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Animating Faith Development: The Experience of Student Affairs Professionals at U.S. Catholic
Colleges & Universities

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Social Work
West Chester University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Education

By

Sarah W. Williamson

May 2023

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the good company in our lives, journeying with us as we navigate and make meaning in this ever-changing world.

To my good company, thank you for walking with me on my journey to reach this moment. To Andy, thank you for being my biggest supporter, reconnecting me to my faith many years ago, for the sacrifices you made for me to accomplish this dream during a global pandemic, and for moving what feels like 800 times to help me reach this point. To Teri, thank you for reinforcing throughout the many stages of my life, but most especially during my childhood, that I had the tenacity and ability to be anything I wanted, including a professional, partner, and mother. To Lora, thank you for introducing me to student affairs, what feels like a lifetime ago, and the tremendous impact we can help cultivate in the lives of others. To LaShonda, thank you for introducing me to the world of faith scholarship and collaborating on my first piece of research, which laid the foundation for this study. Finally, to Rebecca, thank you for believing in me, for fostering a love for Catholic higher education, and for your mentorship to me as a mother, professional, and scholar. You all have truly been my good company throughout this journey and have profoundly changed my life for the better.

Finally, to Micayla and Mason, may your lives be filled with faith, joy, and the knowledge of your limitless potential to contribute to the greater good in this world. May you find your own good company to journey with together through this beautiful, complicated world.

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Abstract

Faith is a form of social identity encompassing an individual's religious and spiritual beliefs that aid them in making meaning in their lives (Fowler, 1981; Patton et al., 2016). While many secular institutions have reduced or removed learning about faith, Catholic higher education is an environment that integrates faith development into its work with students (Clark, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Estanek, 2008). However, limited research exists on faith development in practice by early to mid-career student affairs professionals within Catholic higher education (James & Estanek, 2012). This qualitative study explored student affairs professionals' personal faith development experiences and their influence on understanding college student faith development. Nine student affairs participants with three to nine years of professional experience at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities were interviewed. Participants engaged in a semi-structured interview, provided a photo and narrative of a faith artifact related to an item of significance in their faith development, and shared reflections about faith in their work through video recordings in faith vignettes. Three themes emerged from the professionals as shared characteristics of faith development: disconnect, meaning-making, and a sense of belonging. In addition, three themes emerged related to how these personal experiences influence their understanding of college student faith development: faith is complex, faith development is a journey, and faith is not developed alone. This study contributes to understanding how student affairs professionals support student faith development within the context of U.S. Catholic colleges and universities and provide recommendations for practice and future research.

Keywords: faith development, student affairs, Catholic higher education, early to mid-career, qualitative

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Chapter 1

Faith is integral to human life. It is the deepest yearning of the human soul to know its origin and purpose (Parks, 2000). The concept of faith is often grouped with other related concepts of religion and spirituality. Conflation between these concepts exists in research and individuals' everyday conversations. Often, these terms are used interchangeably, though I treat them as distinct herein. *Spirituality* is a recent concept grounded in the idea that individuals are connected to all things and, through those connections, make meaning toward their greater purpose (Triana et al., 2020; Astin et al., 2012). Alternatively, *religion* is the adherence to doctrine shared amongst a group tied to a specific deity (Love, 2001). Some examples of religion within the United States include Judaism, Catholicism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.

In this work, I use “faith” as a broader, more encompassing sense of belief. The concept of *faith* moves beyond the static beliefs of a specific religion and instead is a combination of beliefs and worldviews developed throughout one's life to understand the world (Fowler, 1996). It encompasses components of religion, spirituality, and personal experiences unique to an individual (Fowler, 1981). Faith is a tool central to supporting individual meaning-making by exploring patterns, connections, and significance experienced in the world. It allows for meaning-making in lived experiences, serves as a guiding principle in decision-making, and aids individuals in building connections in the complex world (Fowler, 1981). The meaning-making guided by personal faith orients our views of the world and aids individuals in developing a sense of self (Zajonc, 2010). The variations of how faith is lived by different people, including unique experiences with the concepts and intricacies of religion and spirituality situated within it, lead to frequent debate about the true shape, authenticity, usefulness, and purpose of faith in the world.

When it comes to the realm of postsecondary education in the U.S., faith is intimately intertwined with its origins and history (Geiger, 2019). The nine original colonial colleges were established with Protestant Christian beliefs intertwined throughout their mission and curricula (Rockenbach, 2011). The first higher education institution in the U.S., Harvard University, was chartered in 1636 by Puritans fleeing religious persecution (Geiger, 2019). Another early institution in the U.S., William & Mary, was linked to the Church of England throughout the mid-1700s (Geiger, 2019).

These early higher education institutions in the U.S. were established to train missionaries. Their early curricula focused on Christian moral philosophy and the character development of their students (Rockenbach, 2011). Beginning in the mid-18th century and coupled with the return of students studying in Europe, the religious values present during the establishment of the institutions diminished, leading to a curriculum shift focusing on more modern science, math, and philosophy (Rockenbach, 2011; Geiger, 2019).

Around the same time the original higher education institutions in the U.S. began shifting away from their religious origins, Catholic higher education began to grow exponentially, with 42 schools established to train future clergy before 1850 (Garrett, 2006). Some original institutions included Villanova, Notre Dame, and Xavier (OH) (Garrett, 2006). During the late 19th century, Catholic higher education evolved, moving the training of clergy to separate seminaries, and introduced curricula tied to secular interests like the original colonial colleges (Gleason, 1997). However, though many Catholic institutions made distinctions between their seminaries and other curricula, Catholic identity remained integrated throughout the institutions, consistent with their valuation of faith and religion (Gleason, 1997).

The Catholic intellectual tradition is the guiding philosophy of Catholic education that encourages individuals to pursue the whole truth, both discovered through human expression and revealed through the supernatural (Janosik, 1999). The Catholic intellectual tradition encourages individuals to consider not only what is taught academically but also engages them in self-reflection and exploration of questions around the purpose of life (ACCU, 2017). One element within the Catholic intellectual tradition is the interconnectedness between faith and reason. This tradition asserts that faith is a form of knowledge and is dependent on personal meaning-making. Through dialogues, individuals can identify congruence between faith and reason, influencing their view of the world. Unlike most other post-secondary institutions today, faith continues to be an area of emphasis in Catholic higher education connecting back to Catholic identity and the education of the whole person (ACCU, 2022). Catholic higher education is uniquely situated as an environment to support students in developing their faith based on their valuing of it within the Catholic intellectual tradition. As such, I am focusing this study on the Catholic higher education setting as it continues to emphasize, encourage, and value faith development, unlike other secular U.S. higher education institutions.

For individuals developing faith, the emerging adulthood period when students are enrolled at higher education institutions is a critical period for development. During this period, students are often experiencing increased independence, including exploring identities such as faith. These identities are optimally supported in a mentoring environment such as those within colleges or universities (Parks, 2000). Faith practices can aid an individual in navigating ambiguity by creating meaning tied to life's purpose (Boss, 2007). Faith also serves as a tool for developing resiliency in diverse communities (Abi-Hashem, 2011; Ögtem-Young, 2018). Within the concept of faith, divine support, maintaining purpose, and expressing gratitude are problem-

solving tools that support resiliency development and human flourishing (Manning et al., 2019). Boss (2007) found that individuals with mature faith beliefs were more resilient in the presence of ambiguity within their lives. Recognizing that faith development is incredibly important during emerging adulthood, higher education administrators need to consider who is responsible for supporting the faith development of college students.

This study examines the role of Catholic college and university student affairs professionals in integrating the faith development component of Catholic identity for students in their work. In higher education, student affairs professionals often engage with students outside the classroom, creating spaces for mentorship. The origin of student affairs professionals was defined as supporting the education of the whole student with specific attention to their physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth (American Council on Education, 1937).

More recent discussions identify student affairs professionals as educators responsible for cultivating student development and learning outside of the classroom setting that completes the academic mission of a postsecondary institution (NASPA, 2010). These professionals often work in areas such as identity centers, residence life, campus recreation, student activities, and student conduct, where they support students in their personal growth as well as learning outside of the classroom setting. While student affairs professionals at non-religiously affiliated institutions have shifted away from supporting spiritual development (Kaplan & Lee, 2009), student affairs professionals in Catholic higher education continue to provide support for faith and spiritual development within their work (ACCU, 2017).

Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities are expected to infuse Catholic identity and student development into their work (Estanek, 1998). They do this by discussing values and decision-making, inviting students to learn more about religious traditions,

and empowering them to learn and respect individuals. The Catholic identity of these institutions is further strengthened through the outside-of-the-classroom experiences (King, 2014). This may include experiences in a community, such as living in a residence hall, participating in service learning, or engaging with university faculty and staff outside the classroom. For example, student conduct professionals may engage students in dialogue around ethical decision-making, the impact on the community, and their responsibility for the respect and dignity of all persons within the Catholic intellectual tradition. Alternatively, a student activities professional may animate Catholic identity through acts of hospitality when advising student organizations on campus, including encouraging them to welcome all community members even when disagreements occur.

While student affairs professionals are critical in supporting the faith development of students, little is known about how they come to learn about this form of identity development (Love, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Speck, 2005; Rogers & Love, 2007; Rockenbach, 2011). Conversations and curricula around faith, religion, and spirituality have rapidly declined at secular institutions (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). These tend to house graduate degree programs where many student affairs professionals are trained, including those who may later work at Catholic colleges and universities. Currently, there are less than 20 Catholic higher education institutions that offer student affairs master's degrees of the 117 institutions in ACPA's directory (ACPA, 2023). In other words, fewer student affairs professionals are provided formal learning opportunities about how faith is developed (Tisdell, 2003). While a lack of training regarding faith development may have less of an impact on the work of student affairs professionals at secular institutions, student affairs professionals transitioning to work at a Catholic institution may be ill-equipped to support the faith development of students in their role at these institutions

(Estanek et al., 2011; Schaller & Boyle, 2006) This leads to a gap where trained student affairs professionals coming out of master's preparation programs quite likely do not understand how to integrate faith development for the students that they support (Clark, 2001; Tisdell, 2003; Astin & Oseguera, 2004).

Much of the research within Catholic higher education to date focuses on the learning and integration of Catholic identity by senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) such as vice presidents rather than those early or in the middle of their career (Schaller & Boyle, 2006; James & Estanek, 2012). On the other hand, often within student affairs, early and mid-career student affairs professionals are the individuals who most closely work with students (Schaller & Boyle, 2006; James & Estanek, 2012). These professionals frequently develop and facilitate programming outside the classroom and provide most of the direct student support. Within Catholic higher education institutions, early and mid-career student affairs professionals support students in grappling with life's challenges and social issues, including supporting faith development (Estanek, 2008). As such, Catholic institutions expect that student affairs professionals, in conjunction with campus ministry staff, support and integrate tools for faith development within their work (ACCU, 2022).

This study explores how early and mid-career student affairs professionals support the faith development of the students whom they serve based on how student affairs professionals have developed an understanding of faith. This is important as limited research exists around what faith development looks like in practice by early and mid-career student affairs professionals. In addition, it adds to the understanding of how professionals learn about faith through their unique experiences, which in many cases may not have included elements of curricula commonly present for other forms of identity. Student affairs professionals and

students are navigating greater challenges within a complex world. Catholic higher education institutions are uniquely situated to support students in developing faith. As such, students developing greater faith maturity may experience greater meaning-making, purpose development, and enhanced decision-making, aiding them in navigating the complex world throughout their life span. This study looks to add to the understanding of how student affairs professionals support students leading to benefits from greater faith maturity as well as highlight how they come to learn about faith development within the context of Catholic higher education.

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study aims to identify and explore how the personal faith development experiences of early and mid-career student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities influence their ability to support college student development related to faith in their work. Student affairs professionals influence faith development by modeling faith practices and creating discussion spaces to support identity exploration and learning about others. Whitney and Laboe (2014) highlighted that it is the responsibility of all members of the university community at Catholic colleges and universities, regardless of their beliefs, to integrate and ensure that Catholic identity is lived out in their work. Early to mid-career student affairs professionals often serve in roles that develop programs to support co-curricular learning or engage in student support roles such as serving in an emergency response capacity within a residence life team. The interactions with students grounded within these roles are ripe with opportunities to support student development and animate the faith component of Catholic identity at their institutions.

While many secular institutions have reduced or removed curricula or informal learning around faith development, Catholic higher education is an environment that integrates faith development into its identity and institutional missions (Clark, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004;

Rogers & Love, 2007; Estanek, 2008; ACCU, 2022). This environment further supports the holistic development of college students, including their faith and spiritual practices that may not be present at secular institutions. As such, student affairs professionals working at Catholic colleges and universities are expected to support college student faith development. However, limited research exists regarding how professionals learn about faith to integrate it into their work. Some institutions have developed mission orientation programs to address educational gaps and provide skill development to support learning around Catholic identity (Whitney & Laboe, 2014). However, these programs vary by institution and do not always include formal learning about faith development. Instead, they highlight the Catholic identity of the institution, the history of founding orders, and the institutional values or charisms (Schaller & Boyle, 2006).

This study seeks to understand how early and mid-career student affairs professionals learn about faith through their unique experiences and then explores how their personal experiences may support student development and learning at their Catholic institutions. Since faith is considered a more unique and personal form of identity, this study's use of qualitative inquiry exploring the lived experiences of professionals provides the opportunity to identify characteristics unique to the student affairs professional. The information garnered by the study will add to the knowledge around how student affairs professionals, especially those in early and mid-points of their career, support the Catholic identity of their institution and the faith development of students in a complex world.

Rationale for Study

Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities are expected to integrate and apply student development theory and Catholic identity within the work (Estanek, 1998). Three Catholic Higher Education professional organizations created *The Principles of*

Good Practice in Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (The Principles) to support student affairs practitioners in developing a shared understanding of Catholic identity and its application in their work (James & Estanek, 2012). One component of Catholic identity is the faith development of students, including those who may hold Catholic and other religious identities and those who may be nonreligious (ACCU, 2022). During the recent revision process of *The Principles*, professionals working on the project found that student affairs professionals self-reported low levels of responsibility and understanding in applying faith and spirituality in their work (R. Sawyer, personal communication, February 24, 2021; S. Estanek, personal communication, May 4, 2022). Rogers and Love (2007) highlighted similar findings by professionals at secular institutions, with faculty and staff expressing reluctance to discuss faith and spirituality with students. While student affairs professionals may articulate reluctance or a lack of responsibility for this component of Catholic identity, according to *The Principles*, it continues to be their responsibility shared with campus ministry staff (ACCU, 2022).

Until this point, research has focused on the understanding and application of Catholic identity in the work only of SSAOs and presidents (James & Estanek, 2012). However, early and mid-career student affairs professionals often work the closest with students in programming, mentorship, and student support roles. This study seeks to add to the understanding of how these student affairs professionals support faith development of college students by exploring how they come to learn and develop their faith and then apply their understanding within the context of their work at Catholic higher education institutions. As faith development plays an integral role in how students find their purpose and make meaning in the world, it is important to explore how the unique ways student affairs professionals learn about faith, including the absence of it, influence their ability to support its development in students.

Problem statement

To date, there has been minimal research regarding how early and mid-career student affairs professionals understand, experience, and animate Catholic identity in their work, especially the components of faith and spirituality. In fact, during the recent revision process of *The Principles*, student affairs professionals self-reported low levels of responsibility and understanding of faith and its application within student affairs functional areas (R. Sawyer, personal communication, February 24, 2021; S. Estanek, personal communication, May 4, 2022). In addition, research in the secular environment mirrors a reluctance and comfortability in discussing faith and spirituality with students (Speck, 2005; Rogers & Love, 2007). This study seeks to address this problem by exploring how affairs professionals learn about faith based on their personal experiences and then utilize their understanding of faith to support student development and learning.

While some institutions within Catholic higher education have implemented mission orientation programs to aid faculty and staff in learning more about Catholic identity, education around faith development remains limited for many professionals (Whitney & Laboe, 2014). Therefore, this study engages early and mid-career student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. to reflect on their faith development and how it influences their role in supporting student development. Since faith and spiritual beliefs are innately personal, qualitative inquiry with the constructivist paradigm lends itself to this research highlighting the lived experiences of student affairs professionals constructed throughout their lifespan in learning, developing, and supporting faith development in their work (Miller & Thorsen, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Research Questions

Faith and spirituality are essential forms of social identity that connect individuals to finding purpose in their lives, making meaning of relationships and experiences, and may serve as a resiliency tool in navigating adversity (Tisdell, 2003; Love, 2001; Reymann et al., 2015). In the emerging adulthood period, individuals begin taking responsibility for themselves, including their faith (Parks, 1986; Patton et al., 2016). Within the collegiate setting, student affairs professionals actively support the social identity development of college students, including serving as mentors and developing supportive environments (Patton et al., 2016; Parks, 2000). This study explores two questions centered around how the personal faith experiences of early and mid-career student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities influence their understanding and work in supporting student development, including faith.

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. What are the characteristics of the personal faith development journeys for early and mid-career student affairs professionals working at Catholic colleges and universities in the United States?
2. In what ways do the personal experiences and insights of these student affairs professionals influence their understanding of contemporary college student faith development and their work in supporting student learning and development?

The study's first research question seeks to identify the characteristics of the personal faith development journeys for early and mid-career student affairs professionals working at Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. As helping professionals, student affairs professionals must be self-aware of their faith development to be comfortable in supporting students in their development (Love, 2001; Rockenbach, 2011). More recently, formal learning around faith has faded away from secular higher education institutions, where many student

affairs professionals are educated and trained (Clark, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Tisdell, 2003). Student affairs professionals socialized at these secular institutions are often identified as being unprepared to work at Catholic colleges and universities because of an absence of understanding of Catholic identity and faith development (Estanek et al., 2011). Student affairs professionals' personal experience with faith may serve as a foundation for how they learn and support it within their work if they do not have opportunities to learn about it elsewhere.

The second research question looks at how personal experiences and insights of early and mid-career student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities influence their understanding of college student development, especially concerning faith development. This question seeks to build on the understanding of how student affairs professionals personally learn about faith and its influence on their ability to support it within their role working with college students. Faith underlies everyday life and impacts academic, social, and emotional well-being (Bryant & Astin, 2008). This is important to note for both student affairs professionals as well as the experiences of students. Within Catholic higher education, student affairs professionals support students in wrestling with problems and social issues that support faith development (Estanek, 2008). Environments such as those with support from student affairs professionals can aid students in growing in their faith and positively impacting their well-being (Reymann et al., 2015). This research question connects to the first in exploring the connection between the professional's faith experiences and the ways, if any, it contributes to their understanding of supporting emerging adults in developing faith.

Significance of Study

Though there is a declining presence of curricula and conversations around faith in many institutions, college students are increasingly expressing interest and commitment to faith. In

fact, students have reported faith as being a central component of their worldview. A 2014 study found that 62% of students reported that their faith life was important to them (Volpe, 2014). Furthermore, individuals who develop a more robust faith maturity tend to have a greater sense of purpose in their life serving as a foundation for them when navigating adversity (Abi-Hashem, 2011; Reymann et al., 2015). While many secular institutions continue to avoid curricula and conversations around faith, Catholic higher education institutions are tasked to emphasize faith within their communities (Love, 2001; Estanek, 2008). This study explores the faith development of college students within Catholic higher education institutions where faith and spirituality are still emphasized as articulated in the recent best practice highlighted within *The Principles*.

One of the most frequently referenced theorists on faith, Sharon Dolaz Parks, indicates that the emerging adulthood period during college is a critical time for faith development based on the introduction of independence for many students, mentoring relationships, and the community of learners present. Environments where students can grow in their faith positively impact a student's resiliency, well-being, and ability to thrive in diverse environments (Reyman et al., 2015; Manning et al., 2019). Over the last 20 years, higher education scholars such as Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm have emphasized the need to focus more on "students' 'inner' development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding" (Dalton et al., 2006, p. viii). Student affairs professionals are uniquely situated to support faith development based upon their responsibility for supporting and educating the whole student within higher education institutions (Rockenbach, 2011). However, there continues to be minimal research related to the ways in which supporting faith development by student affairs professionals exist in practice. This study will address this limitation by

exploring the ways student affairs professionals within their various functional areas support faith development in their work.

Within Catholic higher education, faith continues to be an area of emphasis, unlike in other secular postsecondary institutions. Unfortunately, most student affairs professionals working at Catholic colleges and universities tend to be trained at secular institutions where faith is removed from curricula, often making these individuals ill-equipped to support it within a Catholic institution (Clark, 2001; Love, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Estanek, 2008). Catholic higher education has responded to this tension with the development of Catholic student affairs professional organizations and institutional mission orientation programs to better understand Catholic identity within their work (Whitney & Laboe, 2014; Estanek, 2008). However, research regarding faith development and Catholic identity often focuses on SSAOs rather than individuals such as early and mid-career professionals working more closely with students. Little is known about how early and mid-career student affairs professionals learn about the faith development component of Catholic identity. In fact, during the recent revisions of *The Principles*, student affairs professionals reported that they felt faith development was the responsibility of campus ministry members rather than their own (R. Sawyer, personal communication, February 24, 2021; S. Estanek, personal communication, May 4, 2022). This may further highlight the learning gap present around student affairs professionals and the faith component of Catholic identity (Estanek, 2002; King, 2014; King & Herr, 2015).

Positionality

Early in my professional career, I had the opportunity to transition into a leadership role at a Catholic higher education institution. Prior to this position, both my education and professional experience were situated solely at public or non-religiously affiliated institutions. At

the time, I felt my transition to Catholic higher education would be easy as I was raised and identified as Catholic. However, my experience was far more difficult as I learned there was more to the Catholic intellectual tradition than what I learned in my previous religious education. Through a series of experiences within Catholic higher education, including mentorship from my first supervisor and colleagues, participation in mission orientation programs, attendance at Catholic student affairs conferences, and completion of a Catholic Social Doctrine certificate program, I began to develop my own understanding of how to infuse Catholic mission within my work as a student affairs professional. However, it took more than five years, with the support from many individuals, to be at a place where I felt confident in my understanding of these elements of Catholic identity. However, within my roles in Catholic higher education, the expectation was always there that I incorporated Catholic identity into my work even when there was a gap in my understanding of how to do so.

While I can reflect now on the ways I learned about Catholic identity, I remain curious about understanding how I came to understand and support the faith development when working at a Catholic university. Recently, I have connected with former students from my time in Catholic higher education. In one conversation, a former student shared how influential student affairs professionals, including myself, were in their own faith development. They mentioned how the conversations over coffee or passing by in the hallway supported them in navigating a period of spiritual struggle. They felt it strengthened their faith beliefs and was a major reason they felt they navigated several personal challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, as a professional, I still find myself wrestling with identifying what exactly in those moments I did to support this student and their faith development. As a professional who completed a graduate preparation program at non-religious institutions, there was never a time when faith was

discussed in my own curriculum. I had no explicit education around supporting faith development, even within my learning of Catholic identity. Yet, here is a student articulating that they felt supported in their faith development by me.

As the researcher for this study, I am intricately connected to the topic. My own experience, in many ways, mirrors that of other student affairs professionals in research transitioning into this environment and learning about Catholic identity. However, much of the research is situated around SSAOs and university leadership, not early and mid-career professionals such as myself at the time. My personal experiences uniquely situate me close to the research topic as I have navigated transitioning and working in early and mid-career student affairs roles at Catholic colleges and universities. I have also participated in a variety of learning opportunities that addressed my own learning gaps. While I am continuing to learn about the ways faith development is supported, it is only in hindsight that I can identify how I integrated faith into my work as an early and mid-career student affairs professional. As such, my personal experiences may support me in recognizing some of the ways professionals learn about and support faith in their work with students.

Rationale for Methods

In this work, I use qualitative methods to identify and understand the characteristics of the personal faith development of student affairs professionals and the influence of those experiences on supporting student development within their work. Based on the innately personal experiences that influence faith development, qualitative research is the preferred methodology for this field of research (Miller & Thorsen, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research is grounded in human experience and explores how individuals bring meaning to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study seeks to add to the

understanding of how the personal experiences in developing faith for student affairs professionals over their life span influence their work supporting faith development within the Catholic higher education environment.

To date, most research on the integration of Catholic identity and student development is based on a limited number of case studies at institutions or focused on the experiences of SSAOs (e.g., Bryant et al., 2003; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001). This study seeks to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals at various institutions, including different founding orders throughout the U.S., to further expand their understanding of the learning and integration of the faith component of Catholic identity by student affairs professionals. Within the qualitative design, a constructivist orientation is proposed highlighting that the experiences which form meaning for the student affairs professionals are socially constructed based on their relationships and the environments in which they occur (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A study of this nature will provide a greater understanding of how student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities construct an understanding of faith and the influence their learning has on their ability to support college student development within their roles and responsibility of supporting Catholic identity.

