process of selecting participants was different in each of the care homes, with the gatekeepers being managers, chaplains or activity coordinators. I required support to identify suitable participants in order to ensure that a range of people were involved in the research, including those who stayed in their rooms who I would not have met within communal areas. I had varying degrees of control in each home as to who was approached to participate. Nevertheless, through conversations with activity coordinators, chaplains and managers who were supportive of my aims, as well as conversations with residents, I did interview people with a range of different community experiences.

In the first care home, I explained to the chaplain that I would like to talk to people who did not have a diagnosis of dementia, who were able to give consent, and who differed in their range of community networks. She identified possible participants and provided background information about each person. This proved to be an effective approach, as it supported me to approach people who, from her perspective, had different community experiences, including those who tended to stay in their own rooms. One of the participants was somebody who was not on her list, but who I had made contact with in the lounge. In two of the homes, staff members expressed surprise about the involvement of at least one of the participants. These were participants who were not particularly talkative. This reflected a tendency for care home staff to select people who they perceived as 'liking to talk'. However, these less talkative participants were keen to be involved, and enjoyed the process. Although their responses were briefer, I gained an insight into community that would otherwise have been missed.

In the second care home, many residents had significant cognitive difficulties. I revisited Maureen, who had participated in the pilot, and we completed a taped interview. I also met another lady during my time in the lounge, and she agreed to be interviewed. Following that I struggled to find suitable participants. I had built relationships with several residents with varying degrees of dementia, but this was outside of the scope of my research. The manager and the activity coordinator supported me in identifying two more participants.

In the third home, the owner wanted the manager to identify suitable participants. He was keen for a range of people to be involved. He commented that some residents always stay in their rooms. He said that the staff say that is what the residents are choosing to do, but he wondered whether it was their true preference, and thought that the research might provide insight into this. I liaised particularly closely with the manager in this care home, discussing the aims of the research. She was receptive to my aims, and identified suitable participants with a range of experiences.

In the fourth care home, the manager indicated that the majority of the residents had capacity to consent. I recruited three ladies whom I met in the lounge, and the activity coordinator introduced me to a man who agreed to participate.

3.6.3 Power and empowerment

I was aware that I held a position of power regarding recruitment of participants, particularly over those who had limited community links, or were lonely and longing for company. It would have been possible to coerce people to take part through the way that I interacted with them. I sought to avoid this by forming relationships with a range of people in the home, and through my body language, tone of voice and choice of words I made it clear that it was optional to take part in the interviews, and that declining to take part would not affect our relationship. However, there is a balance to be found in encouraging people to contribute and

thus empowering them, without coercion. Wenger advocates identifying reasons for reluctance to take part in interviews, and addressing these in order to support people to take part (Wenger, 2002, p. 265). Two participants who were clear that they wanted to take part also expressed concern about their suitability, one because she felt she didn't have anything to say and one because she did not think she was educated enough. However, as I gave examples of the types of questions I would be asking, their fears were allayed. One lady initially said that she did not want to be interviewed, but when I confirmed that there was no pressure to take part, she learned more about the research and me and she changed her mind. A turning point was a conversation in which, sensing her discomfort during a care home family event, and knowing that she did not have close family, I disclosed that I did not have children. In turn, she disclosed how it can feel to not have family. The conversation developed further about my research and family and community related issues. She decided that she would like to take part, and she subsequently enjoyed the process. My disclosure about not having children supported the research in this instance.

Some potential participants in three of the homes chose not to be interviewed. Although they enjoyed talking to me informally as was evident from their responses, they did not want to be involved in the research. This provided me with evidence that people had the opportunity to decline participation and that they were not coerced into taking part. It is also possible that they were not sufficiently empowered to take part. I did address this by explaining what the interviews were about, but took care that this did not become coercion.

As I completed participant observation, I developed relationships with residents who spent time in the communal areas, which enabled most potential participants to get to know me before agreeing to be interviewed. However, one gentleman volunteered as soon as he met me, suggesting that it was not always essential to establish rapport over a period of time to recruit participants. This was also the case when I recruited a lady recommended by the

chaplain who does not take part in communal activities. I simply knocked on her door, explained about the research and she immediately agreed to be involved. Similarly, in three care homes, when initial approaches were made by managers or activity coordinators, participants agreed to take part and were keen for the interviews to take place immediately.

3.6.4 Range of participants

I did meet my aim of interviewing people with different types of community experiences in terms of length of time living in the home, family links, connections to the wider community and involvement with other residents in the care home (Appendix A). However, there was limited diversity in other areas, which affects the generalisability of the findings. It is also possible that the nature of people who agreed to take part in the research have shared characteristics. All the participants were white British, reflecting the population of the care home and the lack of ethnic diversity in the geographical areas where the care homes were located. All the participants expressed a Christian faith, though had different denominational backgrounds and had not necessarily been regular church attenders. This may have reflected the religious demography of the areas, as well as the age of the participants. It may also be that the MHA homes attracted people from a Christian background. All the participants were in their eighties and nineties. I did not ask participants about sexuality. The gender ratio reflected the population of the care homes. In the second care home I was aware that I had not interviewed many men, nor met any men who met the research criteria within this home. The activity coordinator and manager confirmed that the men currently in the home were too frail or had diagnoses of dementia. Similarly, in the third care home, there were no men who were suitable to be interviewed. In the fourth care home, I sought support from the activity coordinator to identify a man who would be willing to participate.

3.7 The interviews

I will comment on the interview process in terms of the approach used, the variation between interviews, the validity, and the effects of the interview process on the participants.

3.7.1 Approach

Allowing participants to choose when and where to be interviewed and who they wanted to be present gave them control over their involvement in the research process. Most of the participants chose to be interviewed on the same day that I invited them to take part; as soon as the consent process was completed, they were keen to be interviewed. Some participants chose to be interviewed in their rooms; however, several participants did not want to be interviewed in their room, and in these cases, it was challenging to find a suitably private space to use. On a few occasions the interview was interrupted and on two occasions we moved to a quieter space to conclude the interview. Interviewing in communal areas inhibited the interview process to some extent, and I was aware that I did not probe as much if we were in these spaces. I did pause these interviews to check that the participants were happy to continue as the interviews turned to more personal information. They appeared more comfortable than I felt within this situation. Perhaps through communal living they had adjusted to a lack of privacy, perhaps they felt safer in a communal area, or perhaps they chose to keep their bedroom as their personal sanctuary. It was important that the participants had this choice; they had control over the interview process and took part on their own terms, in a way with which they were comfortable.

The first part of the interview consisted mostly of factual information about the structure of community, and was an opportunity for us to get to know each other before we moved to the second part of the interview, which included deeper, more personal questions about function of community. This worked well. The use of the Mind Map supported me as an interviewer to share information about myself and structure the interview, while allowing for flexibility. As in

the pilot, the participants appeared to benefit from engaging with the Mind Map. One participant, Brenda, looked at her completed Mind Map with interest and exclaimed "Oh yes!" as we looked at each section. Looking at the branches of the Mind Map triggered her recall of further information, which was added.

When we moved to the second part of the interview, I explained to the participants that different things may be important to us at different times in our lives, and I was interested to find out what was important to them now. As in the pilot, I was overt about the rationale for asking the questions. As I anticipated, the Talking Mats™ approach helped me to structure the second part of the interview and gain an overview of functions and their fulfilment, covering a lot of information efficiently. Talking Mats™ also allowed for topics to be raised in a non-threatening way as the response could be single word or even non-verbal, but expanded on if appropriate. The Talking Mats™ approach was also useful with one participant with hearing impairment, as she read the cards for herself as well as listening to me. However, there were also unexpected benefits. Within the Talking Mats™ approach, scaling statements in terms of importance appeared to support some participants to give a thoughtful response. For example, one participant identified that talking about end of life was important, but then explained that she had not done this, and how she would find it difficult to do so. I felt that asking people to scale statements in terms of importance helped them to consider them in a deeper way.

The Talking Mats™ approach also supported me to pace the interview. One very articulate participant had a lot to say about each of the different areas. Using the Talking Mats™ approach gave structure to the interview, as she could see how many cards were remaining to discuss. She commented on this, and it helped us to stay focused and move through a range of topics in a timely way. I had not anticipated that Talking Mats™ would have been so useful for someone with no discernible communication difficulties.

The communication tools helped me to have meaningful conversations within a short time of meeting the participants. I felt that I got to know the participants through the interview process. The conversations that I had held with participants prior to the interviews were more superficial than the interview. Even for participants who were readily expressive about their life stories, the Talking Mats™ approach enabled me to probe for deeper meaning. I found that, following the interview, some of the participants were more spontaneously open with me and more direct with their questions to me. I am aware that not all people want a deeper conversation, and that perhaps the people who agreed to participate were people who were open to the idea of talking in depth, so they found the experience a positive one. However we cannot assume that just because a person has not talked in such a way in the past, that they don't want to now, and it can be helpful to check this periodically.

Using strategies such as these during care planning might be helpful for both the carer and the older person to broach topics and ascertain whether further exploration of the topic is desired. However I am also aware that talking is not the only part of communication, and as we spend time together, communication can reach beyond ourselves, and God may be revealed to us in times of shared silence (Albans & Johnson, 2013, pp. 88-91). Nevertheless, communication tools might be helpful for people to express themselves, and may provide a way for carers and chaplains to quickly establish relationships.

3.7.2 Flexibility within the interviews

May comments that within semi structured interviews, the interviewer is free to seek clarification and elaboration, and this process of probing may affect “standardisation and comparability” (May, 2011, p. 134). However these interviews do potentially lead to a more thorough exploration of how the interviewees understand their situation (May, 2011, pp. 134-135). As I was aiming to find personalised information about how the participants viewed their

networks rather than collect quantitative data, a flexible approach was appropriate (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 412).

Each interview differed in style, reflecting the communication preferences of the participants. Throughout the interviews I was aware that I was interpreting body language and tone of voice to ascertain strength of feelings about topics, as well as judging when it was time to bring the interview to a close. I also ensured that I was actively listening with interest and affirming their stories through body language, comments and reflections on their stories. I was aiming for the participants to be able to express themselves as fully as possible, and this approach enabled that to occur. Despite having planned a structure for the interviews, there was considerable variation in how the interviews were conducted and how I gathered the information on my schedule. When carrying out research with people who have varying communication abilities or preferences, it is necessary to be flexible; it is this flexibility that enables people to express themselves as fully as they are able and increases validity of the data. It was important to be able to adapt to the personalities and communication styles of the individuals. It is considered important to individualise strategies to support adults with communication difficulties (McGilton et al., 2011, p. 22). Although this cohort did not have diagnosed communication difficulties, their communication styles varied, and talking was effortful for some participants. I adapted my interview technique to accommodate their communication styles. I consider the resulting data to be more valid than had I used a rigid approach, because each participant was able to express themselves more fully as I adapted my style to suit them. As I carried out the interviews myself and adjusted for communication preferences (which I cannot guarantee another interviewer would have done), it is my judgement that the interviews are as aligned as possible with the aims of a qualitative interview. May comments that although there will be variability in the quality of information that is generated in unstructured interviews, if the researcher conducts these interviews themselves rather than asking others to complete the interviews, there will be comparability between the interviews (May, 2011, p. 135).

While I wasn't aiming to hear the life story of participants, two participants told me their life history with minimal prompting. I therefore allowed the initial part of the interview to be relatively unstructured, though I did prompt for specific information to fill the gaps.

Liamputtong asserts that life stories “function as ideal vehicles for understanding how people perceive their lived experiences, and how they connect with others in society” (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 112). As the participants shared their history, their narrative answered my questions. I heard their perspectives about their community connections. Atkinson comments that it is important that the story be told in a way that is comfortable to that person, and that the telling of the story makes meaning of the past (Atkinson, 2002, pp. 125-126). I aimed for the story to be told in a comfortable way by adapting my approach for each person. I had a sense that these participants had already framed their life story and that in telling it they were reaffirming this story.

The following examples give some insight into how the interviews varied between participants. With several participants I sketched out the Mind Map as we talked, and this ensured that we covered all the information within the interview. With one participant I sketched out the Mind Map following the interview and referred to it in the second interview. I did not use a Mind Map with one particular participant, because she commented that she had talked to another participant, and was concerned that she was not as educated as her. I felt that introducing a Mind Map would have increased her concerns and disempowered her.

In the second parts of the interviews, I made a judgment whether to use Talking Mats™ based on the flow of the interview and the communication style of the participant. When Talking Mats™ were not used, we talked through the list of statements. Even when I did not physically use Talking Mats™, asking participants to scale statements was a useful technique. I did not cover all the statements with all the participants. Some statements were omitted if they had already been covered in the first part of the interview or if the question was deemed

inappropriate based on information acquired. This is a feature of qualitative interviewing (Warren, 2002, p. 87). I also limited the number of statements covered if the participant showed signs of fatigue. However, each interview did include at least one statement from each of the overarching themes. Kvale comments that within research there is a “dilemma of wanting as much knowledge as possible, while at the same time respecting the integrity of the interview subjects” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 174). I opted to respect the integrity of the participants. This flexible approach meant that people could be included in the research even if they were not as verbally articulate as some other participants, or if they were generally frail.

3.7.3 Validity

There was a degree of congruence between the interview data and the participant observation data for the aspects which were current and observable. However, I was not able to triangulate historical data or data relating to relationships outside of the public spaces within the care home. Nevertheless, even if there had not been congruence this would not have invalidated the data that the participants provided. I was interested to hear about their perspectives. As Atkinson states,

There are scales of validity for all life stories...interviewers should remember that it is possible that what they are getting from those they interview is not the whole truth. They can be pretty sure, however, that what they are getting are the stories respondents want to tell. That in itself tells us a good deal about what we really want to know. (Atkinson, 2002, p. 136)

This sentiment is echoed by Woodward, who comments on how, although not necessarily factually accurate, these stories can help us make meaning of our lives (Woodward, 2013, p. 66).

In terms of reliability, the nature of the data is that people may answer differently on different days. This does not make the data unreliable; however, it does mean that the data needs to be

recognised as representing what each person expressed about their social world based on their perception, and how they chose to represent it at that moment in time. There were occasions when there appeared to be lack of congruence within participant responses, particularly when sensitive topics were broached. For example, participants sometimes said that it was not important to talk about end of life or faith, but then, without prompting went on to do so. A strength of the research is that it allowed for this apparent contradiction and gave opportunity for the participants to talk about topics that, on one level, they wanted to, but perhaps found difficult.

The findings are limited in generalisability due to the small sample size, and level of diversity. Nevertheless, helpful insights were gained, which are supportive in understanding community from the perspective of older people living in care homes.

I tape recorded each main interview. For follow up conversations I made notes during the conversation or immediately after the conversation. Booth and Booth suggest that tape recording can inhibit people even if they have consented to the recording (Booth & Booth, 1994, p. 419). I think that this may vary between participants, and I am not sure that the presence of the tape recorder in my interviews inhibited people from saying what they really thought. For example, one participant had said in our initial unrecorded meeting, prompted by the volunteer, that she had a sense of identity. The volunteer said that in some places you would feel like a number, but that wasn't the case here. The participant agreed with her. However, in the main taped interview that followed, she did say that sometimes she felt like she was one in twenty-five. This may be because she had used the interim time to reflect, the volunteer was not present, and she may have felt that she knew me better. I felt that the second interview, which was recorded, was a more accurate reflection of her feelings. A strength of the research is that talking to the participants on more than one occasion allowed

the participants the opportunity to make sense of their own experience and reshape their story. It may also simply be that people feel differently on different days.

Overall, meeting the participants for a follow up conversation after their interviews was useful for debriefing, checking the data and gathering further information. The nature of the follow up conversation varied between the participants. George was unwell and we just had a brief conversation. With Brenda I reflected on the Mind Map and she added some more information. When I met Evelyn on subsequent occasions, she was more expressive than previously, and spontaneously shared information with me about her life, which she gave me permission to include in the research. The activity coordinator was present when I discussed Winnie's Mind Map with her again, and this supported wider relationship building. Building relationships with the participants in this way prevented the process from being what Booth and Booth describe as a 'hit and run' approach to interviewing (Booth & Booth, 1994, p. 417). Within their research they returned to participants several times until they had gathered all the data they needed. I did not require as many interviews to gather the data that I needed, because I was aiming to gather an overall impression of community from the perspective of several different people. I was interested to find out the participants' initial responses about structure and function rather than explore the functions of community in depth. If I had attempted to explore functions in depth this would have led to a more psychological conversation and the interviews would have become therapeutic, which is outside of my skill area, not what the participants had consented to, and does not reflect the overall purpose of this research.

There were advantages to making notes on un-taped conversations during the fieldwork, as this highlighted apparent incongruence. It facilitated my reflection on how participant responses developed and changed over time, as additional information was shared as our relationships developed and situations changed. It supported the validity of the research, as I

have not based my analysis only on what was said at one point in time. It allowed for a more accurate understanding of the perspectives of the older people. The everyday conversations also highlighted what was important to the participants, sometimes revealing new information. The disadvantage of not tape recording all the follow up conversations was the level of accuracy. I did make notes during some conversations, particularly if I knew I was going to use the data. I also asked for permission to use this data.

3.7.4 Effect of the interviews on the participants

There were times in the process when participants expressed emotions such as sadness, for reasons including not having a sense of identity, being one in a number, missing people, loss and pain. However, the interview provided the opportunity for this to be expressed. Each of the participants made spontaneous, positive comments about the interview, including that they had enjoyed the process, it had been stimulating, inviting me to visit again and being pleased that they had been helpful. When I asked George what could be better in the care home, he replied that I had made it better for him, it was good to talk to someone who was interested. A few months later when I saw him again, he volunteered, "I enjoyed our chats." There was also a lot of shared laughter within the interviews. The opportunity to tell our story is important, as Woodward states,

For as the body ages, the self is not destroyed but requires a relationship in which, through the telling of the story, the self can be held, find meaning and flourish (Woodward, 2013, p. 67).

It is a privilege and a responsibility to hold these stories. Additionally, I found that the telling of the story benefitted both the story teller and the listener (Albans, 2013, p. 34). I found that as a listener I benefitted from the wisdom of the participants and gained a sense of perspective through their stories.

I was conscious of the need to be clear about the finite nature of my involvement with each home to reduce the impact of withdrawing at the end of the process (Wenger, 2002, p. 275). I made sure I reiterated the limited nature of my time in the home throughout my time there. I also felt it was important to mark the end of my involvement and to thank the residents and the staff. Having seen how the older people valued receiving cards, I personalised thank you cards to take in on the last day, as well as flowers and chocolates for the staff and residents. There was a sense of loss as I left each home, though I knew that I could not maintain involvement due to other commitments. I was aware that I was another person who was leaving, but I also felt that awareness of the transience of a relationship does not mean that a relationship should not be developed, even it is for a short amount of time. Some residents were surprised at, and appreciated being thanked, which made me wonder how much the contribution of older people is under-recognised.

3.8 Reflexivity

Keeping a research journal highlighted how my own experiences affected the research and some of the ways in which I was changed as a researcher and as a person during this process, which I will comment on here.

My background as a speech and language therapist affected how I conducted the research, included people who were not as talkative as others, and tuned in to how communication affected relationships. This was a strength of the research, but I was also aware that I needed to look beyond the role of communication in community and listen to what the participants told me about their experiences, rather than use communication as the lens for analysis.

My life experience meant that my analysis of the data was attuned to comments people made about having children or not. Other researchers may not have drawn this out in their analysis. Equally, I may have not been alert to characteristics pertinent to other researchers. This was,

to some extent, mitigated against by the analytic process, but it is likely that I brought my own experiences into the analysis. In the same way that interviews are 'co-authored' by the interviewee and the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 192), the final analysis of the data is a dual construction between the participants and myself. Liamputtong highlights that while interviewing techniques do require researchers to be sensitive to what is said, our own life experiences can support us to hear what is said (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 97).

My assumptions about older people were challenged. I had assumed that moving to a care home would have been a significant change that suddenly led to a severing of links with the wider community. However, I heard of significant changes in people's lives and communities, notably during the second world war, but also at other times of their lives. This was not the focus of the research, but it did make me realise that I had stereotyped older people and failed to take into account the resilience that some of them had developed over their lifetime. I also began to understand how society had marginalised older people prior to their moving into care homes, and that any current marginalisation may not be entirely due to the move to the care home.

Perhaps the most significant way I was changed was through engaging in theological reflection about another dimension. First, my attitude to and engagement with play has changed. The theological reflection on play gave me permission to play and revealed how playing may be part of my relationship with God. It has given me insight into the value of chaplains playing, sharing interests and enjoying activities with older people as an integral part of their spiritual role. I now appreciate the value of playfulness for older people in terms of spirituality and overall wellbeing. Further, as I reflected on the process of gathering the threads of our lives, I had a fresh and deep experience of God's grace, and a deep understanding of God's unconditional love. Sexton comments that the older Roman Catholic sisters she interviewed in her research had a sense of "ongoing daily conversion, which will continue until the very end

of their lives” (Sexton, 2019, p. 51). This has affected her understanding of her own “journey of conversion” (Sexton, 2019, p. 51). As I reflect on my research journey, I can identify points of conversion for myself as I spent time with participants, carried out theological reflection and engaged in the research process. The research process has been part of my own journey of conversion.

3.9 Analysis

I aimed, in the analysis of the data, to mitigate against basing the themes on my own experiences as far as possible by analysing each interview line by line. I also wrote a summary of each interview to give an overall sense of what was important to each of the participants. Sexton comments on the value of considering each participant’s narrative as a whole before embarking on coding (Sexton, 2019, p. 47). This process enabled me to listen to their individual voices and hold onto their individuality as well as drawing out common themes. It also emphasised their voices, rather than my own, as I considered each individual story as a whole. However, it is inevitable that I will bring my own experiences to the research process.

I transcribed the interviews within a week of each occurring, starting transcription on the day of the interview. This enabled me to recall the conversation as I typed, which was particularly helpful in supporting intelligibility issues. Nevertheless, there were occasional words or parts of phrases in some interviews that I was unable to transcribe due to unclear speech. This was noted in the transcripts.

I began to identify themes as I transcribed the interviews. I worked through the interviews, copying and pasting direct quotes into a document, categorising them under different headings. Initially I used the functions of community I had already identified alongside concepts from social network analysis as category headings. I created new headings as new themes emerged. The categories were refined, changed and expanded as further interviews

were conducted and analysed. As I conducted the later interviews, I was sensitive to new themes that had arisen during the earlier interviews. When all the interviews had been completed, I revisited the transcripts, reviewing them in the light of new themes which had emerged. Following this I used my journal, analysed quotes that had not been taped, and my observations, and added them to the themes. I repeated the review process of the data from the interviews, and the journal, until saturation point was reached, and no new themes emerged. This meant that the interviews were given dominance over my observations in the development of themes. Finally, using a combination of post it notes and collections of typed quotes, the themes were physically grouped on rolls of lining paper into overarching themes, which were reviewed and refined until I was satisfied that the overall meaning of the data had been represented. I used Mind Mapping to support this process.

In order to analyse the structure of community, I began by using the framework of people, places and interests used in the interview process. I drew on principles of ego-centric social network analysis (J. Scott, 2013, pp. 33, 38) to analyse the structure of community within this framework. This approach allows for an individual's links with other people to be identified and information about the nature of the relationship gathered. However, as I analysed their responses collectively, it became apparent that the theme of geographical place was particularly significant, and it would be helpful to explore relationships within their geographical context. This led me to explore the structure of community within a geographical framework. This will be outlined in the results chapter.

The analysis was therefore initially based on the concepts that I had used as the basis for the interviews. The analysis went beyond these concepts as new themes based on the voices of the participants emerged. Charmaz explores how 'sensitising concepts' are used by grounded theorists to begin the process of data coding (Charmaz, 2002, p. 683). Although my research was not 'grounded theory', as I had drawn on social capital theory and psychology to develop a

framework from which to explore community, this type of analysis enabled me to go beyond the initial framework and develop a new framework based on the data. I developed a way to understand community structure and identify themes relating to functions of community, which formed the basis of the theological reflection.

3.10 Theological reflection on the methodology

Ethical considerations may be thought of as spiritual and theological considerations (Phillips, Porter, & Slee, 2018, p. 15). As I reflect on the ethical decisions I made, I can see that they reflect my spirituality and have a theological basis. The research question was inspired by notions of justice, which influenced the methodological design. I hypothesised that older people living in care homes needed liberation from oppressive structures that meant that they were marginalised and cut off from the wider community. My methodology was loosely based on principles from liberation theology, including standing in solidarity with people and aspiring to transform situations in the light of God's reign, and ensuring that all people are included (Gutiérrez, 2001, pp. 22-23). Although in liberation theology the community is empowered to make changes for itself, and this did not occur in my research, my role functioned within the broader framework of liberation theology as an organic intellectual (Fuchs, 2021, p. 1221; Wood, 2001, pp. 157, 159) in that I advocated on behalf of the participants as I provided feedback and coaching to care home staff.

The methodology was designed with empowerment in mind; it was designed to give people the opportunity to tell their story about their community experiences in a way that they were comfortable with, and which would enable them to voice their aspirations for community. I wanted to understand their story. I wanted to be alongside people, to give them the opportunity to give feedback to the care home manager, and to represent their voices to the academic and professional worlds so that policies and future developments are based on what older people say is important to them. I wanted to challenge the academic and professional

worlds to overcome barriers to listening to older people in future research. In order to strengthen the voices of older people to be heard and reflect how I regard them as equal partners, I have started each data chapter with quotes from the participants, interspersed with my comments and questions.

During the research, I deliberately adopted an approach which I thought would be empowering. However, as I reflect on the process as it occurred, I wonder whether that term is patronising, and whether it is the right term to use. I encouraged people to engage in the research by clearly explaining what it was about, my motivation for doing the research and what their involvement in the research would mean. I was available, I listened, and I used communication strategies when these were helpful. Drawing on principles from the Equality Act 2010, I recognise that there are times that adjustments are required to ensure that there is equal access of opportunity to avoid indirect discrimination for people with communication needs (Equality Act 2010, 2010). I was keen to ensure that communication needs were not a barrier to participation, which is why visual strategies were part of the methodological design. For those with visual difficulties, these were not always appropriate, and I ensured that my spoken communication was clear. Communication strategies are not a substitute for good communication skills and empathy. I was genuinely interested in what people had to say and wanted to understand their life experiences, which is important in creating rapport (Berry, 2009, p. 37).

In a sense, the process was empowering in that older people had the opportunity to make their views known to managers. It was also empowering in that the participants knew that their voices would be heard in a wider context. However, I recognise that by considering myself as empowering the participants I could be placing myself over and above them, assuming that I was in a position of power, that I had something to offer them, and that they would benefit from participating in my research. Nouwen, reflecting on liberation theology

and his own experiences in Peru, said that he hoped that he was going to give, but he found that first of all he received as he learned from those he was living with (Nouwen, 2005, p. xx). This partly resonates with my own experiences, as I thought that I would go and empower people to participate in the research and be liberated from their marginalisation, so that they could enter into a wider community experience. I was challenged by some of the presumptions that I made. I did hear about people's aspirations, but I also heard a celebration of community and a broader experience than I had anticipated.

There is a sense that the process was mutually empowering, as, by openly sharing their stories, the participants empowered me to understand their community and to learn from their wisdom. Like Nouwen, although I went expecting to give, I found that I received. Nevertheless, as I met the potential participants, I was conscious of the power I held as a researcher. I was spending time in their home, uninvited, though welcomed by them. If they chose to be involved in the research I would be interpreting and telling their stories in my own way. I was keen to not exploit this power or manipulate people into taking part. I used strategies to empower, supporting people to take part in the research by explaining what their involvement meant, using strategies that were supportive of communication, and checking in with people following the interviews. I checked periodically whether people were happy to continue their interviews, allowed participants to direct the interview conversations, and interpreted body language, for example to ensure that I stopped if people were fatigued. Underlying this was a desire to be in right relation with people, to form relationships with people and to get to know them, including sharing something of myself with them. Friendship, love and equality within relationships is part of a Christian praxis of liberation (Gutiérrez, 2001, p. 23). The empowerment could perhaps be understood better as being in right relation. Grey talks about a "re-imagining of power as mutuality in relation," which includes "a bringing-to-birth of what is already there, empowering people in their own powers" (Grey, 1989, p. 103). This is what I hope occurred within the research process. Grey describes how this kind of relating was

modelled by Jesus; it is dependent on faith, sensitive, compassionate and leads to justice making (Grey, 1989, pp. 103-104). It also leads to building community. In this way, the research method reflected the topic and the aims of the research. This is considered to be one of the defining characteristics of feminist theology, and also theological research (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 15).

My spirituality affected the way I carried out the interviews. From the beginning, I considered the participants and their wellbeing as more important than the thesis, to the extent that early in the process I had some concerns regarding validity, as the interviews were so different having been carried out on the terms of the participants. However, the data that emerged was subsequently richer, as I listened to people and, as well as covering the broad themes of the interview schedule, followed their agenda to identify what was important to them, which in turn challenged my initial assumptions about their experiences of community. The methodology and my engagement with the participants led me to a different understanding of community and enabled me to glimpse something of what community meant to them.

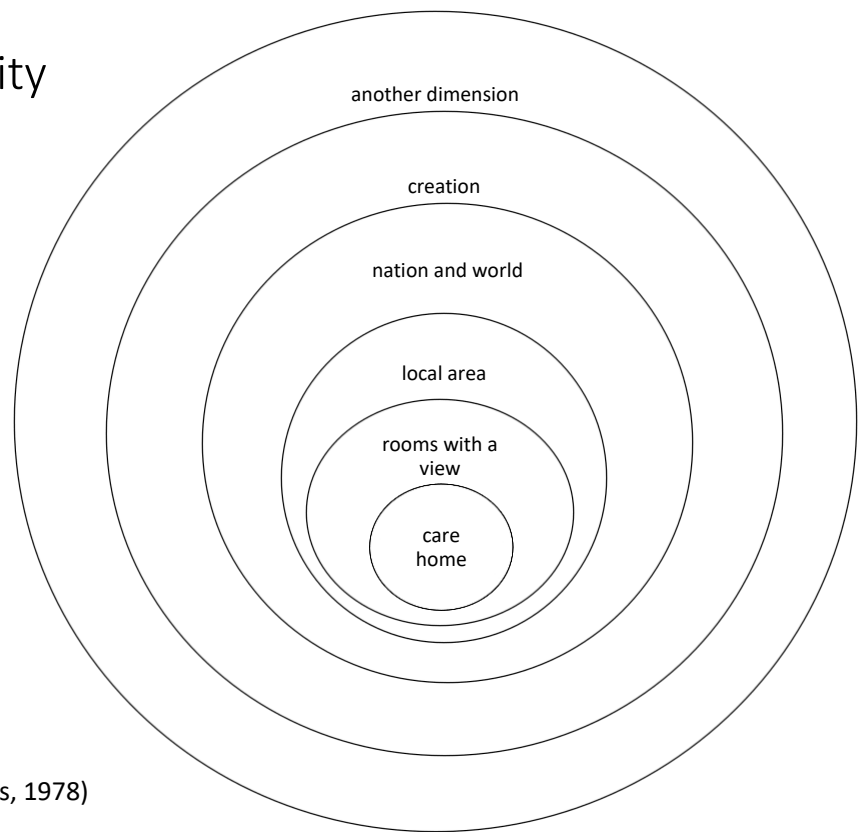
CHAPTER 4: Results

4.1 Community structure

The theme of geographical place emerged as an important concept, and it became apparent that a geographical model would best represent the structure of community described by the participants. The geographical place of home was particularly significant, and for some participants this new place was not home. When participants talked about people, they often placed them geographically. Appreciation of creation and closeness to God was sometimes linked to geographical place. As the participants described relationships with people and the past, they tended to place these geographically. In order to explore community connections within a geographical framework I adapted a geographical model developed by Rowles (Rowles, 1978, p. 168). I was not anticipating using a geographical model but it reflected what the participants told me about their community.

Combining the data about social networks and geographical place revealed that communities are located within an everchanging landscape. Threads are woven across this landscape through relationships; they connect people with other people, specific places, the whole of creation and God. These threads transcend time, and may be held in memory or project to the future.

A community landscape



Helen Hindle
(based on Rowles, 1978)

Figure 1: A community landscape

Although my model is based on Rowles's model, there are some differences, reflecting the differences in the data we gathered. Rowles's model includes home, surveillance zone, neighbourhood, the city and beyond spaces. Rowles describes 'beyond spaces' as spaces beyond the city. These 'beyond spaces' may include places of special significance for people (Rowles, 1978, pp. 168-170).

In my model, the care home is at the centre of the web. I do not call it 'home' as for some of the participants it did not feel like home.

Although I use the concept of the 'surveillance zone', I rename this 'rooms with a view', as this removes potential negative connotations of the idea of surveillance.

In my model, the local area (neighbourhood) may refer to the previous local area that was lived in, as participants sometimes referred to this more than the area that the home was located in.

Instead of 'city', I include the 'nation and the world' as a zone, as this reflected the data.

Finally, instead of the 'beyond spaces' zone, I include 'creation' and 'another dimension' as two separate zones. Creation includes local connections to creation, memories and hopes linked to creation, and universal aspects of creation. In my model, the 'another dimension' zone permeates all the other zones. This zone spans time, inner worlds and faith.

Although the zones of community are geographically nested, similar to an ecological model that represents different layers of environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514; Keating & Phillips, 2008, pp. 3-5), the outer zones do not necessarily directly impact the internal zones of community, though they may interact. The participants often described feeling safe and secure within the home, which is reflected in the image of a nest that potentially provides shelter and refuge, though is not guaranteed to do so. The outer zones may similarly contribute to a sense of shelter, but not necessarily. There are threads of connection within each zone as well as connections across zones. The connections to the outer zones are not reliant on connections to intermediate zones. Drawing on illustrations used in social network analysis (Gilchrist, 2009, pp. 48-52) I considered mapping examples of networks onto the model of community; however, due to the complexity of the networks, and particularly relationships which crossed time dimensions, I decided that a pictorial representation would not yield meaningful information. The responses from the participants demonstrated that, through their networks, there was interaction within the care home and across the zones. Additionally, links within zones supported links in other zones, for example, some participants described connecting with people within the care home because they found shared links in another geographical

zone. I also found that some links were stronger than others (Granovetter, 1973), that some connections were surrogate connections (Rowles, 1978, p. 32) and that networks changed over time.

4.2 Functions of community

All the functions of community that I identified prior to carrying out the interviews were important to at least some of the participants, and, through the analysis, these were explored for deeper meaning and application. For example, the statement 'giving as well as receiving' was explored within frameworks of hospitality, reciprocity and web weaving. As well as functions of community, new themes emerged including the importance of solitude, being known by name, mealtimes and food. Themes of transience and loss, feeling a burden, inclusion and making connections also became apparent.

I also initially analysed the data by looking at which functions were important. While it was interesting that all functions of community were demonstrated as important within the totality of participants, I recognised that perceptions may change from day to day. I also wondered whether, if something is part of our life, we might take it for granted and not consider it important unless it was missing. I did not include a quantitative analysis of 'importance', as this data was neither meaningful nor what I was aiming to investigate.

As the data was analysed it became apparent that, although exploring community networks and using the concepts of structure and function was helpful in finding out about community, rigidly dividing the data into network structure and function would reduce the overall meaning of the data. Finding out about the structure and functions of community networks told me something about the nature of community; this is what is reflected in the data analysis chapters.

4.3 Development of theological themes

The data overall contributed to the development of theological themes, which I mapped onto the different zones of community. As I did this, I saw that although there were overlapping elements between the zones, each zone of community had a distinct overarching theme. Theological themes of hospitality, liberation, right relationship and wisdom emerged as I worked with the data.

Initially, when I looked at the data relating to the care home zone, I focused on the theme of inclusion, recognising that this was an important part of life within a care home community. However, as I worked with the data, I found that the theme of inclusion was too restrictive and did not fully encompass the data. I realised that the theme of hospitality allowed me to incorporate the idea of inclusion alongside other aspects of community, reflecting more fully what the data told me about the nature of care home communities. I identified that relationships were important in order to create a hospitable place. A hospitable place is one where people can get to know one another and make connections, where there are reciprocal relationships, and where people don't feel like they are a burden. In a hospitable place, people are known by name, and are both included and allowed solitude. Mealtimes and food are an important part of hospitality. There can be transience within hospitable places. A hospitable place can feel like home.

When I reflected on the data about connections to the wider world, I initially considered that enabling older people to be part of the wider community, both before and after the move to the care home, was a matter of justice. Further reflection on the data, including consideration of the language used by the participants, caused me to consider it in terms of liberation, brought about through relationships. This includes working towards justice, but also allows me to highlight the impact on the participants and the wider community.

When I considered creation, my foundational idea was that creation is part of our community, and that it was important to be in harmony with creation. As I explored the data, this revealed the interconnectedness of relationships with creation, each other and with God.

As I explored 'another dimension' which includes health and wellbeing, interests, faith, the past and preparing for end of life, I was drawn to a sense of wellbeing and wholeness, which led me to the biblical idea of shalom. Further analysis and reflection indicated that wisdom had a role in leading people towards shalom.

4.3.1 Emergence of the overarching theme of shalom

The theme of shalom emerged as I explored 'another dimension'. While initially recognising the concept of shalom as including peace, wellbeing and wholeness, further investigation gave me a broader understanding. Swinton asserts that at the heart of shalom is being in right relationship with God, and through this relationship we move towards being in right relationship with others (Swinton, 2000a). Strong's dictionary illustrates the nature of right relationships, drawing on biblical passages including Psalms and the Prophets to indicate that shalom includes 'peace; completeness; welfare; health', 'a harmonious state of the soul and mind' and 'safety' (Strong, 2010). Particularly relevant to my research, it also includes "a state in which one can feel at ease, comfortable with someone...the relationship is one of harmony and wholeness" (Strong, 2010, p. 280). This led me to realise that I could use shalom as a lens to explore each of the different zones of community. I therefore decided to use shalom as an umbrella concept, demonstrating how right relationships in each of the areas of community lead towards a shalom community. Right relationships make places hospitable, lead to liberation, contribute to the harmony of all creation, as well as wholeness in another dimension. Right relationships lead us towards shalom.

4.4 Presentation of results in the data chapters

One aim of the research was to give voice to older people, and I wanted this to be reflected within the main body of the thesis. At the beginning of each data chapter, the results are presented as a dialogue between the participants and me. The dialogue uses direct quotes from the participants, which are highlighted by quotation marks. These quotes are interspersed with my comments and questions, which frame the quotes. Some of the data is not in the form of direct quotes, as I did not tape record all my interactions with the participants. This data is not within quotation marks, as it is either paraphrasing or referencing notes made at the time. Although I matched the language of the participants as far as possible, I wanted to differentiate between tape recorded information and remembered information.

