

# **Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors: A Mission for Catholic Primary Schools**

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## **Abstract**

Spiritual development in the outdoors within the school setting is a seemingly untapped area of research. In this dissertation I present the theory and reasons why outdoor spiritual experiences provide rich benefits for children and adult leaders alike, offering practical ideas for schools along the way. I also highlight the current state of play in Catholic primary schools as regards this subject and put forward why I feel that developing spirituality in the outdoors is a mission for today.

The study begins with defining spirituality and considers children's spirituality in particular. It gives a historical overview of our changing relationship with the outdoors and reviews what we can learn about spiritual development in the outdoors from biblical sources, spiritual traditions and recent Church teaching. I will pay special interest to Pope Francis' recent, and for the purposes of this dissertation, very timely encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*.

I investigate the practice of spiritual development in the outdoors with Catholic school children today. This is done through my research based on interviews with teachers and spiritual directors and activities carried out with a focus group of children from my school. I present how the outdoors is used for spiritual purposes as well as the advantages and disadvantages of developing spirituality in the outdoors. Models and aspects of leadership are explored throughout.

To conclude, recommendations for developing spirituality in the outdoors with children are offered to leaders in Catholic primary schools, including my own school, and to anyone else who is inspired to take up this mission.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1 Purpose, Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate why I believe that the use of the outdoors for spiritual development is a mission for Catholic primary schools. Although Catholic school leaders are my key audience, I hope that my findings can support other types of schools, groups or individuals looking to deepen their understanding of spiritual development using the outdoors.

To do this, I aim to explore spirituality in itself and children's particular openness to it. I will investigate the principles of outdoor spirituality from a historical and Catholic perspective. I will then focus on practice within various contexts, including my current school setting, St. Jude's R.C. Primary School<sup>1</sup>. Throughout I will be considering the impact on leadership.

My objective is to provide some key recommendations for embedding the development of spirituality in the outdoors, which will not only serve my own school, St. Jude's, but will also offer practical steps for Catholic primary schools in general.

### **1.2 Rationale**

I love being in the outdoors as it has always been the place where I feel closest to God and most spiritual. The more time I spend outside with my toddler son, the more I am aware of the importance of being outdoors on child development and well-being. Seeing my child scream with delight at spotting a spider on the ground or exclaim a whole-hearted "Wow!" at the moon in the night sky remind me of how the natural environment helps us develop our sense of self, understand our place in the world and connect with something greater than ourselves. These small yet mighty experiences are a constant reminder of the spiritual beings that we are.

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<sup>1</sup> For ethical reasons, I have adopted a fictitious name.

From a personal point of view, it is for this reason that I wish to explore the development of spirituality in the outdoors with children.

From a professional perspective, as a teacher within the Catholic school setting where spirituality is central to school life, I have mainly experienced spiritual activities through the indoor setting in the form of liturgies and collective worship, for example. Very often, imagery or symbols from the outdoors are brought in: for example, photos of beautiful landscapes often act as inspiration for prayer or a natural object such as a shell or stone is chosen to be placed in a focus area. Although I feel that there is definitely a place for indoor spirituality, it really surprises me that developing spirituality outdoors has not been more prevalent, seeing as it is the place where many people, including myself, claim to feel most spiritual.

A few years ago, I taught at a state primary school, Woodland Primary<sup>2</sup>, where outdoor experience was part of the fabric of the school and embedded into the curriculum, supported by its onsite woodland and working farm. Although activities were not labelled 'spiritual' and there was very little mention of God, I came to realise that, in that particular setting, being outdoors and connected to nature *was* the school's spirituality and spiritual development happened incidentally. Furthermore, it was there that I first realised the importance of outdoor experience for the development of the whole child and the spirit.

My current school, which I will describe below, has a strong Catholic ethos. However, spiritual development, although very vibrant, has largely been an indoor experience, as is seemingly the case in many schools. I therefore think that the school could greatly benefit from developing spirituality in the outdoors. Of course, some schools already use the outdoors for spiritual purposes, to a lesser or greater degree, and it is leaders in these schools who I wish to approach, among others, to participate in my research.

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<sup>2</sup> For ethical reasons, I have adopted a fictitious name.

Another reason to embark on this study is that it appears to be a relatively untouched subject. There is a plethora of material that has been written about spiritual development within schools, particularly Catholic schools, and there is a vast array of materials which talk generally about spirituality and connection to nature. However, there appears to be very limited reading material, if anything at all, which concretely talks about developing spirituality using the outdoors within the school context. References are made to it: for example, encouraging in pupils a sense of awe and wonder at the natural world or suggestions for the creation of prayer gardens. I would therefore like to research and gather information to benefit my own school setting but also to benefit primary Catholic schools as a whole and other types of schools whose teachers and leaders may wish to refer to my findings.

Let us think about the national context. What does the National Curriculum say about spirituality? The National Curriculum Council (1993:2, Online) stated that the spiritual dimension applied not only to Religious Education and collective worship “but to every area of the curriculum and to all aspects of school life”. This suggests an integrated approach to spirituality. However, it seems that spiritual development is something that is very much left up to the school to manage and leaders often view spirituality as an ‘add-on’. Moreover, I feel that there is a growing, inspection-fuelled culture of getting boxes ticked which serves to undervalue the true significance and depth of spirituality. Of particular importance to OFSTED, schools in England are now required to promote SMSC, ‘Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’. The ‘Spiritual’ aspect of this umbrella term is defined as: “Explore beliefs and experience; respect faiths, feelings and values; enjoy learning about oneself, others and the surrounding world; use imagination and creativity; reflect” (Citizenship Foundation, 2015, Online). As we can see, these are very broad terms. It is worth noting that although there is a mention of the outdoors – “enjoy learning about...the surrounding world” - there is no expectation to develop spirituality in the outdoors.

Interestingly, in the national context, there has been a big push for outdoor learning in primary schools and huge amounts of time and energy have been invested into promoting the use of the outdoors and developing outdoor spaces. This has particularly been the case with the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum due to the rich benefits of outdoor experience on child development, for example: physical activity, freedom and movement; unique experiences with the natural world, weather and the seasons; problem-solving skills; creativity; imagination, inventiveness and resourcefulness, and well-being. (Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, 2015, Online). However, although I totally agree with all these reasons for promoting outdoor experience, most explanations ignore the benefit of spiritual development for the child, which in my opinion is paramount. If children learn best outdoors, what is not to say that they develop more spiritually outdoors?