Summary

This dissertation seeks to identify and add to the understanding of how early and mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities learn about faith and how their personal experiences may influence how they approach college student development. The next chapter presents a literature review, starting with a focus on existing research regarding Catholic identity, faith development, and student affairs professionals' role in supporting college student development. The second half of Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical

framework, including the application of two frequently referenced faith development theories by James Fowler and Sandra Dolaz Parks that are used for this study.

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Chapter 2

This chapter comprises two sections: A literature review and the theoretical framework for the study. The literature review can be subdivided into three portions: (1) exploration and definition of the concept of faith, (2) faith and Catholic higher education, and (3) how student affairs professionals learn about faith development. Within the theoretical framework, two prominent theories of faith development, James Fowlers' (1981) Faith Development Theory and Sharon Dolaz Parks' (2000) Faith Development Theory, are discussed in combination with the philosophies that define what it means to be a Catholic higher education institution. The chapter concludes with an illustration of the theoretical framework used in this study and a summary of the chapter.

Defining Faith

This section of the literature review explores and defines the concept of faith. It is composed of three parts looking at the definition of faith and the way in which it is developed. First, the concepts of faith, religion, and spirituality are defined as distinct terms in the initial part of this section. I then discuss the importance of faith. Thereafter, the faith development process and the importance of reconciling spiritual tensions are highlighted. Finally, this first section of the literature review concludes by exploring the importance of the emerging adulthood period and its connection to the higher education environment.

Faith, Spirituality, and Religion

Faith, spirituality, and religion are present in everyday life and impact an individual's well-being (Parks, 2000; Bryant et al., 2003; Reymann et al., 2015). However, research often conflates faith, religion, and spirituality as one form of identity though they are distinct (Fowler, 1981; Love, 2001; Astin et al., 2012). As such, individuals often struggle to articulate the

differences between the concepts of faith, spirituality, and religion (Craft & Rockenbach, 2011). It is important to note the definitions, variations, and similarities between these and their influence on an individual's personal or collective identity (Patton et al., 2016) because they are distinct albeit related concepts.

Religion is the adherence to a specific doctrine or organization among a group (Miller & Thorsen, 2003). This is a form of collective identity as it is a membership inclusive of shared beliefs by a community (Côté, 1996). For individuals, religion can be immensely personal and have some variation in the ways it is present in their lives. However, at the foundation of religion is a doctrine often connected to divine figures, scripture, and rituals that are shared amongst a specific community (Rockenbach, 2011). For example, within Catholicism, Catholics believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, where his teachings are articulated in the New Testament of the *Bible*, and Catholics practice their faith through rituals such as Sunday mass and saying prayers with a rosary.

Faith and spirituality, on the other hand, can be conceived of as forms of personal identity. Although collective identities may influence them, they are ultimately unique to the individual (Patton et al., 2016). *Spirituality* is separate from faith constructs and is the understanding that one is connected to all things that aid in meaning-making (Triana et al., 2020). For individuals who may not identify with a religion, spirituality may serve to understand the intersections between lived experiences and the mystery and purpose of life. A mature sense of spirituality is ultimately tied to the notion that individuals live authentically with congruence between their inner and outer lives (Palmer, 1998).

One of the most frequently cited theorists on faith development, James Fowler (1981), identifies *faith* as the integration of beliefs, religion, and worldviews in a way that aids

individuals in meaning-making in their life. Fowler (1981) expanded on his definition of faith to highlight that it is developed through a process of reconciling dissonance that may exist in current faith beliefs through meaning-making strategies. He emphasized that religion, biological, emotional, cognitive maturity, and associated cultures affect faith development (Fowler, 1996). Faith allows an individual to make meaning of the experiences, patterns, and connections between all aspects of life (Fowler, 1981). Faith in practice may consist of how an individual practices gratitude in their life. It can include idioms used in everyday languages and even objects, such as crosses, which serve as a reminder of the importance of one's beliefs and purpose in the world. While faith may differ in meaning and how it is lived for each person, it serves as a core component of the individual, guiding their external actions and internal dialogues to make meaning and understand their role in the world.

In comparison to religion and spirituality, faith is a term that better reflects shifts in individuals' defining their own beliefs within specific religious traditions and outside of them (Jochum et al., 2007). Faith can take on multiple forms and include different expressions through language, rituals, and practices (Parks, 2000). It also provides a greater fluidity than religion as it allows individuals to navigate the complexities of religion personally and redefine the belief set within the individual's worldview (Jochum et al., 2007). Faith is not limited to a specific religion but rather something that all human beings can have to understand their purpose in the world. It lies at the intersection of culture, spirituality, religion, and lived experiences to form a person's beliefs. While all individuals have a form of faith, there are central elements such as its connection to resiliency (Abi-Hashem, 2011; Ögtem-Young, 2018) and meaning-making (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000) that make it critically important to the human experience.

Importance of Faith

Faith is important for the holistic development of the person, is a critical part of life, and influences interactions with others (Fowler, 1981). Research indicates that faith may serve as a tool for resiliency and connect to how individuals find their purpose and make meaning in their lives (Tisdell, 2003). *Resiliency* is an individual's ability to navigate, persevere, and flourish when facing adversity (Campbell & Bauer, 2021; Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Research has indicated that faith can serve as a tool for resiliency, especially when navigating stressful or traumatic life experiences (Ögtem-Young, 2018; Campbell & Bauer, 2021). In addition, Boss (2007) asserted that faith development and resiliency both aid individuals in navigating competing ideas or ambiguity that may exist in their lives. For example, if an individual has a significant person in their life pass away, their faith helps them articulate the importance of their time together, while resiliency helps that individual move through sadness.

Faith practices can aid an individual in navigating ambiguity by creating meaning tied to life's purpose (Boss, 2007). Divine support, maintaining purpose, and expressing gratitude are problem-solving tools within faith that support human flourishing (Manning et al., 2019). Boss (2007) found that individuals with strong faith beliefs were more resilient in the presence of ambiguity within their lives. Alternatively, individuals with lower levels of purpose had more significant faith struggles (King & Herr, 2015). Boss (2007) pointed out that for some individuals, ambiguity may exist based on conflicts with faith and their other identities, thus leading to a reduction in resilience, specifically within the community and cultural contexts.

Faith development, especially during the period of emerging adulthood, is critically important as individuals navigate greater independence and define what is important in their lives. Supportive communities and mentoring environments are important for faith development and ultimately result in greater life satisfaction (Astin et al., 2012). In addition, individuals who

can strengthen their faith maturity are better able to find purpose in life (Reymann et al., 2015). However, for individuals to experience the benefits of faith, they first need to navigate a process of growth and maturity often.

Faith Development Process and Navigating Tensions

Faith development is a critical part of life that is important for the person's holistic development, often influencing how they interact with the world (Fowler, 1996). Like other forms of identity development, individuals navigate a series of experiences with their faith that, when reconciled, may support their growth (Patton et al., 2016). Experiences where an individual may face a challenge or struggle with their existing beliefs serve as critical moments that, when reconciled, lead to greater faith maturity. Mentorship and support are important elements of the faith development process that allow a person to move from stagnation to growth (Parks, 2000).

Within faith, struggles or challenges are defined as tensions or conflicts an individual may experience between their lived experience and what they hold sacred (Exline, 2014; Pargament et al., 2005). For individuals, this may mean trying to reconcile the actions of their peers with their own beliefs. This is a form of struggle for many college students during emerging adulthood, especially if they are navigating independence or autonomy for the first time (Parks, 2000; Pargament & Sweeney, 2011). However, when individuals successfully navigate faith struggles, it can lead to better self-awareness, personal development, regulation, empowerment, and maturity (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011).

Regardless of identity, faith tensions or struggles are reported by individuals of diverse ages, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status (Pargament et al., 2015). For some individuals, aspects of their faith that they struggle with may cause distress when they conflict with other aspects of cultural identity or community support system. Faith struggles may

also exist based upon other identity conflicts, such as gender and sexuality, requiring an individual to redefine forms of identity to navigate the conflict (Anderson, 1994; Sheridan, 2001). While these moments of tension may impact the individual's connection with faith, the ability to move through these periods are critical to faith development.

The ability to navigate these types of tensions and struggles is innately personal. It can often involve individuals needing to reconcile different personal and social identities and values (Wedow et al., 2017). This may mean individuals need to choose which communities they are interested in or even (re)interpret their beliefs in a way that resolves any conflicts present. During these periods of faith struggle, environments where individuals can wrestle with different beliefs are critical to moving from stagnation to reconciliation (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000; Patton et al., 2016). Individuals who can redefine their faith beliefs with these tools ultimately grow in their faith maturity, leading to greater resiliency (Wedow et al., 2017).

Emerging Adulthood

Psychosocial theorists break down periods of human development into stages defined by skill development and common developmental experiences during that period (Newman & Newman, 2015). While many theories posit a period between adolescence and adulthood called "young adulthood," Parks (2000) proposed a language change to "emerging adulthood" (p. 3). The differentiation of this proposed period is based on individuals navigating additional independence, often while in college, while also remaining dependent in many cases on parents and family members for a more extended period. Parks (2000) identifies *adulthood* as a period when an individual takes responsibility for oneself and *emerging* as a descriptor of the exploration, tentativeness, and sometimes dependent nature of college students. There are added challenges in precisely defining this developmental period as the cultural indicators such as

obtaining a driver's license, becoming eligible to vote, and reaching the legal drinking age have specific chronological age markers that may not correlate with psychosocial development related to decision-making, finding purpose, and identifying one's sense of belonging in the world.

Parks (2000) utilizes the collegiate environment, referencing the traditional college-age student who is 18-24 years old, to contextualize this period and their growth towards being responsible for their own beliefs and actions.

The emerging adulthood period is a time consumed with questions regarding purpose, vocation, and belonging (Parks, 1986). During this time, individuals often live independently for the first time allowing for greater exploration and responsibility, including with their faith beliefs, than earlier in their lives. Individuals grounded in supportive communities during this exploration period are better able to navigate decision-making in a complicated world (Parks, 2000). Mentoring relationships, often outside the traditional family unit, situated in these new environments are critical for providing guidance and support for exploring faith (Dunn et al., 2015). Individuals who are supported by mentoring relationships and environments ripe for exploration become more committed to faith matters, especially in the collegiate environment (Bryant et al., 2003).

Emerging Adulthood and Postsecondary Education. College is a crucial environment for many individuals during the emerging adulthood period. During this time, identity formation takes place as students are often away from their families for the first time. In many cases, this allows for identity exploration, especially if a student is curious about an identity uncommon in their previous environments (Kaufman, 2014). Prominent scholars on faith development, Astin et al. (2012) found that college students increasingly value their faith within the context of their personal growth and vocational development occurring while enrolled in higher education.

Nurturing environments, especially those facilitated by student affairs professionals, support students in navigating and learning decision-making. These environments provide space for students to explore their multiple forms of identity, including faith, with peers, and those individuals serving as mentors (Dunn et al., 2015). Researcher Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach (2011) explained, “mentors and peers who make space for big questions and who are comfortable with the ambiguity that is integral to spiritual questioning make ideal companions along the way” (p. 338). Student affairs professionals in functional areas such as residence life and student activities support college student development through their work in programming and student outreach often providing informal spaces for engagement in the greater community. Mentorship occurring in these spaces helps students use their imagination to connect their lived experiences to how they see themselves in the world (Parks, 2000).

Research indicates a connection between faith, developing a sense of purpose, and resiliency, that is critically important during emerging adulthood (Campbell & Bauer, 2021; Parks, 2000). Environments, where students can grow in faith, can have a positive impact on their well-being and ability to thrive (Reymann et al., 2015). Mentorship, spaces that feel safe, and community within higher education during emerging adulthood to help individuals navigate these faith struggles leading to greater faith maturity.

Faith Development in Catholic Higher Education

The next section within this literature review explores the connection of faith development to the higher education environment, specifically at Catholic colleges and universities. It includes three subsections. The first section highlights a brief history of events leading to the current understanding of Catholic identity and the Catholic intellectual tradition. The second section situates Catholic identity within the context of the Catholic higher education

environment, including exploring the role different professionals have in its integration. The final section discusses the role of student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities and their connection to Catholic identity.

History of Catholic Identity & the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Catholic colleges and universities are linked to each other by their Catholic identity. This is expressed through the Catholic intellectual tradition. The Catholic intellectual tradition is a philosophical framework that utilizes seven core principles to articulate what it means to be a Catholic institution of learning (ACCU, 2017). Elements of Catholic intellectual tradition includes pursuing the ‘whole truth’, valuing the common good, and respecting the dignity of the human person. Catholic colleges and universities are interconnected through the foundational principles within the Catholic intellectual tradition (Schaller & Boyle, 2006). Institutions may emphasize different elements of the Catholic intellectual tradition based on their institutional mission statements, values or charisms, and the influence, if applicable, of founding orders. Within a Catholic higher education institution, Catholic identity is systematically integrated into all aspects of the institution, including academics and co-curricular initiatives (Pharr, 2017). These elements make Catholic colleges and universities distinctively different from secular institutions.

Within the Catholic intellectual tradition is the concept of faith development (ACCU, 2017; ACCU, 2022). Faith development is grounded in the heart of transformational learning within Catholic higher education and connected to recognizing the influence of God in the world (Estanek, 2008). Part of faith development includes critical thinking and reflection by individuals while considering the implications of human dignity and justice in their actions and decision-making (Janosik, 1999). Catholic colleges and universities are encouraged to engage Catholic

students in reflection on these concepts through contemporary and traditional prayer opportunities as well as faith direction to aid them in strengthening and actively participating in their relationship with God. Alternatively, Catholic colleges and universities engage with non-Catholic identifying students through dialogue to develop mutual understanding around the complexities and heritage of faith traditions (Estanek & James, 2007). Pope Francis (2013) has reinforced the importance of dialoguing with individuals of different faiths in a 'culture of encounter' and points out that meaning making from it only occurs with an invitation to engage others with no purpose other than to be present and dialogue. As such, the campus community itself is an essential element within Catholic higher education and assists in creating a robust intellectual community connecting back to the mission of Catholic colleges and universities.

Mission statements were introduced into Catholic higher education in the 1970s after the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Second Vatican Council or Vatican II) in response to social issues impacting the world (Gleason, 2001). The Second Vatican Council occurred between 1962-1965 under the leadership of two different Popes, Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. The intent and outcome of the Second Vatican Council was to connect the teachings and purpose of the Church to the needs and values present in contemporary culture. In addition, Vatican II also recognized the learning which takes outside of the classroom where student affairs professionals have significant influence (Gleason, 2001). This included the importance of openness and increased participation by clerical and lay persons in the Church. The documents from Vatican II concentrated on the importance of laity (non-ordained members of the Church). These activities encouraged the engagement of all persons and shared governance with the Church (Wangard, 2019).

Vatican II empowered Catholic colleges and universities to respond to the importance of less centralized involvement of the Church and an increase in leadership roles held by laypersons instead of religious men and women (Rizzi, 2018). Lay persons were no longer seen as collaborators but equal partners in sharing the Church's mission. This change in leadership, later reaffirmed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (Latin for 'for the heart of the Church') was due to the significant decrease in vocations to the Church that continued to decline after Vatican II. With the increase in lay faithful taking on more significant leadership roles came the encouragement of further dialogues within Catholic colleges and universities around the intersection of faith and culture (Pharr, 2017). Student affairs professionals play an important role on campuses and often serve in leadership roles within the institution such as on committees, task forces, and presidential leadership teams. After Vatican II, there was a further need for Catholic higher education leadership to discuss how institutions could evolve in the modern world, focusing specifically on academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Wangard, 2019).

Vatican II set the groundwork for the declarations made shortly after that in the *Land O' Lakes Statement*. The Second Vatican Council allowed space for Catholic higher education to pursue more institutional autonomy and academic freedom while also viewing itself as a collaborator with the Church. The *Land O' Lakes Statement*, more formally known as the *Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University*, is a document created as a result of the discussions of two dozen male Catholic higher education administrators who met in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin to discuss the role institutions played in the modern world (Wangard, 2019). The statement was written in the summer of 1967 in response to the assertions made by the Second Vatican Council (Rizzi, 2017). Many of the frameworks and changes that have

permeated Catholic Higher Education over the last fifty years are directly tied to the recommendations made by the authors of this document.

Before the *Land O' Lakes Statement*, Catholic colleges and universities faced dwindling enrollments. In addition, institutions faced legal challenges regarding funding sources and the exhaustion of military education benefits after World War II. As such, institutions were confronted with the need to adjust the perception of their lack of academic excellence compared to research institutions (Gleason, 2001). Some institutions also modified how Catholic identity was incorporated on their college campuses. These changes have led to critiques of U.S. Catholic higher education for focusing more on student demand than its lived values (Rizzi, 2018).

In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, that attempted to define what it meant to be a Catholic higher education institution. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* provided general norms for Catholic colleges and universities to fulfill their mission as Catholic institutions (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000). Within *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, four distinctive characteristics essential for Catholic identity within Catholic higher education were identified: (1) Christian inspiration for individuals and the university community; (2) reflection and research on human knowledge in the light of the Catholic faith; (3) fidelity to the Christian message in conformity with the magisterium of the Church; (4) institutional commitment to the service of others (Pope John Paul II, 1990). The animation of these distinctive characteristics for student affairs professionals may include heavy engagement in service such as homeless food runs or offering mission trips during break periods. It may also include decision-making around limiting speakers or programs that may be perceived as conflicting with Catholic and Christian beliefs. In addition to the distinctive characteristics, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* also emphasized that institutions could use the assertions made in the apostolic

constitution to explore and renew their commitment to Catholic identity including through the lens of the charisms of the religious communities that established their respective Catholic colleges and universities (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The constitution asserted that institutions claiming to be Catholic were required to be affirmed by Rome, the Catholic hierarchy, or a diocesan bishop. The assertions made within *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* are also viewed as the Vatican's response to the *Land O' Lakes Statement*. As Gleason (2001) pointed out, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* reinforced cultural associations of negativity toward Catholic identity by trying to establish judicial authority over Catholic colleges and universities. Part of the more integrated involvement of the Church was viewed as a need due to the increased lay persons in leadership within Catholic higher education (Rizzi, 2017).

Since the publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Catholic higher education continues to wrestle with the notion of what it means to be a Catholic institution of learning. While some elements of authority initially proclaimed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* have subsided in the 30 years since its release, Catholic higher education continues to navigate a period of renewed focus on the purpose, integration, and impact of Catholic identity within Catholic colleges and universities (Ackerson, 2018).

Integration of Catholic Identity

The success of Catholic colleges and universities is tied to how institutional charisms and the Catholic intellectual tradition are applied within the institution (Pharr, 2017). Institutions benefit from using these concepts to define what is encouraged and supported within their communities, grounding their role in navigating these issues in a positive view (Rizzi, 2019). Student affairs professionals are essential in fostering community within Catholic colleges and universities and

integrating the values, mission, and Catholic intellectual tradition into their work as educators (Estanek & Larrey, 1998).

Mission statements and values connect institutional core beliefs to their Catholic heritage including principles of the Catholic intellectual tradition, faith, and if applicable the beliefs of an institution's founding order (Janosik, 1999). Institutions with founding orders such as the Franciscans, School Sisters of Notre Dame, or Benedictines articulate their Catholic identity and values through their charisms (Rizzi, 2019). Charisms are a founding order's purpose that provides distinctive characteristics to the decision-making, operations, and priorities of institutions sponsored by them (Pharr, 2017). Founding order charisms influence institutional mission and allow for the uniqueness and diversity within Catholic higher education and their interpretation of the Catholic intellectual tradition (Flannagan, 2010).

While the Catholic intellectual tradition is a point of unification for Catholic higher education institutions, there are more than 20 founding orders and an additional 27 institutions with other sponsoring congregations (ACCU, 2022). Founding orders are religious communities that helped establish or create a pathway for the establishment of a particular institution (ACCU, 2017). Some variations of how institutions embody the Catholic intellectual tradition vary based on their founding order's charisms or mission. In the Catholic religion, a charism is considered a gift from the third entity in the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and for founding orders may be lived out as values providing direction in their work. For example, Benedictine institutions may emphasize stewardship and hospitality while the Jesuits place emphasis on the development of the whole person within their Catholic identity (ACCU, 2017). Through these lenses of Catholic identity, higher education institutions engage students in learning in their academic coursework

as well as support students' personal development as they seek understanding of who they are and their purpose in the world.

Though there is some variation at Catholic colleges and universities due to founding order charisms or institutional mission, the Catholic intellectual tradition is the foundational principle that links these institutions' identities in Catholic higher education. The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), the Association of Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASACCU), and the Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Administrators (JASPA) sponsored the development of a mission-driven tool, *The Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities (The Principles)*, to support professionals in understanding and implementing Catholic identity in their work (James & Estanek, 2012). *The Principles* recently underwent a review and subsequent revision process for the third time. Initial feedback for two statements within *The Principles* regarding Catholic faith college students indicated a disconnect by student affairs professionals in viewing this as their role within Catholic higher education (R. Sawyer, personal communication, February 24, 2021; S. Estanek, personal communication, May 4, 2022).

In June 2022, the third edition of *The Principles* was published and shared with Catholic higher education institutions at the annual ASACCU conference. According to *The Principles*, there are nine best practices as it relates to Catholic intellectual development animated through student affairs. While one of *The Principles* explicitly identifies faith development, all but one principle encompasses components of faith development such as compassion for others and diversity of thought. *The Principles* articulate the role student affairs professionals play in supporting student faith development through their development of co-curricular initiatives where the majority of student affairs work is situated. All of the principles are grounded within

the Catholic intellectual tradition. In the recent edition of *The Principles*, the sixth principle is the one that explicitly states the shared role student affairs professionals have with campus ministers in supporting individuals interested in learning about or growing within the Catholic tradition and supporting the faith development of students with other religious and nonreligious identities. It encourages respect and dignity for the common good within the religiously pluralistic world represented in Catholic higher education environment and beyond campus (ACCU, 2022). *The Principles* serve as a tool to support student affairs professionals in reflecting and understanding their role in animating Catholic intellectual development.

Student Affairs Professionals & Catholic Identity

Shortly after *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was issued, SSAOs were called upon to further integrate Catholic identity into their work (Estanek, 1996). However, Catholic identity and institutional mission integration cannot solely originate from university leadership such as SSAOs (King, 2014). Early and mid-career student affairs professionals apply this notion through developing and executing co-curricular programs and through individual conversations with students. In these efforts, student affairs professionals can engage students in discussions outside the classroom on navigating social issues or life's challenges through the application of the Catholic tradition (Estanek, 2008).

Student affairs professionals are key contributors to the development of outside-the-classroom experiences that integrate and strengthen Catholic identity (King, 2014). Student affairs professionals are responsible for supporting learning and development outside of the classroom setting at colleges and universities. This includes supporting the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth of enrolled students at an institution (American Council on Education, 1937; NASPA, 2010). According to the seminal scholars on Catholic

identity integration within student affairs, Michael James and Sandra Estanek (2012), “Student affairs professionals do their work within the context of the university's mission, a concept that has been accepted from the earliest stages of establishing student affairs as an independent profession.” (p. 2). Within their role, student affairs professionals integrate supporting student learning and development through the lens of an institution’s Catholic identity (Estanek & Larrey, 1998).

Student affairs professionals support the faith development of students by (1) modeling authenticity, (2) creating opportunities for dialogue around faith, religion, and spirituality, (3) developing a mentoring environment, (4) connecting to students to resources, and (5) navigate the support of its development within the nuances of their institution (Rockenbach, 2011). Within colleges and universities, early and mid-career student affairs professionals work the closest with students in the outside-the-classroom experience. As such, they are often the individual’s developing programs, serving in mentoring relationships, and acting as a liaison to resources for students.

Part of the integration of Catholic identity also means utilizing the concept of community that is quintessential in Catholic intellectual tradition. Collaboration with all university community members—students, faculty, student affairs professionals, and campus ministers—is essential to supporting students in their cognitive, psychosocial, and faith development (Estanek, 2008). These communities can engage students in critical dialogues to support their development, including providing spaces to engage with mentors. Mentoring environments include creating a network of belonging, providing opportunities to encounter others, engaging in dialogues with big-enough questions, and providing opportunities for contemplativeness (Parks, 2000). For student affairs professionals, mentoring environments may include one-on-one conversations

with professionals, lounge spaces within offices where students engage authentically, or a program series where students learn and discuss social issues.

Student affairs professionals are essential in creating affirming spaces within the collegiate environment to support college student development (Elon, 2010; Wedow et al., 2016; Parks, 2000). Student affairs professionals influence faith development by modeling faith practices and creating safe spaces for discussions to support identity exploration and learning about others. Both Fowler (1996) and Parks (2000) highlight the heavy influence of peers and institutions such as schools and religious communities on faith and the need for spaces where students feel safe within them. Within the higher education environment, student affairs professionals often support students in navigating interpersonal dynamics such as roommate conflicts and the influence of peers on personal decision-making.

