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## Spiritual Life Review With Older Adults: Finding Meaning in Late Life Development

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Spiritual Life Review with Older Adults:  
Finding Meaning in Late Life Development

by

Alicia M. Stinson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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College of Behavioral and Community Sciences

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Phenomenology

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who has always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. To my parents who told me since I was a young girl that “anything is possible if you work hard enough for it.” To my best friend and twin sister, Allison, who offered me support, encouragement and most importantly humor when I needed it most throughout this endeavor. To my husband, Alfredo, who believed in me every step of the way and provided me with endless support and love. I really couldn’t have done this without all of you!

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## ABSTRACT

Spirituality has been recognized as a positive factor in the lives of older adults, especially as it influences their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. This convenience sample study included 17 older adults residing at a faith based continuing care retirement community in Florida. The sample was represented by Caucasian older adults with an average age of 84 years, highly educated, majority Protestant and mostly female. Spiritual life reviews were conducted using spiritual lifemaps (Hodge, 2005) and semi-structured interview questions. Erikson's epigenetic stage of ego-integrity was used along with Butler's life review process and Tornstam's gerotranscendence as a conceptual framework for understanding late life development and spirituality in older adults. This mostly qualitative study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to analyze the responses to the open-ended interview questions about spirituality across the life-time. Ego-integrity was measured at the beginning and end of the spiritual life review study.

Paired t-tests found that participation in the spiritual life review did not influence the ego integrity scores of participants. Specifically, there were no statistically significant difference between the pre ego integrity score (M=82.94, SD= 8.235) and the post ego integrity score (M=84.47, SD= 7.551);  $t(16) = -.769$   $p = .453$ . However, in comparison, the qualitative analysis revealed that the spiritual life review does influence ego-integrity in some participants. Additionally, the spiritual life review confirms gerotranscendence and contributes to information about spiritual development in the lives

of older adults. The conclusion offers a discussion about the study's limitations, strengths, implications for future research, and suggestions for clinical practice.

## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the population of people 65 and older is estimated to grow from 41 million in 2011 to 72 million in 2030, shifting the current percentage from 13 to 20 for the total population over age 65 (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Additionally, the 85 years and older age group is projected to be the fastest growing adult population, increasing in size from 5.8 million (14%) in 2010 to 8.7 million by 2030, and increasing to an estimated 19 million (21%) by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, the average life expectancy for older Americans has increased as well with projections of those reaching age 65 successfully expected to live until 83.5 years old and with those reaching age 85 successfully expected to live until 91.8 years old for women and 90.7 years old for men (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2010). Also noted in aging research is the projection of growth by ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and other minority groups which are estimated to exceed those of Caucasians over the next 50 years constituting one third of the older adult population (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Berkman & Harootyan, 2003; Magilvy, Congdon, Martinez, Davis, & Averill, 2000).

Many older adults experience a number of vulnerabilities related to aging such as an increase in physical, mental, and emotional health issues and significant changes in social and economic status (Berkman & Harootyan, 2003). Choi and Jun (2009) report

that older adults often review their lives with contentment or discontentment, and if burdened with unresolved regrets they are likely to experience depressive symptoms which can lead to clinical depression. Similarly, in an overview of depression in late life, Blazer (2003) uses Erikson's life stage theory to suggest that depression may occur when the developmental tasks of accepting certain inevitable losses associated with late life (e.g., death of a loved one, loss of independence and meaning, etc.) are not accomplished successfully by the individual.

However, in the face of these inevitable late life challenges, spirituality is often identified as a significant source of strength and resiliency in the lives of older adults age 65 and over (Collins, Furman, Hackman, Bender & Bruce, 2007; Lewis, 2001). In fact, researchers suggest that the healthiest people in our society have a profound sense of spirituality in their lives and that the spiritual-religious dimension of individuals, families, and communities is a significant factor for well-being and optimal functioning (Hagon, 1998; Rice, 2002; Siporin, 1985). Furthermore, researchers recognize the positive relationships between spiritual/religious practices and the ability to cope with hardships faced with aging (Collins et al., 2007; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, 2007; Yoon & Lee, 2007).

The White House Conference on Aging (1971) included specific policy recommendations that recognized spiritual well-being as essential and fundamental to healthy aging (Damianakis, 2001; Derezotes, 2006; Griffin, 2005; Moberg, 1984). In his pastoral work with elders, Seicol (2005) found older adults between 70 to 113 years of age capable of dealing with a multitude of life challenges due to their spiritual well-being. In the last several decades of public opinion polls and survey research, favorable

attitudes towards religion and spirituality consistently have been rated highest among older adults 65 and over (Moberg, 2005). Similarly, Emery and Pargament (2004) report findings from recent Gallup poll data indicating that more than 70% of older adults (65+) identify religion/ spirituality as a top priority in life.

Additionally, several authors found that older adults report using spirituality and religion as a coping strategy to deal with the stress of late life role changes such as being a caregiver, becoming medically ill, or when dealing with dementia (Koenig, et al., 1992; Lewis 2001; Powers & Watson, 2011). Spirituality is also noted as influencing behavioral regulation in older adults dealing with challenges related to alcohol or substance abuse (Miller, 1998; Hodge, 2000; Stoltzfus, 2008). Similarly, spirituality has been identified as a key indicator for positive psychological and physical well-being for an older adult (Armstrong, & Crowther, 2002; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, 2007; Niederman, 1999; Seicol, 2005).

Recognizing and nurturing the spiritual aspects of older adults is a fundamental value of the strengths perspective in social work (Collins et al., 2007). Rice (2002) offers that spirituality and social work could be viewed as sharing similar goals: both promote the growth of the individual and the greater good of the community. The holistic aspect of social work that addresses the entire person-in-the environment cannot ignore the spiritual dimension of an individual's development over the lifespan. As a prolific scholar of spirituality in social work Hodge (2000) also supports these values and has developed a multitude of spiritual assessments and interventions that promote the spiritual aspect of the individual. Others also suggest spiritual community programs and referrals to appropriate religious resources as necessary in the helping process

(Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Canda, Nakashima, & Furman, 2004; Farley, 2007; Hodge 2005; 2006; Sacco, 1996; Yoon & Lee, 2007).

Although spirituality and religion are not mutually exclusive there are distinct differences between the two concepts. For instance, spirituality is often defined as the search for purpose and meaning in one's life and does not always include a belief in God, whereas religion involves a systematic body of beliefs and practices shared by a community in a formalized manner related to a spiritual search (Cornett, 1992; Nelson-Becker, et al., 2007; Sermabeikian, 1994). Others describe spirituality as a transcendent dimension and a desire to be connected to something greater than oneself (Derezotes, 1995; Staude 2005). Furthermore, this definition of spirituality is considered to be more fluid than universal religion, defined as "an institutional pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and experiences, orientated toward spiritual concerns and shared by a community and transmitted over time in traditions" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 37). In an online survey completed by 457 professionals working in the gerontology field (e.g., registered with American Society on Aging and the National Council on Aging), researchers found that 50.4% of the participants believe religiousness and spirituality overlap but they are not the same concept. Additionally, more than half (54.7%) consider themselves to be both religious and spiritual (Ellor & McFadden, 2011).

Research supports the idea that religion and spirituality as defined by older adults are dealing with distinct constructs but share considerable overlap. For instance, Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adleman (2008) conducted a narrative research study with 64 retirement community dwelling older adults and found that religion was defined in more concrete terms related to institutional (e.g., church) or organizational based activities

(e.g., study group and fellowship) whereas spirituality was most often described with nonorganizational-based activities (e.g., meditation and prayer). Additionally this group of older adults identified as being both highly religious and spiritual. In other research, Cohen, Thomas, and Williamson (2008) conducted an exploratory study of differences and similarities in defining religion and spirituality across groups of Jewish and Protestant older adults. Although both groups had difficulty in separating religion and spirituality there were differences in defining the two constructs among the groups. For instance, the groups had greater agreement in defining religion as a shared belief in God/Christ/Jesus through practice (e.g., attending church) or tradition (e.g., reading the Torah) but greater differences in defining spirituality with both groups referring to more esoteric terms (e.g., Protestants – meditation, joy, love/Jewish – rituals, acceptance of others).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore spirituality in the lives of older adults. It offers a review of three underlying theories – Erikson's (1968) epigenetic stages of life theory, Butler's (1963) life review process and Tornstam's (1989) theory of gerotranscendence. Additionally, the study utilizes spiritual life reviews with older adults to contribute to an understanding of the life span.

This study has three purposes: (1) to describe the phenomenon of spirituality throughout the life span of older adults (2) to explore spiritual life reviews with older adults to understand how they find meaning in their lives through spiritual experiences; and (3) to assess how a spiritual life review influences an individual's level of ego integrity and gerotranscendence.



## **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the unique meaning of spirituality for older adults residing in a faith-based continuing care retirement community across the life-time?
  - a. How are spiritually significant events across the life stages described by these older adults?
  - b. How does a Spiritual Life Review help older adults find meaning in late life?
  - c. Does the process of completing a Spiritual Life Review help reconcile unresolved conflict (integrity versus despair) and confirm gerotranscendence in late life development?

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

Researchers suggest that increased spiritual development is often associated with later stages of adulthood when individuals are likely to explore the greater meaning of their life and existence. This is especially relevant when older adults are facing changes in role status and identity, coping with an illness, recovering from a loss, dealing with daily limitations, and generally shifting to a “here and now” focus from a future orientation (Leder 1999; Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Moberg, 2005; Kaopua, Gotay, & Boehm, 2007). Life span development and gerotranscendence both offer a theoretical platform in this research to explore how spiritual experiences across the lifetime have influenced individuals’ life satisfaction and meaning in the later stages of adulthood.

In Chapter 2 a conceptual framework for this study is provided, including a brief overview of Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial development theory, followed by a more in depth discussion of Butler’s life review process and how it is used to evaluate the stages of life development in gerontology research. Additionally, I will introduce Tornstam’s theory of gerotranscendence as an extension of Erikson’s epigenetic stages of life development. Spirituality will be reviewed and defined as it relates to older adults. Also, the utility of spiritual life reviews, spiritual assessments, and spiritual lifemaps will be covered in detail. As well, a summary of spirituality in social work practice is provided.

Lastly, a closing statement about the current study and its benefit to social work practice is offered.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Psychosocial Development.** Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development spans the life course from birth to old age suggesting that an individual's personality is a lifelong process consisting of eight stages of development each reflecting opposing outcomes (e.g., the first stage is basic trust vs. mistrust at birth and the eighth is ego integrity vs. ego despair at 65+). Erikson's theory further posits that at each stage there is a chance for crisis and conflict related to the natural progression towards the next stage. For purposes of this study with older adults the focus is on the eighth and final stage, when the individual is believed to have achieved successful ego integrity when s/he is able to look back on their life with overall satisfaction versus regret and is not afraid of what lies ahead in his/her future. However, if an individual is dissatisfied with his/her current circumstance, or is unable to reconcile unresolved conflicts, and cannot find hope for future experiences they will feel a sense of despair (Brown & Lewis, 2003). In an effort to understand if completing a spiritual life review assists older adults in looking back at his/her life with satisfaction or regrets a pre and posttest measure of ego-integrity was administered and compared before and after the study.

**Life Review.** Life review originated from the work of Robert Butler more than four decades ago while studying "vibrant and healthy" older adults (65+) at the National Institute of Health. Butler (1963) noted that older adults naturally reviewed their life events in an attempt make sense of what s/he has experienced in the past. Butler (1963)

also recognized the influence of mortality on the mental process when an older adult expressed vulnerability about the finality of his/her life.

Choi & Jun (2009) used life review as the conceptual framework to examine life regrets and pride among low-income older adults on mental health outcomes (e.g., depression), hypothesizing that older adults would experience less regret and better mental health if they fully accept responsibility of personal losses (e.g., failures and mistakes) and have a sense of satisfaction for life successes (e.g., personal and professional).

Throughout the literature, the life review process for older adults is reported as an evaluative process that involves participating in active or structured reminiscence therapy, reviewing and reconciling past relationships, seeking or permitting forgiveness, writing self-autobiography or spiritual autobiography and resolving conflicts ultimately to achieve a sense of purpose and meaning in life in order to avoid the despair of old age (Beaver, 1991; Butler, 1963; Molinari, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Peck, 2001; Serrano, Latorre, Gatz, & Montanes, 2004; Steinhauser, et al., 2008). Life review and structured reminiscence therapy as counseling techniques with older adults have been shown to be effective in a number of studies. Hyer and Intrieri (2006) report that life reviews offer an effective treatment for depression with older adults who are introspective, willing to revisit the past, and cognitively intact. Other researchers found that using life review with residents in a long term care facility was effective in helping individuals find meaning in the absence of prior life-enhancing situations and relationships (Thompson & Gallagher-Thompson, 1997). In another study, autobiographical life review was used as a therapy to treat depression in older adults. Through memory recall and analysis of

specific life events (positive and/or negative) the older adults reported feelings of improved mood states, and satisfaction with life as well as decreased depressive symptoms and feelings of hopelessness (Serrano, Lattore, Gatz, & Montanes, 2004). In a 5-year study of newly relocated nursing home residents, residents' depressive symptoms were significantly fewer for those receiving life reviews as a preventive intervention for treating clinical depression (Haight, Michel, & Hendrix, 1998). Similarly, in a review of various life review therapy studies with depressed older adults, researchers report consistent findings related to significant reduction in depressive symptoms among those who participated in individual structured life reviews across the lifespan (Serrano, Latorre, Gatz, & Montanes, 2004). Additionally, empirical findings of a longitudinal study (e.g. one year) show that life review interventions with older adults promote and sustain greater sense of purpose in life, self-acceptance, relationships with others, pride and autonomy (Lewis, 2001; Haight, Michel, & Hendrix, 1998).

In other studies of life review as an evaluative form of reminiscence therapy, the findings are similar in relation to cognitive, psychological, social, behavioral, and health outcome measures with older adults (Chin, 2007; Gagnon, 1996; Hill & Brettle, 2005; Watt & Cappeliez, 2000). For example, Hsieh and Wang (2003) provide a systematic review of nine studies on the effect of reminiscence (life review) therapy on older adults with depression, defining reminiscence therapy according to Butler's (1963) life review process. Half of the nine studies that used this reminiscence therapy in the life review framework found significant decreases in depressive symptoms (Hsieh & Wang, 2003). More recently, Chin (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 controlled trials on the clinical effects of reminiscence therapy in older adults on life satisfaction, happiness,

depression, and self-esteem with the two variables of happiness and depression showing the most significant positive benefits. Still other researchers expanded on reminiscence life review therapy by adding a problem solving component to the technique based on cognitive theories of depression and found significant improvements in depression with moderately to severely depressed older adults at the end of the intervention as well as three months later (Hill & Brettle, 2005; Watt & Cappeliez, 2000). For purposes of this study the life review structure is used as a method to facilitate in-depth interviews with each participant from his/her childhood to current age.

**Gerotranscendence.** In 1968 Butler posited that the process of personality reorganization from reconciliation of life events may help to account for the evolution of such qualities as wisdom and serenity in the older person. Almost three decades after Butler's work and Erikson's original hypothesis that successful resolution of the 8<sup>th</sup> stage of development results in ego integrity and greater life satisfaction, Joan Erikson proposed a 9<sup>th</sup> stage of development (1998) that permits the review and crises of earlier stages to be used for continued growth and strength in later stages of life (Brown & Lewis, 2003). This life stage has been characterized in the literature as gerotranscendence (Erikson, 1998; Peck, 2001; Tornstam, 1989, 1992, 1996). Brown and Lewis (2003) write about gerotranscendence in the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of life development recognizing that as aging individuals confront and experience life challenges, there is a shift from a materialistic and pragmatic perspective of the world to a more "cosmic and transcendent" viewpoint of life and the future. In other words, there is a quality of wisdom achieved at the 9th stage whereby older adults are able to focus on the purpose of their life and are able to recognize the reality of their strengths and limitations without

judgment (Sinnott, 2009). According to several authors, wisdom is a characteristic that increases with age. Specifically, an individual is said to be wise when he/she fully understands the meaning of his/her life's journey from a pragmatic and contextual perspective (Ardelt, 2000; Mickler & Staudinger, 2008; Sinnott, 2009; Yang, 2008). Spiritual growth is associated with the older adult who is able to accept with satisfaction the reality of his/her past and current life (e.g., ego integrity) while maintaining a realistic future orientation that is non-materialistic, purposeful and open to death without fear (e.g., gerotranscendence) (Brown and Lewis, 2003; Yount, 2009).

In an article about life review and its influence on subjective well-being, Peck (2001) writes about the importance of meaning in older adults' lives and how reconciliation and gerotranscendence both require the individual to look back on his/her life experiences and be able to relate it to his/her current life circumstances. In essence, life review and life review reminiscence therapy offer the older adult an opportunity to find meaning and purpose in the later stages of life through reviewing past events and relationships, often transcending earlier experiences that may have been causing emotional and psychological suffering. This leads us to a discussion of how finding meaning and purpose through a transcendent process in later life is attached to spirituality.

## **Spirituality**

**Spirituality with Older Adults.** Finding meaning and purpose through spirituality is recognized by several authors as increasingly important throughout the life course for older adults (Birkenmaier, Behrman, & Berg-Weger, 2005). Researchers indicate that spirituality addresses fundamental issues of inner faith, personal

significance, mortality, existence of a higher power, and the ultimate meaning of life (Cascio,1998; Canda & Furman 1999; Edwards, 2002; Sermabeikian,1994). Carroll (2001) describes spirituality thematically as either an innate gift that originates from the individual at birth or as something that is garnered over time due to a personal experience with a higher (transcendent) being. Carroll (2001) then uses these themes to further conceptualize spirituality as having two different meanings: “spirituality- as- essence” (e.g., one’s core nature and inherent motivation toward self-development and self-transformation) and “spirituality-as-one-dimension” (e.g., one’s quest for a relationship with God, the transcendent or ultimate reality) (p. 7). This concept of spirituality is incidentally described in the findings of a qualitative research study involving forty-six community dwelling older adults. In this study, Eisenhandler (2005) identifies spirituality as a theme evolving in late life due to either the individual’s lifetime commitment of spiritual/religious beliefs or to newly developed beliefs due to late life experiences. Furthermore, Eisenhandler found that many participants shared a transcendent perspective on life as being connected to all others, nature, and something greater than oneself.

Evidence suggests that important spiritual needs emerge in the later life cycle of aging, such as the need for meaning and purpose, for love and relatedness, for forgiveness, and for spiritual integration (Reed, 1991; Staude, 2005; Steinhauser et al., 2008). There are many reasons to address spirituality in the counseling process with older adults. For instance, spiritually sensitive practice represents a strengths based perspective, demonstrates a respect for client heterogeneity (e.g., diverse worldviews and cultures), promotes functional behavior with death and dying, lowers levels of anxiety



about death, increases mental and physical health, increases resiliency, and assists with depression and bereavement (Armstrong & Crowther, 2002; Canda, Nakashima, & Furman, 2004; Farley, 2007; Hodge 2005,2006; Sacco, 1996; Van Hook, 2008; Yoon & Lee, 2007). Spirituality has also been identified as a significant factor in helping older individuals cope and is often recognized as playing a key role in fostering client self-determination, dignity, and strength (Sacco, 1996; Williams, 2004). Therefore, it appears from the literature that social workers who use a spiritual life review tool can help promote positive aspects (of spirituality) in the lives of older adults so as to help in later stages of life development.

For purposes of this study, spirituality among older adults will be defined as a quest for the meaning of life through both religious and non-religious experiences over time and involves a relationship with God, transcendent and others ( MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010; Nelson-Becker et al., 2007; Schlehofer, Omoto & Adelman, 2008; Snodgrass & Sorajjakool, 2011; Yoon & Lee, 2007).

**Spiritual Life Review.** Although spirituality or religion may be one of the session topics in a life review program, few researchers have specifically focused on life reviews that are dedicated to exploring spirituality. In one study, Lewis (2001) introduces the concept of a *spiritual life review* by suggesting that late life development counseling should integrate spirituality with Butler's (1963) life review process as framed in Erikson's epigenetic stages of life development. For example, Hateley (1985) conducted a qualitative study with adults who completed a spiritual life review. The participants reported an increase in personal insight and enhanced spiritual well-being. This finding is promising for gerontological social workers to help facilitate positive

emotional and mental outcomes with older adults facing issues of late life development. Furthermore, researchers hypothesize that spiritual life reviews with older adults residing in nursing homes can be beneficial as these individuals are often challenged not only with identity issues but also with the meaning of life. Despite the lack of empirical evidence on spiritual life reviews per se with older adults, there is much literature that supports the use of spiritual assessments and interventions to promote spiritual well-being (Feldman & Howie, 2009; Hodge, 2000; Peck, 2001; Staude, 2005).

**Spiritual Assessments.** David Hodge (2000), a social work researcher, has written extensively about a multitude of spiritual assessments and interventions reflecting the holistic value of social work, recognizing that spirituality is a key part of the “client’s personal and environmental strengths central to the helping process” (p. 204). Hodge (2001, 2005, 2006) designed five spiritual assessments tools including one verbal model (e.g., spiritual history) and four diagrammatic approaches (e.g., spiritual ecomap, spiritual genogram, spiritual ecogram, and spiritual lifemap) that can be used to identify different aspects of an individual’s spiritual life. All five of these spiritual approaches offered by Hodge (2001, 2004, 2005, and 2006) are client-centered assessments designed for planning and intervention. Furthermore, these five models offer a holistic (e.g., bio-psycho-social-spiritual) dimension of the client providing contextual insight into multiple stressors that can assist in alleviating existential discord which is often associated with life challenges with older adults.

**Spiritual Lifemap.** For purposes of this study Hodge’s spiritual lifemap was used as the instrument to conduct a spiritual life review with older adults. A spiritual lifemap is a client directed pictorial presentation of the individual’s spiritual journey and

relationship with God (or transcendence) from childhood to present and into the future. This allows clients to view their spiritual life experiences from an existential perspective shifting the focus to the spiritual events and away from clients directly. Spiritual lifemaps are drawn by the client in the same format that one would draw a “road map” with a beginning and end. Essentially, the client is instructed to draw a path on a piece of paper and then that path is broken into sections by years or decades. The client is asked to fill in the path with spiritually significant life events with whatever symbols best represent the events. David Hodge suggests asking open-ended questions to the client after the lifemap is completed to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the clients identified spiritual assets (Hodge, 2005) (see Appendix D). Similar to the structured life review process (see Appendix E) the above mentioned tool provides a resource to explore the meaning of spirituality throughout the life course with older adults as they are in later stages of life development. Using the spiritual lifemap in the context of a life review process creates a *spiritual life review* for this study.

**Spirituality in Social Work.** There are several advocates for the inclusion of spirituality onto the social work agenda. These advocates argue that spirituality already has emerged as a significant topic in practice and recognize the need for it to be addressed with our clients (Armstrong, 2002; Bethel, 2004; Birkenmaier, 2005; Canda et al., 2004; Damianankis, 2001; Edwards, 2002; Finger & Arnold, 2002; Griffin, 2005; Hodge, 2006; Peck, 2001; Rice, 2002). In a recent study, 60% of practitioners indicated being familiar with the need to assess spiritual issues and two-thirds of the respondents reported applying spiritual strategies in their social work practices (Sheridan 2004; Vohra-Gupta, Rusell, & Lo, 2007).

In a recent study of over 1,000 National Association of Social Work (NASW) members 71% said that they help clients consider the spiritual meaning and purpose of their current life situation (Canda et al, 1999). In another study, researchers report that 50% of 1,069 social work practitioners from four geographical areas reported using a multitude of spiritually focused approaches with clients (Canda & Furman, 1999). Additionally, there has been a rapid increase of accredited social work programs offering courses on spirituality and social work; at least 50 schools of social work currently offer such subjects, up from 17 in 1995 (Miller, 2001). Furthermore, Ai et al. (2004) present results from a recent study of MSW students where more than 25% of respondents identify spirituality as an issue that was seen in both their field and work settings; 61% recognized the importance of spirituality in social work curriculum as meeting the NASW code of ethics related to the values of dignity and worth, service, competence, and human relationships; and most significantly more than 90% of the students supported the role of spirituality in social work practice (Williams & Smolak, 2007).

In addition to the micro level (e.g., clinician) and meso level (e.g., community) interest in spirituality is also seen at the macro level of the profession. For instance, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) require social workers in a number of settings to conduct spiritual assessments while the NASW establishes the ethical mandate for cultural competence in social work practice requiring practitioners to gain necessary skills, knowledge, and professional qualification in order to engage in spiritually sensitive practice (Canda et al., 2004; JCAHO, 2001; NASW, 2001). Additionally the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) endorses spirituality

in social work through symposia at annual program meetings and also by listing hundreds of references to spirituality in social work on the CSWE website (Canda et al., 2004).

### **Current Study**

Knowing the projections of the aging population in the next several decades may provide practitioners with the opportunity to plan on how to meet the needs of this population. Spiritual life review as an area of interest in practice with older adults is significantly influenced by the acceptance, and integration of a belief in the spiritual or transcendent as part of the human development experience. Spiritual life review acknowledges the client's spiritual world-view and provides a framework for engaging in the reality of the client's environment (Hodge, 2005; Lewis, 2001; Rice, 2002).

In this study, an integrated approach that combines the framework of Erikson, Butler and Tornstam's theories along with Hodges spiritual assessment tool (spiritual lifemap) allow both the researcher and subject an opportunity to seek and explore greater meaning from life especially during stages of late adulthood. A spiritual life review process offers a non-pharmacological and alternative technique to address a multitude of needs with older adults who are dealing with issues of integrity versus despair, loss of a spouse, chronic and terminal illnesses, and displacement from family, friends and other support networks (Lewis, 2001). Spiritually sensitive counseling including the design and implementation of spiritual life reviews with older adults would seem to bridge existing approaches and ideas into a unified model of practice.