Catholic education claims to offer an education which is very much holistic, integrating the secular and religious dimensions of life. As Treston (1991:10) reminds us: "Spirituality is not something added to our humanity, it is the very essence of what it means to be human". Therefore, spirituality in the Catholic school should infuse the whole life of the school, underpinned by the centrality of Jesus. Catholic schools should aim to practise the sacramental vision that we can find God within the context of everyday events and through all subjects. "One of the mistakes we make is to think that God only comes to us through religion. Wherever there is beauty and truth, there is God" (Beckett, 1994). Furthermore, Catholic schools should study the work of our Creator: "To explore the universe is to explore God's handiwork, a spiritual motivation that is denied to those who view science purely as a means to material benefits" (Jones and Barrie, 2015:103). One would think, therefore, that we would find spirituality being developed in the outdoor setting much more than it currently appears to be. However, when a Catholic primary school has its Section 48 inspection, it is judged under the categories of Catholic Life, Collective Worship and R.E. Education and nowhere in that collective framework does it claim that any of this has to happen outdoors.

There is no explicit expectation or guidance on developing spirituality in the outdoors in either the secular or Catholic setting. I strongly believe that there is a need to marry the spiritual and the outdoors as: “every part of creation has the potential to become a medium through which God can speak to us, can meet with us” (Osborn, 1990:14). Without denying the importance of indoor spirituality, the purpose of this dissertation is to explain why developing spirituality in the outdoors is a mission for Catholic primary schools, including my own school, St. Jude’s.

### **1.3 Context**

My current school is St. Jude’s R.C. Primary School. It is a Roman Catholic primary school set in an old shipbuilding town in the North-East of England. The town has a population of around 50,000, many of whose forefathers came from Ireland seeking work. The school has a very strong history in the town having celebrated its one hundredth birthday last year and generations of the same families have attended the school. It has strong links with the parish of the same name.

The school (and its morning nursery) has a population of around 200 pupils, serving children from three to eleven years of age. Its location is in the top five per cent of most deprived areas for schools nationally. It has thirty-seven per cent of pupils on free school meals, ten per cent with special educational needs and five children with English as an additional language. The percentage of baptised Catholics is thirty-five per cent and the percentage of Catholic teachers is ninety per cent.

In 2012, OFSTED graded the school as ‘Good’ overall and in all four areas of the report: Achievement of Pupils; Quality of Teaching; Behaviour and Safety of Pupils; and, Leadership and Management. The report states: “This is a very caring school where pupils achieve well and reach standards that are above those found nationally by the end of Year 6” (OFSTED, 2012:1, Online). In the Section 48 report, the Diocese also graded the school as ‘Good’ overall and in all three areas of Catholic Life, Collective Worship and Religious Education. It states that “Pupils make

a good contribution to the Catholic Life of the school and benefit greatly from it” (2013:6, Online) and that “All leaders...have very high expectations for the promotion and on-going development of the Catholic Life of the school, which is a priority, along with the spiritual and moral development of pupils” (2013:7, Online).

The school is still on its original site with its two-storied Victorian building, school playground and field. The outdoor area has recently been improved, including the creation of an allotment, an outdoor gym and a mud kitchen in the nursery. Since the outdoor area is beginning to be embedded into the curriculum more, I feel that now is the perfect time to look at ways of developing spirituality in the outdoors. I hope that this dissertation will have a positive impact on St. Jude’s and also on other schools in the future.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

I plan to do a literature review which refers to my subject area, studying books, chapters, articles and essays as well as online materials. Key search words or phrases will include: ‘spirituality’, ‘children’s spirituality’, ‘spiritual development in the Catholic primary school’, ‘spiritual experience’, ‘the spirit’, ‘outdoor spirituality’, ‘developing spirituality in the outdoors’, ‘spirituality and nature’, and ‘spirituality and creation’. I will look at biblical references to outdoor spirituality and so my searches will also include ‘the Old Testament and nature’ and ‘Jesus and nature’. I will also refer to Catholic traditions which have developed their spirituality in the outdoors and I will research the Franciscans and the Jesuits, for example. I will refer to Church documents, in particular Pope Francis’ recent encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si’*.

To carry out my research, I will interview and learn from adults who have already developed spirituality in the outdoors with children, both within the primary school setting and beyond; I plan to interview two Catholic primary school teachers and two Christian spiritual directors. To further my research, I will also gather information from children. I will create a focus group of four Year 5/6 children in my

school for which I will plan and lead some spiritual activities outdoors. This will be their first experience of such activities outside. I will interview them before and afterwards and use their answers, as well as my own observations, for further data collection. All interviews will be recorded. I will analyse the information I gather using a qualitative approach and interpret it in light of the literature reviewed. This will lead to general recommendations for the development of spirituality in the outdoors in the Catholic primary school setting, and for St. Jude's in particular.

### **1.5 Summary**

To summarise so far, I have explained the purpose of my dissertation - to demonstrate why I believe that the use of the outdoors for spiritual development is a mission for Catholic primary schools – as well as the aims and overall objective of my study. I have discussed the rationale behind my choice of subject area, from a personal, professional and national perspective. I have also talked about the originality of the subject matter: it is seemingly a largely untapped area of research and it involves the blending together of two large facets of primary education – spiritual development and outdoor experience. I have described my school context and explained the methodology for my research.

In Chapter 2, I will undertake a literature review. Since there is limited material which refers explicitly to developing spirituality using the outdoors in the Catholic school setting, I will approach the subject more generally, looking at spiritual development and the outdoors. I will consider the subject from a historical perspective, looking into the theory behind Catholic teachings and traditions, to see what it can teach us about this area and what it presents for leadership.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I discussed the purpose, aims and objectives of writing this dissertation. I also explained the rationale behind it from a personal and professional point of view. I described the context of my school, St. Jude's, and the methodology I will use to carry out my research. In this section, I will embark upon my literature review. Because of the apparent lack of substantial material on developing spirituality in the outdoors for schools or Catholic primary schools, I will look at what has been written about spirituality using the outdoors generally.

Firstly, I think that it is important to define what is meant by 'spirituality'. This will lead on to a discussion about the development of children's spirituality in particular, seeing as the focus of this dissertation is children in Catholic primary schools. Next, I will consider spirituality using the outdoors from a general point of view and present the supposed historical shift in this type of spirituality. I will then discuss biblical references which relate to spiritual development using the outdoors, starting with the Old Testament and then moving on to the New Testament, signalling Jesus's own spiritual teaching and experience. I will then look at spiritual traditions within the Catholic faith which have been inspired by the natural environment to see what we can learn from them. I will also consider the Church's teaching in more recent times with reference to Pope Francis' recent encyclical on the care for our common home, *Laudato Si'*. I will also allude to particular leadership styles which are illustrated through the literature. I will end this chapter by drawing up a list of questions which emerge following my reading and which I would like to pose to participants in this study. These will form the basis of my research.