While some environments may support the reconciliation of conflicts with faith supporting resiliency development, professionals need greater awareness of practices that may lead to disengagement or withdrawal from a community. This is especially important if a student holds a non-dominant identity, conflicting with faith and as such negatively influencing their resiliency (Reyman et al., 2015). Student affairs professionals must note that even within a religiously affiliated institution, individuals not identifying with the same faith practice as the institution may experience more significant conflicts leading to increased religious skepticism and possible isolation within the community. Student affairs professionals also need to be aware of their personal beliefs around faith, faith's impact on their worldview, and their coping skills (Campbell & Bauer, 2021). To be authentic in the mentorship, student affairs professionals need to be aware of their own beliefs on faith. This allows for openness when working with students about where they are in their own faith journey (Rockenbach, 2011).

Training & Education in Supporting Faith Development

Many student affairs professionals choose to work at Catholic colleges and universities after completing a master's degree based on their connection to elements of Catholic identity, such as the care for the community and institutional values (Schaller & Boyle, 2006). This section of the literature review highlights the ways in which student affairs professionals may come to learn about faith development. There are three learning opportunities discussed within this section—graduate preparation programs, mission orientation programs, and Catholic student affairs professional organizations.

Graduate Preparation Programs

Graduate school student affairs and counseling programs often provide training and education for new student affairs professionals. Within these programs, new professionals often learn the profession's history, theoretical frameworks, and skills to serve as educators and support persons in a functional area of student affairs (NASPA, 2010). Catholic colleges and universities appeal to some student affairs professionals after completing their master's degree based on their connection to elements of Catholic identity such as community as well as institutional values (Schaller & Boyle, 2006). However, Estanek et al. (2011) found in their research that the socialization of professionals into student affairs at secular institutions made them ill-prepared to serve as professionals at Catholic colleges and universities because of a lack of understanding of Catholic identity and differences in values between the environments. In addition, faith development is minimally discussed in graduate programs, and most of the research does not consider the diverse makeup of contemporary college students due to minimal research on the topic (Kiessling, 2010). Catholic higher education institutions, as well as professional organizations, have created trainings and tools to assist in addressing this concern.

In addition to training new professionals on the concepts connected to Catholic identity, Catholic colleges and universities also assist professionals in navigating the incongruence that exists between the values within Catholic identity and the frameworks they were taught in student affairs graduate programs (Estanek, 2008). Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities must integrate student development theories taught in their graduate programs into the Catholic mission into their work (Estanek & Larrey, 1998). However, within these two frameworks, Catholic identity and student development theories, there are conflicting ideologies. For example, student affairs graduate programs often promote inductive reasoning, emphasizing personal experience in shaping worldview, while Catholic higher education utilizes deductive reasoning highlighting that our beliefs are the foundation of decision-making (Estanek, 2002). This complexity adds to the challenge of new professionals in transitioning into Catholic higher education from secular institutions based on knowledge gaps of how to apply Catholic identity and mission to their work (Schaller & Boyle, 2006). As institutions continue to hire professionals with training and experiences outside Catholic higher education, further considerations to address these concerns through onboarding need to be addressed.

Mission Orientation Programs

Catholic colleges and universities created mission integration programs and mission officer positions in response to the declining involvement and presence of consecrated persons within the Catholic Church (Whitney & Laboe, 2014). With the increase of lay persons serving in roles previously held by men and women religious, institutional mission integration programs are necessary to address the knowledge gaps of professionals and maintain Catholic identity (Rizzi, 2017; Pharr 2017). Mission integration programs are comprised of various components such as (1) orientation programs for staff during onboarding, (2) consultation by the mission

officer, and (3) mentorship programs. These programs vary by institution, but may include a history of a founding order, overview of Catholic identity, discussion of founding order charisms, and even a history of the institutions to better support professionals (Whitney & Laboe, 2014).

Within Catholic higher education, the application of Catholic identity and mission is the responsibility of all members regardless of their personal beliefs. Many professionals continue to choose to work at these institutions based on connections to Catholic values (Schaller & Boyle, 2006). Mission programs, both formal training and informal dialogues, provide professionals with skill development to support mission integration within their work (Whitney & Laboe, 2014). These programs may also help professionals transitioning between different institutions in Catholic higher education who may apply their Catholic identity differently based on the influence of the diocese or a founding order (Rizzi, 2019). As Catholic colleges and universities continue to develop programs to support mission integration, the creation of formal mentorship programs after onboarding may be beneficial to student affairs professionals in understanding how to incorporate faith into their everyday work and navigate institutional differences (Kiessling, 2010).

Catholic Student Affairs Professional Organizations

Catholic student affairs organizations such as JASPA and ASACCU were established to provide opportunities for learning and conversations to navigate the complexity of student affairs within the Catholic intellectual tradition (James & Estanek, 2012). These organizations provide support and continued education to professionals to navigate the changing landscape of higher education with their knowledge of Catholic identity. Even those practitioners who identify as Catholic may not be aware of the different interpretations of Catholic identity or official Church

teaching so the space for dialogue within these organizations are critical for professionals (Estanek & Larrey, 1998). Interpretations of Catholic identity articulated by the Vatican and how it is lived at Catholic colleges and universities may conflict or be incongruent with each other at times (Rizzi, 2019). James and Estanek (2012) identified that SSAOs, though mainly Catholic, also felt they did not have enough knowledge of Catholic intellectual tradition while serving in a leadership role at Catholic colleges and universities to incorporate it within their work. This is one catalyst that led to the development of *The Principles* by ACCU, ASACCU, and JASPA to support further professionals in integrating mission into their work.

In alignment with the ‘culture of encounter’ identified by Pope Francis (2013), Catholic higher education professional organizations continue to support individuals and institutions in their development around mission integration practices through conferences and workshops. Kiessling (2010) found that these conferences provide the most significant access, understanding, and visibility to Catholic identity applications. These experiences provide opportunities for learning and the ability to dialogue with each other in a community of knowledge. As institution and student demands change on campuses, discussion around the role that student affairs practitioners play in Catholic identity integration is even more critical than when the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was published (Estanek, 1998; Gleason, 2001). Professional organizations continue to play a critical role in the support of student affairs professionals transitioning into Catholic higher education by providing community as they learn about how Catholic identity is applied within their work.

Literature Review Summary

Faith is a tool that aids individuals in making meaning in their world by integrating their beliefs, lived experiences, and relationships (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Faith maturity may

serve as a tool in helping individuals understand the world as well as overcome adversity in their lives. Catholic higher education institutions are uniquely situated in higher education to support faith development based on their valuation of it within their Catholic identity. This provides the opportunity for members of the institution, including student affairs professionals, to support the faith development of college students during the critically important period of emerging adulthood. However, recent decline in formal curricula within secular institutions may challenge student affairs professionals trained in these environments in supporting faith within the Catholic higher education environment. Catholic colleges and universities have responded to this need by creating opportunities to learn about Catholic identity through specific professional organizations within Catholic higher education, mission orientation programs, and tools such as *The Principles*. However, there is a need to learn more about the ways in which student affairs professionals learn specifically about faith and what integration of faith development elements by these professionals looks like in practice. This study looks to address that need by exploring the experiences of student affairs professionals at various Catholic higher education institutions in the U.S in learning and integrating faith in their work.

Theoretical framework

In my dissertation study, I explore the influence the personal faith development of student affairs professionals has on their ability to integrate and support faith development practices in their work at Catholic colleges and universities. The theoretical framework for this study integrates two theories of faith development with the philosophies that define what it means to be a Catholic higher education institution. Within Catholic colleges and universities, the Catholic intellectual tradition guides them in balancing two fundamental principles, faith and reason,

within an educational environment dedicated to forming the whole person through their Catholic identity.

The concept of faith used in this study merges definitions identified by two prominent theorists, James Fowler (1981) and Sharon Dolaz Parks (2000). Fowler (1981) defined faith as the combination of personal beliefs, religion, and an individual's worldview. Parks (2000) further defined faith as "the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience" (p. 26). While there are differences between the two theories, Fowler's definition of faith development is the basis of Parks's theory, which was developed years later. In addition, both theories bring together elements that allow for application as a psychosocial theory (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Psychosocial theories view human development as ongoing interaction where individuals navigate biological, social, and psychological needs with societal expectations (Newman & Newman, 2015; Patton et al., 2016). Within psychosocial theories there are six elements: (1) stages of development, (2) developmental tasks, (3) psychological crises, (4) process of resolving, (5) network of significant relationships, and (6) coping skill development (Newman & Newman, 2015).

Situated within this study, Fowler's (1981) theory provides stages for development, developmental tasks, possible crises, and processes for resolving faith struggles. Alternatively, Parks's (2000) theory highlights processes of resolving faith conflicts, the importance of networks of relationships, and coping skill development within the higher education environment. While neither scholar specifically situated their research within a Catholic higher education environment, the philosophy used to connect Catholic colleges and universities to their Catholic identity, the Catholic intellectual tradition, emphasizes the importance of faith development. This provides an important connection between the psychosocial theories of faith

development provided by Fowler and Parks with an environment that emphasizes humanity, understanding faith, and reconciling differences between faith and knowledge within the Catholic intellectual tradition (ACCU, 2017).

Student affairs professionals support the faith development of college students within the contexts of their Catholic institutions by applying both the development theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) and their Catholic identity within their work. Below, I begin by first introducing James Fowler's (1981) theory and Sharon Dolaz Parks's (2000) theory. Then, I discuss the application of Fowler's (1981) and Park's (2000) theories within the Catholic higher education environment by student affairs professionals. This section of the chapter includes a theoretical framework diagram of the elements of Fowler's and Parks's theories with the elements of Catholic identity situated at Catholic colleges and universities. I conclude the second half of this chapter with a discussion of the importance of this theoretical framework within the context of the research study.

James Fowler's Theory of Faith Development

Fowler (1981) is one of the first scholars to address faith development. His theory explores the development of faith and the stages of faith experienced by individuals. The theory was developed based on his qualitative research study with participants ranging from 3.5 to 84 years old, including more than 350 participants in the semi-structured interviews (Fowler, 1981). Fowler (1996) indicated that his theory differed from other cognitive structural theories as he did not claim that the stages were universal but did indicate that his theory was tested and therefore generalizable. While participants represented balance in male and female identities, a frequent critique of Fowler's (1981) study and subsequent research is that participants overrepresented Judeo-Christian religions and whiteness (Moran, 1983; Hiebert, 1992; Watt, 2003). In this

subsection, I first provide an overview of the faith development model within Fowler's (1981, 1996) research and conclude by discussing the component of Fowler's (1981, 2000) faith development that applies to traditional-aged college students.

Developmental Stages

Fowler (1981, 2000) indicated that individuals move through the stages of faith by reconciling dissonance that may exist in their current faith beliefs through meaning-making strategies. He highlighted that religion, biological, emotional, cognitive maturity, and associated cultures affect faith development (Fowler, 1996). According to Fowler (1981, 1996), there are seven developmental periods an individual navigates to develop faith maturity. Within each developmental period, there are three stages to navigate. The three stages are endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Fowler, 1981). These stages are linear and indicate that individuals move from grieving in losing their old beliefs in the endings stage to exploring new ways to make meaning in the neutral zone. Fowler (1996) indicated that the neutral zone for some individuals may be a "holding environment" and needs dedicated time until individuals can make meaning of their faith and shift into the new beginnings stage (p. 74).

The developmental periods identified by Fowler have a linear progression through seven stages beginning at the primal faith stage through the universalizing faith stage. Fowler posited that the further an individual progresses through the faith stages, the greater flexibility the individual has in understanding their faith and the faith of others. Within the stages, faith originated with a strong influence from an authoritative figure or family to a place where in the final stage, individuals can decentralize their beliefs from their worldview (Fowler, 2000). For each of the six stages, Fowler identified developmental periods where most individuals will reach that stage of faith. In his later work, Fowler linked faith development to vocation,

indicating that vocations are more than careers and that communities significantly impact faith development (Fowler, 2000).

Faith Development of College Students

According to the stages, most traditional-age college students are situated either in the third stage, synthetic-conventional faith, or the fourth stage, individuative-reflective faith (Fowler, 1981). The synthetic-conventional stage occurs in early to emerging adulthood (Fowler, 1981). It emphasizes validation from external stakeholders in an individual's decision-making while attempting to integrate abstract concepts of faith into their worldview. The later stage, individuative-reflective faith, is reached when individuals begin to use self-authorship to define what faith means to them and explicitly integrate it into their meaning-making (Fowler, 1981). In his later revisions, Fowler (2000) pointed out that the individuative-reflective faith stage may not occur until midlife when there is greater exposure to new environments and people. With this change, he also adjusted his original theory. He stated that most individuals will never achieve the final stage in natural life as it requires individuals to balance a deep commitment to their faith while accepting the faith of others (Fowler, 1996; 2000). He identified Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Martin Luther King, Jr. as some of the few individuals ever able to reach the final stage (Fowler, 1996).

Sharon Dolaz Parks's Theory of Faith Development

Sharon Dolaz Parks was a graduate student of James Fowler who in later years proposed additions to his original theory with three clear distinctions in her own theory (Parks, 2000). Parks's (2000) theory is one of the most dominant theories referenced related to faith development in student affairs (Long, 2012). Parks believed faith development was dynamic and multidimensional, not linear like Fowler initially proposed (Parks, 2000). Parks highlighted the

importance of the emerging adulthood period for faith development which she believes Fowler underemphasized (Parks, 1986). Parks's research explored the influence of the higher education environment specifically on the development of young adults (Parks, 1986). She highlighted that the mentoring community present for many in this environment provides individuals with spaces to use their imagination in conjunction with their lived experiences to define life's meaning (Parks, 2000). In this section, I start by providing an overview of Parks's (2000) theory of faith development. I then discuss Parks's (2000) theory within the emerging adulthood period and conclude this sub-section by discussing the importance of mentoring communities in support faith development.

Faith Development

Parks describes her theory as an overlap between her concepts of *forms of knowing*, *forms of dependence*, and *forms of community* (Parks, 2000). These concepts occur during four periods of faith development, starting with conventional adolescence and moving through mature adulthood, with various overlaps during each stage. Within *forms of knowing*, individuals navigate through five periods where their faith commitment is more rigid and defined by authority figures to a more flexible sense of responsibility recognizing and understanding variances in truth between individuals (Parks, 2000). This form of development mirrors Fowler's stages with how an individual becomes more flexible in applying faith beliefs over time. Parks's (2000) identified two periods, unqualified relativism and probing commitment, that are commonly encountered by college students. For students and professionals, being aware of and being able to communicate their inner lives and understanding of the world is important as they grow in their self-expression (Rockenbach, 2011).

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a period marked by an individual's independence in decision-making. Within Parks' (2000) *forms of knowing* concept is the notion of an individual's *probing commitment* to exploring their own beliefs. *Probing commitment* is defined by an individual reaching a place where they explore and integrate different forms of knowledge that they believe to be truthful in their world (Parks, 2000). The focus is on the application of various forms of knowledge into the individual's view. It can incorporate their relationships with others, work, and beliefs (Parks, 2000). Parks (2000) highlighted that this may be a period of frustration for faculty or university administrators as this stage may be short-lived or change a few times in college or beyond. For example, a student may participate in a study abroad experience that was impactful to them. This may lead the student to engage in exploratory conversations with a mentor when they return about whether they should plan to attend graduate school or complete a year of service after graduating. The developmental goal for *forms of knowing* is the exploration or *probing commitment* that occurs in learning from new experiences and making meaning of it within the individual's life.

Forms of dependence (Parks, 2000) focus on how an individual reconciles the content of their faith beliefs with the way an individual uses it for meaning-making. This differs from Fowler's (1981) theory as he believed that faith content and structure were the same. *Forms of dependence* (Parks, 2000) range from an individual's application of faith precisely as taught, too dependent on authority, and progress towards interdependence on others to develop new understandings of faith (Parks, 2000). The final element of Parks's (2000) theory, *forms of community*, emphasizes the role of people, places, and communities. Different *forms of community* vary from individuals being dependent on each other to communities where individuals deepen their awareness by learning about the faith of others (Parks, 1986, 2000).

Within the emerging adulthood period, Parks emphasized the mentor community as creating a “network of belonging” to support imagination, foster critical thought, and help individuals answer life’s big questions (Parks, 2000, p. 135). Parks (2000) wove these elements throughout her theory to emphasize the importance of emerging adulthood in developing faith, mainly when supported within the higher education environment.

Mentoring Environments

Mentoring environments are critical for students who encounter unforeseen challenges in their lives including struggles related to their faith (Rockenbach, 2011). This may include a student navigating their relationships with peers who are engaging in behaviors such as underage alcohol consumption. This may conflict with a student’s personal belief on substance use or engaging in illegal activities. However, for a mentoring community to be supportive, it needs to be an environment where there is flexibility and members are non-judgmental in exploring shared values. The more defined the value set of the mentoring community, the less likely *probing commitment* may be engaged within the environment (Parks, 2000). While campus ministry offices or faith-based student organizations may appear to be the primary space for faith development, student affairs professionals create experiences and environments ripe for faith development. These may include spaces to engage socially like a college union or leadership and volunteer opportunities that foster faith development during a period when individuals are searching for meaning (Love, 2001; Long, 2012).

Faith Development in the Context of Catholic Higher Education

Within Catholic higher education, the publication *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* by Pope John Paul II has defined what it means to be a Catholic institution of higher education since the 1990s (ACCU, 2022). Student affairs professionals, such as residence life and student activities

professionals, play an essential role in animating the Catholic identity and values articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* through programs, activities, and engagements outside the classroom setting (Estanek, 2008; Janosik, 1999). Student affairs professionals engage students within the Catholic intellectual tradition to wrestle with life's problems and social issues, which Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) point out can further support an individual's faith development (Estanek, 2008; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). The Catholic intellectual tradition asserts that Catholic educational institutions provide academic enrichment and are responsible for "developing the mind, body, and soul" (Estanek et al., 2017, p. 33). Student affairs professionals support the holistic development of college students in their co-curricular work, such as programming and student outreach. This responsibility overlaps and aligns in many cases with the faith development process and components identified by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), especially elements of mentorship, community, and learning throughout the lifespan.

Student affairs professionals influence faith development by modeling faith practices and creating spaces for discussions to support identity exploration and learning about others. Catholic identity encourages individuals to interact with others, which aligns with Parks's research indicating that interdependent communities support faith development (ACCU, 2022; Parks, 2000). The Catholic intellectual tradition emphasizes the importance of individuals developing a greater understanding and deepening their faith and spirituality (Estanek et al., 2017). Both Fowler (1996) and Parks (2000) highlighted the heavy influence of peers and institutions such as schools and religious communities on faith and the need for safe spaces within them.

Within the higher education environment, student affairs professionals often support students by navigating interpersonal dynamics such as roommate conflicts and the influence of peers on personal decision-making. The mentoring communities situated within these

environments provide a space where individuals both feel a sense of belonging, but also have the strength to probe their commitment to shared values. This may include individuals exploring their lived experiences in relation to other members of the community through conversations late at night in a residence hall lounge. It may also include learning about a new topic at a program and discussing how it may change your view in relation to it while having dinner in the dining hall. Based upon the nature of the work in supporting student learning and development, student affairs professionals are uniquely positioned to support the faith development of college students.

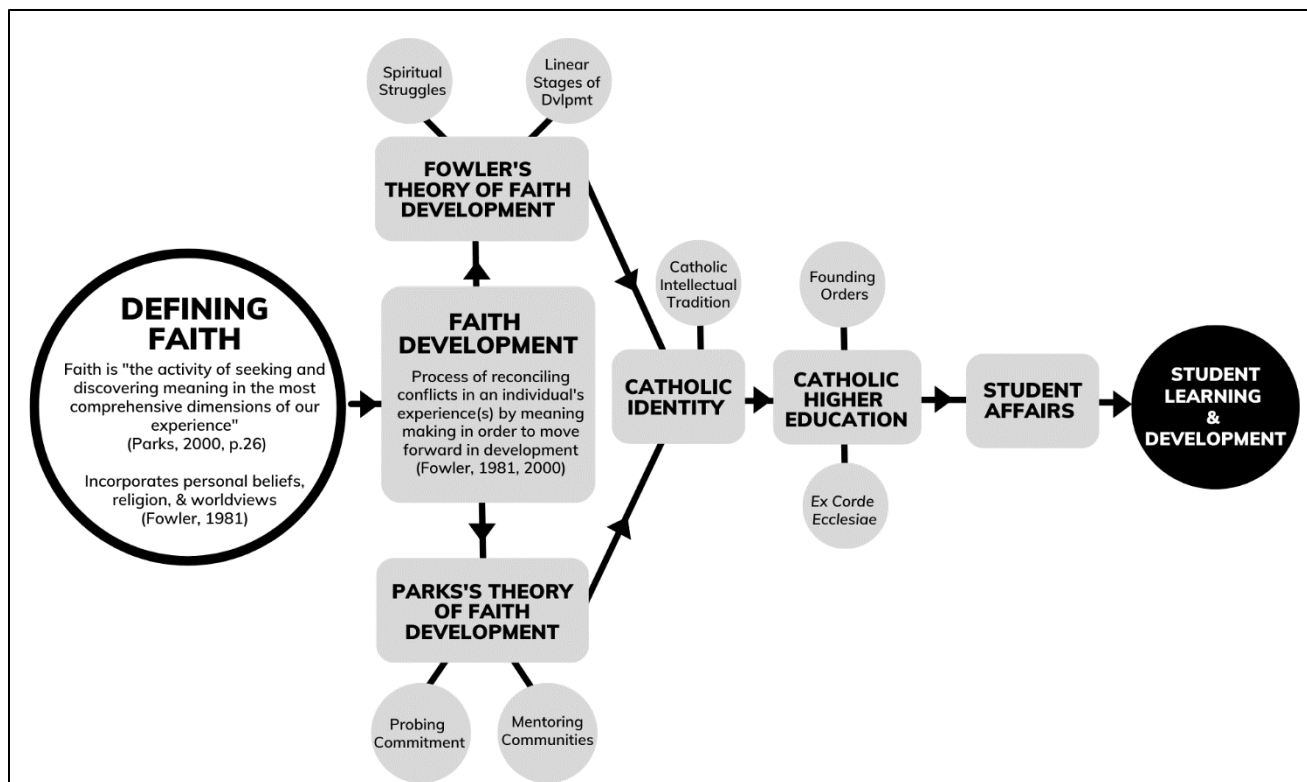
Integration of Theories

Parks (2000) highlighted that an individual's lived experiences validate their faith. In my research study, I applied the theoretical framework within the context of student affairs professionals' lived experiences at Catholic higher education institutions in hopes of better understanding how they learn about faith development and how they support students' learning and developing faith. Fowler's (1981) theory of how an individual develops faith and moves to a more flexible interpretation will serve as a tool when examining the faith development of student affairs professionals and how they support students. Specifically, I used Fowler's (1981) stage process of how individuals develop faith maturity with the developmental challenges during emerging adulthood identified in his linear developmental periods. Alternatively, Parks's (2000) emphasis on probing commitment and mentoring communities provides a lens in the methodology professionals may use to support faith development. The theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) provide a lens for identifying the shared characteristics of student affairs professionals in developing an understanding of faith development. They also serve as tools for understanding how the practices student affairs professionals use in their work may support students in the learning and development of faith. The theoretical approach comes together

within the context of Catholic colleges and universities where student affairs professionals support Catholic identity, including the elements of faith development of their students situated within it.

Figure 1 visually depicts how the faith development theories connect, how they relate to Catholic identity expressed at Catholic higher education institutions, and ultimately how they support student learning and development. My theoretical framework is composed of six elements which move from defining faith development through to student learning and development within the context of Catholic higher education. The goal of this process is student learning and development as depicted in the dark circle appearing on the right of the diagram in Figure 1. The long vertical column in the center of the diagram is where I identify the important elements of faith development highlighted in Fowler's (1981) theory and Parks's (2000) theory. The purpose of this column is to define faith development and detail how it is supported during the emerging adulthood period through probing commitment and mentoring communities (Fowler, 1981, 2000; Parks, 2000). The next two grey rectangles on the diagram identify what are the distinct qualities that define Catholic higher education through the expression of Catholic identity, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and the influence of founding order's charisms. Finally, on the right hand of the diagram, I identify the role of student affairs professionals with the goal of supporting student learning and development of faith. This theoretical framework is essential when considering faith and how students develop faith in the collegiate setting.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework Diagram



Summary

In this chapter, I discussed relevant literature defining faith, exploring faith development in Catholic higher education, and highlighting training and education available for student affairs professionals in learning about faith. In the second half of this chapter, I discussed the theoretical framework for this study including the integration of Fowler's (1981) and Park's (2000) theory on faith development and grounded them in the context of Catholic higher education. I highlight the elements that may be considered in the study when identifying shared characteristics related to how student affairs professionals learn about faith as well as how they may support student learning and the development of faith within their roles. This study will explore the shared characteristics of student affairs professionals in their faith experiences and the influence they may have on the student affairs professional supporting student learning and development of faith. In chapter 3, I provide details for the proposed methodology used in this study.