Considering the limited research on spiritual life reviews and the scope to which spirituality is significant in the lives of older adults, this current study explored the meaning of spirituality by utilizing a spiritual lifemap (Hodge, 2005) along with semi-

structured questions to explore the meaning of spirituality across the lifespan of older adults. Additionally, this research measured late life stage of ego-integrity (Ryff & Heincke, 1983) pre and post the spiritual life review to determine if a spiritual life review could facilitate reconciliation of any life regrets and confirm gerotranscendence in late life.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODS**

This study was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The first part of chapter 3 describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a qualitative research method. Next, this chapter presents information about sample selection, participant eligibility and recruitment, data collection, procedures, and interview questions. Lastly, this chapter provides information on the data analysis of the ego integrity scale and the spiritual life interview using hermeneutic phenomenology.

#### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology focusing on understanding the meaning of life as it is lived and experienced historically in relation to a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Lavery, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Furthermore, the methodological issues of hermeneutic phenomenology are focused on the interpretation of texts (written and visual) related to the “historical meanings of experience and their developmental cumulative effects on individual and social levels” (p.15) as interpreted by the reader (Lavery, 2003). In other words, hermeneutic phenomenology involves the process of interpreting text in a circular pattern referred to as a hermeneutic circle (Creswell, 2007; Lavery, 2003). This interpretive process begins with reading the text of the individual’s historical experiences of the phenomenon as a whole to grasp an initial understanding of the lived experience. This is

then followed by a reading of the text to identify themes and subthemes of the narrative including the researcher's personal understanding of the experienced phenomenon. Finally, the text is read again as a whole viewing the shared meaning of the phenomenon from the subject's narrative, the reader's pre understanding of the experience, and a reflection on the literature that also helps to understand the phenomenon of study (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Laverly, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology study was threefold: (1) to explore spiritual life reviews with older adults to understand how they find meaning in their lives through spiritual experiences; (2) to describe the phenomenon of spirituality throughout the life span of older adults; and (3) to assess how a spiritual life review influences an individual's level of ego integrity and gerotranscendence.

## **Participants**

**Research Setting.** Participants were recruited from a faith based continuing care retirement community (CCRC) in West Florida. The researcher chose this CCRC as it is a residential community that promotes the spiritual life and interests of older adults in Florida. The CCRC residents are older adults who live in a shared community consisting of independent housing, assisted living and a health center facility. This CCRC has its own spiritual life committee made up of residents and administrators who work together towards the interest of spiritual development in the community. Additionally, the residents of this CCRC often participate in various research studies to help understand and promote the quality of life and well-being of older adults. One of the researcher's doctoral committee members is a former board member of the CCRC and provided an introduction to the Executive Director of the center. To recruit participants the researcher



contacted the Executive Director of the community and requested an opportunity to make a presentation of her research interest to the key personnel of the community for approval and to request assistance in identifying potential participants. The meeting was on September 28, 2010 with the community's Executive Director, Chaplain, Compliance Administrator, and Registered Nurse (RN) in charge of all research initiatives. The meeting attendees were informed of the study purpose and proposed procedures for conducting spiritual life reviews with older adults at the continuing care retirement community (CCRC). Approval was granted for the research to commence at the CCRC in the Spring/Summer of 2011.

**Sample.** In hermeneutic phenomenology, the subjects are individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Groenwald, 2004). Polkinghorne (1989) recommends interviewing 5 to 25 participants as appropriate for phenomenological research. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants from a continuing care retirement community for this study. Willing residents of the CCRC attended one of three sessions to learn about the study details of spirituality across the life time of older adults. Potential participants were presented with information about the study including the purpose, procedures, confidentiality, and the opportunity to volunteer in the study. Overall, 20 residents from the CCRC in Florida volunteered to participate in this study.

**Participant Eligibility.** Participants who were willing to take part in this qualitative study were eligible if they met the following inclusion criteria (i) they resided at the CCRC in West Florida; (ii) they were 65 years or older; (iii) they spoke English fluently; and (iv) they made 5 errors or less on the Short Portable Mental Status

Questionnaire (SPSMQ). Participants who scored more than a 5 on the SPSMQ and were not fluent in English were excluded from enrollment.

The SPSMQ (Pfeiffer, 1975) is designed to screen for cognitive impairment in older adults. Eight or more errors reflect severe intellectual impairment. The researcher chose 5 errors as the cutoff score (e.g., indicating moderate intellectual impairment) because participation required memory recall of life events back to childhood up to current age.

**Recruitment of Participants.** To recruit potential participants, three individual social hours (e.g., ‘meet and greet’ sessions) were held at the chapel of the CCRC. Participants interested in volunteering for the study provided their contact information on a sign-up sheet during one of the three information sessions held on June 27<sup>th</sup> - June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the residential community. Initial meetings were scheduled with each of the 20 participants prior to setting up the final two meetings including (a) the instructional meeting on how to create a spiritual lifemap and (b) the spiritual life interview meeting. At the initial meeting participants first signed two copies of the informed consent outlining the purpose of the study, procedures, rights to withdraw at any time, contact information in the event of feeling harmed or unsafe, expected time commitment, and all matters related to privacy and confidentiality. Second, the SPMSQ was administered, completed and immediately scored demonstrating normal mental functioning for all volunteer participants who were eligible. Third, participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire about age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest level of education completed, marital status, living arrangement, religious affiliation, group/church organization involvement, and a self-report of how religious/spiritual on a scale of 1-5 the

participant considers himself/herself . Finally, at the initial meeting participants completed the Ryff and Heincke's (1983) Ego Integrity Scale (EIS) as a pre-test measure to the spiritual life interview. The initial meetings took place between July 5 - July 8, 2011 and on average lasted approximately 30 minutes.

At the closing of the initial meeting, the researcher checked with each participant on their continued interest in participating with the study. Two of the 20 participants contacted the researcher separately via telephone after the initial meeting and decided to withdraw from the study for different reasons. Specifically, one participant withdrew for anxiety attacks unrelated to the research and the other participant withdrew due to a sudden diagnosis of cancer. The remaining 18 participants who chose to continue in the study established a date to meet one on one with the researcher for the instructional meeting on how to create a spiritual lifemap. At the instructional meeting the participants received supplies (e.g., large poster paper and colored pencils) and typed instructions on how to create a spiritual lifemap. The instructional meetings took place July 11<sup>th</sup> - July 21<sup>st</sup> 2011 and on average lasted approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes each. At the closing of the instructional meetings the researcher agreed with each participant to follow-up via telephone to schedule the audio-taped spiritual life interview. The spiritual life interviews began with the first interview on August 8, 2011 and the last interview taking place on September 15, 2011. During the interview period, one participant chose to withdraw from the study due to an onset of medical issues unrelated to the study and their interference to the participant's ability to complete the spiritual lifemap. A total of 17 older adults participated in the spiritual life interview study.

## **Data Collection**

### **Measures**

*Short Portable Mental Status Questionnaire.* As a brief screening tool for identifying issues with cognitive impairment, each volunteer participant was required to complete a Short Portable Mental Status Questionnaire - SPMSQ (Pfeiffer, 1975) and make no more than 5 errors. The SPMSQ is one of the 15 original brief screening instruments developed for testing cognitive dysfunction in older adults (Gruber, Varner, Chen, & Lesser, 1997). More specifically, the SPMSQ was developed as a 10-item exam of short term memory, long term memory, current events, orientation, and mathematics (Pfeiffer, 1975). Welch and West (1999) studied the utility of the SPMSQ on memory of nursing home residents and found it to be an effective and efficient brief memory assessment tool. Furthermore, in previous research with an outpatient geriatric population researchers found the SPMSQ demonstrated reliability of .74 and validity of .91 when tested face to face (Roccaforte, Burke, Bayer, & Wengel, 1994). (see Appendix A)

*Demographics.* SPSS 20 was used to run descriptive statistics on all demographic data collected. All demographic information was measured as self-reported by participants on a brief questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Descriptive statistics were run on age reporting the mean and standard deviation of the group. All other variables, including, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education completed, marital status, living arrangement, religious affiliation, and how religious/spiritual participants consider himself/herself were measured as frequencies reporting the percentage of people who fit into each category (see Appendix B).

***Ego Integrity.*** Participants were asked to complete Ryff and Heincke's (1983) Ego Integrity Scale (EIS) at the beginning of the research study and a second time after completing a spiritual life review (see Appendix C). The Ego Integrity scale was used in this study to assess where participants were with regard to Erikson's last psychosocial stage of integrity versus despair. The scale consists of 16 items measured on a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The EIS is designed as a self-report to measure (operationalize) the dimensions of ego integrity by assessing how much one accepts life as being lived with meaning and purpose (e.g., "When I consider the ups and downs of my past life, they somehow fit together in a meaningful way"/ "If I had to do it all over again, there are very few things about my life that I would change") or feels disgust for choices made and fears death (e.g., "I still feel angry about certain of my childhood experiences"/ "I wish my life were just beginning so I could avoid many of the mistakes I made earlier in my life"). Items from the scale are written to assess both the high and low dimensions of integrity at any adult age regardless of gender. There are 9 negative items on the scale that are reverse scored and then added to the 7 positive items creating a possible range of scores from 16 to 96 with total higher scores indicating higher levels of ego integrity (Ryff & Heincke, 1983). The internal consistency of the scale has been reported at .82-.85 in general and older populations (Ryff & Heincke, 1983; Hoang, 2009).

***Spiritual Lifemap.*** Participants were asked to complete a spiritual lifemap (Hodge, 2005) during the spiritual life review. A spiritual lifemap is a client directed pictorial presentation of the individual's spiritual journey and relationship with God (or transcendence) from childhood to the present and into the future. This allows participants

to view their spiritual life experiences from an existential perspective shifting the focus to the spiritual events and away from clients directly. Spiritual lifemaps are drawn by the client starting with their childhood and ending at current age. Essentially, the client is instructed to draw a path on a piece of paper and then that path is broken into sections by years or decades. The client is asked to fill in the path with spiritually significant life events with whatever symbols best represent the events.

***Spiritual Life Review.*** Participants were asked a series of exploratory questions during in-depth interviews to elucidate the phenomenon of spirituality across the lifespan while reflecting on significant positive life events (e.g., marriage, birth of a child) and significant negative life events (death of a spouse, divorce, loss of a job). The spiritual life review is one approach to use with an older adult population that is helpful in identifying issues of unresolved conflict as well as areas of pride and life satisfaction (Johnson, 2008; Lewis, 2001). The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions written to explore and clarify the participant's spiritual history and spiritual assets (Hodge, 2005).

## **Procedures**

Data collection took place in several steps including obtaining informed consent, administering surveys (e.g., SPMSQ, demographic survey, and pre-test ego integrity scale), drawing a spiritual lifemap, conducting in-depth interviews based on the spiritual life review, and completing the post-test ego integrity scale.

**Step 1: Informed Consent.** Informed consent was required of all residents participating in this study. The first step was to gather consent from all volunteer residents wishing to participate in the study. A letter of approval to conduct the study

and collect data was provided by the executive team of the study site (see Appendix F). An application for permission to collect data and conduct the study was submitted to the University of South Florida - Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved (see Appendix G). After receiving IRB approval, three “meet and greet” sessions were held at the research site to provide information about the purpose of the study and to recruit volunteer participants. At these meetings the researcher built rapport with potential participants, reviewed in detail the informed consent, and answered any questions about the study. Participants interested in the study completed the SPSMQ (receiving a score of 5 errors or less) and then reviewed and signed the USF IRB approved consent form. All signed consent forms were collected and stored in a secured file in the researcher’s office. A copy of the consent form was provided to the participant as well.

**Step 2: Survey Administration.** All residents who signed an informed consent were provided with a survey packet of initial measures to be completed prior to setting up the spiritual life review session. The first measure in the packet was the SPMSQ that was administered by the researcher and which residents were required to achieve a cut off score of no more than 5 errors (e.g., moderate cognitive impairment) or higher (e.g., normal mental functioning) for continued participation in the study (Pfeiffer, 1975). The researcher explained to each participant the criteria for continuing in the study based on the SPMSQ score. The SPMSQ was scored immediately after completion to determine continued participation. All participants passed the SPMSQ then completed the demographic survey followed by the pretest ego integrity scale. After the eligibility criteria were met and the screening measures were completed, the researcher scheduled a

separate appointment for a face to face meeting with each participant to complete the spiritual lifemap and spiritual life review.

**Step 3: Spiritual Life Review.** The spiritual life review was conducted with participants through two steps. First, the participants were instructed how to draw a spiritual lifemap (Hodge, 2005) depicting their own personal history of spiritual experiences (positive and negative) from birth until current age (Appendix H). The spiritual lifemaps were completed individually by each participant at their leisure during the course of one to two weeks on average. Each participant brought his/her completed spiritual lifemap to the scheduled spiritual life interview. The spiritual lifemaps were referred throughout the interview as a reference point to the significant spiritual life events within different decades.

The second step involved the in-depth interview with the participant describing in detail the meaning of their spiritual experiences on the lifemap in response to a set of semi-structured open-ended questions used to elicit the participant's lived experience of spirituality from childhood to current age. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 60 – 120 minutes with two participants having to schedule a second meeting for completion of the interview. In addition to each audio-taped spiritual life review, field notes were kept to further capture and understand the narrative comments in the context of the interview (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). These sessions were held in a safe and private meeting space at the faith-based retirement community. Overall, the data collection took place from July, 2011 to September, 2011 with three face-to-face meetings. Each meeting focused on a specific aspect of the spiritual life review study.



*Interview Questions.* Interview questions were semi-structured to guide the participant in reviewing their spiritual lifemap. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with each participant on a prearranged meeting time. If necessary, a second meeting was scheduled to continue the interview. All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. At the time of each interview, the participants were reminded that all information would be kept confidential and de-identified as well. Before getting started, participants were invited to ask any questions for clarification. Each interview was held in a private conference room at the CCRC for the convenience of the participants. Each interview included a review of the spiritual lifemap and the six main interview questions (IQ) that elicited spiritual events from birth until current age for the participant. Throughout the interviews, exploratory questions (EQ) were also asked to clarify the depth and meaning of a particular life stage or spiritual event experienced by the participant. All questions were based on answering the main research question of the study, “What is the unique meaning of spirituality for you across your life-time?” The participant’s spiritual lifemaps were central to the life review process as they provide participants the opportunity prior to the interview to recall and pre-record significant spiritual life events throughout their lifespan that they wished to discuss.

Each interview started with a general statement followed by a series of questions. The general statement was, “Today I want to gain a general understanding of spirituality across your lifetime from birth to current age. So in getting started with the interview tell me about your spiritual lifemap beginning with your childhood.” This statement was followed by questions about spirituality at each stage of the lifespan (childhood - current age). Additionally, participants were asked to answer two final questions (FQ) at the end

of the interview. The goal of each question was to explore an in-depth meaning of the phenomenon and the face-to-face interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to fully describe in detail their spiritual experiences and feelings related to the phenomenon as well. (see Appendix I)

**Step 4: Post-test Survey.** After the last interview was completed and finalized, the researcher mailed all 17 participants the post-test ego integrity scale (Ryff & Heinicke, 1983) along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for return and comparison to the pre-test scores.

**Reflective Journal.** In the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher kept a journal (notebook) throughout the study to capture self reflective thoughts, biases, and assumptions about the phenomena of study for the purpose of later integrating these thoughts into the interpretation of the lived experience being studied (Finlay, 2009; Lavery, 2003). These notes were used to discern between what was being understood as the participants' lived experience from the researcher's personal assumptions of the lived experience. This approach is unlike the traditional phenomenological approach where the researcher's thoughts and presuppositions related to the phenomena of study are bracketed and set aside in an effort not to bias the research (Creswell, 2007; Finlay, 2009; Lavery, 2003, Moustakas, 1994).

**Data Maintenance.** All data collected were saved on the researcher's password protected personal computer. For backup, all data were saved using a password protected personal external drive (LaCie Genie Backup Assistant). All data including, informed consents, SPSMQ results, demographic questionnaires, ego-integrity scales, audio-recorded files, and transcriptions were de-identified using a numeric code for each

participant. All of these documents were stored in a locked cabinet or similar safe location at the researcher's home office and will be destroyed after the required time frame of storage (e.g., 7 years).

## **Data Analysis**

**Role of the Researcher.** The researcher was closely involved with the participants while conducting in-depth interviews. The researcher took an empathic stance while exploring the phenomenon using personal assumptions to inform the initial understanding (Patton, 2002). Later the researcher switched from a natural attitude of knowing about the phenomenon to a phenomenological attitude and naïve understanding (Van Manen, 1990; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) exploring further the lived meaning of spirituality for each participant. However, the researcher remained self-reflective throughout the entire study and continued to bring subjectivity to the forefront of the study (Finlay, 2009). The researcher kept a journal of her experiences during the study related to the phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). The researcher took a holistic perspective when interpreting the text by transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading and re-reading the text repeatedly, identifying concepts and sub-themes from the written text, comparing these for similar meaning, identifying meaning units about the phenomenon, rewriting the text to include the meaning units, reviewing the written text again, identifying essential (major) themes and checking if the understanding was consistent with the whole context of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

**Demographic Survey.** Descriptive statistics were examined to organize demographic characteristics of the participants; measures of central tendency and dispersion for the variables using SPSS (version 20).

**Ego Integrity Scale.** Paired t-tests were conducted using SPSS (version 20) to test differences in means between the pre and post test data collection comparing the ego integrity scores before the spiritual life review to the final spiritual life review session (interview).

**Qualitative Software in Data Analysis.** NVivo 9.0 was used for management of all qualitative data including audio recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, and spiritual lifemap images. NVivo 9 assisted the researcher in organizing data, classifying *nodes* (codes), capturing meaning units, and developing sub-themes and major (essential) themes for expressions of commonality related to the lived experience of spirituality.

**Coding the Transcripts.** The 17 digital audio taped interviews were loaded onto the researcher's personal locked computer and later transcribed verbatim into individual Microsoft word 2010 documents using Dragon software from December 2011 – April 2012. The transcribed interviews were reviewed and corrected for any errors and then uploaded as separate internal files into the NVivo 9. Field notes for each interview were also read and organized by content in relation to the transcribed text noting any nonverbal communications that were significant to the researched phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The self-reflective journal detailing any pre-understandings, thoughts, and experiences of the phenomena during the study were also included in the interpretive process of the text and added to NVivo 9 for analysis (Laverly, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Each transcribed interview was read over and over again with a naïve understanding of the phenomenon working up towards the structural analysis (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). This iterative process continued until it made sense

to create Nodes by life stages (e.g., childhood – current age) which were populated with essential passages or meaning units identified in the interviews that would lead to the sub-themes and themes of the phenomenon. Additionally, some participants gave the researcher permission to scan their spiritual lifemaps to be added to the spiritual life review file in NVivo 9. All spiritual lifemaps were returned back to the participant after being scanned. Some of the symbols used in the spiritual lifemaps were coded as images and added to the appropriate Node categories in NVivo 9.

**Interpreting the Text.** A key component of the hermeneutic approach to interpreting the text is referred to as a hermeneutic circle whereby the researcher enters into an understanding of the phenomenon through a “dialectical movement between the parts and the whole of the texts of those involved” (Laverty, 2003, p. 21). In other words hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to read and write the text over several times revealing themes and sub-themes while always comparing back to the whole context of the experience in an attempt to understand the essence of the phenomena (Van Manen; 1990; Lane, 2005; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Laverty (2003) highlights the importance of capturing the historical meaning and cumulative effect of the lived experience for the participant as key parts of the hermeneutic interpretive process. Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenology relies on the use of multiple forms of communication (visual, written, and verbal) as well as the imagination of the researcher in order to interpret the text until a new “sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions, for the moment” is achieved (Van Manen, 1990; Laverty, 2003; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Moreover, a thoughtful process of reduction and elimination of the data takes place while interpreting the text to identify the “essential” versus the “incidental” themes

related to the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Finally, the results of the interpreted phenomenon was written up in commonly used language (as opposed to scientific) to explain the lived experience in a new perspective or manner for the participants, ourselves, and others (Lane, 2005; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Below is an outline of the method for interpreting the text in this hermeneutic study based on the approach by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) that has been developed for over ten years and replicated in several studies. However, it is important to note that the below steps serve only as an organized representation of an approach to understanding and explaining the technique used for interpreting and analyzing the text to discover a meaning of the lived experience being studied. As Van Manen (1990) points out, although hermeneutic phenomenology does have a particular “way” (methods) of being approached there is no simple way to master the procedures quickly nor should they be sought out as it would compromise the true meaning and the authenticity of conducting human science research.

### *I. Naïve Reading*

- i. Listen and transcribe verbatim the audio-tapes, notes, maps, and journal
- ii. Read the text as a whole several times with a pre-understanding (natural attitude) of the lived experience and then read it with a phenomenological attitude
- iii. Produce a naïve understanding of the text in phenomenological language

### *II. Structural Analysis*

- i. Divide the whole text into meaning units
- ii. Read the meaning units reflecting on the naïve understanding
- iii. Condense the meaning units into common everyday language

- iv. Reflect on all condensed meaning units for similarities/differences
- v. Create sub-themes based on further condensing and similar meaning units
- vi. Assemble themes based on sub-themes
- vii. Reflect on themes in relation to naïve understanding
- viii. Question whether the identified themes validate or invalidate the naïve understanding
- ix. Continue structural analysis from beginning until naïve understanding is validated

*III. Formulate results in a phenomenological hermeneutical way*

- i. Use everyday language to describe the lived experience
- ii. Use verbs instead of nouns
- iii. Use metaphors, sayings or poetic language to convey the interpreted meaning

These steps explain the iterative process of circular interpretation or the hermeneutic circle. In further elaborating on this process, the naïve reading is the researcher's first attempt at understanding the text as a whole. This is accomplished by reading and re-reading the text first with an open "feeling" attitude towards the descriptive experience (phenomena) and then moving into a phenomenological attitude about understanding the overall meaning of what is being expressed. Through this a naïve understanding begins to develop and thoughts are identified in the texts that are then explored further in the structural analysis.

In this next step of structural analysis, the text is read again but this time with the intention of creating "meaning units" that represent a concept or sub-theme of the phenomena in a descriptive format varying in length from one key word to an entire section of an interview. These meaning units are then further explored and reviewed in

reflection of the naïve understanding in an effort to elucidate an essential meaning about the phenomena which either validates or invalidates the meaning unit. Also used in this research is the structural analysis offered by Van Manen (1990) to discover concepts, sub-themes and themes in a hermeneutic phenomenology study. Van Manen (1990) refers to three ways for uncovering themes in the text: (1) the wholistic or sententious approach; (2) the selective or highlighting approach; (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach. For purposes of this study, the selective or highlighting approach was used whereby the researcher read and re-read the text to identify the statements or phrases that are essential components of the phenomenon or experience described. Specifically, in this study, essential phrases and expressions of shared spiritual life events were highlighted into meaning units and then categorized by sub-themes relating to the essential (major) theme of spirituality at each life stage.

Lastly, formulating the results in a phenomenological hermeneutical way is a creative process, which involves representing the identified shared lived experiences of the phenomena that have been validated by the naïve understanding as well as the literature in a language that conveys a meaning of the phenomena that is easily understood and related to by anyone reading the results (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p 149-151).

**Strategies for Rigor.** Issues of rigor were addressed directly through the interpretive process including the multiple reviews of the text, and the constant validation of naïve understandings leading to developed themes of the lived experience (Laverly, 2003). To recognize biases the researcher was aware of any preconceived notions she had of spiritual life experiences and kept these present during the research in an effort to



remain separate from the participants described spiritual life experiences (Finlay 2009). Issues of trustworthiness were addressed through data triangulation by using multiple sources of data including in-depth interviews, participant's spiritual lifemaps, field notes, and a self-reflective journal (Padgett, 2008). To check reliability the researcher sought advice from a committee member who was willing to discuss the texts in comparison to the identified nodes (codes) and themes providing informal inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, a decision trail was used to identify how the data was collected, interpreted and analyzed throughout the study (Laverty, 2003; Padgett, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Descriptives**

Descriptive information about the participants is presented in Table 1. The participants were between 69 and 92 years old with a mean age of 83.55 years. The majority of participants were female (75%; n=15) and all were Caucasian. Participants self-identified as: 50% married or partnered; 40% widowed; 5% divorced, and 5% single. With respect to living arrangement, less than half the participants reported living with a spouse or partner (40%), one-third (30%) reported living alone, 15% reside in assisted living, 10% reside in an apartment complex (independent living), and 5% reside in the health center. The majority of participants (70%) reported having a college degree or post-college degrees; 15% have some college experience; 10% have a high school diploma; and 5% had less than a high school education. The participants reported their religious affiliations most frequently (80%) as Protestant, while 10% reported as Other Christian (e.g., Unitarian and Methodist), 5% reported Catholic, and 5% reported Agnostic. The majority of residents self-identified as being religious (55%), 25% identified as being very religious, 10% identified as neutral, while 5% reported being somewhat religious, and 5% self-identified as not very religious. Similarly, the majority of residents (80%) self-identified as either being very spiritual (40%) or spiritual (40%); 15% reported being neutral, and 5% reported as not very spiritual.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Participants**

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Age (years), <i>M</i> (SD)	84.17	(6.14)
Gender, <i>n</i> (%)		
Female	12	(71)
Male	5	(29)
Marital Status, <i>n</i> (%)		
Single	1	(6)
Divorced	1	(6)
Widowed	6	(35)
Married/Partnered	9	(53)
Race, <i>n</i> (%)		
Caucasian	17	(100)
Education, <i>n</i> (%)		
High School Diploma	1	(6)
Some College	3	(18)
Associates Degree	1	(6)
Bachelor's Degree	2	(12)
Some Graduate School	2	(12)
Master's Degree	6	(35)
Doctoral Degree	2	(11)

**Table 2. Participants Data Description**

#	Study ID	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Religious Affiliation	Subjective Religious/Spiritual
1	001	Male	89	Married	Masters	Other/Christian	Somewhat Religious/Neutral Spiritual
2	002	Female	90	Widowed	Bachelors	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual
3	003	Female	88	Widowed	Masters	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual
4	004	Female	87	Married	Some College	Protestant	Very Religious/Very Spiritual
5	005	Male	92	Married	Masters	Protestant	Very Religious/Neutral Spiritual
6	006	Female	90	Widowed	Some College	Protestant	Religious/Very Spiritual
7	007	Female	77	Married	Some Graduate	Protestant	Religious/Very Spiritual
8	008	Male	78	Married	Doctorate	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual
9	009	Female	82	Married	Masters	Protestant	Very Religious/Spiritual
10	010	Male	84	Widowed	Doctorate	Protestant	Very Religious/Very Spiritual
11	011*	Female	82	Widowed	Less than H.S.	Protestant	Neutral Religious/Neutral Spiritual
12	012	Female	89	Single/Widowed	Bachelors	Other/Christian	Religious/Very Spiritual
13	013	Female	92	Widowed	Some College	Protestant	Neutral Religious/Very Spiritual
14	014	Female	76	Married	Masters	Protestant	Very Religious/Very Spiritual
15	015	Female	86	Married	Associates	Agnostic	Not Religious/Not Spiritual
16	016*	Female	69	Married	H.S. Diploma	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual
17	017*	Female	89	Widowed	Masters	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual
18	018	Female	76	Widowed	H.S. Diploma	Catholic	Religious/Spiritual
19	019	Female	74	Divorced	Some Graduate	Protestant	Religious/Very Spiritual
20	020	Male	81	Married	Masters	Protestant	Religious/Spiritual

\* Withdrew from the Study

### **Ego Integrity Scale**

Paired t-test was conducted to test differences in means between the pre and post test data collection comparing the ego integrity scores before the spiritual life review to the final spiritual life review session (interview). There was a moderate positive correlation ( $r=.463$ ). People who scored high on the pre- test also scored high on the post test. There was no statistically significant difference between the pre ego integrity score ( $M=82.94$ ,  $SD= 8.235$ ) and the post ego integrity score ( $M=84.47$ ,  $SD= 7.551$ );  $t(16) = -.769$   $p= .453$ . The test results means the spiritual life review did not influence the ego integrity scores of participants.