As I wrote this section of each chapter, I could hear the voice of each person, and an image of them came into my mind. This helped me to stay close to their voices as I analysed and reflected on their experiences.

This technique also reflects something of the dialogical nature of the research, and my recognition of each participant, with their own distinct voice, as an equal conversation partner with myself. Although I asked the questions and had the power to control the interviews, they had the power to tell their own story and to ask about my story. This was the best way that I could find to reflect their individual stories, in their words.

CHAPTER 5: The care home

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider what the participants told me about community within the care home. The participants described their relationships with a range of people living in, working in and visiting the home. This chapter focuses on what those relationships mean in terms of community within the home; some of these relationships did provide links to the wider community, but that aspect will be discussed in the next chapter. The participants identified what was important to them within their community life, and described the factors that contributed to building community. For some participants the care home felt like home, and factors relating to that are explored. It became apparent that care home communities continually change, and that this has an impact on the residents. I will begin by presenting some data. The data will then be considered in relation to the literature, followed by theological reflection, in which I will argue how relationships contribute to hospitality, which leads towards shalom within care home settings.

5.2 In dialogue with the participants

As we discussed your community within the care home you described relationships with a range of different people. All of you talked about your relationships with staff members.

“We got very friendly.” (Regarding relationship with night carer)

(Maureen, Westhome, August 2018)

So, would you say is it important to have companionship?

“Oh yes.”

Do you have companionship here?

“A certain amount. Not as much as I’d like, but a certain amount.”

Where do you get that companionship from, is it from the staff?

“Yes, the people who work here.”

Is there any companionship from the other people who live here?

“No, I wouldn’t say that, no.”

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

“I don’t feel I’ve got anyone special. The only one [carer] who’s sort of special, she’s only on a couple of days a week now... I can’t say, because it might not be reciprocated.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

“They [carers] might think I’m a nuisance. I hate it when I’ve got to keep buzzing. I’m thinking I’m just a nuisance, you do you know you think ‘I’m a nuisance.’”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

You also talked about relying on staff members. Are there people here that you can rely on?

“Oh yes, yes. No, I’ve, the computer had gone flat and he got the internet up for me and charged it up, one of the lads.”

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

“It would be nice if they [staff] just kept their promises a little bit. They say all sorts of things, ‘Oh we’ll go here, go there,’ but it doesn’t come.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

You talked about the care you received.

“Sometimes you can’t wait for the toilet in a morning and if you blow they say, ‘Well why couldn’t you blow before?’ and I say, ‘Well you can’t blow before you want it.’”

And sometimes you've to wait three quarters of an hour before they come back. It's a long time. If they could just see that, many a time you've to wait an hour."

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

"I do feel they need more staff. I mean we have this situation every morning when there is a bottleneck. Everybody wants to get up between shall we say between seven and nine to ten, and they all want to go to the toilet, to have their breakfast, have a cup of tea, which is always very nice and then it's breakfast time."

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

At Greenpark in particular there was a sense of shared respectful fun and mutuality in some of your relationships.

"When I came here do you know what the staff called me? Speedy [laughter]

I was walking down this passageway one morning, and Kirsty, she was just coming out of her room, we nearly had a crash you know... [laughter]. She says, 'You want to get a bell on that thing then we can hear you coming!' Kirsty went to...like a holiday place, and her sister Louise works in here, and she came in one night, she says, I've had a parcel from Kirsty, and she's sent you a present. I opened it, it was a bicycle bell [joint laughter]."

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

For you Brenda, the community consists of people you are able to have conversations with.

"Community here is managers, assistant managers... and those who are able to think...able to converse. Yes, the people who are on my table, who sit regularly on the same table, you can converse with those. And there are one or two others as well, in the dining room, but not on my table, with whom I've had conversations."

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

You talked about your relationships with other residents.

"Gill who I play dominoes with... she lived in Old Town on the old road. She knew all the people I knew in that road when she first came here so it was very interesting really...I get on with Gill very well. We are great pals...She knows a lot of people you see as I know in Old Town. That's why I suppose we have a connection as well."

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Have you got to know any of the other people who live here?

"I wouldn't say I know them...they're acquaintances."

(George, Newlodge, September 2017)

Winnie, you had moved away from your local area, and you said that you feel 'alien to everybody.' You also said,

"I've never achieved a friendship with anybody here like I have with those people. It could be just the way we are, because I'm from Yorkshire and we're in Lancashire. I don't know if that has anything to do with it."

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

Some of you talked positively about your relationship with your family, and how they provided support. However, this was not the experience for all of you.

"No, I don't have children...No, and when you get to this age I think it's a drawback really...I'm relying now on one of my nephews and nieces, you know."

(Nancy, Greenpark, January 2019)

"No family of my own... Some nephews and nieces but they're some distance away, see them very, very rarely."

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

Your family members don't necessarily visit as much as you would like.

"I don't see, I don't see very much of him [son]. It was one of those things, oh when you come up there mum you know mum, but..."

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

Some of you relied on your family and friends for advice and practical support.

"It's her [sister's] daughter as comes to see me three times a week, just doing little jobs, things that you can't get hold of you know. She can only come Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Just for about half an hour."

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

Is it important to have someone to rely on?

"Oh yes, close friend."

Yes, so have you got a close friend who comes to visit?

"Yes."

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

A theme that emerged as I talked to many of you was about the value of people saying 'hello' and of people using names.

"I know those over there [gesturing to other residents in the lounge]. I try to learn names if I can."

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

Gwen, I reflected on a conversation in which you had said it is important to have people to say hello to and that it breaks up the day. You affirmed this, and also said,

"Oh it does yeah and then it's mostly everyone in the morning you get your name good morning, well most of them are, well lots of them do it which is good."

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Another theme that emerged as I talked to you was about solitude. So do you have your meals in here?

“Yes, I have them in here, yeah. You can’t lick your plate when you’re int’ dining room [joint laughing]. You can please yourself what you do when you’re in your own room.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

You told me about your different experiences of mealtimes. Do you tend to sit in the same place or with the same group of people at mealtimes?

“Yes, there are four of us. We sit at one table. We naturally go to the same table each time. So I do get to know them that way.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

“Well, up till recently I did. I sat with Rosie and Linda, until, well they’ve both died now. Now there is no conversation. They need feeding you see. The carers just rush round. I’m left just sat there. It’s not their fault. They’re doing their best.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

Gwen, in an un-taped conversation, you said that the home has changed over the last eighteen months. Now there is a strong focus on family. This brings home to you that you don’t have family. You described how people's families come in and have meals with them. You said, “It makes me feel...” You couldn’t describe how it made you feel, but it seemed to highlight your own lack of family (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Many of you talked about food.

“They make me good meals. Good sweets. Apple pie, lemon cheesecake, like lemon meringue. Oh there’s always a big choice. I’m just not such a big sweet lover. That’s my fault, not theirs. Then they bring me a banana when they have any you see because they know I like I love a banana.”

(Elvie, Greenpark November 2018)

When the activities coordinator came round with a glass of wine, you said,

“Put that in your research.”

You said,

“I don’t really like it, but you can’t say ‘no’ all the time.”

(Maureen, Westhome, June 2018)

“What I miss mostly is cooking my own little bit of treats and food and that sort of thing, you know it's not quite the same, but you just have to put up with it. I used to love that meal. I didn't have it regular but just felt, I thought, ‘Oh, I'll have that today, I really enjoyed it,’ but you can't, it's impossible.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

You talked about inclusion and exclusion. Gwen, you described your interactions with a lady with dementia who does crocheting.

“One lady in the wing does beautiful crocheting. She carries it with her everywhere she goes. She had one...was it mauve and white the other day it was lovely. She likes you admiring them, you know.”

“Funny thing dementia isn't it. It affects you in different ways. Some can be very awkward. Some can be very quiet...”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

Marion, you talked about some challenges communicating with one of your friends in the home.

“I can talk to her six times, and she still won’t have it that whatever it was we were talking about was real. Very difficult to talk to you know, but you have to do.”

“You’ve to just have a little bit more patience.”

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

When I visited the home for the carol service, Evelyn, you said you didn't know who half the people were. I said that some of them were from downstairs [the wing for people with dementia]. You said,

“And we don't mix with them!”

You were joking, but there was some truth in what you said. Gwen contradicted you and said that they do mix, and that a few of you had gone downstairs yesterday afternoon to sing carols (Newlodge, December 2017).

Some of you reflected on the exclusion that you experienced within the home.

“I don’t like to be left on my own if you know what I mean. I like people to come and, because I can’t hear, I have to rely on people coming up and speaking, like you. And if they don’t speak to and I could go for hours, and I can’t hear what they are talking about. I can’t join in. And that is a bit hurtful. It’s not their fault, they’re too busy, they do the best they can.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018).

Giving as well as receiving and making a difference was important for many, but not all of you. Some of you would like to be able to make more of a difference. There were barriers to giving and to making a difference. And do you have the opportunity to give?

“Not much really to be honest. Anybody that’s getting a bit infirm and that I don’t want to interfere because I think the staff should do it, but if I can help in any way, but I try not to sort of push myself into it. If anybody’s in real trouble I can give them a hand and then they can take over but I sort of back off. I don’t know whether I was in hospital, it was drawn out to me once. I didn’t do it, but somebody went to help somebody that was in hospital. I think and they were told not to do it because the insurance is not covered if anything went wrong. As a stop gap, I’ll help at the moment and let them take over as soon as they can.”

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

Maureen, although you wish you were able to give, you did not think it was important to make a difference to where you lived now.

“No, it’s not important. No, I just sit in my own little circle and stay there.”

(Maureen, Westhome, September 2018)

Another theme that emerged was about how people supported relationship development.

“[the activities coordinator] has got me going into the lounge more than I ever did. I think I must have been a bit shy or something. I think, well nobody will want to talk to me.”

(Maureen, Westhome, June 2018)

I saw some of you caring for each other. For you, Alice, this was linked to you sharing your faith.

“You see I watch Joyce Meyer on television. And she stressed when God gives you anything, let it go...I think sometimes I’m a bit like t’ Dead Sea, you see it’s coming in, I’ve got it but I don’t share it with other people like I should, and I read it about this Dead Sea you see, it’s like well it’s dead, and I think, well am I dead? Am I not sharing

with other people like what I should be sharing? But I've talked about Jesus to people, just one or two, [unintelligible] next door but you see they have to decide for themselves what to do. But you can always do something to help them. Somebody said to Marjorie, when she was told she was coming into next room to me, 'Oh you're alright then if you're coming next room to Alice,' she said, 'she'll look after you.' Well in a way, that's testifying, you know. You can do it all kinds of ways. It's the way you live your life. Somebody said, I can't just think, you shouldn't need to say so much, if you live it out."

"You can just go and visiting different people as are in here, you know."

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

Barbara, you were at home enough to welcome others into your home. What about feeling at home?

"Very important. Yes, for me it is, and I feel at home."

And what do you think helps make somewhere feel at home?

"The welcome you get. The way people talk to each other and help each other. And that's very important here. We all know each other. I don't remember names, faces of people I know, and that's about it really. Making people feel welcome."

"If I see somebody lonely, I go and sit and talk to them."

(Barbara, Northway, May 2019)

In contrast, Ruby, you do not feel at home and you are not able to make a difference to where you live. Is it important to make a difference to where you live?

"Oh yes, yes."

And are you able to do that?

"To a certain extent but wholly no, because it's not my place you see."

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

Winnie, you also do not feel at home, and do not feel able to make a difference where you live. Is it important to you to make a difference where you live?

“I don’t know because I don’t know if I have confidence in myself.”

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

The theme of safety also emerged. Brenda, although you did not feel at home you said,

“I’m here and secure and safe and looked after, so I’m alright.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Two of you, now widowed, described domestic violence that you had endured in your married life. Home had not been a safe place for you.

There were different levels of attachment to your previous place of home. For those of you with strong attachments, you did not feel fully at home following the move to the care home.

George, your wife was still living at home, and your attachment to home was linked to your attachment to your wife.

“I would love to be at home. But there’s no way my wife could cope. She’d like to have me there.”

(George, Newlodge, September 2017)

Evelyn, you were strongly attached to the geographical community of home, which was part of your family identity and your own overall identity.

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

Nancy, you were attached to the bungalow you used to live in.

“Well, you see my husband built that. It was his mother’s big house at this side, and he had a brother, Bill, and he built another house at the other side, so there was room for us a bungalow in the middle, and it was just ready for when we came back off were honeymoon, so we didn’t have a big honeymoon you see we just put all were money in the bungalow, but we came back to it, and I was there all the time, and I think I had about sixty years there.”

“I’m missing my bungalow.”

(Nancy, Greenpark, January 2019)

Some of you formed new attachments to the new place you had moved to. Some of you, although not feeling being at home, felt at times like it was home, or it was beginning to feel like home. Do you feel at home?

“At times. It’s not home, but it’s a good home.”

(Nancy, Greenpark, January 2019)

Is it important to feel at home?

“Oh yes, and feel you belong.”

Do you feel at home here?

“I do, to a certain extent.”

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

A sense of home was felt by some of you when you returned to the home after a time of absence. What about feeling at home, is that important?

“Oh yes. When I go to chapel on a Sunday morning, I come back, when I come in I say, ‘home again!’”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

Length of time living here was an important part of feeling at home for some of you, and this was connected to making relationships. Do you feel at home here?

“Yes, I do now, I mean it’s a long while eight years isn’t it. At first it takes a while because some people don’t speak out, they wouldn’t look at you. They just sit staring at you, you know as though you’re a piece of wood. But you get other people that think oh they’re the same as you, you know you’re alright. They make friends with you. That lady that comes from Southern County, the one right opposite, more refined people you know, but you know, they’re still friends.”

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

Relationships were also commented on by you, Anne. What things help it to feel like home would you say?

“Comfort, care, companionship.”

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

Moving to the care home was a significant change in community, and this change was something that you felt you had varying degrees of control over.

“Well I started having falls you see. My daughter thought I’d be better in here. But since I’ve been in here, I haven’t had any.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

“Well I didn't choose it... I think it was my daughter and my son... I think they sort of decided where I was going to settle... I didn't. No. They decided where I was going to come. But I felt it wasn't my decision, what happened.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

Your community continued to change following the move to the care home. Several of you commented on the transient nature of the staff in the care home.

“You get friendly with someone, and then they disappear.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

There was also expansion in communities as families expanded.

“...and Jennie [daughter] has just become a grandmother. My younger daughter has been a grandmother for quite a while and I love them very dearly. They are both different. They both have good husbands who are also very good to me.”

(George, Newlodge, September 2017)

Death and dying are part of the community experience here. There was a conflict between wanting to know what is happening and expressing care, as well as a barrier to enquire.

Gwen, in an un-taped conversation you said that a lady had died this week. You said that you have got to know people here and they have died. There was a sense of loss. You asked did I know how George was. You had not seen him today, and you know he is not well and that he enjoys coming out of his room. You said that ‘when you are here, you don't ask’. You were concerned for him (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Another theme that emerged was about the changing nature of the care home. This was something that those of you who had lived in the homes for a number of years often commented on.

“Now more people with dementia are creeping into our section. That is Christianity. I don't object. Some do.” [from notes made during follow up conversation].

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

However, you did not consider people with dementia to be part of your community.

5.3 Analysis

Within this analysis I will begin by considering the types of relationships described by the participants and the blurring of relationship boundaries. I will then explore aspects of community life highlighted by some of the participants, including building community and feeling at home. Finally, I will consider how the care home community changes over time.

5.3.1 Relationships

The data highlighted the importance of relationships within a community. Evans outlines three types of social relationship identified in the literature that are important for good health and wellbeing, which are “relationships with close kin, with friends and neighbours and with voluntary and community groups” (Evans, 2009, p. 125). Within the care homes I identified four main sources of potential human relationships, which share similarities with those identified by Evans. These were relationships with staff, with other residents, with family and with other visitors. It is important to note that these relationships were not routinely experienced by all participants; however, all of the participants talked about relationships with staff. I will explore these different types of relationship and how boundaries may be crossed as professional relationships may include closeness and as strangers become friends.

5.3.1.1 Staff

Residents spoke positively about their relationships with staff. Staff members were an important source of companionship and, in some cases, friendship. In some homes this was apparent in the everyday interactions in communal areas, where I observed banter as well as quiet conversations occurring between staff and residents. However, in one home, the public interaction between residents and staff was limited, and the reported relationships between staff and residents varied. In another home, interaction with carers in the communal areas was mostly task orientated; however, from the interviews it was clear that more personal interaction was occurring at other times. This reflects other research findings regarding some

care homes where there was limited communication in public areas, but relationships developed through personal care routines (Brown-Wilson, Davies, et al., 2009, pp. 1048, 1050, 1059). Hunt comments that “a care giver can be tender in touch, but only friends are tender in feeling” (Hunt, 2009, p. 22). However, some participants did talk about friendly relationships with caregivers; there was a sense of loss if those carers moved on. Hunt was not talking about care giving within care homes, which perhaps highlights that there can be something special about the relationships that can develop between carers and residents in care home settings. Reciprocity in relationships was important to participants. Gwen valued the mutual sharing of personal information with carers. Barbara valued ‘having a laugh’ with carers, and some participants valued the companionship they shared with carers. Shared laughter is recognised as having a role in relationship development (S. K. Scott, Lavan, Chen, & McGettigan, 2014, p. 620). Sharing laughter may be a part of how we connect with each other; it may also be a sign of a healthy community. Other researchers describe the value of staff sharing information about themselves to facilitate the development of reciprocity and mutuality within the relationship (O’Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 140; Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 65). In my research, participants with good communication skills had a greater sense of equality and reciprocity in their relationships with carers than those who had difficulties with communication. Communication difficulties are a negative factor in relationship formation (McGilton & Boscart, 2007, p. 2153).

In relation to mental health services, it has been suggested that it may be difficult to fully achieve mutuality within a caring relationship, and that there are issues of power as well as professional boundaries (B. Brown, 2015, p. 831). However, the benefits of increasing social capital through mutual relationships for staff, patients and organisations are recognised (B. Brown, 2015, pp. 833-834). Nursing literature outlines the value of professional boundaries and the differences in how these might be understood (Baca, 2011, pp. 196-197). Arguably, boundaries might be less defined in the care home context than in short term care settings,

and, as Nakrem, Vinsnes and Seim found, residents may be dependent on care home staff for their social relationship needs (Nakrem, Vinsnes, & Seim, 2011, p. 1363). Kang found that reciprocity between staff and residents fostered a sense of “being valued and recognised as a person of worth” (Kang et al., 2020, p. 1169). Doris’s sense of worth appeared compromised, as she felt like she was a nuisance and was unsure whether her relationships with staff were reciprocated. Maureen’s comment reflects staff attitude towards residents who do need more care:

“The carers say to me, ‘I wish there were thirty-two Maureens.’ I bet they do. I’m no trouble.” (Maureen, Westhome, June 2018)

Fear of becoming a burden increases as people age (Heywood, Oldman, & Means, 2002, p. 55; Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 23). This may partly be due to an unhelpful societal attitude towards dependency (Heywood et al., 2002, p. 36). It is suggested that reciprocity in relationships may reduce the feelings of being a burden, or is at least related to this (Godfrey, Townsend, & Denby, 2004, p. 71; Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 25); however, this is something that requires further exploration and is likely to be multifactorial.

Across the homes, several participants commented on the need for more staff, with Flo identifying that additional staff in the mornings would be helpful. Managers agreed that responding to buzzers in a timely way was challenging. Research by Roberts suggests that this has implications for residents in terms of feeling able to ask for help as well as for their relationships with staff (Roberts, 2018, p. 4368). Nevertheless, on the whole, staff members were appreciated. George felt that the staff should be paid more, reflecting the regard that he felt towards staff members.

5.3.1.2 Other residents

There was a range of different experiences regarding interactions with other residents. Several participants, particularly at Westhome, didn't feel that there was companionship with the other residents. A significant proportion of residents at Westhome were frail, which may have contributed to the lower levels of companionship from other residents (Roberts, 2018, p. 4368). In other homes, there were varying levels of relationship with other residents, from limited interaction, to acquaintances and great pals. A range of relationship types is helpful within a community structure, as different relationships perform different functions, including providing support and connecting us to other communities (Granovetter, 1973). Part of the difference in relationships with others is due to the fact that we might find some people easier to bond with than others, perhaps finding it easier to make friends with people who are similar to us (Roberts, 2018, p. 4366). Flo commented on the saying 'birds of a feather flock together' as she reflected on getting on with some people better than others. Another factor relates to personality differences (Roberts, 2018, pp. 4366-4367). Evelyn said it took time to make friends, whereas Brenda referred to me as her friend on the second occasion that we met. Our circumstances might also be significant. George had strong ties with his family, who visited a lot. He perhaps only sought acquaintances. He enjoyed participating in the activities within the home, and his family often also joined in with these. Some residents may not seek close relationships with other residents.

5.3.1.3 Friends and family

Contact with friends who were known prior to the move to the care home was valued, and provided support, including being someone to rely on for people with or without close family members. Reflecting other research, family members were valued for companionship and reliable alliances (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 24); however, these relationships were not always straightforward. Flo's weekly visits from one of her sons may appear sufficient from his perspective, but was different from her perspective as she spends most of her time alone in

her room. Winnie indirectly alluded to anxieties about her actions in relation to the domestic violence in her household, and how they may have affected her son. It is difficult to know what the long-term effects on their relationship have been. Relationships are difficult to fathom from an outside perspective, and, as Woodward and Kartupelis comment, family relationships can take many forms (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 63).

Some participants commented on not having children. European research, which did not include the UK, concluded that childless older people compensated for the lack of children through relationships with others; however, these relationships did not provide the same level of support that children provide (Deindl & Brandt, 2017, p. 1543). Wenger's research in rural Wales found that childless older people were likely to enter residential care. Factors which contributed to childless older people staying in their own homes included being married, being female, having strong financial capital, the development of social networks earlier in life, and for some people, new friendships forming in old age (Wenger, 2009, pp. 1243, 1250). These studies were not focused on people who were living in care homes; however, some of the themes were reflected in my findings. Nancy felt that relying on nephews and nieces was different from relying on children. Maureen had formed long lasting relationships throughout her life. However, a significant relationship was one that she had developed since moving to the care home. She talked about one of the carers, Susan, whom she considered to be a friend. She told me that Susan said she regards her as being like her grandma. Maureen did not say whether she reciprocated this sentiment, but she did feel close to Susan. Marion talked about visits from her sister, who has Alzheimer's disease, which have been arranged by social care. She talked about her strong relationship with her niece. Not having children was not a factor that defined either Maureen or Marion. Maureen commented that other residents often come into her room to look at the carpark, to look to see whether their daughters have arrived. She said, "these daughters never come." She sounded sympathetic, but at the same time, sounded as if she was saying, see we are all the same, having daughters doesn't bring any advantages.

Reflecting other research (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 90) my findings indicate that there was a blurring of relationship roles. Residents may become friendly, or sometimes friends, with carers and other residents, and carers may regard residents as family. Residents may see less of their true kin than they would like. While Evans reflected the literature relating to different sources of relationships as being important for health and wellbeing (Evans, 2009, p. 125) it may be more helpful to consider the extent to which different types of relationship provisions are fulfilled (Weiss, 1974, pp. 23-26).

5.3.2 Building community

I will explore different aspects of community development including:

- giving, making a difference and making connections
- being known by name
- mealtimes
- activities
- the value of solitude
- barriers to inclusion

I perceived that giving, making a difference and weaving webs of connections through offering hospitality were ways in which community could develop. I observed staff members developing relationships with residents and supporting them in forming relationships with each other. I also observed some residents engaging in web weaving and providing hospitality. Barbara introduced herself to new residents who came into the home and then took the role of introducing them to other residents. Kang identified that opportunities to support peers during group activities as well as interactions in everyday activities helps people feel they have something to offer to the community (Kang et al., 2020, p. 1167). Barbara talked about welcoming people. Alice visited other residents and supported them where she could, and would have liked more opportunities to give within the home. She used to take her empty

plate back to the kitchen after mealtimes, which she felt the staff appreciated. However, she was asked not to carry on doing this for health and safety reasons, which she found frustrating.

Knowing people's names was important for some participants, as was being known by name. Brown-Wilson, Cooke and Forte commented that residents try to remember names in order to support interaction (Brown-Wilson, Cook, & Forte, 2009, p. 79). I had a sense that it went further than this, and that being called by name might reinforce the sense of identity and belonging. Alice enjoyed her nickname of 'speedy' as it affirmed her identity in a positive way. O'Shea and Walsh comment on the way identity is diminished if residents feel they are "one of a number" (O'Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 143). Being called by name may reinforce their identity. Barbara commented that she could not remember names, but emphasised that she could remember faces.

Participants raised the topic of food, and what they enjoyed eating. This showed that, for some, mealtimes were a welcome part of the routine, which was partly about the enjoyment of food. Enjoyment of food is one of the significant factors associated with nursing home satisfaction (Burack, Weiner, Reinhardt, & Annunziato, 2012, p. 52). Food and mealtimes are important within care home settings for the enjoyment of both food and social interaction (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 52). Several participants talked positively about mealtimes as opportunities to build relationships, and George valued the fact that his wife could join him at mealtimes. Curle and Keller explored interactions at mealtimes in retirement homes, recognising that mealtimes are important opportunities for social interaction. They commented on the negative effect of family members and guests being present, partly because other residents could not join in with their conversations (Curle & Keller, 2010, p. 196). Within my research, Gwen was negatively affected by families joining in mealtimes, as it highlighted that she had no family visitors to share mealtimes with. As Garland comments, in care homes there are challenges in balancing the rights of individuals against the needs of the

group as a whole (Garland, 1993, p. 141). Several residents valued having the freedom to eat in their own rooms.

Reflecting other research findings, provision of activities within the homes provided an opportunity for people to get to know each other (Kang et al., 2020, p. 1167). Playing dominoes and cards together was one time when relationships were formed and developed. Brenda, however, perceived the activities in her home as 'entertainment', which she was not interested in, so did not participate. Some activities are more conducive to community building than others, but a mixture of activities is helpful, as not everything needs to be about building community, and some people may want to be 'entertained'.

Opportunities for times of solitude and being able to be selective about our community experiences is important in care home settings (Kartupelis, 2021, p. 25). Alice told me that she liked to sit in the conservatory on her own. She also has daily times of prayer. Elvie and Maureen didn't join in with many of the communal activities organised by the home; however, they were strongly connected to communities outside of the home and had formed good relationships with staff members in the home. They enjoyed solitude as well as companionship, and their boundaries meant that they had time on their own and time with selected people. Some residents may not want to be part of the care home community. My research highlights that some people experience community primarily through staff and people from outside of the home. For some participants, building connections with residents within the care home was not a priority, whereas enjoying solitude interspersed with meaningful relationships with others was important. Tornstam, drawing on disengagement theory, activity theory, continuity theory and social breakdown syndrome, outlines how thinking and practice about solitude has changed since the 1960s. He comments on reports from staff members who,

confessed feeling that they were doing something wrong when they tried to drag certain old people to various forms of arranged social activity or activity therapy. They felt as if they were trespassing on something they rather ought to respect and leave alone. (Tornstam, 2005, p. 34).

He talks about the value of solitude (Tornstam, 2005, p. 75). His research shows that “the need for solitude increases up to the age category of 35-44 and remains quite stable after that” (Tornstam, 2005, p. 100). He also found that “respondents with one or several diseases report a greater need for solitude” (Tornstam, 2005, p. 100). My research suggests that some older people in care homes would like more interaction, and that some people benefit from support to participate, but that it is also important to respect the desire for solitude. A carer needs to know someone well to discern whether the outward choices are a genuine preference, or whether there are ways in which the environment can be made more hospitable; a resident needs to know somebody well enough and have a certain level of trust in order to show their true preferences. Brown-Wilson, Cook and Forte advise providing support if residents are not engaging with other residents in order to help them to form relationships (Brown-Wilson, Cook, et al., 2009, p. 83). I agree; however, this support may lead us to realise that it may be a true choice to not want to engage with other residents, and that should also be respected.

Cognitive, hearing and visual impairments did pose challenges to inclusion, and residents commented on the changing nature of their care home communities in relation to other residents being increasingly frail. Oldman and Quilgars comment that the trend of people being increasingly frail when they enter residential care is a barrier to them being socially included in care home life (Oldman & Quilgars, 1999, p. 380). Out of the four care homes, Northway was the exception to this trend. Brown-Wilson, Cook and Forte state that, as residents become frail, new relationships may need to be supported by staff (Brown-Wilson, Cook, et al., 2009, p. 80). I would add that this support may also be required for existing relationships, particularly when residents develop cognitive impairments. I observed chaplains

and activity coordinators working towards inclusion by, for example, talking to residents about dementia and creating supportive opportunities for people with and without a diagnosis of dementia to interact with each other. One member of staff also commented on the challenges of having people with dementia living in the same home as people without a diagnosis of dementia, suggesting that needs for both groups might best be met if people were segregated. This was reinforced by some residents, who had previously lived in homes where there were more people with dementia, who described feeling that there had been nobody to talk to. This debate is beyond the scope of this research; however, it does demonstrate that if people with a variety of needs are living together, there do need to be strategies in place to address this.

Some participants described feeling excluded due to hearing difficulties, and some alluded to excluding people with dementia. However, some participants talked about actively including people who were frail, having patience, repeating things and trying to understand. There was an intentionality to including people who were frail. These participants actively wove the web of connections, strengthening threads that were fragile by using compensatory strategies as well as making new connections. I observed an activities coordinator using writing to support a resident who was deaf. Summarising the research regarding the effects of hearing loss, Hubbard, Mamo and Hopper (2018) report that hearing loss is associated with more rapid cognitive decline, loneliness, depression, mental fatigue and social withdrawal. Their recommendations for management include use of hearing aids, assistive listening devices, environmental modifications and communication strategies (Hubbard, Mamo, & Hopper, 2018, p. 199). I observed hearing aids being used with varying success, and only some use of communication strategies, suggesting that homes may benefit from some training in this area. Doris also had visual impairment, which compounded her difficulties with communication. Further research to measure the impact of addressing hearing and visual impairment would be beneficial. This should begin from the perspective of the residents themselves, with

researchers and health professionals working jointly with the residents throughout the process.

5.3.3 Home

The concept of home is not central to the research question. However it was something that was part of the interview schedule, as feeling at home is related to relationships that provide attachment (Weiss, 1974, p. 23). It is a concept which runs through all the data chapters as it has relevance in all the zones of community. The participants who felt at home in the care home and articulated what made somewhere feel like home talked about relationships. This corroborates other research findings, which highlight the connection between relationships and a sense of home (Gunter, 2000, p. 12; Heywood et al., 2002, p. 74; Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 50). For Anne, “care, comfort and companionship” made somewhere feel like home. Barbara talked about welcome, people talking to each other and helping each other. Marion talked about making friends.

Residents who contributed to creating a home like environment through behaviours such as giving, making a difference and offering hospitality, tended to report feeling at home. In contrast, Ruby did not feel at home, did not feel that this was her place, and did not feel fully able to make a difference to where she lived. Likewise, Winnie did not feel at home and did not have confidence to make a difference. Many residents who said that giving and making a difference where they lived was important to them, and were able to do this, did report feeling at home. However, this was not necessarily a causal relationship, nor was feeling at home always dependent on this. Participants who were particularly upset about not being able to give or make a difference, or did not feel that their voice was heard, did not feel at home. It would be interesting to research this further. Feeling at home may be affected by the extent to which we feel able to make somewhere home. We need to feel sufficiently at home to have the power and confidence to become homemakers. The act of homemaking may reinforce our

own feeling of 'at home-ness'. Having the ability to offer hospitality to visitors has already been identified in the literature as being beneficial (Brown-Wilson, Cook, et al., 2009, p. 76; O'Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 142). It would be useful to explore ways in which older people can be supported to show hospitality to each other and to visitors to the home.

In order to make a difference within the home beyond one's own interactions with others, it is important to have a voice that is heard. In Gwen's interview, we talked about residents' meetings, and she commented, "but we hardly got a word in edgeways with one of the people in here." Residents' meetings may not always be the best way of giving people a voice.

Alternative strategies were identified in a Joseph Rowntree report including using mealtimes as an opportunity for staff, older people and managers to share their views informally (Owen & Meyer, 2012, p. 24).

Participants with a particularly strong attachment to their previous place of home did not feel fully at home in the care home, and talked about missing their home and wishing they could be there. Developing place attachment is one factor required for successful transition to a retirement community (Sugihara & Evans, 2000, pp. 400-401). Emotional attachment to place can develop over time (Rowles & Bernard, 2013, p. 10), which contributes to a sense of identity and belonging to a place. When I asked Evelyn whether it was important to have a sense of identity, she replied, "Yes I think it is. I don't know whether I have got an identity now. Not now separated from my roots." Her roots belonged in a geographical place where she was known and had been known from childhood. Although she had formed some new connections in the care home, these were not sufficient for her to have a sense of identity in this place. Her lack of identity appeared to be due to not feeling 'known' in the way she was known in her previous community. She said, "People don't know me now like they used to do. At one time I was well known, now I feel as though nobody knows me now."

There may be mixed feelings about revealing ourselves in a new environment. Alice, for example demonstrated a sense of needing to be on your best behaviour in public areas, hence eating her meals in her own room. However, she made choices about when to be public and what to share, as perhaps we all do. Other residents may not be able to readily make those transitions between public and less public places due to their level of dependency.

Some participants talked about this new place beginning to feel like home after a number of years of living there. Marion described feeling at home, and this was linked to forming relationships over a period of several years, whereas Flo did not feel at home after five and a half years. However, not feeling fully at home did not necessarily mean a lack of attachment to the care home. Brenda talked about feeling affectionate towards her abode even though it was not home. Brenda and Gwen both talked about feeling safe in the care home, contrasting this with not feeling safe prior to moving to the home. For Gwen this meant that she didn't need to worry if she became unwell, and for Brenda there was a sense of feeling 'alright'.

It is also important to recognise that home may not always be a safe place (Gurney & Means, 1993, p. 122). Two participants described abusive relationships and domestic violence that they had endured in their married lives. Care homes may not always be safe places, and it is important to be aware of that and to address safeguarding issues (NICE, 2021).

Although this new place did not feel like home for several participants, there were positive aspects to the move. O'Shea and Walsh outline the debate about whether it is "feasible or desirable for long-stay care to ever be considered *home* or even *homelike* by older people" as some residents may never feel at home within a care home. They advocate creating homelike environments in care homes (O'Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 128). Summarising the literature, Brown-Wilson suggests that although it is positive to aim for homelike environments, developing community through relationships in care homes may be more helpful than focusing

on the concept of home (Brown-Wilson, 2009, p. 177). However, these are not mutually exclusive, as my research suggests the formation of relationships is one way in which a place may become more homelike. Focusing on relationships creates both community and a homelike environment.

Woodward and Kartupelis comment that people living in large independent living developments tend to regard each other as neighbours, whereas people in care homes saw each other as family members (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, pp. 83, 57). It is interesting to consider whether participants within the care homes felt like this was a family home, where staff and residents felt like family, or whether it felt like a place of co-located individuals, with the corridors as streets. Nancy talked about her neighbours as being people who lived on her corridor. Alice went 'visiting' the other residents, again suggesting co-location of individuals. However, at the same time, Alice was comfortable rearranging furniture in the communal area, suggesting a homelike comfortableness in the wider home. Elvie agreed she felt at home, although she would like a dog. She did not participate in the wider care home community. Potentially feeling at home did not necessarily mean that the care home felt like one large family in a large household. Some people appeared to feel at home within their room, and in this way the overall household contained a collection of homes.

5.3.4 Change

People's wider community experiences had changed prior to moving to the care home, and this will be discussed in the next chapter. The move to the care home was another change that occurred, and one over which people had varying degrees of control. Bowers et al. comment that decisions to move to a home may have been made by others (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 6). For all the participants, physical health played a part. Some participants were keen to tell me that the move to the home had not been their decision. Evelyn was generally reticent during the interview, but this was a point that she expanded on. Within this exchange she made four

comments asserting that the move to the home had not been her decision, partly balanced by two comments about being quite happy here and fitting in. Alice made the point that this decision had been made by her daughter, and was keen to point out that since she had been in the home she had not had any falls, with her tone of voice implying that perhaps the falls were not as much of an issue as had been suggested. For both of them, it still rankled that the decision to move had not been their own. Some participants asserted a sense of control over the decision to move into the care home. Brenda said that moving to the home was necessary, that she didn't fancy being in her own home and having carers and not knowing what they were doing. Her daughters suggested that she did stay at home.

I heard how community continued to change within the care home through families expanding, and the development of new friendships and acquaintances with staff, visitors and residents. Families were a source of continual community expansion as babies were born and as people gained partners. There was also loss as people died and staff moved on. There was a sense of this being a transient community. Brown-Wilson, Cook and Forte acknowledge these factors as challenges in forming relationships in care homes (Brown-Wilson, Cook, et al., 2009, pp. 78-80). In most homes I heard how the nature of the community is changing, with challenges to community due to people with dementia and increasing frailty living in the home.

5.3.5 Summary

The care home community is made up of a wide range of relationships. There are several ways that a sense of community can be strengthened through these relationships, and this may help some people to feel at home or to have a sense of home. The care home community is constantly changing. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a change that was unpredicted and unplanned for. This would have created challenges to building community within care homes, as the focus necessarily became about reducing transmission of the disease. Many

staff members and residents died in care homes during this time and this loss will have deeply affected those surviving within those communities. The pandemic also heightened the importance of relationships between residents and staff. During the pandemic, visits to care homes were stopped completely for several months, and the functions fulfilled by friends and family as part of the community within the care home were curtailed. My research highlights the importance of visitors to care homes, but also the value of staff relationships with residents, and the possibility of strong bonds being formed. Going forwards, the importance of staff resident relationships needs to be recognised, as these may be the main source of contact that a resident has.

5.4 Theological reflection: shalom and hospitality

A biblical meaning of shalom includes a sense of being relaxed, living harmoniously and being in good relationship (Strong, 2010, p. 280). The root of the word also includes meanings of safety, friendliness and reciprocity (Strong, 2010, p. 282).

Hospitality is part of shalom as it describes how we are in right relation with each other and with God. It helps us to feel comfortable within a place. Based on the responses of the participants and the analysis, I will argue that right relationships are at the heart of hospitality, and this leads towards shalom. These relationships lead to the creation of hospitable places.