Chapter 3

This study aimed to further understand how contemporary college student faith development is supported by student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. The research explored the shared characteristics in the personal faith development of student affairs professionals and the influence of their faith experience in supporting student development and learning in their role. The study used qualitative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of the student affairs professionals with faith and its influence in their roles at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

This chapter begins with an overview of the research design followed by a description of the participants in the study. The chapter continues with more detailed information related to data collection procedures, materials, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the approach to triangulation used in the study.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. Faith is innately personal to the individual and is defined by their lived experiences (Fowler, 1981; Palmer et al., 2010). In addition, an individual's faith is developed over the course of their lifespan, connecting their beliefs to their lived experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Therefore, the use of qualitative research within the constructivist paradigm allowed participants to describe their unique experiences and the ways in which it has developed throughout their lifespan (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

For this study, I recruited participants through a professional organization in Catholic higher education, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) as well as

through social media. Participants indicated their Interest in a Participation Survey (Appendix D) which I used to select participants based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. Individuals selected completed the Informed Consent and Demographic Form required for participation.

Participants shared their experiences developing faith and integrating it into their work in student affairs through one semi-structured individual interview, lasting anywhere from one to two hours in duration. In the interview, the participants brought a personal artifact and described its importance to their faith development, adding depth to their personal narratives regarding their experiences with faith (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After the interview, for a period of two to three weeks, participants were asked to share vignettes via video recording when they found themselves enacting or reflecting on faith in their work. Eight of the nine participants engaged in the faith vignetter component portion of the study sharing two to four faith vignettes each. The vignettes captured participant reflections on or thoughts about faith in relation to their work. The faith vignettes were submitted directly to the primary investigator via the Marco Polo technology app. The total time commitment from participants in the study did not to exceed four hours.

Participants

Nine early to mid-career student affairs professionals participated in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were full-time student affairs professionals employed at a U.S. Catholic higher education institutions. Participants were early and mid-career professionals defined as individuals who have worked three to nine years, inclusive of any graduate experience, in student affairs. Three years of experience was used as a minimum to ensure that the participant's experience was not solely during the COVID-19 pandemic where roles may shifted briefly. In addition, participants had (1) a master's degree in a

non-faith and spirituality field, (2) did not serve in an SSAO or campus ministry role, (3) had at least one year of professional experience at a Catholic higher education institution, and (4) were employed at an institution representing one of the seven largest founding orders at Catholic colleges and universities (see Appendix A for inclusion criteria). The founding orders with the greatest representation in Catholic higher education are the Jesuits, Franciscan, Sisters of Mercy, Dominican, Benedictine, Holy Cross, and Lasallian.

Within the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants, master's degrees, institutional founding orders, and years of professional experience were used to select participants.

Individuals who held degrees in a faith and spirituality field were excluded from participation in the study as they have participated in a formal curriculum around faith development. The criterion of having a master's degree was used because many student affairs professional roles require or recommend a master's degree as part of their hiring requirements. Therefore, I required participants to have a master's degree as it is in alignment with a standard of practice in the field. The inclusion criteria related to founding orders were used to interview participants from as wide a variety of founding orders as possible. The seven founding orders included representing the orders with the greatest presence within U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Recruitment & Selection

After receiving Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval (Appendix L), early and mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities were recruited through a call for participation email and student affairs social media groups. Snowball sampling was used by professionals forwarding the recruitment email or social media posts to encourage other individuals to participate in the study. Snowball sampling is a strategy in qualitative inquiry where participants are identified through referrals between individuals based on

knowledge related to a specific topic that may otherwise be difficult to identify (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this study, snowball sampling allowed university administrators such as SSAOs or other colleagues to identify individuals who may be passionate about the topic or have been observed integrating faith in their work to be referred for participation. Individuals with these interests or passion areas may not otherwise be captured in listservs or other professional capacities within Catholic higher education.

Appendix C is the email sent to student affairs professionals based on their membership in ACCU inviting them to share the Interest in Participation Survey. The email also contained instructions for interested individuals to express interest in participation through the participation interest survey. Appendix B includes a letter of support from the ACCU to send a call for participation email to student affairs professionals who are members of their organization at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Individuals were also recruited to participate through student affairs professionals' social media groups. The use of snowball sampling occurred in these groups when other professionals tagged or referred individuals to participate. Appendix A includes the social media post text and image that was used to recruit participants in these professional groups. Recruitment occurred in two social media groups, Student Affairs MomS (SAMS) and Student Affairs Mid-Level Professionals, within the Facebook platform in which I am already a member. Individuals who were interested in participating were directed to complete the interest in participation survey.

Demographics

There was a total of nine individuals who met the inclusion criteria for the study that were selected to participate in the study. Table 1 displays the participants' demographics as shared in their Informed Consent and Demographic Form. One third of participants identified as

35-44 years of age while the remaining 2/3 of participants were 25-34 years of age at the time of data collection. Twenty-two percent of participants identified as Black/African American and 78% identified as White/Non-Hispanic. One third of participants in the study identified as male while the remaining 2/3 of participants identified as female. All participants in the study identified as heterosexual. Within their faith beliefs, 45% of participants identified as Catholic. One of these individuals identified as a non-practicing Catholic. Thirty-three percent of participants identified as Christian and 22% identified as a combination of religious and spiritual beliefs. One of the individuals with a combined belief set identified as Jewish and spiritual while the other participant identified as Christian and spiritual. To provide anonymity in the study, the participants identified their own pseudonyms which are used to identify them. The participant demographics, using their pseudonym identifiers are in table 1, below.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	Sexuality	Faith Beliefs
Bobby	25-34	Male	Black/African American	Heterosexual	Catholic
Charlie	25-34	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Catholic
Char	35-44	Female	Black/African American	Heterosexual	Christian
Claire	35-44	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Christian/Spiritual
Mark	25-34	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Catholic
Rachel	35-44	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Christian-Moravian

Sam	25-34	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Christian- Methodist
Sophia	25-34	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Jewish/Spiritual
Tricia	25-34	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Heterosexual	Catholic (non-practicing)

Within the study, participants were required to be early to mid-career student affairs professionals, defined as three to nine years of professional experience, with at least one of year of experience in Catholic higher education. The average number of years' experience for the student affairs professionals was six and a half years. The participants averaged four years of experience within Catholic higher education. Another criteria in the study were that the participants had to currently be employed at an institution with one of the seven founding order with the greatest presence in U.S. Catholic higher education. The founding orders of the participants' current institutions represented the Benedictines, Franciscan, Jesuit, Lasallian, and Sisters of Mercy. There were no more than two participants per founding order with the exception of the Sisters of Mercy founding order where there was one participant. No participants in the study were employed at institutions with a Holy Cross or Dominican founding order. Each participant was employed at a different institution throughout the U.S. The participant demographics related to their professional experience, using their pseudonym identifiers are in table 2, below.

Table 2: Participant Professional Experience

Name	Years of Student Affairs Experience	Years in Catholic Higher Edu.	Current Institution's Founding Order
Bobby	9	9	Benedictine
Charlie	7	5	Jesuit
Char	6	2	Jesuit
Claire	6	4	Benedictine
Mark	6	4	Sisters of Mercy
Rachel	8	4	Franciscan
Sam	7	5	Lasallian
Sophia	5	3	Franciscan
Tricia	5	3	Lasallian

Data Collection Procedures

This section is a narrative description of the data collection procedures for the study. Within the qualitative design of this study, data was collected through an individual interview, including the description of a personal artifact within the interview, and then subsequent collection of faith vignettes through the Marco Polo app. The study launched at the end of December 2022 with participant recruitment continuing in early January 2023. Data collection occurred in January and early February 2023. Coding and triangulation of the data collected occurred in late February 2023. Table 3 visually depicts the researcher's timeline for the study. The following subsections describe in narrative form the five procedures in the study: participant recruitment, the study components, data collection, coding, and triangulation.

Table 3: Research Timeline

Research Phase	Timeline	Description
Participant Recruitment & Selection	December 2022/January 2023	Distribution of recruitment email and social media posts. Selection of 8-10 participants.
Study Components: Interview, Personal Artifact, Faith Vignettes	January/February 2023	Semi-structured in-depth interviews of participants. Description and photo of personal faith artifact. Collection of faith vignettes through Marco Polo app.
Data Collection: Transcription, Photo Documentation, Researcher Memoing	January-February 2023	Transcription of the interview and faith vignettes. Photo documentation of the personal artifact. Researcher memoing from the interview, transcription, and coding processes.
Coding	February 2023	Interview and faith vignette transcript analysis around faith development themes identified by Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000).
Triangulation	February 2023	Comparison of themes and theoretical framework.

Screening

Prospective participants were screened through the Interest in Participation survey. The Interest in Participation Survey (see Appendix D) collected contact information and asked individuals to respond to questions based on the participant inclusion criteria for the study to determine their eligibility for participation. Individuals concluded the survey by sharing one to two sentences regarding why they were interested in participating in the study. The information provided by this survey was used to select the participants of the study.

Within the Interest in a Participation Survey (Appendix D), I used responses to the questions regarding founding orders, current higher education institutions, and years of experience within student affairs and Catholic higher education to select participants¹. I identified participants with varied years of experience highlighting diverse perspectives in their learning about faith and integration of faith in their work based upon the length of time in their experience within student affairs and Catholic higher education. Since values and charisms of founding orders influence the application of Catholic identity at institutions (Janosik, 1999; Schaller & Boyle, 2006; Pharr, 2017), I had no more than two individuals per founding order represented, all from different institutions.

Individuals who were selected to participate received an email response (Appendix F) asking them to complete the Informed Consent and Demographics Survey and to share their availability within it to schedule their interview. After all participant spots were filled in the

¹ Additional screening was used on the 138 responses submitted in the Interest in Participation Survey. Only 38 of the responses were determined to match some of the criteria for the study. The additional screening in the Interest in Participation survey included removing responses submitted from the same IP addresses (73 responses from the same 13 IP addresses), unrelated degrees (e.g., aviation; 17 responses), and incongruence between the founding order and institution listed (10 responses). An additional 55 emails were sent to the researcher expressing interest in participating using the same language in each email that was not reflected in the participant interest survey.

study as well as when an individual did not meet the inclusion criteria, I sent them an email response (Appendix E) notifying them that they were not selected for participation in the study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is the process where individuals grant their permission to participate in a research study after having the opportunity to review identified risks and benefits of participation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The Informed Consent and Demographics form provided prospective participants the opportunity to review the nature and purpose of the study. It also informed participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and that participants may withdraw their consent to participate at any time with no penalty. Each research participant had the opportunity to review information related to the study, ask questions, and express any concerns before indicating their consent to participate.

In this study, informed consent was secured through an electronic survey form using university-provided software, Qualtrics, which is password protected. Individuals selected to participate received an email (Appendix F) inviting them to review and complete the Informed Consent and Demographics survey (Appendix G) to participate in the study. The Informed Consent and Demographics Survey provided interested individuals the opportunity to review the time commitment, expectations, risks, and benefits of the study. The last component of the Informed Consent and Demographics survey captured demographic information including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, years of professional experience, and the age of participants.

If after reviewing the information an individual chose to participate, they completed the Informed Consent and Demographics form, selected a name to anonymize their participation, and provided their availability for their interview. All participants interested in volunteering for

the study completed their informed consent before participating in the study. Information collected from the Informed Consent and Demographics form was gathered through university-provided software, Qualtrics, and stored on my password-protected computer in a separate location from my research notes, recordings, and interviews.

Transcription

Transcription is a process where spoken data is transitioned into written data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After the interviews were conducted, the audio files were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft word document stored on a password-protected laptop. At the conclusion of the two to three-week faith vignette collection period through the Marco Polo app, I verbatim transcribed any experiences shared by the participants. Since participants in this study were throughout the U.S., zoom was used to audio record the interviews. After the interview and faith vignettes were transcribed, I anonymized the data collected, including any names and references to institutions with the pseudonym(s) the participant identified on the Informed Consent and Demographics survey. If the participant identified a person or other institution where they did not previously select a pseudonym, I selected pseudonyms on their behalf to anonymize other individuals or institutions referenced.

Memoing

Throughout the study, memoing was used to capture the researcher's reflections on the study. Memoing occurred after each interview, during the transcription of the faith vignettes, and throughout the analysis. In addition, memos were used to capture decision-making regarding pseudonyms added and the participant selection process based on the additional screening used on the Interest in Participation survey. Analytic memos highlight the patterns or research insights

to support the analysis of the data in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The memos also assisted with separating the responses of the participants from the positionality of the researcher.

Materials

This section describes the various materials that were used in the study. This includes the Interview Guide (Appendix I), Personal Artifact (Appendix H), Faith Vignettes (Appendix J), and compensation.

Interview Guide

The study utilized a semi-structured interview to guide the flow of the interview. The Interview Guide provided the basic structure for the interview. However, the semi-structured format allowed for the tone to remain conversational in nature, the ability to ask follow-up questions to initial responses, and to vary the order of the questions while addressing both components of the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The interview was broken into two components, with the first half of the interview focusing on the personal faith development experience of the student affairs professional. The second component of the interview focused on the student affairs professional's experiences in learning and supporting faith development within the context of their Catholic institutions. The last question of the interview provided participants the opportunity to share anything additional related to their personal experience with faith and their experiences supporting college student faith development as a student affairs professional that was not discussed with the other interview questions. At the interview, participants were thanked for their participation, introduced to the faith vignette collection activity (see Appendix I), and provided the next steps for the study including reference, to a follow-up email with additional instructions for the faith vignette activity and distribution of the compensation for the study.

Personal Artifact

Within qualitative research, an artifact is a physical object that suggests a particular meaning related to the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Within this study, participants were asked to bring a personal artifact to the individual interview that was an item of significance related to their faith development experience (see Appendix H). During the individual interview, participants were asked to describe the item and its connection to their faith experience (see Appendix I). Some participants brought or referenced two personal faith artifacts during the interview. One question within the semi-structured interview was designed to elicit reflection and personal storytelling regarding an important moment in their faith development connected to the faith artifact.

After the individual interview, participants emailed the researcher a photo of the personal faith artifact. The photo was stored on the personal password-protected computer of the researcher. To protect the identity of the participants, any personally identifiable information such as the faces and names of individuals was blurred or redacted with a black box.

Faith Vignettes

The faith vignette component of the study asked participants after the individual interview to send video messages using the Marco Polo technology app directly to the researcher when they find themselves reflecting on or integrating faith into their work as it happens. The Marco Polo app is a free technology app, stored on the password-protected personal phone of the researcher. Participants were provided instructions on the prompt and how to use the app verbally at the conclusion of the individual interview (see Appendix J). An email (see Appendix K) was also sent to participants within a week after the individual interview thanking them for participation in the individual interview, reminding them of the faith vignette prompt, and

including a link for more detailed instructions on how to use Marco Polo. The researcher sent the initial message through Marco Polo. The participant received a text message through the cell phone number they provided during the Interest in a Participation Survey (see Appendix D) inviting them to download the Marco Polo app to view the first message. As the participants sent brief video messages of when they reflected on or enacted faith in their work, the researcher responded back to them summarizing their vignette or asking follow-up questions regarding their vignette. If there was a delay in the participant sending a video message, the researcher sent additional follow-up messages checking in on the participant and reminding them to submit a faith vignette. The video messages were brief in length and did not exceed five minutes each, with total participation in this component of the study not exceeding 30 minutes. The faith vignette collection took place for two weeks following the individual interview. Eight of the nine participants engaged in the faith vignette collection.

Compensation

Participants received a \$40 Amazon gift card as compensation for their participation in the study. The gift card was sent after the participants submitted two faith vignettes via Marco Polo or three weeks had passed, whichever came first. Included with the gift card was a thank you message from the researcher for participating in the study.

Data Analysis

This section described the data analysis process for the study. Data was analyzed through the process of coding the interview and faith vignette verbatim transcriptions to identify key themes in response to the research questions. Inductive and deductive coding were used to identify the themes for the study.

Coding

Within qualitative research, coding is the process where the researchers label and identify themes for analysis within the textual data collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This section highlights the first and second cycle coding process that was used to identify themes of significance in the study.

Coding process. The coding and analysis process was conducted manually on the anonymized individual verbatim transcripts and then transferred to an Excel document saved on the researcher's password-protected personal computer (Ose, 2016). The coding for the faith vignettes and individual interviews were stored on separate excel documents. A first and second cycle coding process were used for both the individual interviews and faith vignettes. Both sets of coding as well as researcher reflections were included as separate columns on the Excel documents. The coding Excel documents were stored separate from the non-anonymized individual interview and faith vignette transcripts and recordings.

First cycle coding. First cycle coding is a process that occurs during the initial coding of data and helps to illuminate broader patterns in research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). The first cycle coding for this study utilized an affective method of coding. Affective coding explores the emotions, values, and other subjective qualities of an individual's experience (Saldaña, 2016). The use of this coding method was appropriate for this study as it acknowledged and named the innately personal experiences that contributed to the participant's meaning of faith.

During the process of coding, I utilized the splitter method within the affective codes (Bernard, 2011; Saldaña, 2016). The splitter method allows for data to be chunked into smaller moments leading to the presence of more codes. The combination of the splitter method with the affective first cycle coding allowed for the stories and experiences shared by participants to be

broken into smaller chunks. Responses to each of the questions in the interview guide often included several examples from the participant's lived experiences that were complex in nature. This approach to coding allowed for the various moments of significance including reactions, decision-making, and emotions within one shared story to be identified. This further assisted in identifying characteristics of faith development shared by the participants. In the first cycle of coding, more than 1450 lines of codes across the individual interviews and an additional 50 codes through the faith vignettes were identified. While the use of the splitting within the affective method was more time consuming, it allowed for a more nuanced and trustworthy approach to analysis within the context of this study's design (Saldaña, 2016).

Second cycle coding. The second cycle coding was deductive in approach and utilized a code list developed from key concepts in the theoretical framework (Appendix L). This approach to second cycle coding assisted in condensing the large number of first cycle codes. These second cycle codes were added as a separate column on the coding spreadsheet identified as deductive codes (Ose, 2016). A column was added next to the deductive codes to include researcher reflections that occurred during this round of coding. The use of different columns and the researcher reflection notes allowed for comparison and contrast of the data in the first and second cycle codes to identify themes (Ose, 2016). After all rounds of coding were completed and themes were identified, the themes were added as the final column on the coding spreadsheet.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a validity procedure in qualitative research conducted through the process of compiling data from multiple sources to identify convergence of themes in analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Triangulation was used in the final step

of data coding and analysis in the study to confirm emerging themes (Merriam, 2001). The use of triangulation in research adds to the study's validity and trustworthiness, helping to ensure accuracy and objectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study utilized the convergence of information collected through individual interviews, faith vignettes, and personal faith artifact photos and descriptions to determine themes. In addition, I explored the relationship between the data collected and the theories discussed in the theoretical framework to identify additional areas of congruence in the themes and related contributing factors.

Summary

This chapter described the qualitative methodology this study used in exploring the experiences of student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities in learning about and integrating faith in their work. I interviewed nine participants in an interview ranging from one hour to 90-minutes as well as collected reflections on their integration of faith in their work through faith vignettes via the Marco Polo technology app. Using Fowler's (1981) and Parks's (2000) theories of faith development as part of the analysis of this study's data, I identified shared characteristics and themes related to the learning and application of faith by student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. Chapter 4 will detail the analysis of the data I collected in the study.

Chapter 4

This chapter provides an overview of the findings in this qualitative study exploring the personal faith development experiences of early to mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. In the first portion of this chapter, I present the findings related to the shared themes of faith development for student affairs professionals. In the second portion of the chapter, I describe the findings related to how personal faith development experiences shape the understanding of student affairs professionals supporting college student's faith development. The findings for each portion of the chapter include key themes emphasized by descriptive responses and quotes by the participants from their individual interviews and faith vignettes. In addition, visual imagery from the participants' artifacts is embedded. Finally, I conclude the chapter by presenting overall insights from the study.

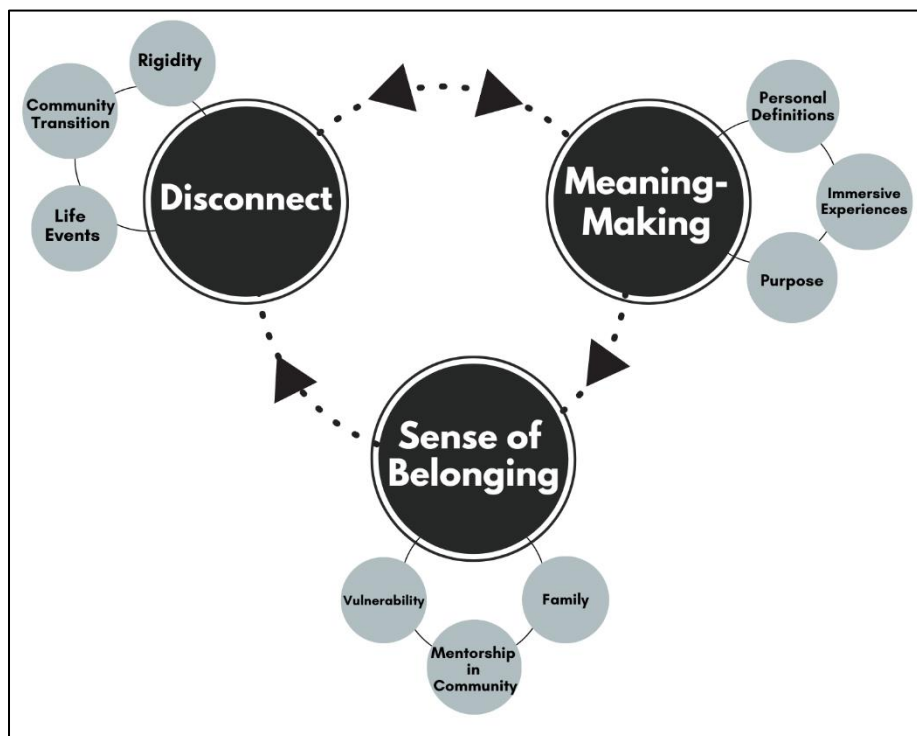
Personal Faith Development

The first research question asked, "What are the characteristics of the personal faith development journeys for early to mid-career student affairs professionals working at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities?" Participants identified three themes regarding their personal faith development: (1) meaning-making, (2) a sense of belonging, and (3) disconnect. Within each theme, three contributing factors were identified from the participants' experiences providing additional understanding for each theme, and these are described in the following pages.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between these three themes and highlights the contributing factors expressed by the participants for each theme. The connection between these themes identifies the process of moving from a place of meaning-making in one's faith to a sense of belonging that can be disrupted at different times, resulting in feelings of disconnect.

Participants indicated meaning-making cannot be reached if participants could not reconcile tensions between their lived experiences and beliefs ultimately leading to feelings of disconnection. Alternatively, participants may experience something unexpectedly that leads to a shift from a sense of belonging to feelings of disconnect. Participants experienced movement between these themes throughout their lifespans as an ongoing process without a clear ending.

Figure 2: Diagram of Personal Faith Development



Participants engaged in meaning-making by integrating their lived experiences with their beliefs. Meaning-making occurred through immersive experiences and environments, personally defining what their faith is to them and connecting their faith to what they believe is their greater purpose. When participants found congruence between their lived experiences and beliefs, they indicated a sense of belonging with their faith. Within the sense of belonging theme, participants indicated that their faith community was heavily influenced by three contributing factors: being authentic and vulnerable, family support, and mentorship within the communities. Finally, most

participants experienced periods of disconnect with their faith where they either could not reconcile their lived experiences with their beliefs at that time or encountered something unexpected that influenced their sense of connection. During periods of disconnect, participants identified the rigidity in their faith communities, the movement between faith or religious beliefs, and the impact of significant life events as contributing to a sense of disconnect.

The arrows on the diagram in Figure 2 highlight the bi-directional movement that can occur between meaning-making and disconnect. The arrow from a sense of belonging to disconnect represents the changes that may occur influencing a person from experiencing belonging to feeling disconnect from their faith beliefs. On the margins of each theme are the three contributing factors identified from the participants' experiences for each theme.

Meaning-Making

The first theme that all nine participants identified was meaning-making from experiences important to their faith development. Three contributing factors aided meaning-making for the participants: (1) personal definitions, (2) immersive experiences, and (3) significant life events. Below, I present each of these contributing factors to meaning-making.

Contributing Factor: Personal Definitions. The first contributing factor participants identified as aiding in the development of meaning-making was the development of personal definitions of what their faith meant to them. All participants in the study shared stories of their personal faith development, where they personally defined their faith to help them make meaning of their experiences. In this section, I highlight the experiences shared by Tricia and Bobby of how they used personal definitions of their beliefs to make meaning of their faith.