### **Participants' Spiritual Life Reviews**

The researcher categorized themes found within each interview question from the spiritual life review with older adults. Overall there were 7 major themes with several subthemes identified with each major (essential) theme. The seven major themes that emerged about spirituality across the lifetime with older adults were: (a) Childhood – Experiencing a relationship to God through religious rituals, practices, and beliefs, (b) Family of Origin – Being part of a deeply rooted spiritual/religious interpersonal system (e.g., family, church, community), (c) Adolescence –Developing a spiritual life and community outside of immediate family, (d) Adulthood - Maturing in faith and wisdom, (e) Family of Procreation – Making a Commitment to marriage and family, (f) Trials & Hardships – Spirituality during trials and hardships means having faith, trust and belief, (g) Meaning of Spirituality – Spirituality means experiencing the transcendent nature of God in one's own life and in relationship to others and the Universe. Below is a discussion of each interview question and the identified sub-themes that related to the

overall major themes that were found to best describe the meaning of spirituality at each life stage.

**Table 3. Question 1- Childhood**

***Theme: Spirituality in childhood means experiencing a relationship to God through religious rituals, practices and beliefs***

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In looking back at your childhood were you able to identify any spiritually significant events? Can you tell me about the first spiritual events you can remember in your life?

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<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Being baptized or dedicated/ making first communion	004, 009, 014, 015, 018
Attending Sunday school	001, 003, 006, 007, 010, 015
Belonging to a religious/spiritual community	001, 003, 007, 008, 009, 012, 014, 018, 019
Learning bible stories/prayers	006, 007, 009, 012, 013, 020
Experiencing unconditional love	003, 009, 010, 012, 014, 019, 020

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As noted above, five sub-themes were identified by the researcher that related to the major theme of what spirituality means in childhood. The five sub-themes from the older adults interviewed were: (a) Being baptized, dedicated or making first communion, (b) Attending Sunday School, (c) Belonging to a religious/spiritual community, (d) Learning bible stories/prayers, (e) Believing in Jesus’s and Gods love.

**Being baptized, dedicated or making first communion.** When answering the question about identifying first significant spiritual life events during childhood, many participants recalled participating in a spiritual ritual that signified a connection to their

relationship with family and God. One female (Presbyterian) participant, age 78, offered the following memory:

*Church was a big part of our life and it was consistently that way, dad's father was a Seventh Day Baptist preacher, as well as other things...when I was born I was baptized at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral in Spokane...so it was... you know it (spirituality/religion) was just basic for us which was great.*

Similarly, another female participant, age 87, now an agnostic, recalls her baptism as the first spiritual event and makes reference to her parent's relationship with church as the reason for her baptism into their religion at the time.

*I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 18th, 1925. In June 1925, I was baptized Presbyterian at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. My folks were living with my father's mother at the time as they had eloped...and that's why they were members (of that church). I also attended Sunday school at Southwestern Presbyterian Church where I met my future husband.*

Still other participants acknowledged their first spiritual event with a sense of excitement related to a particular part of the ritual. For instance one female (catholic) participant, age 78, shared the following:

*First communion....yeah...and I thought it was so neat because they gave us a little purse that had our rosary and our prayer book and that type of thing...that is the first thing...I remember we always went to church ....but it was age six we made our first communion.*

Still, other participants recognize the importance of how an early ritual shaped their own commitment to a religious community. A female (Salvationist) participant, age 84, recalls the significance of her first memory in the following description:

*Salvation Army has what they call dedication of children instead of baptism.....it's basically the parents giving back to God their children and agreeing that they will give an environment that leads them to God and that they will keep them from temptations of the world as we say which basically meant drinking and smoking, that is a no-no in the Salvation Army. You don't do either one...the congregation and then when the prayer is given, the pastor takes the child and holds the child as he prays. That is very sweet... it is....but it's also a big responsibility for the parents and then they ask during... when the pastor is going to pray, they usually ask the congregation to stand if there are people in the congregation to stand if they also will be a part of this child's spiritual life...It is a commitment...big time.*

**Attending Sunday school.** Many participants described a similar childhood experience of attending Sunday school as a significant part of their spiritual life. Although, the participants represent a diverse group of Christians most attended Sunday school and remember it being a big part of their spiritual foundation and belief in knowing God.

*That was the first (memory)...when I thought back ...and I still remember it vividly, I wrote there "God looks over us." That's one quote. And it was in a primary Sunday school class and I was four... I still remember sitting on these little chairs that look like a dollhouse chair and the teacher was telling us that "God looks over us" and that impressed me that God looks over us....I mean the whole idea of believing in God and so forth but that's where -- I remember it so vividly. I remember the room we were in, sitting on these little chairs. (86, male, Presbyterian participant)*

*Well I was born in 1922 ...and they tell me that six weeks after I was born I was taken to Sunday school and listened from my cradle role, as it was called. A little early I guess... and I missed very, very few Sundays...from then on until when I was grown. First memories of Sunday school were Miss H who was superintendent of the beginners in primary department and she was also the teacher for the very youngest kids...and I was certainly no more than four maybe younger...and I remember sitting around this table where she was teaching us from a leaflet. I went to the...at that time the Reformed church which later*



*became evangelical and reformed and is now United Church of Christ....which is fairly liberal. The German Reformed church is not like the Dutch Reformed church, they're different. (90, male, Anglican participant)*

*I had influential Sunday school teachers that I remember fondly and they just you know were anchors for us. I remember one thing at the time it was at just a gift my grandmother called and gave me my first bible when I was about age 7 and um...I was so proud of it because we really didn't have a lot of books and that...the bible was very special and I could use it in my Sunday school classes and later she remarked 'I notice you carried that bible every Sunday to church' and she was pleased and I didn't think anything of it at the time but I began using it and that was definitely a spiritual influence of my life and I still have the bible which I treasure. (77, female, Methodist participant)*

*Well, I was born 1921 in a farm of Iowa. The only child... I was exposed to nature and God's part in nature...we would have family prayers and Sunday school was a big part of my life. (91, Female, Protestant participant)*

*I always went to Sunday school....all the time...and the big thing was to memorize scripture and like the beatitudes, the ten commandments -- all those things...and some of the Psalms and everything, not just the 23rd but more different ones and I used to know them all and now I can't even remember... I know the gist of them, but now I can't ...well 23rd Psalm, you never forget that because you hear it all the time. (88, Female, Universalist participant)*

**Belonging to a religious/spiritual community.** In reflecting on their spiritual lifemaps and childhood events, participants spontaneously identified attending church and being part of a spiritual community as an important part of their spiritual life. For instance, a male Christian participant (age 89) described the important role of church in his childhood development by stating, "I grew up in that church...and that church was a central part of my life very much." A female Catholic participant (age 76) supported the

role of church not only in her life but in her family's life stating "...church was a big part of our life and it was consistently that way..." Another female Protestant participant (age 74) shared a similar sentiment on the experience of church in her childhood as an expectation: "I was born into a minister's home...so we were always at church...church was just expected... I mean it was just there." Meanwhile a male Protestant participant (age 80) reflected on the impact that both church and boy scouts had on his spiritual growth during childhood years stating:

*1932...I was their (parents) first child and we lived one block away from the Church so I was back and forth over there all the time...almost growing up in the shadow and every part of ...part of it (church) sometimes in fact later on I even did janitorial work there while in college (chuckled)...but most significantly I remember from my Church upbringing of the Presbyterian catechism...they had a short uh... catechism and they required all children to memorize it... 'Who is God? God is a spirit' ...and then I learned later that there was a longer version of that in the adult catechism which I have committed to memory ... 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable....in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth' and then when I was 12 years old I was cub-scout and then joined the boy scouts and I think that...all that was – I don't know... – but everything was part of spiritual growth.*

Likewise, a female Protestant participant (age 82) reminisced about how attending church and camp as a child impacted her spiritual experience of knowing God.

*I was very fortunate in that I went to camps from the time I was about seven and they were Salvation Army oriented and so they were spiritual. We always had church. We always had devotions in the morning and we sat around the campfire at night and that sort of thing. And I think God always comes close to people in nature and those were very significant years for me spiritually as a youngster. Certainly not understanding a great deal but just knowing that God was there, a feeling, a sense of His presence really.*

One female Protestant participant (age 88) recalled the importance of church and values in her childhood as a spiritual event that shaped her life:

*You had everything right out Saturday to get up and go, get ready for Sunday school and church and I remember one time, I must have been five years old, I ran out in the yard, I was all dressed ready to go and waiting, I ran out in the yard and got my shoes dusty and I came in and got a cloth from under the sink where we kept the shoe polish and stuff, and I wiped the dust off one shoe and he (grandfather) came into the kitchen and he said what are you doing and he took the cloth away from me and wouldn't let me brush the dust off the other shoe because you weren't supposed to do anything on Sunday. Church was the center of our lives socially and spiritually it just was understood we attended church twice on Sunday morning and evenings on Sundays and then Wednesday evenings.*

Again, another female Protestant participant (age 82) recounted with a sense of pride the importance of knowing the values of her spiritual community from childhood as a positive event rather than negative:

*I had no outside interest and I suppose you could look it as being very protective environment. I'm sure it was because we didn't do this and we didn't do that but it never came across as things you couldn't do. You know, it was never presented to me like, 'Well you can't do that because you are a Christian'... It wasn't rules, regulations. This was the way of life that was fun...and it was fun...they made it fun, you know. My friends were there. I had lots of friends. I didn't have to look outside the church really because those were my friends and I had a lot of them. I mean it's like a parsonage, same idea so all these kids that were within our three or four blocks of each other all our parents were pastors. How could you go wrong?*

**Learning bible stories and prayers.** Several of the participants recounted how learning prayers and bible stories was a foundation in childhood that influenced their spiritual life. A female Protestant participant, age 92, starts out with "...and of course the

Bible I have is the one I got when I was 7 years old so it's the King James Version." One other female Protestant participant, age 88, remembered her first significant spiritual event was about praying: "Okay...first one I remember is kneeling by my bedside at age six which I did every night with my mother and asking God to forgive me of my sins and to help me be a good girl." The early memory of prayers as part of childhood spirituality is further supported by many participants as well. One male Protestant participant, age 81, who recalled almost without question how natural an experience it was to have prayers early in life, "I mean we have prayers in our home from the very earliest time I can remember." Likewise a female Protestant participant, age 77, provided a similar account from childhood stating,

*Well there was always a blessing giving thanks before meals, which we just didn't think of eating without a blessing and there were preparations for we invited pastors into our homes right early for meals preparing for church activities and things together.*

One female Protestant participant, age 90, recounted

*We would have family prayers...and my mother was a church worker from way back... (giggles) and all that sort of thing and so we had prayers in the meal time and in bedtime, and all that sort of thing.*

Another female Protestant participant, age 82, had parents that were both ministers and remembered the sanctity of prayers together as a family in her childhood by sharing the following:

*Well my parents were ministers, both of them and so, you know, right from the start church was everything in our household and we always had daily devotions and we always had prayer time at night and anything that happened at church we were there. And I*

*was never rebellious about that. I say my parents were fortunate....but I was very fortunate that the good foundation they gave me meant spirituality to me. It wasn't something I had to do but it was something that I realized was very positive and meaningful and I certainly had moments when I was sure God was there with me.*

A female participant, age 88, recalled how “every morning we had bible reading at breakfast and we had three meals with everybody at the table....my mother was a good Christian woman.”

Another female participant, age 89, recalled vividly the following memory as the second most significant spiritual event in her childhood, “well...we had bible stories and prayers at bed time... and also we had meals with...there are prayers at meals...that too.” This same participant mentioned that when she began drawing her spiritual lifemap the following two hymns/prayers she learned in childhood immediately came to mind:

*These were significant in my life the whole time...and the first hymn is an old hymn that goes 'be not dismayed whatever the tide, God will take care of you' and this here (pointing to the spiritual lifemap) it says 'beneath his wings of love abide, God will take care of you.'*

One female participant, age 77, remembered fondly the meaning of learning bible verses in her childhood:

*Also I learn about that time at age... I guess around 9, 10, 11 and 12 in this little rural school I attended....couldn't do it today... but they allowed the children's bible mission to come in on Fridays and give us a little meditation or bible lesson and they always encouraged us to memorize sections and segments of the scripture. And they rewarded us starting with if you first learn one verse John 3.16 then you were given the little gospel of John then the next step was to memorize 25 verses and they were all well-known verses mainly New Testament a lot of teachings of Christ and someone who memorized 25 verses that you maybe have two choices then you received a New Testament then next would be 75*

*verses...100 new you got a bible and when you memorized more than maybe 200 scripture verses then you were eligible to go to children's bible mission camp... I was young but that was a very meaningful experience because it was recreation and bible study and counselors who were really there to promote our spiritual growth and that was my first time to make a profession of faith around age 10 or 11 I guess at bible camp*

**Experiencing unconditional love.** Some participants described an experience of feeling deeply protected, cared for or loved by a parent, grandparent or caregiver that made them feel remarkably safe or special in their childhood and this has carried with them as a spiritual experience throughout their lifetime.

*And he (grandfather) was my hero really. He passed away, always remember -- he passed away the year I was seven, I was still six, he passed away in May at age 77 and I was seven in September and I just, he's always been in the top of my mind whenever I think about anything I am doing, I sort of think about back to that time and I used to say I knew, I know that he (grandfather) was praying for me when I was in my mother's womb before I was ever born...(Female, age 88)*

*...and apparently my mom and dad were in the fortunate position that when the child would be born to them, we are five. There was usually a live-in person that they would bring in and usually a college student or someone like that. This is a picture of the lady I'm going to be talking about...and she was my nanny and I am told that she absolutely loved me. She thought that I was the best thing that ever happened in her life....and so as the result of it, I probably was the recipient of unconditional love at that point and I've carried that with me in my entire life. It's this concept to be loved so I've never questioned love....It is a wonderful memory of that. (Male, age 81)*

*Okay well I remember being told....because of course I can't remember, that I have a little child here with a halo [Laughs] ...because they said that I was a blessing. The nurse said that if I did nothing else in my life [Laughs] that I had brought joy to them and my mom told me that. (Female, age 78)*

*I had all the support in the world from family to start with which brought me to the church where there was further support. So, I like to think how could I go wrong? (chuckles) ... But I think the respect of family also keeps people in line. We just... our age was... family was everything and church was second. What family didn't do the church did. We didn't really have much outside of that... (Female, age 82)*

Some participants recalled a similar experience of sensing unconditional love and regard from God or Jesus as part of their childhood spirituality and explained what a profound impact that made on their life in feeling safe and secure. One female participant (age 82) who has dedicated her entire life to serving others in ministry offered that “even as a child I felt special...yeah and I was sensing in church, you know, a presence there that was just speaking to me really. It was a very personal thing even as a youngster.”

One widowed female participant (age 88) who reflected on really missing her husband recently especially because she doesn't feel well shared the following account from childhood that she claims still brings her comfort:

*I can remember my first thought was that I would go to heaven because Jesus died for me. I knew that when I was tiny, tiny... It's just something that he (grandfather) just instilled in us and I just knew it.*

This anecdote about experiencing God's love in childhood was stated as significant from a female participant (age 74) who decided to become an ordained minister later in life at 60 years old:

I was born into a minister's home...so we were always at church but I remember very vividly when I gave my heart to Christ at 7 years of age... It was a Sunday

evening worship service...and I was taken by the fact that God loved me and that really meant a lot to me.

**Table 4. Question 2- Family of Origin**

*Theme: Spirituality in family of origin means being part of a deeply rooted spiritual/religious interpersonal system (e.g., family, church, community)*

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Describe the religious/spiritual traditions you grew up with and how your family expressed spiritual beliefs? What were your parents/grandparents like spiritually? Did you have any brothers or sisters and were they involved in the same spiritual community?

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<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Having a family history in church/ministry	001, 003, 005, 007, 009, 010, 014, 018, 019
Respecting family spiritual/religious values and ethics	001, 002, 003, 004, 009, 010, 012, 020
Having spiritual/ religious celebrations or traditions	007, 009, 012, 015, 019

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In the second question the researcher identified three sub-themes that illuminated the essential (major) theme of what spirituality means in family of origin. The three sub-themes from participants were: (a) Having a family history in church/ministry, (b) Respecting family spiritual/religious values and ethics, (c) Having spiritual/religious celebrations or traditions.

**Having a family history in church/ministry.** When reflecting on spirituality in family of origin, most participants described having a rich history with a particular church or denomination. A shared experience within this cohort is reflected in similar stories related to the changes that took place among Protestant churches and how the participant’s families stayed committed to the church historically despite all these



changes. The following are narratives that represent this shared experience of spirituality in the family of origin for volunteer participants.

*I mean I don't know how long that is...years and years and it was United Church of Canada, which combined Methodist, and Presbyterian, my English family was Methodist, my Scottish mother was Presbyterian so I had that mix but it was United Church of Canada. They combined with other things too...some evangelicals and whatever. I had two sisters and two brothers. I was second from the last. I was number four [Laughs]...and of course they (siblings) had the same religious upbringing as I did (Female participant, age 88).*

Likewise a female participant (age 78) offered with a sense of humor her own personal account of changes that took place in her family's history with a church affiliation:

*I've always been in the Methodist Church... but I laugh because my father was an Evangelical pastor then the Evangelical Church merged with the United Brethren Church so we became the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Then that denomination merged with the Methodist so we became the United Methodist Church. So I jokingly say I've changed denominations 3 times and I've never left the church...*

A male participant, age 89, offered a more pragmatic review of his family's history related to participating in church with the following narrative:

*My family's background in the church was started in 1911....we were long time Presbyterians, but there was no Presbyterian Church within walking distance and my grandfather would never ride a streetcar on Sunday. To do so would mean that he was encouraging the motorman to break the Sabbath by working. Of the three churches within walking distance, Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist church the Reformed Church was closest in doctrine and governance to Presbyterian, so that is where they (family) went.... I have one younger brother and we both studied an abbreviated form of the Heidelberg Catechism eventually making our confirmation.*

However, some of the participants experienced less change within their family of origin churches. For instance one female participant (age 82) related this intimate story about how her family has remained generations deep in the same religious organization:

*...my great grandparents and my grandparents and my parents are all from Salvation. My mother knew the founder of the Salvation Army. When I say knew, she worked at the international headquarters in London when she was about 16-17 right after she'd finished what we would call high school and she went in as a stenographer and while the founder was blind then and what not...active. He would come occasionally to the headquarters and she remembered him well. She said he was a lovely, gentle old man. That's how she described him personally, her response...*

One other female participant (age 76) was sentimental when reflecting on the meaning of spirituality in her family of origin:

*My mother was catholic my father was non-Catholic but he always went to church with us.... we just took for granted that (religion was a big part) was our life...It was just like that was my life, we went to church and we went to religious.... we had religious training in school. Our family is a circle of strength and love founded in faith joined in love kept by God forever together [crying].*

Other narratives offered when sharing the meaning of spirituality in family of origin were reminiscent of having a spiritual leader who set the overall tone for the family. For instance two female participants and one male participant used almost the same language when describing this phenomenon.

*Well, my grandfather, he was very spiritual and a very...a good Christian man and leader in the community and everything... and he had very definite ideas and he was like the leader of the family...And he would read the bible and say prayers from the time I can remember (female, age 88).*

*My Dad was always in a leadership role...but not officially...um... he was very involved and contributed a lot to the Presbyterian Church so... yeah...he was seen as a leader of the congregation (male, retired ordained minister, 92)*

*Spirituality in early childhood came through osmosis from being born into a family of faith... our grandmother who was very spiritual lived next door; my parents were also very active in the little local church in the rural area where we lived... (female, age, 77).*

Still, other participants described spirituality related to family of origin as having a close family member (parent, grandparent, uncle) who was actively involved in a ministry role with church or community as significant in their own spiritual life. For example, a male participant (retired professor emeritus, age 84) described the following about his parents: "Very much (parents were very involved in church)... my mother taught the ladies, women's Sunday school class. She was a great influence on me. She was really the -- what should I say, the minister to the women." A comparable account was provided by a female participant, age 77, now involved in volunteer ministry work as well:

*Another very big influence all during childhood years was my father's example of regular bible study he never made an issue of it he just at a certain time every Saturday night he always sat down and prepared for his Sunday school lesson for the next day and he always read...sometimes he would share some of the scriptures. But that was something as I say it was very important in his life so it must be something that he was getting something from...*

In the following excerpt, a retired (MSW) social worker (age 82) recounted with respect and admiration how both her parents were involved in serving others through ministry work:

*Okay, my father was second in command of all church activities in the Southern 12 states... and my mother also was a teacher for many years. What we call it is a brigade. It's a group of teenagers who study the Bible for five years and do specific lessons etc. and my mother was the instructor of that when from the time I was about six or seven maybe eight until well into my teens. That was her ministry really, it was the thing she chose as her ministry because she of course was in administration too and it was*

*handled. She was responsible for all the women's work that would go on throughout whatever like the state of Michigan or the state of Missouri wherever we were stationed. Yeah, she had a big responsibility...*

**Respecting family (spiritual/religious) values and ethics.** Not surprisingly, participants fondly recognized the spiritual guidance that parents and grandparents gave to them in their earlier years and how that seemed to influence them throughout their lifetime. One male participant, age 84, labeled on his spiritual lifemap what he called the second most significant spiritual event from his childhood as “truth taught by my mother” after being caught telling a “white lie.” He shared how his earlier experience had a lasting effect on him as he went through life stating, “I got a little lecture (as a child) that you don't – tell lies...that's about it...these are first –impressions (parent's ethics) but they are lasting...and so I learned early to ask myself...would I do this if my mother knew it?” A female participant, age 82, described how most of her life she had a closer relationship to her father than mother and how his influence is still with her today. She said,

*Well, I think of my dad every day, just every day... oh yeah, if something comes up and I think 'I wonder what dad would do?' I mean, that's 50 some years ago but he is still very much a presence in my life...he very definitely is...which is another reason; you have to believe in eternal life. I mean, memory isn't there, without it...*

One female participant, age 88, was almost guilty when thinking about her grandfather's spiritual values “we never did anything on Sunday that was a day of rest...now...every time I do laundry on Sunday, I think grandpa wouldn't like this, he would say, ‘why are you doing laundry on Sunday?’ [laughs]. In an almost identical manner, a retired male engineer, age 89, described with humor and respect the values of

his grandfather who lived right next door to him during childhood as someone who would not subscribe to the Sunday paper and would not allow any playing on Sunday as “he (grandfather) lived to the letter of the law as he understood it...God forbid you had fun on Sunday [laughs]...but in any right [laughs] he (grandfather) had a tremendous influence on my growing up.”