## 2.2 What is Spirituality?

And so, let's begin by asking the question, what exactly is spirituality? There are countless definitions of 'spirituality'; hence the term can seem rather nebulous. Perhaps, this is because spirituality is such a personal thing.

West-Burham (2002) offers a secular definition of spirituality:

- The search for self
- The search for truth
- The search for social justice
- The search for community

Spirituality is also seen as a universal human capacity, which may or may not have religious connotations:

an innate ability to show awareness or consciousness of the surrounding world shown through wonder, a sense of compassion and love towards this world and everything in it, and for some people a relationship with a transcendent being, who can also be immanent in the individual (Taylor and Francis Online, 2015, Online).

Notice that this particular definition mentions the surrounding world.

The National Curriculum (1993:2, Online) states that:

Spirituality is something that is fundamental to the human condition. It has to do with relationship with other people and God. It has to do with the universal search for individual identity – with our responses to challenging experiences such as death, suffering, beauty and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which we live.

This particular definition of spirituality includes a relationship with God and other people but not necessarily a relationship with the rest of creation.

David O'Malley (2007:9) draws upon a youth worker publication and defines spirituality as a desire to be connected to the Other, to others and to the world around us:

Spirituality is about the other, either the other in terms of a God or a transcendent being, or the other in terms of being different to the more mundane areas of life. Spirituality is something to do with relationship and

connection – both with people and in community, and with the environment and the world.

In Catholic tradition, spirituality is the very essence of what it means to be human - it is our life's purpose - and in fact the word 'spirituality' is derived from the Latin word *spirare*, meaning 'to breathe'. Antonio Botana (2004:52) describes this essence:

Spirituality expresses our life's deepest meaning, the *spirit* that enlivens our every action and our way of relating with the world, with our neighbours and with God. It is like the common thread that runs through and guides all our steps, giving unity and sense to our journey.

As you can see from these definitions, they are rich and varied and I think that it is important to recognise that most definitions include one or a mix of the following: relationship to oneself, relationship to others, relationship to the Other or a transcendent being, relationship to the world around us. Therefore some, but not all, definitions of spirituality include a connection to the outdoor world.

Everybody is a spiritual being, whether or not they are in tune with their spiritual dimension. However, it is widely acknowledged that children are naturally more open to spirituality than adults, "for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew, 19:14). David Hay and Rebecca Nye explain three reasons why children are more open to spirituality: their ability to be in the 'here and now'; their awareness of mystery and awe; and, their intensity of feeling, all three of which are subdued in adult life (in Hayes and Gearon, 2002:174-5). Cane and Duennes (2005:71) explain that the spiritual nurturing of children is so important because it is an essential part of the health and well-being of the human person. They recommend the use of the outdoors as an easy way to nurture children spiritually: "Reconnecting to the Source of Life and to the beauty and abundance of nature through daily rituals and prayer are simple ways to encourage the spiritual growth and development of children".

### **2.3 Spirituality and the Outdoors – A Historical Overview**

I think that it important to understand historically what our relationship has been with the outdoor world in terms of our spirituality.

Throughout the brief span that the human species has been upon this beautiful planet our interpretation of our relationship with the natural world has shifted, both consciously and unconsciously.... Running parallel has been humankind's developing and shifting attempts to define, explain and understand the great mystery of Creation itself (Blindell, 2001:1, Online).

The outdoor environment is, in my opinion, our natural environment. Adam and Eve were created in a garden which they were to tend to and live in. Throughout history there has been a strong connection with being outdoors and feeling spiritual. When our ancestors looked at the natural world, they saw their faith in its wonder and glory. They looked at nature with awe. They saw the sun and other natural phenomena as emanating the spirit world or the Divine, and worshipped, revered or feared them. They made deities of place, mountain, river, sea, the sky and the seasons. Osborn explains: the "sense of awe, that natural urge to worship, has been the inspiration and basis for nature religions throughout the history of human culture...However many would argue that the biblical religions have set their faces against this basic human experience" (Osborn, 1990:3). With the advent of monotheistic religions, there grew a negative view towards creation due to its association with pagan idolatries. A dualistic view was formed which saw nature as material and of this earth, created by a separate heavenly God.

This dualistic view pulled people away from accessing God through nature and the outdoors. Additionally, the development of indoor places of worship to keep shelter from the elements further brought spiritual practice into the indoor domain. Habits cemented over time. Rabbi Panitz (2013, Online) describes the paradox that has occurred:

Religiously, we have handicapped ourselves by focusing on indoor spirituality almost exclusively. Most of our worship and most of our study, and even most of our socializing, take place in indoor settings. On the other hand, we know that some people connect to the Infinite all the better when they are in the Great Outdoors.

Due to these historical circumstances, I believe that Christianity and the Catholic faith have largely kept formal spiritual practice as an indoor activity. I feel that this norm for indoor spiritual practice has shaped schools too. Along with the traditional predominance of classroom-based activity, I feel that this is a key reason why we see so much spiritual practice within schools happening indoors, not outdoors. However, I believe that our faith has always been, in essence, creation-centered. Perhaps this is the natural basis of all religions or as Osborn says “the basic human experience”. If you ask people about their most spiritual moment, it often involves a meeting with the sacred in the natural world. Matthew Fox, a former Dominican priest and now theologian, named and articulated ‘Creation Spirituality’ in the 1970s, which integrates the wisdom of Eastern and Western spirituality and global indigenous culture. He writes:

Creation Spirituality is not a newly invented path, but for twentieth century Westerners it is a newly discovered path.’ He further adds, ‘Creation Spirituality is a tradition: it has a past; it has historical and biblical roots; it boasts a communion of saints (Fox, 2015, Online).

I intend to present the case that, although there has been an overriding prevalence for indoor-based spirituality in Church and education, there are many examples throughout Catholic history where spirituality has been strongly linked to the outdoor environment and where creation has served spiritual development very deeply. Let us first look at what the Bible teaches us about developing spirituality in the outdoors.

## **2.4 The Bible and Spirituality in the Outdoors**

In many of the Old Testament stories, we see God communicating to us through his natural world, demonstrating His power over nature and His immense love for His people. Take the Creation story: “Let there be light!” He commanded, and there was light. In the Exodus story God rescued Moses and the Israelites from the advancing Egyptian army with His power over the sea: “Yahweh drove back the sea with a strong easterly wind all night, and he made dry land of the sea. The waters parted and the sons of Israel went on dry ground right into the sea, walls of water

to right and to left of them” (Exodus 14: 21-23). In the Noah story, God floods the earth because it had become too violent, saving Noah and his family and a pair of each species of animal. He makes a covenantal relationship not just with humans but with all creation not to destroy earth again, giving the rainbow as a sign (Genesis 9:12).