Tricia shared that she was raised in the Catholic church, including completing all her sacraments through marriage in the church. However, as Tricia moved through adulthood, she

shared that some of the messages in her religion were either incongruent with her life experiences or that she felt were politicized in her community and were the source of tension in her beliefs. One example Tricia provided was the politicization of women's health by her church around the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case which overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision in summer 2022. Tricia highlighted that when navigating this tension, she leaned on the values she learned early in the church and the charisms articulated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame and Jesuits during her college education. As a result, Tricia said, "I don't feel that I necessarily identify with all aspects of being Catholic, but more of the underlying principles of what it means to be Catholic." Based on these tensions between her own life experiences and religion, Tricia shared that she has taken components of her religion to redefine them within her life experiences. She explained that the key values of the Catholic church that she learned early in her life, such as kindness, respect, grace, and forgiveness, or the Jesuit value of *cura personalis* and caring for the whole person, were how she chose to embody faith in her life.

For another participant, Bobby, personally defining faith emerged while considering converting to Catholicism. During that process, Bobby shared that he wanted to be clear about his values and beliefs in the world to ensure that his decision to engage in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was congruent with his sense of self. RCIA is the process in which adults participate in Christian formation to become participating members of the Catholic Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023). Before engaging in RCIA, Bobby shared that he engaged in dialogue with individuals who identified as Catholic and the campus ministry member at his institution coordinating the RCIA process. Bobby described the importance of this process as "we really need to figure out whom we want to be and how we want to be within our

faith.” Through this dialogue process, Bobby indicated that he felt he better understood the variations in the religious application of beliefs by the people in his social circle. He also shared that he could define his faith in the context of his experiences and beliefs, ultimately leading to his decision to join the Catholic Church. For all the participants in the study, navigating a process where they defined their faith within the context of their beliefs and experiences served as a critical component of their faith development.

Contributing Factor: Immersive Experiences. The second contributing factor participants identified as aiding in the development of meaning-making was participation in immersive experiences and environments. Immersive experiences such as religious retreats and faith-based environments provide an opportunity for individuals to engage with like-minded individuals. All of the participants in the study shared experiences in immersive environments that they described as having a positive impact on their faith development. Several individuals also highlighted that working at a Catholic higher education institution has strengthened their desires or beliefs related to faith. In this section, I describe the immersive environments and experiences Sophia, Charlie, Sam, Char, Mark, and Bobby described.

Sophia shared in her interview that during college, where she found herself exploring faith, she had the opportunity to participate in an immersive experience through the Birthright Israel Foundation. The immersive experience was an educational trip to Israel to create an ongoing Jewish connection with other early adulthood individuals who identified as Jewish or had a parent who identified as Jewish (Birthright Israel, 2023). Sophia highlighted that she questioned if she was “Jewish enough” to participate in the trip leading up to the opportunity. However, Sophia stated that both being in Israel and with other individuals her same age removed her doubt. Sophia shared that she resonated with seeing the historical structures she had

learned about in classes, read about in books, and had the opportunity to be in a community with others who shared her beliefs. She described this as one of few opportunities where she felt surrounded by like-minded individuals sharing her religious beliefs rather than the isolation she had previously felt as one of the only Jewish-identifying individuals in her social circles. Sophia described this experience as necessary in her meaning-making of faith, including integrating her Jewish identity and spiritual beliefs in connecting all things.

During her trip, Sophia shared that she purchased several items to remind her of the importance of that experience. Figure 2 is a photo of one of the items she purchased, a Hamsa, that Sophia shared as her faith artifact during her interview. The Hamsa is a palm-shaped amulet used in some religious cultures as a sign of protection (Wecker, 2023). Sophia described the Hamsa depicted below as an item of significance that she now displayed in her office. She purchased the Hamsa while on her Birthright trip to Israel when she was beginning to explore and define what her spirituality meant to her.

Figure 3: Sophia's Faith Artifact



Sophia, Charlie, and Sam described the impact of immersive experiences on their faith development. For example, Charlie identified his experience attending World Youth Day twice

in high school as a profound experience in his faith development. World Youth Day occurs every three years in different countries worldwide, where young adults engage in experiences, including an encounter with the Pope, grounded in shared beliefs in Catholicism (World Youth Day, 2023). Charlie said, “[participation in World Youth Day] put into perspective for me how different lives and walks of life can be. However, people can have a lot of the same beliefs and values that is derived from this faith.” In addition, this experience contributed to Charlie’s sense of connectivity with other faith community members.

Alternatively, Sam shared that in her last semester of graduate school, she had the opportunity to participate in a faith retreat called *Search* through campus ministry. *Search Retreats* are peer-led retreat experiences grounded in Catholicism that seek to develop trust, curiosity, and a sense of belonging between individuals and their faith (Search Retreat, 2023). While Sam did not identify as Catholic, she shared that the experience of participating in the retreat helped her create lifelong friendships and helped her feel grounded in her faith, including the influence of God in her life.

While Sophia, Charlie, and Sam participated in retreats and trips identified as immersive experiences, several participants also identified the Catholic higher education where they were working as an immersive environment important to their faith. Bobby, Charlie, Char, Sam, and Mark shared that their experiences working at a Catholic college or university were important to their faith development. Bobby shared that he decided to convert to Catholicism after attending religious services in a Baptist or African Methodist church with his grandparents as a child because of his work in Catholic higher education. He said, “my journey to this [Catholicism] wholeheartedly is solely because of where I had worked.” In this community, he found himself connected to others, also exploring their faith, including the individual who eventually became

his wife. After watching her navigate the RCIA process and witnessing its positive impact on her and their relationship, he also wanted to convert to Catholicism. Bobby shared that he had worked at a Catholic institution for five years before he decided to change religions. During that period, he said that he felt that there was no pressure for him to change religions and that even after he completed RCIA, the response from community members was happiness for where Bobby was on his faith journey, not the fact he had chosen to practice Catholicism.

Mark highlighted that, for him, working at a Catholic university provided him the opportunity to integrate his whole self into his work with students fully. He shared that this experience has been profound for his faith development and provided meaning to why he worked in student affairs, connecting it back to his desire to live a life like Jesus. Finally, Char shared that it is through her experience working at a Catholic university engaging students in dialogues around their faith that she finds herself called to be reconnected to her faith community after her departure from her church years ago.

For the participants, immersive experiences allowed them to engage with others about faith which was missing in their lives until that time. While for some, the experience led to them forming a connection and joining a new community, for others, these immersive environments helped them identify the significance of their own experiences with their faith beliefs and the complexity within them. The experiences described by participants mirror research regarding the purpose of faith in understanding the connections between a person's experiences and the growing prevalence of individuals using faith as a term to define the complexity of their experience beyond a single set of religious beliefs (Fowler, 1991; Jochum et al., 2007). For Sam, Sophia, and Bobby, these immersive experiences contributed to their meaning-making in a combination of religions, spiritual beliefs, and experiences throughout their life. In addition, it

highlights the complexity of faith and its importance as a broader term in encompassing more than an individual's religious and spiritual beliefs.

Contributing Factor: Purpose. The final contributing factor participants identified as aiding in the development of meaning-making was how they integrated faith with what they viewed as their life's purpose. For the participants, purpose connects to their clarity in their values, motivation, and intent for their lives. In this section, I highlight the descriptions Rachel, Mark, Bobby, and Sam share in how they made meaning of their faith with the beliefs of their greater purpose.

Rachel shared that her connection to her faith from her childhood through her current period of adulthood has led her to look for signs to affirm that her actions and decision-making connect to her purpose. In her interview, Rachel said, "I look for signs from God and that means opening my mind [to possibilities]." Between her individual interview and faith vignettes, Rachel mentioned the signs she looked for and connected to her purpose eight times. During one of her faith vignettes, Rachel shared a photo from her office that connected to an experience she had in the first few weeks at her institution. Figure 4 is a photo of the artwork hanging in Rachel's office above her doorway. Rachel shared that colleagues sometimes start meetings with a mission moment at her current institution. During one of the first few weeks of Rachel starting in her current role, a colleague shared a verse, Matthew 6:34, from the *Bible*. The artwork above the door in her office is the Matthew 6:34 verse she hung when she started at the institution. While Rachel is not Catholic, she shared that this verse connected to her Moravian beliefs. Rachel described the experience as one of those signs that reinforced what she was meant to do professionally and connected to her greater purpose.

Figure 4: Rachel's Office Artwork



Like Rachel, Mark shared that he connected his purpose to his belief in God's role in shaping his experiences. Until his current role, Mark never saw himself attending or working at a Catholic college or university because it was out of reach financially for his family. However, his role at the time of the interview reflected his distinct experiences as a basketball coach, academic advisor, and student success coach, and how he felt working at a Catholic institution strengthened his faith and connected to what he viewed as his life's purpose. Mark described this experience as, "I'm a big believer in God's timing and him putting me in the place that I am supposed to be."

Bobby and Sam shared similar sentiments to Mark in the connection between their life experiences, faith, and purpose. Bobby shared that through his meaning-making of faith in his life, he has found that sometimes in the most challenging moments, it is important to "just take a deep breath and be able to know that there's something bigger helping to guide you." Sam also emphasized the importance of trust as she connected her life experiences to her faith in this meaning-making process. For her, even at the most challenging times, integrating her faith into her life has allowed her to feel that her decisions and experiences are necessary as they relate to her more significant purpose in the contributions to the world she will make during her life. In

those moments, such as when she has a sudden change in her life, she is reminded, “I am supposed to be on this journey.”

Summary of Meaning-Making. Meaning making, as articulated by the participants, is an immensely personal process that includes integrating their life experiences and faith to make meaning of their experiences. Individuals who can (re)interpret their faith that affirms their life experiences after undergoing spiritual struggles or disconnect can strengthen their faith identity (Means & Jaeger, 2016). Participants in this study indicated they were able to do so through participation in immersive experiences and environments, creating personal definitions of their faith, and connecting their faith beliefs to their greater purpose. The next theme I discuss related to the participants' faith development is feelings of belonging towards their faith.

Sense of Belonging

The second theme that all nine participants identified was developing a sense of belonging within their faith. Three contributing factors impacted participants' sense of belonging: (1) family, (2) mentorship within communities, and (3) vulnerability and authenticity in communities. Below, I present each of these contributing factors or Sense of Belonging.

Contributing Factor: Family. The first contributing factor participants identified as aiding in developing a sense of belonging related to their faith is the connection with their family. Most participants' families served as the origin of their faith beliefs. Seven of the nine participants emphasized their family's role in creating a sense of belonging within their faith. In this section, I highlight the experiences of Mark, Char, Claire, and Rachel and their family's role in creating a sense of belonging connected to their faith.

For Mark, the origin of his faith is deeply connected to his relationship with his mother. Mark shared that family is of utmost importance to him and that it is through his mother's efforts

that he grew up prioritizing his faith. As a graduation gift from his graduate school program, Mark shared that his mother gifted him a necklace with the face of Jesus on it. He shared that the intentionality of his mother giving him this specific item tied back to how they both valued their faith. In adulthood, Mark said that he and his mother continued to dialogue about their faith and how they lived it. He shared that they both admire how the other individual speaks about their faith and live authentic lives deeply rooted in it.

Figure 5 is a photo of the necklace given to Mark by his mother. Mark shared that he wears the necklace daily with the face of Jesus resting directly over his heart. It reminded him of his mother's thoughtfulness, shared experiences growing in their faith together, and of whom he wants to be in the world. As Mark continued to move through adulthood, he shared that he and his mother are mutually inspired to continue to grow in their beliefs based on how they see each other integrate the values of their faith into their lives.

Figure 5: Mark's Faith Artifact

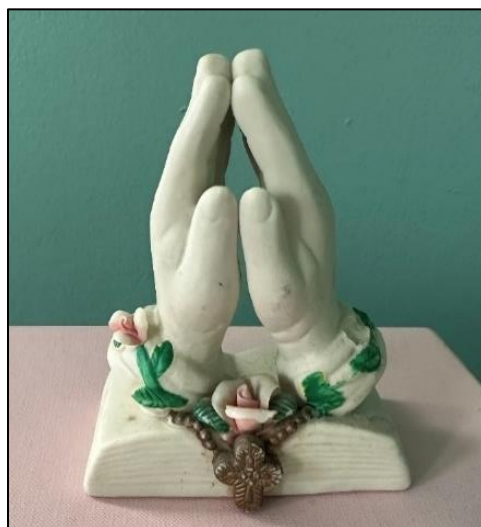


Char's faith was also tied to a family member. Char shared similar sentiments with Mark when describing her grandmother and the origin of her faith beliefs which significantly contributed to her sense of belonging. Char shared that she lived in the same household as her

mother and grandmother. She described her relationship with her grandmother as foundational in developing her faith and spirituality. In particular, Char said, “I was very close to my grandmother before her passing. She really instilled in me the importance of not just faith, but the importance of being rooted in faith and spirituality while also being able to question religion.” To this day, Char shared that she carries with her the memories of her grandmother and the commitment to authentically engage in a faithful community that her grandmother modeled for her.

One item that continues to remind Char of her connection to her grandmother is a statue that her grandmother kept on her table growing up. Figure 6 is a photo of the statue of praying hands that belonged to Char’s grandmother and was gifted to Char after her grandmother’s death. Since her grandmother’s death, Char has shared that the statue has an even greater significance towards her connection with her grandmother as there is a similar statue next to her grandmother’s grave. Char also commented that while many of her friends and family know that the statue in her home originally belonged to her grandmother, very few know its importance to her feeling a sense of belonging and connection to her faith and spirituality.

Figure 6: Char’s Faith Artifact



During Claire’s interview, she shared the complexity of her faith and how it is interwoven in her relationships with her family and friends. At this point in her life, Claire also identified the role she sees in helping her young daughter develop her faith, including sharing with her the vulnerability that led to Claire’s faith development. During her interview, Claire shared a book as her faith artifact, including a poem and illustrations she made for her daughter, highlighting significant beliefs in Claire’s faith development. The book was created as a culminating assignment for a staff seminar Claire took at a previous institution. Figure 7 is a photo of one page within the book. The image is one of the first pages in the book dedicating it to her daughter. Claire described the book dedicated to her daughter as “encompassing of what I feel like is the scope of my faith.” She shared that included in the various pages throughout it are images and a poem of her hopes for her daughter and examples of the impact her “soul friends” had led to the day her daughter was born. In this example, the sense of belonging is not solely the origin of Claire’s faith but rather the responsibility Claire feels as a parent in creating a similar sense of belonging for her daughter.

Figure 7: Claire’s Faith Artifact



While not all participants shared a sense of belonging connecting their faith to their family, for most participants, their family members or their children were an essential component to the sense of belonging they have about their faith. For these individuals, the mentoring communities in their families were critical to their faith based on the participant's ability to be their authentic selves and had a deep connection to others.

Contributing Factor: Mentorship in Community. The second contributing factor participants identified as aiding in developing a sense of belonging related to the role of mentors within their faith communities. All nine participants identified the role mentors played in helping them feel a connection and a sense of belonging within their faith. In this section, I highlight two mentoring relationships Rachel and Charlie shared, which influenced their sense of belonging.

For Rachel, mentorship in her faith community is also connected to her extended family. Growing up, Rachel shared that her family did not actively participate in a faith community. However, the invitation from her uncle, a deacon at a Moravian church, catalyzed her faith development. As a result, Rachel said the community she found and the mentorship of the pastor at her church served as a place of stability and safety even during her parents' divorce. Rachel said, "It wasn't just the church service. It was out of hours. It was the youth group. We had the run of the church. I mean, that was just our home away from home." Rachel highlighted that her desire to spend more time with her cousins led to her developing a mentoring relationship with her pastor, which she identified as important to find a sense of belonging with her church. To this day, Rachel shared that she is still a member of the same church. However, on a few occasions, such as when she moved and attempted to find a new church, neither she nor her family found the same deep connection and belonging as in her childhood church cultivated through her relationship with the pastor.

Alternatively, Charlie shared the impact of being in a community with others who shared his beliefs. He identified his experience at his Catholic undergraduate institution as well as his experiences working in his first full-time student affairs role at a Catholic institution, as being specifically profound. Charlie highlighted the tight-knit relationships built through dialogue, engaging in his faith rituals, and hearing the experiences of others as critical factors in finding a sense of belonging connected to his faith. In particular, he referenced the role two priests, one at each institution, played in dialoguing with him to explore his understanding of faith and its connection to his experience. Charlie noted that being in an environment with others with shared beliefs, being vulnerable, and exploring components of his faith with these priests deepened his beliefs.

Participants in the study highlighted an important person in their faith who served as a mentor. As indicated in the participants' stories, these mentors created spaces where they felt they could engage authentically, be vulnerable in exploring their beliefs, and feel connected to others with shared identities. The profound experiences shared by participants included an appreciation for supporting individuals with their faith who contributed to their sense of belonging.

Contributing Factor: Vulnerability. The final contributing factor participants identified as aiding in developing a sense of belonging relates to their ability to be vulnerable and authentic in spaces with others. Six of the nine participants shared experiences where they felt authentic and vulnerable with others, including relinquishing control, listening and connecting with others, sharing about themselves, and being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. In this section, I point to some examples of authenticity and vulnerability shared by Sophia, Sam, Bobby, and Char, contributing to their sense of belonging.

Bobby and Char described the most significant experiences in their faith development as the ones where they acknowledged their vulnerability as humans and the ability not to have control over everything in their lives. Bobby said, “I think it speaks a lot to faith and religion because we often, as mortal beings, get so focused on the things that are out of our control or the things that we believe we alone can control.” In response to this feeling, he shared that he utilized meditation and prayer to be more comfortable with the unpredictable, allowing him to authentically engage with others. Similarly, Char shared, “faith is not just sitting around expecting magic to happen, but rather it’s listening, being connected, and then taking those steps.” For her, moments like participating in mass or engaging in prayer connected her to the community and grounded her to her faith and those she is engaging in the community. Both Bobby and Char shared experiences of how faith supports them when they feel vulnerable and out of control.

Alternatively, Sophia and Sam shared that they have realized through their experiences the importance of showing up as their authentic selves and being willing to share that version of themselves with others. For example, Sophia identified several times throughout her life when she was the only person who identified as Jewish. For her, navigating experiences where she felt comfortable disclosing her faith identity, such as when others made assumptions based on her work at a Catholic university, helped her feel a greater sense of belonging and connection. Sam identified similar ideas, noting that the spaces where she was vulnerable in small groups sharing her own life experiences, were the ones that led her to feel a greater sense of connection to the community. Sam shared an example of when she collaborated with colleagues in campus ministry at her institution to host a program remembering loved ones that died around a Catholic celebration for All Souls Day. In that experience, Sam pointed to her vulnerability to share her

personal experiences navigating grief through the death of her parents as a place that helped her connect to others in the community.

Authenticity and vulnerability were important contributing factors shared by the six participants in finding a sense of belonging in their faith and communities. While participants varied in their application of this concept, with some emphasizing their need to be vulnerable while others acknowledged their awareness of their vulnerability, the overall importance of this component to the theme of a sense of belonging was important. As education and comfort around faith continue to decline (Miller & Thorsen, 2003), spaces where individuals can be vulnerable in discussing their beliefs and showing up authentically are increasingly important to faith development.

Summary of Sense of Belonging. As indicated by participants, a sense of belonging is a feeling of connection and value with their faith supported by the community. Participants shared the importance of vulnerability and authenticity, mentorship, and the influence of family and community in creating a sense of belonging with their faith. Scholars have found that when individuals are in environments where they experience a sense of belonging, including ones where faith is nurtured, it can lead to greater awareness, development, regulation, empowerment, resilience, and maturity (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011; Parks, 2000; Fowler, 1981). Similar sentiments were expressed by the participants in this study when they reported feeling a sense of belonging connected to their faith.

Disconnect

The last theme that all nine participants identified was a sense of disconnect. The disconnect from faith occurred at various times in their lives. Sometimes disconnect resulted when participants could not reconcile tensions between their lived experiences and beliefs. At

other times, the feeling of disconnect came after an event that acted as a catalyst shifting the individual from feelings of belonging to disconnect. Three contributing factors impacted participants' feelings of connection: (1) rigidity of religious and community beliefs, (2) movement between faith communities, and (3) significant life events such as a death of a loved one. Below, I present each of these contributing factors to disconnect.

Contributing Factor: Rigidity. The first contributing factor participants identified as leading to a disconnect in their faith were dynamics of rigidity in their religious and faith communities. Eight of nine participants in the study highlighted ways rigidity around faith led them to experience disconnect from their faith communities. For some participants, such as Claire and Tricia, rigidity is highlighted by rules or expectations in their religious beliefs. This leads them to feel a disconnect from these communities and, ultimately, depart from their religious communities. Alternatively, for participants such as Char and Charlie, rigidity appeared in the expectations and application of faith within their professional roles. For these individuals, a disconnect occurred when they were expected to follow these expectations and rules even though they were incongruent with their beliefs, ultimately impacting their personal beliefs and experience professionally. In this section, I explore the experiences of Claire, Tricia, Char, and Charlie and how their experiences related to the rigidity of beliefs led them to feel disconnected from their communities.

Claire is one of the participants that explicitly used the word rigidity in explaining her faith and its development during her life. She shared that she felt her faith beliefs over time became more flexible than earlier in her life. Claire compared her experience attending a non-Catholic, religiously affiliated undergraduate institution with her current beliefs. She said, “in college, I probably veered a little bit too intensely, like I don’t think I would have considered

myself a fundamentalist, but I was definitely, like gun-ho.” She explained that as she moved into adulthood, her beliefs shifted “from a place of black and white or rigidity...to developing of the gray.” Claire shared that her disconnect and shift in beliefs ebbed and flowed. At the same time, she explored what she actually believed in, conflicts with her religious beliefs, and was influenced by people in her life at different moments.

Another participant, Tricia, described that as she got older, she struggled with some of the beliefs within her religion, like the periods of questioning Claire highlighted. Tricia explained that some of the expectations set in her religion when she was younger did not match her lived experience as an adult. She used gender roles in marriage as an example. She explained, “[it is] a juxtaposition between what I’ve been told and what’s actually playing out in real life.” Tricia shared that the religious education she received in childhood and young adulthood emphasized that women were expected to be caregivers for their husbands and children. In contrast, husbands were to serve as the “breadwinner,” providing financially for the family. However, in Tricia’s family as an adult, she shared that her experience is the opposite of that expectation, with her husband serving more as the caretaker. At the same time, she contributed more significantly to the family’s finances. For Tricia, the rigidity of beliefs within Catholicism led her to identify as someone no longer “practicing” her religion but rather more broadly living some of the values it instilled in her when she was younger such as forgiveness and caring for others.

While Tricia and Claire described in their interviews the role rigidity played in creating a disconnect in their faith, Char and Charlie emphasized how the rigidity of faith being restricted in their professional experiences led to a personal and professional disconnect. Char highlighted that some of her professional roles as a mental health counselor before working in Catholic

higher education restricted discussing faith with clients or students. She shared that, as a result, it hurt her and how she supported her clients. Char said, “you get this message like that’s a part of you, you have to leave out. I think that it had a trickle-down effect...I had to turn quiet and timid about that part of myself.” In return, Char shared that she felt challenged and, at times, ill-equipped as a mental health counselor to support clients in their care, as it felt like their faith and culture were considered off-limits based upon this expectation.

Alternatively, Charlie highlighted that when his department at a Catholic university decided to terminate a student staff member for a conduct violation, he felt disconnected from his colleagues and supervisor since he felt their decision was absent of the Catholic mission of the institution to care for the whole person and ultimately was incongruent with his values. Charlie said, “for a while, I struggled with that. [I] struggled with, am I in the right place?” Until that moment, Charlie shared that he found working as a live-in professional in this environment incredibly impactful to his faith development based on being surrounded by community members with similar values and commitments to faith. However, this incident made Charlie question his community membership and values. Charlie shared that he leaned on a family member, who ultimately challenged him to consider whether he genuinely embodied his faith or if what he was telling others was “propaganda.” During this time, Charlie’s doubt was related to his beliefs, trust in his colleagues, and happiness with his employer.

For participants, including those shared by Claire, Tricia, Char, and Charlie, the tensions they experienced resulted in doubt, isolation, and questioning of their faith and community membership, leading to a disconnect from their beliefs. While several of the participants identified the tensions leading to their feelings of disconnect being connected to Catholicism or working in Catholic higher education, religious and spiritual struggles are a component of faith

development and have been reported across a variety of identities, including religious affiliation (Fowler, 1981; Abu Raiya et al., 2015). The eight participants who expressed these feelings also indicated that they felt that the period of disconnect they experienced influenced their overall faith development.

Contributing Factor: Transition between Faith Communities. The second contributing factor participants identified contributing to a feeling of disconnect was a transition in their faith communities. All participants indicated that at some point in their lives, they shifted away from a faith community, in many cases, a specific religion, which left them feeling disconnected. Though each participant shared a different catalyst that led to their transition from faith communities, an overarching experience across all participants was a probing commitment to their faith, including elements of questioning and exploration within the context of their lives. In this section, I highlight the experiences of Claire, Sophia, and Bobby in their transition between faith and religious communities and its relation to their feelings of being disconnected.