When describing family member’s spirituality, some participants professed having an attitude towards professional work that was learned early on from a parent and/or grandparent and later adopted as their own. For instance, an 81 year-old retired professor of ethics, who was also instrumental in supporting civil rights activities, remembered his father with this statement “so my dad... he and I had most of our moments working together and I learned very strong work ethic from him.... but that he got from God.” Additionally, a female participant, age 82 recognized the example of her family’s spiritual commitments and dedicated her entire professional career (over 50 years) to the service of others and stated:

*Yeah, I never got a paycheck, never...so, I worked all those years without a paycheck... we knew that one when we went in (to ministry). It wasn't a big deal....yeah that was the way my parents were and my grandparents for that matter...*

Meanwhile, a retired ordained minister reflected unabashedly on her family of origins spirituality with a sense of respect, admiration, and self-pride, stating:

*And I remember something else...some kids would boohoo about who their parents were. I felt it a privilege to be a child of a minister because I discovered I had special privileges that they didn't have. I got to go places and do things that they didn't get to do... it, I just, to me that was a special thing. (Female, age 74)*

Yet other participants openly acknowledged with respect that there were differences in religious and spiritual values within their family of origin but how these differences did not negatively influence their own spiritual life but perhaps made it stronger. One 92 year-old evangelical female offered the following remarkable reflection about her family of origins spirituality/religion:

*We belonged to a Methodist church but my parents weren't church men... they were not, it was not vital in their lives and they did not really go a lot. But I ...early as if a tiny child, toddler I guess, I crawled into the lap of some friends of theirs, and his name was Mr. G and he was part of my life up until I had two little boys of my own ...and so I ....he took me. I sat with him in church every Sunday...So I sat second to the back row...and I sat and colored the hymn books and so forth, But probably the fact that I kept going and probably went to Sunday school...I would go to church with him on Sunday...yes, I was brought up in the same situation my brothers were and they were church men right to the end with one marriage and good people. But they were smokers, and they were dancers and they were all these things a fundamentalist would have said was wrong. But I think that they did not want to go to Sunday school church like I did. I think the Lord just had his hand on me and I always had a good relationship with my brothers except when I wore the question mark, and when I wouldn't play cards with them, but they always welcomed me in their home and my kids were welcome too.*

**Having spiritual/religious celebrations or traditions.** Many participants recalled Christmas and Easter as the two most notable holidays that were spiritually significant while growing up. As one female participant, age 78, recalled with excitement the memory of traditions that surrounded her Christmas:

*Christmas was always a special tradition....my mother would make apricot tea ring and on Christmas, oh well! I should tell you that church members always gave you boxes of chocolate and candy and she would set up a card table and it would be overladen with cookies and junk. And so she would make this apricot t-ring the night before and so on Christmas morning we all piled in my parents bed and we ate breakfast with a half a grape fruit with the Bing cherry ...not a Bing cherry, maraschino cherry in the middle*

*of it. Half a grapefruit and this apricot t-ring and then we heard the story of the birth of Jesus in their bed around our breakfast...and when she was downstairs she turned on the tree lights and Christmas music. So then we would line up youngest child first and then my father was the oldest so he was the last one and then we go down on the steps to our family Christmas. So that was the traditions that I continued in my own marriage.*

A retired female social worker, age 82, recalled with enthusiasm her mother's efforts around Christmas to not only make her family feel special but also to make certain her employees were personally recipients of her affection as well.

*Christmas was very important. My mother again was a party person. She loved parties. She entertained a lot oh, yes. She loves parties, very much so and one of the traditions that she had was she would ask...she would get every employee to give her a list of three things that they would like that would not cost more than x number of dollars and she would personally shop for one of those three things. And then she would wrap every gift different. She would spend hours till midnight and after, day after day after day doing this for the employees and I'm talking 45-50 people...you know, a lot of them!...Yes, then everything was over Christmas day and it was just family. Christmas day was always just for us but prior to that my mother would have all the employees out to the house. We never went to a hotel or anything. It was always at the house. I can remember 40 people in our little parsonage for a party quite often, really. It was fun. It was really fun...*

While others had less elaborate celebrations at home the Christian holidays were still recalled as significant within family of origin. "They (Christian Holidays) were very...we observed them but they were very modestly observed... Yeah there were no real elaborate celebrations just our family and that was a strong relationship with other members of the family" (Female, age 78). One female participant, age 89, a minister's widow for 45 years, who now volunteers to teach homeless men math and reading, reflected with insight on how her parents' lack of celebration during the holidays at home

influenced her appreciation of her husband’s nature. She shared the following memory with fondness,

*My mother was spiritual/religious but my father wasn't. They (holidays) weren't... (celebrated/special) no... no... they weren't... that was one thing I guess this is the reason that he (husband) meant so much to me because he...when he came to my life he made every day special.*

Similarly, one female participant (age 82) pointed out how Easter was recognized as spiritually significant but was not celebrated with any flare.

*I think Easter was pretty much just church, you know, the usual kinds of things, Palm Sunday and Easter resurrection and early church service and sunrise service of course we always went to. I was always playing in the band so I was always “on duty.” Yeah, so I think Easter was pretty traditional too. No, we didn't give gifts or anything. We didn't have Easter baskets. No, no. It was really more church oriented.*

**Table 5. Question 3- Adolescence**

***Theme: Spirituality in adolescence means developing a spiritual life and community outside of immediate family***

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When you think about yourself and your life as a teenager what is the most significant or important spiritual memory you have from that time? Did you have a spiritual mentor? Did you attend youth groups?

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<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Making a personal commitment to God	004, 009, 012, 014, 018, 019
Cultivating a spiritual life through experiences with Church and community	001, 002, 003, 008, 009, 010, 019, 020
Having a spiritual mentor	001, 003, 004, 005, 007, 008, 009,010, 018, 020
Participating in Church camp/youth group	003, 004, 006, 007, 010, 012, 019, 020

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The third question in the spiritual life review was related to each participant's memory of significant spiritual experiences during adolescence or teenage years. The researcher discovered the following four sub-themes from participant's spiritual experiences during adolescence: (a) Making a personal commitment to God, (b) Cultivating a spiritual life, (c) Having a spiritual mentor, and (d) Participating in church camp or youth group.

**Making a personal commitment to God.** Participants recalled key moments in their adolescence when they decided to commit their spiritual life to God. Many narratives reflect participants making a commitment to God through a religious rite of passage, such as this 76 year-old Catholic female stated in a simple matter- of- fact manner "...next big thing was my confirmation and I think we were around 13." While others were more elaborate in describing this same rite of passage such as the following stories that were shared with enthusiasm and passion:

*And then I was...when I was thirteen I was baptized and that was you know that would have been a....that was a high point too because...it was interesting because at age thirteen I was confirmed by the bishop at All States Episcopal Church in Washington and I actually felt something happen to me then really....and I didn't know what it was, I mean you know it was like being confirmed at thirteen, it was kind of what you did but I think it was all part of me enough...that there was something and I found out later...what it was, it was really the Holy Spirit, but it was kind of, it kind of just lived inside of me until later on when it was sort of a released so um...you know I'm kind of up here - high point on spiritual lifemap. (Female, age 76, Protestant)*

*This one is a vivid memory....it was in March, on my 13th birthday. There was again snow on the ground. When I went to school, I had this school car...it was a covered sled with horse drawn sled so that's when I went to this next town – wouldn't have a baptismal fountain in our Church (sarcasm) so I had to go to the*

*next town (for Baptism) where they did have one...it was Easter Sunday, still cold. My mother went with me and I can remember this woman singing "Halleluiah." She had this beautiful voice and it was all just so thrilling. (Female, age 87, Protestant)*

Other participants described more random or unplanned events from adolescence that marked their personal commitment to a lifelong relationship with God. However, like the narratives above the following accounts were offered spontaneously when reflecting on significant spiritual moments during adolescence. The following tales describe the unique experience of knowing or sensing a relationship with God intimately at that time:

*Because here (at 12) I joined the church and I promised God then that I would either be a missionary or a preacher. Then at 16 I went to church camp with a boyfriend and this boyfriend (future husband) showed up when I was about 15....and since my parents just didn't like the idea of a boyfriend... well...at church camp I went down by the lake and I asked God about this (boyfriend) and He (God) became very real to me and I was sure I was doing the right thing. (Female, age 89, Christian Minister's Widow)*

*..and at age 12 I was getting ready to be a senior member of the Salvation Army and I went to what they used to call Youth rallies and there were probably 300 of us or so and on a Sunday morning they gave an altar call and I very clearly sensed God saying to me, "You're going to stay in the Salvation Army." And from then on I was very aware of it. Any time I would go to some big event especially and we had these youth councils every year and they still do incidentally. (Female, age 82, Retired Salvation Army Minister)*

*...Yeah, our church had family night dinners and programs and I remember when I was 17, a girlfriend and I left the fellowship hall which was down in the basement. And we went up to the sanctuary and we lit the candles on the altar. And I gave my heart to Christ*

*to be in full-time Christian service. (Female, age 74, Retired Christian Minister).*

### **Cultivating a spiritual life through experiences with church and community.**

Several participants described significant moments from their adolescent years related to experiences of being involved with a community or church that instilled long-lasting spiritual virtues. Male participants especially talked with pride about the influence of belonging to the boy scouts as a community and how this activity provided spiritual guidance throughout their life.

*...and so when I was 12 years old I was a cub-scout and then joined the boy scouts and I think that that was – I don't know if – but everything was part of spiritual growth...but mainly it gave me a kind of assurance... self-assurance and some experience in leadership. (Male, age 78, retired PhD)*

*...and the boy scouts played a tremendous, tremendous part in my growing up ...and in what I am today I think because I learned the Boy Scout law from trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous and so forth. A Scout is trustworthy and scout is honor is to be trusted. If you were to violate this honor by telling a lie or cheating or by not doing exactly a given task he may be directed to hand over his scout badge. And the twelfth one says a scout is reverent, is reverent toward God, he is faithful in his religious duties and he respects conviction of others in matters of custom and religion. (Male, age 89, retired engineer)*

*...rules of conduct, service to others, principles of leadership and counseling....that came to a large extent in scouting. I'm not bragging on that, two of us became the first Eagle Scouts ever in that county...oh yeah, you learn your rules of conduct, trustworthy, brave, and clean, whatever, and then you get these merit badges and a lot of those are in order, it may affect someone in the area. But scouting was very important for your spirituality it seemed to me, you don't forget it. Oh yeah. You know, sometimes in a church, they'll have you stand up. They have Scout Sunday, and*

*they will go through the Scout Law, a Scout is trustworthy, and so forth, there are 12 of them and I memorized those chucking corn in the barn. I'll just sit there and then say it over. It isn't that hard to do. So a Scout is loyal, thrifty, and clean, brave, whatever, and so forth...(laughs). (Male, age 84, retired PhD)*

Other participants reflected on how involvement with a church community during adolescence stood out as shaping their spiritual experiences. An 81 year-old male, retired professor and former chair of a community based spiritual life committee described his adolescent years with the following spiritual insight:

*The next...kind of the decade that takes place is a gradual awakening to faith. And my parents are very, very instrumental in that in the sense ...that they were activists who left the expression with me that I have never forgotten.... 'The church is the window into a relationship with God' so that has included both the church which is manmade following God's instruction, but nonetheless, it's manmade and subject to all the problems that you can have... But on the same token, it (church) is a gradual awakening to Jesus Christ becoming Lord and Savior of my life.*

Here, a 90 year-old female participant shares an intimate story from her spiritual lifemap about adolescence and “being touched” spiritually during an experience with her church community.

*I remember one thing and I was with my mother in church then and we had...um...an evangelist came, And I must have been 12 or 13, I do not really remember but I remember I went forward and was touched spiritually so that probably (was spiritually significant)... and then I...during that time I remember once that they had some missionaries come to the church and I offered hospitality because I had this 5, 6 bedroom home, and they stayed and I remember I was headed back to school at noon so I must have been young 12 or 13 I am not really sure but they said well, let us pray for you and so they did and I could still see them in the bedroom where they were staying and they would lay hands on me sort of...and had a prayer for me, and that touched me and when I*

*was a little older, one night we had one minister and I sat around the table in this cabin that I can still remember one bathroom and about 50 kids. And then he had us praying and we prayed....we then we squeezed a hand of the person next with us. And I remember that touched me, it seemed to me that happened when people prayed for me like that...*

One female participant reflected on an event she noted from her spiritual lifemap during late adolescence that stood out to her as being significant because she was asserting independence to cultivate her own spiritual life at college but struggling to be respected by her family during this time.

*...Yeah, it (college) was united brethren, very strict...no dancing, no smoking, no holding hands on campus which is why I couldn't really understand my mother, well I understood to the point that I was leaving home at 17, but I said, "Mom, I chose a Christian college. I'm not going out into the world to be rebellious," you know, and I really wasn't. But anyway I came home at Thanksgiving, this is my favorite story - and we were out in a restaurant and I ordered coffee which we never had in our house...we had tea and my mother looked at me and said, "I knew you'd get some bad habits if you went off to college" and I said, "Mom, if that's the worst you'll ever find me doing, you need to be grateful." I was 17 and I absolutely told her...well I saw kids sneaking off to the dances...I saw kids sneaking around the corner but, you know, we still had three days a week that we had to go to chapel and I was very involved still in church. I wore a uniform from the time I was a senior member in the church which would have been age 12.*

**Having a spiritual mentor.** When asked to reflect on spiritual mentors during adolescence most participants recognized a relationship outside of their family as the most influential at that time. "My folks didn't worry if they were mentoring but how they lived their life rather than what they said...now I got the mentoring from ministers when I worked with them in the church and mentoring in faith." Likewise, a male participant (age 78) offered thoughtfully and succinctly "I- would think - the single

person who had the most influence on my life through much of it but particularly the first 18 years....was with my pastor...” Again, another male participant (age 92, retired Pastor) whose mother died when he was 14 years old and was sent away by his father to live with an uncle remembered this “So, I became active with the Presbyterian church and the pastor there became my mentor...and he helped me go to College and Seminary School.” While other participants offered more elaborate reflections on the role of mentors in their lives as this one male recalled fondly.

*...then later, I was in high school and we got this minister there...he not only wanted me to go to a school in Virginia where he went, but he also was trying to get me to study to be a preacher, because I was very active in the church too. He even started a choir and he taught me to sing bass in the choir and so forth...he was looking out for the teenagers, and we had a lot of them there. That was a much larger church. I said, "I can't be a preacher." I said, "I cannot give a 20-minute speech... (laughs)." But the values and career goals...that was my high school superintendent and the scoutmaster. The scoutmaster actually was a teacher in high school. He taught math and he also was the scoutmaster of the troop and the high school superintendent, we had -- Mr.H, when I was in high school, a wonderful guy and he had a lot of influence on me. (Age 84, retired Professor of Economics at a Christian College)*

Similarly, a female participant, age 82, expressed gratitude when thinking about her mentor during a time of transition when she was first away from home and experiencing life challenges.

*...this lady for four years picked me up every single Sunday morning for four years and during that time of course, you know, she became my mentor and I would share with her all my confusion, I guess I would say with R (boyfriend at the time) and in my love for him and his love for me and his plans etc... And I told her later after I became a Salvation Army officer I said, “You know I wouldn't be in the army today if it wasn't for you” ...and it sure is sure. Well how can you get away from that when every*

*single Sunday morning you're reminded this is where you belong? I mean it was more a sermon than any sermon of words could ever have spoken to me and she was there. She was the example and I stayed... the nice thing also was I would stay all day with the family. We would have Sunday night service and she would bring me back after Sunday night so it was the full day as a reminder where I ought to be.*

**Participating in Church camp/youth group.** When reviewing their spiritual lifemaps for significant events from adolescence older adults identified participating in a church camp or youth group as an important spiritual life event. Mention of belonging to a youth group ranged from the sublime account such as “I went to youth group and felt the call of ministry there...it was a very evangelical setting...I was pleased” (male, age 92, retired pastor) to more commonplace “I graduated from high school and I was active in youth activities in the church...that (church youth group) was my whole social life” (female, age 90). When asked to expound on these experiences some others shared how belonging to a youth group was one of their first opportunities to have a leadership role.

*And when I became a youth I was extremely active in youth work. We had over 100 youth in our church and always doing things and going places even fun things by ourselves....and so I was an officer at National, State Officer in the Youth Council for our denomination. So I traveled all over the State with youth events and programs. And somehow the Mayor of the city of Detroit got a hold of me and put me on the youth council for the city of Detroit!*  
(Female, age 76)

*Well in high school we had a Methodist Student Fellowship, it was called. And all the churches in the county would get together periodically, I won't brag but I was elected to be the president for the youth of the county, when you had meetings, presided and all that... (Male, age 84)*

*Okay. Let's see, I guess the next thing to talk to you about is when I was a senior in high school. I was the president of our youth group, same church, a little bit later on. And we had a full-time director because we would have an average of attendants of a 120 people on a Sunday night...very big. We had a cabin and all these kinds of things...just for the youth group...and we decided that...now keep in mind the time...we are talking about 1947 - Let us invite a youth group for the intercity Black church to come out and have fellowship with us on our Sunday night program which did happen and it's a long story but we just got to know one another and that was fun. And we had a worship service and they (parents) thought that was...everything was going just fine and then we did what we always did at the end of the night, we had a jukebox in the church and started to dance together. And, at that point, the whole thing fell apart. Oh that (dancing) to them (parents) became social, outside of worship and this wasn't what you hoped for. All of a sudden, they (parents) began to have fear...and so, it was just a horrible experience and being the president of the youth group, I was broken hearted. But I learned in that experience and it stayed with me my whole life. In a certain sense, the segregated life was not the way that God planned it to be. Again, it's very alive and well, yet on the same token, it isn't what God has planned. So that became both a very devastating time but a good time too. (Male, age 81)*

**Table 6. Question 4- Adulthood**

***Theme: Spirituality in adulthood means maturing in faith and wisdom***

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Now I would like to talk to you about your life as an adult, from when you were in your 20's up to now. Tell me about the most important/significant spiritual experiences that happened in your adulthood?

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<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Experiencing spiritual growth	All
Gaining new insight	All
Questioning beliefs	001, 003, 005, 006, 007, 008, 009, 010, 013, 014, 015, 018, 020
Taking on ministry work (volunteer or professional)	All

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The fourth question was to explore significant spiritual experiences that took place during adulthood. As adulthood covers the greatest portion of a participant's lifetime this is where all individuals seemed to have the most common shared lived experiences of spirituality at each sub-theme level relating the major theme of what spirituality in adulthood means. Even though family of procreation is a large part of adulthood these findings are revealed separately in question 5. However, the researcher identified the following 4 sub-themes from participant's narratives about their lived spiritual experiences during adulthood: (a) experiencing spiritual growth, (b) gaining new perspective and insights, (c) seeking to understand life events, (d) taking on ministry work.

**Experiencing spiritual growth.** When participants were asked about their adulthood all expressed how it was a time of spiritual growth. Several participants described this exact phenomenon of spiritual growth being at the center of their adulthood experiences.

*Well those (College) years were very pronounced. I was very active in the Wesley Foundation and I would attend Mass at 7 AM before going to class. I was one of those in charge of preparing Sunday night meals for like 150 to 200 students every Sunday evening and I'd have to do the shopping for that and everything but its great social and spiritual growth experiences. And from the Wesley Foundation we would often be asked to go on little mission trips to nearby communities like Savannah or the other little towns nearby and conduct vacation bible schools or just Sunday mission...gathering up the children and taking them to some church and provide bible stories and give them little booklets or something. So we were doing a lot of things and it really had a strong effect I think on the spiritual growth of those who were involved there. I was in other clubs and groups there but that one was the one that really contributed to a lot of my spiritual growth. (Female, age 77, Retired Homemaker)*

*...and so I went into what I called my fundamentalist era....so no drink, no dance, no smoke, no nothing (all during college)...very strict and we had a gospel team and we went out and well you know my Jesus you will sing and I cannot sing but I sang with them...and we went into church and so forth and we wore ourselves question marks and we pinned them on (our clothes) and swore that we would never not recognize...speak out for our Lord and so I went home for a weekend wearing my 'question mark' - my mother and I went to do some window shopping, and a lady said 'Oh, what is the question mark?' I said 'That is the question on you, sister!' (laughs) I thought that nearly went through her...she nearly died. Then I went to nurse's training and when I was in nurse's training I got in a group at a Baptist church. So every week we'd finish as fast as we could and I was pretty good in pinning other guys to go with me and I got other girls to finish their work with me and we'd tear across the street and catch the trolley downtown and a second trolley all the way up to 31st street Indianapolis to sing a rousing song for this independent Baptist church. Then the minister or somebody would drive us home to get us in by curfew and that was a regular thing...so that influenced me (spiritually) a lot. (Female, age 91, Widow of a Christian College President)*

*I had been teaching some Sunday school but they (church colleagues) threw this group at me...we met every week and had bible study and stuff it was like God gave me a crash course in the bible. Like I said back before that the bible didn't really mean a lot to me... I mean it was... it (the bible) was there and I knew it had principles in it but this seven months of crash course in the bible taught me so much... I actually had to quit teaching Sunday school because I knew I didn't know anything!(laughs)...So anyway because of that, that is why there is this great period of spiritual growth, the bible was making sense to me and I felt gifted to teach and then I taught Sunday school for a long-long time. (Female, age 76, Retired Pastor's Secretary)*

**Gaining new perspectives and insights.** Many participants discussed adulthood as a time when new perspectives or insights were gained. Male participants especially seemed to be contemplative and open to new discoveries during adulthood starting in college or military service experience all the way through to retirement. One male

participant (age 84, professor emeritus) shared how certain life experiences during adulthood gave him insight to having an attitude of God's love and compassion for others. He starts out describing his spiritual lifemap from adulthood with stating "so now I'm a liberal...and this goes all the way back to college and all the way down to right now." He further expounded on this by sharing the following two situations from his life experiences as being related and spiritually significant.

*Okay, now this timeframe (college) is about replacing an individualistic philosophy with a social agape. Now, I grew up at a farm and I had a lot of individualism in me at that point "lookout for yourself and don't worry about others" –right? Then I read about agape in college, senior year when I came back from the navy and it had a lot of influence on me. I don't hear it being mentioned too much now but that's one spiritually significant event. It was just...it opened my eyes to the fact...I mean I know the Japanese, we fought them and so forth but what the author wrote just made so much sense to me. Anyway, later, I was invited to go to Pakistan to set up a master's program in economics at a Christian College and my approach to economics changed with living in Pakistan and witnessing poverty there. I decided that poverty is important. I gave some talks to professors there, giving a recommendation on another way to finance development and I can't -- don't have time to describe it to you but it's basically having a world treasury, a world development fund that everybody puts money into based on the income of the country. It was wonderful!*

Another male participant (age 81, retired professor) talked about the profound experience of learning about a "new" meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation while traveling abroad during college:

*In 1948 I went to a mission camp in Germany and so, churches across a wide spectrum of countries...and I don't any longer know any of the details how we got put together but ... I'm one of them taken to go over there...this was all summer long...this was a three-month program and they brought together Germans, particularly young Germans, who have fought in World War II and*

*captured and so forth as well as Dutch, Americans and a whole bunch of people...and this time, rather than having a national perspective on these things, it was the first time that I really begin to understand reconciliation and what it really meant. It has to be that even enemies can get together and can realize that we're all children of God. And so, these perspectives are just getting larger and larger in terms of understanding what God's plan is for us and that we can live in peace. There is forgiveness. It can be done for wrongs that are done... so that culminated at the very end of my trip there going to Amsterdam Holland for the first meeting of the World Council of Churches. And so, once again, the perspective...these are people coming from all over the world and meeting together under the banner of Christianity. Yeah, just as a college kid...it was a wonderful experience. As I say, each step is an expansion of my understanding of the world...the human world as well as God's place within that human world but he puts no boundaries on it.*

Still one other male participant, a 78 year-old retired PhD, talked in-depth about his vast spiritual experiences throughout all of his adulthood. His individual spiritual life is described as a culmination of life events starting after college when he stated "I went in the army (after college), everybody did" and he was assigned to Europe for two years recalling, "it was my first time to Europe and I was attracted to the Churches" and how he attended Easter Midnight mass (in Frankfurt, Germany) at a Catholic cathedral (he is Methodist) stating it was "the only time I have ever been to an Easter midnight mass...the place (church) is illuminated ...and there is a sound of joy, that sprang forth at the resurrection." He offered how after the army he attended a religious retreat in Germany for soldiers and described a sense of "spirituality" while visiting woodcarvers in "Oberammergau, Germany" the home of the "passion play" (story of Jesus of Nazareth) where workers have carved wooden images every 10 years since 1634 in observance of the play. Spirituality continued to be a significant role in shaping this

participant's adult life as he described the following about his doctoral dissertation on Tennyson's Idylls of the King:

*I think that was for me a kind of development of spirituality because Tennyson saw Arthur, King Arthur, as a kind of vessel chosen by God to rule England, rule Britain, and to put these Christian values on a society and require that his knights of the roundtable lived up to this Christian value, but Arthur was always confronted by the fact... of that threat of immorality. So, its spirituality, but spirituality linked to...a moral issue.*

Further on in this gentleman's later adulthood he describes his choice to continue the pursuit of spiritual insight as almost a hobby while approaching retirement but still as an integral part of his life and that of others:

*I started teaching Bible literature because I was moving toward this...um...this combining my vocational, my vocational interests with my interest in God and spirituality and religion. Like Frost in one of his poems, Two Tramps in Mud Time, 'my object in living is to combine my vocation and my avocation like two eyes making one in sight, only where love and need are one and the work is play for mortal stakes, is a deed ever really done for heaven and the future stakes.' So...combining my vocation and my avocation I started this course at the United Methodist Church on the classical or Christian themes in literature it started keeping me busy, keeping ahead and giving me always something new...and now, the class still goes on.*

A 90 year-old, widowed, female participant who was an only child and had a very religious upbringing recited her spiritual life events with the following chronological accounts that were sometimes difficult but she garnered insight and ultimately wisdom through it all.