Based on what the participants valued, a hospitable place is a place of welcome and feeling at home. It is a place where we can be ourselves and have times of solitude if we choose. It is a place of eating and drinking, and of sharing stories. It is a place where boundaries are crossed, where people reach out to each other and get to know each other. It is a place where we have the opportunity to give and to receive. It is a place where friendship is reciprocated, and we become known. These themes are also commented on by theologians in relation to hospitality. Pohl states, "In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal and comfortable

space, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship” (Pohl, 1999, p. 13). In giving and receiving hospitality, we remember that God was first of all hospitable to us, that shalom is God’s gift to us (Swinton, 2000a, p. 59), and that God gives us the pattern of “divine hospitality” (Louw, 2019, p. 3). The order of this reflection varies from the analysis because theological themes crossed the different areas of analysis and it is helpful to consider each theological theme as whole. This reflection is structured in the following way:

- Divine hospitality
- Giving and receiving hospitality
- Reciprocity in caring relationships
- Forming relationships across boundaries
- Knowing names and being known by name
- Solitude
- Mealtimes
- Feeling at home

I will finally consider how communities change over time, and the ongoing struggle for communities of shalom.

5.4.1 Divine hospitality

I will begin by arguing how God as Trinity provides us with an image of hospitality, in the form of right relationships that reach out to all people in a continual movement of loving actions. Moltmann described the Trinity in terms of perichoresis, a process of relationships between Father, Son and Spirit (Moltmann, 1993, pp. 174-175). Louw highlights that “perichoresis expresses intimacy and reciprocity” (Louw, 2019, p. 6). Building on Moltmann’s work, Swinton asserts that our relationality stems from the fact that we are made in the image of a triune God (Swinton, 2012, p. 158). In a footnote, while acknowledging criticisms of this approach for projecting ideals of community onto God, he argues that “the relational nature of the Trinity is an important key to the relational nature of human beings” (Swinton, 2012, pp. 159-160). This

includes our need for relationship, and our interdependency. Moltmann describes how “[t]he Persons of the Trinity make one another shine” (Moltmann, 1993, p. 176). Similarly, we are transformed through being in right relationship with each other.

My own understanding of the Trinity in terms of community developed as I read about relationality and dancing and contemplated Rublev’s icon of the Trinity. Fiddes uses the metaphor of a dance to explore perichoresis. He describes how this divine dance involves each person of the Trinity moving in and through each other, while also making room for us to take part, drawing us closer to God and to other people. It is inclusive, and, in Fiddes’s description, it is the ‘patterns of the dance’ that are important, as the patterns reflect ‘actions of love’ (Fiddes, 2014, pp. 175-176). While acknowledging that it could be possible to inappropriately over emphasise relationships rather than people (McCall, 2015, p. 202) it is reasonable to consider the relationality of the Trinity as well as acknowledging the persons of the Trinity. Regarding my research, it is important to recognise both the relationships and the people involved in the relationships. In terms of relationships in care homes, there needs to be an intentionality to the pattern of the dance, so that specific loving actions ensure people are included in this weaving of relationships, even if there are challenges to this. Louw demonstrates how Rublev’s icon of the Trinity illustrates hospitality through ‘divine encircling’ (Louw, 2019, p. 8). This process of divine encircling reaches out to all people, even those it might be difficult to enter into relationship with. Rohr and Morrell also reflect on the inclusivity of Rublev’s icon, and comment that all are invited into the divine circle, with a place at God’s table for everyone (Rohr & Morrell, 2016, p. 31).

The concepts of reciprocity, inviting into relationship, weaving and interweaving, dancing and ongoing change associated with God’s divine hospitality will be included as I reflect on aspects of hospitality within care homes. As we give and receive hospitality, together we may be mutually transformed. This is how we move towards shalom.

5.4.2 Giving and receiving hospitality

Giving and receiving hospitality is part of how we live in right relation with each other, and is part of how we are able to flourish together.

I begin by considering hospitality from a perspective of being a stranger in the land. People living in care homes might consider themselves to be an alien in the land where they now live, even if they consider it to be 'home'. However, Biblical narrative demonstrates how we might be strangers in a land, but at the same time be expected to show hospitality to strangers. Pohl comments on how the People of Israel were strangers in the land. As such, they received God's hospitality, but at the same time they were required to offer hospitality to others (Pohl, 1999, p. 16). Thus, as we receive hospitality from God, so we offer hospitality to others. Our hospitality flows from our relationship with God. A sense of having received from God may inspire us to offer hospitality to others.

Giving and receiving hospitality is not dependent on our material position. When Pohl talks about practising hospitality, she is primarily talking about people opening up their own homes and spaces in an intentional way to people who are on the margins. However, we can also regard hospitality as an underlying attitude (Nouwen, 1998, p. 45). Whatever our circumstances, we can be hospitable to each other in our attitudes toward each other, including people on the margins.

Additionally, although it is possible to provide hospitality to others while in inhospitable places, a hospitable place engenders confidence and a sense of belonging, which facilitate the giving and receiving of hospitality even if the place is not home. Our relationship with God, our internal resources and the hospitality of a place are all factors which may affect our own provision of hospitality to others.

Being guest and host are not mutually exclusive states within a relationship. Pohl comments that guests can be bringers of blessings, for example Abraham and Sarah, in their old age, welcomed strangers who it transpired were angels (Pohl, 2011, p. 482). In stories such as this and Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath, we see how guests can provide hospitality and hosts can receive from their guests (Nouwen, 1998, p. 44). I will explore giving and receiving within relationships in the next section as I consider reciprocity in care giving relationships.

Giving and receiving hospitality is part of how we are fully human, and how we encounter God. Swinton comments that Jesus both gave and received hospitality (Swinton, 2012, p. 270). As we give and receive hospitality, we reflect God's image, and we are on 'holy ground' (Pohl, 1999, p. 13). Supporting older people to provide hospitality to others may enable them to flourish, to be fully human, and to encounter God.

To summarise, as some of the participants demonstrated through their relationships with each other, visitors and staff members, we can practise hospitality even if we are strangers in the land, without our own home and with limited resources. This practice of hospitality strengthens community as people are welcomed, connections are made, and relationships develop. Through giving and receiving hospitality, we are each enabled to flourish, and are transformed as our relationships develop. Through giving and receiving hospitality, we reflect God's image. As hospitality is given and received, we are on holy ground.

5.4.3 Reciprocity in caring relationships

I now argue that a hospitable place is one where we are able to engage in reciprocal relationships, even as we are cared for.

The ways in which we engage in reciprocal relationships may change as we age, particularly if we have increasing levels of dependence and are constrained by our circumstances. Vanstone

reflects on different phases of Jesus's life, and contrasts Jesus's time of working with the later part of his life, when he enters into a time of waiting (Vanstone, 2020, p. 37). There are points in our lives when we are not able to work or to give in the same ways that we did in the past, and there are times that we may be dependent on others. For some participants, this contributed to them feeling like they were a burden. This is partly due to cultural expectations. Vanier suggests that, in western countries, people are encouraged to be independent, which can lead to people "creating barriers around their hearts, and developing their capacities to *do* things, and in this way to be self-sufficient" (Vanier, 1979, p. 15). If there are barriers around our hearts, we are unable to fully engage with people around us, share our vulnerability or share in the vulnerability of others.

Vanstone comments that Christian doctrines relating to the impassibility of God, combined with us being made in God's image, appear to suggest that we should not be dependent on others. (Vanstone, 2020, p. 88). This highlights the external influences that may lead people to feel like they are a burden. However, Vanstone proposes that being made in the image of God includes the experience of being dependent (Vanstone, 2020, p. 150). If we were in a community that was collaborative rather than competitive, where dependence is understood as part of life, we may find it easier to receive help. As Hudson states,

We are called to bear one another's burdens. Therefore if we become frail and dependent upon others it is no cause for shame; it is of the essence of our humanity to care for one another. (Hudson, 2004, p. 96)

I found it difficult to hear older people expressing that they felt they were a nuisance and trying not to be demanding, and I am also aware that I find it difficult to receive help. Perhaps if, as a society, we did emphasise interdependence, we would also find it easier to accept dependence. However, as O'Brien states, we should guard against 'postures of dependency'; rather we should learn to live "gracefully with the continuing demands and temptations of practical dependency" (O'Brien, 2004, p. 49). A healthy care giving-receiving relationship is an

intimate dance in which both learn how to dance together, and with grace filled fluidity move between dependence and interdependence. In this dance we give as well as receive, understanding that sometimes we will be dependent and unable to give, and in all of this together we reflect the image of God. Hauerwas also cautions against what he calls 'oppressive care', in which people are over protected from taking risks and agency is taken away (Hauerwas, 2004b, p. 90). I should note here that Hauerwas and O'Brien are talking about disability in the context of learning difficulties. However, the insights that they provide are applicable to older people who are frail. As we learn to dance together, we move between interdependency and dependency, we find wholeness together, and experience a sense of shalom. Mutuality in relating is important for shalom, so that there isn't an imbalance in the relationship (Greig, 2014, p. 40). Nurturing reciprocity in caring relationships is an act of grace, which may allow people to receive without feeling like they are a burden. This was seen to some extent in the ways that some residents formed relationships with carers and boundaries were blurred. We might need to recognise that although we are not able to give in the ways we used to, there are other ways of giving through being in right relationship with people. Offering friendship is a form of giving, as is showing appreciation for friendship received.

Hospitable relationships allow for reciprocity, and a place of hospitality recognises that it is important for people to give and to receive.

5.4.4 Forming relationships across boundaries

Crossing boundaries to form relationships with people is part of generous hospitality. Boundary crossing is seen in God's relationship with humankind as revealed through the life and teaching of Jesus. The act of boundary crossing is part of hospitality, shown in the treatment of strangers, and how strangers can become friends. This weaving of relationships across boundaries is an interesting way in which communities develop, as it opens possibilities for encounters and deepening of relationships with people who are different from ourselves.

God crossed a boundary when God came to us in the person of Jesus, however, the boundary lines that are seen in human terms are not boundaries in God's eyes. The life and teaching of Jesus suggest valuing all relationships, regardless of human boundaries.

A family unit draws a line around people who are part of that family, with expectations of certain behaviour within the family. Guijarro suggests that Jesus's teachings promoted the family unit, including the "duties of sons and daughters toward their elderly parents" (Guijarro, 2004, p. 114). However, not all the participants had children, complexities in relationships may affect how people perceive their familial duties, and different expectations and competing priorities may affect how duties are fulfilled. Perhaps the line that is drawn around a family unit is best seen as permeable, allowing for duties and care to extend beyond the immediate family. Jesus's example and teaching about family relationships does go beyond blood ties. When Jesus was on the cross, using the language of Jewish law reminiscent of adoption, Jesus shows care as he places his mother under the care of John, and in Roman Catholic interpretation, also places John under the care of his mother (Beasley-Murray, 1999, p. 349). I am drawn to this interpretation as it recognises the mutuality of caring relationships.

There is debate about Jesus's attitude towards blood family ties, including discussion about his view of the importance of the traditional family unit in comparison with the surrogate family of God (Ellis, 1985; Guijarro, 2004; Santos, 2018). The gospel accounts demonstrate that Jesus's family included people beyond blood relations and extended beyond time and place. Reflecting on Mark 3:31-35, Santos describes how kinship with Jesus not only includes the disciples who were present at the time, and who had left their families to follow him, but also invites us as readers to share in this fictive kinship (Santos, 2018, p. 600). Santos refers to Mark's gospel to describe how the family included the whole household and beyond, also stating that slaves and servants were considered to be part of the family in the first century (Santos, 2018, p. 593). This notion of family is useful, as it broadens out the idea of family and

places value on the wider connections we share with people. Hunt recognises that friendships and fictive kinship are important today, when people live far away from their blood relatives, and suggests that our friends may be our family (Hunt, 2009, pp. 35-36). She is not dismissing blood ties, and states that obligations towards family members, especially the elderly and others in need, are important, but that they can be extended to include others beyond blood relations (Hunt, 2009, p. 36). She explores how the command to love our neighbour includes loving ourselves and our family, but goes beyond this (Hunt, 2009, p. 37). She talks about how we can have an 'underlying stance' of loving our neighbour, at home and beyond (Hunt, 2009, p. 37). There is a sense in which we are all part of a 'human family' (Swinton, 2012, p. 156) although we have different types of relationships with each other. Commenting on Jesus, Swinton states that he had different levels of closeness to people (Swinton, 2000b, p. 46). An underlying stance of loving our neighbour has capacity for a variety of different relationships. We will be closer to some people than others, and the level of closeness is not dependent on kinship ties.

Relationships can change and develop over time and be formed between people who are different from each other. However, frailty may create boundaries that are difficult to cross. Love, which causes us to cross these boundaries, reflects 'divine love' (Reynolds, 2008, p. 219). This leads to grace filled behaviours, including patience and perseverance alongside practical strategies. It may also require us to overcome our fears. Swinton explores how dementia can make people strangers to us (Swinton, 2012, p. 258), which can make us fearful as we become aware of our own vulnerability (Reynolds, 2008, p. 55). In the context of discussing fear of strangers, Swinton reflects on Luke 7:34 and discusses how Jesus shared the dishonour of those perceived as sinners with whom he associated (Swinton, 2012, p. 269). Fear of dementia and other age-related changes may contribute to avoiding people who are frailer than ourselves, not necessarily due to fear of contagion, but to avoid being confronted with

something that may become our own future. Swinton comments that, “the stranger threatens our peacefulness, our sense of shalom” (Swinton, 2012, p. 269).

Reflecting on the call to hospitality in Romans 12:13, Swinton explains that hospitality is inextricably linked with loving the stranger (Swinton, 2012, p. 270). He also comments that dementia can lead to someone becoming “strangers...to themselves” (Swinton, 2012, p. 258). This may also occur, albeit in a different way, with other age-related changes. Many residents had a range of impairments that had led to them moving into the care home, and these impairments may also make them feel like they are strangers to themselves. Part of that may include fear of what that might mean in the light of increasing frailty. They may feel that other residents are strange to them because of their impairments, and they may not know how to approach them or form relationships with them. They may also feel rejection from others due to their own perceived strangeness.

Sutherland discusses how, in Middle Eastern biblical times, offering hospitality to strangers dispelled fear and extended peace (A. Sutherland, 2006, p. 23). Through offering hospitality and forming friendships, our fears may be overcome, and we may experience shalom. However, for many participants the barriers to communication, which they were unable to overcome themselves, adversely affected their ability to offer hospitality effectively and form the friendships which may reduce their fear of the stranger. Sutherland suggests that how we behave towards strangers shows our level of obedience to God (A. Sutherland, 2006, p. 28). In a care home setting, this is revealed in the extent to which staff are encouraged to get to know residents, and the support residents have in order to do the same. As residents and carers alike are supported to get to know the stranger, including the stranger we might become, we might make our peace with others and ourselves, and move towards shalom. Fear of communicating with people who are different from ourselves may relate to fear of getting it wrong, fear of rejection and fear of how people may respond to us.

Supporting residents to communicate with each other through use of communication strategies and providing opportunities to communicate is a sign of obedience to God. Supporting staff and residents to form relationships involves standing in solidarity with each other as we learn how to communicate with each other and explore strategies together, seeking feedback from each other about what is effective. As a healthcare professional trained in an expert model, I recognise that it takes courage to depart from a prescriptive approach and reveal our own vulnerability as we work with people to establish a way forward. It takes courage and humility as a professional to say 'I don't know' and invite the other to share their perspective. Inviting older people to be part of identifying ways to facilitate their inclusion is part of divine hospitality. Metaphorically, they are invited to jointly consider adaptations to the table portrayed in Rublev's icon, as well as considering how to get there, so that they can participate. The process and the outcome are both hospitable. Reflecting on the experience of people with intellectual disabilities, Greig states that the aim of inclusion must be 'friendship and belonging', and that mutual relationships are necessary in order for shalom to occur (Greig, 2014, pp. 40, 42). Radical hospitality intentionally crosses boundaries and facilitates friendships with the stranger.

Laughter is also something which disrupts boundaries. Campbell outlines how laughter reflects the gospel message in the way it 'interrupts' the old order (Campbell, 2015, p. 198). He acknowledges that laughter can both create community and exclude people (Campbell, 2015, p. 197) but suggests that 'Christian laughter' includes 'the other' and reflects the gospel message. He suggests that this is "an unsettled, universal laughter that celebrates a reality larger than our finite selves," and reflects the liberation brought by Christ (Campbell, 2015, p. 208). God can liberate us as we reach out to the stranger within ourselves as well as other people, as we share laughter, don't take ourselves too seriously, and risk being vulnerable with ourselves and with others. Through laughter we acknowledge the unsettled nature of the ageing process; we can make friends with ourselves on this journey, and mutually support

those we laugh with along the way. Through this kind of laughter, community can be developed, and it is a sign of healthy relationships.

5.4.5 Knowing names and being known by name

Being known by name and knowing the names of others is important within a community. It is part of how we relate to each other with respect. In a hospitable place, we are known by name. Being called by name draws us into relationship and affirms our identity, and although we might not remember names as we age, in a shalom community we continue to have a place within the community.

McArdle comments on the act of 'naming' in the Bible and discusses how being called by name 'invites' us into relationship (McArdle, 2005, p. 231). He comments on how God calls us by name (McArdle, 2005, p. 221). We affirm people when we call them by their name and invite them into relationship with us, and when, in an act of hospitality, we reach out to them. Names also give us a sense of place within a community by distinguishing us from others (McArdle, 2005, p. 222); we affirm a sense of belonging and connection within a community through the use of names. Names are a means of identifying the other and a way in which we ourselves are identified and made known. Handley, considering Exodus 3:14, discusses how God makes Godself known to us by revealing God's name, although also comments this name is 'beyond translation' (Handley, 2019, p. 436). Our 'knowing God' is partial, reflected in the mystery of God's name. Perhaps all our knowing of people is partial, even when we do know their names. However, using names demonstrates that we do not consider another to be just one in a number; it affirms the relationship and is a commitment to knowing the other.

Naming is an important theme within the Bible, and the power to name can be used positively. Swinton comments on the effect on the identity of the animals of being named by Adam, as through this naming they "found out who they were" (Swinton, 2014, p. 235). McArdle

comments on the name changes that occur within the Bible as “metaphors of... transformation”, which reflect a person’s mission (McArdle, 2005, p. 225). Santos suggests something similar when he describes the positive effect on the disciples of being chosen and in some cases given a new name by Jesus (Santos, 2018, p. 595). However, Swinton highlights how names can be changed negatively as people develop dementia. He says,

some will try to give you a new name – “dementia sufferer,” “Alzheimer’s victim,” “non-person” – which will open you up to all sorts of dangers and difficulties (Swinton, 2014, p. 235).

As people age, they may be given new names of ‘being past it’ or ‘being a problem’. This new name is used to impose a new identity. It is perhaps not surprising that being known by name and using the names of others was important for several of the participants. It was a reminder of their identity in a positive way. It was also a way of inviting people into relationship and having a sense of becoming known. Additionally, the act of giving somebody an affectionate nickname invites the person into a deeper relationship. In a place of hospitality, we are drawn into relationships with people and invite people into relationship with us. However, we cannot always remember names, and this might strike at our own sense of identity and place in the community. At these times we rely on our community to ‘love’ and ‘remember’ us (Swinton, 2012, p. 258). A hospitable community will remember the names, affirm the identities, and engender a sense of belonging for all people. This is a sign of shalom.

5.4.6 Solitude

A hospitable place is one where you feel you can choose when to be alone and when to be with others. A care home that is hospitable does allow for privacy. Nouwen makes a distinction between loneliness and solitude (Nouwen, 1998, pp. 16-17). He also comments that we can’t offer hospitality from a place of loneliness (Nouwen, 1998, p. 73). He talks about the value of solitude (Nouwen, 1998, p. 16), describing how experiencing solitude enables us to draw closer to others (Nouwen, 1998, p. 20). Pohl comments that nearly all practitioners of hospitality

describe the need for solitude (Pohl, 1999, p. 13). This was something that was evident in Jesus's ministry. Nouwen talks about how Jesus spent time alone in prayer, then time in community with others before engaging in ministry. He discusses how solitude is important prior to engaging in the challenges of community life (Nouwen, 1995). Allowing people times of solitude is a part of hospitality, giving people space to be themselves, to retreat and to be refreshed. This in turn supports people to engage in community life and offer hospitality to others. However, for older people there may be another dimension to their solitude. Perschbacher Melia found that older Catholic women religious identified other benefits to times of solitude, including dreaming, preparing for death and spending time with God. Solitude was sought out, and increased opportunities for solitude in older age were valued. She also found that through prayer, these women were connected with the wider world (Perschbacher Melia, 2008, pp. 54, 55, 57, 61).

There are many textures to prayerful solitude. It is something that allows us to connect with others as we pray for them and prepare to spend time with them, as well as deepening our relationship with God. Although God is present in all situations, some people find that solitude enables them to show hospitality to God, and receive hospitality from God, through a deepening relationship.

5.4.7 Mealtimes

In the image of divine hospitality, we are invited to a table. Mealtimes are at the heart of hospitality. Mealtimes were an important social part of the ancient world; Vanier outlines the social value of sharing in meals (Vanier, 1979, p. 322). Smith and Taussig explain the function of banquets in forming friendships, and strengthening connections (Smith & Taussig, 2001, p. 31). Although there was a tension between social status and inclusion, overall, eating together overcame some of this (Smith & Taussig, 2001, p. 33). Finger proposes that, when Jesus ate with a range of people, he was denouncing exclusion (Finger, 2007, p. 184). Woodley

comments that in middle eastern cultures, eating together was a way that people could be reconciled and a way of giving peace. He suggests that when Jesus ate with 'sinners' he was showing that they were "worthy of receiving shalom" (Woodley, 2012, p. 159). Jesus demonstrated that hospitality goes beyond the usual boundaries, is part of our sacred connection to God, and that we can all receive the gift of peace with God. In the parable of the great banquet we discover the extent of God's inclusion for all people (Pohl, 1999, p. 21). Hospitality is also part of our sacred connection with each other, including those who may be marginalised and who don't appear to have anything to offer in return (Pohl, 1999, p. 21). As we offer hospitality to those on the edges, we are demonstrating that they are worthy of shalom, and we grant them peace as we sit and eat together as equals.

Mealtimes can heighten exclusion and loneliness. While it is a positive that residents can eat with their families in care home settings, this can increase feelings of loneliness for those without family, even while they experience the companionship of other residents. Nouwen commented that we can be lonely, even when eating with others (Nouwen, 1998, p. 5). Pohl comments that in the current institutionalised provision for people in need, social isolation can increase (Pohl, 1999, p. 57). She contrasts this with how, in the eighteenth century, John Wesley and the early Methodists created homes for people in need, but that preachers also ate meals in those homes, and that,

there was a...conscious effort to undermine boundaries...Table fellowship that included different sorts of people brought all closer, and reflected the diversity of the anticipated heavenly banquet (Pohl, 1999, p. 54).

Deliberately undermining boundaries is one way in which hospitality and inclusion can be increased. Vanier also emphasises the importance of intentionally setting the scene to create community at mealtimes (Vanier, 1979, pp. 322-325); he comments that we are all invited to the celebration of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:9), and that our mealtimes are times of

daily celebration (Vanier, 1979, pp. 322-326). There would be benefits to carers joining in meals with residents at mealtimes to celebrate together and to build community.

Wirzba celebrates good food, saying that “food is God’s love made delectable” (Wirzba, 2013, p. 378). He emphasizes the enjoyment of the taste and sensory experience of eating, and the fruitfulness of creation as part of God’s love. He also suggests that God’s order is violated when economic systems prevent people from enjoying food (Wirzba, 2013, p. 378). My findings suggest that institutionalisation that restricts food enjoyment also violates God’s order, and that shalom is restored when this is overcome.

5.4.8 Home

A hospitable place is one where we can feel at home, and this is closely linked to a sense of shalom. The participants talked about the different ways they viewed the place in which they now lived. These may be considered in terms of distinct theological themes. The idea of transplantation was evident as participants described a loss of roots and a lack of control over the move to the home. Language of safety invoked the idea of refuge and the severing of attachment to a previous home gave a sense of exile. For some participants, the care home provided a sense of home and belonging. The idea of home was complex, and these themes were not mutually exclusive for each person. Each of these themes will be considered in turn. A sense of shalom is possible within each of these experiences.

Drawing on the Psalms, Brown demonstrates how nations and individuals might be transplanted by God, the divine gardener, into places where they can flourish (W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 77). A hospitable place is a place where we can flourish. The participants did not attribute this transplantation to God; however, in this new environment, there were signs of flourishing. At a basic level, this related to physical flourishing, but also included the formation of new friendships. Transplantation implies passivity. It takes away agency. This is

uncomfortable, and yet did reflect the experience of some of the participants. Vanstone talks about being patients 'done unto', their fate resting in the hands of others, and compares this with Jesus being handed over to Pilate (Vanstone, 2020, pp. 46-47, 92-95). There might be times in our lives when we are 'handed over', and we may find strength in knowing that we are with a God who understands this experience and is with us in it. Vanstone also suggests that recognising Jesus's passion as "a kind of triumph" might lead someone to see their "own transition in a new and more favourable light" (Vanstone, 2020, p. 94). This has the potential to transform a situation, as being 'done unto' does not equate to becoming a lesser person, although this reasoning should not be used to promote a passive acceptance of oppressive care. Brown also comments on the diversity of trees being transplanted in Isaiah 41. In this passage we see trees that may not naturally grow together being transplanted into one community (W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 70). Transplantation may be difficult, and it may take time to adjust to the new environment. However, trees transplanted together may grow together, roots settling into good ground. Trees in close proximity may join roots, or at least communicate, forming connections through the soil and supporting each other (Wohlleben, 2017, pp. 2-3). I can see how participants were able to make connections in this new place, although the trauma of being uprooted may leave its mark, and some people may find it more difficult than others to make new connections. A hospitable place will promote the formation of relationships; however, if the connection to the previous place was particularly strong, some people may find it difficult to find shalom in even the most hospitable of places.

A hospitable place is safe. For some participants, the care home provided a sense of safety and security in contrast to their previous home. Some participants talked about no longer feeling safe at home or about the abuse that they had endured earlier in their married lives. Although, as already acknowledged, abuse may occur in care homes, for the participants in my research the care home provided refuge. In the Bible, cities of refuge were set up for people who had unintentionally committed an offence. In becoming vulnerable and dependent, have older

people unintentionally committed an offence in the eyes of society? We may not want to be reminded about the reality of ageing; society may feel better with older people being hidden away and safe. If this is the case, then that society is not a hospitable place of inclusion. There is also the idea, particularly in the Psalms, that God is our refuge. Drawing on the Psalms, Basson describes the nature of the refuge as a place of “protection and security” (Basson, 2005, p. 12). These are features of hospitality that can contribute to a sense of being at home.

Some participants had a sense of being in exile. Bartholomew comments, “Human identity is deeply bound up with place, and in Genesis 3 *displacement* is at the heart of God’s judgment” (Bartholomew, 2011, p. 29). While not suggesting that the frailty of old age or moving to a care home is a result of God’s judgment, the effects of the displacement may feel the same. For those participants with a strong attachment to their previous place of home, a sense of exile was particularly pronounced, and was not overcome despite the formation of new relationships within the care home. The sense of exile was more pronounced for some participants than for others. It appeared to lessen over time for some participants, and to vary from day to day. Brueggemann uses Jeremiah 29 to show that God wills shalom for the exiles in Babylon. This includes the fact that God is with them and they are not abandoned, and that shalom can be found in the community where they are exiled (Brueggemann, 1976, pp. 22-23). Within a care home, mutuality in relating, developing friendships and creating a place of belonging are all signs of hospitality that contribute to shalom, even in a place of exile.

Potentially, moving to a care home may feel like being transplanted, being in exile or entering a place of safety and refuge. It may also feel like home. These feelings are not mutually exclusive, nor are they static. Forming mutual relationships and being able to give and receive hospitality and to make a difference contribute to a sense of belonging. These actions reflect aspects of divine hospitality. Our home is in God, and it perhaps should not be surprising that

places feel like home when aspects of God's hospitality are reflected. However, even in a hospitable place, we may feel our home is elsewhere.

5.4.9 Community change

In the actions of a dance, of weaving and interweaving of relationships, there is continual movement of divine hospitality. Relationships and community continually change. Change continued once people had moved into the care home. Staff came and went, relationships were developed, and people died. Communities do change over time, and forming new relationships and saying goodbye are part of this process. There was a sense of struggle within the community as participants talked about a sense of loss when people died or moved on. There was also a sense of struggle to be included for some participants. Vanier captures something of this struggle for community and the nature of ongoing change:

The very struggle to build community
is a gift of God
and in accepting it
we acknowledge it as a gift,
not received once and for all,
but one for which we must yearn and pray and labour day after day.
Since community is a living, dynamic body,
it is in continual movement,
It evolves as people grow,
As the whole body grows in welcoming new people,
as other people leave and separate to create another body.
(Vanier, 1988, pp. 102-103)

Struggling for community and shalom is a gift, and one which may be accepted by staff, residents, friends and family and the wider community. Woodley states that working towards

shalom needs to occur at an individual and a structural level (Woodley, 2012, p. 22). This is an approach that we can choose to take in both brief encounters and long-term relationships. Consistent relationships are important in order to build a depth of understanding and shared history. However, short term relationships are also important, even if followed by a sense of loss. The connection formed in each moment can be enjoyed within the moment. Some residents continued to seek out connections, even knowing that these may be short lived.

5.5 Conclusion

I have shown that relationships contribute to the creation of hospitable places, where people feel safe, and may feel at home. Relationships allow for hospitality to be given and received, creating places where people have confidence and a sense of belonging which enables them to reach out to others. It is through relationships that people are known by name, affirmed and have their place in the community established, and through relationships that people are included and strangers become friends. Through mutual relationships we recognise that we are all in need of care, and we care for each other in a way that crosses boundaries while avoiding trespassing on privacy and solitude. All these factors contribute to making a place hospitable. As we care for each other, struggling to build community together, we create a hospitable place, and move towards shalom.

CHAPTER 6: Windows on the world

6.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to windows on the world, which provide connections with the wider community beyond the care home. The wider community discussed here includes the view from the window, the local area, the nation and the world. My model of community identifies these as separate zones because it is important to recognise the extent of the potential links to the wider world. However, as the mechanisms of connection are similar and there are themes that are applicable to all these zones, I have gathered them together in this chapter. The participants described several ways that they are connected to the wider world. It was striking how important the views from the care home windows were for the participants. Connections with people through visitors, phone calls and letters also provided windows on the world. I also explore what the participants told me about going out into the wider world and what connections with the wider community mean to them. Within the theological reflection I will argue that right relationships contribute to shalom by liberating the community so that it is a place where all people can belong.

6.2 In dialogue with the participants

As I spent time with some of you in the communal areas it became clear that the view from the window was an important way of connecting with the wider world. At Newlodge, the communal area overlooked the carpark. Lois, you sometimes stood watching the carpark and commented on what you could see (Lois, Newlodge, September 2016). In addition to visual connections Evelyn, you commented on the distant noise of the trains and wondered where they were going (Evelyn, Newlodge, September 2016).

At Greenpark, the conservatory overlooked the carpark, the bus stop and the road. This outlook frequently provided topics of conversation. Alice, you explained that you like to watch

staff and visitors coming and going in the carpark. You waved to people as you saw them, and they responded (Alice, Greenpark, November 2018). Several of you expressed the same sentiments, commenting on staff shift changes and visitors (Greenpark, November 2018).

In all the care homes, some of you described how your connection to the world extended beyond the literal view from the window. There were other windows on the world which provided connections to local areas and the world. You talked about many different ways of keeping connected to the local area. For many of you this was about keeping connected to the local area where you lived prior to moving to the home. Several of you described how you stayed connected to your local areas to varying degrees.

Several of you talked about telephone contact.

“One of my friends lives away... so I don't see her. We communicate over the telephone. We were very close friends at one time but can't carry it out now.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

Gwen, you talked about keeping in touch with the vicar's wife by phone and how she passes on news of people in the church. You said that this is how you keep in touch with your friends from the church (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Some of you commented on letters and cards that you have received.

“And they wrote to me just a week or so ago, saying that they still missed me...cards, yes, cards are very emotive.”

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

Some of you talked about keeping up to date with the news. Gwen, you get the local newspaper from where you used to live (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Brenda, you talked about visitors. So is it important for you to keep connected to the church?

“Oh yes, that is very important. Yeah. I have many friends younger than myself who are still there.”

Yes, yeah. So are you able to keep in touch with them?

“Oh yes, yes. One of my neighbours, when I went to the bungalow used to visit and she was still in her eighties and still going to church and looking very well. But she comes to visit me with the minister. So, he brings her as well and many of them send me cards from church, which is really nice. I'm always sorry when I hear of anybody being ill or dying.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Gwen, you said that a neighbour visits every week,

“It is good to hear about somebody else and what they are doing.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

You talked about the volunteers who visit.

“I find I get on with...the volunteers I get on very well with them both and we have good conversations.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

You talked about a reduction in visitors.

“My friends from Newtown used to come and visit me, but now they've all got old and they can't come anymore.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

“I don't get quite as many visitors as I used to do because they're all getting older in my generation you see. That's the trouble.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

“All those friends have now died, the majority of my friends. Keep outliving me, it’s not fair.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

By this, Doris meant that she was outliving her friends.

Marion, you talked about being visited by the Scouts.

“The Scouts brought that big box. Now my brother that died, he used to be in the Scouts.”

So did the Scouts come in and deliver them?

“They do, the lady comes with them to the door, and then with my brother being in the Scouts you know when he was alive, and they just ask you different questions you know, ‘How long?’ ‘Do you like being in here?’ ‘Have you any friends?’ And then they always send you a present, if you join in, they send every one of you a present.”

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

You wanted to send a thank you card and were waiting for the manager to give you the address.

Alice, in an un-taped conversation, you said that you enjoyed it when the local primary school came in to sing last Christmas. You wrote to the head teacher to thank him afterwards (Alice, Greenpark, November 2018).

I asked you Anne, whether you enjoyed it when children come into the home. You smiled and said,

“It depends if they are good.”

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

Gwen, in an un-taped conversation, you said that the previous chaplain used to do a Friday afternoon service and people from the church used to come. Now the weekly service is on a Sunday, they can't come. You had enjoyed chatting to people from the church (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Some of you talked about getting out and about. In an un-taped conversation, Gwen, you described going out every week to a group you had belonged to prior to moving to the home. A member of the group picks you up and takes you there. In the group there are people who know other people that you know. You enjoy talking to people and finding out about these shared connections (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Elvie, you talked about your daughter and said,

“And then I go up to the farm sometimes on Saturdays and we watch the horses. She’s always included me in everything.”

“I go out every week. So she takes me out every week and we take Nora out and we go up to Nora’s farm for a meal. Sometimes she makes beautiful cakes and makes us a lovely meal, and she comes with us sometimes. We go to garden centres for meals.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

Not all of you did want to go out more. I asked you, Evelyn, about organised trips from the home.

“I’ve not been on any trips very much.”

“I don’t know, I think I’m a bit past that. I would perhaps a few years ago now. I am ninety-seven now so I don’t get out as much as I would have liked at one time.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

Maureen, you had not previously gone out when trips were arranged by the home, but a new activities coordinator, who you particularly liked, supported you when going out.

“Going out a little bit now as well, with [activities coordinator].”

(Maureen, Westhome, June 2019)

For some, being able to physically connect to the wider world was important and you would like to connect more to the outside world. Is there anything that would make it feel more at home?

“Well the fact of, if we had some freedom and there was some arrangement where some, if it was only once a week. I’m talking about wheelchair people now. Just to see as I say the rest of the world which is just what my sons do when they come.”

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

Ruby, you said,

“I like to go out if anybody would take me.”

What kind of places would you like to go?

“Anywhere, anywhere.”

You talked about this in the context of keeping your spirits up. Is it important to keep your spirits up?

“To stop getting bored.”

Do you get bored?

“Occasionally, yes.”

“I’d like to go out.”

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2019)

“My complaint here that we don’t get out at all. We are just in a box. This is our community. It’s not good...you need to mix with the world, the real world. If they’re

only shoppers it doesn't matter what they're doing, but they're people like you once were."

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

Some of you identified barriers to going out.

"They took us to the safari park, that was two years ago I think now, and that was the last trip that we've out as a group. But you see a lot of people don't want to go. They say no I don't want to go so you see that's and you can't get a coach if nobody wants to go on it."

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

For those of you who expressed a desire to go out more, this was to local places, such as local shops, local National Trust properties and garden centres. These were places that were easy to get to and didn't require much walking around.

Connections to the wider community, for some of you had changed prior to moving to the care home. Brenda, your connections with people changed prior to moving to the care home.

"Well, no before I came before here I was sort of immobile - not mobile. And so I had to give over going to church. Because strange cars have the effect of being rather difficult. Because people were willing to come for me. But it was awkward."

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Nancy, you had become isolated at home, though you did have some visitors.

"When I was in my bungalow, well, there were days when I was completely on my own, but at the same time I had friends coming in, I had a lady, two ladies across the way in the alms houses and I used to have a big family you see, so they used to come with their children or their wives or whatever they'd got at the time, you know."

(Nancy, Greenpark January 2019)

Nancy, you also described changes in your community connections.

“The villages are all changing aren’t they? ...like Westvillage is not like Westvillage and like I say we could go out of our back doors and go anywhere. Just close the door, and nobody would break in, or go in, but today you can lock it or do whatever you like, and when you get back and it can be broke in can’t it? You know, that’s a big change isn’t it?”

“When I was a young girl it was a quiet village, I could go all the way round the place, New Road, up here, used to know everybody, but you don’t know your neighbour now do you?”

(Nancy, Greenpark, January 2018)

You talked about your interactions with people in the wider community. Gwen, you talked about calling for an ambulance for yourself prior to moving to the care home. You talked about how good the paramedics were, making sure that everything was locked up before you left (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

You varied in how much importance you placed on a connection to the wider world. When I asked you to rate the importance, you said,

“Not as important, no I wouldn’t say it is was as important as the people as I’m coming across everyday life.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

“To a certain extent, in other ways, not. Only important to a point.”

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

“Well I don’t want to know the way of the world, there’s too much horrible news coming on.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

However, Alice, you did tell me what was going on in the world and that you pray about it.

For others of you, it was important, and you described how you stayed connected.

“I belong to that club, racing club. They send me papers and that. My daughter joined me for a birthday. Every year now she gets it for my birthday, well one of my birthday presents.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

“Oh yeah, oh yes, I always watch the news and oh yes and I decide what they should be doing or what they’re not doing. This Brexit as well, oh dear, going to go on forever I think. I did vote for leave, well it was with my daughter actually, she said, I don’t want to go into detail, I don’t want to know, but like the animals. Some people they have a different way with them, so I voted for the animals’ sake. So, when it will ever come about I don’t know.”