In the Creation story, we see that God views His creation as ‘good’ and gives His earth as a gift to us: “God blessed them, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth’” (Gen 1:28). However, the word ‘masters’, or in some translations ‘dominion’, has been seen to encourage the unbridled exploitation of nature, depicting man as domineering and destructive by nature. In fact, this is a grave misinterpretation of ‘masters’ or ‘dominion’. For kingship at the time meant protecting and serving your realm. Rather, we are to be stewards of the earth, to serve and care for it, in the image of God’s loving kingship over us, as the second creation story confirms: “Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Likewise, the Noah story has a deep environmental message: that we are to preserve the diversity of plant and animal species that God has created, fulfilling our part of the covenant.

Just as the Old Testament demonstrates how God communicates to us through His created world, it also demonstrates how we can find God in nature and communicate with Him through the world around us. The writers of the psalms show us how to meditate on the wonders of God’s beautiful creation, thanking Him and proclaiming His glory. Psalm 104 announces:

Bless Yahweh, my soul.  
Yahweh my God, how great you are!  
Clothed in majesty and glory,  
wrapped in a robe of light!

You stretch the heavens out like a tent,  
you build your palace on the waters above;  
using the clouds as your chariot,  
you advance on the wings of the wind...

Psalm 96: 11-12 shows how creation itself is invoked to join in praise of its Creator: “Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy”.

And so, the Old Testament seems to show us a symbiotic relationship between God, mankind and his created world: it shows us how God connects to us through nature and we can connect to God through nature; moreover, nature itself seems to proclaim God. The Old Testament also teaches us to care for the earth and serve it.

It seems no coincidence that God yet again communicates to us through nature in the New Testament to herald the birth of His only Son and then to tell of His death. He uses the sky and light to do this: the bright star over Bethlehem signals Jesus’ entry into the world (Matthew 2:2) and the darkening of the sky announcing His departure from this world (Mark 15:33).

Through the life of Jesus, we learn a lot about developing spirituality in the outdoors. Jesus spent much of His time outdoors, teaching as a spiritual leader, and texts reveal that He had great affection for the natural world. He appreciated the beauty of nature: “Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28-29). He lived in full harmony with creation and just as God communicated His transformative power and love for us through nature, we too see Jesus fulfilling this, depicted so beautifully in the miracles He performed: we see Him turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12), increasing the five loaves and two fish to feed five thousand men (Matthew 14:13-21) and calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41).

Jesus used the outdoor environment to help develop spirituality in others, perhaps knowing that it is something that everyone can connect with. The images Jesus used in his parables to teach spiritual truths were rich in nature imagery. Parables

featuring seeds, weeds, wheat, yeast, fish and trees teach about the Kingdom of God for example (Mark 4; Matthew 13; Luke 13: 6-9; 21:29-30). He used nature metaphorically to deepen our understanding of His purpose here on earth: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35), “I am the true vine” (John 15:1), “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), for example. He actually became nature itself: the bread and wine became His body and blood for us to share and the Holy Spirit was made visible in the form of a dove, wind and flames of fire. Perhaps the message is not that He became present in those natural elements alone but rather to confirm His everlasting presence in everything.

In the New Testament, we see how the power of the landscape helps to develop spirituality, for example through the mountains, the sea, gardens or the desert. Many prominent spiritual moments take place on mountains, for example the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). It was in the mountains that Jesus appointed the twelve (Mark 3:13) and that the risen Jesus commissioned His disciples: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations”. (Matthew 28:19). A mountain was also the site of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Silf (2011: 17-18) explains that mountains give us a view from the top and a different perspective on our lives, leading us to a new vision. She continues: “For as long as humankind has been engaged in spiritual searching, we have turned to the mountains for inspiration and challenge, and seen the ascent as a metaphor of our spiritual journey”.

The sea is another landscape in which we find Jesus developing spirituality in others. He often taught on the shore or out of a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Here is the setting for his call of the first disciples, the fishermen. Here is also where the risen Jesus meets for the last time with His disciples as they are fishing, where he makes a fire, cooks them a breakfast of fresh fish, talks with them on the shore and tells Peter, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). And it was a storm on the Sea of Galilee which Jesus calmed with a word and eased the fear of the disciples who asked themselves: “Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him” (Mark 4:41). Silf (2011:24) explains how the sea is a sacred space where one meets the

immanent and transcendent God: “To walk the seashore is to allow the mystery (of the ocean) to touch the edges of our everyday world’.

The garden is another landscape where Jesus developed spirituality: there He went to pray, for example in the Garden of Gethsemane before being handed over to be crucified. Another such landscape is the desert: Jesus retreated to the desert, it being a place of “stillness and quietness that makes it possible for the mind to withdraw from the distraction of the world and its cares and devote itself to the contemplation of God” (Louth, 2003:2). McDonagh (1986:134) says that the natural environment, such as the landscapes described above, “points to the ultimate mystery at the heart of the world which continually calls human beings to a deeper communion with the Earth and with God”.

Jesus very much showed us how we can develop spirituality using the outdoors. He appreciated the beauty of nature and paid attention to it, referring regularly to the natural world around Him. He used nature in His miracles and teachings to show His serving love for us, to inspire faith in Him and to deepen our understanding. He became part of nature itself, thus promising His everlasting presence with us. He used the backdrop of landscapes which enhanced key spiritual moments, connecting Him and us very deeply to the earth and our Creator.

## **2.5 Spiritual Traditions and the Outdoors**

Let us turn now to spiritual traditions within Catholicism and how their spirituality has been inspired by the outdoor environment. There are many traditions throughout the history of the Church which have used the outdoors as part of their spiritual development, reaping the benefits of connecting to God through nature. Within the limits of this dissertation, I will look at four traditions: the Celts, the Benedictines, the Franciscans and the Jesuits.

Traditional Celtic spirituality emerged from the fusion of the Christian tradition and the pre-Christian traditional, pagan religion on the island of Iona. It is particularly

sensitive to the presence of God in the natural world. McDonagh (1986: 205) explains that the Celt was very much God-intoxicated whose spirituality was based on an intense sense of presence:

But this presence was always mediated through some finite, this-world reality, so that it would be difficult to imagine a spirituality more down to earth than this one. The sense of God's immanence in his creation was so strong in Celtic spirituality as to amount sometimes almost to pantheism.