*In 1947 I met and married my first husband...became acquainted with in-laws, who had no church connection but learned from them*

*the true meaning of love, acceptance, forgiveness, generosity and many other virtues...1965, my mother married a retired preacher that had five children; four of them having a psychiatric treatment, and one committed suicide. After a couple of years, they moved to Florida and that was when I learned the difference between religion and spiritualism. In 1971, my son was killed in a swimming accident and the support from students and friends was overwhelming. In 1972, the dormitory became self-governing and my job was over. They offered to let me stay on as a coordinator of women's housing, but my son was gone. I did not want to work with young people anymore. I returned to my former home and worked short time as a manager in a dress shop. In 1973, I quit and moved to Florida. In 1976, my mother died and I moved to a Mobile Home Park. In 1995, I married one of the neighbors. In 1996, my husband became ill, and I was a caregiver until 2001 when my husband died. In 2001, I moved to this continuing care retirement community. The bottom line is that religion and spirituality are not one in the same. I cannot control what happens to me, but with the help of other people and God can control what it does to me. That's my thought.*

**Questioning beliefs.** Not surprisingly many individuals called into question certain beliefs held from earlier years in an attempt to understand life circumstances and events as they unfolded during adulthood. The few that did not seem to question beliefs in their spiritual life experiences were the most demonstrative about their solid faith in God throughout all of life including losses and challenges that were still communicated as spiritual experiences. However, the majority of participants did experience moments in their lifetime that called for pause and reflection about certain beliefs but these experiences only seemed to contribute to a maturation of faith in adulthood.

*...I considered during the years of growing up did I want to become a ...become a minister... part of that – the spiritual training was of course the Bible and I read it all...but by that time I went through a lot of questioning and doubts and I resolved one time that, well, all that I will ever do is just abandon all beliefs and start all over and work up, you know...I don't think you can do that but...I tried. I developed certain eclecticism about it because I*

*roomed with a student in College who was an Episcopalian so he was planning for the clergy, Episcopalian clergy, and also I spent some time at the Methodist Foundation and Wesley Foundation, in East Florida... So, I kind of floated among the Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopalian, and I think that that's what led me away from any kind of a partisan orthodox, ...and in religion and because when I envisioned this idea of spiritual, spirituality, I see that as being something of more comprehensive – I won't say above ...but more comprehensive than just theology... of a particular doctrine. (Male, age 78, retired professor)*

*Well I think I tried to convince God that I knew better than He...yeah, I wasn't listening. Yeah, I really didn't want to listen as long as I... I wanted to tell God, "Well as long as I am doing your work, what difference does it make?" you know, is it Salvation Army or another? And of course those are very different roles. The church roles for the pastor's wife and a Salvation Army officer because one of the unique things about the army is husband and wife both have to go through seminary....yes and have to be pastors or you don't marry or if you marry you get out ...so I don't think I ever felt I was doing wrong. I felt like I was still searching for, would God open the door for me to do something else because when I went to the Army on Sundays I was still quite joyful and happy and listen to the sermons and, you know, they spoke to me. So I never felt like I was rebelling at God. I never felt that way. In a sense I was but I was just maturing I think. There is more like a maturation process trying to seek out. I was still seeking. (Female, age 82, retired pastor)*

*...and here comes my rigid puritan upbringing by the time my older son was ready for college and was going up to MIT and he proposed to live with his girlfriend and the minister of our church said 'that's fine, all fine with me' and then the next thing... what really broke the camel's back was when that minister ran away with the - oldest story in the world - ran away with the choir soprano [Laughs] and not even the alto the soprano [Laugh]! And you know, I couldn't abide by this so I dropped out I took a vacation from God and my wife she was not really happy that way and she found the Unitarian congregation of Minneapolis and they were just pretty much starting out. And they were meeting in some non-discrete sort of a building and then ultimately they built a building and she finally talked me into going and it was a great place I became real good friends with the minister. We were friends until he died (Male, age 89, retired engineer)*

When faced with death of friends and loved ones during adulthood one male participant (age 84) continuously reflected on the meaning of spirituality and life. In his earlier adulthood he recalled with fondness his girlfriend from college who was his “first love” and wondered how life might have been different had she not died so young from meningitis stating: “she was tiny, just the sweetest thing...you know, you never know what would happen in life if she was not dead...but she (girlfriend) died.” He immediately recollected in detail the death of two friends sharing the following:

*Then I had friends killed in World War II. One of them was a fellow counselor at the Boy Scout camp. He went in the Navy and he was on a ship and he happened to be down in the bottom engine room of the ship and they got torpedoed. Well, the first thing you do on a ship, you close the hatches. Well they closed the hatch and he was in there alive and they knew he was in there alive. Think of that death! You hear the hatches go, you can't get out. The water is coming into the hole. He was near where the torpedo hit...then another one was my guitar teacher and he went to the Army and he was killed in Europe shortly after he went into the Army...well, I think that influences your spirituality.*

This same individual in his later adulthood lost his wife and reflected deeply on this event highlighting the following thoughts and questions that he wrote about on his spiritual lifemap.

*When it comes to death, my wife and I, our idea was that it's like going to sleep but you don't wake up. Here basically, (pointing to spiritual lifemap) I wrote these things.... 'After the death, oh my sweetheart why from eternity you came to return now to the same? Your body now rests in God's earth from which the beauty of creation is given birth.' Well, what I'm trying to say is eternity, no beginning and no end. So where do we come from? I mean I'm not done but this bone and skin...well I'm done by you! Yeah, where do we come from? I mean, just think about it...mother's womb? You*



*know, the doctors, the scientists, they can go and tell you all about the development of the fetus and so forth, but where does --Where did you come from? And then I say, 'when we die, that goes back into eternity, whatever eternity is, we don't know.'*

An 86 year-old female participant provided a great description from her spiritual lifemap during adulthood (starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> decade) of how several life events caused question in her spiritual belief system. However, now in her 9<sup>th</sup> decade she volunteers as a greeter during Sunday chapel services and claims to be at the happiest point in her life despite having innumerable questions she simply accepts her understanding of life and faith as she knows it. She provided tearfully with joy and sorrow the following accounts by decade:

*...now, for my fourth decade...I was very much involved with the Methodist Church at that time. It was a small, preppy church and I was financial secretary and Sunday school superintendent over the lower grades....In the 5<sup>th</sup> decade...my husband's grandmother and father died within a week of each other. She was almost 90 but he was only 64. Did I start wondering then? With the Vietnam War raging, our oldest son became a conscientious objector. He kept saying, how many millions had been killed for religion? [You are going to have me crying. - cries] my husband (a pilot) had the opportunity of delivering some planes to Beirut, Lebanon and could take his family. We stayed for three weeks and it was my first visit to an Arab nation, many good people...questions? Now, for the sixth decade, I was an RN at a small country hospital in Pediatrics. I loved it. I worked the PM shift and tried to sketch on my hours around my husband's....we were living the good life. But watching children die gives a lot of importance for thought. And during this time, my dad died. And then his sister, Aunt Ana, was beaten to death in her own bed. Is this God's world? And where was that loving God with all the natural disasters? We have been taught this is Mother Nature's fault. I'm an agnostic, not an atheist. I just don't know. I sort of envy those who claim to believe every word of the Bible. To me, Jesus was a great teacher. But most other religions had some sort of Adam and Eve story too and great teachers also.*

Naturally, the participant continued on through her seventh, eighth and ninth decade with similar accounts of life events and spiritual questions. Before providing the final commentary from the participant about her current (ninth) decade, it is important to mention that the researcher pursued further discussion of the participant's life events in great detail validating feelings and reframing negative life events in a strengths perspective emphasizing the participant's unyielding compassion for others. Below is the final anecdote from the participant about her current decade of life.

*Now for the ninth decade, first of all, I've had two heart attacks. One in 2000 and the other in 2002 and eventually 5 catheterizations with 9 stents being implanted...at the same time my husband had a 5 way heart bypass. Was this God's will or medical science? And my two brothers were still alive, both diabetic. Was this genetics, luck or God's will? You tell me. I just don't know. I've been happier now. We now have 7 great grandchildren. On our 60th anniversary, in 2006, our kids threw a terrific party for us...what does the future hold? Some would say God has it all planned out for you. I just don't know...I'll stick to my lack of faith in Jesus inside with the agnostics. I just don't know...let's put it this way...maybe, I'm more spiritual and just against organized religion...(but) we do go to chapel every Sunday...and I'm a greeter. I love it.*

Another female participant, in her early nineties, who committed most of her adult life serving others through her church community as a volunteer and worker, shared how she experienced a heinous life event that rightfully called into question many of her beliefs but slowly she was able to reconcile this event and continues to have faith.

*Well, I thought when we moved here that God was not there for me but then I found out differently. It wasn't so much me, it was my granddaughter. In 2005, she was 29 years old, and she was kidnapped and strangled, and hit over the head with a board, and repeatedly raped and then left in her car, with her skirt up above her waist, just naked from neck down and garbage scattered all over her...That threw me, and I really railed at God. And I took a*

*long time to get over that. Evidently it was...It was just so awful. They got the guy; they knew immediately who it was, because he was a known predator. Well, my Pastor was very good. She was very good. She did not pull her punches. She said, "That man had a fun time..." If somebody was preachy, if anybody preaches and said "God is always near", that...sent me to the moon! And I said to her (pastor) on the way out one time from church, "God was not with my granddaughter. That was the Devil." And she said, "You're right." She said, "I have no other answer but the same." She didn't argue and say oh yes, blah, blah, blah. No fairy tales anymore after that, right? It was quite some time before I really just let it go. But I didn't let my granddaughter go...*

**Taking on ministry work.** All of the participants were inclined in their adulthood to contribute part or all of their working years to ministry. Most have been teachers of Sunday school, many participated in various volunteer efforts of their church and some became ministers. One male participant, age 93, a retired pastor, described the evolution of his life commitment to ministry as something that started in his young adulthood when he rationalized "If I go to college it would mean I had a call to ministry, but if I didn't go to college it would mean I don't have a call to ministry." He eventually made it to college and seminary school starting a student church in the early 1940's while in college stating "I was preaching each Sunday and felt very natural, well received...and was quite comfortable writing sermons and preaching." He reminisced about how the church membership grew slowly but he was satisfied with efforts of preaching, calling on sick, and starting a youth group. He talked about having a long career as a Pastor (retiring in 1988) and along the way he received a Doctor of Divinity from the Presbyterian Church and published numerous theological books and papers. He looked back with satisfaction on his contribution to the spiritual/religious community and felt proud to have "established a reputation in various fields (e.g., preaching, editing, and

publishing).” In his recent years he became involved in the chapel and spiritual committee of his residential community receiving an “award for service” as a tribute for his work to ministry.

A 76 year-old female, retired minister, shared how she chose a path of ministry work following a divorce from her husband of 30 years and explains how this impacted her spiritually.

*Well the long and short of that was, I became a Christian educator and I hadn't been trained as a Christian educator other than in our 30 year marriage...my husband was a Christian educator and by osmosis I learned from him...and so I first was certified as a Christian educator and that wasn't it that wasn't what God wanted of me. So then I was commissioned as a diaconal minister and the diaconal minister in the United Methodist Church is a lay minister...you are commissioned to go out to the world and bring Christ. So with my school teaching I could do that. And that still wasn't it...No, that wasn't it and I knew it. I was aware enough of my own spiritual growth by this time that I knew these things were not enough that wasn't what God wanted of me. So I took more seminary and at 61 I became an Ordain Minister and I'm thinking, I remember saying to my senior pastor at the church where I was the Christian Educator. Wait a minute. If I go to seminary and do all of this, it'll be time for me to retire when I get out school. And she said, no no don't worry about that, God uses you all your life. So at 61 just 4 years from retirement age, I finally became Ordained with the help of this church. And I say here praise his holy name because by George is it was because God is working through the people in this church and opening doors for me just continuing pushing me along. And I worked in the church and I loved it!*

One other widowed female participant, age 92, described with joy how after her children were grown she became involved in the ministry work at her church helping out on communion Sunday, tutoring underprivileged youth for several years and providing resources to those in need.

*We were in the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church...they had all sorts of neighborhood programs going on ever since it started. It just stayed there and we liked the minister and we liked the whole atmosphere. We took part in a tutoring program, one-on-one. I was tutoring. You see, my kids were all grown up. Yeah, and I was a tutor. I got a kid, my husband had a kid. It was program that was started by one woman and one young man and it was for ghetto [slang] kids that we had. Yeah but just you tutor this kid, you had that kid from age 12 through High School. And they (program) waited 6 years before they got a High School graduate. But now, they have a hundred tutors and a hundred kids. The dream can work. So we always took the kids...like over Columbus Day weekend, some of them had never been out of that ghetto really... never been out. So we'd take them down and they'd have all 3 or 4 days at a camp and this was, you know, they did their own things. We taught them how to cook, we taught them how to make their beds, and we taught them all this stuff. We did Meals on Wheels. We did a lot of things...so that was a wonderful experience. When we delivered the meals, one meal was hot, one meal was cold. Then they just did all sorts of...things like if they needed a dentist, we had a dentist that they could go to. We did not give them money. The dentist was the one who billed us. And the same with the doctors, we had the whole of that lined up...lawyers too because some of them needed lawyers...*

A female participant (age 77) shared a heartfelt narrative of how after years of teaching Sunday school and organizing the church library she was further compelled to serve others through ministry work starting in her early 70's post surviving an "incurable" cancer diagnosis.

*I think one of the greatest factors in my spiritual growth even after I was in my first remission from cancer I took the training to become a Stephen Minister. Stephen Ministry is a ministry that involves like I think its 65 hours of training on how to listen and care for people who are going through crisis in their lives and so that was something I wanted to do. And it's a ministry that crosses all denominations. The Stephen Ministry is a confidential caring ministry...it's not just limited to the congregation it lets the community know that caring confidential friends are available to walk with those going through crisis meeting with them on a regular basis every week and just sharing the burden. So I did that*

*for 5 years but God is the caregiver but we are the helper and we are assigned a care receiver that sort of matches our abilities or experiences not that you need to have experienced what they're going through and just any crisis that you can imagine and it's a wonderful outreach ministry and I just felt it was a way I could give back and be a little help...so that (ministry services) has been one of my most influential steps in spiritual growth.*

**Table 7. Question 5- Family of Procreation**

***Theme: Spirituality in family of procreation means making a commitment to marriage and family***

Tell me about your marriage and/or children and your spirituality as a family?	
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Having a faith-based marriage	All
Nurturing children's spiritual values and morals	All - except 018
Learning to love others unconditionally	All

In the fifth question the researcher identified three sub-themes that illuminated the central theme of what spirituality means in family of procreation. The three sub-themes discovered were: (a) Having a faith based marriage, (b) Raising children with spiritual values and morals, and (c) Learning to love unconditionally.

**Having a faith-based marriage.** Having a faith-based marriage is a common theme that appeared in all of the participants stories. Most participants said they met their spouse at church or through a fellowship group while others met at college. One female participant, age 86, reflected tenderly on meeting her husband of 68 years during kindergarten age. "I attended Sunday school at Southwestern Presbyterian Church as a child (5 years old) where I met my future husband...and how can I forget our first

date...it was Christmas eve, 1942, caroling with our Sunday school class.” Another female (widow, age 92) who was active with her husband in volunteering for church activities during their entire marriage shared how they first met at church, “we met in church and then he asked for dates and I said why not? [Laughs] and we clicked, it was very nice. We were married in 1940.” Another female participant (age 76) described how she met her husband through a friend but how his involvement in attending church influenced their relationship and her spiritual life:

*Though I met him through a mutual friend he always went to church and then we always went to church. So it (spirituality) went...my spiritual life went up...you know because we always went to church and this was good, so life was good and we got married.*

Many other participants talked about the significance of having similar upbringings and how this influenced their marriage spiritually.

*And he had similar kind of upbringing which I think was a real blessing certainly helps to have a spouse who has same basic beliefs, spiritual beliefs so that was good helped him to care about things and helped him get through things...like graduate school. Also, my husband and I both taught Sunday school group classes and held many offices at our church for many years we're very active in the First Methodist church for 42 years and we were able to participate in a lot of study groups and I think we grew spiritually just gradually all those years. (Female, age 77)*

*We (husband and I) met at church [Laughs] Phillips Brooks Church in Boston, Trinity Episcopal Church it is a very world famous church. People come from all over; it is a beautiful, beautiful church. Well he was brought up by people who were very spiritual. I hate to use a religion -- but religious, but they were religious but not in the good sense, and not in the bad sense*

*that people often use it was the church of the Nazarene; Nazarenes were great, they had their meetings, these campground meetings, revivals and all that and their home was right across the river from a campground in Jamestown, across the James River and so his upbringing was very strict too. (Female, age 88)*

*She (wife) was growing up as a Methodist and I was growing up Presbyterian, so we –we joined one Church and I think, she gave me a kind of a, I guess, a much closer connection to the Church ... and well we had different ideas then and both of us had lots of different parts in the Church...and in fact I became a very thoroughgoing United Methodist. (Male, age 78)*

*We were married in 1950... It really is because both of us came out of a faith experience because; as I told you mine and hers (life) tells you a similar experience that she had with significant people as I did. But from the time that we were (married) until this very day, Christ was the center of our life and He's always been a part of decision making and so...and this really...and I've told you this before. The best thing I ever did with my life was to marry my wife. We've just have an unbelievable experience. (Male, age 81)*

One former evangelical female (widow, age 90) reflected with joy on the memory of meeting her husband and how much she admired his Christian upbringing and his role in their marriage. He eventually became President of a prestigious Christian College:

*So when I came home from college for the weekend my friend introduced me to him (future husband) and we attended a University Christian fellowship party together and he was wonderful, wonderful! So I was just fortunate and he influenced me in all my life. He was brought up Lutheran in a very firm solid; bible based well taught good thinking Christian man - you know? Without the buzz...I use to say when we did interpretation (of the bible) that he had all the facts but I said by nothing great enthusiasm [laughs] so, because he was a very quiet man in a way and not effervescent at all ...we made a nice team.*



A female Salvationist (age, 82) shared with humor, modesty and conviction the evolution of her faith-based marriage when she first met her husband in Seminary school and how important it was to not only have discipline but also spirituality in cultivating their relationship:

*Okay, well I went to seminary and I needed a couple of Sunday school teachers for the summer substitutes. I heard about these two guys down at the Harper Life Center of Salvation Army and they didn't have a Sunday school. They just had church and so I thought, "I wonder if either of those would teach Sunday school?" So I called him up and he said, "Well, yeah I can teach." So he came out and he didn't have a car, poor thing and then well you know the end of the story [laughs]... so, I would offer to take him back to his apartment...I was that nice. I'm a generous soul [laughs] and actually our romance did not really start then. So we waited two years and he gave me an engagement ring on Christmas day and I wasn't allowed to wear it. I wasn't supposed to be engaged for a year after being out of seminary training and this was only six months. So, I put it in the safe and never wore it. Now that's how important the discipline was and I didn't mind. It's just what you did. I thought 'I'm committed now to the Salvation Army and to God so what the Salvation Army says it's what I do' and he had no problem with it either. Well it's not just discipline either. It's this commitment to what you know is right. It's really part of your spirituality. When we finally got married we shared Romans 8:28, 'all things work together for good to those who look out and they are called according to His purpose' and so through all of this life, we believed it [chuckle]...so, that's been very helpful. Today, (56 years later) we do our devotions together at breakfast.*

**Nurturing children's spiritual values and morals.** When participants in this study were asked to talk about their families most mentioned the importance of nurturing children's spiritual values and morals. As one female participant, age 77, reflected on her life spiritual review she shared, "Then our daughter was born and that really gives one realization of how important it is to foster their chance for spiritual growth from the

beginning.” Likewise, a 78 year-old, married male echoed the same attitude about his only child:

*Our daughter was born in 1964 and she is our only child and bringing her up as a believing person and the person who has God in her life has been very important to both of us it was very much a part of our life...I think it did contribute to the growth of our spirituality.*

Additionally, several participants’ mentioned how they made certain their children attended Sunday school, church, and/or youth group as part of spiritual development.

*They (children) went to Sunday school and church...yeah and youth groups they belonged to youth groups and all until they got out of high school and then they went their own way. (female, age 88, widowed)*

*We kept our daughter involved in the church and this group was just a life saver through the teen years I don’t know how families raise children without having them involved in a caring religious youth group it really makes a big difference. (female, age 77, married)*

*Well, of course, they (children) went to school for missionary children. Presbyterians not the Liberals...they had their music censored. They didn’t even allow square dancing. They were very strict. So, you know the Lord’s really been good to us. Our kids are great and they’ve survived it without money. I know...I’ve seen it all as I can tell you. (female, age 90, widowed)*

*And then after the children came along the Unitarian church did not have a really good program for kids so we looked around and there was a Presbyterian church within walking distance of where we lived and we got a car after the birth of the kids but any rate we*

*went to the Presbyterian Church and it was a good fit...the kids really enjoyed their Sunday school there. (male, age 89, married)*

Also participants described how imparting their own spiritual values and attitudes on children and grandchildren was important.

*I always listened to my conscience so you know I told my kids and my grandkids...when they were little - they used to listen to me then and they would love to learn bible verses...and as little boys one reason we gave out for not doing wrong...was 'what would Jesus do?' That is one of the questions you would ask. 'What would Jesus do?' You know, think about it you know, make sure you stop and think it may be that you don't want to do that. (Female, age 88, widowed)*

*I wish we had time to tell you all of what's happening in our family and children and grandchildren but they've gone all over the world in mission trips. Our youngest daughter for many years when their children were younger, she and her husband and their five children would gather at the front door and pray before they all left. We always had worship services in our home. As we look back and we saw what our children and the grandchildren are doing, we adopted the phrase 'we must have done something right'. They truly have incorporated Christ into their lives...every one of their children has already been on mission work...they do local mission work and international missions. (male, age 81, married)*

**Learning to love unconditionally.** Participants described their spiritual life in marriage and family with a depth of honesty that revealed a sense of learning to love unconditionally. All participants at some point in their spiritual life review described this attitude through a story about love, acceptance, forgiveness and self-sacrifice in adulthood towards a spouse, child, parent, or others. One male participant (age 81)

expressed this sentiment of unconditional love in describing the birth of all his children as a significant spiritual life event:

*This (spiritual life event) takes place from 1951 until 1963. And that is the birth of each child that we have, the seven children. And each one, once again, we are impressed with a miracle of birth first of all. But, that is each one is a child...that was given to us to raise. We were the biological parents but God was, in fact, the Father and the maker of it all. So that's very much been a highlight to us. So this star (on spiritual lifemap) is for the joy of parenting*

One female participant, age 74, discussed her marriage as a young wife in college and the reciprocation of support between her and her husband while finishing their degrees and starting a new family. She identified this time in her adulthood as both difficult and spiritually significant as she remembered how they were able to make it through this period.

*So I dropped out of college junior year and put him through his senior year of college and seminary. And wouldn't you know I got pregnant right away...We moved to a different state for him to go to seminary. My school was hundreds and hundreds of miles away. So it was a very hard decision but we made it and I eventually went back to my original college and left 2 babies behind with him...and with his vacation and with my vacations we saw each other once a month. So I tried in those early years to be a support to him. I helped him in the church whenever he needed something. I remember I set up resource centers for the Sunday school teachers. However I could be helpful to him. I tried to do that to let him know he's important.*

A male participant (age 81) shared a heartfelt story from his later adulthood of how he came to understand a greater meaning of love and forgiveness toward family when he was able to reconcile a difficult conflict with one of his adult sons.

*In about 1998 and for about ten years, our oldest son wanted nothing to do with us and we've never even bothered to find out exactly why...well, we think we know some of it... well, to be very, very blunt, I have taught in many bible schools the story of the Prodigal Son and always thought it was a wonderful story and a very instructive story and then we have lived that story with our son. And we never had anything like that with any of our children. So to make again the long – short - not too long ago, he came here and he stayed overnight in our home and I realized I was now ready because I didn't care who made the opening. He was welcomed here and I was going to run out to meet him. You know, we have never discussed anything of that period of time. It was absolutely unnecessary. The joy; however! We have been totally reconciled. He calls, he writes, he couldn't be closer to us than he is. And so once again, it's a faith of God when He operates. And as I say, I knew the story (Prodigal Son) but I didn't know how to operationalize it in many ways. But in the end...if I ever tell that story again, it is strictly out of my own personal experience. It was our ability to let go and to realize that forgiveness is the very heart of life and you have to love even your enemies.*

A female participant, age 91, provided a narrative about her marriage and family that conveyed this experience of learning to love unconditionally during adulthood as she supported her husband in his career, raised and let go of her children when it was necessary, learned to accept others, survived her husband's death, and joyfully celebrated a major milestone in her life. Her story starts at the beginning of her marriage when after several years of living in Maine with her husband, a college professor, having her first two of five children, hand-sewing all their clothes, and living a very modest life with no car they were confronted with the opportunity to do missionary work. It is from this point on that the participant described her greatest spiritual growth.