Do you do a postal vote?

“A postal vote yeah, they send me papers and all that. I just fill them in you know and my daughter posts it. Oh it’s a good thing that.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

You talked about giving and making a difference.

“I like to give rather than receive. I get a lot of pleasure in being able to give. When [neighbour] lived next door, when I baked I gave her things. It gave me pleasure to do that. Yes, I enjoyed giving. I’m sorry now that I can’t.”

(Maureen, Westhome, September 2018)

“I'm still giving to my family of course but it will come to an end because the money will run out.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Giving is important to you Winnie, and you said,

“I suppose I try to and if I give things to do with the charities that they support.”

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

“Well I've done all I can and I can't do anything now...I can't make a difference now... and in my lifetime I've done so much.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

George, off tape, you said that giving was 'so-so' in terms of importance. You would like to be able to give, but you were not sure how you could (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

Is it important to make a difference in the wider world?

“Sort of might have been a bit in the past, but now I just sort of check what's going on...” (Walter, Northway, July 2019)

6.3 Analysis

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation relating to older people living at home found that, “central to well-being in old age were people's links to others: not just family but friends, neighbours and the wider community” (Godfrey et al., 2004, p. 216). Woodward and Kartupelis also emphasise the importance of such connections (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 61). In this analysis I will begin by exploring what the participants said about their

connections through the literal view from the windows in their rooms. I will then discuss their descriptions of other windows on the world including phone calls, written correspondence, the media, visitors and getting out. I will also explore how engagement with the wider community has changed for the participants.

6.3.1 Rooms with a view

Rooms with a view facilitate connection to the natural world and to the past as well as the current time. The connection to nature will be explored in the chapter relating to creation. Connections to the past that are facilitated through the view from the window will be explored in the chapter titled Another dimension. In this chapter, we will consider the contemporary social links that rooms with a view provide.

The significance of the view from the window for older people is something that has been explored extensively by Rowles (Rowles, 1978, 1981). He used the term 'surveillance zone' to describe what can be seen from a person's home, stating that this is an important way in which older people participate in the wider world (Rowles, 1981, p. 1). The term 'surveillance' does have some negative connotations and is often associated with the increase in surveillance technology, which is perceived by some as impinging on privacy and liberty (Mitchener-Nissen, 2014, p. 73). Rowles comments that, although older people can be perceived as being nosy, there are benefits to people noticing what is happening and taking action when this is needed (Rowles, 1981, p. 307). He also identified that some older people may feel a 'twinge of guilt' about watching through their windows (Rowles, 1981, p. 311). However, within my own research in care homes, the view from the window and the act of enjoying this, sometimes collectively, was positive. I decided to use the term 'rooms with a view' to remove potential negative connotations, which were not evident within my own findings in this context. The participants in my research did not express any concerns about being perceived as nosy, they were interested in what the view had to offer.

Rowles's research relates to people who are living in their own home, and not all findings are relevant to this research. However, his observations regarding the surveillance zone as having a source of meaning are pertinent. He comments that the surveillance zone, "provides a crucial link between the old person and the contemporary world outside, a sense of ongoing participation in events" (Rowles, 1981, p. 308). This was evident in my findings. It was also something that provided a shared interest and was a source of conversation for residents within the home. Rowles found that older people generally positioned themselves by windows which provided views of activity (Rowles, 1981, p. 307). Residents at Newlodge and Greenpark enjoyed looking out at the carpark and reflecting on the social activity, and they were able to do this from the communal areas with differing levels of ease.

Rooms with a view enabled participants to visit their immediate surroundings, contributing to a sense of continued belonging to the community. At Greenpark, the church they could see was associated with memories. The view was a familiar one, which provided continuity from the time before they moved into the home, and this may have supported a sense of still belonging to that community. The view of activity may have provided a sense of belonging to a world of activity.

At Newlodge, the carpark could only be viewed while standing up. At Greenpark, the height of the windows meant that residents could see outside while they were sitting down. Alice often positioned a chair facing the carpark. Alice does feel at home in the care home, and this behaviour demonstrates that she felt at home enough to move the furniture, in a way that somebody living at home might do. Rowles commented, "Many old people engage in a process of 'setting up' for watching. They select windows providing the best vantage and then arrange their furniture" (Rowles, 1981, p. 4). Westhome and Northway did not have communal spaces overlooking the carpark – their communal areas had windows facing the garden. Maureen, at Westhome, found that residents came into her room in order to look at the carpark, which she

did not like or encourage. I sometimes, to her relief, redirected residents who were intent on entering her room. It is striking that when Maureen was offered a larger room, with a view over the path to the entrance to the home, she declined. She wanted to be able to see the carpark, the road and the buildings opposite the home. She liked to see what was going on. This was part of how she was connected to the world outside. It was surprising to me that the carpark was the preferred view for the participants. Joan Erikson, in her old age, described her dream of every city having a park, with a home for older people in the centre, and places in the park where residents could sit and spend time with their visitors (J. Erikson, 1998, p. 118). This does sound idyllic, and in the next chapter we will see how participants did value their connection to creation through the window, but, based on the perspective of the participants, this is not the only view that is valued, nor is it necessarily the preferred view of all older people. The view over the carpark provided a connection to the wider community and a view of social activity that seclusion in parkland wouldn't. Rowles commented that in his research of people living at home, "many of the participants profess to wandering from window to window during the day as they monitor events outside" (Rowles, 1981, p. 306). A well-placed care home would have several surveillance zones with different types of views. The care homes I visited were located on the edge of towns and villages and had differing levels of observable social activity. In terms of rooms with a view, Northway was the most visually isolated home, secluded behind a tall wall. The most visually connected home was Greenpark, which overlooked a church, a carpark and a road with a frequently used footpath. For many of these residents this was a familiar view, laden with memories.

6.3.2 Other windows on the world

Rowles outlines how links to the wider world do not necessarily need to be direct connections. In relation to older people living at home, he describes how phone calls and letters can act as 'surrogate' connections (Rowles, 1978, p. 32). I found that a combination of direct and

surrogate connections provided windows on the wider world. I will explore the different types of connections described by the participants, and the value that these had.

Some participants commented on receiving cards and letters. Cards were described as 'emotive' and 'very nice'. They were an important way of keeping in touch and letting a person know that they were valued and missed. In an un-taped conversation, Gwen talked to me about a lady she met on a coach trip, ten years ago. This lady had sent her a birthday card, and in it commented "didn't we have a lovely time" (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017). As Gwen talked about the card, it evoked memories of the lady and the holiday. She talked about the scenery and what they had done. It invoked a sense of wellbeing as in her mind, as their shared connection was reinforced. However, I had a sense of dignified disappointment from one resident when she received a Christmas card from a grown-up grandchild that did not include a personal message. Although the card provided a link and showed she was not forgotten, the link could have been strengthened with a brief message. Although the card acknowledged her existence, it didn't demonstrate how the sender knew her as a person, and didn't provide news of other family members, which would have extended her connection. In contrast, for Winnie, the message in the card from her friends expressing that she was missed was deeply significant for her. Winnie does not feel as if she belongs in this care home community; however, this card affirmed that she does have a place of belonging in a specific place in the wider community, and she valued this.

Some participants commented on phone calls. Evelyn valued phone calls with a friend; however, she did not feel that the friendship was the same once they were physically separated. Gwen found that she was able to stay in touch with the wider church community through her phone calls with the vicar's wife.

The media also had an important role to play in keeping people connected, providing continuity of interest as well as a sense of belonging to something outside of the care home. Gwen received a newspaper from the local area where she used to live. Elvie enjoyed reading a horse racing paper and Marion enjoyed watching and discussing the Grand Prix. Several residents talked about national news from the television and newspapers. At Newlodge and Northway in particular, where the residents were generally less frail, the content of newspapers was sometimes discussed in communal lounges, and residents shared newspapers with each other. The discussions were sometimes supported by care home staff. The interest in the wider world, then served to form connections with people within the homes as a source of conversation.

Personal visitors fulfilled a range of different functions. Visitations enabled people to get to know each other more deeply and express their identity. This was heightened during the interview process, as the participants were supported to express themselves. During my interview with Evelyn, as we reflected on a branch of the Mind Map about her interests, she looked pleased and said, "Yes, that sums it up." As I listened to her, she was able to reveal something of her identity to me, and I began to know her. Being interviewed changes the dynamic of a relationship, and, if done well, empowers the interviewee to engage equally with the interviewer. Following interviews, I noted in my journal how participants were different in how they related to me,

"Today Evelyn instigated conversation with me very readily. It appeared that the interview process had enabled her to get to know me and she expressed herself more directly, including sharing her feelings about what it was like in the lounge." (13.10.17)

I also found that, following interviews, participants were empowered to ask me more direct questions about myself. This was even evident for Maureen, whom I had known for many years before I interviewed her. The purposeful nature of conversation within the interviews enabled a deeper, empowering connection to develop.

Visits also enabled people to have a change of focus beyond the care home. Gwen commented that it was “good to hear about somebody else and what they are doing.” I had a sense of the visitor taking Gwen outside of herself, giving her an interest and something different to think about, which had a beneficial effect. It also provided an opportunity for reciprocity as Gwen fulfilled the role of listener. There was a sense of mutuality in the relationship that Gwen described. Brenda’s visitors from the church provided her with a connection to the church, bringing news of people in the church. This reflects findings by O’Shea and Walsh, who commented on the value of visitors in sharing news about what was occurring in the local community (O’Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 141). Visitors provide a window into the wider community. However, a common theme that emerged was that as friends and family members became less mobile or died, participants received fewer visitors than they had previously. While understanding the reasons for this, and not apportioning blame, this was sometimes seen as an injustice, and contributed to a sense of loss, abandonment and bereavement.

Visitors who take an interest can also transform somebody’s day. Following Winnie’s interview, as we chatted in the lounge, she said that the interview had helped her, and that she had previously been crying in her room. In a follow up conversation a week later, we reflected on the Mind Map we had created, and the activities coordinator joined in. They had a good relationship, and the coordinator was already aware of the areas we had covered in the interview. She said that she sees part of her role as chatting to the residents individually and getting to know them. This role had the potential to be transformative.

Being visited can affirm a sense of belonging to family and the wider community represented by the visitor. George was visited by members of his writing group and was consulted about membership business, which affirmed his continued position as president of that group even though he could no longer attend meetings. There was something very moving about the way he was supported to keep that role and was involved in decisions, rather than being cast aside

when he moved to the care home. I found it emotional, because it was unexpected, and did not reflect what I thought would have happened. However, I also found myself wondering whether this could be taken further and whether it would be possible for some community groups to meet in care homes as a way of supporting links between the care home and the community.

Most participants did not comment on visits from community groups into the home; however, those that did provided interesting insights into the functions these visits fulfilled for them. Anne, living at Northway, was fairly ambivalent about groups of children visiting the home. Alice and Marion, both living at Greenpark had a different perspective. Greenpark was located in a small village where many of the residents had lived all their life, and their families for generations before them. When local groups visited this home, there was a sense that this maintained the strong connections that already existed between people in the home and people and groups within the community. Alice enjoyed hearing the local school choir sing in the home and told me about awards that the choir had won. There was a sense of connection. Marion also had a sense of connection with a Scout from the local Scout group whom she met once, and who brought a Christmas gift. As Marion described how the Scout asked her questions about herself, I had the sense that she felt that it affirmed her sense of personhood. Their brief encounter was meaningful. Alice and Marion both valued the social contact that groups visiting the home brought, and they were keen to reciprocate this in the form of thank you letters. I wonder whether the close-knit community where their care home was located engendered a sense of connection to these local groups. The carers were mostly from the local village, which also reinforced the connections with the local area. The connections that Alice and Marion formed with official visiting groups were fleeting but meaningful, and were in the context of a background of close community links that were in place prior to their move to the home.

A further perspective was provided by Gwen, who lived at Newlodge. She demonstrated that it is possible for visiting groups to provide the opportunity for new relationships to develop if there are frequent visits and opportunities for conversation. She described her connection with people from the local church who visited for church services. The relationships that developed represented a supportive link formed through weekly contact. She missed this when they could no longer come for services.

What is it that motivates people to visit people in care homes, with whom they have no ties? There is some research with preschool and primary school age children demonstrating that, on the whole, intergenerational interaction benefits both adults living in care homes and the children who visit (Di Bona, Kennedy, & Mountain, 2019, p. 1691; Kumiko & Minako, 2013, p. 8). These mutual benefits may support the development of partnerships between nurseries, schools and care homes. The Scout Association is committed to supporting young people to make a difference in their communities (The Scout Association, 2018), which may contribute to their engagement with care homes. People from faith communities may be motivated by their faith. Putman described how faith communities foster civic engagement (Putman, 2000, p. 66). There is a positive association between church and volunteer work (Wilson & Musick, 1999, p. 268), though Edgell-Becker and Dhingra found that social networks rather than beliefs acted as the mechanism through which volunteering occurred. People tended to volunteer when there was a social connection to the people in an organisation (Edgell-Becker & Dhingra, 2001, p. 322). It may be a combination of faith, personal connections and other factors which motivates people to volunteer. Some, but not all, of the church visitors had personal connections to people living in the homes. The volunteers that I met in care homes all had social connections to the care home. Most had had a parent who used to live in the home, and they continued to visit the home following the death of their parent. One volunteer was related to a member of staff in the home. Regardless of motivation, networks of healthy relationships contribute positively to society.

6.3.3 Getting out

As I consider the participants' current experiences of getting out, I will explore:

- The value of getting out
- The frequency of getting out
- The relationships needed to support going out
- Practicalities
- Freedom

In my research, some participants appeared satisfied with the amount that they could get out and about, but not all. Participants who did get out described the benefits of this. Gwen and Elvie valued the social connection experienced through going out. Gwen's club gave her a sense of belonging to specific parts of the wider community. She enjoyed talking to people and finding out about their shared connections. Elvie was able to be part of family life as she spent time at her daughter's farm. The types of places that participants would like to get out to included local places, with the opportunity to do normal things like shopping, or going to garden centres and local National Trust properties. Ruby, who did not get out at all, just wanted to go out anywhere. My research reflects previous research relating to older people living at home, who

placed high value on 'getting out and about'. Getting to the shops, for example, was not just about having sufficient food; it was equally, if not more, about the routine encounters with friends and acquaintances in the street and at the bus stop that reinforced one's sense of being part of social life (Godfrey et al., 2004, p. 219).

Similarly, O'Shea and Walsh reported that some residents in their research expressed the importance of 'getting out' ...as a way of keeping connected to the outside world. 'Getting out' included doing simple things like going for a walk or shopping, visiting friends or family... (O'Shea & Walsh, 2013, pp. 139-140).

Kartupelis comments that local trips can help people to keep connected to the community (Kartupelis, 2021, p. 74). Participants in my research who would like to get out more, or even at all, anticipated that this would lift their spirits, alleviate boredom, and enable them to experience freedom, be part of a wider community and see the rest of the world, mixing with the real world. This highlights potential additional benefits of getting out relating to wellbeing and freedom. For Flo, there were several layers of meaning. She perceived the wider community as representing the real world, but also felt that people in the wider community represented who she used to be before she moved to the care home. I wonder if getting out and forming relationships with people in the context of the wider community would help her to reclaim her personhood and place in the real world.

Frequency of going out was commented on by some participants. Flo would like to go out once a week, in addition to the fortnightly trips out with her son. However, I did become aware that Flo declined opportunities to go out. Whatever the reasons for this, she felt that going out more would provide her with the additional benefits of connection already discussed. Walter's experiences of forming relationships highlights the need for a certain level of frequency of contact in order to initially form friendships. He was perceived by the care home staff as being well connected to the community as he was able to get out to church and to the RAF Association. However, he commented,

“Cos the RAF Association, it's a little bit sort of obscure now, with moving around and you only meet them once a month and that, and sometimes they're not there, and then you can't get too friendly with them because you might not see them for a couple or three months.”

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

This contrasts with Gwen's experience of being part of a group which met on a weekly basis and was a place where she enjoyed connecting with people.

Relationships were essential to people being able to go out, as the residents I spoke to were dependent on others to take them out. In the following example, the local church overcame the inhospitality of the local footpaths, and welcomed residents into the church.

“He’s [vicar] coming in to see us again at Christmas...and then we’ll have to go and see him. With being in a wheelchair you’ve got to have someone to take you in you see, from church, because you’ve got to go round this pebbly bit. We’ve got to tell him, and then... about four or five ladies will come and pick you up. It’s difficult moving the wheelchair round with pebbles on the footpath you know?”

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

Nancy would love to visit the recently refurbished Chapel, but was not able to go due to mobility issues, and perhaps had nobody to take her in her wheelchair. One manager thought that lack of confidence in going out played a part in inhibiting access to the wider world, and that sometimes people changed their minds about going out when the time came. Time spent building relationship may encourage residents to go out. It was notable that the development of a good relationship with the activities coordinator helped Maureen to go out more.

The care homes were not necessarily located in places with easy access to places of interest. One lady in the lounge at Northway commented that there was nowhere to go to nearby. In contrast, the manager at Greenpark talked about the value of their home being located close to the shops, and how occasionally staff members would take residents to the pharmacy to collect their own prescriptions and chat to people from the village. Conversations with managers and residents also revealed that the disrepair of the paths was unhelpful, as was a lack of accessible public toilets. Some care home managers and activities coordinators talked about the physical challenges of organising trips out in terms of arranging suitable transport and the prohibitive cost of the home owning its own minibus. Some of these care homes did overcome these challenges so that ‘residents did not miss out’. Gwen highlighted the need for

trips out to not involve too much walking, and George did not want to feel like he was a burden.

When Rowles reflected on his research with older people living at home, he commented on one of his participants whose physical world had contracted, stating that, largely due to her memories, “she remains in a physical sense a prisoner of space, [however she] is confined in a jail without walls” (Rowles, 1978, p. 216). He felt that, through her memories, she was able to escape the confines of her home. Her memories were a link to the outside world. The participants in my research did value their surrogate connections with the wider world, and some were able to get out and about to some extent. For some this was sufficient, and some participants did not want to go out. However others, even if they did enjoy the surrogate connections and sometimes went out, yearned for freedom. Some participants used language of confinement as they talked about their fellow ‘inmates’. They may have been contemplating the workhouse system (Woodward & Kartupelis, 2018, p. 68), particularly as workhouses included places for the elderly and infirm before they were abolished, and many workhouses were turned into old people’s homes (Longmate, 2003, p. 284) . Most of the homes had locked doors, and visitors and residents could only leave the home if staff released the locks. In one sense, all of the residents are free to go out of the home once the door is opened. However, some participants were aware of the walls that confined them, including their physical frailty, the inhospitality of the wider environment and their reliance on the support of others. In all the care homes at least one participant expressed a longing to go out more.

6.3.4 Changing levels of engagement with the wider world

Relationships with the wider community may have changed prior to moving to the care home. I heard how ‘getting out’ was something that had reduced for several participants prior to their move. Brenda and Nancy talked about staying at home due to their physical limitations. For Nancy, this meant that although friends and family did visit her, on some days she was

completely alone. It has been suggested that increased frailty may reduce people's geographical worlds, but does not always reduce social networks (Godfrey et al., 2004, p. 217). Vera-Sanso et al. identify that it is other factors, including financial status and social structures, that affect social networks in old age (Vera-Sanso et al., 2014, p. 201). Godfrey et al. and Vera-Sanso et al. were not considering people in the fourth age of life, who had become very frail. Nevertheless, it is possible that environmental factors could exacerbate the challenges frail, older people faced while maintaining a social network. Similar to other research findings (Oldman & Quilgars, 1999, p. 372) several participants in my research described a contraction in both their geographical and social worlds prior to moving to the care home. It does appear that, as the level of frailty increases for individuals and their friends, the risk of isolation increases, as they are not able to get out and about to the same extent as they were previously.

As people get older, the death and ill health of friends and family affects networks (Godfrey et al., 2004, p. 216; Löfqvist et al., 2013, p. 922). Walter's wife had died prior to his move to the care home. In his interview, he described not getting over the death of his wife as well as his increased isolation. He said, "We did everything together. You don't move on from something like that." This brings home the emotional impact of the death of a partner (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019, p. 21). Increasing frailty and the death of friends and family did not necessarily mean that people were completely isolated. Although Marion had become more socially isolated as she had become older, and on some days did not see anyone, there were people who did visit. Brenda had offers of lifts to go to places, though she did not feel able to accept these. However, the offer of lifts was a sign of belonging to the wider community, and a sign that people cared and wanted her to be included. Marion and Brenda both had existing networks in the community, which provided some level of support; however, social isolation had increased.

I also heard about other ways that relationships with the wider world had changed, and continued to change. Nancy was concerned about rising crime, and also nostalgic for the days when she knew everyone in the village. Not knowing neighbours appeared to be associated with a lack of trust and feeling of unsafety. Nancy's family had lived in the village for generations, but she now felt that she was not known in the local community in the way she had been in the past. Perhaps as her mobility declined, as people died, and as new people came into the village, her sense of knowing and being known was diminished.

Not feeling safe in an environment highlights a lack of social capital. In terms of social capital, trust includes a belief that most people can be trusted, that it is safe, and that people around are willing to help their neighbours; this leads to a feeling of belonging to the local area. Trust and cooperative norms are associated with personal wellbeing; however, it is unclear why this occurs (Scrivens & Smith, 2013, p. 38). It may be that strengthening supportive relationships within communities, including intergenerational relationships, could increase feelings of safety. It was evident that a reduction in reliable relationships within the community prior to moving to the home meant that some participants did not feel safe in that community. Perceptions about safety and about other people may be based on assumptions rather than the reality of the situation. Walter identified being on the receiving end of negative perceptions when he left the RAF and was looking for work, because he was unknown.

The wider community varied in the extent to which it invited engagement, and to what extent older people were treated with respect. Walter talked about his RAF club, and explained that the club premises were due to close because it had been decided that they were not fit for purpose. He said that the veterans had not been permitted to be part of the decision-making process; they were still going to be able to meet, but the wider benefits of having the RAF Association base, which also provided respite stays for veterans, would be lost. There was a sense that the nation has abandoned these service men, and that they did not have a voice. He

also commented, “more and more now, I do feel that my era’s gone” (Walter, Northway, July 2019). He did not feel that he had a place of belonging within the wider community. In contrast, Elvie did have a sense of belonging in the world beyond the care home. Her close-knit family gave her a place within her family unit. She was fully involved in family life and in decisions that were being made. She said,

“So, it was funny when we were at the farm I heard this little skirmish going on, you know, talking, and then I said, what’s the matter? They wanted to...Roman Catholic, and I said, ‘Oh good, I said because I’ve always thought of turning.’ So that were it, they go to St Joseph’s Catholic Church.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

She enjoyed being involved in the debate and being listened to. She commented on how well the decision to convert had turned out.

The participants placed differing levels of importance on currently engaging with the wider world. Some participants placed greater importance on the people they saw on a day-to-day basis, and for some the wider world was less important now than in the past. For other participants it was important, and some would like to be able to make a difference but were unsure how they could do so. Keeping abreast of politics and news was important for some of the participants.

Our level of connection and engagement may change as we grow older. Tornstam describes that, as people get older, they may become more selective about relationships (Tornstam, 2005, p. 75). For some of the participants there was a sense of selectivity, as they now focused on relationships in their immediate environment. Tornstam does acknowledge that people’s experiences will be different. Building relationships can help us to understand what is important for people, recognising that this might include being engaged as citizens involved in wider issues. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recommends that,

We need to reinstate the notion and importance of citizenship and human rights for older people with high support needs, especially for those who live in residential and nursing homes for whom this is seen as obsolete or irrelevant (Bowers et al., 2009, p. 45).

Part of this is about recognising citizenship and supporting people who want to be engaged in the wider world to make a difference. We have already identified that feeling at home within a care home can be associated with being able to make a difference where you live. In the same way, being actively connected to the wider world may be part of how we are at home in our local community and the world in which we live. Being able to vote was important to Elvie; it was a sign that she was part of the democratic process, and her voice was important.

6.3.5 Summary

There were many ways in which participants engaged with the wider community – more than I had anticipated. Some participants described how their focus was no longer on the outside world. For many participants, windows on the world were important in order to maintain connection with the world and to be affirmed as a person within the world beyond the care home. Prior to carrying out the research I hypothesised that people living in care homes would feel marginalised. While there was some evidence of this, I was surprised at the connections that people had. A sense of connection was of differing importance to different people. I had not anticipated this potential change of focus. However, even a change of focus does not render the fuzzy edges unimportant. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected visitation for care home residents. This has led to campaigns for increased visitation rights, with reference being made to justice and deprivation of liberty (Learner, 2020; Rights for Residents, 2020). This highlights the importance of visitation and the distress caused when face to face contact is disrupted. Surrogate connections are particularly important at this time; however this does not replace the longing for physical connection with loved ones. Nevertheless, reflecting on a research day with chaplains working in care homes, Swift

observed that during the pandemic the act of letter writing, as well as use of technologies to support connection, has increased (Swift, 2020b), highlighting the value of surrogate connections. Through social media, I have observed creative ways that some care homes are connecting people with their communities. The importance of connecting with people outside of the care home community has been brought into sharp relief during this pandemic, as has the negative impact of digital poverty. Haslam comments on the importance of community for all older people, specifically the value of belonging and the need to support connections during the pandemic (Haslam, 2020, pp. 62-63, 68). Others have observed how some communities have increased in solidarity during this time, and consider how this might continue beyond the pandemic (Ntontis & Rocha, 2020, p. 87).

6.4 Theological reflection: shalom and freedom

Woodley states that “The whole community must have shalom or no one has shalom” (Woodley, 2012, p. 21). Brueggemann commented that shalom is about all parts of the community, ensuring that nobody is excluded (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 16). This takes us beyond the care home community and into the wider world. Within the data and analysis, the themes of freedom and incarceration were raised, along with the value of belonging to the wider world. Brueggemann comments that freedom is part of shalom, it is part of God’s plan and can be seen clearly in the Exodus and in Christ (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 40). He describes how the freedom that Christ brings is both physical and spiritual; it enables people to become part of the community and it is associated with joy (Brueggemann, 1976, pp. 41, 43). The data and analysis, combined with the COVID-19 restrictions reducing freedom of access, have led me to consider this zone of community in terms of liberation. In this reflection, drawing on disability liberation theology, I argue that a liberation theology of ageing includes older people having a place of belonging and shalom in the wider community. I argue that right relationships lead to liberation. Eiesland comments that a liberatory theology of disability involves a struggle for inclusion in society (Eiesland, 1994, p. 29). Although she is writing from

a disability perspective, this is relevant for older people who find that the changes they are facing in their minds and bodies lead to exclusion from the wider community. Freedom to access the wider community is not only about physical access, it is about being included in that community. This involves being able to participate in mutual relationships within the wider community, which themselves are a source of shalom.

To structure the reflection, I will draw on Julian of Norwich's experience of engaging with the wider world while living in a cell. I have chosen this image because although Julian had a choice about living in a cell, in contrast with the older people in my research whose choices were limited and potentially associated with incarceration, there are some points of connection. Although Julian had a confined experience physically, her windows provided her with links beyond her cell. This resonates with the experiences of the participants, who had different levels of physical confinement within their current experiences, but who had relationships with the wider world. Julian of Norwich may have had two or three windows from her room. One window would have looked out onto the street, and one into the church (Sheldrake, 2019, p. 41). Windows are important, and we can assume that her inner life, nourished by her window towards God, interacted with her outward life, which included "concern for all her fellow Christians" (Sheldrake, 2019, p. 41). There is "evidence that Julian received visitors who came to talk about their spiritual journeys" (Sheldrake, 2019, p. 22). Through windows we can see and be seen by others; we can be visited and we can visit others. As Julian engaged with the people who came to her window she may have been visited, but she may also have visited them. Windows allow interaction and relationship development. In this reflection, I will argue that the relationships which develop through these windows promote freedom and a sense of place in the wider community, contributing to shalom. I will consider:

- Visitation by others
- Only visiting?

- Loving

6.4.1 Visitation by others

As Julian was visited, so too the older people in my research were visited. In this section I will argue how visitation contributes to freedom. Visitation includes people physically visiting and visitation through letters and phone calls. Relationships develop through visitation, and, as people get to know each other more, a sense of belonging to the wider world is affirmed, we are transformed and we encounter God.

6.4.1.1 Deepening relationships

Drawing on the Latin origins of the word, Swinton asserts that “To visit someone is to see them” (Swinton, 2012, p. 280). As we see each other, we begin to know each other more and our relationship can develop. Visitation can set us free from a sense of loneliness and isolation. Visitation invites mutuality which in turn strengthens the sense of connection. Visitation through letter writing is one way that we can express something of ourselves as well as showing that we ‘see’ the person in our mind’s eye. Through letter writing, our relationships can deepen as we reveal more of ourselves and articulate what the relationship means to us. Although Psalms are not letters, they share some of the characteristics of letters as the psalmist addresses God directly, giving a sense of knowing and being known. Brown describes how Psalm 139 demonstrates that, even though God is not close by, we are not abandoned by him. He contrasts this with other Psalms, in which God’s distance is associated with abandonment (W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 208). Letters and phone calls from people who are geographically distant can communicate ongoing love, especially if they demonstrate that they are seeing the person they are writing to in their mind’s eye and share something of themselves. Brown talks about how “God’s tender yet totalising knowledge” is expressed in Psalm 139 (W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 208). As we visit in a variety of ways, we can communicate to the person how we know them, and we can reveal more of our ourselves to them, and as we

do so, our relationship deepens. This pattern of revelation and sharing echoes our relationship with God, as God reveals more of Godself to us and demonstrates that we are known to Godself. Brown also comments that in this Psalm the Psalmist 'enjoys' this relationship with God, his 'intimate yet transcendent partner', and there is 'a sense of serenity', 'warmth', 'poignancy' and 'solidarity' (W. P. Brown, 2002, p. 208). These aspects of loving relationships expressed in the Psalm can be conveyed through letters, phone calls and visits in person. As we visit, we can reveal the nature of our relationship as we convey intimacy and warmth. We can show our love.

6.4.1.2 Belonging

Visitation can also convey a sense of belonging, which is especially important if people feel they have been excluded from the wider world due to their increasing frailty. Visitation can set us free from a sense of marginalisation. Swinton states that, "In order to belong, one needs to be missed if one isn't there" (Swinton, 2012, p. 279). As we visit people in care homes, we demonstrate that we miss them in the places where we could once find them. We demonstrate that they still belong in the wider world, and that they continue to belong in relationship with us. Swinton discusses how God visits God's people (Swinton, 2012, pp. 281-282). By visiting us, God affirms God's connection with us, as God's people, and our place within the community of creation. Swinton explains that God visits us because God loves us. This visitation is not dependent on our "abilities or goodness" (Swinton, 2012, p. 283). God does not cast us aside if we have become increasingly frail. Increasing frailty can lead people to step down from roles and feel that they no longer belong in the same way because their contribution may now be different. Reynolds comments that our membership of God's household is based on an economy of grace rather than ability, and, through our mutuality in relating, we belong to each other (Reynolds, 2008, p. 104) – even if the role we play in the relationship has changed. However, it is also important to note that roles are not necessarily given up or altered. Being offered support to continue in a role, with adaptations being made,

can powerfully demonstrate to someone how much they are valued. There is a time for roles to be relinquished and a time for adaptations to be made, and this might be a fluctuating, fluid state that can be navigated within loving relationships. As we visit and see each other, we are able to navigate these steps together, knowing that we continue to belong together. We might continue to belong even without an active role. Visiting involves actively going to where people are, seeking them out, calling them into relationship and demonstrating their value to us. We are the body of Christ, and, as we visit, we embody God's visitation. Those who are visited can know that they belong to someone and something beyond themselves. When we visit people, we affirm our connection with them, our sense of belonging together in relationship and, through that relationship, a sense of belonging and connection in the wider world. As people are visited in a variety of ways, their sense of belonging within a family or community structure at different levels can be strengthened.

6.4.1.3 Transformation and encounters with God

Visitation may also lead to transformation. Visitation can set us free from the notion that once we move to a care home our journey is over. Reflecting on the Old and New Testaments, Swinton comments that,

God's visitations are profound and deep and designed to initiate change and transformation... Ultimately God comes to visit human beings in Jesus (Swinton, 2012, p. 282).

There can also be something profound about the visitations we experience with each other.

Swinton focuses on how

... those we visit can encounter God in the sensitivity of our touch and our words, and a gentle presence that transcends all time. God is with us as we visit (Swinton, 2012, p. 283).

As people visited Julian to talk about their spiritual journey, they may have been seeking transformation. While those visiting older people in care homes may not be seeking

transformation, they may nevertheless be transformed by the visit. Reflecting on comments from the participants and my own experiences, at times there was a sense of mutual transformation and flourishing as I visited the participants during the research process. This was not something that only affected the participants, although some of them did share how they had been affected. As I spent time with the participants, I learned from their wisdom to be in the moment and to have a sense of perspective. I was liberated. I also learned during the process of transcribing the interviews how to listen more fully and respond more appropriately to what was said. There was a sense that we saw each other in the interview, as I shared something of myself as part of the process. It may be that sometimes the participants encountered God during the visit, experiencing affirmation and comfort. If, in visiting the stranger, we are visiting God, I too encountered God. Similarly, Sexton, reflecting on her experience of interviewing older Roman Catholic sisters, comments that there was mutuality in the encounters, and that they ministered to her (Sexton, 2019, p. 51). Buber outlines how 'I – Thou' relationships, extended, include the eternal 'You', and that as we encounter each other as Thou, we encounter God (Buber, 1970, pp. 123-168). It is interesting to consider that even fleeting visits can lead to transformation, as Swinton comments, "When God visited Mary, Jesus we might say 'happened'" (Swinton, 2012, p. 282). There are times when our encounters with people are brief, and when relationships only last for a short amount of time.

As I developed relationships with people as I carried out the research, I was concerned about the sense of loss that residents might feel when the research was over and I no longer visited. However, I came to realise that each encounter that we have is important, and each interaction has an intrinsic value, and while ongoing relationships may be more beneficial, this does not diminish the value of each moment. I began to recognise that in each encounter, we are on holy ground. Ross outlines the value of sacramental rituals in heightening awareness of God's presence, while also acknowledging that rituals are not necessary for God's presence to be known (Ross, 2001, p. 84). She recognises that there are encounters with each other that

might be considered to be sacramental; they are 'occasions of grace' that make God's presence known (Ross, 2001, pp. 47, 74, 231). An example of this can be seen in Vanstone's description of visiting an elderly bishop who was very frail, completely dependent and did not speak much. Within this visit Vanstone had a sense of something significant occurring (Vanstone, 2020, pp. 89-90). This type of experience is not something confined to those who are considered to be holy. Ross comments that God's presence is not dependent on whether people are good, or holy, or even aware of God's presence (Ross, 2001, p. 84). God is present in our encounters whoever we are and whether we recognise it or not.

Visitors to care homes, and the experience of visitation, were a potential source of liberation as, through these visits, relationships were deepened, a sense of belonging was affirmed and people were enabled to flourish. Visiting people is an act of social justice, but it is one which should not be done from a position of condescension. It should be done humbly, recognising the mutuality of the interaction, the mutual transformation, the mutual liberation and the furthering of right relationships. Sharing holy ground, meeting with God and reflecting God's image as we see each other and share more of ourselves is part of how we grow towards shalom together.

6.4.2 Only visiting?

Julian of Norwich may have been confined to her cell, but her writing, and the fact that she was sought out by people in the wider world, not only meant that she visited the world, but that she had a place in the wider community. She belonged there, and had a place of honour and respect. In my research there was variation in the extent to which the participants were free to access the wider community or felt they had a place in the wider world. For some, this lack of freedom affected their sense of wellbeing. For some of those who did go out, there was a sense that they were 'only visiting' the wider world, and that this was not their home. This was not somewhere they fully belonged, had a voice or were able to make a difference.

However, others did demonstrate a sense of belonging to the communities they visited. Here I argue that relationships set people free from marginalisation through justice, which includes ensuring rights are met, friendship, and treating people with honour. This has the potential to bring liberation to the whole of the community as we are set free from those things that potentially hinder our belonging. This can bring us closer to shalom.

6.4.2.1 Justice

Justice brings liberation from the margins of community, carrying with it a sense of belonging. The justice I am referring to here is bound up in love and righteousness. Brueggemann comments on Jeremiah 9, saying that cities should not boast about wisdom, might and wealth, but about steadfast love, justice and righteousness (Brueggemann, 2014, pp. 40-41). In this interpretation, Brueggemann implies that knowing God is connected with living in accordance with God's ways. We will see later that this is a theme he uses in his interpretation of Jeremiah 22:15-16 (Brueggemann, 2014, p. ix). According to Strong's Hebrew and Aramaic dictionary, this steadfast love includes an obligation towards those who need our help, but also goes beyond this and involves generosity and a sense of commitment that goes beyond the law (Strong, 2010, p. 93). Justice involves judgement, people's rights and right relationship (Strong, 2010, p. 176). The righteousness in this context is connected to justice and being in right relationship (Strong, 2010, p. 236). Justice, incorporating loving kindness and right relationship, can liberate us from the margins and lead us towards shalom. Freedman uses Psalm 72 to reflect on meanings of shalom in society. He comments that signs of shalom are that 'everyone feels included' and that all are cared for through the wealth of the society (Freedman, 2016, pp. 55-57) and that acting in these ways reflect 'God's own values' (Freedman, 2016, p. 57).

Reynolds comments that communities can be disabling (Reynolds, 2008, p. 33). A just community overcomes this, ensuring that the wider community is a hospitable and accessible

place. This involves legislation and practical design as well as loving relationships. Legislation such as the Equality Act (Equality Act 2010, 2010) is important, and supports increased access and rights for a range of people, but it only goes so far, and even if it is followed it does not necessarily mean that people are supported to belong to a community. Practical accessible design is also valuable. Factors which could increase accessibility as highlighted in my research include provision of accessible toilets, well maintained paths and affordable disability transport. These were not always evident. This is relevant wherever older people are living, as these practical measures will support older people to physically go out from their home. However, even if these measures were in place, this would not automatically equate to a sense of belonging for older people. These measures support older people to have the freedom to access the community, but it is relationships which create a place of belonging for all people.

6.4.2.2 Friendship

I will argue that relationships based on friendship, love and mutuality may liberate older people from the margins of society. Reinders comments from a disability perspective that although emphasizing 'rights' is important, it does not necessarily lead to people forming friendships. He suggests that marginalisation is addressed when we are willing to become friends (Reinders, 2008, pp. 43-44, 150). Although he is writing from a disability perspective, his comments are pertinent for older people who may be becoming increasingly frail. Reinders equates friendship with belonging (Reinders, 2008, p. 13). Friendships based on mutuality support people to belong to a community. As people have a sense of being known through participating in a community, feelings of safety can increase. This can also bring a sense of shalom.