For participants, Sophia and Claire, their experiences during early childhood with the cultural influences of religion in their family were identified as catalysts that led them to transition between religious communities. Claire and Sophia shared that their current beliefs align more with spirituality with some religious influence rather than one specific religion. Claire shared in her interview that she has changed religious beliefs at least three times throughout her life and now finds herself defining her faith as Lutheran and spiritual. Claire described her faith upbringing as being “culturally Catholic,” where she identified experiences in her upbringing that negatively impacted her, including the power she observed men having within the Catholic church. Claire shared that, in time, she has come to a place of respect regarding Catholicism, but the impact of her experiences during childhood ultimately led her to leave the Catholic church.

While Claire shared that she has affiliated with the Presbyterian and Lutheran churches at times in adulthood, there are periods when she has not felt a part of any faith community. Claire said, “I’ve gone through long periods where I was like, no, church isn’t my thing...none of these faith communities are really meeting my need.” In adulthood, Claire has shared that her disconnect from these various faith communities is often based on her lack of connection with others, feeling like the depth of beliefs and maturity she seeks in relationships with others is missing.

Sophia shared that while her family identified as “culturally Jewish,” her parents’ beliefs and how she was raised ultimately aligned with atheism. As a result, Sophia described herself as “almost mistrusting of anybody who was super outwardly faith based.” At the same time, she also questioned, “am I Jewish enough?” based on her upbringing. This raised concerns for her during early adulthood when Sophia began exploring her spirituality while taking philosophy courses at her undergraduate institution. She said, “I was scared to consider myself spiritual,” as it could isolate her from her family and their beliefs. Alternatively, Sophia said that when she had the opportunity to explore Judaism further, she questioned if she could claim that identity as she did not complete important religious rituals in Judaism, such as her bat mitzvah. As such, Sophia identified the transition between different faith beliefs such as atheism, Judaism, and the concept of spirituality challenging as she was unsure if she belonged in any of the set of beliefs and ultimately experienced a period of disconnect.

While Claire and Sophia shared the influence of their early experiences with faith as contributing to transitions between communities, participant Bobby shared the challenge of finding a connection to a faith community in adulthood. Bobby shared that he struggled to find connection and trust in a faith community when exploring membership in a new church with his wife before their daughter was born. He questioned whether their identities would be affirmed in

the community. Bobby described his concerns about joining some churches in his community based on their history and the religious institution's impact on individuals who shared his racial identity as a Black man. Bobby stated:

We were very skeptical and afraid of joining a church in our community. As with all religions and all organized things, there's a lot of ugly, and the community we live in has some very public struggles with issues of race and the support of people who have been historically marginalized.

He later described his concerns for his family. "We don't want our daughter to be a victim of the ugliness that exists within the organization." In his example, Bobby shared that his fear and struggle to find connection were also tightly woven with his desire to raise his daughter in an affirming, supportive community for all her identities, not just her faith.

All study participants shared similar experiences like the stories shared by Claire, Sophia, and Bobby. While some participants indicated the period of questioning or departure from beliefs was shorter than others, there was consistency in feeling disconnected or lacking belonging. For the participants, these feelings of disconnect and lack of membership as their authentic selves are evident in hindsight, especially for those who currently identify with a greater sense of depth in their faith.

Contributing Factor: Significant Life Events. Significant life events were the final contributing factor participants identified as disconnecting them from their faith. Five of the nine participants highlighted the impact of events such as a family member's death, the ending of relationships, and the COVID-19 pandemic in contributing to their feelings of disconnect. While participants often shared that their faith made them feel connected or as a member of a larger community, several identified significant life events that impacted their connection to their faith.

In this section, I highlight the experiences shared by Sam, Char, Rachel, Claire, and Charlie regarding how significant life events led to a disconnect in their faith beliefs.

For Sam, the death of her parents was a significant life event she identified that disrupted her connection to her faith community. Sam shared that both of her parents died within a short period of time and somewhat unexpectedly during adolescence. The impact of navigating both her parents' sudden death and grief triggered a disconnect with her childhood church community. Before their death, Sam shared that she and her family were deeply involved in their Lutheran church. Sam was an acolyte and a youth group member, spending much of her time outside school at her Lutheran church. However, after the death of her parents, based on the response of other community members, Sam shared that she felt a lack of support in navigating grief. She shared those members of the church, whom she previously had close relationships with, told her prayer would solve her grief or that there was a purpose to her parents' deaths. Sam shared that the response from these communities did not help her process her grief and ultimately separated her from her church community. As a result, she said, "my faith really, and my spirituality, like, shook at that point." Sam shared that the lack of support while navigating grief from her religious community led to her questioning the meaning behind her parents' death and whether she should remain a member of her religious community regardless of her prior involvement based upon their lack of support.

Alternatively, Char identified the ending of a relationship as a significant life event that separated her from her faith community. She shared, "It [her church] was very small, and there were some things that happened interpersonally there that I then found it hard to grow spiritually there, and so I left." As a result, Char emphasized the impact to her of losing a close relationship and her faith community simultaneously. As time has passed since that experience and her

departure from the religious community, Char shared, “I’ve found myself recently kind of yearning and speaking more for being rooted in that way again.” Char identified that one of the contributing factors to her desire to find a new faith community was the dialogue she has with students and colleagues around faith in her current work. In this example, the faith community's interconnectedness and the end of her relationship were a significant life event that led to a disconnect for Char in her personal relationship and membership within her former church community.

Four participants, Rachel, Claire, Charlie, and Sam referenced the COVID-19 pandemic as a significant life event that led to feelings of disconnect from their faith. For these individuals, the unprecedented experience of navigating lockdown and virtual participation in faith communities was significant in their lives, leading to being disconnected from the communities where they practiced their faith. For example, Rachel shared that in addition to her and her family moving in the middle of the pandemic, she felt that during the lockdown period, she also lost the connection to her religious community since in-person services and social interactions within the community were abruptly paused. Similarly, Sam shared that moving shortly before the initial COVID lockdown and the slow re-opening of faith communities after the lockdown impacted her ability to find a new church community, prompting a significant period where she did not belong to a church. While Claire did not move during the pandemic, she also shared that during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, her family did not go to church or engage much with their religious community leading to a disconnect for her and her family as well. Finally, participant Charlie shared that though his church provided opportunities to engage in rituals virtually, he was disconnected and easily distracted. Charlie stated:

The pandemic was tough...we watched mass on TV, but to say I was focused would be a lie. I was doing certain other things. I was on my phone. It felt more like checking a box, because it had been something I'd done in the past.

For Charlie, the lack of in-person engagement and mindfulness during his rituals created a disconnect between himself and his faith.

While each participant experienced the disconnect of faith in different ways, significant life events led to a physical disconnect in faith communities influenced by the participant's ability to engage with others in the community. The unexpectedness of the events which impacted these five participants were significant to not only their sense of belonging within their identity but also their ability to continue to practice their religion or faith with others.

Summary of Disconnect. Participants identified disconnect as a period where they felt disengaged or struggled with tensions in their faith beliefs. Periods of spiritual struggle created by strains between lived experiences and what individuals hold most sacred are critical to faith development (Exline, 2013; Fowler, 1981). In this study, participants indicated rigidity of beliefs, transitions between faith communities, and the impact of significant life events such as a death in the family as contributing factors that influenced their feelings of disconnect within their faith. In addition, the participants identified periods of disconnect at different periods of their life and not just during childhood or early adulthood. For these participants, feelings of disconnect are not tied to the linear development of faith, but something they may navigate in unexpected and sometimes anticipated ways.

Summary of Personal Faith Development Findings

Faith development is an immensely personal process based on reconciling life experiences with personal beliefs within a person's identity (Fowler, 1981; Wedow et. al, 2017).

This study revealed that all participants experienced a sense of belonging, meaning making, and disconnect with their faith. Furthermore, the participants' experiences indicate fluidity between these three themes, with movement between each theme, during different periods in their lives.

Supporting College Student Faith Development

The second research question asked, "In what ways do the personal experiences and insights of these student affairs professionals influence their understanding of contemporary college student faith development and their work in supporting student learning and development?" I answered this question by identifying three key themes identified by participants about their role in supporting student faith development: (1) faith is complex, (2) faith development is a journey, and (3) faith cannot be developed alone.

Faith is Complex

The first theme participants identified about their role in supporting college student faith development is that faith is complex. According to the participants, faith is not simply the practice of religious rituals but rather an abstract, complex, and grey form of identity unique to each person. The participants shared that their understanding of the complexity of faith from their own experiences influenced how they engage with students around concepts of faith in their work as student affairs professionals. Seven of nine participants shared that they felt faith was complex. Participants identified three contributing factors to the complexity of faith: (1) faith is more than religion, (2) variability in expression, and (3) power and faith. Below, I present each of these contributing factors of faith complexity.

Contributing Factor: More than Religion. The first contributing factor is the assertion that faith is more than just religion. For the participants, faith encompassed more than religion and may include elements such as an individual's values, cultural influence, religion, and belief

in spiritual connections. In addition, several participants highlighted the influence of people within religion, leading to variations between communities even within the same beliefs, and the importance of engaging in conversations with others to understand what faith means to them. Char said, “I think sometimes those two things [faith and religion] get murky. Religion is an institution and it’s run by people and people are fallible. Like any other institution, it’s going to be impacted by other institutions around it.” As such, some participants, such as Claire and Sophia, highlighted the importance of not making assumptions even when an individual identified with a particular religion, as how those beliefs may be animated in an individual’s life is complicated. Sophia pointed out that individuals are not always able to articulate or willing to share what faith means to them based on how personal it is. These individuals may not necessarily be comfortable with the vulnerability of sharing something so personal or may not have considered how they personally define faith prior to being asked that question.

Bobby highlighted that even within a specific religion, there are added layers of complexity. He pointed out that while his current institution is a Catholic college, it is also heavily influenced by the hallmarks of its Benedictine founding order. He shared that even in his learning about the Benedictine hallmarks, the common understanding of the hallmark based on the definition of the word in the dictionary is not always what the hallmark means in the context of the founding order’s work or Catholic beliefs. Bobby shared:

An example of that is the hospitality hallmark. It’s not just about walking people into a space and being kind. It’s about taking the next step and making sure they have a sense of belonging and that they’re able to navigate the spaces you’re welcoming them into.

Through conversations with a faculty member, Bobby shared that he was able to develop a better understanding of what it means to be a Benedictine Catholic institution and then incorporate it into his work with students.

The personal faith experiences of Char, Claire, Sophia, and Bobby mirror the complexity they shared about understanding faith in their work as student affairs professionals. Each participant who named the complexity of faith identified that their unique experiences and definition of their identities contributed to how they viewed faith with others. As such, each participant emphasized the importance of asking questions and dialoguing with others as an important tool when engaging with others about faith since it encompasses more than a person's religious beliefs.

Contributing Factor: Variability of Expression. The second contributing factor to the complexity of faith is the variability in faith expression. In their personal experiences and work with students, six participants indicated that their belief in the complexity of faith is tied to a variations in how an individual may express their faith. The participants identified differences in connection and commitment, which influence faith expression. In this section, I highlight examples provided by Claire, Rachel, and Mark, where they described the variability of faith expression in their work as professionals and in their personal experiences.

In their interviews, Rachel and Mark referenced integrating and applying their founding orders' charisms and values at their institution. Where Mark highlighted a strong understanding and integration at his institution, Rachel explained the disconnect she has found between the institutional values and practices of both students and colleagues. The contrast between the experiences of these two professionals highlights the variation of understanding and application of Catholic identity between two institutions as an example of the continuum of connection.

Mark shared in his interview that at his institution, the values of the Sisters of Mercy, such as commitment to acts of service, are lived out by most community members daily, including faculty, staff, and students. It defined how they approach their work with students as a service to others and even how they committed to helping those in need in the surrounding community. However, Rachel shared that at her Franciscan university, which has a similar value of service, there is a lack of connectivity to this core belief in their Catholic identity. She indicated that she frequently finds herself explaining the service requirement for graduation or other decision-making at the institution in conversations with faculty, staff, and students based on a higher level of disconnect to the Catholic identity of the institution. Rachel described her approach to these conversations as helping to remind colleagues and students of what the institution has identified as most important to them and pointing out those points of connection in her daily work.

While Rachel and Mark have contrasting experiences regarding the expression of Catholic identity at their institutions, Claire identified different levels of connection to faith based on an individual's life experiences, including the origination of their beliefs from diverse backgrounds, as a contributing factor to the variation of expression. She shared that only when individuals can build relationships where they feel safe, heard, and cared for can they authentically express their faith. Mark points to similar sentiments when he spoke about the reluctance of individuals to speak about their faith based upon the personal nature of the topic. He believed the reluctance in speaking about faith was often connected to challenging experiences individuals navigated in their lives. He shared that he finds that when he authentically shares and acknowledges his faith with others, it opens the door for their vulnerability in expressing faith.

Claire, Rachel, and Mark articulated similar sentiments in their personal experiences in addition to the examples in their professional experiences I highlighted. Rachel and Mark emphasized how they have felt varied levels of commitment to the institutions where they work, indicating how some environments have strengthened their faith identity while others had less of an explicit connection. Clarie's experience of changing religions three times and then redefining what faith meant to her provided an added layer to her understanding that individuals may experience varying levels of connection and expression to their faith as it ebbs and flows throughout their lifespan. The identification by professionals with their own faith and how they see it lived at their Catholic institutions adds to their understanding that each person may be at a different place with their faith identity and, as such, makes it increasingly difficult to define what faith is more broadly.

Contributing Factor: Power and Faith. The third contributing factor to the complexity of faith is the connection between power and faith. Within their understanding of faith, five participants discussed how they view faith as being influenced by power, contributing to their understanding of the complexity of faith. Identifying power dynamics and the historical use of power by faith organizations was important for these professionals in understanding faith's innately personal and complex nature. In this section, I point to experiences shared by Rachel, Tricia, Bobby, Char, and Claire, where they have identified the influence of power on faith beliefs, adding to their understanding of its complexity.

Rachel and Tricia highlighted the power they have observed existing when there is a tight coupling of politics with faith. For them, the influence of power when politics and faith are combined influences their commitment to faith and work within their institutions. Tricia and Rachel shared observations of the power when politics and religion are leveraged in a

community. They identified a concern regarding using faith, which is innately personal to the individual, to make decisions that impact the masses. Rachel said, “it’s hard to divide some of the political rhetoric that seems to overwhelm faith and religion in our country.” She continued by sharing her beliefs that faith and politics have become too intertwined in society, making it increasingly difficult to discuss with others as it is often polarizing.

Tricia shared sentiments with Rachel and provided an example of how leadership in her institution applied the proximity of political decisions with faith. She shared that many individuals identified as “conservative” in their political and religious beliefs in the surrounding communities where Tricia lived and worked. She felt that after the Supreme Court decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* case was made overturning the *Roe v. Wade* decision, individuals in her community used their religious beliefs, which were closely intertwined with their political beliefs, to impinge on the personal decision-making of others. Tricia shared that she felt her institution was also using its power as an employer in applying religious and political ideology on its employees by requiring them to sign a covenant statement agreeing to live their lives inside and outside the institution in alignment with the institution’s religious values or risk termination. Tricia shared that the power used by select members of her institution to infringe on her individual beliefs was an example of power within the context of a faith community and a Catholic university. Tricia emphasized that such decisions to leverage power further disconnected her from her faith and she has observed similar sentiments from her students.

Char and Bobby spoke to the power prevalent in the history of the Catholic Church, including how throughout its history, decisions have been made that both support and cause trauma for others. Within their work at Catholic higher education institutions, Char and Bobby

emphasized the importance of remembering that the Catholic Church's actions have impacted individuals within their community differently based on their identities and whether they benefited or were disadvantaged by those decisions. Within the context of her Catholic institution, Char identified how she benefited from full time employment based on the financial success of her Catholic university as well as how the immersive environment emphasizing Catholic identity, in alignment with her own Christian beliefs, encouraged her faith development. However, she noted within her work in supporting college student mental health, not all individuals experienced the positive outcomes she had. Char explained:

I can't divorce the way I'm thinking about this or what it means that we're saying this from the fact that we are part of a Catholic institution and that has a history. People have feelings about it and have both experienced a lot of triumph and a lot of uplifting through Catholic institutions while some folks have experienced a lot of trauma and a lot of oppression.

Bobby shared similar sentiments as Char when considering his own experiences and how faith was supported on his campus. He emphasized the importance to note that not all individuals have positive experiences based on decisions made by the Catholic church. In his own faith development, Bobby highlighted that the decisions some Catholic churches made in his community further marginalized individuals such as those in lower income communities. Within his professional role, Bobby described campus ministry within the context of his current institution as lacking diverse beliefs and experiences. He shared that the individuals connected to campus ministry tend to be homogenous populations who share identities and life experiences. As a result, there was a failure to acknowledge those different than themselves, including those who have experienced trauma because of decisions made by faith communities. He shared,

“there’s a need to create more inclusive spaces and provide more opportunities for people who have historically been marginalized.” Char and Bobby highlighted the importance of acknowledging the different experiences people have within faith communities, including the role power and decision-making have on individuals, adding to the complexity of faith based on a person’s unique experience.

Lastly, participant Claire shared that her understanding of Catholicism and its application within a Catholic institution is based on her ability to dialogue with others to understand the context and application within her work as a student affairs professional. In her interview, Claire shared an experience where one of the Benedictine brothers at her institution assisted with a departmental research project. As part of the final elements of the project, there was an opportunity for Claire’s staff member and the brother to travel together. Ultimately, the Archabbot, the head of the Benedictine order at her institution, decided that the brother was not allowed to travel with the other staff member with no other reason provided to Claire or her staff member. Claire emphasized that this was incredibly difficult for her as, due to the Archabbot’s positional authority and power within her institution, he was inaccessible for her to even ask questions about his decision in order to develop an understanding of why the decision was made for the brother not to travel. For Claire, the power some individuals have within faith communities significantly contributed to her understanding of the complexity of faith and the influence power has when applied by individuals within faith communities.

Rachel, Tricia, Bobby, Char, and Claire provided varying examples of how they viewed power influencing their understanding of faith. Their experiences highlighted how individuals influenced decision-making within faith communities, frequently making a broad sweeping decision for something the participants view as innately personal. Whether exploring the history

of faith-based institutions or trying to understand current practices, faith is frequently influenced by other people, including their use of power, adding to the complexity of faith.

Summary of Faith is Complex. The complexity of faith, as defined by participants, is expansive as it incorporated the unique beliefs and experiences of the individual. The participants shared that they believe variations in faith expression and their understanding of the influence of power within faith institutions critically contributed to their belief in the complexity of faith. The personal experiences the professionals described contributed to their understanding of the complex nature of faith and is embedded in their understanding of how to support student faith development.

Faith Development is a Journey

The second theme participants identified as contributing to their role in supporting college student faith development is their belief that faith development is a journey. This journey occurred across the lifespan as an individual makes meaning of their experiences. All participants mentioned viewing faith development as a journey, with the word “journey” used 32 times across the individual interviews. In addition, the participants identified two contributing factors to the theme of faith development as a journey: (1) faith is innately personal and (2) the importance of space for engagement. Below, I present these contributing factors to the faith as a journey theme.

Contributing Factor: Faith is Innately Personal. The first contributing factor to the view that faith development is a journey is the belief that faith is innately personal. Each participant described their faith development as a personal and complex journey influenced by their unique experiences and community engagement. For some individuals, a lack of committed identity resulted from a significant life event disrupting their connection to their faith

community. Alternatively, other participants highlighted that when they could connect profoundly with their faith, they were vulnerable and authentic in a community of shared values and beliefs. A common thread among the participants was a reflection on how their unique experiences, relationships with others, and mindset each influenced their definition and development of faith. Participants identified the need not to make assumptions and engage with others in learning about their specific experiences regarding faith as each person's experiences are unique to themselves. As such, the contributing factor of faith's personal nature resulted from understanding that the distinct experiences unique to the individual contribute to how a person understands faith.

Six of the nine participants described changes in their religious practices throughout their lifespan and ultimately redefined their beliefs based on their life experiences. These participants often combined various elements of religion, spirituality, and values to define what faith means in their lives. For example, Claire said, "I feel like I can integrate my faith very naturally, even though it's outside of sort of the traditional boundaries of a faith position." Claire also explained that now in her 40s, it was a journey for her to reach this current place of understanding in the complexity of her faith. Alternatively, the three participants, Rachel, Mark, and Charlie, who described their faith and religious commitment as more consistent, also shared varied levels of connection to their faith based on their relationships in their faith communities. Charlie described his variation in religious commitment as being tied to his engagement in a community that prioritized a shared commitment to religious rituals and values as him. He compared his experiences where he was deeply involved in his undergraduate institution's faith community with many of his friends whom he considers lifelong friends to his feelings of complacency present during graduate school where the community was not present. Charlie shared that he felt

a greater sense of disconnect when he was not immersed in a community with a shared commitment to his religious rituals and values. For these individuals, life events, peers that connected to their faith beliefs, and mentors influenced their connection to their community. However, while the participants believed the faith development journey was unique to the person, there were common contributing factors to what supported these individuals, their experiences of how faith was animated in their lives, and the presence of catalysts to create connection for each individual.

Contributing Factor: Leave Space for Engagement. The second contributing factor to the view that faith development is a journey was a belief that faith development occurs when there is space for engagement. Six participants highlighted the importance of creating and leaving space for exploration and discussion around faith. The participants identified that the informal opportunities to engage with others around faith were significant and, as such, something that feels essential in their work. The participants highlighted leaving time in their lives that can otherwise feel busy to have these organic interactions with others, including their colleagues and students, and the need to create spaces where they can dialogue with others. In return, they felt these experiences supported others in exploring their faith and positively impacted their faith development. In this section, I highlight examples of how Bobby and Charlie created spaces for engagement around faith modeled by the spaces others created for them.

In one of his faith vignettes, Bobby described his experience meeting with a student who was struggling with grief and anxiety after the death of an important family member over the summer. Bobby shared that he held fifteen minutes to meet with the student to check-in and allow him to “vent” about his feelings. However, their conversation ended up being two hours together after Bobby created a space for the student to explore their feelings about faith and the

connection back to the situation they were navigating. While the meeting took significantly longer than Bobby anticipated, the space he provided to be present for the student, based on their needs, allowed for exploration and an invitation to continue dialoguing about the student's faith together in the future. During Bobby's interview, he shared a similar experience where space was provided to explore his decision-making with his faith. One example he provided was in the transition to his current institution. Bobby shared that in some of his conversations with a Benedictine faculty member, he explored the animation of Catholicism in their work and lives, including similarities and differences between their experiences and beliefs. Bobby identified that while he sometimes disagreed with this important person to him, he always left the conversation with a new understanding and appreciation regarding faith.

Charlie shared that throughout his faith development, he found moments where he could dialogue with others or engage in a shared experience, such as World Youth Day, as being profound for his development. As such, in his role as a student affairs professional, he has tried to cultivate similar environments with his students can engage in topics related to their lived experiences, values, and faith. In his staff meetings, rather than doing an ice breaker such as highs and lows of the week, Charlie described how he created space for his student staff team to discuss current events related to social justice topics through the lens of their values and beliefs. Charlie said he designed the activity so that regardless of an individual's religious beliefs or depth of their faith commitment, all his team members could engage with others to explore their own beliefs further. As a result, Charlie shared that he often observed students continuing the conversations after their staff meetings. He described, "not every conversation transcended beyond staff meetings. However, especially with this one staff, who had so many different religious and political beliefs, late at night, they would just be having deeper conversations."

Leaving space for engagement around faith was identified by the participants as an important part of their own experiences in exploring faith's meaning in their world. Participants such as Bobby and Charlie highlighted how they tried to cultivate similar environments in their work based on the positive impact these types of environments had on their faith development. While space can be related to flexibility in time and work schedules, it also can be tied to committing to holding space in a meeting or taking a trip with close friends, as Claire shares, to explore what is most important in your life.

Summary of Faith Development is a Journey. According to the participants, faith development is innately personal and occurs when there are opportunities and time to explore it further. Participants who left space for engagement with others provided a supportive environment which contributed to faith's development across the life span. Supportive environments during young adulthood, such as those with the contributing factors identified by participants, strengthen an individual's commitment to faith and spiritual matters (Bryant et al., 2003). The reference to faith development as a journey was one of the strongest themes in the interviews and faith vignettes. It was something the participants unanimously identified as contributing to their understanding of faith development.

Faith Cannot be Developed Alone

The third theme participants identified about their role in supporting college student faith development was the belief that faith cannot be developed alone. Faith does not grow in a vacuum. Instead, the participants' faith was nurtured through connection and community. Eight of the nine participants shared experiences where they felt the importance of community was emphasized in their work supporting student development. In addition, participants identified two contributing factors that impacted their belief that faith cannot be developed alone: (1)

engaging with different perspectives and (2) being good company. Below, I present these contributing factors to the Faith Cannot be Developed Alone theme.