*We knew that God had a plan for us and we wanted to find it so we began to pray about that every day. It was spiritually a very rich time. So eventually we moved to Pakistan and we stayed there through the rest of our career until late 1980s. And I had to say bye to my mother half a dozen times, you could imagine...and I*

*had five small children so this was a big change for us. But during that period, my three boys finished at school for missionary children and they graduated - that was very hard to see them go back to the States; and, our daughter by then was in high school and she really was having a hard time. So, I moved the girls from the little missionary school, where the kids all went, to an American school and then, the government took over all the Christian schools and colleges, so my husband was in terrible turmoil of trying to save what he could and find a Christian to put in his place...and I think the hard things we faced and focused on, this was all spiritually significant. I had a Christian community around me all through the whole thing. But we have, we have a lot of Muslim friends too, and I have a lot more tolerance today than when I wore a question mark in College [laughter]...I lost my husband in 2010 and again people are so wonderful and every family member participated in everything. Then I just had my 90th birthday with the whole family, and that was a spiritual high, so that's where I am now. A very rich and wonderful life! And the Lord has just blessed us no doubt...*

Life events that occurred during adulthood were some of the first opportunities for participants to experience unconditional love towards others. A widowed, female participant, age 89 described how she was compelled to marry her husband at a young age despite having an intuitive sense that he would not live long. With some trepidation she offered the following memory from her spiritual lifemap as significant:

*Well you know it's interesting when I decided to marry him...I felt that he would not live...ah-ha...yes...that's right...I felt that he would not live. And so that was the reason that I had to marry him because I couldn't forgive myself for knowing that...and so he said he had received a call to the ministry and he had his first church at 19. He only lived to be 45 and we had 25 years in the ministry. So then this is (pointing to spiritual lifemap) when he (spouse) died and God said 'I told you so.' But, I knew in my heart when I married him... but then we had 25 years. You know I didn't... in my heart...I didn't think it would be that...that long.*

The role of caregiver is another aspect of adulthood identified by many participants as spiritually significant as they have learned how to give and receive unconditional love in times of need. One female participant, age 76, described how two events in her adulthood were spiritually significant when she and her husband were at one time both caregivers and then later both needed to be cared for by others:

*We were trying to have a church centered family and years later we both had to care for his mother and my mother in their declining years but it's just really a challenging undertaking and you need all the spiritual strength and physical strength you can muster for being a caregiver.*

*At the same time my husband had to have open heart surgery I was in another hospital and then for quite a long period of time for at least 6 weeks neither of us was driving. So we were house bound and needing to see doctors regularly and our church family came to our rescue and helped us through it. Certainly it was a time of mustering all the spiritual strength we have and you find out how very willing your friends are to help in time of need and that was a great comfort.*

A retired male professor, age 81, provided a story of experiencing a deeper love with his wife as he has had to become her caregiver. He offered the following story related to a spiritually significant event from his late adulthood:

*As a result of her recent dementia diagnosis we became much closer together in the middle of this...depression as we shared...she shared with me what she was going through...let me just say this about it...it has been challenging because it's been hard for me to accept. But, with God's help everyday as we call for strength and endurance to go take this road. It really is a very hard road that you're being asked to take...it really is the only time you really grow....that we're learning and it's been very, very hard at this present time to turn this over to God. It's constantly on our minds but one of the wonderful things is we have 61 years of*

*marriage. We look back and we have an unbelievable marriage and so that's helping us too.*

A female participant, age 89, spoke with great affection about marrying her second husband later in life. She shared how he became sick a few years after marriage and now resides away from her in a health center. She talked about this experience as being significant in her spiritual life review:

*I was 81 and he was 86 (seven years ago)...we had a church wedding. Being the wife of a former Pastor, it was rather daunting at first but I really didn't realize how much...anyway, we've really clicked actually better than my first marriage because we could talk and he is such a sweet guy. My niece she asked me this twice - she said if you would know ahead, would you've done it and without thinking I said yes. Some people can hand just a platonic relationship but we wanted a lot more than that. Now I always tell him 'Don't worry about the future because we're going to be taken care of here, God will take care of us...don't you worry.'*

Another female participant, age 83, reflected on her years of marriage with loving-kindness and offered spiritual wisdom about facing death:

*I think heaven gets closer [laughter] all the time of course with my husband especially, he's 13 years older than I am. Yeah, he's 96 years old. That's a reality for us and we're dealing with it. We're talking about it. When he has a bad day, he'll remind me and say, "You know I'm not long for this world." [Chuckle] I say, "I know, honey" but that's okay. I mean, what could I complain about? Fifty-six wonderful years together...God it has not always been rosy obviously but the love has been there and the support - when I need him he has been there and I think I've supported him to. He had needs. So, that's life and if you believe in an eternal life, it's not that sad. How could it be? So, I don't understand, I have difficulty understanding people who don't accept at least to some point the spiritual life because if you look at the corpse, what's there? Whether we want to make it Christian or not, there's something else. I don't know how you deny that we're spiritual people.*



When participants in this study discussed spiritually significant events from adulthood it often involved intimate stories detailing love and courage during the dying process of a spouse or significant other. A female participant who was married for 65 years described a tender moment with her husband when he was dying and how she still finds comfort in this memory:

*When my husband was dying... I took the stool over. Because it's high, you know like a bar stool and I could sit right up next to him and I could sort of massage his arm and so forth. I would read to him or sing to him, from the classic hymns and then one of those songs meant a lot after he died. I'd leave it (book) open all night just to put on my bed stand and every time I go by - I got it memorized you know - and it means a lot to me...and I still occasionally if I wake up at night, I will sing that...even if I only sing in my mind.*

A male participant, age 84, offered how “the death of my wife of 55 years and my significant other has certainly influenced me spiritually but that's just where I stand now.” He further explained how it took him several years to accept the loss of his wife and then when he finally did he met and fell in love with a woman who unexpectedly was diagnosed with cancer and was given only six months to live. He then tearfully described how he had so many plans with his significant other and how difficult it was to lose her so soon in their relationship. The participant finally explained how he eventually found comfort in the ‘hymn of promise’ by Natalie Sleeth:

*My significant other planned her own funeral when she was diagnosed with end stage cancer. And that was rough on me. We'd get to go to bed and we would -- before we go to sleep, she would be reading scriptures that she wanted in her service. Now that's rough. But she shared a hymn to be sung (hymn of promise) at her funeral...It is a beautiful thing. It's just perfect for that...and well I can't remember the first verse but you'll see what it's talking about. [Singing] 'In the bulb, there is a flower... In the*

*seed, an apple tree...In cocoons a hidden promise - butterflies will soon be free. In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see...*

**Table 8. Question 6- Trials & Hardships**

***Theme: Spirituality during trials & hardships means having faith, trust and belief***

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If you had any trials or hardships in your lifetime what was your relationship with God/Higher Power like during those times? What are your favorite scriptures or readings?

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<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Believing in God (faith)	002, 003, 004, 006, 007, 008, 009, 010, 012, 014, 018, 019, 020
Acting with awareness (trust)	002, 003, 004, 006, 007, 008, 009, 010, 012, 014, 018, 019, 020
Accepting the truth of life events (belief)	002, 003, 004, 006, 007, 008, 009, 010, 012, 014, 018, 019, 020

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The sixth question in the spiritual life review was to explore each participant's relationship with God/Higher power during life's trials and hardships. The researcher discovered that this question presented a unique outcome whereby the majority of participants described three sub-themes as interconnected when dealing with trials and hardships. Figure 1 shows the interconnectedness of the sub-themes for trials and hardships: (a) Believing in God (**faith**), (b) Accepting the truth of life events (**belief**), (c) Acting with awareness (**trust**).



**Figure 1. Interconnected sub-themes for trials and hardships**

When participants in this study shared stories about trials and hardships all of them described experiences that represented a unified theme of belief, faith, and trust in God. Participants shared a number of difficult life events including the loss of parents, children, first loves, and spouses. Also many experienced a sudden onset of a challenging medical condition (e.g., cancer, aneurysms, deafness, polio, etc.) or had a loved one with a serious medical condition (Alzheimer's, diabetes, cardiac arrests) during their lifetime. For instance, when asked to describe what God has taught her about trials and hardships during her lifetime, a 77-year-old female participant (in remission from cancer) shared the following insightful narrative:

*Well, I had a diagnosis of cancer in 2001 and not just a regular cancer but an incurable type...so the diagnosis was or the prognosis was maybe 2 years...I had my first remission and then it came back a few years ago and I had a wonderful treatment that I felt was just providential that I was able to respond to it **(trust)**...but I have really drawn heavily on my spiritual strength through that and realized profoundly the importance of intercessory prayer because I found I could feel it. I think it was just a steady awareness that God is with us through whatever we're going through and that strength is available if we seek it and I found that certainly to be true **(faith & belief)**. So...it rains on the just and the unjust and that blessings fall on the just and the unjust... it's not a way... it doesn't ...your faith doesn't guarantee you at all that you'll be trouble free or unchallenged by all the worldly issues that surround us all it's just that it **(faith)** gives you an anchor to hold on to...to help you make it through the trouble times **(belief)**.*

One other female participant (age 90) offered a descriptive narrative about how life challenges caused her to grow spiritually. Her story represents a belief in God/Lord (faith), an ability to accept the truth of life (belief) and the opportunity to act with awareness (trust) about what life has presented:

*We had two little boys born and we did not have a car and neither of us drove, we went on a bus and the second baby – they were twins and one of the babies died so that was very significant. I find every time that things are hard, that you are spiritually growing **(belief)**. I had a bad accident a few times and those are spiritual highs. And I think the hard things we faced and focused on, I mean, my... you are beating your head against the wall a lot and that throws you...You have to depend on the Lord **(faith)**, I mean, you have to. It makes you aware that your own resources are not enough **(trust)**. And so I think it causes you to grow spiritually and you are brought into speaking in tongues and so forth...And the Lord just blessed us no doubt...and I think that because perhaps of my faith, that they (difficulties) make me grow.*

Similarly, another female participant, age 76, described how she not only grew spiritually during difficulties but how she also learned to have faith, belief, and trust:

*My spiritual life...yeah...this is difficulties (referring to spiritual lifemap)...and my spiritual life goes way up there...But then He (God) would just be there **(faith)** ...umm...so trials are part of... they are part of His plan for me...I didn't even understand that for a long time...and I still if... all that seems to be cushioned with this knowledge that God does know I do now know God has a plan for each of us **(belief)**...and the ups and downs of our lives are part of that if it were all smooth I mean - you know if you tried to walk on ice, you don't get anywhere...there has got to be some kind of rough surface **(trust)**... I just think 'Lord you really have a sense of humor' [Laughs]*

A female participant, age 90, shared some of her life challenges and how she dealt with these spiritually. Once again, the interpretation of faith, belief and trust are highlighted in her story:

*In 1960, my father died and my mother came to live with me, and I learned the true meaning of mid-life, when you're caught between your parent and your child, this was a very difficult time. I taught a young married couple in Sunday's school class. No matter how down I had been all week, Sunday morning was the time to think positive and that also gave me a social life. Well, I think my belief in God **(faith)**, gave me an acceptance and knowing that I can get through anything I had to **(trust)**. Yeah. It was a... I had a feeling. I have always felt it that there was a...well life has a pattern **(belief)**. When my husband died, my first husband, somebody left a leaflet and a little booklet in my door, saying it was an honor to die young because you put your life with a purpose and you didn't leave until your purpose was completed, and over the years, I think, so what? (Laughs) but at the time it was very meaningful to me **(belief)**.*

An 82-year-old female participant offered a detailed event of a time in her life when she was a young pastor, married with a baby and suddenly while on vacation she was struck with Polio and unable to move for one year. In her narrative she expressed this union of faith, belief, and trust during this ordeal.

*I had the awareness that this was serious and that I couldn't move my legs and so I said to the Lord, "now Lord, you know, I am committed to you and you know that I can't do a lot of the work if I can't use my legs. But if that's what you want, I'll get in the wheelchair." That was the end of it and I really felt right straight from my heart that commitment **(faith)**. "If that's the way I have to serve you, that's okay" and I really felt a sense of peace about it. I didn't bargain in the sense that, do it my way. I simply said "whatever happens here is okay that, you know you'll find a way for me to do what I'm supposed to do because you told me I am supposed to do this" **(belief)**. You know, that was really my sense. Yeah, this was really my attitude about it. And so I spent a year in bed...a year in bed, there was nothing I could do. I mean they didn't have any treatments or anything but, you know, exercising and doing what I could and my husband took care of the baby, bless his heart. He was wonderful and fortunately we had someone from the church that would come in and fix meals and they were wonderful. And I gradually got better so I had no after affects, whatsoever. So that's a miracle **(faith & trust)**.*

An 81-year-old male participant provided an account of a difficult time when one of his adult sons suffered a serious cardiac arrest and how the events that followed represented a deep faith, trust, and belief in God.

*You can understand the agitation that we all felt...and with the concern, your son may be dying... and a biblical verse came into my mind. I guess I wasn't even aware of it being a biblical verse but I realized all of a sudden I found peace. It was just a sense of peace and I don't know whether God was speaking or whether it was my mind ruminating on what I had just experienced. I realized it was a win-win situation **(belief)**. There can be no looser in this situation and if God had chosen to bring our son home, - he's a pastor by the way - If He would choose to bring him home then he's in heaven... and it's all fine and that all he creates is gone and if he lived, it meant that God still had work for him to do **(trust)** and, of course, God has proven to be very true with what he's doing now **(belief)**. But I think the most dramatic part of that occurred a day later when he was still in intensive care and a peace came into the room as we were praying and all there were at peace and we realized that God was, once again, in the middle of something very tragic, God was at work, that only God can do. And so once again, it's a faith of God when he operates **(faith)**.*

Furthermore, participants were asked if they had any favorite scriptures or readings as an exploratory question to trials and hardships. A few participants made reference to particular Christian authors that they read regularly. One 76-year-old female participant responded “Max Lucado, Charles Stanley...I also have some prayer cards to pray and sing with daily.” Others reported reading the Bible “especially when they feel down” or doing daily devotionals in the morning, afternoon, evening, and often at bedtime. Many participants were able to spontaneously recite a hymn, psalm or reading from the bible that has great meaning to their spirituality. An 89-year-old female participant offered two hymns from her spiritual lifemap that she recalled as significant throughout her entire life “and the hymn is an old hymn that goes - be not dismayed whatever the tide, God will take care of you - and this down here it says - beneath his wings of love abide, God will take care of you.” Still others provided more elaborate recitations of scripture and prayers.

*It's 1st Corinthians, Chapter 13... “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I have become a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.” And it goes on about love being the greatest thing in the world, and I think, it came into my life of the time that I needed it...when my husband died way back then and when I was teaching Sunday school class, I used this quite often. (Widowed Female, 90 years old)*

*The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And thanking God for his greatest gift of His son Jesus Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son that whoever believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal*

*life. John 3:16 ...and that's what makes you a Christian not just that verse but the concept of it. Philippians, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you", so I remember that, but my latest one is "I am sure and certain" Hebrews 1:11 I think, "I am sure of what I hope for and certain of what I do not see". And my interpretation, I don't know, somebody asked what does that mean, I said while I am sure...I am sure and certain, I am sure of an eternal life and I am certain of heaven that is what I think it means but I don't know if it is. (Widowed female, age 88)*

An 87 year-old married female participant who recently joined a centering prayer group offered the following prayer with enthusiasm:

*Okay... for drawing you more deeply into relationship with God. This is the prayer of Jabez. "Lord, bless me indeed. Do something so big in my life that is obviously from you. Increase my influence and my opportunities for you and give me a sense of your continual presence and direction. Protect me and keep me from falling into Satan's traps, Amen." It's interesting because – it looks like a simple prayer (Jabez) but if you believe and really get into it and do what you should be doing, things happen.*

A compelling narrative was offered by a 74-year-old divorced female participant about the significance of certain bible narratives on her faith, belief and trust during major life challenges and transitions that influenced her spirituality.

*I thought of the scriptures that said 'Mary treasured all these things pondering them in her heart.' I did a lot of pondering in my heart and never shared with...anybody...I never shared that I was being abused. And the scripture that got me through all this ups and downs here (referring to spiritual lifemap) is Isaiah 41:9 10 and 13 and it says basically 'Do not be afraid for I'm your God and I will hold you in my victorious right hand and I will help you so do not be afraid.' That got me through all this. I finally, I didn't know that then but here I realized there are scripture passages that are there for a reason. All these before they were just stories you know...now they had meaning. I grew in my spiritual life and in my understanding of my spiritual life. And who I am and what God means to me and what I mean to Him. And I keep hearing Joseph's narrative that says 'You intended this for evil, - my husband intended this for evil - but I, God intended it for good.'*



*It's just God turned my chaos into joy. I am the happiest that I have ever been in my entire life.*

**Table 9. Final Question 1- Meaning of Spirituality**

***Theme: Spirituality means experiencing the transcendent nature of God in one's own life and in relationship to others and the Universe***

Could you please take a moment to describe what spirituality means to you?	
<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Having a relationship to/or awareness of a higher being	002, 006, 007, 009, 012, 013, 014, 018, 020
Having gratitude and respect towards God, others and the Universe	001, 003, 004, 006, 010
Committing oneself to God	005, 008, 009, 019

In final question (1) the researcher identified three sub-themes that related to the overall arching theme of what spirituality means to older adults in this study. The three sub-themes from participants were: (a) Having a relationship to/or awareness of a higher being (God, Jesus Christ, Supreme Being, Lord, and Savior), (b) Having gratitude and respect towards the universe and others, (c) Surrendering of oneself through a relationship with God

**Having a relationship to/or an awareness of a higher being (God, Jesus, Christ, Supreme Being, Lord, and Savior).** When asked to define spirituality, a majority of participants described an awareness of being connected to a higher being often referred to as God/Supreme Being/Jesus Christ/Lord and Savior. Many of these participants recognize this as a connection or relationship to something outside of

themselves (external) that motivates them intrinsically to live a spiritually centered life.

A male, Protestant participant, age 81, provided the following thoughtful definition:

*Spirituality is the dynamic and growing connection between my Lord and Savior and me – my innermost being – my soul. Even now, being care partner with my precious wife suffering with dementia, this connection is empowering me to learn, understand and respond with patience and love.*

Similarly, in the following narrative, a female, Christian participant, age 90, eloquently presented an open-minded perspective on spirituality as both universal and personal:

*To me spirituality means an awareness of a higher being available to us in our lives. Depending on one's culture, background, teaching, or personality, it could take on different forms and meanings but is available to one's seeking. As a Christian of course I believe the divine God is that Supreme Being. One's happiness, peace, and deep joy and meaning in life become much richer and more meaningful when learning more about and accepting the way of life as given in Biblical teaching. Only in Christianity do we find forgiveness of sin and a loving Savior. People who accept and walk that path can find life rich and meaningful. The more one follows it the more spiritual he/she is.*

Likewise, a female, Christian participant, age 76, provided the following intimate and in-depth definition of spirituality:

*To me, Spirituality involves seeking something outside oneself to answer questions about this life, one's purpose and what is to come. As a Christian, I have found the answer lies in my belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came as our redeemer and reconciler to God. Believing the Bible as the Word of God has led me along life's journey with a greater understanding of spiritual things and events in my life in light of that Word. My spiritual life has been one of growth in that understanding, and it has never let me down. It is a relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit that has given me a stable hope in a world that changes all*

*the time. And He never changes – which gives believers a more secure spiritual life if they can see it that way – at least, that has been my experience*

Other participants definitively acknowledged spirituality as awareness and presence of a higher being that is accessible at all times but especially in times of need:

*I think Spirituality means the active presence of God in my life. God's presence is felt when I am at a loss of what to do, anxious, worried, in pain, facing a grave decision, or feeling helpless (Protestant Widowed Female, age 89)*

*To me, spirituality means having an awareness of the presence of a spiritual force, and the belief that I can connect with it – for guidance for comfort and wisdom. (77, female, Protestant participant)*

*The ability to feel at “one” with our Heavenly Father...to know I always have someone to turn to at time of need or just to say “good morning, beautiful day, thank you” Now, more than any other time in my life, I feel the need to communicate with our Lord, my family and friends. (76, female, Catholic participant)*

Still others identified spirituality as an empowering relationship with God that has fostered a sense of certainty, success and peace throughout life.

*Spirituality is self-awareness and relationship to a higher power, God. It leads to self-acceptance and contentment, also creativity, the acceptance of others and the power to accomplish things in one's life in spite of circumstances. (90, female, Protestant participant)*

*Spirituality means a relationship with God. I believe God made man so we could have a relationship with Him and He with us. Recognizing that man is a spiritual being is perhaps the most valuable concept to embrace. It gives meaning to life. A relationship with God, our Father, through Jesus Christ, His Son,*

*makes possible a life of contentment and peace in all life experiences. (82, female, Protestant participant)*

*What does it mean to me? What will I say? I think it means life. Without Spirituality, you're nothing. It means life. Without it, you're just a lost sheep. You might get mad at God and you might just say things that you shouldn't say but it's...well my mother used to say it all comes out in the wash. (92, female, Protestant participant)*

**Having gratitude and respect towards God, others, and the Universe.** Having gratitude and respect towards God, others, and the universe was expressed as what spirituality means by more than a few participants in this study. These participants provided a range of similar responses that included a precise biblical reference, a brief historical review of religious ethics, and an introspective reflection on respect and gratitude. A female, protestant participant, age 88, responded with the following succinct definition of spirituality:

*Spirituality means living with an attitude of gratitude for all of God's blessings – loving the Lord your God with all your heart – loving your neighbor as yourself. The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).*

In comparison a male, protestant participant, age 84, provided a comprehensive definition of spirituality inclusive of the world's religious ethics:

*Spirituality is one's sensitivity to the ethics of the major religions: Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. For example, the Mosaic and Brahmanic Codes are very similar in rules of conduct in a wide range of areas: usury, wages of labor, weights and measures, taxation, property rights, rate of profits, monopoly, inheritance, attitude and treatment of the peer, etc. Similar to the Mosaic Jubilee Year was the Brahmanic Year of the*

*Death of the King. There is very high system of ethic in Buddhism, the chief of the cardinal virtues being love. The Buddhist scriptures contain passages that remind one of Christ's sermon on the mount and Paul's discussion of love that came along later. One of the five pillars of Islam is giving alms (a tithing of 2 ½ percent of one's wealth each year plus the giving of alms directly to the poor.) And certainly there is a high system of ethics in Christianity. The Christ, in announcing the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, said he had come to give people hope, liberate the oppressed and oppressors, and free people for human fulfillment. The beatitudes, the parable of the sheep and goats, and the choice of common property leave no doubt as to the ethics of Christianity. For me, spirituality is being sensitive to these ethical principles of our major religions, endeavoring to live our lives in accordance with them.*

Likewise, another deeply contemplative response was offered by a male, non-believer, age 89, when offering his personal reflections on what spirituality means:

*My wife says the short answer is "the way you live your life" To me, I'm not at all sure that I am a spiritual person. Or that I am "spiritual." Certainly I am not a St Thomas a Kempis. For that matter I am not the Christian I was brought up to be. I have an interest and curiosity about religions in general and because of my roots in Christianity, my interests tend to lie in that direction. I know that I do not believe in an anthropomorphic God, at least in what I was taught about Him (or Her) in Sunday School. For years I was quite comfortable as an unbeliever. Then, starting about the middle of the last century, a new cosmology fueled by quantum physics and the Hubble telescope put an end to the "steady state" concept of our universe and it was replaced by the "Big Bang." Now the birth of our universe has been pretty well dated to about 13.7 billion years ago. I was comfortable with the steady state concept; if it had always been here than there was no need for a creator God. Now then, if there was a start, a big bang, then there could have – should have been a first cause? However, we got here, I believe we must be responsible for accepting this world gratefully and for passing it on to future generations in as livable condition as possible. A spiritual person will not "kill nor hurt any living thing needlessly, but will strive to save and protect all harmless life" as the sixth Boy Scout law says. I have tried to live my life that way to the best of my ability. I recycle, save water,*

*and try to conserve our precious resources. If that qualifies, then I am a spiritual person.*

**Committing oneself to God.** Committing oneself to God was expressed by a few participants when defining spirituality. One male, protestant, age 92 stated simply “spirituality means doing the will of God in my life.” While others shared a more elaborate expression of this commitment to God:

*It (spirituality) does not mean “play acting” religious activities. Rather it is the practice of the Soul, i.e., the qualities of human life (will, thinking, feeling, and being) in relation to the creative activity of God through Christ. It is striving to “live for” God with a special purpose, the redemptive power of God at work in the lives of those who surrender to God and accept God’s graciousness. (74, Female, Protestant participant)*

*Spirituality is a range of experience in which my senses and my mind are alert enough to open my thoughts and sensations to the contemplation of God. What I hope for is that the senses and rational mind, having done their part, will give way and leave the field to God. (78, Male, Protestant participant)*

*The relationship (with God) takes away fear of death, and provides assurance of eternal life with God. Accepting the Bible as truth provides the foundation for a spiritual life. The Bible says we are all given a measure of faith. It is our responsibility to develop that faith. (82, Female, Protestant participant)*

### **Final Question 2- Participating in a Spiritual Life Review**

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Could you please take a moment to answer and briefly describe the following: How have you have enjoyed participating in this Spiritual Life Review?

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Seventeen participants completed the spiritual life review study. At the conclusion of the study each participant was asked to answer the above final question.

From the feedback they provided the researcher found that all responses demonstrated levels of ego-integrity and gerotranscendence among participants. Specifically, all participants stated they reviewed their past life events with satisfaction; some reconciled life regrets; most transcended challenges; all experienced spiritual growth and development; many gained wisdom as well as accepted the future with purpose and meaning; and several acknowledged feelings of peace, love and joy. Below are a range of narratives provided by participants about the experience of participating in this spiritual life review.