Newell (1997:25) talks about this sense of presence when he alludes to the hymn of St. Patrick, himself a Celt, who brought Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century. He says that the words of his hymn "draw our attention not simply to the goodness of what has been created but to a perception that within creation there is something of the presence of the uncreated, that is, God":

I bind unto myself today  
The virtues of the star-lit heaven,  
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,  
The whiteness of the moon at even,  
The flashing of the lightning free,  
The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,  
The stable earth, the deep salt sea  
Around the old eternal rocks.

In the seventh century, St Cuthbert, also a Celt, retired to the Inner Farne to build a hermitage "surrounded by a wall that blocked out views of everything except the sky, where he would sit and contemplate, his gaze drawn upwards to sky and to heaven" (Frodsham, 2009:59). He was also known to pray at night immersed up to his neck in the sea, reciting psalms. He lived the essence of Celtic spirituality – feeling the presence of God in the natural world and the elements.

The Celtic essence of feeling the presence of God in the world around us is very much alive in Celtic music, poetry and blessings. Here is a well-known example (Bridge House, 2015, Online):

Deep peace of the running waves to you  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you

This same essence is also very much alive in the everyday life of the Irish people, as Mary Meighan (2012, Online) explains. She says that Celtic spirituality is an everyday spirituality and a spirituality of the heart. She adds that everything can hold a blessing and that by tuning into nature wherever we are, can shift our lives.

The Order of St. Benedict, formed in 529 AD, follows the Rule of Saint Benedict. The Benedictine monks learned to live self-sufficiently and demonstrated responsible stewardship in their care for the earth through gardening: McDonagh (1986: 130-131) calls their model of interaction with the natural world as the “taming of the earth”. He says: “The Benedictine model of relating to the natural world was marked by gratitude for the good things of the Earth and respect for the Earth in order to ensure its continued fruitfulness for human beings”.

Tending a garden and caring for the earth was humanity’s first vocation, way back in Eden. Rhodes (2010, Online) explains how gardening is a deeply spiritual practice. “It is a way of engaging God’s creation in a personal and intimate way that I have found to be first of all frustrating, then humbling, next centering, now rewarding, and finally (if I succeed) delicious”. He continues:

As the plants grow, I know that my job was to continue in my care and tending to the soil itself. It is, of course, what keeps the plants thriving. And those plants, in the end, are what permit me to live: they feed and nourish me. Thus in order to receive life and service from the soil, I must immediately humble myself and serve *it*. How oddly beatific.

Perhaps one of the spiritual traditions most in touch with nature is the Order of the Franciscans, formed in 1209, which adheres to the teachings and spiritual discipline of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis inspired great affection for all of creation because he realised that we all come from the same creative source in God. He loved and cared for animals by preaching to birds; purchasing doves from village vendors, blessing them and then setting them free from their cages; negotiating peace with a wolf; saving worms in rainstorms, protecting bees in winter and rescuing fish from predators. He was filled with affection for plants and trees: he would ask his

brothers never to cut the whole tree when cutting wood, but to take off branches so the tree might regenerate; he also requested that part of the friary garden be left untouched so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. He walked reverently over rocks as a way of showing honour to God and He spoke with flowers, spring water and rocks. St. Francis was so in touch with nature and the outdoor world that as he was dying, he lay down on the ground because he wanted to feel the soil on his naked body. He never lost the sense of being part of creation. St. Francis demonstrated fraternity with creation, proclaiming his belief in its equality. In his *Canticle of the Creatures* (1225), an account of his marvel at Creation, he refers to Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Sister Water:

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;  
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

(Custodia Terrae Sanctae, 2011, Online).

St. Francis never lost the sense of innocence and wonder from childhood and the stories of him show him to be 'like pre-fallen Adam in paradise' (Brother Ramon, 1994:113). Brother Ramon asks:

Who would be able to narrate the sweetness he enjoyed while contemplating in creatures the wisdom of their Creator, his power and his goodness? Indeed, he was very often filled with a wonderful and ineffable joy from this consideration while he looked upon the sun, while he beheld the moon, and while he gazed upon the stars and the firmament.

The Franciscan movement was and still is a very ancient way of being in the world and yet deeply Christian and incarnational.

The Jesuits, who form the Society of Jesus, was founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola. He composed the Spiritual Exercises to help others follow the teachings of Jesus. Part of Ignatius's teaching was 'Finding God in All Things' (Ignatian Spirituality, 2009, Online). Pedro Ribadaneira, one of the early Jesuits, wrote about his friend Ignatius's ability to find God in nature:

We frequently saw him taking the occasion of little things to lift his mind to God, who even in the smallest things is great. From seeing a plant, foliage, a leaf, a flower, any kind of fruit, from the consideration of a little worm or any other animal, he raised himself above the heavens and penetrated the deepest thoughts, and from each little thing he drew doctrine and the most profitable counsels for instruction in the spiritual life (Martin, S.J., 2010:171).

Gerard Manley-Hopkins (1844-1889), who was a Jesuit priest, wrote poetry which glorified God in the things he saw in nature. His poems: “display a passionate love for the natural world and an acute awareness that, as he enjoyed nature, he was also enjoying the presence of God” (Osborn, 1990:17). *Pied Beauty* (1877) is one of his poems:

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

(Poetry Foundation, 2015, Online)

What have we learnt about developing spirituality using the outdoors from the above spiritual traditions? Celtic spirituality inspires us to feel God’s presence through nature and the elements; the Benedictines teach us to tend to the earth in a gentle and self-sufficient way; the Franciscans show us how to care lovingly and deeply for every created thing by seeing all creation as brothers and sisters, and looking with wonder and awe at God’s creation; and the Jesuits demonstrate that we can find God in everything, in even the smallest of things, an incarnational and sacramental view.

## **2.6 Church Teaching on Spirituality in the Outdoors**

What has the Church said in recent times on spiritual development using the outdoors? Pope John Paul II (1989) said: “the aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked. Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity”. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (2008:7) referred to the purpose of nature:

Nature reveals God to us and allows us to experience God's presence. For example, people of faith have testified that nature's abundance and beauty reveals God's generosity and majesty, its healing, nourishing and life-giving properties reveal divine reconciling love.

Similarly, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003) wrote: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine". Moreover, Pope Benedict XVI (1995:27-8) said that: "Creation is designed in such a way that it is oriented to worship. It fulfils its purpose and assumes its significance when it is lived, ever new, with a view to worship. Creation exists for the sake of worship".