Contributing Factor: Engaging with Different Perspectives. The first contributing factor participants identified was the importance of engaging with people who hold different perspectives than themselves. Participants identified the importance of engaging with others to broaden their understanding of faith, identify the greater meaning, and understand its context for the greater good. Within the participants' experiences, four continued to identify with the religious beliefs from their childhood. The remaining five participants indicated that they changed religious practices two to three times each throughout their lives. Two of these individuals no longer identified with religious communities but rather a spiritual belief in connecting experiences and things in the world. For the participants that shifted their religious and faith beliefs, they identified spaces where they could engage with others about various religious and spiritual beliefs as pivotal to their faith development. While the other four participants remained committed to their religious beliefs, they still shared how their interactions with individuals different from themselves were important to them in their faith development.

Charlie is one of the participants who reported remaining consistent with his religious beliefs as a Catholic. In one of his faith vignettes, Charlie explained his recent interactions with religious leaders who supported the living-learning communities hosted in the residence halls on his campus. While this meeting was intended to identify ways Charlie could better support students with Muslim or Jewish beliefs in these residence halls, Charlie shared that his conversation with these leaders impacted him personally in seeing the connection between other religions and his beliefs as a Catholic. In addition, Charlie shared that he met with the Muslim chaplain on his campus to learn more about the halal lifestyle supported in the living-learning

community. During the conversation, Charlie sought to understand more about what it means to have a halal lifestyle and some of the challenges those students experienced at his Catholic university. After this conversation though, Charlie noted that the chaplain and him connected the meaning of the halal lifestyle to the concept of human dignity and care for the whole person mirrored in Catholicism and his institution's Jesuit charisms.

Like Charlie's experience engaging with members of different religions on campus, Bobby, Sam, and Rachel highlighted the importance of creating spaces for individuals to engage with those different from them. Bobby explicitly stated, "we need not be afraid of acknowledging the other big backgrounds of people." He explained that because he engages with people of differing beliefs, he often used a spiritual lens to highlight the connections between beliefs, values, and experiences. Sam pointed out that because of students' diverse perspectives and beliefs on college campuses, interfaith spaces are critically important to provide an environment where students can dialogue and engage with others who hold different religious and spiritual beliefs. Participants referenced the need for inclusive or interfaith spaces more than 10 times and the importance of helping individuals of all backgrounds to develop faith.

The participants throughout the study highlighted how the opportunities they had during their life to engage with other individuals helped to expand their understanding or, in some cases, led to a shift in their faith beliefs. Engagement with individuals different than themselves is grounded in their belief of the importance of inclusive and interfaith environments on campuses to support the diverse needs of community members. The participants felt these spaces provided an opportunity to find connections across communities while also allowing others to understand the greater complexity of faith, its expression by others, and the uniqueness to each person's journey.

Contributing Factor: Being Good Company. The second contributing factor in the belief that faith is not developed alone is tied to the need participants identified for individuals to be good company for each other. The emphasis on relationships, community, and mentorship by participants in the development of faith is connected to their belief that it is important to be good company for others as they explore and deepen their beliefs. Participants highlighted that being good company with others included knowing others have navigated similar challenges and sentiments. It is a space where individuals feel they can show up as their authentic selves while they journey together. Seven participants identified their beliefs of being good company for others, including their students and colleagues, while exploring what faith means to them. These individuals highlighted the other person's responsibility to challenge and support the individual as they are being good company for faith exploration.

Sam and Mark described the support a good companion for faith development provides as resource referrals and sharing in the feelings they are experiencing. Mark described a sense of responsibility to "walk that journey" with others, especially during adversity. Sam highlighted that conversations with others and invitations to consider faith in their lives can support others, especially if uncertain where to go on their spiritual journey. Sam shared that when she felt her faith shaking during adolescence, it was an invitation to explore a new religious community through a youth group by a friend that helped her reconnect to her faith. Both professionals shared that this is a consideration they make when being good company, especially in their roles in higher education.

Charlie and Sophia discussed how they see being good company as challenging others to step outside their comfort zone. Sophia emphasized that she feels it is the responsibility of the person accompanying the other to encourage them to think about things more deeply and ask

themselves to consider life's big questions. While exploring her faith during college, Sophia shared that her philosophy classes served as a space where she found herself connecting her beliefs to more significant questions, such as the meaning of life, with others. The space her faculty members created for discussions with others was a way she explored her spirituality and now tries to model similarly in her interactions with others. Charlie described his interactions with students during the disciplinary process as a space where he can challenge individuals to explore their beliefs further. He said, "faith was such a big part of those conduct conversations in the sense that your actions aren't defining who you are, but this is a kind of opportunity to frame things." He shared that he could guide students in exploring the congruency between their core beliefs and actions in these spaces. For the participants in the study, the good company provided by other individuals, including the support they strived to provide in their work as student affairs professionals, was critical to the journey of faith being developed.

Summary of Faith Cannot Be Developed Alone. The study's participants shared that both in their personal faith development experiences and in their work with students, other people and communities are necessary for faith development. Participants in this study highlighted the importance of being good company for others, including providing both challenge and support, as well as the importance of engaging with individuals different than yourself as it relates to the role of others in faith development.

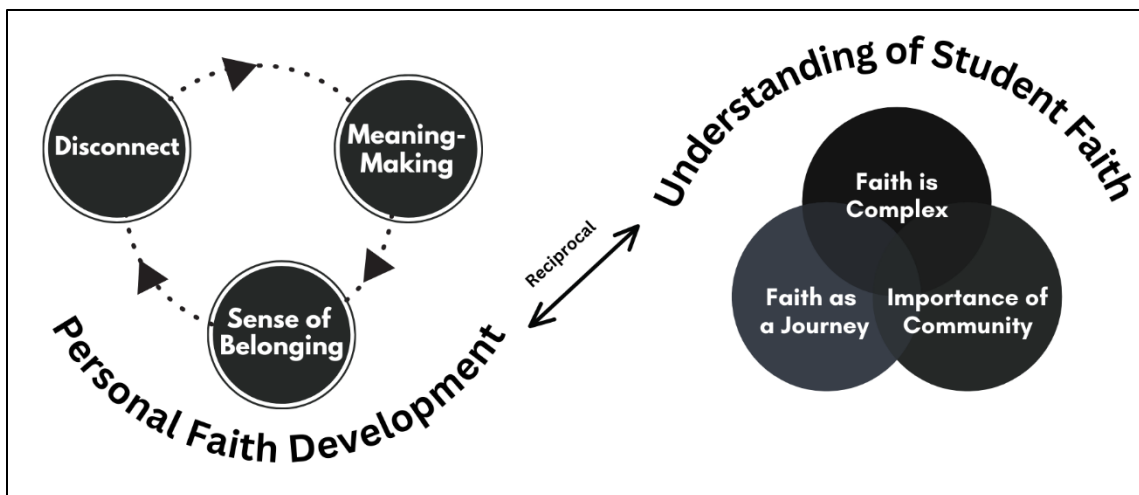
Summary of Supporting College Student Faith Development Findings

This study revealed three themes the participants had from their personal faith experiences that influenced their support of student faith development. Participants identified the complexity of faith, its development as a journey, and the importance of other people as contributing factors for faith development in themselves and their work with students. These

three themes, as articulated in the stories and experiences of the participants, frequently overlapped with each other. For example, the emphasis by participants in engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds also contributed to the complexity of faith and its development for that person. Lastly, participants indicated that while their personal experiences in developing faith provided insight into their work with students, they also found that their work with students influenced their own faith development. This reciprocal relationship is important to note and connects back to the participants' shared themes of faith development, varying between a sense of belonging, meaning making, and disconnect.

Figure 8 depicts the relationship between the themes of each research question. The left diagram depicts the themes of personal faith development expressed by the nine participants in the study. The three themes of faith development are a cyclical process with individuals moving from meaning making to either belonging or disconnect depending on their ability to find congruence between their lived experiences and beliefs at the time. Participants also moved from belonging to disconnect when they experienced something in their lives such as moving. The right side of the diagram visualizes the themes participants identified as contributing to their understanding of college student faith development. These themes are depicted through a Venn diagram highlighting the overlap between the themes of faith complexity, faith as a journey, and faith being developed in community. Finally, the arrow connecting the left and right side of the diagram emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the personal faith development experiences, the participants' understanding of faith development, and the influence supporting student faith development ultimately has on the personal faith development experience of the professional.

Figure 8: Personal Faith Development and Understanding of Student Faith Relationship



Overall Insights

The research questions in this qualitative study identified shared characteristics of personal faith development for early and mid-career student affairs professionals and their influence on the professionals' understanding of how student affairs professionals support student faith development at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. Through semi-structured interviews, the narration of faith artifacts, and documentation of faith vignettes, three shared themes of faith development and three themes for their influence in understanding student development were identified. In addition to these themes, participants identified a reciprocal relationship between their personal faith development and their understanding and work supporting student faith development at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

The themes identified in the study mirror prior research in faith development, including how it is developed and the influence of communities and mentorship on it. The tensions and struggles individuals reported in their experiences with disconnect were created through differences in their lived experience and what they identified as most significant to them (Exline, 2003; Fowler, 1981). These experiences, including their innately personal nature, contributed to the participant's overall understanding of the complexity of faith and the journey to its

development. In addition, the participants' personal definitions of their belief set connect to research identifying the concept of faith as a broader term reflecting more than an individual's religion (Jochum, 2007; Fowler, 1981). Most participants in the study changed religious beliefs or shifted to a general belief in spirituality. In addition, participants identified the influence of their cultural, familial, and community experiences in their understanding of faith. Finally, the participants consistently emphasized the importance of supportive communities where mentors are present to nurture faith identity development. The next chapter will further explore findings related to the theoretical framework, limitations, and implications for practice and future research related to faith development within the context of Catholic higher education.

Chapter 5

This qualitative study explored the role personal faith development experiences of early and mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities have on their understanding of supporting college student faith development. This chapter starts with a summary of the study and a brief discussion of the research findings for each question, followed by the connection between the two questions. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the relationship of the findings to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 with specific connections to James Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory, Sandra Dolaz Parks's (2000) Faith Development Theory, and its relation to the animation of the Catholic intellectual tradition within student affairs at Catholic colleges and universities. In the third section of the chapter, I examine a few limitations of the study and conclude by discussing the implications for practice and research.

Study Summary

This study explored the characteristics of personal faith development for early and mid-career professionals and the connection of those characteristics to how these professionals understand the faith development of college students. In addition, this study looked to expand understanding related to early to mid-career student affairs professionals' role in supporting student faith development at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities by answering two research questions. The following section summarizes each research question and the key themes identified through the participants' responses.

Personal Faith Development

The first research question asked, "What are the characteristics of the personal faith development journeys for early and mid-career student affairs professionals working at Catholic

colleges and universities in the United States?” Data indicated that early to mid-career student affairs professionals experienced periods of meaning-making, belonging, and disconnect when developing their own faith. These three sets of experiences do not progress linearly. That is, one does not always start at a certain point, say disconnect, and then travel through the other two sets of experiences in a particular order. Rather, participants reported going through these three sets of experiences in a cyclical process throughout one’s life span. Individuals moved between the three themes based on their lived experiences and beliefs about faith (see Figure 2 in Chapter 4).

Student affairs professionals navigated a meaning making process to find congruence between their lived experiences and beliefs. Meaning making occurred through immersive experiences or environments, (re)defining their beliefs within the context of their lived experiences, and finally by connecting their experiences and beliefs with what they view to be their purpose in the world. When student affairs professionals could find understanding between their lived experiences and beliefs, they identified feeling a sense of belonging within their faith community. Student affairs professionals identified the presence of mentorship, the influence of family and community, and their ability to be vulnerable and authentic as contributing factors to a sense of belonging. However, when student affairs professionals could not find congruence or experienced a life event that disrupted their belonging, feelings of disconnect with their faith community emerged. Participants described contributing factors to disconnect as their beliefs in the rigidity in the application of faith or a particular religion, their own movement between religious and faith communities, or the impact of significant life events such as the death of a family member or a geographical move that separated them from their faith community. Individuals moved from a sense of disconnect to belonging through meaning-making. The three themes of personal faith development journeys and the contributing factors that define them are

consistent across all participants and were present at various times in their lives not just in their early adulthood. The reflection on their faith development journeys and identification of these themes contribute to their understanding of the meaning of faith within their worldview, including as student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Supporting College Student Faith Development

The second research question asked, “In what ways do the personal experiences and insights of these student affairs professionals influence their understanding of contemporary college student faith development and their work in supporting student learning and development?” The findings revealed that based on their personal experiences in faith development, the student affairs professional participants believed: (1) faith is complex, (2) faith development is a journey, and (3) faith cannot be developed alone. These understandings of faith contributed to how professionals supported faith development through their knowledge of the personal nature of faith, its ability to shift and evolve, and the importance of other people and communities in its development.

The study highlighted that faith was more than an individual’s religion and is influenced by a person's culture, values, and religious or spiritual connections. Within this notion of faith, individuals varied in expression and connection, sometimes influenced by their experiences navigating power dynamics within communities where faith was present. The understanding of faith and its complexity was further understood by the notion that faith development is a personal journey unique to the individual and their ability or desire to explore it further. In these periods of exploration, individuals and communities shared experiences, helped people to engage with others who may be different from themselves, and provided challenge and support, strengthening faith development. As such, student affairs professionals who engaged in mentoring relationships

with students, grounded in their ability to challenge, support, and dialogue with others in perceived safe spaces, could impact the faith development of their students.

Research Question Connections

The personal faith development experiences of the student affairs professionals influenced their understanding of how to support contemporary college student faith development in their work. None of the student affairs professionals indicated formal learning experiences about faith development in their education or onboarding into student affairs at a Catholic college or university. Only one of the professionals noted participating in a mission orientation program at his institution that focused more on learning about the founding order of the institution than understanding faith development. As such, the participants all shared that their understanding and approach to supporting college student faith development was connected to their personal experiences and those meaningful moments to them. The participants often shared that they used their experiences in faith development as examples in conversation with students as possible strategies or anecdotes to understand faith. This connection supports previous research on the removal of faith identity from formal curriculum and its identification as a barrier to animating Catholic identity by student affairs professionals in their work (Clark, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Rogers & Love, 2007; Estanek, 2008; ACCU, 2022). Instead of more formal knowledge on faith development, student affairs professionals used their unique experiences and understanding of faith as an alternative to fulfill their obligation of integrating Catholic identity in their roles at Catholic colleges and universities.

Connecting Findings to the Theoretical Framework

This section explores the relationship between the study's findings and the understanding of faith development within the context of Catholic higher education identified in the theoretical

framework. James Fowler's (1981) faith development theory provided an understanding of the process of faith development including navigating spiritual struggles, while Sandra Dolaz Parks's (2000) faith development theory emphasized the importance of mentoring environments and community in supporting faith development during emerging adulthood. Both theories add to the understanding of how faith development is connected to the Catholic intellectual tradition embedded within Catholic colleges and universities and supported by the work of student affairs professionals. Below I discuss how the findings of this study add to the knowledge of faith development articulated in these theories, specifically animated by early to mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Fowler's Faith Development Theory

Within the study, components of James Fowler's Faith Development theory, such as characteristics of stages in faith development and the process of navigating spiritual struggles, were congruent with the participants' experiences. Fowler (1996) used faith as a broader, more encompassing concept that considered the influence of a person's culture, spirituality, and lived experiences in addition to religion. While faith is a broader, more encompassing term, participants in the study highlighted the complexity of the term, which they felt was muddy and lacked clear distinctions from religion and spirituality. As a result, the complexity of the meaning of faith influenced how they viewed faith development in their work with students. Many participants used faith and religion interchangeably in conversations emphasizing the lack of clarity in understanding the broader notion of faith that Fowler posits in his theory. This is an important note as Fowler's (1996) definition may not fully reflect the lived experiences of professionals in their understanding or work.

Fowler (1981) emphasized spiritual struggles in faith development as the time when an individual must reconcile dissonance to reach greater faith maturity. Spiritual struggles may include dissonance between lived experiences and beliefs or identity conflicts (Fowler, 1981; Anderson, 1994; Sheridan, 2001). Spiritual tensions or struggles from the participants in the study included conflict between their identities such as race and gender, disconnect between their beliefs and their communities, and tensions between their lived experiences and faith. This contributed to the disconnect theme, a shared characteristic of the participants' faith development. It also reinforced Fowler's (1981) emphasis on the importance of spiritual struggles in faith development. Participants also felt that navigating those struggles through meaning-making was significant in their faith development.

Within his theory, Fowler (1981) identified two stages of faith development during emerging adulthood and adulthood, synthetic-conventional and individuative-reflective. The findings from the study connect both stages based on personal experiences shared by student affairs professionals. Fowler (1981) shared that the synthetic-conventional stage emphasized external validation in faith practices when integrating faith into worldview. Participants such as Claire and Sam shared examples from their faith development where they found themselves closely influenced by authority figures reinforcing the characteristics in this stage identified by Fowler. Alternatively, Fowler (1981) described the individuative-reflective stage as a period when individuals reached a place of self-authorship, personally defining faith within their worldview, often occurring in adulthood. Participants also shared similar contributing factors identified during the meaning-making theme, where they (re)defined what their faith meant to them. While the contributing factors of these stages mirror Fowler's (1981) stages, one distinction is that Fowler described faith development within these stages as linear. In contrast,

participants in the study emphasized that they felt the move between disconnect, meaning making, and belonging more in alignment with cyclical process. This more closely aligns with Parks's (2000) faith development theory than Fowler's (1981) linear faith development theory.

Parks's Faith Development Theory

Sandra Dolaz Parks's (2000) faith development theory described faith development as a cyclical process where individuals move through different periods ranging from more rigid beliefs defined by an authority to a more flexible sense of self. Participants in the study shared experiences that aligned with Parks's theory. Within these periods, individuals navigated periods of probing commitment where they explored and attempted to integrate different forms of knowledge within their worldview (Parks, 2000). For example, Tricia, Claire, and Sophia shared accounts of where they felt they had a probing commitment to their faith leading to a disconnect from their faith. During this time, they found themselves exploring how their beliefs and experiences fit within their community and the experiences they were having, such as a death in their family. These experiences with probing commitment occurred at various points in their lives, congruent with the cyclical nature of faith development that Parks (2000) described.

This study also contributed to a greater understanding of the qualities within a supportive mentoring community, especially in higher education. Parks (2000) described mentoring communities as spaces that foster a sense of belonging, provide a space for engagement, and create opportunities to contemplate meaning and purpose. Participants described moments in their interviews and faith vignettes where they felt they could lean on colleagues and mentors to explore their faith or understanding of Catholic identity within their roles. Some of the spaces included grabbing coffee or sharing a meal with individuals where they could discuss their work and the challenges they may be experiencing. In other spaces, mentors supported the

professionals in exploring how they could integrate their own identities and experiences within the context of the institution's identity. This was especially important to participants who did not identify as Catholic and felt the perceived safe space was a place to ask questions to expand their understanding. Findings from the study reinforce the importance of these communities within Catholic higher education for students and the student affairs professionals responsible for supporting student learning and development around faith.

Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Catholic identity encourages individuals to encounter others, especially those with different experiences than themselves, to develop mutual understandings around the complexity of faith (Estanek & James, 2007; ACCU, 2022). Participants in the study shared similar sentiments in their beliefs of the experiences that most significantly influenced their faith development and were important in their work within Catholic higher education. In the participants' personal faith development experiences and their work supporting faith development, dialogue with other individuals was critical and led to their belief that faith is not developed alone. Like the best practices regarding interfaith dialogues identified in *The Principles*, participants in the study also shared that they felt interfaith spaces where dialoguing with community members from diverse backgrounds was important when supporting contemporary college students. This contributed to their personal faith development and was an important element for supporting faith development in their work.

Student affairs professionals shared a deep connection to the charisms and values of the founding orders at their institutions. Charisms include distinct characteristics for decision-making and operations tied to a particular founding order's purpose (Pharr, 2017). For participants such as Sophia, Tricia, and Charlie, even during periods of disconnect or tension, the

charisms of the founding order resonated with them and, in many cases, aided them in the meaning-making of their faith. While research indicates that founding order charisms contribute to institutional values and a distinction in the expression of the Catholic intellectual tradition on college campuses (Flannagan, 2010), participants shared that their experiences learning and animating these charisms and values contributed to their own faith identities, even when they did not identify as Catholic themselves.

Summary of Connections in Findings and Theoretical Framework

This study explored how personal faith development influenced understanding in supporting college student development for early and mid-career student affairs professionals. The faith development theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) aligned with many of the experiences and beliefs of the participants. The Catholic intellectual tradition defines what it means to be a Catholic college or university and is often expressed through a founding order's charisms or institutional mission. Participants in the study were deeply connected to the charisms and values of their institutions, often adopting them as their values or foundations for their personal meaning of faith. Within Catholic colleges and universities, student affairs professionals integrated and animated faith development and the Catholic intellectual tradition in their work using their personal faith experience as the foundation of their understanding. While the findings of the study and application of the theoretical framework were directed towards understanding the animation of faith by student affairs professionals, many of the experiences the student affairs professionals shared in their development were also reinforced by their theories that have contributed to our understanding of faith development and Catholic identity within the context of Catholic higher education.

Limitations

All research has limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). While qualitative inquiry in this study fits the innately personal experiences of faith development, this research design includes limitations related to researcher bias, methodology, and generalizability. In this section, I explore these three limitations as it relates to the design and findings of this study.

Researcher Bias

I was the primary researcher facilitating all individual interviews and engaging directly with the participants during their faith vignette collection. As such, it is important to note the potential for researcher bias in this study regarding my involvement as the primary researcher. While I am currently not employed at a Catholic college or university, most of my experiences within higher education and student affairs are in this environment. In addition, many of the participants in the study shared experiences that mirrored my own while working in that environment. I attempted to limit researcher bias throughout the study by engaging in researcher reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity is a validity procedure to self-identify assumptions and biases during the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Prior to initiating the study, I identified my positionality in relation to the study and included a summary of it in Chapter 1. I identified any assumptions and biases on memos after the individual interviews and faith vignette collections as well.

Prior to analysis, I recognized that my interpretation of the participant's spoken words during the interview and faith vignette collection may differ from their intention. I addressed this by member checking the faith vignettes and individual interview transcripts. Member checking allows participants to confirm the data collected for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000). All participants had seven days to review their transcripts and confirm their accuracy. Any corrections or elaborations were noted using track changes in Microsoft Word or adding

comments to the documents. All participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcripts which were then used for the data analysis. While engaging in data analysis, I also noted any researcher reflections in columns next to the respective first and second cycle codes or on additional memos. Additional strategies I used to limit the researcher bias included permitting participants to skip questions, anonymizing their identity and the identity of their institutions, and keeping all responses confidential. Although memoing, identification of my positionality, and member checking the interviews and faith vignettes were used, it is important to note the possibility of research bias, including the subjectivity and close connection to the setting as a limitation for this study.

Methodology

This study has two limitations based on the methodology and procedures used in the study. The first limitation explores the impact of snowball sampling and the second highlights the possible impact of the timing of the study on the faith experiences shared by the individuals. It is important to note these limitations as they impact the generalizability and conclusions of this study.

The first limitation related to the methodology and procedures in the study is the use of snowball sampling. This study identified participants using snowball sampling from senior leadership at Catholic colleges and universities who are members of the ACCU and a network of professionals within Catholic higher education through social media. As such, why specific individuals were referred for participation may vary from their interest in compensation for the study to the individual's deep connection to faith and belief in its importance. For some participants, the referral to participate by a senior level of their institution may also have influenced their perceived ability to decline participation in the study. In addition, there was no

consistency on why some referrals were made to one individual compared to a large group. This may skew the perspective of professionals' experiences captured in the study based on the reason the participant may have been referred to participate. In response to this limitation, I utilized the informed consent process as a way for participants to articulate their desires for participation, including opting out. In addition, I provided additional anonymity using pseudonyms for both the participants and their current and prior institutions.

The second limitation, as it relates to the methodology and research procedures, concerns the timing of the call for participation and the individual interviews. The call for participation in the study was sent during Chanukah and several days before Christmas, when for the participants in the study, faith was at the forefront of their minds based on their related religious and cultural traditions. Many participants referenced these specific religious holidays during the individual interviews. The participation in the study for these individuals or their emphasis on these holidays, both in their early memories and current faith practice, may be related to the timing of the study skewing the reality of the participant's recollection of the importance of religious holidays or their faith in their lives.

Generalizability

Qualitative studies by design are not generalizable in predicting similar findings across a population (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Instead, the findings from this study add to the understanding of how student affairs professionals personally developed faith and used their understanding of it in supporting college student learning and development at a Catholic college or university. The findings of this study may be helpful within the context of Catholic higher education. However, they may not be applicable in secular or non-religiously affiliated private institutions where faith does not have the same emphasis.