There are challenges for older people in forming and maintaining friendships as they and their generational peers become increasingly frail and physical access to places becomes more limited. Older people may have visible and hidden disabilities, which can lead to them

becoming vulnerable and marginalised. Eiesland highlights that vulnerability is something experienced and understood by God. She comments that “Christ’s disfigured side bears witness to the existence of ‘hidden disabilities...’” (Eiesland, 1994, p. 101). Again, although Eiesland’s work is not specifically about age related disability or loss of significant relationships, her comments speak to those who are vulnerable and marginalised. Eiesland suggests that,

God is in the present social-symbolic order at the margins with people with disabilities and initiates transformation from this de-centred position (Eiesland, 1994, p. 100).

God is here, identifying with people with disabilities and participating in these communities, and this is where we are called to be, standing in solidarity, offering friendship and working for change. Woodley discusses caring for people who are on the margins. He states that,

the disempowered triad of widows, orphans and strangers best represent God’s concern for those...who are most easily oppressed (justice). Shalom expresses God’s concern for the socially marginalised (Woodley, 2012, p. 16).

Reflecting on Jeremiah 22:15-16, Brueggemann comments that the prophet equates ‘care for the poor and needy’ with ‘knowledge of Yahweh’ (Brueggemann, 2014, p. ix). While disliking the language of caring for the poor and needy, it is true that we do meet with God when we care for each other. However, this is a mutual encounter. Reynolds explores the dangers of using the language of ‘needy’ and ‘the least of these’ in our interactions with people with disabilities. He comments that ‘disinterested love’ does not allow for mutuality (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 114-115). It is through loving relationships, which allow for mutuality and recognition of shared vulnerability, that we meet each other and know Yahweh.

Alongside the comments revealing social isolation, I saw glimmers of justice in the stories of love and friendship that people told me about the care they received prior to moving to the care home. Social connection and participation in the wider community had reduced, but there were individuals who showed love and care. Supporting older people to engage with

their communities is an important part of social justice, and this begins with us intentionally standing alongside and forming friendships with older people. As we do so, we are standing alongside God, who fully identifies with those who are marginalised. There were signs of justice when care home staff, friends and volunteers overcame inhospitable environments and supported people to engage with the wider world.

6.4.2.3 Honour

Treating people with honour liberates them from the marginalisation that frailty can bring. Meador and Henson comment on how the New Testament demonstrates that older people are to be honoured (Meador & Henson, 2000, p. 193). Treating a person with honour includes listening to their voice and allowing them to make a difference. Meador and Henson comment that, in some biblical narratives, “growing old became a symbol of blessing, wisdom and righteousness” (Meador & Henson, 2000, p. 192). This is a characteristic of a society that is loving, just and righteous.

If older people were regarded as being wise and righteous, they would be given a place of honour, their advice would be sought, and their place within their family and the wider world would be affirmed through this process. They would be able to make a difference in their community, and through this to have a sense of belonging to the community. However, we might not all become wise as we age, and MacKinlay suggests that lack of connection to our spiritual selves may be one contributing factor to limited growth in wisdom (MacKinlay, 2017, p. 254). Nevertheless, whatever our level of wisdom, we should still be treated with honour, in recognition of our shared humanity.

The level of importance in belonging to the wider community was different for different people. Some participants were more concerned about their immediate environment, and this was where their interests lay. They did not express sentiments of abandonment or exclusion

by the wider world, but positively commented on their own changing focus. Things that were important in the past were not considered to be as important now. As people become older and more aware of the time left to live there can be a 'stripping away', as people reflect and make sense of their life (King, 2004, p. 133). Perhaps with increased wisdom there also comes an awareness of how to live in each moment, and to engage with what is immediately present. Perhaps as people "move towards transcendence" and "change from *doing* to *being*" (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 153) this includes a shift in perception about what is important. However, being part of a community is still part of 'being', and for some participants the wider community was still part of their present. Their engagement with the wider community was important for their sense of belonging and 'being'. For all people, even if their focus is not towards the wider community, they are still part of community, and justice is evident when they are shown respect and have a sense of belonging. Reynolds asks the question, "is the world a home for us?" and discusses how that signifies belonging, a sense of connection, and an environment in which we can flourish (Reynolds, 2008, p. 51). Even if our focus has changed from the wider world, the wider world is still present in the fuzzy background. This was reflected in the comments from those participants whose focus had changed. They talked about the wider world being less important rather than not at all important. A characteristic of a shalom community is one where all people belong (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 176) and feel at home.

6.4.2.4 The whole community

Brueggemann suggests that, within shalom, freedom is balanced with unity of the community (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 50). This freedom is not about selfish indulgence, nor about the needs of only one group of people. All people should be treated with honour. Freedom in the context of shalom is the freedom for all people to enter into mutually loving relationships with each other, with God and with the whole of creation. This is liberatory for the whole of the community. If communities honoured all, enabling all people to have a place, to be heard and

to make a difference, then the community would move towards wholeness. With the rise of initiatives such as 'Age Friendly Communities' (Centre for Ageing Better, 2021), 'Dementia Friendly Communities' (Local Government Association, 2015a) and 'Think Autism' (Local Government Association, 2015b) it occurs to me that the overarching aim should be for communities in which we can all belong and become friends. Brueggemann, commenting on Ezekiel 34: 25-29a and Leviticus 26:4-6, states that the wellbeing referred to in these passages is both individual and for all the community, and is for all regardless of age, wealth or power (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 16). The Equality Act 2010 reminds us that people are potentially excluded for a range of reasons, and identifies personal characteristics which must be protected (Equality Act 2010, 2010) and the Child Poverty Act 2010 (Child Poverty Act 2010, 2010) reminds us that economic factors exclude people. However, legislation does not cover all situations, and is limited in what it can achieve. Eiesland comments that when theology meets with political action, solidarity involves holding together with other people who are marginalised (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 94-95). As part of that, there is value in highlighting the particularity of individual groups of people who are marginalised to ensure that we work towards treating all people with honour. Without this particularity, people are likely to be treated without honour, especially if we need to proactively make changes to ensure that they are.

Heyward comments that "love is justice", and, as we act in the right way, the act is both love and justice (Heyward, 2010, p. 219). Fostering communities that honour all people and value interdependence is part of love inspired justice. It supports older people to physically access the wider world, to feel safe and connected, and to have their contributions valued, and is a whole community approach. Brueggemann states that "Shalom is rooted in a theology of hope...that the world can be transformed" (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 74). We are living in a place of 'now and not yet' as we see glimpses of shalom in an imperfect world, where legislation is

required to promote basic rights, but also where there are loving relationships which go beyond legislation.

6.4.3 Loving

One of Julian's windows was in towards the church, which we could say allowed her to be nourished by God, which in turn enabled her to relate to those who came to her window. I argue how our relationship with God influences our relationships with others and our movement towards shalom. This is relevant for all of us, regardless of age or where we are living. This is not about how younger people can be inspired to love older people living in care homes, although that is part of it. It includes how older people in care homes can also be inspired and energised in their relationships with others and contribute to a wider liberation.

Drawing on social capital theory, the link between faith and social engagement is sometimes referred to as religious or spiritual capital. Baker and Miles-Watson define religious capital as the "actions and resources that faith groups contribute to civil society" (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010, p. 18). Spiritual capital can be defined as the "belief or faith that actually energises or motivates our ethical and public living" (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010, p. 19). One expression of spiritual capital is being with people who have been marginalised (Baker, 2012, p. 575). This can be useful in bringing a spiritual dimension into the social capital, and captures something of the link between our faith and actions; however, it has the potential to be reductionist by considering our spirituality in terms of measurable outcomes, and has overtones of 'doing to' people as a result of our faith. I prefer a more fluid, relational exploration. Some of this is captured in the response to the pandemic from faith leaders, who have urged us to consider how we live in community in the light of our relationship with God. This does reflect the concept of spiritual capital, but focuses on relationality. Pope Francis commented that in times of crisis, God's love reminds us of our common humanity and can lead us to a new freedom (Pope Francis, 2020, p. 97). Justin Welby comments on the love of

God sustaining faith groups that work for the common good and developing communities which include a sense of belonging (Welby, 2021, p. 264). He also states that a loving society is liberating and enables people to grow (Welby, 2021, p. 8). Pope Francis asserts that a better future comes from knowing that God loves us, being open to the Spirit and choosing a way that benefits all people, including the elderly (Pope Francis, 2020, pp. 51, 59) and Justin Welby emphasises the value of 'solidarity between generations' (Welby, 2021, p. 112). The connection between love and liberation is marked, as is the understanding that this is about mutual relationships. Older people also have a role to play in the liberation of the community through their relationships with others.

Describing God's visitation, Swinton comments that "as we have been visited, so we in turn visit" (Swinton, 2012, p. 283). Reflecting on Buber's work, he states that, as we experience God, we are able to enter into similar relationships with others (Swinton, 2012, p. 147). As we experience God, we are transformed, we receive the gift of shalom, and we are drawn to others. We are inspired to reach out while also being open to receiving. Those who visited Julian of Norwich may have consequently been liberated in their spiritual life, and those visiting older people may likewise be liberated from some of their own concerns. This may even occur if those older people are unable to communicate verbally and are in a state of dependence. As we recognise our mutuality, we realise that we meet God in others as well as them meeting God in us. However, this is more than a passing on of what we have received and experienced from God. Grey explores how, as all creation, we participate in the being of the Triune God, and that God is the "divine ground, the limitless creative source of relationality" (Grey, 1989, p. 86). This adds a further depth to the relationality we experience. It is not simply a matter of we have received and therefore we give; there is scope for continual circular flow of relating and deepening of relationships. Grey discusses how this deepening of mutuality may transform society through increasingly just ways of relating, suggesting that 'broken mutuality' leads to injustice (Grey, 1989, pp. 86-87). I recognise

something of this in the experiences of the participants and those who visited them. We are all dependent on God, and our relationship with God is part of our relationship with others. This deepening mutuality is not about us and them, or doing to the weak and needy. It is about shared relationships. I have already discussed Reinder's comments about belonging and friendship, but he also explores how these friendships have their source in our relationship with God. He states that "we are drawn into the divine communion: to be God's friends and thus to be friends with others" (Reinders, 2008, p. 313). Loving others is not something that we are left to do from our own resources. Grey comments that God's love sustains the web of life (Grey, 2003, p. 123). Brueggemann, reflecting on Ephesians 2:14, comments on Jesus being our shalom, and how this both inspires and empowers us (Brueggemann, 1976, p. 24). We can take hope as we yearn for right relationships, because God is at the heart of this process, and as God sustains the web of life, through the Holy Spirit, we too are sustained and transformed. We are enabled to work in mutuality with others to weave webs of connection across boundaries.

I recognise that not everyone will identify with having a relationship with God. However, even if we don't recognise it, there may be something about the relational way that we and the whole of creation were created that is inherently good and causes us to reach out to others. Where this occurs, God's justice can be seen through right relationships and deepening mutuality, in which we meet God, and affirm our mutual connectivity and belonging to each other within a framework of belonging to the whole of humanity. When this occurs, we have a sense of being at home, and we move towards shalom.

6.5 Conclusion

Julian of Norwich was free to leave her cell. She was there by choice. Older people living in care homes did not choose the circumstances that led to them residing there. Living in a care home can lead to a sense of not being known, of the end of possibilities for growth and

change, of marginalisation, of bearing the dishonour of becoming frail. However, in this reflection I have argued that windows on the world provide opportunities for relationships to develop that can liberate us from those things which marginalise people and hinder growth. Relationships can contribute to a just society where all people are respected, enabled to flourish and have a sense of belonging and of being at home in the world. This is a matter of justice and is part of shalom. Our relationship with God, and God's encircling creative love, enable relationships to be formed and to grow. Through mutual loving relationships, the whole community can be liberated to be a place of justice, respect and honour. In this community, older people, and all people, are known and honoured. We are all part of the transformation of the community. Through this transformation, as we move towards freedom and unity in community, we move towards shalom.

CHAPTER 7: Creation

7.1 Introduction

In its broadest sense, our community goes beyond our relationships with other people and with God, and includes our relationship with creation, with plants and animals and the whole of the world. In this chapter I will explore what the participants told me about their relationship with creation and how, for some participants, this interacted with their relationships with other people and with God. This was a recurring theme throughout the interviews and the participant observation. It begins to take us into another dimension as we discuss spirituality, wellbeing, the past and the future in the context of creation. In the theological reflection I will argue that living in harmony with creation includes being in right relationship with creation, with God and with each other.

7.2 In dialogue with the participants

Some of you told me how you connect to nature directly as you go into the garden. However, for most of you, connection to nature was through a window, through the television or through memories. Several of these conversations were un-taped, informal conversations which I recorded in my journal.

Maureen, you told me you enjoy watching nature programmes, including Spring Watch (Maureen, Westhome, September 2018).

Marion, you said that you were looking forward to going into the care home garden in summer. You described your experience last year of sitting outside and chatting to the owner and other residents with a sherry. You described it as 'having a change'. You also talked about the greenhouse. You said that relatives bring plants, for example tomatoes or chrysanthemums, and that anybody can go and look at them or look after them. You used to

work growing flowers, and your firm won a prize at the local flower show (Marion, Greenpark, December 2018).

Nancy, you talked about the same garden at the home. You said it wasn't worth going in now, and that it was better to wait till summer (Nancy, Greenpark, January 2019).

Evelyn, you frequently talked about the leaves on the trees. One day you commented on the colours of the leaves on the trees outside the window being particularly bright. You talked about the changing seasons, and your dislike of winter. As the lounge and bedrooms are upstairs, and there are trees around the home, there is a connection to nature, albeit through the glass. You talked about the trees swaying in the wind, leaves changing colour and leaves falling. There was a connection to the changing seasons. You have a connection to the living natural world and the rhythms of the seasons (Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017).

Nancy, you described enjoying the different seasons and weather, summer, winter, rain and snow (Nancy, Greenpark, March 2019).

I asked you, Barbara about the importance of being connected to nature. And what about keeping connected to nature and the natural world?

“Not so important I think, but very enjoyable, when I get out, but I don't get out a lot.”

Do you get out in the garden here?

“Oh yes, I've walked all round the garden, but there's not much there...but I can't walk far.”

(Barbara, Northway, May 2019)

Flo, you said it was important to keep connected to nature

“Oh yes, I would live in a tent.”

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

I asked you, Anne about gardening. And what about gardening?

“Oh yes, quite interested but I didn’t get down to do any.”

And was that like growing flowers or vegetables?

“Flowers...yes, but I can’t bend down.”

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

George, you did not go on a recent trip to the local nature reserve. You were reliant on help, and you were concerned about your wife not being able to manage you. You minimised missing the trip by emphasising that you had been there before.

“Yes, but I have been there been there before, but my wife can't manage me so I didn't think it was fair to.”

(George, Newlodge, September 2017)

Doris, you were concerned about the devastation caused by the wildfires in the summer of 2018 (Doris, Westhome, July 2018).

Maureen, you were concerned about plastic pollution.

“At least this picking up the plastic is a good thing... that they’re doing isn’t it... I wish I could help with that...I think it’s awful when you see how much there is in the ocean.”

(Maureen, Westhome, September 2018)

For some of you, animals were important in your connection to nature. Have you been a vegetarian for a long time?

“As long...too far back as I can remember...I can’t remember when I started. I did eat fish for a long time, and then I gave up on fish too. I thought why should a little fish,

you know suffer when I'm like trying to save other animals, but I thought, no, fish are entitled to a life just like the other animals are, you know so I don't eat them. The only thing I have is like I have milk in my tea, but I only like a bit in to colour it. So I like it dark, with just a bit in to colour it, that's about it. And I don't think you're supposed to eat eggs, I'm not sure, but I think that's vegan isn't it?"

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

Maureen, you talked about watching the birds and squirrels on the bird table outside your window. You have a photograph of the grey squirrel pinned on your wall. You found the rats interesting who also visited the bird table (Maureen, Westhome, June 2018).

Nancy, your views about the grey squirrels that you used to see from your window were different, and although you were interested in seeing them, you described them as vermin (Nancy, Greenpark, March 2019).

You described social connections between farmers.

"...you knew all the farmers like...they were all farmers round there."

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

Gwen, you talked about driving around with your dad to look at neighbours' fields before going out for fish and chips (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

The natural world also provided the backdrop for your memories and stories of friendships. Nature, memory and social connections were linked for you George. You recited a poem you had written describing a woodland scene with a recurrent motif of the sound of a blackbird singing. It was about a man, remembering a childhood experience complete with the sights and sounds of the experience, and the reflections of looking back. You also described meeting

a friend, in the context of him collecting a blackbird's egg (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

At Greenpark, as we carried out craft activities in a group, we remembered jam jar fishing and catching tiddlers in ditches (Greenpark, March 2019).

At Newlodge, as we sat in the lounge, we reminisced about blackberry picking and about holidays in the Lake District (Newlodge, September 2017).

Several of you enjoyed talking about the crops you had grown in the past. Gwen, you talked about calabrese, and Marion, you talked about the flowers you had grown (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017; Marion, Greenpark, December 2018).

Some of you commented on having pets.

“I do miss [having] a pet...but then again you know you can get sorrow from pets can't you, you know when you have to part. It's not all laughter is it, when you have pets.

But my daughter has two little dogs, so I nurse them when I go.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

There were resident pets in some of your homes. Northway had a dog, who came to work with the activity coordinator, and he promoted interaction. One day, residents enjoyed playing with the dog, stroking him, throwing toys for him to catch and feeding him biscuits prior to the quiz. This promoted interaction between residents. The chaplain joined in. There was also a cat at Northway who tended to slink into places away from people but was a source of conversation (Northway, April 2019).

An animal safari visited Westhome. The animal handlers brought a snake, a bearded dragon, a tortoise, a meerkat, a skinny pig and a rabbit. They talked briefly about each animal then went around the room giving the residents and staff the opportunity to touch and stroke the animals. The district nurses joined in when they came. There was a strong sense of community and interaction between residents, staff and visitors. Even with animals, including reptiles, that were not universally liked, there were opportunities for communication as dislike was expressed and shared. It livened up the lounge and people with and without cognitive difficulties could join in. The activities coordinator supported interaction by mediating and intervening if residents had communication difficulties. She was proactive in this (Westhome, June 2018).

Reminiscing about going for walks in the past, Flo, you commented,

“When you’ve got dogs or young children, you’ll never be short of friends.”

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

Nature was part of your relationship with God,

“I see God in the trees outside my window.”

You said that you had always seen God in nature, and that is why you liked going to a particularly beautiful part of the countryside (Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017).

"Well God's presence is always to me. Always. That's all I can say about that really."

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

“Sometimes just sit here saying thank you Jesus...and in nature...in creation and that you see a bush across there just now, and the leaves have all gone red and different colours... and I don’t know how folk can’t see all the beauty that there is around us...”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

“When God created it, it says and it was very good, every time and it was very good, very good and last verse and it was very, very good.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

Harvest time was important to you, Gwen.

“The harvest festival the other week was lovely. Cos [the chaplain has] been in farming you see. It feels like the town people don't really realise...I think with [the chaplain] being in farming that's why she was so keen to have a harvest festival... she altered the situation”

You expressed thankfulness for harvest, and the importance of harvest service. Some of your favourite hymns are harvest hymns (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

7.3 Analysis

The data revealed how the participants connected to nature and what this meant to them. It showed how shared connections with nature had the potential to draw people closer to each other and to increase wellbeing, and was intertwined with their relationship with God. In this analysis I will explore these connections with nature and how they contribute to our relationships with each other and with God.

7.3.1 Connection to nature

Peace, Holland and Kellaheer found that older people in care homes were less likely to talk about the outside environment than those living at home. They concluded that those living in care homes may be more concerned about “shelter, security and companionship” and also noted that this cohort did not do outside gardening (Peace, Holland, & Kellaheer, 2006, p. 86). This was not reflected in my findings, and although some participants did not place high importance on connection to nature, the majority indicated that connection to the natural world was important. It was a source of spontaneous conversation in communal areas as

participants talked about what they could see and commented on going out into the garden. The staff at Greenpark and Northway in particular were proactive in their approach to supporting residents to enjoy the garden, which perhaps supported residents to look beyond their immediate needs and to appreciate the natural world. At Newlodge, the views from the first-floor windows seemed to draw the natural world in, which promoted interaction with nature. I will explore connection to nature in terms of:

- Wellbeing
- Seasons
- Rooms with a view
- Assistance to connect with nature
- Senses
- Caring for the natural world

7.3.1.1 Wellbeing

There was some variation in the level of importance that participants placed on keeping connected to nature. However, as many of them talked about creation, a sense of peace and wellbeing was communicated through their facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. This is reflected in other research findings. Orr et al. carried out a systematic analysis of how older people describe the natural world, and commented on the pleasure and joy that older people experience from connecting with nature (Orr, Wagstaffe, Briscoe, & Garside, 2016, p. 1). Rappe et al. found that when older people living in care homes “were engaged in the observation of nature, pains and other distresses were not evident” (Rappe, Kivelä, & Rita, 2006, p. 57). This links in with other research, which suggests that increased engagement in nature may be associated with gerotranscendence (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, pp. 394, 399). My findings are supportive of this, as I observed the participants transcending their current situation as they described their encounters with nature. This engagement with nature was a source of interest and delight that provided an external focus.

7.3.1.2 Seasons

There was a sense of enjoyment of the changing seasons. Participants looked forward to summer. Nancy enjoyed all seasons, but particularly looked forward to going in the garden in summer. Nancy's response is reflected in other research findings, in which older people in nursing homes found elements to be enjoyed in all seasons, though used the garden most in summertime (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 396). Observing the seasons and talking about them was important to some participants, and they initiated conversations about it. Being connected to the changing seasons gave a rhythm and a sense of progression as well as hope for the future. Other researchers also found that a connection to changing seasons was important for older people,

The seasonality of the natural environment is symbolic of all that is growing, that will die, and that will be replenished and many older people draw comfort from it (Peace et al., 2006, p. 91).

These particular sentiments were not overtly expressed by the participants in my research; however, there was a sense of hope, particularly in relation to anticipation of summer. There was a sense of delighting in the seasons and observing the changes. There was a sense of being connected to the living world through the seasons, and a sense of connection to God as the harvest was appreciated.

7.3.1.3 Rooms with a view

Orr et al. comment that for some older people, their way of connecting with nature is through their windows. They also comment that, although some authors describe this connection as 'passive' engagement, other authors consider 'looking' and 'watching' to be active engagement (Orr et al., 2016, p. 5). My findings support the latter interpretation, as although looking could be passive, the way that the participants observed, described and delighted in what they saw demonstrated active engagement. For some participants, their main connection with nature was through their windows, and the view of creation from these windows was a

source of joy. This included views of trees and flowers. Watching birds, squirrels and rats through the window was also a source of interest for participants. Alice often sat in the conservatory at Greenpark looking out over the garden, car park and local church, and delighted in the view. Contact with nature through windows is considered beneficial for health and wellbeing (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St Leger, 2006, p. 47). Alice's view through the window connected her to nature and to aspects of her social world. The combination of nature and sociability in her view was important to her. Although she enjoyed the natural world, she also enjoyed the social activity that she could see and engage with from her vantage point. This is something that has been identified in other research. Kearney and Winterbottom asked forty residents in long term care facilities what they like to see through the window: 35% of residents mentioned gardens, 30% mentioned birds, 22.5% said that people were important, 12.5% talked about the landscape and 7.5% mentioned animals, weather and the sky (Kearney & Winterbottom, 2005, p. 21). Bengtsson and Carlsson highlight the value of movement in the view from the window from both the natural world and what they describe as 'city life'. They emphasise that residents in care homes valued seeing things that move and change (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 396). Although views of nature are associated with wellbeing, and were appreciated by the participants in my research, participants also sought out views that were socially active.

7.3.1.4 Assistance to connect with nature

Rappe et al. reported that the main reasons older people in long term care were restricted in being able to go outside to connect with nature were lack of support, inclement weather, the terrain and inaccessible doorways (Rappe et al., 2006, p. 57). Bengtsson and Carlsson reported that residents in nursing homes without family to support them were not able to go outside as much as they would like due to a shortage of staff time (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 396). In my own research, George did not feel able to go on a trip to the local nature reserve organised by the home because he did not feel that his wife would be able to support him. I

had the impression that he would like to go, but he minimised this, saying that he had been before. Flo longed to go outside but had nobody to take her. However, at Northway, the activities coordinator organised walks round the garden of the home at set times. This included residents who were independently mobile and those who required support with their wheelchairs. At Greenpark, the manager talked about how they had developed the garden to make it accessible. There was an emphasis on making it a pleasant and useable space.

7.3.1.5 Senses

Franco et al. consider how, although most research focuses on the visual benefits of nature, other senses also contribute to our beneficial experiences of nature. They state that there is emerging evidence regarding potential benefits within the air that we breathe in green spaces, though additional research is required (Franco, Shanahan, & Fuller, 2017, pp. 10-12, 14). Some participants described the importance for them of actually getting out into the open air, and Ruby expressed an unfulfilled longing for 'fresh air'. Orr et al. comment that many studies show that fresh air is associated with wellbeing. They also suggest that, although studies don't explore the multisensory nature of 'fresh air', the air does stimulate senses through the touch of wind, the smells in the air and the sense of open space (Orr et al., 2016, p. 6). Throughout the garden walk at Northway, the residents talked about the plants, passed leaves to each other to smell and wondered about the names of the plants. This attention to detail engaging a range of senses has been commented on by other researchers in relation to older people living in long term care (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 396; Rappe et al., 2006, p. 57). Orr et al. comment that studies show older people providing detailed descriptions of the plants, flowers and trees that they could see, and suggest a greater focus on what they can see, perhaps to compensate for having fewer opportunities to get outside, but also perhaps due to a "fresh appreciation of nature" (Orr et al., 2016, p. 5). The participants engaged in the garden walk at Northway appeared to be continuing an interest in nature related to their past

experiences of gardening. It is difficult to know whether this attention to detail was now heightened; however, their appreciation of nature was enhanced by this attention to detail.

7.3.1.6 Caring for nature

For some participants, the connection to nature included a desire to care for nature. This included caring for the natural environment, caring for animals and caring for nature through gardening. Some participants expressed concern about the natural world, as seen in a desire to do something about plastic pollution and distress about the devastation caused by local wildfires. This reflected concern about the future of the natural world. Part of caring for nature may involve culling animals, and this is something that Nancy was aware of as she described squirrels as being vermin. Animals were important to some of the residents. For Elvie, this translated into being a vegetarian, which she regarded as being about saving animals. For most participants, relationships with animals came through observing nature through the window and through television, and their relationship with domesticated animals, including resident pets. Johnson, Bibbo and Harvey, summarising the research regarding older people and animals, state that contact with animals can be beneficial for wellbeing and that animals provide an opportunity for 'friendly touch' (R. A. Johnson, Bibbo, & Harvey, 2019, pp. 315, 317). It was clear that residents enjoyed touching and holding visiting animals, as well as overcoming fear to touch some and delightedly not touching others. This was particularly evident at Northway, where residents were able to show some care to their resident dog through showing affection and feeding him biscuits. Caring for animals is one opportunity for older adults to provide nurturance (R. A. Johnson et al., 2019, p. 316), which is recognised as contributing to wellbeing (Weiss, 1974). Some of the participants enjoyed nurturing plants as well as animals, which may also support a sense of wellbeing and may contribute to a feeling of being at home through the continuation of interest and the action of influencing the current environment. Marion talked about the greenhouse at Greenpark, and how one man's family brings tomato plants and flowers to grow in the greenhouse that anybody can look after. The

home-grown tomatoes are subsequently used in the kitchen. Orr et al. comment that planting, watching growth, harvesting and eating produce are rewarding activities for older people, and includes the benefit of “connecting with a living, growing thing and appreciating the earth” (Orr et al., 2016, p. 8). Some of the participants at Greenpark were from farming backgrounds. Most, but not all, of them talked about feeling at home there. The manager at Greenpark reported that in the past residents have been supported to grow flowers in pots, and that they can see which is their own pot. I wondered whether people who had the strongest links to creation were more likely to feel at home wherever they were. I hypothesised that engaging with creation may help us to put down roots in new places. Bengtsson et al. suggest that being comfortable in the outdoor environment and having a continuation of access to that which is familiar in nature can support a feeling of being at home; however, more research is needed in this area (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 399). My research suggests that feeling at home is multifactorial; however, it is possible that a connection to nature, particularly for those for whom this is important, may contribute to a sense of feeling at home.

7.3.2 Connections to each other through nature

Nature can connect us to each other. I will explore farming communities, social interactions in gardens and how animals support interaction, as well as shared memories associated with the natural world.

For farmers, community can be borne out of a shared connection to the land. A sense of community between farmers, based on place attachment, can be strong. As Salamon and Davis-Brown state, “A farming community has organic coherence because its residents have strong ties to the land that defines the place.” (Salamon & Davis-Brown, 2007, p. 182). Feeling the earth between your fingers and growing and harvesting crops alongside neighbouring farmers forges a connection with the land and with each other. This was particularly evident in Marion’s account, in which she described knowing all the local farmers. Gwen described

driving round looking at fields with her dad. According to Burton, in some places this practice is known as 'hedgerow' or 'roadside' farming. Through this process, which may be connected to friendly or unfriendly competitiveness, reputations are established that contribute to the identity of the farm and the farming family (Burton, 2004, pp. 204-206). This process of observing neighbours' fields could be said to be part of the process of affirming a farmer's place within the farming community. Management of the land is part of the formation of a farmer's reputation. We did not discuss farming reputations or the level of mutual support between farmers. It is worth noting that, although there is evidence of farmers supporting each other within their communities, levels of support between farmers can vary (L. Sutherland & Burton, 2011, p. 253).

Interestingly, Gwen's account of having a connection with the chaplain because of shared farming experiences was not based on a specific place, but more of a general shared experiential connection to the land. This suggests that although place attachment is a source of connection between farmers, shared experiences of working the land also provide a sense of connection. My own farming background gave me a connection with Gwen. To what extent this was greater than a connection based on other shared experiences is difficult to say; it perhaps depends on how much of a person's identity is based on their identity as a farmer.

Gardens in the care homes provided a source of shared interest and enjoyment. Socialising in the garden at Greenpark was important for Marion. Studies relating to older people show that being outdoors promotes connection with others, either through social interaction or by observing others (Orr et al., 2016, p. 6). At Northway, during a group walk round the garden, residents talked to each other about the plants they saw. There was something about being outside that encouraged people to connect with each other, and, as people were drawn towards nature to appreciate it, they were drawn to each other as they shared the experience together. During the garden walk at Northway, a staff member accompanying the residents

produced some spring bulbs that he had been given by one of the residents. He asked advice from the residents about where to plant them. The residents enjoyed this shared planning of the garden planting scheme.

Reflecting other research findings, animals within the care homes promoted interaction between residents and between staff and residents (Bernstein, Friedmann, & Malaspina, 2000, p. 221). Flo commented on the social benefits of having had a pet in the past. Johnson et al. note that pets can have a 'social-lubricant' effect as a topic of conversation, and can promote interaction between older people and across generations (R. A. Johnson et al., 2019, p. 316). This was evident at Northway in particular, as residents enjoyed talking to me about their resident cat and dog.

For some residents, memories involving nature were important. Bengtsson and Carlsson discussed how, in their research in nursing homes, activities in outdoor environments provided connections to the past, as residents talked about outdoor activities they had engaged in earlier in life (Bengtsson & Carlsson, 2013, p. 397). During the garden walk at Northway, the residents reminisced about their own gardens and asked me about mine. As George read me his poem about a man remembering a childhood experience, he reconciled different phases of his life within a natural setting. Places can provide a sense of identity and aesthetic experience, and may be settings for healing (Gesler, 1992, p. 738). All these aspects were evident in George's description of his encounter with nature. His poem was firmly set in a physical place, describing the sights and sounds of a woodland setting. His recurring motif of a blackbird singing, interspersed with his memory of the time, gave a sense of completeness and resolution. Talking about past encounters with nature provided a contemporary connection between residents. As residents talked about blackberry picking, fishing for tiddlers and Lake District holidays, even though they had been separate experiences, they became shared experiences as residents had a shared experiential connection to creation. Foraging for food

and making jam was a common activity when food was short – partly due to rationing, but continuing after rationing. This provided a shared experience to reminisce about in the present.

7.3.3 Connections to God through nature

Jansen and von Sadovsky comment that, in their research, when participants viewed the natural environment, they “described feeling the secure and comforting presence of a higher power, that they were not alone” (Jansen & von Sadovszky, 2004, p. 394). In my research, some participants described their connection to God through nature. Brenda talked of seeing God in the beauty of the natural world, particularly the trees. God was made known to her through creation. Her favourite part of the Bible was Isaiah because of the use of poetry and references to nature; her love of nature drew her to appreciate Bible passages which relate to it. Her lived experience was of a constant awareness of God’s presence and a connection to God through nature. Alice was drawn to thank God when inspired by the beauty of nature. As I listened to Brenda and Alice, I heard how they met the Creator God through creation and knew God’s presence with them. There was a sense of deepening mutuality as I heard Brenda and Alice reaffirming God’s goodness with gratitude as they enjoyed creation. Their focus was on the beauty and goodness of creation. Alice reflected on Genesis 1 and said that at each stage of creation, God looked at creation and declared that it was good. From Alice’s interpretation, when creation was completed, God said that it was very, very good. Throughout her account of Genesis, she added an extra ‘very’ to each stage of creation, emphasising her own appreciative view of creation. Therefore, each day was ‘very good’ rather than simply ‘good’, and the final day was ‘very, very good’ rather than ‘very good’.

Farming was part of Gwen’s life, and there was a sense of connection to the farming community she was part of. She was delighted when the care home chaplain held a traditional harvest festival service in the home, and advised the chaplain where to get harvest

decorations from. Many of Gwen's favourite hymns were harvest hymns, and this attitude of harvest thanksgiving was an important part of her faith.

7.3.4 Summary

Most participants said that their relationship with the natural world was important. They enjoyed looking at nature and going outside to experience the natural world with a range of senses. They paid attention to the details of creation and enjoyed the changing seasons. This connection to the natural world was associated with personal wellbeing. Some participants talked about their concern for the natural world; others talked about their physical interaction with the natural world when cultivating the land by farming and gardening, and through their relationships with animals. Connections with the natural world drew people together through shared experiences of cultivating the land, enjoying experiences of nature together, interacting with animals, and reminiscence. The natural world also caused some individuals to see God, to give thanks to God and to praise God for the goodness of creation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused people to consider the effect of the pandemic on the natural world and our interdependency with creation. Zambrano-Monserrate et al. discuss the environmental impact, commenting that during the pandemic there have been improvements in air quality, cleaner beaches and reduction in noise. However, they also state that there has been an increase in waste and recycling has reduced (Zambrano-Monserrate, Ruano, & Sanchez-Alcalde, 2020). Pannell and Adamowicz consider the pandemic in terms of environmental economy. They comment on our interaction with the environment, stating that "people greatly value social interactions, as well as being in nature, and these two values are complementary" (Pannell & Adamowicz, 2021, p. 107). They suggest that further research exploring people's connections to each other through nature would be helpful. They comment that, during the pandemic, measures relating to the value of social contact and being able to access nature, including parks, have not been used. They raise the question as to whether non-

market values such as these could or should be considered in policy making during emergency situations (Pannell & Adamowicz, 2021, pp. 107-108). This highlights the complexity of the interaction between ourselves and creation, alluding to the benefits of nature and the potential for the natural world to connect us to each other.

7.4 Theological reflection: shalom and harmony

My findings demonstrate that God can be found in creation, and some participants revealed how our relationships with God, each other and the whole of creation are intertwined. In this reflection I will explore these relationships through the lens of harmony. Woodley discusses how the world was created with each part in harmony with everything else and with God, and that the earth is our home (Woodley, 2012, pp. 42, 119-120). A sense of home is created through being in right relationship and living in harmony. However, there are places of disharmony in the world, and Woodley comments,

...we desperately need a restoration of harmony between human beings, the Creator, the earth, and all God provides through the earth such as plant and animals (Woodley, 2012, p. 9).

He emphasises the importance of mutuality and reciprocity in these relationships and comments that, "Everything in creation plays a part in the others' existence and well-being" (Woodley, 2012, p. 66).

Based on the responses of the participants, I will argue that being in right relationship with the whole of creation, including development of mutuality in these relationships, leads to harmony and contributes to shalom. Because of what I found in the interviews, this includes a sacramental understanding of creation, through which God is revealed. I will argue that right relationship with creation includes recognising God's presence in creation, alongside appreciating creation for its own sake, and that as we meet God in creation, we are drawn towards harmony within ourselves and our relationships with others, including the whole of

creation. Due to the responses of the participants, I will focus on our physical relationship with creation through cultivation of the land, and our relationship with animals. I will argue that being in right relationship with creation includes a recognition that we are called into mutual relationships with all life forms, and that all things are connected.

7.4.1 God's presence in creation

Some participants experienced God in creation or were drawn towards God through their delight in nature. Woodley states that "God is present in creation; and in this, there is a kind of harmony." (Woodley, 2012, p. xix). In this section I will argue how a sacramental understanding of creation that combines seeing God in creation and appreciating creation for its own sake is part of how we live in right, harmonious relation with creation. I will also argue that, as we meet God through creation, we are drawn into life in all its fullness, including a sense of wellbeing and growth in our relationships with others.

Ross describes sacramentality as the way that God is made known to us through the material world. She comments that all creation is "potentially revelatory of the divine" (Ross, 2001, p. 34). Fischer goes further: when reflecting on Wisdom literature she says that "something of an artist always lives on in her works" (Fischer, 2009, p. 4). Similarly, Moltmann comments that the Creator is present in creation (Moltmann, 1985, p. 14). Moules discusses how spirituality across different faiths and among many indigenous and tribal peoples includes the idea that all parts of creation are connected and sacred. He uses the term 'Christian Animism' to consider this from a Christian perspective, stating that "everything that exists is both alive and sacred" (Moules, 2015a). These theologians suggest that creation is sacred and may reveal God to us, and that we may meet God in creation. As we engage with creation, we are engaging with the Creator and are drawn closer to God. This includes our experience of the seasons and the rhythms of life, and it involves the whole of who we are. Fischer discusses how Celtic

spirituality draws on the rhythms and seasons of creation. She also reflects on a Celtic prayer that emphasises an embodied connection with nature,

Bless to me, O God,
Each thing mine eyes sees;
Bless to me O God,
Each sound mine ear hears;
Bless to me O God,
Each odour that goes to my nostrils;
Bless to me O God,
Each taste that goes to my lips,
Each note that goes to my song.
(Fischer, 2009, pp. 22-24)

Some participants reflected this embodied spirituality as they used their senses in their appreciation of nature and were attuned to the changing seasons. There was a sense of connection to both the past and the future as participants reflected on past seasons and looked forwards to the seasons that were to come. Appreciation of the natural world, taking time to savour and experience the world around us, is part of how we meet with God.