Perhaps the most poignant publication from the Church is Pope Francis' recent *Laudato Si' (Praised Be)*- which is the first papal encyclical ever to concentrate on environmental issues and has been described by Archbishop Blasé Cupich of Chicago (in Teague, 2015) as "a watershed moment for the Church, for humanity, and for the planet". Pope Francis refers to 'our common home' who 'groans in travail' due to mankind's global destruction of the environment, stressing that "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (*Laudato Si'*, 2015:#217). He talks about the need to protect the earth from further deterioration, offering us practical methods. However, in order to do this, he calls for a new Catholic spirituality.

What is this 'new' Catholic spirituality? In fact, it is a very ancient spirituality, one which centres on the Franciscan way of expanding our understanding of what it means to love our neighbours to include creation as a whole; we need to reconcile with the earth and speak the language of fraternity, realising our interconnectedness with the rest of creation and living in communion:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth' (#92).

Moreover, Pope Francis says that it will require a profound shift and a conversion of the soul: “attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness” (#220). He continues: “We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness... which accepts each moment as a gift of God to be lived to the full” (#226). We are asked to discover God in all things, a sacramental and Ignatian view, contemplating God’s mystery and beauty: “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop” (#233).

## **2.7 Leadership**

What do we learn about aspects of leadership regarding spiritual development in the outdoors, from the people and groups written about in this literature review? Let me give a few examples. Jesus demonstrated servant leadership through His use of the outdoors, serving to develop spirituality in others through His miracles and teachings based on love. In his essay *The Servant as Leader*, first published in 1970, Greenleaf said: “The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*” (Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2015, Online). Greenleaf, regarded as one of the main exponents of servant leadership, promoted the model without sufficiently recognising its Christian origins: fundamentally, it is a theological construct rather than a secular one, perfected in the person of Jesus. Larry Spear, a successor of Greenleaf, carefully identified ten characteristics of the servant leader from Greenleaf’s original writings. They are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building a community (Spear in Punnachet, 2009:118). Jesus was indeed a perfect example of a servant leader and a model for us all to follow.

Jesus was also the perfect transformational leader as He transformed lives through developing spirituality and faith in others using the natural environment. Transformational leadership is people-oriented and it transforms feelings, attitudes, and beliefs; it aims to help all to fulfil individual and group potential and is driven by

longer term goals and vision. As Jesus said “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). In the same way, transformational leadership could also be attributed to St. Patrick, St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Ignatius through their transformative use of the outdoor environment.

Jesus and the aforementioned saints also proved to be charismatic leaders; charismatic leadership in itself being very transformational. As Lydon (2009:9) describes: The charismatic leader will “demonstrate the ability to share his/ her vision with the community, build up trust in the vision and create a genuine commitment to it”. Jesus shared His vision about the outdoor world with His followers and apostles were told to “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28: 19). St. Francis, St. Benedict and St. Ignatius inspired the formation of orders in their name, with a following committed to their ‘outdoor’ vision.

Pope Francis’ encyclical demonstrates his collegiate leadership style. He is calling us to redirect ourselves towards a more creation-centred, outdoor-based spirituality; but he is also asking for a collaborative approach to work towards the greater good: this is our ‘common home’ and we’re in this together. MacGilchrist et al (1997:109) refer to Collegial Intelligence as: “...a recognition that whilst individuals can make a difference, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole”.

All of the spiritual leaders mentioned in this chapter model authentic leadership; they held true to their own beliefs as regards spiritually connecting to the outdoor world and they knew themselves. In order to lead others in spiritual development, authentic leadership is essential. Seymour (2001:33) likens it to igniting the flame of spirituality which cannot be possible “unless we already have that flame burning brightly within ourselves... We must be in touch with our own spirituality, then our flame will ignite their flame”.

## 2.8 Summary

In this chapter I have carried out a Literature Review. I have defined spirituality and considered children's spirituality specifically. I have discussed the historical shift in our spiritual relationship with the outdoor world. I have then looked towards the Bible (New and Old Testaments) to find out what God and Jesus have taught us about spiritual development and the outdoors. I have also turned to Celtic spirituality and the Catholic orders of the Benedictines, Franciscans and Jesuits to see what we can learn from their traditions and relationship with the natural environment. I have also described the Church's recent teachings with particular focus on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Moreover, I have described the leadership styles evident in the spiritual leaders mentioned in the review, concentrating on servant, transformational, charismatic, collegiate and authentic leadership models.

In my next chapter, Chapter 3, I will talk about the different methods of research I have carried out to find out about the practice of developing spirituality in the outdoors with Catholic school children today. In the course of my reading, research questions arose in my mind which I wanted to pose to adults who have experience in this area. They were:

1. What would be your definition of 'spirituality'?
2. Within your work, can you tell me about activities, in particular spiritual ones, that you've led or observed using the outdoors?
3. From a leadership perspective, what do you think are the pros and cons of leading spiritual activities outside?
4. In what ways, if any, do you think that being outdoors helps children connect to their spirituality more than being indoors?
5. From your experience, in what practical ways, if any, do Catholic primary schools use the outdoors to develop spirituality in children?

These questions will form the basis of my adult interviews. (See Appendix 1 for further questions used in the research process).

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 2, I discussed the relevant theory behind developing spirituality using the outdoors. In Chapter 3, I will explain the methodology I used to research the practice of developing spirituality using the outdoors. I will describe the research design adopted for my investigation, highlighting the theoretical perspective which lay behind the methodology of my study as well as the practical details of carrying out my research. I will justify the research tools I chose, including the advantages and limitations of these methods, and provide a profile of the people I asked to participate and my reasons why. I will also give details of how I gathered my data and tried to ensure validity. Furthermore, I will talk about the ethical issues which had to be addressed before undertaking my research.

My research aimed to find out more about developing spirituality in the outdoors with primary school children from a practical point of view. I wanted to discover, in essence, if there is correlation or a gap between practice and theory and to prove whether or not more spiritual development using the outdoors needs to occur in Catholic primary schools. With my research topic in mind, would it be a quantitative or qualitative study? Quantitative research understands truth to be an objective reality, concerning the collection of objective and quantifiable data. My research was not going to involve the collection of quantifiable, statistical or necessarily objective data, nor would it lend itself to number-crunching or large scale statistical analysis. It would however involve the personal experiences and feelings of the participants and therefore a qualitative investigation was much more appropriate. How can you measure or quantify such information? Hyde (2008:62) affirms that qualitative research “understands reality to be subjective and dimensional as seen by the participants of a particular study. It generally upholds and gives credibility to the collection of thoughts, perceptions and experiences of the participants.” Moreover, this would be phenomenological research. ‘Phenomenology’ (from the Greek word ‘phainómenon’ which means ‘that which appears’ and ‘lógos’ meaning

'study') concentrates on the study of the subjective, direct experience and consciousness. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research therefore is to describe a 'lived experience' of a phenomenon.