An 89-year-old male, participant who has struggled with being an Anglican and non-believer wrote how the spiritual life review gave him the opportunity to finally look back at his life, resolve regrets and accept his life experiences:

*The review made me sit down and contemplate past joys and mistakes in my life. I have, for years, avoided thinking about past mistakes and have resisted facing some of them. Others have been lurking just below my radar, but the review made me face up to those. I may not have been totally forthcoming about all of these, but I did take the occasion to look inside and to some extent have accepted my own responsibility and to forgive some others for their part of those things I regret. Please understand that I don't have a criminal background, but have had my fair share of human failings and I'm beginning to accept that it is pointless to "be-weep my outcast state"*

A 90-year-old female Protestant participant shared how the spiritual life review not only caused her to look back on life with satisfaction but also gave her a new perspective on spirituality and religion:

*Participating has given me an opportunity to review my life, beliefs and practices. It's been an enlightening experience; first I realized there is a difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is*

*belief & practice. Spirituality is feeling. Religion can and does divide people. Spirituality unites. Religion can and does lead to spirituality depending on the individual and I am thankful to realize that personally that's what it has done for me – how fortunate I am.*

An 88- year-old female protestant participant shared how looking back on her spiritual life motivated her to embrace the future with more purpose and love in her life:

*The Spiritual Life Review has been a lovely moving spiritual journey for me. It has made me aware that I need to “let it out” to express the love, the joy, the gratitude that I feel in my heart. Now my mission is to be more vocal in expressing my Christian beliefs. Now I will renew my custom of writing letters to my grandchildren expressing Christian values and love for our country.*

Other participants shared how doing a spiritual life review provided an opportunity to recognize their own spiritual growth throughout life. The sense of gratitude towards people, events, and challenges that shaped their spiritual development is presented in the following passages:

*Participating in the Spiritual Life Review study was interesting and worthwhile. It encouraged me to take time to reflect on how various events and people over the course of my life have influenced my spiritual growth and development. (77, Female, Protestant participant)*

*I appreciate the unique opportunity to diagram my intellectual and spiritual growth and to hold my experiences up for viewing. Participating in this review has helped me to understand myself better. (78, Male, Protestant participant)*

*It was a joy to review my life and see how much I have grown in my spirituality, to re-affirm myself as a child of God, and to share with the researcher how God placed people in my life to assist me*



*when life was at its lowest points, so I could see the positive blessings in life. Thanks! (74, Female, Protestant participant)*

Many participants believed that the spiritual life review gave them an opportunity to reflect with satisfaction on past life events that they otherwise would not have done. Also, they expressed how God has been instrumental in shaping their past and future life experiences. A 90-year-old female protestant participant stated: “The study has been a good experience of appreciating the rich and wonderful life God has given me. I can see Gods hand guiding me into right paths in a richer way”

Similarly, others expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to look back on their life with satisfaction and to give thanks to God:

*First of all, meeting the researcher and communicating at our meetings was an inspiration to me. My life path chart helped me re-live my life and thank God for my wonderful life. Now I am munh more aware of how fortunate I am to have had such a life. (76, Female, Catholic participant)*

*I have enjoyed meeting and talking with the researcher. She has made me realize that I grew up in a wonderful period of growth in my Country and also my personal life. It is amazing to me how God has worked in my life. (87, Female, Protestant participant)*

*I have totally enjoyed the opportunity that the researcher’s study has provided me – to look back over a lifetime of blessing upon blessing that God has rewarded upon me. Why God has done so remains a mystery. It started with my heritage at birth and continued during my unremembered early childhood that I have been told about. The researchers warm, open and non-judgmental demeanor made each contact relaxed and pleasurable (81, Male, Protestant participant)*

Additionally, other participants expressed how meaningful it was to reflect on both positive and negative life experiences and how the process confirmed their faith, wisdom and sense of spirituality in later life:

*Participating in the Spiritual Life Review was very meaningful. I was able to review life experiences which brought blessings; to review difficult life experiences which provided opportunity to increase (challenge) my faith. I recognized again how fortunate I have been to have had family, friends and a church home which assisted me in making choices to strengthen my spiritual life in Christ, rather than become disillusioned by life's disappointments and loss. God has been so good to me, I am reminded of my responsibility to share the gospel everyday by word and deed. Thank you for this experience (82, Female, Protestant participant)*

*I have enjoyed taking part in this Spiritual Life Review because it has given me a chance to look back at the events in my life that only with God's help was I able to accomplish what needed to be done. God has given me wisdom that proved to be very valuable in years later. I never would have been able to solve those problems without His help. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to think seriously about the events in my life. (89, Female, Protestant participant)*

*I have enjoyed participating in the Spiritual Life Review. It has helped me to sit down and really think about where I am and what affects my life's journey has had on me. It was interesting to note that as life got tough, my faith strengthened. When things were better, it sort of held steady, perhaps dipped a bit. Since life is bound to have challenges, it's good to know that I actually did learn a lot about God and my faith through those challenging times. Thanks for this opportunity! It was most helpful to me. It was fun to take this journey with you. God's blessings! (76, Female, Protestant participant)*

*In constructing the spiritual lifemap I enjoyed going back in my memory to select incidents that influenced the development of my spirituality, assuming I possess any spirituality. This is something I'd never done and I spent a great deal of time simply thinking*

*about, or daydreaming, about each one. Some joyful, some sad, some neither! As you know, memories keep things “alive” – the love of my life is still with me in memories and it is especially wonderful for them to occur in dreams. I also enjoyed finding out a way to put it on one panel of paper – reminded me of taking a course in engineering drawing during WWII. (84, Male, Protestant participant)*

*I’ve enjoyed looking back because I’m sure I never would have done this without this and seeing just how far I’ve travelled, so many times I’ve tripped up. You stumble no matter how hard you try not to, and I have enjoyed that very much. Just looking back at some of the fun things and some of the not so fun things (92, Female, Christian participant)*

*It forced me to look back on my life such as it is. When you do a time line like that, you bring back many memories, good and bad. Yes, I did enjoy it, even if I was a devil’s advocate. (86, Female, Agnostic participant)*

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **DISCUSSION**

Chapter five focuses on the integration of the seven major themes discovered and how they relate to the life review process, drawing on Erikson's final stage of development (ego integrity) and Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence. A detailed discussion is offered of how themes generated from the spiritual life interviews help answer the main research questions of the study. Also, a broad view is offered on how results from the spiritual life reviews inform the literature about spirituality and spiritual development with older adults. Finally, the conclusion addresses the study's limitations, implications for social work research and practice, and recommendations for future research and practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of spirituality in the lives of older adults across the lifespan through a spiritual life review and to understand its influence on levels of ego-integrity and gerotranscendence. The main research questions of this study were addressed through both quantitative and qualitative measures. The quantitative measure compared participant's self-reported levels of ego-integrity before and after the spiritual life review. The qualitative portion of the study was based on participants' audio-taped responses to eight semi-structured interview questions. The researcher guided the participant in sharing his/her spiritual lifemap narratives. Participants showed no statistically significant changes in ego-integrity before and after

the life reviews. However, the qualitative results suggest that the spiritual life review was useful in contributing to an understanding of spiritual development across the life-time, facilitating experiences of ego-integrity and confirming gerotranscendence (see Table 10). Furthermore, the qualitative results show how participants not only gained personal insight and spiritual growth but also experienced a renewed sense of purpose and meaning from participating in the spiritual life review.

### **Integration of Conceptual Framework and Spiritual Life Review**

Butler (1963) promoted the life review process as a means to systematically review one's past life events from childhood to current age with the ultimate goal of revisiting and resolving any past conflicts, losses or regrets. Many studies have shown that a life review process is effective in facilitating successful resolution of Erikson's final stage of integrity with older adults (Haight et al., 1998; Peck, 2001). The general idea of gerotranscendence is that in achieving ego integrity individuals are said to be able to "look forward" with hope for the future rather than fear, and accept the uncertainty of what lies ahead with serenity and wisdom (Brown & Lewis, 2003; Tornstam, 1997).

There are various formats and structures that can be used for conducting a life review with older adults (e.g., memoir, autobiography, structured life review form, etc.). Flexibility in the approach to conducting a life review allows for various techniques to be used and tested to determine how a life review process helps older adults achieve ego integrity. For purposes of this study a modified version of a structured life review with a specific focus on spiritual life events that were significant to the participants was used to facilitate an organized review of one's life from childhood to current age. However, whereas a structured life review aims to ensure successful review and resolution at each

stage of Erikson's epigenetic model (e.g., childhood - trust vs. mistrust through adulthood - integrity vs. despair) over the course of 8 one-hour long visits, this spiritual life review took place in three visits and was focused primarily on how the review of spiritual life experiences across the life span helps contribute to an understanding of spirituality with older adults, Erikson's 8<sup>th</sup> and final stage of ego integrity, and Tornstam's theory of gerotranscendence. These goals were achieved by using the same set of eight semi-structured open-ended questions to guide the spiritual life review. More specifically, participants were asked five main questions about spiritual experiences across the lifespan (e.g., childhood, family of origin, adolescence, adulthood to current age, family of procreation - see Appendix I - IQs#1-5). The responses to these five interview questions provided answers to the first main research question (e.g., how are spiritually significant events across the life stages described by these older adults?) The older adults in this study were also asked about spirituality during trials and hardships of life (see Appendix I - IQ#6). Lastly, participants were asked two final questions; one about the meaning of spirituality and the second about the experience of having participated in the spiritual life review (see Appendix I - FQs#7-8). The responses to questions 6-8 addressed the second and third main research questions of this study (respectively, how does a spiritual life review help older adults find meaning in late life? does the process of completing a spiritual life review help reconcile unresolved conflict –integrity vs. despair and/or influence gerotranscendence in late life development?) (See Table 10 below)

Using a spiritual lifemap provided an effective tool to facilitate individual reminiscence of life events in this study. All participants completed the spiritual lifemap with enthusiasm and pride. Initially, some participants were reluctant to draw a lifemap

making statements such as “I’m not an artist” and “don’t expect too much.” However, with reassurance and a reminder that there is no correct way to create a lifemap, participants were eased into the process. One of the unique features of this study is that participants were not pressured to complete the spiritual lifemap “on the spot” or answer questions without being prepared. Rather participants were provided personal time between the second and third visits to construct a spiritual lifemap on their own that took on average approximately three weeks to complete.

Only a few participants chose not to draw a spiritual lifemap due to varying physical limitations such as mild shaking (e.g., palsy) and limited range of hand motion (e.g., stroke). These participants provided a typed narrative timeline by decade which proved suitable for facilitating the spiritual life review. The use of a tool such as the spiritual lifemap to systematically guide older adults in the life review process is consistent with the methodology of Feldman & Howie (2009) who used a participant constructed tool with older adults to facilitate life narratives and found it provided structure and guidance.

As Hodge (2005) suggests, the spiritual lifemap is a client-directed tool that allows the individual to look back at the journey of his/her life with an opportunity to not only reevaluate, reframe, and forgive, but also to find meaning, purpose and hope with the present and future. For these reasons the spiritual lifemap seemed to be an appropriate tool to determine how spiritual life reviews impact levels of ego-integrity and gerotranscendence with older adults.

## **Discussion of Research Questions**

The focus of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore what the unique meaning of spirituality is for older adults. Unlike the extensive research available on the influence of spirituality on the later stages of life development, there is little research to understand the process of spirituality across the lifespan with older adults. Below is a discussion of the findings that attempt to provide an explanation to the three main research questions that guided this study.

### 1. How are spiritually significant events across the life stages described by older adults?

As highlighted in Chapter 4, all participants were able to identify spiritually significant events across their life time and did so with extraordinary similarity in the narratives about spiritual experiences. Findings from this study are in line with other research suggesting that experiences of religion and spirituality in early life are predictors of spirituality in later adulthood (Dalby, 2006; Melia, 1999; Wink & Dillon, 2002). First, from childhood through adolescence including family of origin, significant spiritual life experiences were most often described as extrinsic experiences related to religion including: having a relationship to God through religious rituals, practices and beliefs; being part of a deeply rooted spiritual/religious interpersonal system; and developing a spiritual life and community outside of immediate family (e.g., church/youth camp, mentors). Interestingly, many participants described how these early experiences fostered an internal spirituality (e.g., faith, devotion, love, trust, and respect) that carried through to adulthood.



**Table 10. Research Questions/Major Themes and Findings**

Phenomenon of Study	Research Questions	Major Themes/Findings
<p>1. What is the unique meaning of spirituality for older adults residing in a faith-based continuing care retirement community across the life-time?</p>	<p>a. How are spiritually significant events across the life stages described by these older adults?</p> <p>b. How does a Spiritual Life Review help older adults find meaning in late life?</p> <p>c. Does the process of completing a Spiritual Life Review help reconcile unresolved conflict (integrity versus despair) and confirm gerotranscendence in late life development?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Spirituality in childhood means experiencing a relationship to God through religious rituals, practices and beliefs</li> <li>➤ Spirituality in family of origin means being part of a deeply rooted spiritual/religious interpersonal system (e.g., family, church, community)</li> <li>➤ Spirituality in adolescence means developing a spiritual life and community outside of immediate family</li> <li>➤ Spirituality in adulthood means maturing in faith and wisdom</li> <li>➤ Spirituality in family of procreation means making a commitment to marriage and family</li> <li>➤ Spirituality during trials &amp; hardships means having faith, trust and belief</li> <li>➤ Spirituality means experiencing the transcendent nature of God in one’s own life and in relationship to others and the Universe</li> <li>➤ Participating in a Spiritual Life Review confirms ego-integrity and gerotranscendence in older adults</li> </ul>

Second, a distinct difference exists between spirituality per se in the first half of life in comparison to spirituality in the second half of life.

Specifically as participants shared their significant spiritual life events starting with adulthood (20s) through family of procreation to current age, spirituality shifted to a description of primarily intrinsic spiritual experiences including: maturing in faith and wisdom; making a commitment to marriage and family; having faith, trust and belief; experiencing the transcendent nature of God in one's own life and in relationships to others and the Universe. However, throughout the stages of adulthood most participants have maintained some sort of external spiritual environment (e.g., attending a Christian college, belonging to a church, teaching Sunday school, performing ministry work, etc.). Although these spiritual environments are significant aspects of the individual's social context (e.g., raising a family and belonging to a church community, etc.), the shared stories reflect a lifespan development process that is more oriented towards intrinsic spirituality in later adulthood. These findings are consistent with the literature about spiritual development that recognizes how individuals have a propensity to alternate, supplement, or integrate both extrinsic (adhering to the norms of a religious group) and intrinsic (belonging to a religious group while maintaining a sense of self-awareness and existential quest) spiritual/religious experiences throughout life (Canda & Furman, 1999; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, Canda, 2007; Wink & Dillon, 2002). However, the study suggests a general trend towards a more intrinsic spiritual nature with aging. The findings on intrinsic spirituality are consistent with previous qualitative studies that identified an intrinsic orientation towards religion/spirituality in older adults who have nurtured their spirituality (e.g., religious beliefs and practices) within a community of

similar spiritually-minded others and who have also maintained a transcendent or ‘cosmic’ relationship with self and God (e.g., scared) especially during mid to late life (Ardelt & Koenig, 2007; Dalby, 2006).

This study did not specifically aim to explore how older adults perceived control (e.g., locus of control – internal or external) over significant spiritual events across the lifespan. However, the qualitative results present findings that are interesting and consistent with research related to older adults’ religious/spiritual orientations (e.g., intrinsic or extrinsic) and perceived control of life events. As noted above, it appeared that the majority of participants are more oriented towards spirituality in mid to later adulthood. Additionally, qualitative responses showed that most participants expressed having a mutual relationship with God throughout their life most often experienced through prayer, dedication and service. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis revealed that most participants accepted their life events – especially trials and hardships - with an unyielding positive attitude based on faith, trust, and belief in God who is seen as a constant reliable force in their lives. These findings are congruent with previous research describing perceived control of life events by intrinsic spiritual older adults as “God-mediated” or “collaborative” whereby the individual and God work together through positive and negative life events (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2000; Fiori, Hays, & Meador, 2004). Interestingly, the research results did not reveal any findings that support older adult’s perceived control of significant spiritual life events as solely external (e.g., God is in the only one in complete control of life).

Results also reflected how spiritual development is directly related to the bio-psycho-social-historical-and cultural aspects of one’s life. Specifically, with this group

of older adults', spiritual events such as deciding to give one's heart to Christ at an early age were influenced by being born and raised in a religious family. Also, growing up during the depression with financial stability gave an everlasting impression of compassion towards the impoverished; for example, such historic event inspired one participant to develop a world fund program to combat poverty. Likewise, in adolescence, joining the Boy Scouts shaped a lifelong perspective of honor, trust, and respect that resonates to this day for three male participants. In young adulthood, the experience of living through a world war and other conflicts (Vietnam War) inspired some participants to become pacifists. Others became involved in supporting the civil rights movement and joining freedom fighters later dedicating their careers to ethics, social and criminal justice roles. For some, attending church camp and having a spiritual mentor led to a life dedicated to ministry work. In adulthood, getting married and having children highlighted the importance of passing down learned values and morals. Being a recipient of love and care in adulthood during difficult times (divorce, illness, loss) inspired some to become marriage counselors, grief counselors, and volunteers to those in need. These findings add to the findings of previous studies that recognized the influence of a multi-dimensional (e.g., bio-psycho-social-cultural and historical) and contextual perspective on one's spiritual development across the lifetime (Mattes, 2005; McFadden & Gerl, 1990; Muto & Martin, 2009, Thomas & Cohen, 2006).

There were no differences between male and female participants in how they described spiritual life events across the lifetime. The one unexpected finding was that male participants intellectualized spiritual life events from young to middle adulthood especially with regard to education and career choices whereas women related spiritual

life events during the time period emotionally toward having a first love, getting married, and starting a family.

Lastly, the findings highlight how spirituality and religion are now central to the way of life for these older adults. First, when participants were asked to rate themselves on two separate scales of how spiritual and religious they considered themselves, 47% (n=8) of participants described being “very spiritual” while the remaining participants reported “spiritual” (35%, n= 6), “neutral spiritual” (12%, n=2) and “not very spiritual” (6%, n=1). In comparison, only 29% (n=5) of participants described being “very religious” but the majority of the twelve remaining participants reported being “religious” (53%, n=9), followed by a tie of “neutral religious” 6% (n=1), “somewhat religious” (6%, n=1) and “not very religious” (6%, n=1). This shows that the majority of participants (82%, n=14) view themselves somewhere on the spectrum of very religious to religious or very spiritual to spiritual. Second, all participants described how it was a purposeful choice to reside in a faith-based retirement community where they are immersed in a culture of faith and spirituality with like-minded older adults who share similar values, interest and background. Finally, participants in this study actively pursued spiritual development in later adulthood as they all reported daily/weekly engagement in some sort of spiritual activities including, reading inspirational literature, participating in a bible study, attending a prayer group, centering (meditation) group and volunteering at weekly chapel services.

## 2. How does a spiritual life review help older adults find meaning in late life?

Meaning-making takes place through the review and integration of past life events into one’s present and future (McFadden & Kozberg, 2008; Moschella, 2011; Peck, 2001;

Snodgrass & Sorajjakool, 2010; Thomas & Cohen, 2006). Incorporating spirituality into a life review process has been identified as a way to facilitate meaning making with older adults (Haber, 2006; Ortiz & Langer, 2002; Thomas & Cohen, 2006). In this study, meaning in life was not measured objectively; however, the results are consistent with similar qualitative research that demonstrated anecdotally how a spiritual life review did help older adults to identify meaning in life (Hateley, 1985; Lewis, 2001).

Additionally, findings in this study support previous research regarding the use of a specialized life review with older adults to recognize meaning in life events. Previous studies have shown that using a life review to identify spiritually significant turning points across the lifespan provide a useful way to generate meaning in late life (Thomas & Cohen, 2006). Furthermore, when specifically focused on spiritual reminiscence as a way to confront age related losses, challenges, and difficulties, older adults experienced an enhanced presence of meaning in life (MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010). In this study, participants experienced an increase in trials and hardships (e.g., loved one's suffering from Alzheimer's, stroke, palsy, terminal illness, death of spouse, death of child, divorce, murder of family member) from mid to later stages of adulthood. Yet despite this range of negative events the majority of participants expressed tremendous positive attitudes about spirituality and meaning in life (Horning, Davis, Stirrat, & Cronwell, 2011). These findings are consistent with other research that showed older adults who constructively reviewed and reappraised losses, challenges and difficulties (e.g., loss of loved ones, illnesses, physical limitations, and emotional changes) in the lens of spirituality enhanced meaning and purpose in late life (Faigin & Pargament, 2011; Moschella, 2011; Snodgrass & Sorajjakool, 2011). Furthermore, the results of this study confirm other research that

found older adults attribute the ability to endure difficulties and make meaning out life events (positive and negative) to an unyielding faith, trust, and belief in God (McFadden & Kozberg, 2006).

Interestingly, results showed anecdotally that all but two participants (e.g., agnostic/non-religious) interpreted life events with spiritual meaning making. Initially, the researcher expected that the spiritual life review might cause frustration or resentment for the two “non-believing” participants. However, findings revealed that the spiritual life review provided a meaningful opportunity for these two participants to review the life events that shaped their accumulated uncertainty towards faith, religion and spirituality across the life-course. Consistent with recent findings, these results show that non-believing older adults do not necessarily need (to identify / search for/ associate) meaning in life related to religion or spirituality but rather they can accept life “such as it is” (e.g., unrelated to believing in God) with meaning and satisfaction (Horning, Davis, Stirrat & Cornwell, 2011).

At the end of the spiritual life review, the majority of participants described having an awareness and connection to God in their life’s journeys: most recognized their life as having meaning and purpose not only as a “believer” but also as a loving parent/grandparent, committed spouse, caregiver, or dedicated teacher; and all expressed compassion, love, and acceptance for self, others and the universe. Overall, findings confirm that a spiritual life review works almost in a confessional manner that nurtures the innate need for older adults to share their life stories, make peace with past events and to recognize the presence of meaning in life that otherwise might not be

explored/expressed/experienced (Hateley, 1985; MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010; Moschella, 2011).

3. Does the process of completing a spiritual life review help reconcile unresolved conflict (ego-integrity versus despair) and confirm gerotranscendence in late life development?

As previously discussed, ego-integrity is the 8<sup>th</sup> and final stage of Erik Erikson's psychosocial model of personality development, which could be achieved when an individual has positively resolved all of the preceding seven stages of crisis (e.g., from stage 1- trust vs. mistrust to stage 7 – generativity vs. stagnation) and is able to look back at his/her life with satisfaction (e.g., integrity) as opposed to having unresolved conflicts or regret (e.g., despair). Gerotranscendence is a concept developed from the work of Lars Tornstam that was recognized and added on to the life span theory by Joan Erikson as the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of human development. Gerotranscendence (e.g., 9<sup>th</sup> stage of development) is when older adults not only look back at life with satisfaction and accept their present circumstances (e.g., often with physical or other limitations), but also look forward to the future with hope for self and others, feel connected or interrelated to something greater than themselves (e.g., God/Universe), and accept death without fear.

### **Ego Integrity**

As discussed earlier, the quantitative results did not show significant changes in the ego integrity scores for participants in this spiritual life review. Furthermore, findings show that participants scored relatively high levels of ego integrity even before participating in the spiritual life review which is consistent with earlier research that shows higher levels of ego integrity in older adults indicates successful resolution of conflicts and regrets at an earlier age (Brown & Lewis, 2003; Torges, Stewart, &



Duncan, 2008). Although, ego integrity is viewed as an enduring and internal characteristic previous research findings show that it can be sensitive to change for depressed or terminally ill older adults who participate in a form of structured life review (Taft & Nehrke, 1990; Haight & Hendrix, 1998; Serrano, Latorre, Gatz, & Montanes, 2004S). Although, the use of a spiritual life review is much less studied it has also been shown in previous research findings to increase life satisfaction, decrease anxiety and reduce depression in older adults with dementia and depression (Lewis, 2001; MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010). It could be said that healthy, well-adjusted older adults with high levels of ego integrity would not demonstrate a change in ego-integrity scores similar to these other findings. However, the qualitative results of this study showed that all participants enjoyed or benefited directly from taking part in the spiritual life review.

It is noteworthy to mention that ego integrity is often criticized for being difficult to be operationalized due to the lack of a formal definition provided by Erikson (Santor & Zuroff, 1994; Chong, Kim, Long, Kim, Ahn, Cho, 2008). Furthermore, ego-integrity is recognized as one of the least examined constructs of the lifespan development theory (Hannah, Domino, Figurado, & Hendrickson, 1996; Jame & Zarrett, 2005). However, despite these criticisms the ego integrity scale used in this study and developed by Ryff & Heincke (1983) is identified by many as the most commonly used reliable and valid measure of ego integrity in a variety of research studies (Santor & Zuroff, 1994; James & Zarrett, 2005; Torges, Stewart, & Duncan, 2008; 2009). Overall, the closed-end results suggest that the process of completing a spiritual life review does not necessarily impact levels of ego integrity for older adults who have no life regrets or few (if any) unresolved conflicts.

However, the responses to the open ended questions indicated that a few participants addressed unresolved issues and reconciled past life events and mistakes from participating in the spiritual life review. Such qualitative changes many not have been adequately captured by pre-post testing on the ego-integrity scale. These findings reflect recent research that suggests ego integrity can be attained through the use of a structured or narrative life review process in late life (Haber, 2006; Torges, Stewart & Duncan, 2009; Hearn, Saulnier, Strayer, Glenham, Koopman, & Marcia, 2012). Specifically, individual responses to the final question 2 “how have you enjoyed participating in this spiritual life review?” suggest that the spiritual life review had a significant impact on some of the participants’ ego-integrity. Findings revealed that not only was this the first time for some to revisit and resolve difficult life experiences that have been ignored but also the first time for most participants to share such intimate details of their spiritual life stories with another person. Consistent with previous findings, the results documented how many older adults expressed joy and satisfaction in life after participating in the formal process of looking back, documenting, and discussing life experiences in a spiritual lens (Lewis, 2001; Moschella, 2011; Thomas & Cohen, 2006; Turesky & Schultz, 2010). Although the results suggest that participating in a brief spiritual life review in three visits benefited some of the older adults in experiencing aspects of ego-integrity (forgiveness of unresolved conflict and reconciliation of past mistakes or regrets), it is unlikely that older adults with less unresolved conflict or regret would experience increased ego integrity from this type of spiritual life review. Additionally, the qualitative findings in this research mirror findings from earlier studies that found older adults with high levels of ego-integrity also reported having had

successful and satisfactory marriages, close-knit relations with family members, experiences of being a caregiver or care receiver, and achievements with guiding younger generations (Ryff & Heincke, 1983; Torges, Stewart, & Duncan, 2008, Chong, Kim, Kong, Kim, Ahn, Cho, 2008).