However, this does not necessarily mean that creation is only to be regarded as pointing us towards God. McFague outlines historical developments in understanding creation from a sacramental perspective. She explains how, in the early sacramental tradition, creation tended to be seen as a stepping-stone to God, and that the earth was not valued for its own sake. She suggests that there are benefits to the sacramental tradition, but that within this framework we should intrinsically value and care for creation (McFague, 1993, pp. 183-186). Reflecting on Genesis 1, McFague comments "God looked at creation and said: 'It is good'- not good for people or even for God, but just good" (McFague, 1997, p. 1). She suggests that we should see aspects of nature as subjects rather than objects; we should love nature by paying attention to

it, looking at it and acknowledging it for itself (McFague, 1997, pp. 26-29). For McFague, this includes learning the names of plants and animals, and, through this level of engagement, forming a deeper connection with them (McFague, 1997, p. 37). She talks about the value of science and nature writers who help us to focus on the details (McFague, 1997, p. 135).

Ruether emphasises the value of sitting, taking time to notice and recognise that we are on holy ground (Ruether, 1992, p. 270). As we sit and spend time with older people, we may find that we learn from them about how to appreciate nature, to notice the details, learn the names and delight in what we see. Moules values creation for its own sake as he emphasises the personhood of all creation, including the personhood of rocks, plants, animals, wind and clouds. He describes the earth as being the 'foundational person' which nourishes creation (Moules, 2015b).

McFague comments that we can value things for themselves as well as seeing them as "signs of God" (McFague, 1997, p. 172). She suggests that

Francis of Assisi was on the right track: he saw the wind and the sun and water as subjects, as brothers and sisters, who were valuable in themselves, but at the same time he saw them as manifestations of God (McFague, 1997, p. 4).

Recognising God in creation as well as valuing nature for its own sake, and recognising the personhood of creation, underpins a way of living in harmony with creation. This is how we live in right relation with creation.

A right relationship with creation can also lead us towards harmony within ourselves. When the participants talked to me about aspects of nature, it was evident that this had a positive effect on their wellbeing. McFague comments that "If we are hard-wired...to close encounters with the natural world, the loss of such experiences is a deep and damaging one" (McFague, 1997, p. 119). She discusses how we belong with elements of the natural world, including animals and water; there is reciprocity in these relationships and we "feel good when we are in

their company” (McFague, 1997, p. 119). Enabling older people to connect with nature contributes to shalom. There was a sense of broken shalom when access to creation was inhibited. Based on research about forest bathing, Hansen, Jones and Tocchini report on the human ‘yearning’ to connect with nature and the healing effects of nature on body, mind and spirit (Hansen, Jones, & Tocchini, 2017, p. 44). Yearning for a connection to nature for our wellbeing is part of how we were created. Following that yearning is an instinctive response. God intended us to live life in all its fullness. God placed us in creation, to live in mutual relationship with all living things and with Godself. Fischer suggests that using nature primarily for personal healing is a form of commodification of nature. She contrasts this with relating to nature in a Christian way, which recognises the importance of the wellbeing of all of creation (Fischer, 2009, pp. 119-120). Supporting older people to access nature in order to enhance their wellbeing could be considered to be commodifying nature; however, we can engage with nature in a way which values nature for itself and is concerned for its wellbeing, as well as being aware of the benefits that our encounters with nature bring. Additionally, our assistance of older people may become a mutual encounter involving ourselves, the older person and creation. From a relational perspective, this process moves beyond providing support and assistance, and becomes a deepening of relationship with each other and creation. As our harmony is restored through our experiences, we may be inspired to love and care for each other and nature more. We may broaden the scope of our concern and support people to enjoy creation together, recognising the mutuality within these relationships.

Connection with nature can also lead us towards harmony in our relationships with other people. If God is present in creation, then engaging meaningfully with creation may lead to transformation of all our relationships. Fischer suggests that contemplating nature can lead us to increase in the ‘life patterns’ of the fruit of the Spirit (Fischer, 2009, pp. 119-120). She interprets this in ecological terms as “the Spirit’s desire for the well-being of the entire Earth community” (Fischer, 2009, p. 120). Engaging in nature does not necessarily mean that we will

follow the prompting of the Spirit. However, if we do, as we meet with God in creation, the fruit of the Spirit may grow in our lives, which will affect our life patterns in how we engage with others around us. As we meet God in creation, we may be inspired to reach out to others. Creation also gives us a shared connection to each other; Genesis 1 demonstrates how we were created to engage with creation. The participants demonstrated their common humanity through their engagement with nature; this can be seen within farming communities, but it is not limited to this. A joint appreciation of the beauty of creation, thanksgiving for creation and caring for the natural world can cause us to grow together. As people reminisced about the past in the context of creation, there was a sense of flourishing, growth and affirmation of the past. There was also a sense of mutuality as relationships deepened and people discovered new connections with each other based on their experiences of nature. Characteristics of mutuality outlined by Moltmann include 'participating', 'accompanying', and 'delighting' (Moltmann, 1985, p. 14). He used these to describe God's relationship with creation, but they can also be characteristics of our relationship with nature and with each other.

The participants talked about trees: about seeing God in trees and enjoying the changing seasons seen through the trees. Moules uses the motif of the Tree of Life. He describes how we may become a tree of life, being rooted in God, growing tall, and offering shelter and nourishment to others (Moules, 2012, pp. 65-67). This is the way towards harmony. Although Moules was talking metaphorically, there was a sense of this as participants met with God in creation. Part of our rootedness in God may be through the way we meet God in creation, and through this we may be nourished and enabled to bear fruit in our relationships. As the residents of Northway accompanied each other in the garden, they delighted in creation together. As residents participated in conversations about memories based around nature, they accompanied each other on journeys into the past. These are signs of harmony, of right relationships between people inspired through their connection to creation. These connections may support us to have a sense of belonging and to feel at home.

To summarise, some, but not all, the participants expressed a sense of sacramentality in their relationship with creation. I heard how participants paid attention to nature, recognised interconnectivity and appreciated the challenges of the natural world. I heard them valuing nature for its own sake, and through their voices I felt a sense of relatedness which was sacred. At times I sensed that we were on holy ground as they described their relationship with the natural world. Woodley asserts that, “in all our connection to creation, there is a sense of shalom” (Woodley, 2012, p. xix) and this was evident in the verbal and non-verbal ways that people expressed their connection to creation. There were signs that for some people creation was valued for its own sake. It was also something that sometimes drew the participants to God and each other, and contributed to inner harmony.

7.4.2 Harmonious cultivation of the land

Part of being at home on the earth involves making ourselves at home through cultivation of the world around us for food, comfort and pleasure. Some of the participants had a background in arable farming. Although we did not fully explore their relationship with the land, there was a sense of appreciation and thanksgiving for the crops that were produced. Some participants also enjoyed gardening, which shares many similarities with farming, including the intentional and physical interaction with the land to produce a desired result. Underlying attitudes about the nature of our relationship with the land, responsibilities to the land, and commodification of the land for our benefits are also relevant for farmers and gardeners. Farming and gardening may be considered commodification of the land, with desired outcomes including crops, provision of livelihoods, places of relaxation and aesthetic delight. However, while the land and its products can be reduced to objects of commodity, there is scope for other relationships with the land, which can exist alongside serving our purposes. McFague, reflecting on the interdependency of different parts of creation, comments that “each and every part has both utilitarian and intrinsic value” (McFague, 1993,

p. 185). This is particularly evident in farming and gardening, where relationships with the land, the weather and other people contribute to food production and creation of space for enjoyment, with each part fulfilling a function as well as being of worth for its own sake. Being in harmony with creation incorporates these different aspects of relationship. For the sake of the clarity of the argument, I will focus on farming here; however, much of what I say is also relevant to cultivation of the land through gardening.

The experience of growing crops can lead to an awareness of dependence on creation and can be part of how a farmer's relationship with God may develop. I have already considered how engaging with creation can be a 'stepping-stone to God', but here I consider this in terms of mutuality. For farmers who tend the soil, their utter dependence on the natural world may lead them to an attitude of thankfulness to God, especially for the right weather at the right time and the growth of a healthy crop. For some, even when farming days are over, the harvest thanksgiving is an important time to recognise that we are recipients of God's goodness. Gillies reflects on how harvest festivals have changed and have, in some cases, been replaced with charitable giving campaigns rather than agricultural harvest thanksgiving. He suggests that while charitable giving is good, we do need liturgical space to celebrate God's gift of creation, give thanks to God, repent for misuse of the land and intercede for farmers (Gillies, 2003, p. 432). Some churches are now creating liturgical space to celebrate creation and to consider our relationship with it by designating September as 'creation time' (CTBI, 2020), which does have the potential to include celebration and thanksgiving for harvest. The celebration in some churches of Plough Sunday, at the beginning of the agricultural year, is another time that thanksgiving for the land, and an awareness of dependence on the land and on God for the harvest can be expressed. Rogation Sunday is another opportunity to ask for God's blessing on the land, and boundary beating walks may be seen as having some similarities with hedgerow farming. Hedgerow farming may be motivated by competition or a delight in seeing a well nurtured field; however, this observance of field boundaries may also

lead to prayer for the land and the crops. Celebrating harvest within care homes provides continuity, especially for farmers, and can reinforce a sense of connection to creation and progression through the changing seasons.

Farming may also be considered a form of stewardship of the land. The idea of stewardship of creation is not accepted by all theologians, as although the idea of stewardship can imply caring for creation, it can also be regarded as unhelpfully continuing a tradition of viewing creation hierarchically. Grey outlines how, within Christian traditions, humankind's relationship to creation in Genesis has historically been interpreted in terms of 'domination'. She discusses how attempts by Christians to reinterpret this as stewardship don't go far enough, and suggests that stewardship focuses on caring for creation as a commodity rather than valuing creation for its own sake. She emphasises the value and interdependency of all life forms (Grey, 1997, pp. 63-65). Similarly, Bauckham has reservations about the use of the term stewardship to describe our overall relationship with creation, partly due to the way that stewardship puts people over and above creation (Bauckham, 2010, p. 11). However, within the context of farming, he considers stewardship to be an appropriate term, and uses Genesis 1 to explore stewardship in terms of people subduing the land through farming. He sees stewardship as farming the land in an ethical way, so that we have enough food to eat while also sharing the land with other animals (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 16-18). Burton comments that the notion of stewardship, which he perceives may have developed from Christian origins, is "deeply entrenched within farming cultures" (Burton, 2004, p. 210). He comments that farmers traditionally have a nurturing and custodial role, with commitment to the soil and to the crop forming part of their spiritual connection with the natural world. He states that farmers do not like to see an untidy field, which may be because untidy land demonstrates a lack of commitment to the nurturing role associated with farming. In this way, farming stewardship is not just about the crop yield, it is also about caring for the land (Burton, 2004, p. 209). It should be noted however, that farmers do vary in their approach and commitment

to caring for the land (Läpple & Rensburg, 2011, p. 1412). Living in an arable farming community, the idea of stewardship of the land is ingrained in my understanding of my responsibility to creation. However, I am not comfortable that stewardship can be associated with the idea of domination, because I do not consider this relationship should be regarded as one of power over the natural world. It should be about loving care, thankfulness, and recognition of interdependence. Moules rejects the idea of stewardship, including rejection of the idea of managing the land and using the land as a commodity. He suggests that we are called to companionship, sharing and friendship with creation (Moules, 2012, pp. 86-87). This is a more attractive proposition, as it takes away the hierarchical overtones associated with stewardship. We can adopt these relationship attitudes within farming. Friendship with the land might include the cultivation, nurturing and spiritual connection that Bauckham and Burton associate with stewardship, and has the advantage of taking out the notion of domination. Farming does involve working with the land, and crops may be seen as a commodity, but working with and receiving from the land can be done from a position of friendship with the land.

Being in right relationship with creation includes appreciating and loving creation in a practical way. We are dependent on creation for both food and aspects of our wellbeing, and it seems inevitable that these things will be commodified. However, recognising our dependence on creation and giving thanks for these elements may support us to be in right relation with creation, so that we value creation for its own sake at the same time as being nourished by the natural world.

7.4.3 Harmonious relationships with animals

Relationships with domestic animals were important to some participants. One participant chose a vegetarian way of life as part of how she related to animals. This led me to consider how human-animal relationships have developed over time, and what right relation might look

like. I will argue that right relationships can exist between humans and animals, including domestic animals. I will also argue that being in right relation with animals does not rule out eating meat.

Bauckham comments that the Genesis account of naming the animals has often been interpreted as meaning that animals are under human authority. He disputes this and suggests that Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis is not about domination, but about entering into relationship with them by "recognising them as fellow creatures" (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 22-23). Walker-Jones acknowledges the widely held theological interpretation of power associated with the naming of the animals in Genesis and the ethical issue this raises (Walker-Jones, 2017, p. 1007); however, he also draws out additional points implied by the act of naming, including discernment of role, creation and kinship, suggesting that there is more to the relationship than power (Walker-Jones, 2017, pp. 1014-1015). Moules emphasises the personhood of animals suggested by the Genesis account of naming (Moules, 2015b), and interprets the idea of dominion and kingship in terms of servanthood and shepherding, or love and mercy (Moules, 2012, p. 85). These comments represent a shift of focus in how the Genesis account of naming the animals is being interpreted, particularly by theologians with an interest in ecology.

It appears difficult for us to live in right relation with animals. Budiansky suggests that, as humans, we tend to fluctuate between seeing animals as objects or as people (Budiansky, 1997, p. 3). Moules argues that the Genesis account of creation demonstrates that "everything is a person" (Moules, 2015b), therefore it is appropriate to consider animals as having personhood. However, this does not mean that we should sentimentalise animals. McFague suggests that both "objectification and sentimentality" fail to recognise animals as "subjects in their own right" (McFague, 1997, p. 63). McFague outlines the challenges of being in right relation with domesticated animals. She is critical of relationships that reduce pets to being

possessions rather than equal subjects, and of relationships in which people treat animals as children, which she considers diminishes the animals (McFague, 1997, p. 63). However, we live in a context in which domestication of animals has occurred. Larson and Fuller outline different evolutionary pathways by which this may have developed, suggesting that some animals were initially drawn to human camps for the advantages that came with this (Larson & Fuller, 2014, p. 117). This sharing of our home highlights some of the mutual benefits of human-animal relationships and the potential for mutually beneficial relationships to be initiated by animals. We can be in right relationship with pets through recognising them as other subjects, as being different to us while also being our fellow creatures. Clough states that part of our relationship with companion animals must be to enable the animal to flourish, rather than basing the relationship on our own needs (Clough, 2019, p. 214). McFague discusses the benefits of using the language of friendship to describe our relationship with other lifeforms, highlighting reciprocity and growth in knowledge about the other (McFague, 1997, p. 111). Ruether comments that it is through relationships with pets that many people learn about the personhood of animals (Ruether, 1992, p. 219). On this basis we are able to engage in mutual relationships that bring joy and companionship. Daly describes how a cat became her Familiar, her companion and her inspiration (Daly, 1993, p. 220). Our relationships with animals can have deep meaning. Enabling older people to develop and maintain relationships with animals, which includes enabling the animal to flourish, may be part of how they live in harmony with creation.

A relationship with animals may lead some people to a vegetarian or vegan way of life.

Bauckham and Ruether comment on the Biblical tradition that prior to the Fall neither humans nor animals ate meat, but that through the covenant with Noah humans were permitted to eat meat with limitations. These limitations demonstrate that we share the life blood of other creatures, and we don't have dominion over them (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 23-26; Ruether, 1992,

p. 224). Whether we choose a vegetarian way of life or not, Ruether comments that thanking animals and plants is important. She suggests that

... the prayer of thanksgiving before every meal is required if we are to begin to be in right relation to our fellow beings in the covenant of creation (Ruether, 1992, p. 228).

Within a care home setting, having a respectful attitude towards food and recognising its value not only shows respect to the older person, but supports them to be in right relationship with the food that they are eating.

7.4.4 The harmony of creation

Through my exploration of our relationship with God through creation and our relationship with different aspects of creation including each other, I have demonstrated something of the interconnectivity of creation. I will now consider harmony within creation as a whole. To do this, I will comment on the Gaia hypothesis and an ecological model of care from a Christian perspective. I have selected these models because they demonstrate interconnectivity. I will argue that all parts of creation are connected, and that although we do not live in a world which is harmonious, we should respect other life forms, recognising that we are not at the centre of creation. I will assert that our Creator God continues to create and inspire new ways of relating harmoniously.

Ruether explores the concept of Gaia in relation to Western Christian culture (Ruether, 1992). The Gaia hypothesis highlights interconnectivity by viewing Gaia as a living, complex, self-regulating entity encompassing everything involved in life on earth (Lovelock, 2016, pp. 10-11). Lovelock refers to Václav Havel's comments about the Gaia hypothesis, which suggest that, if we put Gaia in danger, we will be dispensed with so that life itself can be preserved (Lovelock, 2016, p. xvi). It is beyond the scope of this research to evaluate to what extent this is scientifically plausible, but it is a helpful concept, which highlights wider interconnectivities and our place within a system rather than at the centre of it. Ruether comments that we are

physically connected to Gaia, and, through the substance of our bodies, connected to the past and the future. She also comments that, within this framework, we recognise every other living thing as valuable, which affects how we relate to the other (Ruether, 1992, p. 252). Lovelock poses the question of how we should live within Gaia and concludes that, “There can be...no set of rules for living within Gaia. For each of our different actions there are only consequences” (Lovelock, 2016, p. 132). While Lovelock talks about consequences of our actions, Ruether goes further, and, from a Christian perspective, acknowledges God’s presence beyond Gaia, stating that we are accountable to God for our relationships with all other life forms (Ruether, 1992, p. 227). Both Lovelock’s and Ruether’s comments are helpful when considering the responsibilities of living within a larger system, highlighting consequences and accountability. There is debate as to the extent humankind can influence the wider planet. Drawing on Lovelock’s work, Bauckham comments that as humans we don’t know how to best care for creation, and we are limited in what we can achieve. However, we do have responsibilities within this wider framework (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 2-7). Some participants showed a sense of responsibility towards the earth and a longing for things to be put right. They did not link this to their faith, nor was it a concern borne out of commodification of the earth’s resources; it was an instinctive concern for the natural world. Supporting older people to act on this instinctive connection to the wider world is part of how we might move towards harmony together.

McFague comments that, from an ecological model of care from a Christian perspective, we need to recognise that we live in a community with the whole of creation, including each other, which includes a responsibility to care for the other (McFague, 1997, p. 152). However, there are challenges to this. There are some life forms that do damage crops, spread disease and threaten biodiversity. Ruether states that we should take care of creation in an ethical way and she comments on the negative impacts of not culling some animals (Ruether, 1992, pp. 221-222). There are also parts of the natural world with which we may be in conflict, but which

we should nevertheless recognise as being part of our community. McFague states that our community includes “all the earth others” (McFague, 1997, p. 151) – including viruses (McFague, 1997, p. 152). Based on this understanding, we can regard the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for COVID-19 as being part of our community. McFague suggests that we can recognise viruses as having a world of their own, and not being ‘out to get us’ (McFague, 1997, p. 152). She suggests that although we might ‘fight’ viruses, we can also respect them as being “subjects in their own worlds” (McFague, 1997, p. 152). This attitude may be difficult to adopt at the height of a pandemic, yet I find that it makes sense, particularly as McFague also comments that this attitude requires us to recognise that “we are not at the centre of the creation, around which everything is orientated” (McFague, 1997, p. 152). Part of living in harmony with creation is about recognising that we are not at the centre. Nevertheless, the oppression caused by COVID-19, even if we don’t regard it as directed at us, may lead us to fight it; but as time progresses, we may also learn to live alongside it.

It is worth noting that, in critiquing creation spirituality, McFague comments that it is best seen as a vision of how things should be, and a call to strive for that, rather than a picture of how things currently are (McFague, 1993, p. 72). Ruether comments that God calls creation into creative positive possibilities, but does not force entities to make the best choices. She asserts that God suffers when there is pain (Ruether, 1992, p. 246). There is beauty in creation; however, there is also oppression and struggle. There is cruelty within the natural world and there is an imbalance of relationships. Culling animals and learning to live alongside viruses is a reflection of the oppression and struggle that currently exists, and it is part of how we attempt to restore balance and harmony. However, as McFague comments, we “are limited by our [own] perspective” (McFague, 1997, p. 152) and our idea of harmony will reflect that. A harmonious creation is one where no part of creation oppresses another, but that is not our reality. Grey talks about the “intertwining of beauty and savagery in creation and trying to hold them together in the sacredness of the universe” (Grey, 2003, p. 171). It is important to

acknowledge the savagery within nature, which paradoxically exists alongside the way in which creation can also draw us together into harmony with each other and with God. Ruether suggests that the restoring of relationships through Jubilee years illustrates that, although relationships do breakdown, including eco relationships, this is “not to be allowed to establish itself as a permanent ‘order’” (Ruether, 1992, p. 213). This highlights both the reality of a lack of harmony and God’s desire for the restoration of harmony. Ruether recognises the hope of restoration of relationships within nature in the “Peaceable Kingdom” described in Isaiah 65 (Ruether, 1992, pp. 213-214). As we live in a time of now and not yet, we are called to live in right relationship with creation as far as possible and to look forward to the future with hope. As we recognise the interconnectedness of creation and the current struggle within the community, we also know that God is present and active in this community. Commenting on a doctrine that includes the presence of the Spirit of the Creator God in creation, Moltmann states,

This doctrine views creation as a dynamic web of interconnected processes. The Spirit differentiates and binds together. The Spirit preserves and leads living things and their communities beyond themselves. This indwelling Creator Spirit is fundamental for the community of creation. It is not the elementary particles that are basic...but the overriding harmony of the relations and of the self-transcending movements...It has to be understood as a system that is open – open for God and his future (Moltmann, 1985, p. 103).

God’s Spirit continues to lead creation into new life; it restores and renews creation and draws us into new ways of relating.

Bauckham comments on the eschatological hope of a new creation as a ‘living hope’, which inspires us to heal relationships and live in harmony with all creation (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 176-177). Our eschatological understanding may affect how we relate to the earth. McFague suggests that “we need to realise that the earth is our home, that we belong here” (McFague,

1993, p. 102). Fischer states that if we recognise that the earth is our home, rather than a 'way station to heaven', we may be inclined to care for it (Fischer, 2009, pp. 91-106). There are glimpses of harmony in our current time. The appreciation of nature, the connection to God, and the desire to live in right relation with the whole of creation, recognising it as our shared home, provides the basis for living in harmony within creation. Supporting older people to enter into new ways of relating within the community of creation is part of how we move towards harmony, as we recognise our interdependency with each other as part of our relationship with the wider world.

7.5 Conclusion

The earth is our home. I have argued that God is present in creation, and that, as we are drawn to the natural world, we meet God. Responding to God's healing love as we meet God in creation has a positive impact on both our wellbeing and our relationship with each other and the whole of the natural world. I have also argued that being in right relation with creation includes valuing other life forms for their own sake. Meeting God, being restored, growing in relationships through creation, and valuing creation for itself provides the basis for living in harmony. However, alongside this is the recognition that there is disharmony and oppression within the natural world. Living in harmony with creation where we can, and respecting the different elements of creation, including each other, is part of how we move towards shalom.

CHAPTER 8: Another dimension

8.1 Introduction

I asked the participants about different functions of community and their community connections. Their responses were then coded into themes of health and wellbeing, interests and learning, faith, the past, and preparing for end of life. Their responses took us into another dimension, which included their current material world, but also spanned time, inner worlds and faith. In one sense, this dimension could have been placed at the centre of the model of community that I shared as a diagram on p. 72, because all of these areas relate to the individual, their wellbeing and their inner world. However, the relationships that contribute to these areas go far beyond the individuals, and I decided to place this as the outer layer of the model, recognising that it permeates through all the other zones, and also goes beyond them.

8.2 In dialogue with the participants

You expressed different attitudes towards physical health.

George, in an un-taped conversation you said that physical health is important, and you wished that you had this (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

“Oh physical health...it's very important. So I don't over eat and I don't eat certain things that I think might put weight on. I don't have fresh cream. They have a lot of fresh cream here. It's saves them making custard. And when the others are saying, 'Yes, I'll have fresh cream,' I always say, 'No fresh cream.' I'd rather have whatever it is without because the calories are terrific in fresh cream.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

When I asked you, Anne, whether physical health was important, you said,

“It used to be when I was younger, but now I’m nearly a hundred years, no, not important now.”

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

Is physical health important?

“Oh it is yes, it is really yes. I’m lucky that for my age I haven’t had too much that is troublesome and that. Hopefully it will keep on going like that, cos I can get about. Now there’s a lot of people there not as old as me that need quite a lot of attention. That trolley there, I can’t get about much just walking but that there is marvellous. Well, I wouldn’t have got to that outing at the pub the other week if it hadn’t been for that.”

You expanded on your outing to the pub.

“On Sunday one of them came up, one of the carers. He said would you like to go out for a drink together, the one at Lakeside, and I said yeah. I thought we were going in the car, but we were walking it. I didn’t realise I could walk that far. It was a lovely pub now and refurbished it all. It’s quite nice and flat. I was there for about an hour and a half. It was just a surprise that I was walking it.”

So that was with one of the carers?

“Yeah, there were two of them and another chap from farther up the corridor, he came along. It were a lovely afternoon. I enjoyed it.”

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

When I asked you Maureen about whether it was important to keep your spirits up, you said,

“Not really, I don’t think. I’m more on a plane. I don’t get depressed, and I don’t get sad. I just think about things, and it doesn’t bother me really.”

(Maureen, Westhome, June 2018)

Yes, and what about keeping your spirits up. Is that important?

“Oh yes, yes. I just put Elvis on!”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

Is it important to keep your spirits up?

“Oh I try to, yes.”

And are there things here that help that happen would you say?

“Well, if they think I am a bit down they will say, you know, they've not done lately, they will say, ‘Oh Gwen you do look worried today,’ or something like that you know, but they used to do it, even when you're not. They expect you to keep on smiling all the time, but you see you can't really. You're bound to get a little bit down in these places at times.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

Is it important to keep your spirits up would you say?

“[laughter] yes.”

“Sometimes you can, your spirits are not there at all, but you've got to do, you must try, because other people, you hurt them, which makes it worse. You can't talk then can you?”

Is there anything that helps you keep your spirits up?

“Yes, that young lady who's been in before. She's always jolly. She doesn't always feel it but she's always jolly and you can always get going when she's in, she's a way of, like the lady who does the, doing them things [indicated crafts on wall]. If you're ever down she can spot it in a minute, and she'll not do it knowingly, but she'll get you going on something that will, you soon get going on, you know making flower wreaths or something.”

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

Is it important to keep your spirits up?

“Oh it is. I can get very depressed at times. Yes, it is. I think part of it is you’re in this one room so much and you can go for hours and never see anybody. If there’s nothing on downstairs or... Some of its my own fault cos it gets very, very hot in both the dining room and the lounge where we go, and I can’t stand too much heat now that I’ve got older. I loved it when I was younger, when I say younger, only five or six years ago now, but you don’t improve with keeping.”

(Flo, Northway, May 2019)

You also told me about having a sense of identity and about self-worth, and about having external reassurance of your own self-worth.

Gwen, you said that it is very important to have a sense of identity. You have a sense of identity, and this is because people talk to you. You said that the staff have conversations with you (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

Brenda, you said that you didn't think it was important to have a sense of identity

“A sense of identity? I've never thought about that. Not really. No, no.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

It is important to be reassured of your worth?

“Well I don’t expect to be, let’s put it like that because they’ve got too many other people. I mean there are thirty of us here, and then some that come in for respite.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

Brenda, you said that being reassured of worth “wasn't all that important”. However, you hoped you were a good chairperson of U3A and said, “and individuals did tell me I was pretty good” (Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017).

Is it important to have a sense of self-worth?

“I think for me it would be very important. If I felt I was being shunned I would be heartbroken, so it's very important, so I try be friends with everybody cos I know how I would feel if I was left out.”

(Barbara, Northway, May 2019)

George, you said that you were so full of yourself that you were reassured of your own worth (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

You told me about interests which you are able to pursue in the home.

“But it [dominoes] keeps you occupied. The games can last a long while and some can be quick.”

(Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017)

For some of you, there were specific interests relating to specific times of your life including amateur dramatics (Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017) and the Townswomen's Guild (Doris, Westhome, July 2018). These were interests that belonged to a specific time and place, and you did not appear to be distressed by no longer participating in them.

There were some interests that you could not continue due to physical frailty or due to lack of opportunities.

"I'd love to go dancing. The lady who used to teach, she'd say, 'Well would you like to come and watch?' I said, 'It's murder that. It's like saying we can't do it...we have done it.' You've just to talk to people about it."

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

"You don't get a lot of interests though do you when you get old do you. I'd like to still go dancing like I used to go...we only went to local dances ...you know in the villages."

(Nancy, Greenpark, January 2019)

"I'd like more singing. I like to sing. I was always involved in singing but I don't seem to get the chance here. I would like that [to sing in a choir] because I used to [be in a] church choir... and if I'd stayed with where I was, I would be."

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

Singing had been an important part of your life, George. You also felt that it was important to make a difference where you live, and you did that by joining the choir in the home.

"Well I did a bit, I think with me joining a choir and putting on a concert which I think they recorded."

(George, Newlodge, September 2017)

Some interests did not rely on other people,

"Oh I'm an Elvis fan. Oh you must mention Elvis. I always have an hour of Elvis every morning."

"I belong to that [horse] racing club...they send me papers and that."

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

"Well I brought my books...they're great friends."

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Anne, you had dismissed most of the functions of community as not being important, but when we came to talk about interests, it was clear that this is what was important to you. Is it important to keep connected to interests?

“Interests?”

Yes.

“Well I think *that* it is, yes.”

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

You talked about card games, a recent party in the home and reading historical books.

Ongoing learning was important for some of you. Brenda and Maureen, in the absence of learning activities organised by the home, you both talked about actively learning things from the television (Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017; Maureen, Westhome, June 2018).

However, Flo, you said that you did not want to learn (Flo, Northway, May 2019).

Some of you told me about times of worship in the care home and at local churches.

“Like when he comes in to take communion, there might be about eight or nine of us, but it’s not so many when you think there are about thirty people in here. I keep hoping we’ll get twelve, you know, like the twelve apostles. But we don’t seem to make it yet, but you get the feeling in here that there’s not so many folk who are really interested in Christianity.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

“I like going to church. I like the prayer that. I sort of sit and have a cup of tea afterwards. Very nice people there. Course I’m not like you say friendly with them. I associate with them.”

(Walter, Northway, July 2019)

You also reminisced about past worship.

Ruby, you talked fondly about the church community you had been part of,

“You belonged to a group of people outside of yourself, and outside of everything else. People you belonged to.”

I asked you about the value of services within the home. You said it was important, and,

“Yes, if ever there’s a service on I go.”

But this did not seem to be a substitute for the church community of which you had been a part (Ruby, Westhome, June 2018).

We talked about God’s presence,

“Well God's presence is always to me.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Do you have an awareness of God’s presence?

“I can’t say I do. I’d like to, but, no I don’t. I do say my prayers, but being aware of it I can’t say I do.”

(Maureen, Westhome September 2018)

“Oh yes. I mean I talk to my husband every night, and then I change round and talk to God.”

“I don’t know if it’s my husband. It’s either him or God, but I can tell when I’m talking that there’s someone there. And I chat away. If anything bugs me during the day I have a little moan and I sometimes say please take me away Tommy, I’ll come with you.”

(Doris, Westhome, July 2018)

Winnie, when I asked you about feeling God's presence, you started describing a church you used to attend,

"It was cared for, but inside it was all thatched, and it was all thatched on the outside as well. But it was beautiful inside and outside. But there was the same, beautiful worship there."

Yes, so you felt God's presence?

"Yes, I did, and I never have since. I've never felt right again."

Is that since you've moved here?

"Yes."

Is there anything that would help with that do you think?

"Well I like to think there would be if I could meet people who had the same kind of feelings that I have."

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

What about having an awareness of God's presence, is that important?

"Oh yes, yeah, oh yeah I believe, yeah. I was talking to Sophie yesterday, that's what I was on about, these Jehovah's Witnesses came to the house when I was in town. I opened the door, one of them said, do you know who Jesus Christ is? I said of course I do, I said, he's a mate of mine. I said he lives here. I talk to him many a time. Anyway, I was actually telling them, when I was a little girl. I'd be about six and my grandma took me to the church in the village and she said can you see those pictures there, there were three beautiful glass windows, she said can you see the one in the middle, the man in the middle on the cross, I said yes, she said, well that's Jesus Christ, she said, and if ever we are all dead, and you've nobody left in the world, she said, I want you to remember that you'll always have him and he'll never leave you. And it stuck in my mind, you know, and I told these two lads that. They give me a big Bible with pictures in."

(Elvie, Greenpark November 2018)

You also told me about your thoughts about other Christian denominations.

“Yes, with Sophie [manager], was only talking about it the other day. Yes, she was saying like the same as me you know really it’s all for one God you know.”

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

Alice, you are a Methodist, and you said that,

“When we get to heaven, if we say we are a Methodist, Jesus will say ‘What’s one of them?’ We are all joined together in Jesus. That’s what matters.”

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

Some of you told me about your favourite hymns, and the reasons why they were your favourite.

Maureen, you told me that your favourite hymn has the line, “Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen.” You said that it gives you hope. You said that is why you had chosen it for a songs of praise service in the home, because you think other people here would appreciate it too (Maureen, Westhome, September 2018).

We talked about opportunities to talk about faith.

Ruby, you wanted to talk more about your faith.

“Oh yes you should be able to. People don’t like it. You know they get embarrassed, I think. You like to talk about your faith, don’t you?”

(Ruby, Westhome, June 2018)

Maureen, when we talked about opportunities to talk about things to do with faith, you said,

“Well I don’t feel like I want to talk about them, but when I talk about them I’m quite interested. But I don’t sort of go out of my way to talk about it.”

However, on subsequent visits, now that the idea of talking about faith had been broached, you did raise topics of faith that you had questions about (Maureen, Westhome, September 2018).

We talked about the past. Reminiscence was supported in a variety of ways.

Marion, your reminiscence was supported by the view through the window. Your husband had been a wagon driver and you took great interest in the wagons which drew out of the road opposite the home. This view gave you a connection to your current and past social worlds (Marion, Greenpark, December 2018).

Seeing the bus stop prompted some of you to comment on bus journeys you had been on and changes in bus companies (Greenpark, December 2018).

Food memories were important and supported reminiscence. The manager at Westhome told me that they have tripe on the menu at times, because that is what some residents want to eat. It is what some residents used to eat before they came to the home (Manager, Westhome, September 2018).

During the interviews, although it was not part of the interview schedule, several of you spontaneously reminisced about food.

George, you talked about having fish and chips and a bath on a Friday night as a child (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

Evelyn, during a discussion in the lounge, we talked about Christmas baking. As I described baking, your eyes lit up and you said, "Oh I can taste it now!" You said that you miss Christmas baking, especially the smells. You talked about how you used to make Christmas puddings for different members of your family (Evelyn, Newlodge, December 2017).

You also talked about photographs as a way of remembering the past.

"It's nice to look back on them [photographs] you know we have books in library, albums and what not you know, and people keep saying let me look at your wedding and let me look at yours. Just if you've nothing much to do, you know, you get up sometimes and especially if you've lost them since, you know, it's like a spiritual thing isn't it really. If you feel down any time, just get a book out. That one lady said last week, she came in, she said you've got some pictures up there Marion, who are they? I said, well every one of those, every one belongs to me, you're connected with all of them."

(Marion, Greenpark, December 2018)

You also told me about your relationship with the past.

"Well I just take the view that that's happened and you know that's done with it."

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

"I think it's best to let a lot of things go. Depends whether they're good things or bad things."

(Alice, Greenpark, November 2018)

What about keeping connected to the past?

"Well you can't forget the past can you, well some people, well how can I put it, I don't know how to explain it. You can't forget it, and I think about it often, but the thing is I

make the most of each day that comes along, you know I look forward. So, they are mixed together, the two of them you know. I often remember the old days, and dogs that I've had and all that yeah, yeah, but on the other hand I think, think yourself lucky you are still here. Carry on. At least I've got Elvis."

(Elvie, Greenpark, November 2018)

Maureen, following your first interview as part of the pilot, as we looked at the Mind Map together, you commented that you often say that your life has not been interesting, but perhaps it has been (Maureen, Westhome, June 2017). We revisited this a year later in a follow up interview, and this time, with more confidence, you said,

"Oh Yes I've had quite a full life really. Although I don't feel like I've achieved much, but I've done quite a bit."

(Maureen, Westhome, June 2018)

We then went on to discuss your achievements.

We talked about end of life.

When I asked you Anne about whether it was important to talk about end of life, you replied,

"I'm not bothered about that."

(Anne, Northway, May 2019)

George, you said that it is important to talk about end of life. You wish it would hurry up, when you are in pain. You are in pain a lot. You said it is important to talk about it but there are no opportunities. However, on a follow up visit, you said that you hoped the chaplain could deal with things at the end. You had talked to her about this (George, Newlodge, September 2017).

For you, Brenda, preparing for end of life was important but you felt you could do this on your own.

“I'm not frightened because I know, I mean I can't go on much longer. Well you could I suppose, but I don't want to. No, I don't want to.”

How important is it to talk about the end of life?

“It is important, but I do it with myself. I can talk to myself. I think about my funeral service. In fact, I've got it all planned and it's all in a box for my daughter to bring. It's just another stage of being.”

(Brenda, Newlodge, September 2017)

Some of you sounded like you might want to talk about end of life, but that this would be difficult for you.

Evelyn, you thought it would be useful to talk about end of life but haven't done so. Is it important to have opportunities to talk about end of life, or not?

“Oh well I would say so, and I've never discussed it.”

Is it something that you would like to talk about with the chaplain or not necessarily?

“I could do with having a chat with the, the parson who looks after that side of things. I've never discussed it with anybody. I find it, I'm a bit backwards at talking about things that are close to me. I find it very difficult to talk about.”

If there is chance here, that might be a useful thing maybe?

“I think I would have to be pushed into it.”