### **3.2 Research Tools**

Taking into consideration that this would be a qualitative study rather than a quantitative one, I had to decide what research tools would be most suitable for this type of investigation. Cresswell (in Hyde, 2008:62) describe the enquiry process of qualitative study as being based on "developing a complex and holistic picture using prose, reporting detailed views of the participants". The research tools would therefore not be of a survey or questionnaire type format. I decided that interviews with adults who already had experience of leading spiritual activities in the outdoors with children, would be apt. Cotgreave et al. (2000), summarise the advantages of interviews from Denscombe. Interviews:

- Produce information about problems/issues in depth and detail.
- Depth of information can lead to important insights by key participants and by the researcher.
- Participants' priorities, opinions and ideas can be accessed. Participants have the opportunity to expand/ explain their views and identify what they see to be crucial factors.
- Interviews offer flexibility in opportunities to probe, to develop and/or change the line of inquiry.
- Direct contact with interviewee allows data to be checked for accuracy and relevance at point of collection.
- High response rate because interviews are usually pre-arranged and scheduled for convenience of time and location.
- Interviews can be a positive experience for interviewees because of the personal element and the opportunity to talk about their ideas with someone who is interested and willing to listen.

However, I had to also consider the disadvantages of conducting interviews. For example, due to the relative uniqueness of data due to specific contexts or individuals, consistency and objectivity are hard to achieve in interviews, raising questions about reliability. Also, the transcription process following interviews

would be time-consuming. Moreover, the open format of interviews produces data that are not pre-coded and therefore can make analysis difficult. Nevertheless, weighing up the advantages and the disadvantages of conducting interviews, the former far outweighed the latter.

Alongside adult interviews, I decided to gather information from primary school children, seeing as the focus of the research was developing spirituality in the outdoors for primary Catholic schools. I felt that children needed to be part of the research process, to be acknowledged and to have their say. Their opinions and experience was of utmost importance to me and my study. I therefore decided that I wanted to create a focus group of children from my school who would try out some spiritual activities in the outdoors for the first time (See Appendix 2 for an outline of the activities used). Focus groups are seen to be a valuable method for eliciting children's views and experiences. They "can capture their perspectives, original ideas, and insights, which are often neglected in more traditional paediatric research...(and) offer a rich, interactive and developmentally effective approach to planning, content and evaluation in research with children." (Kennedy et al., 2001, Online). And so, I interviewed the children before and after the activities, beforehand to gain insight into their existing experience of spiritual activities and afterwards, to get their feedback from the spiritual activities we tried outdoors (See Appendix 1 for a list of the interview questions I used). All the while, I made observations of the children during the activities and paid attention to my own experience as a leader of the focus group.

Since I used more than one method of data collection, I employed a multi-method approach, or 'triangulation'. I was keen to use more than one approach as "the key to triangulation is to see the same thing from different perspectives and thus be able to confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another" (Laws in Bell, 2010:118). Had I had more time, I would have gathered data using more varied methods. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, these two methods – individual adult interviews and a children's focus group (with group

interview) – seemed substantial enough as I knew that they would allow me to gather a lot of information.

### **3.3 Sample**

I decided to interview four adults: two teachers/ leaders in the Catholic primary school sector who already had some experience of developing spirituality in the outdoors with children, and two Christian spiritual directors who also had some experience of leading spiritual activities outside with children. I wanted to gain the insights of Catholic school teachers/ leaders seeing as Catholic primary schools are my main audience but I also wanted to find out information from other adult sources to widen my approach and data, hence why I chose to ask two spiritual directors for their input. Moreover, I wanted to interview more than one of each to broaden my data. Had I had more time (I confess that I left gathering my data until late in the school year) or had this been a deeper investigation, I would have interviewed a larger sample of people but, within the limits of this dissertation, four adults in total seemed ample.

For my focus group, I decided to approach children in my school who I already teach. I did this because I knew that they had no prior experience of developing spirituality in the outdoors and I already had a rapport with them which would help to ease the process of the focus group. I wanted to keep the group small to make the spiritual experience more intimate and to limit the amount of information I would collect, envisaging that four children would provide plenty of data to analyse. The two Catholic teachers who agreed to participate in my study are women in their early thirties who have both been teaching for around ten years. They work at different Catholic primary schools within the same diocese. For anonymity purposes, I will call them Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher A is a Year 6 class teacher, the deputy-head and RE coordinator at her current school which is in a very deprived inner-city area. Teacher B has been an Advanced Skills Teacher in RE and is currently a Year 4 class teacher and RE coordinator in her school which is in

situated in a leafy suburb. Both teachers have experience of planning and leading spiritual activities using the outdoors.

The two spiritual directors who agreed to participate in my research work at a spiritual centre in a nearby city. The spirituality centre is ecumenical and funded by the Church of England. They themselves are Anglican. They are middle-aged. They usually work with adults, giving them spiritual direction, but they both have some experience of leading spiritual activities outside with children from local Catholic primary schools. For anonymity purposes, I will call them Spiritual Director A and Spiritual Director B.

The children who were invited to participate in my focus group are from the Year 5/6 class from St. Jude's. I chose to invite children from this class because I teach them once a week and so I know the children well, and also because I thought that this would be a good age group to target as they would probably express themselves more coherently than younger children. That is not to say that younger children would not have benefited from being part of the focus group and had this been a deeper study, I would have included a wider range of ages. I invited children who I thought would be open to the activities and interview process. I chose a mix of girls and boys to keep it fair. I also wanted to have a mix of Catholic and non-Catholic children seeing as this would represent the population of the school better. For anonymity purposes, I will call the children Pupil A, Pupil B, Pupil C and Pupil D. Pupil A is a Year 6 pupil who is eleven years old, she is not a Catholic and she is not sure if she believes in God; Pupil B is a Year 6 pupil who is eleven years old and a practising Catholic; Pupil C is from Poland originally but moved to England when he was four years old, he is a Year 5 pupil who is ten years old and a practising Catholic; and Pupil D is a Year 6 pupil who is eleven years old and is a practising Catholic and altar boy. None of the children had prior experience of activities which develop spirituality using the outdoors.