### **Gerotranscendence**

Consistent with previous findings, the present study showed evidence of gerotranscendence in late life with the majority of older adults in this study (Tornstam, 1997, 1998; Yount, 2009, 2010). Further, the study results are congruent with other research findings that reveal dimensions of gerotranscendence in older adults who experience a transcendent relationship with God/Higher power through prayer, mediation, and reading of sacred scriptures or spiritual literature (Melia, 2002). Findings also echo the cosmic features of gerotranscendence as the majority of older adults reflected on death with equanimity and peace rather than fear (Brewer, 2011; Brown & Lewis, 2003). When specifically focused on spirituality and aging gerotranscendence has been recognized as a naturally occurring stage of late life that is reached by looking back and forward at life with satisfaction and hope about the uncertainty of the future. In this study results confirm other research that shows how a review of one's life and history with a focus on spirituality demonstrates several characteristics of gerotranscendence with older adults such as a reported satisfaction with life, increased interest in solitary activities, acceptance of physical limitations, respect and connection to family's spiritual history, concern for the universe, care for the well-being of others and a desire to share values with children and grandchildren (Snodgrass & Sorajjakool, 2010; Tornstam, 1997; Turesky & Schultz, 2010; Yount, 2009). In summary, completing a spiritual life review

provided an opportunity to confirm gerotranscendence as participants shared significant life events from childhood up to their current age that have influenced their perspectives on the sacred and transcendent aspects of life.

## **Implications**

**Social Work and Gerontology.** The results of the current study offer ideas about how a spiritual life review is useful in addressing important aspects of aging. It is fairly well-known in the field of aging that spirituality is an important factor that promotes and contributes to the overall well-being of older adults (Hodge, 2010; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, 2007; Turesky & Schultz, 2010). Additionally, spirituality has been found to be a supportive coping mechanism for dealing with the increased challenges, trials, and hardships related to aging (Faigin & Pargament, 2011; McFadden & Kozberg, 2008). Furthermore, as spiritual needs and commitments increase with aging so do the needs for clinical assessment and interventions that foster these positive spiritual attributes of older adults (Gotterer, 2001; Mattes, 2008; Moberg, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary for professionals in gerontological social work to not only understand the meaning of spirituality in the lives of older adults but also to understand their own spiritual identity in order to provide ethical and supportive services that match the individual's needs (Hodge, Bonifas, & Chous, 2010; Sheridan, 2009).

Although previous research shows the efficacy of incorporating spirituality into clinical interventions to address many of the needs related to aging there are few empirical studies on the use of a 'spiritual life review' with older adults. Since spirituality, ego-integrity and gerotranscendence are all associated with healthy and positive development in older adults, social work practice should promote interventions

that aim to nurture and facilitate these attributes of aging. Unlike the well-known structured life review process (Haight & Haight 2007) there is no comparable structured approach to a spiritual life review with older adults. However, there are many empirical studies that have used modified versions of the standard life review focusing on spirituality (e.g., spiritual autobiography, spiritual life history, spiritual reminiscence and spiritual life review) with each presenting efficacious outcomes related to meaning in life, ego-integrity and gerotranscendence (Hateley, 1985; Lewis, 2001; MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010; McFadden & Gerl, 1990; Moschella, 2011; Thomas & Cohen, 2006).

A few thoughts on how social workers can address these important developmental tasks associated with aging through a spiritual life review are now offered. First, what distinguishes the current study from other spiritual life review approaches is the inclusion of a participant constructed spiritual lifemap (Hodge, 2005). There are several advantages to this unique spiritual life review approach, which: (1) honors client self-determination and autonomy given that participants are completely self-directed in deciding what events represent their spiritual life; (2) can be empowering for older adults to look back at a lifetime of spiritually oriented events (both positive and negative) and recognize “just how far they’ve come” through life with faith, strength, resilience, hope, and wisdom; (3) represents a strengths perspective as the older adult identifies spiritual assets that can help them face current or future challenges with a renewed sense of spirit and resolve; (4) offers an opportunity for reappraisal and positive reframing (spiritual or not) or validation of negative feelings associated with life events that an older adult may not have been able to reconcile or move beyond; (5) can address unhealthy beliefs,

anxiety, and depression especially with diverse religious cultures; (6) offers an opportunity to address issues or concerns related to end-of life matters.

Second, the spiritual lifemap and the semi-structured questions become the tool for navigating through the spiritual life interview with older adults. With a non-judgmental attitude of respect and understanding, social workers can foster support for older adults to address their unique perspectives on spirituality/religion while they review their life events (Ortiz & Langer, 2002). Additionally, social workers must consider a holistic multi-dimensional perspective when conducting the spiritual life review as it takes into consideration the important aspects that have contributed to the older adult's spiritual development over the lifespan (Moberg, 2005; Ortiz & Langer, 2002; Seicol, 2010; Thomas & Cohen, 2006). Social workers using a spiritual life review in this context can help older adults to understand and accept the way spirituality has shaped their worldviews and perspectives, to re-evaluate negative events in a spiritual lens, to identify meaning and purpose in life, and to recognize aspects of the sacred and transcendent in later life (Hateley, 1985; Hodge, 2005; Lewis, 2001; MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2010; McFadden & Kozberg, 2008; Moschella, 2010; Turesky & Schultz, 2010). Without knowledge or skill to recognize the importance of spirituality in the lives of older adults, social workers could miss out on an opportunity to assist older client in using a spiritually oriented tool that can promote a positive outlook and provide valuable insight to spiritual development (Brewer, 2011; Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, 2007).

Third, it is necessary to ensure a commitment to ethical principles when dealing with spiritual needs as the field of social work is experiencing an increase in the interest

and use of spiritually oriented practices with an ever growing population of diverse older adults (Canda & Furman, 2010; Ellor & McFadden, 2011; Hodge, Bonifas, & Chous, 2010; Lewis, 2001; Moberg, 2005; Sheridan, 2009). The most salient ethical principles recommended for spiritual practice with older adults include client autonomy (e.g., respect for clients spiritual beliefs and determination), spiritual competence (e.g., awareness of one's own spiritual orientations and knowledge of diverse spiritual perspectives through educational pursuits), and professional competence (e.g., pursuit of training on utilizing spiritual interventions). Finally, boundaries are a significant part of all three of the above mentioned principles. Specifically, social workers should never impose their own spiritual beliefs, values or practices on any older adult, and referrals should always be made when appropriate (e.g., Pastor, Rabbi, Shaman, etc.) ensuring that the spiritual needs of the older adult are always met with trust, compassion, empathy and respect (Hodge, Bonifas, & Chous, 2010; Sheridan, 2009) .

### **Future Research**

Knowing the projections of the aging population in the next several decades provides a good rationale for social workers to conduct extensive research on how to meet the spiritual needs of this population. A future research program interest might strive to replicate the current study with a larger heterogeneous group of ethnic and religious older adults in a variety of retirement and healthcare settings (secular and faith-based). Also, adding valid and reliable measures to assess changes in spirituality, religion, meaning in life and gerotranscendence relevant to brief interventions would provide quantitative data to buttress the qualitative results. Another possibility would be to explore the effects of a spiritual life review on mental and psychological health

outcomes (e.g., levels of depression, hopefulness, resilience, optimism, life satisfaction, and quality of life) between older believers and non-believers. Future social work research effort would also be to evaluate and compare the outcomes of a traditional life review process versus a spiritual life review process with older adults as measured by changes in depression, forgiveness, life satisfaction, and overall spiritual well-being. Still other opportunities remain for future research with regard to having more equitable gender representation to determine if there are any gender differences in spirituality or spiritual development (Dalby, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

**Strengths/Limitations.** An evaluation of qualitative responses derived from spiritual life review suggests that it is effective in promoting an understanding of spiritual development, facilitating ego-integrity and confirming aspects of gerotranscendence with older adults. However, the results may not be generalizable for several reasons. First, the sample consisted of a small, convenient sample of 17 older adults residing in a faith-based continuing care retirement community in Florida. Their choice of residence indicates that religion may have been an important aspect of their lives and reflected the group's inherent positive attitude about spiritual life experiences. Therefore the findings must be cautiously applied to residents of a non-faith based continuing care retirement community who might be less comfortable discussing details of spiritual life experiences. Second, there was no ethnic, racial, or religious diversity represented in this group of older adults. All participants in this study were Caucasian and mostly Protestants with the exception of one Catholic, and two non-believers. Therefore, the transferability of the study outcomes was limited by the lack of religious and ethnic diversity in this group of



older adults. Third, besides measuring levels of ego-integrity there were no objective measures used to test the effect of the spiritual life review on participant 'meaning in life' and 'gerotranscendence'. Therefore, the findings from this study are limited to qualitative observations about the perceived benefits of the spiritual life review on those components. Fourth, this study did not seek to understand the relationship between a spiritual life review and mental health factors such as levels of depression, hopefulness, resilience, optimism, life satisfaction, quality of life, or well-being. Fifth, this study did not focus on spirituality and gender differences as this sample was mostly represented by women with only five men participating. Lastly, the sample consisted of a highly accomplished and educated group of older adults with almost all participants having completed college, graduate or post graduate education; thus participants' life experiences may not be compatible with a group of older adults who have different levels of education, careers and lifestyles. Future research is necessary to determine if results of this study would be replicated for diverse groups of older adults in other settings.

Despite the number of limitations, there were strengths of this study that should be noted. Using a qualitative approach of hermeneutic phenomenology produced rich descriptive narratives about the meaning of spirituality across the lifetime that would not be captured through quantitative measures. The research approach produced insights and understanding about spirituality in the lives of older adults through the rigorous systematic process of the hermeneutic circle (Laverly, 2003). The credibility of the research as the 'created text' from the 17 interviews was constructed by the researcher and the interviewee. The 'voice' of the interviewee was represented consistently throughout the study results. Furthermore, the interpretation involved repetitive readings

of the texts, theme identification (analyses), reflection on how the themes answer the research questions and a comparison to related literature that illuminated the phenomenon (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Additionally, the use of multiple sources of data including the participant self-constructed spiritual lifemap, typed notes/timelines, recorded interviews, transcribed records, and field notes ensured the rigor and credibility of the research.

Lastly, the cooperation, interest and support of residents and administrators at the research setting positively affected the success of this spiritual life review study. The fact that the CCRC has its own ‘spiritual life committee’ comprised of residents and administrators was significant to the interest and participation in this study. Additionally, the administrators were instrumental in facilitating the recruitment process by offering the on-site chapel for the three recruiting sessions and also by making private conference rooms available for all meetings with residents. The on-site research provided convenience to residents as they did not have to coordinate transportation to and from meetings. The flexibility of the researcher to meet with residents at their convenience was also helpful in this study. These findings may be transferrable to other similar faith-based retirement settings or to other communities (nursing homes, assisted living, hospice, etc.) but where there is neither support for nor interest in the spirituality of older adults.

## **Summary**

As postulated by Erikson and other researchers, ego-integrity may be achieved when older adults are at the 8<sup>th</sup> decade of life and are able to look back at life with little or no regrets or unresolved conflicts. This process of life review, although associated

with a natural part of aging, is not easy for one to facilitate in casual conversation with others or by ruminating alone but is better achieved through a formal process such as the spiritual life review. Furthermore, the spiritual life review appeared to be a useful technique in understanding spirituality across the lifetime and its influence on spiritual development, meaning in life, and gerotranscendence. Several valuable illustrations were offered reflecting spirituality across different stages of life, and during trials and tribulations. It appears that with aging spirituality becomes more intrinsic and less extrinsically motivated. The spiritual life review offers a modified approach to the structured life review that is readily accepted by spiritually-minded older adults and can assist them in understanding their spiritual needs. Overall, this hermeneutic phenomenology study was able to document a shared meaning of spirituality in the lives of older adults.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

### **Short Portable Mental Status Questionnaire**

#### THE SHORT PORTABLE MENTAL STATUS QUESTIONNAIRE (SPMSQ)

1. What are the date, month, and year?
2. What is the day of the week?
3. What is the name of this place?
4. What is your phone number?
5. How old are you?
6. When were you born?
7. Who is the current president?
8. Who was the president before him?
9. What was your mother's maiden name?
10. Can you count backward from 20 by 3's?

#### SCORING:\*

0-2 errors: normal mental functioning

3-4 errors: mild cognitive impairment

5-7 errors: moderate cognitive impairment

8 or more errors: severe cognitive impairment

\*One more error is allowed in the scoring if a patient has had a grade school education or less.

\*One less error is allowed if the patient has had education beyond the high school level.

Source: Pfeiffer, E. (1975).

## APPENDIX B:

### Demographic Questionnaire

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male
3. Race/Ethnicity (select one):
  - \_\_\_\_\_ African American / Black
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Asian / Asian American / Pacific Islander
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Latino / Latina / Hispanic
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Native American / American Indian
  - \_\_\_\_\_ White / Caucasian / European American
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Biracial or Multicultural (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify)  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Highest level of education completed (select one):
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Less than high school
  - \_\_\_\_\_ High school diploma or equivalent
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Some college
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Associate's degree
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Some graduate school
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Master's degree (M.A., M.S., MBA)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Doctoral degree (Ph.D., M.D., J.D.)
5. Relationship Status (select one):
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Single
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Separated
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Widow/Widower

APPENDIX B (CONTINUED)

- Married or Partnered
- Living with significant other, not married
- Have a significant other, not living together
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please list all the civic, church, and community organizations that you are involved in currently:

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7. Living arrangements (check all that apply):

- Alone
- With spouse / partner
- Assisted Living
- Health Center
- Apartment Complex
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your religious affiliation?

- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Spiritual, not religious
- Christian (please circle): Catholic Protestant
- Other Christian (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- None

9. On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not very religious and 5 being very religious) where would you rate yourself in terms of how religious you consider yourself?

Not Very religious.....1 2 3 4 5..... Very Religious

10. On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not very spiritual and 5 being very spiritual) where would you rate yourself in terms of how spiritual you consider yourself?

Not Very spiritual.....1 2 3 4 5..... Very Spiritual

**APPENDIX C:**

**Ego Integrity Scale (Ryff & Heincke, 1983)**

Below are items which are used by people to describe themselves. Please circle the number that best describe you.

QUESTIONS	Disagree			Agree		
	Strongly	Somewhat	Slightly	Slightly	Somewhat	Strongly
1. If I had to do it all over again, there are very few things about my life that I would change	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I feel generally contented with what I have accomplished in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I wish my life were just beginning so I could avoid many of the mistakes I made earlier in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. In general I would say I have few regrets about my past life.	1	2	3	4	5	6



APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)

QUESTIONS	Disagree			Agree		
	Strongly	Somewhat	Slightly	Slightly	Somewhat	Strongly
5. All in all, I am comfortable with the choices I made regarding my life's work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I still feel angry about certain of my childhood experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. If I had had just a couple more lucky breaks, my life would have turned out much differently.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. My life has been fulfilling, and I am not frightened by the thought of death.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. If I could turn back the clock, there are many things I would do differently.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. It doesn't bother me to think about goals I haven't reached and probably never will.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Reading old diaries and letters usually brings more pain than pleasure	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. One of my greatest disappointments is that I have not been able to do more traveling	1	2	3	4	5	6

APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)

QUESTIONS	Disagree			Agree		
	Strongly	Somewhat	Slightly	Slightly	Somewhat	Strongly
13. I often wish I had been born during a different period of history.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. There are many people whose life I would prefer to my own	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. When I consider the ups and downs of my past life, they somehow fit together in a meaningful way.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. There are some disappointments in life I will never be able to accept.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**APPENDIX D:**

**Hodge's (2005) Spiritual Lifemap Questions**

Spiritual Assets	Exploratory Questions
Relationship with God	How did your relationship with God help you to address that problem? What did God teach you about that situation? Have you been able to apply those lessons in other situation? How has God supported you in times of crises? What are the spiritual strengths of your relationship with God? How does God view you/feel about you?
Spiritual Beliefs	What does your faith teach about trials? Is there a metaphysical reason for life's challenges? What are your favorite scriptures? Are there certain scriptures that really speak to you during times of stress? What spiritual principles have you learned from life's experiences?
Spiritual Rituals	Are there certain rituals or regular spiritual practices that help you cope with life's trials? Are some rituals particularly effective in certain situations? Are there particular rituals that strengthen your relationship with God?
Church-Based Social Support	What role has your church or faith community played during the crisis? Are there relationships in your church that are particularly supportive? Has there been a spiritual mentor in your life that has been particularly significant? How have these individuals assisted you in coping with trials?

**APPENDIX E:**

**Haight's (1988) Life Review Form**

<b>Life Review by "stage"</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Childhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What is the very first thing you can remember in your life? Go as far back as you can.</li><li>2. What other things can you remember about when you were very young?</li><li>3. What was life for you as a child?</li><li>4. What were your parents like?</li><li>5. What were their strengths and weaknesses?</li><li>6. Did you have any brothers or sisters? If so, tell me what each was like.</li><li>7. Did someone close to you die when you were growing up?</li><li>8. Did someone important to you go away?</li><li>9. Do you ever remember having an accident?</li><li>10. Do you remember being in a very dangerous situation?</li><li>11. Was something that was important to you lost or destroyed?</li><li>12. Was religion a large part of your life?</li><li>13. Did you enjoy being a boy or girl?</li></ol>

APPENDIX E (CONTINUED)

Adolescence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. When you think about yourself and your life as a teenager, what is the first thing you can remember about that time?</li><li>2. What other things stand out in your memory about being a teenager?</li><li>3. Who were the important people for you (parents, brothers, sisters, friends, teachers, those you were especially close to, those you admired, those you wanted to be like)? Tell me about them.</li><li>4. Did you attend church or synagogue and youth groups?</li><li>5. Did you go to school? What was its meaning to you?</li><li>6. Did you work during those years?</li><li>7. Tell me of any hardships you experienced at this time.</li><li>8. Do you remember feeling that there was not enough food or necessities of life as a child or adolescent?</li><li>9. Do you remember feeling left along, abandoned or that you did not have enough love or care as a child or adolescent?</li><li>10. What were the pleasant things about your adolescence?</li><li>11. What was the most unpleasant thing about your adolescence?</li><li>12. All things considered, would you say you were happy or unhappy as a teenager?</li><li>13. Do you remember your first attraction to another person?</li><li>14. How did you feel about sexual activities and your own sexual identity?</li></ol>
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APPENDIX E (CONTINUED)

<p>Family and Home</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did your parents get along?</li> <li>2. How did other people in your home get along?</li> <li>3. What was the atmosphere in your home?</li> <li>4. Were you punished as a child? For what? Who did the punishing? Who was “boss”?</li> <li>5. When you wanted something from your parents, how did you go about getting it?</li> <li>6. What kind of person did your parents like the most? The least?</li> <li>7. Who were you closest to in your family?</li> <li>8. Who in your family were you most like? In what way?</li> </ol>
<p>Adulthood</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Now I’d like to talk to you about your life as an adult, from when you were in your 20s up to today. Tell me of the most important events that happened in your adulthood.</li> <li>2. What place did religion play in your life?</li> <li>3. What was life like for you in your 20s and 30s?</li> <li>4. What kind of person were you? What did you enjoy?</li> <li>5. Tell me about your work. Did you enjoy work? Did you earn an adequate living? Did you work hard during those years?</li> <li>6. Did you form significant relationships with other people?</li> <li>7. Did you marry? [Yes] What kind of person was your spouse? [No] Why not?</li> <li>8. Do you think marriages get better or worse over time? Were you married more than once?</li> <li>9. On the whole, would you say you had a happy or an unhappy marriage?</li> <li>10. Was sexual intimacy important to you?</li> <li>11. What were some of the main difficulties you encountered during your adult years?</li> </ol>

APPENDIX E (CONTINUED)

<p>Summary</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. On the whole, what kind of life do you think you have had?</li> <li>2. If everything were to be the same, would you like to live your life over again?</li> <li>3. If you were going to live your life over again, what would you change? Leave unchanged?</li> <li>4. We have been talking about your life for quite some time now. Let's discuss your overall feelings and ideas about your life. What would you say have been the three main satisfactions in your life? Why were they satisfying?</li> <li>5. Everyone has had disappointments. What have been the main disappointments in your life?</li> <li>6. What was the hardest thing you had to face in your life? Please describe it.</li> <li>7. What was the happiest period of your life? What about it made it the happiest period? Why is your life less happy now?</li> <li>8. What was the unhappiest period of your life? Why is our life more happy now?</li> <li>9. What was the proudest moment in your life?</li> <li>10. If you could stay the same age all your life, what age would you choose? Why?</li> <li>11. How do you think you have made out in life—better or worse than what you hoped for?</li> <li>12. Let's talk a little about you as you are now. What are the best things about the age you are now?</li> <li>13. What are the worst things about being the age you are now?</li> <li>14. What are the most important things to you in your life today?</li> <li>15. What do you hope will happen to you as you grow older?</li> <li>16. What do you fear will happen to you as you grow older?</li> <li>17. Have you enjoyed participating in this review of your life?</li> </ol>
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## APPENDIX F:

### Site Letter of Approval

*It's Our Community's Heart That Sets Us Apart.*

January 7, 2011

Alicia Stinson, MSW, PhD Student  
Principal Investigator – Spiritual Life Review Dissertation  
University of South Florida (USF)  
College of Community and Behavioral Sciences (CBCS)  
School of Social Work – MGY 132  
4202 E Fowler Ave.  
Tampa, FL 33620

Re: Memo of Understanding to Conduct Research at Florida Homes, Inc. Florida

Dear Ms. Stinson and USF IRB Committee:

Florida Homes, Inc. of Florida agrees to allow Alicia Stinson, PhD Student to conduct research related to her proposed dissertation titled: Spiritual Life Review with Older Adults: Making Meaning In Late Life Development.

We are providing this letter to show:

1. Our administrator has reviewed the research and found it appropriate for the population targeted at our facility.
2. We have appropriate resources available to allow for the research to take place in an IRB approved manner.
3. Adequate provisions are in place to handle unanticipated/adverse events that may occur.

Thank you,



Executive Director



## APPENDIX G:

### USF IRB Approval Letters



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 0001069  
12911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., JDC031 • Tampa, FL 33612-7199  
813/974-3433 • FAX: 813/974-8812

May 31, 2012

Alicia Stinson  
School of Social Work

RE: Expedited Approval for Continuing Review  
IRB#: Pro0004625  
Title: Spiritual Life Reviews with Older Adults: Finding Meaning in Late Life

Study Approval Period: 6/13/2012 to 6/13/2013

Dear Alicia Stinson:

On 5/31/2012, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above protocol for the period indicated above. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number:

- (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.

Protocol Document(s):

Spiritual Life Review Ch123 Chair Reviewed April 2011.doc 5/20/2011 10:53 AM 0.01

Consent Document(s):

Study is closed to enrollment

## APPENDIX G (CONTINUED)

focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Christina Calandro  
USF IRB Professional Staff

APPENDIX G (CONTINUED)



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
179C1 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC036 • Tampa, FL 33613-4799  
813/974-3633 • FAX 813/974-3611

May 31, 2012

Alicia Stinson  
School of Social Work

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Continuing Review  
IRB#: Pro00004625  
Title: Spiritual Life Reviews with Older Adults: Finding Meaning in Late Life

Study Approval Period: 6/13/2012 to 6/13/2013

Dear Alicia Stinson:

On 5/31/2012, Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above protocol for the period indicated above. It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review based on the federal expedited category number:

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(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.

Protocol Document(s):

Spiritual Life Review Ch123 Chair Reviewed 5/20/2011 10:53 0.01  
April 2011.doc AM

Consent Document(s):

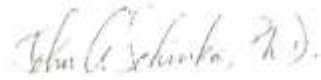
Study is closed to enrollment

APPENDIX G (CONTINUED)

**Please reference the above IRB protocol number in all correspondence** regarding this protocol with the IRB or the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance. It is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



John Schinka Ph.D., Chair  
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Various Menzel, CCRP, USF IRB Professional Staff

## APPENDIX H:

### Spiritual Lifemap Instructions

#### CREATING A SPIRITUAL LIFEMAP

Basic idea is to sketch spiritually significant life events on paper. Similar to a roadmap a spiritual lifemap tell us where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going.

1. Use a pen, pencil, marker, crayon, or paint
2. Draw a path, a roadway, or a single line on the paper to represent your life journey
3. Break the path into years or decades
4. Fill in events along the path using symbols, drawings or sketches to represent significant life events
  - a. You can use basic elements such as pencil sketches to represent an event (e.g., a cross, lightning bolt, cloud, sun, bird, etc.)
  - b. You can use clipped material from magazines and newspapers to depict significant life events (e.g., auto accident, airplane for travel, flowers, wedding rings, baby, etc.)

Materials you can use include colored pencils, crayons, markers, paints, pictures, and newspaper or magazine clippings. You might need glue sticks, scissors, rulers, and other materials as needed.

**Remember: There is no correct way to draw a spiritual lifemap. A drawing using words or stick figures is just as valid as one with more elaborate portrayals.**

Definition of Spiritual Lifemap – Illustrated account of one’s own relationship with God (Transcendent, or Higher Power) over time. A map of one’s spiritual life depicted through significant life events (Hodge, 2005).

## APPENDIX I:

### Spiritual Life Interview Questions

**IQ1 (Childhood):** In looking back at your childhood were you able to identify any spiritually significant events? **(EQ):** Can you tell me about the first spiritual events you can remember in your life?

**IQ2 (Family of Origin):** Describe the religious/spiritual traditions you grew up with and how your family expressed spiritual beliefs? **(EQ):** What were your parents/grandparents like spiritually? Did you have any brothers or sisters and were they involved in the same spiritual community?

**IQ3 (Adolescence):** When you think about yourself and your life as a teenager what is the most significant or important spiritual memory you have from that time? **(EQ):** Did you have a spiritual mentor? Did you attend youth groups?

**IQ4 (Adulthood):** Now I would like to talk to you about your life as an adult, from when you were in your 20's up to now. Tell me about the most important/significant spiritual experiences that happened in your adulthood?

**IQ5 (Family of Procreation):** Tell me about your marriage and/or children and your spirituality as a family? **(No exploratory question)**

**IQ6 (Trials and Hardships):** If you had any trials or hardships in your lifetime what was your relationship with God/Higher Power like during those times? **(EQ):** What are your favorite scriptures or readings?

**FQ1 (Meaning of Spirituality):** Could you please take a moment to describe what spirituality means to you?

**FQ2 (Satisfaction in Study):** How have you enjoyed participating in this spiritual life review?