(Evelyn, Newlodge, October 2017)

Gwen, you said that you had got to know people here and then they have died. There was a sense of loss. You asked whether I knew how Joe was. You had not seen him today, and you

knew he was not well. You said that “when you are here, you don't ask.” You were concerned for him (Gwen, Newlodge, September 2017).

8.3 Analysis

All the themes in this dimension can be considered to be part of spirituality and contribute to wellbeing. Interests and learning are part of how we engage with the world around us, including keeping connected to the past, bringing joy, connection and wellbeing. Faith, the past and preparing for end of life can affect wellbeing now and in the future. I will begin the analysis by considering health and wellbeing together, in order to investigate the relationship between health and psychological wellbeing. I will explore:

- Health and wellbeing
- Interests and learning
- Faith, the past and preparing for end of life

8.3.1 Health and wellbeing

Research with adults aged between eighty and one hundred years old found that physical health and psychological wellbeing are connected (Cho et al., 2011, p. 6). Mobility is also linked to health and wellbeing (Arber et al., 2014, p. 128). Walter's story about going to the pub with a carer and another resident highlights how his mobility enabled him to enjoy a trip to the pub, and encouraged him to walk further than he would have done otherwise.

In my research, having some control over physical health was important for some participants and was demonstrated in healthy eating and exercising where possible. This type of behaviour was also found in other research with older people, where, for some, it was triggered by the onset of illness (Lloyd, Calnan, Cameron, Seymour, & Smith, 2014, p. 12). Within my research, there was no suggestion that this was a new behaviour or adjusting to increased frailty; it appeared to be part of a longstanding approach to taking care of themselves.

For some participants physical health was not currently seen as important; however, these participants were able to engage in activities that they enjoyed, and it may be that their answers would have been different if quality of life was significantly affected by physical health. Tornstam suggests that one sign of transcendence is body transcendence. This is when “taking care of the body continues, but the individual is not obsessed by it” (Tornstam, 2005, p. 74). I suspect that body transcendence is easier to achieve if you are not in considerable pain. Summarising Peck’s work (Peck, 1968), Stuart-Hamilton comments that body transcendence relates not to over emphasising physical health, but to overcoming discomfort or adjusting to it by pursuing interests that don’t rely on ‘bodily status’ (Stuart-Hamilton, 2012, p. 175). Anne, who had restricted mobility, may have adapted in order to engage with activities that were accessible to her as she became frailer. Her outlook was particularly positive; she appeared to have transcended her loss of mobility. George also had significant physical disability, and although he wished he did have good health, he was positive in his outlook, thankful for the life he had lived, and grateful for his continued connections with his family. Although he wished his health was better, he appeared to have overall positive wellbeing and was not defined by his physical disabilities. I am aware that not everybody reacts this way following loss of physical health. Doris appeared depressed, and she struggled with the physical changes that had occurred, including reduced vision, hearing and mobility, which reduced her social interaction and increased her reliance on others. She said,

“I feel like I’m in a vacuum. I don’t think anybody’s said more than two words to me today.”

(Doris, Westhome, August 2018)

Doris’s physical frailty reduced her interactions with others, which may have contributed to her low mood and may hinder her in transcending her physical challenges. Through mutual relationships we can support people to achieve body transcendence in the face of physical decline as they refocus their attention and make adjustments. This type of approach is advocated in an asset-based approach to care, which includes finding out specifically what is

important to people and using that to co-develop appropriate care (Rippon & Hopkins, 2015, pp. 14-17).

A sense of identity also contributes to wellbeing. O'Shea and Walsh comment that it is not easy to maintain identity when living in a care home (O'Shea & Walsh, 2013, p. 136). Identity is linked to self-esteem and is an important factor in quality of life (Davies, 2001, p. 86). Brown, Nolan and Davies discuss how identity may also be affected by chronic illness, and that when working with frail older people it is important for professionals to get to know the older person (J. Brown, Nolan, & Davies, 2001, pp. 22-23). Identity and being reassured of self-worth were of varying importance to the participants. A sense of identity was linked to relationships, having conversations and being known. Being reassured of self-worth was something that participants did not necessarily expect. Two participants described a sense of being one in a number, implying that they were not reassured of their worth. Being reassured of self-worth was associated with being told that a job was well done and being included socially. Brenda's sense of a job well done related to a role from the past, and this had stayed with her. However, George said that he was so full of himself that he was reassured of his own worth; he was not reliant on external validation.

Wellbeing in terms of keeping spirits up was generally regarded as important. Most participants did appear to be in good spirits. This may reflect the nature of people who were likely to engage in research, and does limit the generalisability of the findings. However, for the participants, things that supported wellbeing appeared to be personal disposition and relationships with people, which reflects other research findings. The 2015 World Happiness Report emphasises the importance of perceived social support, and this was one of the areas which contributed to positive life evaluations for older adults (Fortin, Helliwell, & Wang, 2015, p. 70). Wellbeing may also be related to psychosocial development. The work of Erikson, Ardel and Edwards identified a link between wisdom and wellbeing in older adults. The link

between wisdom and wellbeing was stronger in the sample of adults living in nursing homes and hospices than adults living in the community. Causal relationships were not definite; however, they concluded that,

...although it is certainly important to improve older adults' life conditions, such as their physical health, economic status, and social involvement, to enhance SWB [subjective well-being], this study suggests that successful ageing also depends on the cognitive, reflective, and compassionate dimensions of wisdom (Ardelt & Edwards, 2016, p. 511).

Erikson et al. state that wisdom is the strength identified in the eighth stage of psychosocial development, and that wisdom "maintains and learns to convey the integrity of experience, in spite of the decline of bodily and mental functions" (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnivi, 1986, pp. 36-38). Mental health is a complex area that is beyond the scope of this research, and there are many factors which may affect wellbeing. Nevertheless, wellbeing may be a complex interaction between 'within person' factors and life conditions. It is also worth noting that there is a communal aspect to psychosocial development. Erikson et al. emphasise the importance of 'real' relationships at each stage of development. By this they mean that relationships need to be mutual, with reciprocated intensity. They argue that this is not self-centred, but requires communal involvement and communal mutuality (Erikson et al., 1986, pp. 44, 53). Right relationships are therefore important at each stage of psychosocial development.

8.3.2 Interests and learning

Arber et al. state that there is a misbelief that "older people are not interested in engaging in any new activity or learning new skills" (Arber et al., 2014, p. 150). They assert that although older people are all different, engaging in interests and learning is associated with positive wellbeing (Arber et al., 2014, p. 150). Summarising the literature, Arber et al. comment that the 'interpersonal qualities of staff' are important to ensure that individual needs are met

(Arber et al., 2014, p. 151). Within my own research, Anne felt strongly that keeping connected to interests was important. For some participants, there was a sense of loss associated with no longer being able to engage in dancing and singing. However, other participants appeared content to associate some interests with a particular time of life. Several participants were clear about what activities they did and did not like, and were selective with what activities they engaged in.

Activities within care homes fulfilled several functions including passing the time, forming relationships and keeping spirits up. Knitting was an activity that many residents appeared to enjoy. It also served a purpose; sometimes formal knit and natter groups were designed to facilitate conversations and relationships, although this also occurred informally. In Barbara's case, knitting served a purpose of contributing to making blankets as well as making connections to another resident.

"There's one lady I think doesn't like me, but we've got one thing in common now, we do this knitting, little covers, and she's doing one. So I can say to her, 'how's your knitting going on?' She doesn't like talking, I don't think it's only me, and occasionally you can get a smile out of her, but she looks very grumpy. That's the only one, so I go out of my way to try to say hello to her. She doesn't like it, but never mind."

(Barbara, Northway, May 2019)

Some activities, such as listening to music and reading books, had intrinsic value and were enjoyed for their own sake. However, even these activities may have additional functions of keeping connected to the wider world and to the past. My findings suggest that activities may be enjoyed for their own sake, but may also serve another purpose. Reflecting on her own ageing experience, Joan Erikson talks about the benefits of touch, connection, "play, activity, joy and song" in older age (J. M. Erikson, 1998, p. 127). As Elvie talked I had a sense of the joy and playfulness described by Joan Erikson.

8.3.3 Faith, the past and preparing for end of life

As outlined in the methodology chapter, all the participants expressed a Christian faith. They valued the opportunity to worship in the home, and some participants were able to go to their local church. However, some participants missed going to church.

Engaging in worship, going to church or reminiscing about worship gave participants a link to the past as well as the present community to some extent. George, at Newlodge, valued the opportunity to sing hymns. He also saw being part of the choir as an opportunity to 'give'. He had a background in theatre and performing, which perhaps gave him a heightened awareness of the power of giving through singing and the ability to move people. At Westhome, Maureen found hope in the future through the words of a hymn. Marion enjoyed reminiscing about her past church community. Walter and Alice looked forward to going to church. Walter liked both the prayer and the social aspect of church; attending church was part of his connection to God and to other people. There was also a sense of connection to his wife, whose ashes are interred there. He enjoys talking to the people at church, but would not say that they are his friends. There was a sense of partial belonging. Ruby described a strong sense of past belonging to her church, but she could no longer attend; this sense of belonging was not replicated through attending the occasional services that were on offer at Westhome. Nancy missed attending church, but still had connections with the church through visits from church members. While valuing the importance of maintaining the links to previous church communities, additional research would be helpful to explore what might increase a sense of belonging within a care home worshipping community. At Northway, the chaplain shook everyone's hand and talked to each person at the end of the weekly service. At Newlodge, the chaplain included ideas from the residents in her services. At Greenpark, involving the residents in the choice of hymns for a service gave them a sense of connection; this went beyond the service as residents talked to each other about their choices afterwards. Being able to sing the hymns was important, but it was also important to some of the people who chose

the hymns to say why the hymn was important to them. Having the opportunity to choose a hymn invoked memories and provided a space to share these memories with other people. These are all potential practices that might support a person to feel connected to the worshipping community.

Awareness of God's presence was important to some, but not all, participants. An awareness of God's presence was situational for Winnie; it was something that she felt in a particular place and was linked with beauty of a particular building. Winnie used to feel God's presence in the church where she used to live, but hasn't since, and had a sense of abandonment within her overall experience. She had moved to Lancashire at the suggestion of her son, who lived there, but she commented,

"I don't see, I don't see very much of him. It was one of those things, 'Oh when you come up there mum' you know...but..."

(Winnie, Westhome, August 2018)

She missed her church community. This separation from the church community, which she felt had been instigated by her son who she did not see, was associated with her lack of knowledge of God's presence. She did not say she felt abandoned by God, but she did express separation from her church and community, and the sense of abandonment by her son, appeared connected to her feeling a lack of God's presence. However, Winnie hoped that she would again have a sense of God's presence, and that this would occur if she was with others who felt the same as her. Through her words she revealed that she had faith that God was there, and that she may have a sense of God's presence in the future. Community, including being with others who felt the same, was an important feature of this hope. Some people find comfort in their religious faith, but for those whose faith is weakening, this can amplify depression (M. Johnson, 2013, p. 17). Maureen and Winnie did not have a weakening faith, but they would like to know God's presence in a way in which they currently do not. I wonder

whether the creation of a worship space within the home would facilitate awareness of God's presence.

For Doris, awareness of God's presence was linked to the continuity between this life and the life to come; she talked to God and to her husband, and had a sense of both of them with her.

The Methodist Church affirms

an unbreakable bond, the communion of saints, between all God's people, in earth and in heaven, who rejoice together in all God's blessings (The Methodist Conference, 2000, p. 36).

This is not how Doris described it, but she had a bond with her husband that endured beyond death, which provided hope for the future.

When I asked participants about talking about faith, several expressed a desire for more opportunities to do this. Ruby thought that people were embarrassed, and Barbara was concerned about not pushing people into conversations. As conversations with Maureen illustrated, providing opportunities to talk about faith is about more than being accessible in terms of time, or even relationship. It is clear that it is important to make the topics accessible in terms of acceptability. Maureen had always been troubled by part of the Lord's prayer but had not had opportunities to talk about it. Raising the idea that talking about faith was a possibility empowered her to voice her concerns in a future conversation. However, it is telling that she said that she had always been troubled about this. There had not been opportunities earlier in her life to share this trouble. She had not attended church for most of her adult life, but I wonder if her experience would have been different even if she had.

In most of the homes, the residents were able to participate in communion services within the home on at least a monthly basis. Within the homes I interviewed people from Methodist, Church of England and Roman Catholic backgrounds. It was interesting to see how

denominational boundaries were a source of discussion, including confusion, an expression of inclusion for all people, and a dismantling of denominational boundaries. I didn't specifically ask about Christian denominational boundaries; however, several participants commented on their beliefs in relation to denominations or denominational rituals. Marion talked about the importance of being confirmed, and contrasted this with the experience of people who did not think it was important. George said that the different denominations catered for in the home can be a bit confusing. Most participants talked about a blurring of denominational boundaries, which they welcomed. The comments reflected that beliefs about this may have changed over time, and it was important for them to express their current way of thinking. These changes in thinking, and appreciation of a range of perspectives, can be considered as part of the development of wisdom (Erikson et al., 1986, pp. 60-61).

Faith and reconciliation with the past are two of the areas that, for some people, might be part of preparing for end of life. Building on Erikson's work relating to wisdom, two of the areas that Coleman identifies as being important as we develop are acceptance of the past and acceptance of death (Coleman, 2004, p. 106). Life review might be part of the way that some people prepare for the end of life (Schachter-Shalomi & Miller, 1997, p. 182).

Within my research I found that reminiscence was prompted by observing current life through the surveillance zone, photographs, keepsakes, conversations about food, conversations about common experiences and materials put together to promote recollection. There were various attitudes to the past. Anne said that it was not important to be connected to the past. Although she mentioned the past briefly, her focus in conversation was on recent events and current interests. This does not mean that she was not reconciled to the past, nor does it diminish the value of reminiscence; however the reminiscence and life review work that are "essential aspects of constructive listening to and counselling older people" (Coleman, 2004, p. 106) should be balanced. There may be times when older people want to be in the present

or look forward, as Elvie described, and as Anne's conversation about card games, recent events in the home and her observations revealed. These should be equally valued. However, it is notable that, when I visited Anne a week after her interview, she commented on some reminiscence materials in boxes in the lounge. I asked her whether she would like to look at them. She said that she would. I involved other residents as we talked about the contents. When I had to leave to carry out another interview, I asked Anne if she would like to keep the box out. She looked disappointed and said no. I put the box away. Reminiscence needed company. It was relational. For Anne, there were times to talk about the past, and times to be in the present; companionship supported this.

There is some debate about the value of reminiscing about painful events from the past. MacKinlay suggests that, based on Erikson's model, "reprocessing of earlier negative memories may enable the person to move towards ego-integrity" (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 88). However, Johnson cautions that "frequent periods of life review" may "cause... profound distress" (M. Johnson, 2013, p. 17). My observations suggest that this may be different in each circumstance, but that if an older person does raise painful memories, support should be provided to facilitate healthy outcomes. Some participants did recount painful parts of their lives, and framed them in a way that made sense of the events. Two ladies who described domestic abuse took control of their stories as they described their role in bringing something positive out of terrible situations. One lady talked about her work supporting annulment of marriages and one lady talked about her choice to forgive, but not to return to the abusive situation. The memories were painful, but were offered to me without prompting and were made sense of within the story. Reminiscence through engagement in the research process was a positive experience for Maureen. The act of telling her story and subsequently revisiting it enabled her to change the way that she saw her life. She moved from thinking that she had not done much to recognising that she had had a full life, and from thinking that she had not achieved much to recognising her achievements.

All the participants expressed a Christian faith, yet they varied in their approach to the topic of end of life. Some participants expressed a desire not to live forever, referring to their physical life. For most participants, there was a matter-of-fact approach to the topic of death. However, Gwen was uncertain about it, and did not know what to think about death. Evelyn thought it was important to talk about end of life but felt she would need to be pushed into a conversation about it. Other participants expressed a sense of hope about the life to come. When I asked about the importance of preparing for end of life, some participants interpreted this in terms of practical arrangements, and others about the life after death. Both are important areas. Barbara and Brenda had a sense of assurance about the life to come and did not want to talk about it. Alice also had a sense of assurance, and enjoyed talking about Jesus welcoming people from all denominations into heaven. While recognising that having the opportunity to talk about faith and end of life is important for some people, it is not the case for all people all the time. Collectively, the participants' comments made me realise that it is important to build relationships that allow people to talk if they want to. This includes being accessible in terms of time, approachability and presence. Talking about faith and end of life is something that some people want to do, but not all people feel comfortable doing.

This dimension highlighted how what we say only reflects that point in time and is subject to change. Older people living in a care home may be at various stages of transition relating to moving to the care home and age-related changes. Grenier applies the concept of liminality to old age, suggesting that it is helpful to consider when exploring transitions that occur in later life (Grenier, 2012, p. 43). During a liminal phase, things alter as people make sense of their new situation and adjust to it. This has particular significance when engaging in research with older people at this stage of life, who are dealing with changes. Their perceptions and priorities are particularly subject to change as they adjust to the change in circumstances. The interview process itself may trigger adjustment; this was particularly evident for the ideas that were discussed within this dimension, especially faith, the past and end of life.

8.3.4 Summary

This dimension includes our relationship with ourselves regarding our health and wellbeing, our relationship with the past and our hopes for the future. It includes our relationship with the wider world through the way we pursue interests and learning. It also includes our relationship with God. All these areas can contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Relationships with people within and beyond the care home are an important part of this, as is the development of wisdom.

As I reflect on this dimension in light of COVID-19 I am aware that this has been a challenging time for wellbeing for people in and outside of care homes, as relationships with people have been affected by lack or change of contact. Visits from friends and family, external provision of activities, connections to local churches and access to chaplains in MHA homes have been affected for at least part of the pandemic. There has been variation in care homes as to how communal activities have been able to continue. Relationships with people affect how we relate to the past and develop hope for the future. Pursuing interests and learning, participating in communal worship and exploring faith are also relational activities. Although the themes explored are in another dimension, the responses from the participants prior to the pandemic suggest that these areas require relationships in the current dimension in order to be fully realised. Some care homes have also been affected by increased deaths of residents and staff members, and this is in the context of challenging times in terms of relational support.

8.4 Theological reflection: shalom and wisdom

This dimension is a spiritual dimension. This reflection is built on the understanding that spirituality in a Christian context encompasses all our relationships. It includes our relationships with God, ourselves, others and the world we live in, and how we relate to the world through interests and learning. The reflection is also built on the understanding that our

relationships change and develop, and that spirituality is not static. Based on the analysis of the data, I will argue that wisdom within the whole community is an important part of this process. The analysis explored wisdom from a psychological perspective, but here I will explore a Christian understanding of wisdom, particularly the personification of wisdom.

In this reflection, I will begin by exploring wisdom as contributing to spiritual growth, including dancing with and listening to wisdom. I will then argue that wisdom within our community leads us towards shalom in and through right relationships in the following areas:

- Health and wellbeing
- Interests and learning
- Aspects of faith, the past and preparing for end of life

8.4.1 Wisdom

MacKinlay states that growth in wisdom is one of the spiritual tasks of ageing (MacKinlay, 2006, pp. 51-52). Reflecting on the Bible, Moules comments how we are told to 'get wisdom' (Moules, 2012, p. 159). However, he also comments that "True wisdom... belongs to God alone" and is 'beyond human grasp' (Moules, 2012, p. 152). Wisdom is both something that we are urged to acquire and something that stands outside of us. Fischer discusses "the image of God as Sophia or Wisdom" (Fischer, 2009, p. 3). Moules comments on the biblical image of wisdom as a

Mysterious and beautiful woman... speaking out on the streets and in the town square like a typical Hebrew prophet... [and] we also find her at the city gate giving counsel as a respected elder (Moules, 2012, p. 152).

I find this image helpful as it recognises that as we listen to wisdom and follow her path, we may make wise choices. This is our path to gaining wisdom, but the source of wisdom is external to us. It recognises the dynamics of wisdom, including the fact that there are times we hear and respond to her prompting, but also times we might not, and in new situations we

need to listen again for her voice. Nevertheless, as we interact with wisdom we may grow in her ways. This is how we move towards shalom. Moules comments that the “dance and craft of wisdom...is the means by which *shalom* becomes a reality” (Moules, 2012, p. 150).

King uses the image of a dance to illustrate spiritual growth, highlighting that spiritual growth is not necessarily a linear process, and that “a dance is linked to music and its changing beats and rhythms” (King, 2004, pp. 128-130). As older people navigate the challenges and uncertainty of ageing and respond to the whispers of wisdom, there is a sense of dancing. It would be too simplistic to suggest that challenges in any of these areas indicate a lack of spiritual maturity. The liminal nature of the experiences of older people, with readjustments along the way, suggests a more dynamic process. Reflecting on Biblical Wisdom literature, Yoder discusses how wisdom is often found “lingering in liminal spaces... she beckons from beside doorways and on thresholds” (C. B. Yoder, 2021, p. 282). As we approach doorways and thresholds in later life, wisdom is present, inviting use to choose her way of life as we enter the unknown. Wisdom, dancing with us, helps us navigate the change and uncertainty of older age as our priorities change, and then change again. As we navigate increasing frailty, become aware of approaching death, reflect on our past, live with challenges to our identity in our present, and ponder questions of faith, we might adjust, and then readjust again. Commenting on the pattern of wisdom, Rohr emphasises that progress is not linear; it takes faith “to let go of our first order, trust the disorder, and, sometimes even hardest of all – to trust the new reorder” (Rohr, 2020, p. xv). In Christian terms, he frames this as “Life > Crucifixion > Resurrection” (Rohr, 2020, p. xiv). This may occur multiple times. The struggling of disorder is as much a part of spiritual growth as is the trusting of the new order. As wisdom dances with us, and as we learn her ways, we grow in resilience, transcending our circumstances and finding joy in new ways of being. Wisdom prompts us to grow in right relationships with God, with each other and with the world, leading us towards shalom. Wisdom, present at the beginning and participating in creation, continues to dance with us throughout our lives.

8.4.2 Health and wellbeing

Commenting on Genesis 37:14, Yoder suggests that when Joseph is asked to go and “check on the shalom of his brothers and of the cattle” he is going to find out if they are physically well. He also refers to greetings in several Bible passages, including Genesis 43, where shalom is used to ask about the physical wellbeing of someone (P. B. Yoder, 2017, p. 11). Yoder also states, “shalom refers to a state of well-being, an all rightness” (P. B. Yoder, 2017, p. 12). However, there are challenges to both physical health and mental wellbeing as people become increasingly frail. In this section I will argue how wholeness may be found in the midst of frailty. I will also argue that the influence of wisdom within ourselves and our community leads us towards shalom.

McConville suggests that an Old Testament understanding of wholeness is not an “ideal state of well-being,” rather it, “inhabits the space between reality and the hoped-for perfection of all things” (McConville, 2020, p. 31). He also states that,

Wholeness is a practice in which human fragility is fully self-aware, but finds a context in belonging and love, in the ‘social body’, in shared memory, and in the community’s affirmations of the faith (McConville, 2020, p. 31).

Considering mental health in terms of shalom, Swinton comments that “a healthy mind is not *necessarily* one which is freed from anxiety, stress, suffering and pain” (Swinton, 2000a, p. 71). He suggests that it may be possible to grow into mental health even while experiencing psychological distress. He states:

Mental health is the strength to live as a human being, the strength to maintain holistic relationships with God, self and creation, the strength to continue moving towards the image of the *imago Dei* irrespective of one’s circumstances (Swinton, 2000a, p. 72).

These comments highlight the wholeness that can be found amid frailty. They also demonstrate the need for community, including relationship with God. As wisdom weaves her

way through community, we, as members of community, learn how to support each other in a way which brings wholeness. Reflecting on spirituality, King describes how, although it is possible to dance on our own, we often dance with and ‘touch’ other people (King, 2004, pp. 129-130). As we dance together, we can find wholeness even while we are fragile. Part of this includes finding our rest in God. Moules comments on the pastoral characteristic of wisdom, sustaining those who are weary (Moules, 2012, p. 151). He describes Jesus as “*the ‘Wisdom Dancer’*” (Moules, 2012, p. 155). Fischer explores how, like Wisdom, Jesus invites us to find our rest and life in him (Fischer, 2009, pp. 5-6). Wisdom invites us into life and wellness and leads us towards shalom.

Factors affecting wellbeing may include having a sense of identity, self-worth and keeping spirits up even if circumstances are not ideal. These states of being are interlinked and, as they contribute to being in right relationship with ourselves, contribute to shalom. My research findings show that having a sense of identity was associated with a sense of being known. Knowing that we are known and loved by God and by other people within our communities may support a sense of identity. Even if there are other challenges to identity, the affirmations of faith through a worshipping community may reinforce our identity in Christ and bring shalom. Bryan comments,

The love and acceptance of God for every human being is woven in Scripture. Being accepted and having a sense of belonging is significant for self-worth (Bryan, 2020, p. 16).

This is not dependent on our circumstances. Commenting on Romans 8:15b-17a, Barton reflects that the assertion of being a child of God “speaks in a quite transformative way into situations of status-loss...social isolation and anonymity” (Barton, 2020, p. 64). This language resonates with the language that may be associated with older people, particularly those with increased frailty. Knowing God’s love may transform our sense of worth despite our circumstances.

Knowing the love of God and having a sense of being accepted in community are both significant for our self-worth. Rohr proposes a spirituality for the two halves of life. He suggests that in the first half of life we need a sense of identity and to feel special. He suggests that if we received the right kind of feedback in our formative years, we then won't need that kind of feedback in our later years, because we "feel basically good – and always will" (Rohr, 2012, pp. 4-5). I suggest that this includes knowing that we are loved by God as well as experiencing positive human relationships. Some participants looked at me blankly when I talked about having a sense of identity and said it was not important to them. It may be that they had received positive feedback early in their lives and did not need that type of assurance now; however, these participants were also currently in secure, loving relationships. They had a sense of belonging. Rohr does not rule out the importance of ongoing connectedness, but suggests that we are less narcissistic if we have received our 'narcissistic fix' early on (Rohr, 2012, pp. 4-5). However, ongoing mutual relationships do appear important at all stages of development (Erikson et al., 1986, pp. 44-53), particularly when faced with changes that challenge identity. Our relationship with God may be part of this.

While keeping spirits up was generally regarded as important, there also needs to be permission to lament. It is unrealistic and unhelpful to be expected to be smiling all the time. Acknowledging our pain and bringing it before God may be necessary in order to name it and let it go. Beckett states, "Throughout the narratives of Israel's history, expressions of grief, complaint, and desperate entreaty abound" (Beckett, 2016, p. 208). Beckett comments that between one third and more than half of the Psalms could be considered to be laments (Beckett, 2016, p. 209). Bellinger comments how the Psalms "bring wisdom into the realm of worship" (Bellinger, 2021, p. 578). Part of this is how the shape of the Psalter as a whole "betrays a Wisdom purpose" as it reflects a journey of faith, including times of lament (Bellinger, 2021, p. 575). Wisdom is just as with us as we lament as when we give God praise and offer thanksgiving. McConville comments that,

In the psalms, praise and thanksgiving are interwoven with the realities of illness, fragility and the presence of death... the psalmist gives expression before God to feelings of distress and dislocation (McConville, 2020, p. 28).

Accompanying people and acknowledging their pain rather than denying their reality is important. It is also important to recognise that it is unhelpful to hurry someone to express positivity before they are ready, and sensitivity is needed throughout the process (Warner, 2020, p. 202).

Wisdom guides us and our community to live in right relationship with ourselves and to support each other to experience wholeness, even in the midst of frailty.

8.4.3 Interests and learning

Reflecting on Proverbs 8:22, 30-31, Moules comments that, "At the heart of wisdom there is a childlike playfulness and sheer joy" (Moules, 2012, pp. 152-153). Referring to Proverbs 3:19, he comments on the creativity of wisdom (Moules, 2012, p. 153). Wisdom may lead us to delight in the world around us and engage creatively with the world in a positive way. I will argue that the material world is part of our community and when we engage with the world in playful, creative delight, we reflect God's image. As knitting was a prevalent activity within the homes, I will focus on knitting to explore additional aspects of play. Finally, I will demonstrate that playfulness can be part of our sabbath rest.

I begin by considering how the whole world could be seen as part of our community. Pattison discusses God's delight in the world as described in Genesis, and suggests that the Genesis account of creation includes the expectation that humankind will similarly relate with delight to the material world, including human-made objects (Pattison, 2007, p. 248). Engaging positively with art, objects, interests and creative processes may be part of how we reflect

God's delight in the world, and this may include considering these things to be part of our community. Pattison states,

The challenge is to expand the boundaries of human community and concern, dissolving traditional boundaries between subjects and objects, things and people, to create appropriate friendship and fellowship with artefacts (Pattison, 2007, p. 220).

In my research, Brenda described her books as being her friends, and this is just one example of how people form relationships with objects (Pattison, 2007, pp. 188-189). Pattison's focus is on artefacts; however, his ideas could be expanded further to include the way in which we engage with interests, ideas and learning. These are all aspects of the world around us, and relating respectfully to these things can be part of how we are in right relation with them. Pattison does caution that although it is appropriate to treat objects with respect and interest, "relationships with artefacts should not replace relationships with other humans" (Pattison, 2007, p. 258). However, it should be noted that our relationship with objects and interests may facilitate relationships with people, for example by sharing interest in a reminiscence box or knitting together. Within our community, then, we might relate to objects and ideas in the world around us as well as to people, God and the natural world; however, our relationships with each of these may be different in quality and intensity.

Moules describes wisdom as a 'craftswoman' (Moules, 2012, p. 153). We reflect the creativity of wisdom when we engage in creative activities. Swinton comments that our own creativity may be said to mirror Divine Creativity; however, he also cautions that human creativity is not always used positively. He comments that people who are less creative could wrongly be considered to be less human, thus creativity cannot be the defining factor that make us human (Swinton, 2000a, pp. 25-26). This is important to remember and needs to remain part of our understanding. Creativity, if this gift is used positively, can be seen as reflecting the craftswomanship of wisdom, but is not what makes us human. I will use knitting to explore

being at home in the world, and having a sense of purpose, identity, relationship and spirituality. However, many of these themes could be applied to other ways of engaging with the world.

Fisk comments, “[k]nitting has helped me to become at home in the world, when depression made me want to leave the world, and Christianity told me that I should look beyond the world, that it was not of ultimate importance” (Fisk, 2012, p. 162). For Fisk, this was about feeling at home in the world, but it may be extended beyond this. Supporting older people to continue with activities they found meaningful prior to moving to the home, as well as exploring new activities, may reassure them in knowing that they continue to belong to this world. It may also help them to feel at home where they are living now, and may be part of how they home-make and settle in the place where they are staying.

Fisk describes how knitting brought a sense of purpose and a structure to her life (Fisk, 2012, p. 162). Having a sense of purpose is associated with self-transcendence. Frankl discusses how self-transcendence, looking outside of oneself to something or someone else, is key to finding meaning in life (Frankl, 2004, p. 115). Thus, knitting may be part of how we are able to transcend our circumstances as we look outside ourselves and find meaning. It may also be how we express our identity. Fisk comments on her mother’s needlework activity, saying,

It was...an act of meaning-making, of self-expression during a period of her life when she was not...able to express herself more loudly or fluently (Fisk, 2012, p. 168).

Through engaging in interests, we may be able to affirm our identity – even if we are in a place where we do not feel that we have a strong voice. This has particular resonance for older people who may feel that they have lost their voice. However, there is also an acknowledgement of things that are lost, which can challenge our identity. Some participants longed to dance again. There may come a time for some people when they are no longer able to knit. Swinton comments that such longings can be considered in terms of exile, and that the

People of Israel lost “almost everything that made them who they perceived to be,” but that “the presence of YHWH held them in place... and guided them into new places and new ways of being in the world” (Swinton, 2017, pp. 183-184). As we grow older and become unable to participate in those interests we perceive are part of our identity, we may know that God holds us in place and that God may guide us into new ways that transcend our physical limitations. As people within our community act with wisdom, they may also affirm our identity and support us to express that identity in new ways.

Knitting can bring us into being and into relationship. In a newspaper article, Handley MacMath quotes Alison Phipps as saying,

My first experience of God was as I was being knitted in my mother’s womb – and in the blanket my mother made to wrap me (Handley MacMath, 2021, p. 32).

We are known by God, as God knitted us together and knows every fibre of our being. We are lovingly and carefully created, nurtured by people who knit loving care around us, and we can knit love and care around others. As residents were engaged in projects to knit blankets, they were knitting love and care around people and families they had not met, wrapping them in their love. They were also drawn to each other through the process of knitting together and chatting in knit and natter groups.

Knitting can also be a spiritual experience in itself and form a part of our relationship with God. Fisk describes how knitting is also a source of joy, and suggests that, similar to writing and praying, the process of knitting is part of the ‘divine flow of life’ (Fisk, 2012, p. 162). Phipps also reflects on the act of knitting, stating, “I find prayer grows as I make and move” (Handley MacMath, 2021, p. 32). As we knit, we might grow closer to God. Guenther crochets rather than knits, and states that sometimes this is prayerful. She comments that a friend calls it her ‘Protestant rosary’ (Guenther, 1995, p. 50). Knitting and crocheting may combine movement with prayer, finding a sense of stillness in the movement, freeing our minds and opening us up

to God's presence. It may soothe our inner being and allow us to bring something beautiful into our situation. Knitting may reflect how we make sense of our lives. Guenther comments that, in some places, St Anne, apocryphally the mother of Mary, was known as 'the knitting Saint', and how the second part of our life is a time for craft, "when we may reorder and even re-create our lives" (Guenther, 1995, p. 48). She states that, "Spiritually we all work with fibers and fabrics" (Guenther, 1995, p. 49). When describing spinning and weaving, she uses language of 'creating a pattern' and 'harmony', as well as 'tedious', 'demanding', 'working out a pattern we cannot see' and 'fruition' (Guenther, 1995, pp. 49-50). The activity of knitting can reflect the challenging and fruitful process of discovering meaning in our lives and the peace of finding a sense of harmony. Knitting can be part of how we enjoy being with God. Edgar suggests that playfulness is part of our relationship with God, and considers how God might be our 'playmate' (Edgar, 2017, p. 2). Cronshaw and Parker, reflecting on Edgar's work, comment that it can be easier for Christians to imagine a God who works and sacrifices than one who dances and laughs, and they suggest that running can emulate "the playfulness of God" (Cronshaw & Parker, 2019, p. 246). Playfulness can be part of how we reflect God's image and relate to God. Though knitting and other activities we might grow closer to God, making sense of the pattern of our life and enjoying being with God, our playmate. Edgar emphasises the importance of having a balance between work, rest and play, discussing how all of these are part of our relationship with God. He also suggests that, as we play, we might live out the future of God's kingdom in our present world. He comments on the image of children playing in the city of God in Zechariah 8:5, stating that play "expresses the true nature of life with God" (Edgar, 2017, p. 115).

Huber comments that a "characteristic of wisdom people is their ability to rest" (Huber, 2003, p. 18). This might be considered a part of our spiritual growth. Pursuing interests and engaging in the world around us may be part of our Sabbath rest, although Sabbath rest may also be simply being. Swinton explores different aspects of Sabbath rest, stating, "In God's time people

are commanded to slow down and rest” (Swinton, 2017, p. 77). He reflects on the differences between Sabbath rest and anxious busyness, suggesting that a “fear of failure and the danger of being accused of slothfulness make faithful time-fullness difficult” (Swinton, 2017, p. 77). He talks about how time is “made holy as it is brought under the command of God” (Swinton, 2017, p. 78). He discusses how “slowing down and taking time for God and self” is “an irrevocable dimension of faithfulness” and that Sabbath is a “way of being in the world that is restful, time-full, slow, relational and non-anxious” (Swinton, 2017, p. 79). If we learn this habit, it is perhaps easier to enter into Sabbath rest even as our circumstances change.

Playfully engaging with the world and experiencing the delight of the material world around us, as well as exploring ideas and learning, is part of how we are in right relation with the physical world. It is also part of how we relate to God, reflect God’s image, express our diverse identities, experience Sabbath rest and glimpse God’s kingdom. This is not dependent on our abilities, or ability to respond, as we will all relate to the world in different ways. It may also change as we grow older, but being held in a community of love can support us to hold our place of belonging within the world. This is all part of spiritual growth, and dancing with wisdom towards shalom.

8.4.4 Faith, the past and preparing for end of life

Knowing God’s presence, worshipping, and developing a more inclusive understanding of faith, as well as opportunities to talk together about faith and death, relationships with the past and preparation for end of life, can all lead towards shalom. I will argue that wisdom accompanies us in these tasks and draws us into right relationship with God, each other, ourselves, and the past. This is part of how wisdom leads us towards peace in preparation for end of life.

Shalom includes being in right relation with God. In my research, for Elvie, this included a certainty that Jesus Christ was her mate, her good friend who she talks to and who lives with

her. This was at least in part due to her grandma talking to her about how, no matter what happened, Jesus would always be with her and never leave her. Her relationship with her grandma was formative in her relationship with God, and this was something that she passed on to other people. However, there might be times that we don't feel God's presence (Fischer, 2009, p. 159; Grey, 1989, p. 78). Considering this biblically can be the beginning of how we explore our experiences in a framework that holds us and brings us into dialogue with God. However, there is also an emotional 'hanging on' in faith, holding onto the knowledge that we are known and loved by God. Grey suggests that moving from the dark night of the soul into the light "is to hang on to the insight that we are touched by God, who... is taking the initiative" (Grey, 1989, p. 80). The participants who did not feel God's presence did not express doubt that God was there, though they would like to know God's presence. Burnett comments that the question, "Where is the Deity?" occurs in a range of contexts in the Hebrew Bible, suggesting that this was a 'common religious concern' (Burnett, 2005, p. 234). Burnett also suggests that the texts asking "Where is the Deity" show a "'movement'... from despair to hope" (Burnett, 2005, p. 234). Asking where God is suggests a hope in God's presence. Not feeling God's presence does not mean that God is not there with us, or that there is no hope. Burnett comments that biblical wisdom literature recognises divine absence and presence in everyday experiences, and acknowledges that this is part of God's mystery (Burnett, 2010, pp. 177-178).

Mackinlay emphasises the value of providing opportunities for worship, commenting that, for some people, worship may strengthen faith (Mackinlay, 2006, p. 139). I have already commented that the Psalter brings wisdom into worship through the exploration of different aspects of our spiritual journey (Bellinger, 2021, p. 575). Bell comments positively about how singing 'shapes what we believe', but also cautions that some hymns have damaging content (Bell, 2000, pp. 56, 57). However, wisdom is present in sacred texts and many hymns, inviting us into the path of life, journeying with us on our pilgrimage and drawing our attention to God.