This study explored the lived experiences of a few early and mid-career student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. While the participant demographics included a variety of experiences and identities, the data collected is only reflective of a small group of participants and therefore not generalizable. I utilized triangulation as a validity procedure in this study connecting the data from various sources to Fowler's (1981) and Parks's (2000) theories of faith development in the analysis of this dissertation. However, while not generalizable, this strategy adds to the credibility of the study and how the findings of it add to the understanding of how student affairs professionals support faith development and learning at Catholic colleges and universities.

While this study and the personal experiences with faith described by participants may not have broad applicability, it does provide additional knowledge and context in an area of student affairs with limited research. As such, the findings of this study may be helpful at other Catholic colleges and universities in supporting early and mid-career student affairs professionals in understanding and animating faith within the context of their work. Finally, the findings of this study highlight that the faith development theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), created decades earlier, are still relevant based on the strong connections present in the experiences of the nine student affairs professionals explored in the study.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for practice and research as it relates to college student learning and the development of faith at Catholic colleges and universities. In this section, I discuss three implications for practice and three implications for research due to the study's findings. I conclude this section by highlighting the significance of this study in the

understanding how early and mid-career student affairs professionals support faith development at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities.

Implications for Practice

Faith is a term used to encompass the complex and innately personal nature of its meaning (Fowler, 1981; Jochum et al., 2007). Each participant described their understanding of faith differently in the study, with some individuals relying solely on religious beliefs while others described faith as encompassing spiritual and cultural beliefs within their lived experiences. Since there continues to be limited learning opportunities to develop an understanding of faith identity and its integration into student affairs, professionals shared that their personal experiences and understanding of faith serve as the foundation of how they animate faith within their work. Additional learning opportunities specific to faith development, such as in supervision dialogues and conference presentations, would be beneficial to student affairs professionals regardless of institution type, as faith may serve as a resiliency tool in navigating adversity as well as support meaning-making of relationships and experiences (Tisdell, 2003; Love, 2001; Reymann et al., 2015). However, within the context of Catholic higher education, additional training, and education around faith development for early and mid-career professionals is of added significance as it is a responsibility of theirs to integrate Catholic identity into their work.

While additional learning opportunities are needed, this study indicated that early to mid-career student affairs professionals contextualized their understanding of faith through their own experiences. Where a professional may be in their faith development, ranging from a sense of belonging to feeling disconnected, may influence their approach to supporting the faith development of others. For instance, if an individual is in a place where they define their faith as

rigid religious adherence, they may influence students to engage in faith similarly. Alternatively, individuals who feel a sense of belonging with their faith and may have reached greater flexibility in their understanding may engage individuals in considering their faith similarly. Similar influence exists regarding an individual's knowledge of the definition of faith and their knowledge surrounding different religious and spiritual practices that may be a component of a person's faith. Individuals who may not have encountered individuals of different religious beliefs, such as Judaism or Islam, may have less knowledge impacting their ability to support students who identify with those religious identities. Supervisors of early and mid-career professionals should be aware of the possible barriers within a professional's understanding of faith and the potential impacts of those barriers on their work with students. In addition, departments and even student affairs divisions should explore the opportunities for dialogue with each other and those with different perspectives to help expand the understanding of the variations in faith beliefs. This may aid early and mid-career student affairs professionals in expanding their understanding of faith better to meet the diverse backgrounds of contemporary college students.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of journeying with students in their faith development, including leaving space for engagement in their schedules. Many participants identified that their most significant experiences supporting student faith development are when they logistically leave space to engage with students around the topic. Alternatively, participants identified that one of the barriers to their ability to engage with participants is surrounding the busyness that can exist within their schedules. Student affairs professionals and supervisors should remember this when navigating their responsibilities and schedules. This may mean leaving a buffer between appointments, so there is time to engage with students around faith if it

presents itself in conversation. For supervisors, it may mean being mindful of the portfolio of responsibilities for your team and assisting them in the time management of their responsibilities to leave space for informal and formal engagement around faith and opportunities for additional learning.

Implications for Research

Many student affairs professionals, including SSAOs, are trained at secular institutions where curricular and informal learning around faith development was reduced or removed (Clark, 2001; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Rogers & Love, 2007; Estanek, 2008; ACCU, 2022). Within the study, most professionals indicated completing their undergraduate or graduate degrees in Catholic higher education. Several professionals indicated experiences outside of the classroom within Catholic higher education that impacted their faith development. However, the professionals who completed their education at secular institutions shared fewer or, in some cases, no experiences that contributed to their faith development or knowledge of faith. Additional research is needed focusing specifically on professionals who have completed their education and preparation programs at secular institutions in how their personal faith development experiences influence their support of college student faith development within Catholic higher education. This may support supervisors within Catholic higher education in developing informal and formal training to support these individuals in transitioning to Catholic higher education and animating faith within their roles.

Within the collegiate environment, student affairs professionals actively support college student learning and the development of social identities, including faith (Patton et al., 2016). In the study, most of the student affairs professionals' functional responsibilities were in residence life, student success, and counseling. The professionals described many of their experiences that

were impactful in working with students as individual conversations. While this allowed the professionals to engage in dialogues to explore the innately personal meaning of faith to their students, student affairs professionals also provided opportunities for collective exploration and learning in their roles, such as at programs. Within this study, participants indicated engaging with individuals different than themselves, especially in a community setting, as critical to their understanding of how faith is supported in emerging adulthood. Future research may want to focus specifically on how student affairs navigate supporting faith learning and development in collective spaces in addition to the individual conversations reflected the participants' experiences.

Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities integrate student development theories and Catholic identity within their work (Estanek, 1998). Within their roles, student affairs professionals support students and develop educational initiatives where students can explore life's challenges and social issues with others (Estanek, 2008). However, within these dialogues and programs is also the presence of tensions and possible spiritual struggles students are experiencing (Exline, 2013; Pargament et al., 2005). Some of these may include current event issues such as global events while others may focus more on navigating beliefs within students' lived experiences. Future research should explore the specific strategies student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities use to navigate these tensions as part of the faith development process for students. Based on the findings in this study, scholars may want to consider how the personal faith experiences of student affairs professionals in navigating tensions and spiritual struggles in their own lives may contribute to or influence their ability to navigate tensions when supporting student development and learning.

Significance

This study added to the understanding of how early and mid-career student affairs professionals understand and support college student faith development within the context of Catholic higher education. To date, this field of research is limited with previous studies focusing on the experiences of SSAOs or being conducted as case studies. However, this study look at early and mid-career student affairs professionals across the U.S. working at Catholic colleges and universities representing five of the largest founding orders. Their experiences add to understanding of how professionals utilize their personal faith development experience to animate the faith development component of Catholic identity in their roles.

Results in this study provided insights for supervisors of these professionals in understanding the connection between personal faith experiences with their ability to support college student faith development during emerging adulthood. Within the study, even the participants who completed some of their education and training within Catholic higher education shared that the basis of their understanding of faith and how to support it in their work is tied to their personal experiences. Participants highlighted that faith development in their roles as student affairs professionals is animated through individual conversations, community dialogues, and mentoring relationships. The professionals' experiences mirrored prior research in emphasizing the importance of modeling authenticity, creating opportunities for conversation related to faith, engaging in mentoring relationships, and navigating student development within the context of their Catholic institutions (Parks, 2000; Rockenbach, 2011). Future research directions should explore how early and mid-career professionals' personal faith development experiences impact their ability to navigate faith tensions within their role as well as they ways they engage individuals in collective environments such as at programs in development faith.

Summary

The study of faith development is of critical importance as faith serves as a tool that aids individuals in understanding the world through their beliefs, including religion and experiences in the world (Fowler, 1981; Manning, 2019). The emerging adulthood period is an important time when individuals engage in probing commitment and exploration of their faith (Parks, 2000). Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities are situated in an environment that prioritizes and emphasizes the importance of faith development for college students during emerging adulthood. The work of student affairs professionals in supporting learning and development of faith for college students can have a profound impact on them throughout their life. The findings of this study add to the understanding of how early and mid-career student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities learn about faith through their personal experiences and utilize this understanding in their work with college students.

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Footnotes

Additional screening was used on the 138 responses submitted in the Interest in Participation survey. Only 38 of the responses were determined to match some of the criteria for the study. The additional screening in the Interest in Participation survey included removing responses submitted from the same IP addresses (73 responses from 13 IP addresses), unrelated degrees (e.g., aviation; 17 responses), and incongruence between the founding order and institution listed (10 responses). An additional 55 emails were sent expressing interest in participating using the same language in each email that was not reflected in the participant interest survey.

Appendix A

Social Media Recruitment Post Text:

Call for Participants. I am seeking participants for a study exploring how the personal faith of student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities influences their ability to animate it within their student affairs role.

Participation in this study includes engaging in a 1-to-2-hour interview and a brief engagement via a video messaging app as a follow-up to the interview. Participants will receive a \$40 Amazon gift card via email at the conclusion of the engagement via the video messaging app.

I am seeking participation from those that:

- Have 3-9 years of professional experience in student affairs
 - At least 1 year of professional experience at a Catholic college or university
- Hold a master's degree in a non-faith and spirituality field
- Work at an institution in the U.S. with one of the following founding orders:
 - Franciscan, Jesuit, Sisters of Mercy, Benedictine, Dominican, Holy Cross, or Lasallian

If you are interested or know someone who may be interested and meets the criteria, I would greatly appreciate you sharing the interest in participation survey below. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email at sw946609@wcupa.edu should you have any questions. To indicate interest in this study please visit:

https://wcupa.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dbX3SR84xghS194

This study has been approved by WCU IRB-FY2023-134.

ANIMATING FAITH IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AT CATHOLIC COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES This study has been approved by WCU IRB-FY2023-134.

ENGAGE IN A 1-to-2-HOUR INTERVIEW & BRIEF FOLLOW-UP VIA A VIDEO MESSAGING APP REGARDING YOUR FAITH EXPERIENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUR WORK IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

Participants Must Have:

- 3-9 years of experience in student affairs
- 1 year at a Catholic college or university
- Hold a master's degree in a non-faith field
- Work at a Catholic college or university in the U.S.

Participants receive a \$40 Amazon gift card.

QUESTIONS? Please contact Sarah Williamson at sw946609@wcupa.edu.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Appendix B

ACCU Letter of Support for Recruitment:



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20036
ph 202-457-0650 • fx 202-728-0977 • accu@accunet.org • www.accunet.org

IRB Review Committee
West Chester University
700 South High Street
West Chester, PA 19383

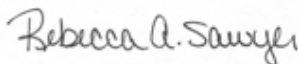
June 30, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter is to acknowledge support for research Sarah Williamson is planning for late fall 2022-early winter 2023. The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) has agreed to send out a call for participation in Ms. Williamson's research study to student affairs practitioners in the northeastern U.S. region who are members of our association and members of the following charisms: Franciscan, Jesuit, Sisters of Mercy, Benedictine, Dominican, Holy Cross, and Lasallian. We are happy to support Ms. Williamson in this manner.

Please contact me with any questions or for additional information via email at rsawyer@accunet.org or via phone at (202) 849-3324.

Sincerely,



Dr. Rebecca A. Sawyer
Vice President
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Appendix C

Call for Participation Email

Subject: Call for Participation-Animating Faith in Student Affairs Study

Dear Student Affairs Professional,

My name is Sarah Williamson and I am a doctoral student at West Chester University located outside of Philadelphia, PA. I am conducting a research study exploring the shared characteristics in the personal faith development of student affairs professionals and the influence of their faith experience in supporting student development and learning in their role at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. The results of the study will hopefully contribute to the expansion of knowledge regarding student affairs professionals in Catholic higher education and their work regarding the faith development of college students.

I am reaching out today based on your membership in a Catholic higher education organization and/or work within student affairs at a Catholic college or university. I am hopeful that either you may be interested in participating in the study or may share this email with another colleague who may be interested in participating. Participation consists of a 1-to-2-hour individual interview followed and brief engagement via a video messaging app as a follow-up to the interview. Participants will receive a \$40 Amazon gift card via email upon completion of the faith vignette collection. This study has been approved by WCU IRB-FY2023-134.

Below is a link to a survey for individuals interested in participating to complete.

[Link to Participation Interest Survey](#)

You can expect to receive an email regarding your participation in the survey by the end of December including the next steps in the process.

I look forward to learning more about the experiences of Catholic student affairs professionals. Your participation or sharing of the study's call for participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Sarah Williamson
West Chester University
Sw946609@wcupa.edu

Appendix D

Interest in Participation Survey

https://wcupa.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dbX3SR84xghS194

Participation Information

Q15

...

Thank you for your interest in the Animating Faith Development: The Experience of Student Affairs Professionals at U.S. Catholic Colleges & Universities study. Please answer the following questions to indicate your interest in participating in the study. You will receive an update regarding your participation in the study no later than the end of December at the email address you indicate on this survey.

Q1



What is your first name?

Q2



What is your last name?

Q3



What is your email address?

Q4



What is your cell phone number?

Criteria for Participation in Study

Q5

Are you 18 years or older?

 Yes No

Q6

Do you have a master's degree in a non-faith and spirituality field of study?

 Yes No

Q9

What is the field of study for your master's degree?



Q7

Do you currently work at a Catholic college or university full-time in the northeastern part of the United States?

 Yes No

Q8

What is the name of your current higher education institution?



What is the founding order of your current Catholic higher education institution?

- Franciscan
- Jesuit
- Sisters of Mercy
- Benedictine
- Dominican
- Holy Cross
- Lasallian
- Augustinian
- Sisters of St. Joseph
- Immaculate Heart of Mary
- Sisters of Sacred Heart
- Other
- My institution does not have a founding order.

Q11



How many years have you worked in student affairs as a professional? For the basis of this study, please include any employment in student affairs as a graduate student.

Q12



How many years have you worked as a full-time employee in student affairs at a Catholic college or university including your current place of employment?

Q13



Please share 1-2 sentences indicating why you are interested in participating in this study.

[Import from library](#)[Add new question](#)[Add Block](#)

Survey

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The researcher will be in touch with you soon regarding your interest of participation in the study. If you have any questions regarding this study, please email the researcher, Sarah Williamson, at sw946609@wcupa.edu.

Appendix E

Email Response-Thank You for Your Interest

Hi <individual name>,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study, *Animating Faith in Student Affairs: A Qualitative Exploration of the Student Affairs Professional Experience at Catholic Colleges and Universities*. At this time, all participant spaces are filled. If a spot becomes available, I will reach back out to you via this email address.

Thank you again for your interest in my study and willingness to participate.

Sincerely,
Sarah Williamson
Doctoral Student
West Chester University

Appendix F

Email Response-Participation Confirmation & Informed Consent Instructions

Hi <participant name>,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study, *Animating Faith in Student Affairs: A Qualitative Exploration of the Student Affairs Professional Experience at Catholic Colleges and Universities*. Below is a link to complete the Informed Consent for participation in the study for your review. This form must be completed through Qualtrics before our first interview.

[Electronic Informed Consent Form](#)

If you have any questions, please contact me at 412-607-4823 or sw946609@wcupa.edu.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Sarah Williamson
Doctoral Student
West Chester University

Appendix G

Informed Consent Survey

Q1



Welcome to the Animating Faith Development: The Experience of Student Affairs Professionals at U.S. Catholic Colleges & Universities study!

Investigator(s): Sarah Williamson; Orkideh Mohajeri

Project Overview: Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Sarah Williamson as part of her Doctoral Dissertation. The purpose of this study is to identify shared characteristics of personal faith development experiences of early and mid-career student affairs professionals and the influence of these personal experiences in supporting college student faith development at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities. For this study, faith is defined as the integration of personal beliefs, religion, and world views that aid individuals in meaning-making through their personal experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). This study aims to explore how the personal faith development experiences of student affairs professionals influence the ways they navigate tensions and support college student learning and development related to faith within their roles in Catholic higher education.

Participation Expectations: Your participation will take about 1-to-2-hours to:

- Complete the interest in participation survey through Qualtrics which you have already completed (5 minutes)
- Complete the informed consent form through Qualtrics (10 minutes)
- Select and bring an artifact such as an object or photo to individual interview (5 minutes)
- Participate in an interview conversation via Zoom (1-2 hours)
- Share at least 2 faith vignettes via the Maro Polo app after the individual interview has been completed (5-30 minutes)
- Review the interview and faith vignette transcript

Participants will receive a \$40 Amazon gift card emailed to them after the faith vignette collection period.

Risks & Benefits:

There is a minimal risk of:

- Sharing difficult experiences or feelings.
- In the current culture within the United States, faith is not a commonly discussed topic. As such, a participant may feel odd or uncomfortable at times sharing their experiences.

Benefits of your participation in the study may include:

- An opportunity to reflect on and process experiences in supporting college student faith development at a Catholic college or university.
- Contributing to the expansion of knowledge regarding student affairs

professionals at Catholic higher education institutions.

The research project is being done by Sarah Williamson and Orkideh Mohajeri as part of Sarah's Doctoral Dissertation to explore how student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities animate faith in their co-curricular work. For this study, faith is the integration of personal beliefs, religion, and world views that aid individuals in meaning making through their personal experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). This study aims to explore how the personal faith development experiences of student affairs professionals influences the ways they navigate tensions and support college student learning and development related to faith within their roles in Catholic higher education. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Sarah Williamson any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how student affairs professionals at U.S. Catholic colleges and universities animate faith in their co-curricular work. For this study, faith is the integration of personal beliefs, religion, and world views that aid individuals in meaning making through their personal experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). This study aims to explore how the personal faith development experiences of early and mid-career student affairs professionals influence the ways they navigate tensions and support college student learning and development related to faith within their roles in Catholic higher education.

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Complete an interest in participation survey
- Complete the informed consent to participate electronically
- Participate in 1 interview
- Participant in sharing faith vignettes via the Marco Polo app over a 2-week period
- Review interview transcripts from participation
- This study will take about 2 hours of your time.

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?

No

4. Is there any risk to me?

Possible risks or sources of discomfort include:

- Sharing difficult experiences or feelings.
- In the current culture within the United States, faith is not a commonly discussed topic. As such a participant may feel odd or uncomfortable at times sharing their experiences.

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?

For any questions with this study, contact:

Primary Investigator: Sarah Williamson at 412-607-4823 or
sw946609@wcupa.edu

Secondary Investigator: Orkideh Mohajeri at 610-436-2941 or
omohajeri@wcupa.edu

9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?

Not applicable.

I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

- I consent, begin the study
 I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q4



First Name:

Q5



Last Name:

Q3



Please indicate the pseudonym (name) you wish to be used in the study to reference yourself.

Q7



Please indicate the pseudonym (name) you wish to be used in the study to reference your institution.

Q6



Please indicate your availability to participate in your first interview by checking the box for all times would be able to meet for your first interview over the next 7 days.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9am-10am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10am-11am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11am-12pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12pm-1pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1pm-2pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2pm-3pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3pm-4pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4pm-5pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5pm-6pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6pm-7pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7pm-8pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8pm-9pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12

Participant Demographic Information: This information is used to better understand the identities of participants in the study. Only the study investigators, Sarah Williamson and Orkideh Mohajeri, will have access to this information. Your responses will be kept anonymous and secure on the private, password protected computer of Sarah Williamson separate from other study information. All questions are optional for you to respond to based on your personal comfort. You can change this information in the future by emailing Sarah Williamson at sw946609@wcupa.edu.

Q10

What is your current age?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- Above 54 years of age

Q8

What is your race and ethnicity? (select all that apply)

- White/Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Black/African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American/Alaskan Native
- Multiracial
- Other

Q14

Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to disclose

Q9



What is your gender identity?

Q15



What is your sexual identity/sexual orientation? (select all that apply)

Q11

What religious family do you belong to or identify yourself most closely to?

- Asian Folk Religion
- Buddhism
- Catholic
- Christian (For example: Baptist, Methodist, Protestant)
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Other
- I am not religious.

End of Survey

Thank you for completing the informed consent for this study.
The researcher will be in touch with you soon regarding the next
steps for participation in the study. If you have any questions

regarding this study, please email the researcher, Sarah
Williamson, at sw946609@wcupa.edu.

Appendix H

Interview Scheduling Confirmation

Hi <participant name>,

Thank you for completing the information consent process via Qualtrics. Based upon your preferred data and times, our first interview session will occur at <time> on <date> via Zoom through the following link: <zoom link>. If this date and time does not work with your schedule, please let me know and I will email you additional dates.

Our interview will focus on your personal experience with faith. For this study, faith includes the integration of personal beliefs, religion, and world views that help you in making meaning of your personal experiences (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). If you are willing, I would like for you to bring an item of significance for you that represents something important to your personal faith formation. This item could be something such as a photo or an object. During our time together, I plan to ask you to share a little about why this is an important item for you.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate. I look forward to meeting with you on <interview date> <interview time>.

Sincerely,

Sarah Williamson
Doctoral Student
West Chester University

Appendix I

Interview Guide

Personal Faith Experience

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How did you find your way into higher education? What led you to your current role and institution?
2. How would you describe your own faith and spirituality at this point in your life currently?
3. Describe an interaction or experience you had in relation to your own faith formation that you felt was profound. Tell me the story of that experience.
4. In our initial communication about today, I asked you to bring an item of importance to you that is significant to your own faith formation. Can you show me the item and tell me about it?
How do you believe working at a Catholic higher education institution has influenced your personal faith formation?

Faith Experiences as a Student Affairs Professional

5. In your transition in working at Catholic institution, were there any experiences or conversations you may have had regarding faith that you found particularly helpful. Could you tell me about one of them?
6. Tell me about an experience you had in creating or implementing a program, policy, or practice where you felt faith was influential. What was that experience like for you?
7. Tell me about a time where you may have experienced tension, conflict, or a struggle between your personal beliefs or expectations as a student affairs professional and supporting college student faith development. Possible follow-up question: What individuals or tools were supportive in you navigating that challenge?
8. What are some considerations you make in reference to faith and spirituality within your role in student affairs? In considering your work, how does your faith and spirituality show up in your role in student affairs?
9. These were the questions I had in mind regarding your experience with faith in student affairs today. Is there anything you may have wanted to share with me that you have not had an opportunity to do so today?

Appendix J

Faith Vignette Prompt Discussed at Conclusion of Individual Interview

In the last component of the study, I am hoping to capture moments where you may reflect on faith or integrate it into your work. Over the next two weeks, I was wondering if you could send me a message via the Marco Polo app when you catch yourself noticing yourself enacting or thinking about faith in your work. I will then respond back to messages you may send me. In the next few days, I will send you an invitation to connect via the app and email you instructions for using the app if you are unfamiliar with it. Please note that messages sent are audio and video recordings.

Appendix K

Thank You for Participating Email & Marco Polo Instructions

Hi <individual name>,

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to meet with me earlier this week for your interview. I really appreciated our time together and hearing about your experience with faith. As I mentioned at the conclusion of your interview, I am hoping to capture moments where you may reflect on faith or integrate it into your work. Over the next two weeks, I was wondering if you could send me a message via the Marco Polo app when you catch yourself noticing yourself enacting or thinking about faith in your work. I will then respond back to messages you may send me.

You should have received a text message to the phone number you provided me with an invitation to connect via MarcoPolo. This is the link you will use to set up your account if you have not already done so. I am including a link below which includes a video and further instructions on using the app if it is helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need any support troubleshooting how to use the app.

[How do I use Marco Polo®? - Marco Polo Support](#)

Thank you again for your participation in my study. I am looking forward to continuing to hear about your experiences over the next two weeks.

Sincerely,
Sarah Williamson
Doctoral Student
West Chester University

Appendix L

Institutional Research Board Approval

IRB-FY2023-134 - Initial: Initial - Expedited



Dec 15, 2022 9:39:52 AM EST

80% — + Reset

To: Sarah Williamson
Col of Education & Social Work

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - IRB-FY2023-134 Animating Faith Development: The Experience of Student Affairs Professionals at U.S. Catholic Colleges & Universities

Dear Sarah Williamson:

Thank you for your submitted application to the West Chester University Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for Animating Faith Development: The Experience of Student Affairs Professionals at U.S. Catholic Colleges & Universities.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,
West Chester University Institutional Review Board

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155

Appendix M

Second Cycle Code List

Code	Connection to Theoretical Framework
Catholic identity tension	Catholic intellectual tradition
Charisms/values	Catholic intellectual tradition
Community	Parks
Dialogue	Fowler/Parks
Faith Artifact	Component to personal definition of faith
Faith Ritual	Component to personal definition of faith
Founding Order	Catholic intellectual tradition
Meaning-Making	Fowler/Parks
Mentorship	Parks
Mission	Catholic intellectual tradition
Personal Beliefs	Component to personal definition of faith
Probing Commitment: Exploration	Parks
Probing Commitment: Integration	Parks
Probing Commitment: Integration	Parks
Reconciling Conflict	Fowler
Religion: Catholicism	Component to personal definition of faith
Religion: Christianity	Component to personal definition of faith
Religion: Judaism	Component to personal definition of faith
Religion: Muslim	Component to personal definition of faith
Religion: Other	Component to personal definition of faith
Spirituality: Connection	Component to personal definition of faith
Spirituality: Intersection	Component to personal definition of faith