Worshipping together is only one part of being church, but it does influence the life of the church. While acknowledging that problems exist within the church, Nesson describes how, through the different elements of the liturgy, we become more like Christ as we worship, and in doing so become a 'shalom church' (Nesson, 2012, p. 51). As we worship, wisdom calls us into the way of peace, for the whole community. This outworking of church was not explored within this research, and further research would be useful in order to understand what belonging to church and being part of the body of Christ means for residents in a care home context. It was evident that links to their previous church communities and experiencing a type of church community within a care home may vary between people within the same care home. It was also evident that it was possible to yearn to attend church alongside becoming part of a new worshipping community within a home. It was not clear to what extent the new worshipping community had become church for most of the participants. Potentially, church within a care home could become a source of shalom in both the care home and the wider community. Further research would be helpful to establish to what extent people residing in care homes are able to be part of a shalom church.

Our spirituality is something that changes and develops. The interviews revealed a sense of people developing in their faith and changing their ideas. This was seen in the way denominational boundaries were overcome. It did not necessarily include a denial of denominational allegiances; some participants were keen to tell me their denomination and that these denomination boundaries did not matter. MacKinlay interviewed older people living independently, and found that one third of them had "increasing tolerance... of other denominations" and suggested that as such they "could be at stage five of Fowler's stages of faith development" (MacKinlay, 2017, p. 217). This stage is associated with listening to the voice of wisdom (Fowler, 1981, p. 185). Wisdom helps us to see beyond initial boundaries and be open to new possibilities. Stage five is associated with ecumenism and openness to other faiths (Fowler, 1981, p. 186). As discussed in the literature chapter, there are some issues with

considering these as sequential stages and applying them to older people with whom they have not been researched; however, Fowler's stages of faith development can be useful in terms of providing some descriptions of different expressions of faith. The stage five description of ecumenism combined with commitment to their own faith tradition was reflected in the stories of some of the participants in my research, though, for some, ecumenism appeared more important than denomination.

Considering spirituality as a dance, King describes how dancing with each other brings a "sense of energy, joy and love" (King, 2004, p. 130). As participants talked about their faith and the changes in their understanding thereof, there was a sense of energy, joy and love in their non-verbal communication and expressions of inclusion. However, they did not always have somebody to dance with, and this was a source of sadness. Coleman emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for people to talk about their faith, particularly emphasising the importance of relationships (Coleman, 2004, p. 112). Harris states that "sometimes it seems that older Christians are not 'allowed' to doubt or question" (Harris, 2001, p. 98). Questions and doubts may be discouraged at any age, or simply difficult to talk about. Hawley recognises the place of doubts and questions within the faith of older Christians. He also outlines the benefits of small groups as places of nurturing and learning (Hawley, 2018, pp. 165-176). Small groups may support some people to explore their questions and doubts. MacKinlay emphasises the importance of giving people permission to talk about difficult topics, particularly regarding end of life, recognising that residents might feel uncomfortable about raising topics even if they want to (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 197). She also comments that while "personal questions relating to physical status, such as bowel movements are quite regularly asked... Somehow questions of spirituality are too frequently relegated to the background" (MacKinlay, 2006, p. 198). However, an alternative perspective is that perhaps carers are right to be cautious, and that faith is so intimate it 'needs handling with the greatest care' to avoid causing 'damage' (Swift, 2020a). Nevertheless, being ready and

willing to listen to older people as they talk about faith and death is important, and sometimes listening is all that is required.

Mackinlay comments that, “one of the spiritual tasks of later life is to tell our story, in the context of preparing for the last careers of life, preparing to die” (Mackinlay, 2004, p. 80). She also reflects on reconciliation with the past and finding meaning as components of wisdom (Mackinlay, 2017, pp. 254-274). Wisdom journeys with us, drawing us into right relationships with ourselves, our past and our future as we tell and make meaning from our stories and find a sense of peace. Harris comments that shalom concerns “the wholeness or integrity of a person in all their life and relationships” (Harris, 2001, p. 99). Reminiscence can be a joyful experience as it reinforces positive connections to people and communities from the past. Marion recognised this as a spiritual experience. Articulation of these connections may also reflect a future hope of life beyond death and recognition of a continued connection with people who have died. Reminiscence was also something that established shared connections in the present time. Mackinlay advocates the use of reminiscence groups in care homes as a way of reducing social isolation and supporting the development of friendships (Mackinlay, 2006, p. 91). It may also support us to make sense of our lives as we reflect on our shared experiences with others. Telling our stories can support us to affirm our connections with people who have died, affirm hope for the future, make sense of the past and make connections in the present time. Wisdom dances with us as we share our stories.

One focus of spirituality for older people might be to “find healing of painful memories” (Jewell, 1999, p. 11). Some participants gave the impression that they had consciously let go of events from the past, considering things ‘done with’ or talking about ‘letting things go’; they had made their peace with the past. Jewell comments that being reconciled with people and the past might be “undergirded by an even more basic need for at-one-ment with God” (Jewell, 1999, p. 11). This perhaps shows an underlying need for shalom, which is found

through at-one-ness with God, each other and the whole of creation. MacKinlay comments that a pastoral carer can support people as they reminisce and reframe their own stories (MacKinlay, 2006, pp. 88-89). Huber comments that “the spiritual journey is geared to lead to not only our own growth but also to the benefit of those in community with us, especially the generations that come behind us” (Huber, 2003, pp. 14-15). Spending time with older people can provide them with the opportunity to talk about their lives, and, as we listen, we can learn from the wisdom that they share through their stories.

Food memories and rituals associated with food were important for many participants. These memories connected them to people from their past and said something about their identity. The Passover and the Eucharist show the power of eating, drinking and remembering through story telling in community, connecting us to something beyond our immediate experience. Mann emphasises the importance of the Passover in terms of identity formation; within the re-enactment of the story, the Jewish people identify with those released from slavery in Egypt (Mann, 1996). As we retell our story, our identity is made known, and we assert who we are to ourselves and to the listener. As we celebrate the Eucharist, we identify with the disciples and affirm our place as followers of Christ. The telling of our story as part of a larger story is part of our faith tradition and gives meaning to our lives.

MacKinlay comments that preparing to die includes looking forwards as well as to the past, and approaching death with confidence and hope (MacKinlay, 2004, p. 96). Preparing for death might incorporate consideration for those we are leaving behind, as final wishes and funeral arrangements are made known. It may also include preparing ourselves inwardly, which could entail development of ideas of what might lie beyond death, an acceptance of death, and a welcome of death at the right time. Harris comments that part of preparation for end of life involves “coming to terms with what one has and has not achieved, and finding in God the one who can make up what is lacking...And of course there always remains for

Christians the hope...that surely lies beyond this life” (Harris, 2001, p. 100). As we gather up the threads of our lives and reflect on the fabric we have to offer, wisdom accompanies us, and we may hear her whisper that we are beautiful to God. Whatever we may see in terms of loose threads, holes, incomplete patterns and false starts, God makes up what is lacking, but, more than that, our creator God sees *us*, and loves *us*. As wisdom whispers to us, we hold more lightly to these threads, and as we recognise that we are saved by grace we learn to live more fully, taking ourselves less seriously, and free to dance and play as we live within the knowledge of God’s love.

8.5 Conclusion

I have argued that wisdom accompanies us within this spiritual dimension, drawing us into right relationship with ourselves, each other, the world around us and with God. Wisdom stands in the liminal places and beckons us towards shalom. Wisdom draws us towards wholeness when we are fragile. Wisdom delights with us as we engage with the world around us. Wisdom acknowledges the mystery of God, draws us closer to God and leads us into the way of life for the whole community. Wisdom accompanies us as we explore the past, present and future, helping us to make sense of our lives, and reminding us of God’s grace. However, this is not only a personal experience. Wisdom dances with the whole community, drawing the whole community towards shalom.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusion and recommendations

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I conclude my findings and make practical recommendations for care homes, incorporating recommendations for further research. In recognition that the responsibility for the development of a shalom community involves the whole community, I comment on implications for the church. I end the chapter with a dream of shalom.

9.2 Conclusion

This thesis is a theological reflection on community from the perspective of older people living in residential care homes. My research adds to the body of knowledge by drawing on the limited literature from the voices of older people, which indicates that community life is one of the factors which is important for quality of life, but does not specifically explore what community life means for them. Some earlier studies do explore community in care homes, but with limited reference to the perspective of older people. Additionally, links to the wider community tend to be overlooked, or mentioned incidentally. My research complements previous studies about community and care homes by focusing on the voices of older people and exploring community beyond the care home. Some earlier studies, which included the voices of older people, highlighted that reciprocity in relationships was important; my research affirms this and builds on these findings.

In order to reflect on the experiences of older people, I developed a model of community that reflected their experiences and highlighted different zones of community. I analysed their experiences in each of these zones before engaging with each area theologically. As I reflected on the themes within each zone of community, it became apparent that right relationships were important within these areas and that all these areas could be considered as contributing to shalom. Wilkinson discusses how shalom means 'wholeness, completeness and well-being'

and affects 'physical, mental and spiritual' aspects of life on an individual and a communal level (Wilkinson, 1980, p. 5). Woodley emphasises that shalom encompasses the whole of creation (Woodley, 2012, p. xix). Swinton's summary of shalom succinctly incorporates these areas as he describes shalom as, "in essence to do with the quality of a person's life and quality of their relationships with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation" (Swinton, 2000a, p. 58). This definition of shalom resonates with my research findings, as does his implication that shalom is here but not yet here. He describes the whole mission of Jesus as bringing shalom, emphasising that shalom is a gift from God and that, "It is in God's redemptive movement towards the world that the whole of creation is being reconciled and guided towards its true state of shalom" (Swinton, 2000a, p. 59). In addition to this, my findings also suggest that experiencing shalom gives a sense of being at home; this was evident in all the zones of community. The world is our home, and we have a sense of being at home when relationships are as they should be. The world is also not fully our home, but will become so when all things are as they should be. This is our hope. Woodley states,

The story, our story is about a party, a community involving all people and all other parts of creation. This party is demonstrated by carrying out justice and righteousness among our fellow humans and the earth and all her other creatures. The community concerns itself especially with the marginalized and disempowered parts of creation that do not have a voice or the power to speak for themselves. This includes strangers, widows, and orphans. It includes the earth itself, and all of her resources. It includes the remaining indigenous peoples. Shalom in the community of creation – life as God intends it – awaits our embrace (Woodley, 2012, p. 165).

Shalom is a gift from God as God draws us into right relationship with Godself, each other and the whole of creation. Right relationships are both a sign of shalom and the way in which we move towards shalom. The main themes identified from the data, namely hospitality, freedom, harmony with creation and wisdom within another dimension, are all aspects of

shalom. I argued that the theme of hospitality within care homes includes the creation of hospitable places, the way hospitality is given and received, the way people are affirmed and affirm each other, and the way that relationships are formed across boundaries. Shalom was present when relationships created hospitable experiences. The constant change within the care home community was also acknowledged. The theme of freedom emerged through consideration of windows on the world, and incorporates the concept of being visited as well as looking outwards. I argued that harmony with creation contributes to a sense of shalom, and that this was evident in relationships with creation, which were important for their own sake and drew people closer together and closer to God. In another dimension, I argued that wisdom leads us into right relationships with ourselves, God and the world around us, contributing to shalom.

Shalom encompasses wholeness and right relationships between God, people, the whole of creation and the material world. At the heart of the thesis argument is the importance of relationships to form community structures across the community landscape within and beyond the care home, in order to contribute to shalom. Shalom is present when relationships in communities are healthy. Furthermore, community development grows from relationships.

Commenting on theological education, Hull argues that theological reflection must lead to change. He states, "In theological education, theological reflection is not enough" (Hull, 2014, p. 242). This reflects my approach to research. For me, theological reflection on community must inspire transformation, and as such is part of God's mission. Hull states, "The mission of God is ... to restore the brokenness of the body of humanity and to renew the face of the earth" (Hull, 2014, p. 219). Prior to carrying out the research, I hypothesised that it would lead to a list of practical recommendations of ways to connect to the wider community, which care homes could adopt as best practice. I expected that the participants would bring ideas about how their communities could be enhanced; however, I found that the reality was simply that

building relationships leads to the building of communities. Good relationships enable the functions of community to be fulfilled. Forming good relationships is in itself a way of developing community, but it also leads to wider community development as it enables wider connections. Nevertheless, as I considered my findings again, I realised that there were recommendations that could be made regarding supporting the development of relationships. I also realised that although most of the participants had not directly shared any areas for improvement when asked for their opinion at the end of the interview, they had articulated areas of positive community experience and expressed areas where community was not as it should be throughout the interview. This demonstrates the value of forming relationships with older people to understand what is important to them, and the value of listening carefully to what is said. It also demonstrates that, while asking some people directly about their aspirations might be an effective way of discovering this, for many people, identifying aspirations is something that will only emerge through dialogue, over time. The recommendations have come from my interpretation of the collective voices of the participants and reflect what they told me was good and what they found challenging or would like to be improved. These recommendations have not been tested and generalisability of the findings is limited due to the small scale of the research and limited diversity amongst the participants. Further research to explore all these areas would be beneficial. Nevertheless, my findings do have theoretical generalisability as they “throw light on similar but different situations” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 48-49). Graham uses the term ‘bricolage’ to illustrate the value of fragments of information, and how they come together to form a bigger picture (Graham, 2000, p. 106). My findings can be regarded as adding to the existing body of knowledge, revealing a fragment of the wider picture and providing areas for further exploration.

9.3 Recommendations for care homes

The recommendations are based on participant responses and reflect things that are already in place alongside areas that could be developed. However, this is not a checklist. Some of these points are ways that relationships can be supported. They are also signs that relationships have developed. I am aware that many of the recommendations are dependent on good levels of staffing and consistency in staff. I recognise that the current staffing shortfall in the social care sector, exacerbated by the pandemic though underpinned by a need for investment and reform (Monaghan, Moule, Ascroft, Hayes, & Rayner, 2021), poses challenges to implementing my recommendations. The recommendations therefore also support the call for investment and reform, not only to ensure that basic needs are met but also to support the development of a healthy community.

I begin with a comment about chaplaincy before outlining recommendations. I have grouped the recommendations into lessons learned from the methodology regarding communication, followed by the zones of community that were identified by the participants. I have separated the different zones of community because it is important that each of these zones is recognised to avoid limiting the vision for community to only one or two zones. The recommendations should be considered in light of what is learned through relationships which are built with each person. One of the research findings was that different things are important to different people and that this may change from day to day and over time. All the recommendations should be considered from a standpoint of 'being with' older people rather than 'doing to' them, recognising that we all have something to offer to each relationship.

9.3.1 Chaplaincy

While this research did not focus on the role of chaplains, it was clear during the research that the presence of chaplains in care homes has a positive impact on community, and that their role extends across all the zones of community. In his keynote speech at a recent MHA

chaplaincy conference, Swinton referred to chaplains as 'bearers of shalom' (Swinton, 2021) in recognition of the work of chaplains in supporting right relationships. It would be interesting to carry out further research regarding the role of chaplains as bearers of shalom.

9.3.2 Communication

These recommendations should be interpreted cautiously. The participants had agreed to be part of the research and so were open to being interviewed; others may be more reticent.

- Recognise that purposeful conversations, which are reciprocal, are one of the ways in which relationships develop. Not all conversations need to be purposeful, and some people may not welcome these types of conversations. However, being available for these types of interactions is an important part of web-weaving and creating community.
- Use communication tools where appropriate, remembering that these are not a replacement for genuine interest and good communication.
- Consider introducing a focus on residents and key staff members getting to know each other.
- Be intentional about inclusion, including addressing communication, hearing, visual, physical and cognitive difficulties by liaising with healthcare professionals, educating staff and supporting residents. For example, it is important to recognise that supporting hearing is not just about hearing aids and that supporting vision is not just about providing glasses. There are technological advances that need to be considered alongside creating inclusive environments including seating arrangements, consideration of background noise, and lay out of the home. These are basic issues which need to be addressed if relationships are to develop.
- Recognise that people might say different things on different days, may not always say what they mean and some topics may be difficult to talk about. As people talk, they

may be making sense of topics themselves, and their perceptions and conclusions may develop over time. Ongoing relationships are important to understand this process.

I hypothesise that relationship building in this way this would ease the transition into the home, as relationships contribute to forming attachment to a new place. Relationship building and transition into care homes is an area that would benefit from further research.

Further research about the impact of addressing barriers to communication would be beneficial. This would be best carried out in collaboration with health professionals, such as audiologists, speech and language therapists, alongside care home staff, with research design that includes the voice of residents.

9.3.3 The care home

Within the care home setting, the following areas may contribute to shalom community.

- Value strong and weak links. Having someone to say hello to is important.
- Use preferred names appropriately.
- Allow solitude, but also be aware of when it is appropriate to encourage participation.
- Manage mealtimes as a time for giving and receiving hospitality and ensure that people are not excluded physically or emotionally, while recognising that some people do prefer to eat alone in their own rooms.
- Consider enabling staff members and residents to share in mealtimes together as a way of celebrating and building community.
- Recognise the importance of food quality and choice, and the role of food in connecting people to the past and to each other.
- Promote a relational approach to care. This includes supporting staff to develop reciprocal relationships. Training, including modelling and coaching, would be beneficial for some staff.

- Put measures in place to promote consistent staffing and identify ways of supporting relationship development if there is lack of consistency. This will include using strategies to quickly develop relationships in transient communities.
- Support residents to offer hospitality in a way that is meaningful to them.
- Support residents to influence change in the home, considering creative ways to listen to residents, not just residents' meetings, which people may find difficult to contribute to.

Further research about factors that contribute to a sense of being at home and having a sense of belonging with the care home would be beneficial. This should include factors such as being able to give, being able to make a difference and having a voice that is heard.

9.3.4 Windows on the world

There are many ways in which residents may connect with the world beyond the care home.

The following areas are supportive of this.

- Make the most of the view through the window; it is important for providing interest, connection to the wider world and a source of conversation. Views of social activity and creation are both valuable.
- Facilitate 'ordinary' trips out to the shops, local restaurants or a pub. These are valuable for reflecting people's experiences prior to the move to the care home. Support people to participate in trips out, for example by being aware of mobility issues, recognising the need for having a trusted relationship with the person they are going out with, and addressing toilet needs.
- Consider the location and design of new care homes, including locating homes within easy access of community spaces, ensuring that windows maximise the view, and designing internal layout to support observing the view and communication within the home.

- Be aware that older people may want to give something back to the local community and the wider world but are unsure how they can do this. Conversations with older people will help to explore this further. This might include caring for creation or social action, for which there may be initiatives that can be developed within the home. In some homes, there were examples of giving through knitting blankets and fundraising. Supporting older people to contribute to the development of their own ideas may increase meaningful engagement and a sense of purpose.
- Some older people were no longer able to attend groups that they had been a part of. Care homes may be able to provide a venue for outside groups, which may be of interest for residents to attend.
- Promote and engage in wider societal change. Community for older people is not just about the care home. Inclusive communities will benefit the whole of society and affirm the place of those who are often excluded or marginalised.
- Nurture surrogate links to the wider world by incorporating the preferences of the older person. This may include:
 - making the home welcoming to visitors.
 - supporting residents to read and respond to letters.
 - supporting residents to make use of phone and video calls where appropriate, ensuring that hearing and visual issues are addressed.
 - enabling residents to access local news from the place they used to live, which may not be where the care home is located.
 - highlighting the value of surrogate connections to family and friends.

Further research into how links to the wider world can be maintained and developed would be helpful, including recognition that responsibility for this includes, but goes beyond, the immediate care home community.

9.3.5 Creation

Connection to creation was important to many participants for their overall wellbeing and as a part of spirituality. Facilitating connection to creation may include the following areas. These are all examples that were present in some of the homes.

- Create accessible gardening opportunities, including greenhouses and raised beds.
- Develop garden areas which can be accessed independently.
- Ensure that there are spaces for socialising outside.
- Organise outdoor activities, such as a walk in the garden, or do activities outside that might normally take place inside.
- Create outdoor spaces for quiet reflection.
- Consider growing food which is used in the kitchen and involve the residents in planting, harvesting and processing the produce.
- Make the most of the views through the windows.
- Position bird tables so that the birds can be viewed from inside.
- Consider having pets in the care home, including cats, dogs and fish. These could be restricted to certain areas if it does not suit all the residents.
- Consider keeping hens.
- Enable residents to live in harmony with the natural world in a way that is meaningful to them.

Further research regarding how a sense of feeling at home may be influenced by connection to creation would be beneficial.

9.3.6 Another dimension

Another dimension includes health and wellbeing, interests and learning, faith, the past and preparing for end of life. This may be considered to be part of spirituality. The following recommendations are supportive of shalom.

- Adopt an asset-based approach to care through relationships. This will promote health and wellbeing. Finding out what is important to people will support them to engage with activities that may have overall positive benefits for health and wellbeing.
- Support adjustment and adaptation. People may not be able to continue to do the activities that they have done in the past. Supporting people as they explore new interests or pursue their interests in a different way may support them to transcend physical and cognitive changes.
- Give permission to lament and don't expect people to be cheerful all the time. Sometimes the appropriate response to a situation is rage and despair, and this needs to be allowed to occur before people can move on.
- Recognise the different functions of activities. For example, some activities are more entertainment than a link to community, and it is helpful to acknowledge that. Some communal activities do not provide opportunities for meaningful interaction, and that needs to be recognised and provided for at other times. Some activities may fulfil more than one function.
- Value play and the pursuit of interests, activities and learning, recognising that this is part of spirituality.
- Recognise that our connection to creation is part of spirituality and acknowledge this in conversations, during encounters with nature, and with acts of worship celebrating harvest and creation time.
- Provide opportunities for worship including receiving communion, singing hymns and participation in services.
- Explore the idea of 'church' in a care home, promoting a sense of belonging. This requires further exploration and research.
- Provide opportunities to talk about faith. Good relationships are needed to allow this to occur.

- Create opportunities for reminiscence. This includes accompanying the older person on the story telling and meaning making process.
- Provide opportunities to talk about end of life – their own life and that of others. There were some barriers to this in some of the homes, suggesting that training for staff would be helpful.
- Listen to older people.
- Recognise that we are on holy ground in all our encounters, and that we may minister to each other.
- Recognise God’s presence weaving through all our relationships, always loving and inspiring us to love.

Further research about a sense of belonging to a worshipping community within a care home and belonging to church while living in a care home would be helpful. It would be useful to understand older people’s sense of belonging to church, whether that is within the care home worshipping community, through connections to a specific church, or as part of the wider church. It would be beneficial to understand the importance of this to older people, and how a sense of belonging can be enhanced.

9.4 Implications for the church

Development of a shalom community involves the whole community. As this thesis is a theological reflection, and as all the participants expressed a Christian faith, I will in this section explore implications for the church. The recommendations I have made for care homes are relevant for the church, either in relation to older people attending church or as we consider our relationships with people who are housebound or living in care homes. I will not revisit those recommendations here; rather, I will focus on additional factors which are specific to the church community. Valuing older people, enabling older people to belong, promoting a healthy understanding of ageing and interdependency and having a proactive approach are all

factors that will contribute to the development of shalom within the church and the wider community.

Jewell comments on older people having a place of respect within the community in the Old Testament, and exhorts the church to counteract the ageism prevalent in society (Jewell, 2001, pp. 2-3). Jewell and Woodward both state that there is often a focus on younger people in the church. They recognise that young people are important too, and Woodward highlights the value of an intergenerational approach (Jewell, 2001, p. 1; Woodward, 2006), but there is evidence that the church still colludes with the prevailing culture, with an emphasis on young people, where older people are not valued in their own right. One of the key priorities for the Church of England in the 2020s is, “To be a church that is younger and more diverse” (The Church of England, 2021). It would be more helpful to affirm all ages within the church. Woodward comments that, “each of us is made in God’s image, and should be valued at every stage” (Woodward, 2006). One way that churches can demonstrate that they value older people is through their engagement with Anna Chaplaincy, which is dedicated to older people. However, the latest Anna Chaplaincy impact report, authored by Kartupelis and Burton-Jones, revealed that, while most churches support the work of their Anna Chaplains, a minority of churches “had a disproportionate emphasis on engaging young people” (Kartupelis & Burton-Jones, 2021, pp. 6-7). One sign of shalom is that all generations are valued within the church family.

It would also be helpful to emphasise that church is more than the people who physically attend services. Older people who are housebound or living in a care home are still part of the church, but too often they are excluded. Nevertheless, there are initiatives which attempt to address this. Within the Methodist Church, annual MHA Sundays raise awareness of the work of MHA (MHA, 2021b); however, although this goes some way to promote a sense of connection, in some churches the focus is on raising funds rather than building relationships.

Part of the challenge to the church is to explore how we can engage with older people living in care homes and how we can build community and 'be church' together, recognising that we each have a contribution to make. A sign of shalom is that people are enabled to belong to the church, to give and to receive, even if they do not physically enter the church building.

The church has a role to play in promoting a healthy understanding of ageing, one that recognises the challenges that some people face as they age alongside the gifts they bring. This includes providing a theological understanding of what it means to be fully human and made in the image of God, which includes our frailty and dependence on each other. It includes recognition of mutuality in relationships. Jewell and Woodward both comment on meeting the pastoral and spiritual needs of older people as well as valuing their contribution (Jewell, 2001, p. 1; Woodward, 2006). Anna Chaplaincy was founded "to support older people spiritually and in practical ways, and enable them to continue contributing to society through their experience, skills and wisdom" (Kartupelis & Burton-Jones, 2021, p. 2). These comments hint at the importance of recognising our interdependency, acknowledging that there are times that we receive as well as give. A church that recognises this may enable people to receive help without feeling they are a burden, and also recognises that giving and receiving are not mutually exclusive. Valuing older people should not be based on productivity and what they 'do'. Woodward comments that an "emphasis on doing rather than being can devalue the latter" (Woodward, 2006). The teaching and actions of the church should address this: we should learn about giving and receiving, doing and being, alongside the challenges and gifts of older age within the context of an intergenerational church community. A shalom church affirms that we are all made in the image of God, and that we depend on each other.

There is a challenge to all of us who are part of the church to do what we can to work towards a shalom community, looking at our own spheres of influence and considering whether they should extend further than we initially thought. This may be how we form relationships across

generations in a range of locations, how we influence policies locally and nationally, and how we promote the voices of those who are marginalised. Some of these may be corporate responses, but many of them are in the relationships we develop within our everyday lives. In order to be a shalom church, we need to challenge the prevailing culture. We need to notice when people are marginalised, ensure that all people are valued for who they are, celebrate our interdependency, and rejoice in the connections that are made across boundaries within the church and the wider community.

9.5 Dream of shalom

Prior to carrying out this research I had a negative view of life in care homes, which included a focus on frailty leading to marginalisation and exclusion. I perceived care homes to be separate from mainstream community, places that separated people from the life they had known before. For some participants there was a sense of loss, a sense of longing for the home they had known, of feeling a burden due to their physical frailty and a desire for more community connection. However, alongside these themes, as I reviewed the data, while challenges of increasing frailty and loss of community were acknowledged as a significant part of some participants' experiences, other participants gave a positive account of community. Listening to the participants and reflecting on the themes that arose, revealed a dream of a shalom community, a longing for its existence and a delight when it was present. There was a sense of 'here but not yet here' as part of this vision, and for some this included a hope for the life that is to come. There was also a sense that shalom may be found even in the context of the frailty and changes associated with ageing.

A shalom community is one where all people are valued and where relationships flourish. A shalom community is one where, by the grace of God, strangers become friends. Drawing on the work of Swinton, who illustrates how others may be strange to us and we may be strange to ourselves (Swinton, 2012, p. 258), it also includes making friends with those who are

strange to us and the stranger within ourselves. A shalom community recognises that community crosses boundaries, and includes the whole of creation, each other and God. A shalom community is hospitable, combines freedom with unity, is in harmony with creation and listens to the voice of wisdom as she leads us deeper into right relationships. As we listen to the voices of older people, may we hear the voice of wisdom beckoning us towards shalom.

Afternote

This research was carried out immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and represents a snapshot in time of community. As we are now learning to live alongside the virus, the insights from this research are particularly relevant as the way forward for social care and older adults is considered in general, and, more specifically, for how care homes function. This includes recognising the importance of mutual relationships within and across all the zones of community, the role of older people in shaping the policies of the future and the need for investment in adult social care.

Appendices

Appendix A: Characteristics of the participants

The care home and participant names are pseudonyms. The age and length of time living in the home are as stated by the participants.

Newlodge 50 places Residential, nursing care and dementia			
	Age	Lived here for:	Family, participation in activities in the home and physical access to the wider community.
George	91 years old	7 months	Married. Family visited every day. Participated in activities. Did not leave the home.
Gwen	84 years old	A few years	Unmarried. No close family. Visited by neighbour. Participated in activities. Went out to meet friends.
Brenda	95 years old	2 years	Widow. Close contact with daughter. Preferred to stay in own room. Did not leave the home.
Evelyn	97 years old	18 months	Widow. Visited by daughter and neighbour. Participated in activities. Occasionally went out with daughter.

Westhome 33 places Residential and nursing care			
	Age	Lived here for:	Family, participation in activities in the home and physical access to the wider community.
Ruby	99 years old	A few years	Widow. Visited by children and a friend. Participated in activities. Did not leave the home.
Doris	87 years old	4 years	Widow. Visited by son and daughter in law. Participated in activities. Did not leave the home.
Winnie	97 years old	About a year	Widow. Occasional visits from son. Participated in activities.

			Went out with organised trips from the home.
Maureen	95 years old	4 years	Unmarried. Visited by friends. No close family. Preferred to stay in own room. Went out with friends.


Greenpark 30 places residential, nursing care and dementia care			
	Age	Lived here for:	Family, participation in activities in the home and physical access to the wider community.
Elvie	94 years old	8 years	Widow. Close relationships with family. Preferred to stay in own room. Went out with daughter.
Alice	92 years old	2 years	Divorced. Visited by friends and family. Preferred not to join in with most activities but visited other residents and spent time in the communal areas. Went out (supported by friends).
Marion	97 years old	8 years	Widow. Son in law arranged for her sister to visit. Visited by friends. Participated in activities. Occasionally went out from the home.
Nancy	92 years old	3 years	Widow. Visited by niece and friends. Participated in activities. Did not go out from the home.

Northway 36 places Residential and nursing care			
	Age	Lived here for:	Family, participation in activities in the home and physical access to the wider community.
Barbara	87 years old	2 years	Married (husband in a different care home). Visited by family and friends. Participated in activities selectively. Went out from the home.
Anne	98 years old	2 years	Widow. Visited by family. Participated in activities. Did not go out.
Flo	94 years old	5 ½ years	Widow.

			<p>Visited by family. Participated in activities selectively (but mostly in own room). Went out from the home.</p>
Walter	94 years old	10 months	<p>Widower. No close family. Participated in activities selectively. Frequently went out from the home.</p>

Appendix B: Information sheets and consent forms

Information and Consent for Care Home Managers

	<p>My name is Helen Hindle and I am working towards a PhD in Contextual Theology through Luther King House College, a partner college with Manchester University. The PhD involves carrying out research.</p> <p>My research title is:</p> <p>"A theological reflection on community networks from the perspective of older people living in care homes"</p>
<p>I would like to invite your care home to take part in the study.</p> <p>The research will focus on asking older people about their community networks in the past and the present, as well as their aspirations for the future.</p> <p>If your care home takes part in the study, I will visit your care home one day a week for 6 months. During this time I will carry out volunteer role as agreed with yourself, carry out observations and I will aim to interview 3-4 older people living in the home. After gaining consent, I will carry out up to 2 interviews with each person. They will decide where and when to be interviewed, who they would like to be present for the interview as well as what information they would like to be shared with you (the care home manager) at the end of the process.</p> <p>The research process aims to be an empowering and positive experience for the older people who participate. The research also aims to identify good practice in care homes. The research will also provide information that will be useful for care home managers in terms of understanding community links from the perspective of older people.</p> <p>I will interview you as care home manager at the beginning and at the end of the process. The purpose of this is to gather background information about how community networks are encouraged within your care home. At the end of the research process we will discuss the research findings and your thoughts about practical implications for the future.</p> <p>All the data collected in the research will be anonymised to protect the identity of the people taking part. The people involved and the care homes will be given pseudonyms when the research is written up.</p>	
<p>I can be contacted at helen.hindle@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk Helen Hindle</p>	
<p>If you have any concerns about the research, please contact Revd. Dr. Clare McBeath at clare.mcbeath@northern.org.uk</p>	

Consent

I have the authority to allow this research to be carried out in this care home.	YES/NO
Is there anybody else who I need to seek permission from (e.g. care home owner)?	YES/NO
I have read the information about the research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES/NO
I will support Helen Hindle to disseminate information about the research with residents, family and staff as appropriate prior to carrying out the research.	YES/NO
I understand that Helen Hindle will carry out participant observation in the care home.	YES/NO
I will identify residents who have capacity to consent to participate in interviews.	YES/NO
I will support Helen Hindle to carry out the interviews and at mutually convenient times, will release staff to be present for the interview if this is requested by the resident.	YES/NO
I agree to support the research process.	YES/NO
The care home has emotional support systems in place which older people can access if required.	YES/NO
I understand that I will be interviewed during the fieldwork process.	YES/NO
I agree to for this interview to be taped and transcribed. I understand that the tape and transcript will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected electronic document until the PhD is awarded. I understand that this will be destroyed after the PhD has been awarded.	YES/NO
I consent to this information to be used within the PhD	YES/NO
I consent for a copy of the final PhD to be made available to the public through Luther King House library and Manchester University.	YES/NO
I consent for aspects of the research to be presented verbally and in written form including journals and books.	YES/NO
I understand that I can withdraw consent for any of these aspects and can withdraw from the research at any time.	YES/NO









Signed _____

Printed Name _____ Date _____

Designation _____

Name of Care Home _____

Participant Consent and Research Design Form

	Have you read the information sheet or had it explained to you?	YES NO
	Have you had time to ask questions and talk about the study?	YES NO
	Are you happy with the answers you have been given?	YES NO Not applicable
	Do you understand that it is your choice to take part in the study?	YES NO
	Where would you like to meet?	
	Do you want anyone else to be here when we meet?	YES NO
	At the end of the study would you also like to talk with other people who are taking part in the study?	YES NO
	Do you understand that I will use tape recording as part of the study? Do you understand that people from Luther King House Theological College and Manchester University may read the typed up conversation?	YES NO
	Do you understand that I will store this data securely? When the study is completed, the data will be destroyed.	YES NO
	Do you understand that the study will be written up and made public ally available? Parts of the study may be published in journals or books.	YES NO
	Do you understand that you can stop at any time? (you do not need to say why you want to stop)	YES NO
	Are you happy to take part in the study?	YES NO

Name _____

Signature _____ Date ____

I am assured that the person named above has given informed consent to take part in this study.

Name _____

Signature _____ **Date** ____

Images all in the public domain:

Clipboard (Pixabay)

Smiley face (Shemesh)

Person (Microsoft® Word for Mac, 2016b)

People (Microsoft® Word for Mac, 2016a)

Tape recorder(Evan-Amos, 2010)

Book (gingercoons)

Stop sign (Schoolfreeware, 2012)

Participant Consent and Research Design Form

Have you read the information sheet or had it explained to you?	YES NO
Have you had time to ask questions and talk about the study?	YES NO
Are you happy with the answers you have been given?	YES NO Not applicable
Do you understand that it is your choice to take part in the study?	YES NO
Where would you like to meet?	
Do you want anyone else to be here when we meet?	YES NO
Do you understand that I will use tape recording as part of the study?	YES NO
Do you understand that people from Luther King House Theological College and Manchester University may read the typed up conversation?	
Do you understand that the study will be written up and may be published in journals or books?	YES NO
Do you understand that you can stop at any time? (you do not need to say why you want to stop)	YES NO
Are you happy to take part in the study?	YES NO

Name _____








Signature _____ Date ____

I am assured that the person named above has given informed consent to take part in this study.

Name _____

Signature _____ Date ____

Participant Information Sheet

	<p>I'm Helen Hindle. I am carrying out a study to find out about community for people living in residential care homes.</p>
	<p>I would like to find out about people and places and interests that are important to you.</p>
	<p>I would like to invite you to take part in the study.</p> <p>If you agree to take part:</p>
	<p>I will come and talk to you about people, places and interests that are important to you now. I will also talk to you about the past.</p>
	<p>You can decide where we meet.</p> <p>You can decide whether you would like to meet me on your own or with another person.</p> <p>You can decide whether you would like to also meet in a group with other people also taking part in the study.</p>
	<p>I will record our conversation on a tape recorder. The conversation will be typed up later. People from Luther King House Theological College and Manchester University may read the typed up conversation.</p>
	<p>I will use the information anonymously to write about community networks. The final study will be available to the public through Luther King House Theological College and Manchester University. Parts of the study might also be published in journals or books.</p>
	<p>I will also share information with the care home manager. You can decide what information you would like to be provided to the care home manager at the end of the study.</p>
	<p>I will store all the information data collected for the study securely. When the study is completed, the data will be destroyed.</p>
	<p>If you change your mind at any time you can tell me to stop.</p>

You can contact me at helen.hindle@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the research, please contact Revd. Dr. Clare McBeath at clare.mcbeath@northern.org.uk

Helen Hindle

Images all in the public domain:

World (publicdomainvectors.org, 2015)

People Talking (Palomaironique, 2012)

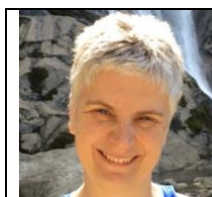
People (Microsoft® Word for Mac, 2016a)

Cassette recorder (Evan-Amos, 2010)

Book (gingercoons)

Stop sign (Schoolfreeware, 2012)

Participant Information Sheet



I'm Helen Hindle. I am carrying out a study to find out about community for people living in residential care homes.

I would like to find out about people and places and interests that are important to you.

I would like to invite you to take part in the study.

If you agree to take part:

- I will come and talk to you about people, places and interests that are important to you now. I will also talk to you about the past.
- You can decide where we meet.
- You can decide whether you would like to meet me on your own or with another person.
- You can decide whether you would like to also meet in a group with other people also taking part in the study.
- I will record our conversation on a tape recorder. The conversation will be typed up later. People from Luther King House Theological College and Manchester University may read the typed up conversation.
- I will use the information anonymously to write about community networks.
- This might be published in journals or books.
- I will also share information with the care home manager. You can decide what information you would like to be provided to the care home manager at the end of the study.

If you change your mind at any time you can tell me to stop.

You can contact me at helen.hindle@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the research, please contact Revd. Dr. Clare McBeath at clare.mcbeath@northern.org.uk

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