### **3.4 Procedures**

Following ethical approval for my research study, and before starting to gather my data, I invited prospective participants to join the study. I invited the spiritual directors by email as I had been given their contact details on recommendation. I verbally invited the Catholic teachers and children because I knew them personally. An information sheet about the research, as well as a consent form to sign should they wish to participate, was given to the adult participants and the parents of the children in the focus group. It was also necessary to get written consent from my Head teacher to carry out the focus group research on the school premises. I wanted to ensure that the questions and activities I had planned were appropriate before I undertook the research and so I spoke with a friend who is a nun, spiritual director and former RE advisor, and asked for her opinion.

I wanted to have validity across my research and so the questions I asked the adults, both Catholic teachers and spiritual leaders, were the same. I limited my interviews to five open questions so that the theme of developing spirituality in the outdoors could be explored in detail, understanding the interviewees' perspective (Appendix 1). The questions I asked the focus group were asked to the group as a whole and the activities were carried out with the group in its entirety; hence they had the opportunity to answer exactly the same questions and do the same activities at the same time and therefore there was already consistency. All interviews were introduced in the same manner and recorded on a voice recorder. Interviews with adults lasted around twenty minutes. The focus group session took about an hour in normal lesson time.

Although it would have been more consistent to have carried out all research at the same location on the same day, logistically that was not possible. My first interviews were with the spiritual directors at their place of work at a spirituality centre. They took place separately in a room with a view overlooking a stunningly beautiful garden. Following the interviews, I realised that it would have been better, and perhaps more inspiring for the participants, to have carried out the interviews in the

garden itself, seeing as the outdoors is the basis of this study. And so I made sure that the rest of my interviews took place outside: and so, the interview with Teacher A took place in the prayer garden at her school; the interview I carried out with Teacher B took place in a local park. The focus group interviews took place in our outdoor classroom, and the spiritual activities on the school field and in the allotment.

### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

Inviting individuals to participate in research means that the researcher must protect participants from any harm throughout the process. During the application for ethical approval I had to ask myself the question “Who might be harmed by my research and how might people be harmed by my research?” This involved exploring whether or not there were any potential risks or adverse effects associated with my study and if the interviews or focus group activities could include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting. I could only foresee benefits gained from participating in this project, such as encountering a gentle or deep spiritual experience and developing greater knowledge about spirituality using the outdoors. There would be no risk of harm or adverse reactions taking place during the process of carrying out my research.

Furthermore, research ethics is about being crystal clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your participants, reducing legal liability of the researcher. Blaxter et al. (in Bell, 2010:47) confirm that:

Ethical research involves getting the involved consent of those who are going to interview, question, observe or take materials from. It involves reaching agreements about the use of this data, and how its analysis will be reported and disseminated. And it is about keeping to such agreements when they have been reached.

In order to ensure that the research I was to carry out was ethically sound, I made participants fully aware of the purpose of my research and understand their rights by providing them with a very detailed information sheet. I gave adult participants and parents of children from the focus group the information sheet prior to carrying

out the research, allowing them to read more about the study and what would be involved so that they could make an informed decision as to whether to agree to give written consent to participate. If they wanted to see the questions or types of activities I would be using before making a decision on whether or not to participate, I invited them to email me in advance. If written consent was agreed by the parent on behalf of the child, the information was asked to be explained in child-friendly language by the parent so that the child could also agree written consent. I made it very clear that none of the participants or parents of the children should feel under any obligation to agree to give consent and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Protection principles for fair and lawful processing of personal data state that:

- Personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and shall not be further processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes.
- Personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.

(Information Commissioner's Office, 2015, Online)

To ensure participants' data protection and confidentiality, I ensured that anonymous names would be given to participants and their work place and they would be quoted anonymously in the write up. Also, the interviews, recorded on voice recorder, would be securely deleted once the dissertation had been submitted and assessed. Only my supervisor, Dr. David Fincham, and I would have access to the data while my dissertation was being written and assessed. Participants were ensured of their confidentiality and anonymity in written form through the information sheet prior to consenting to participate, and also verbally by me, before beginning the interviews or focus group activities. In the same way, they were told how and when their data would be destroyed; they were also informed that they could ask for their data to be withdrawn at any time. I explained the likely outputs which may in the future use the information gathered, for example Catholic primary school leaders and teachers, people undertaking further

study through the form of dissertations, theses, publications or presentations. I offered to send a written summary of the findings of my research, after the completion of the dissertation project and on participant request.

For safeguarding purposes, written consent was firstly requested from the Head teacher to undertake the study on the premises of St. Jude's R.C. Primary School. Also, because the focus group would include working with children, a copy of my DBS form was attached to my application for ethical approval. Written consent to participate was asked from parents of the focus group children, along with written consent from the children themselves.

### **3.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the methodology behind my research, sharing the theoretical as well as the practical perspectives. I have explained how this is a qualitative and phenomenological study and justified my choice in the research tools of adult interviews and a children's focus group, outlining advantages and limitations of my methods. I have included information about the participants in my research, involving two Catholic primary school teachers/ leaders, two spiritual directors and four Year 5/6 children. I have talked about the validity of my research and the fact that I have tried to maintain consistency as much as possible, and the ethical issues which have been addressed prior to carrying out the research. In Chapter 4, I will present my research findings using and interpret these in the context of the theories and models explored in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 4 – Analysis**

### **4.1 – Introduction**

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to investigate developing spirituality using the outdoors as a mission for Catholic primary schools. In Chapter 1, I explained my aims and objectives and the purpose of my study as well as the rationale behind it. In Chapter 2, I completed a literature review which outlined what has been previously written about developing spirituality in the outdoors and what we can learn from theories about the theme, including aspects of leadership. In Chapter 3, I detailed my methods of research and explained my rationale behind my methodology.

In this chapter, Chapter 4, I aim to analyse the data from my research. I will firstly present the results and discuss what emerged from the adult interviews and the children's focus group activities and interview. I will make comparisons between the different groups and sources, highlighting similarities and contradictions. Secondly I will interpret the results, examining them in light of the literature review and my own experience. Is there a gap between the theory of developing spirituality in the outdoors and the practice of it in Catholic primary schools today or is there correlation? I will provide an overall summary at the end of this chapter of what has been discovered.

When examining my data, there seemed to be recurrent themes which emerged.

They were:

1. The Use of the Outdoors for Developing Spiritual Activities
2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors
3. Leadership

I will use these themes to structure my analysis.

## 4.2 – Presentation of Results

### 4.2.1 The Use of the Outdoors for Spiritual Activities

The Catholic teachers had most experience of leading spiritual activities in the outdoors and their examples of activities were too many to mention within the limits of this dissertation. The spiritual directors had less experience working with children than they did with adults but they were able to describe some activities they had carried out with Catholic school children in the setting of their spirituality centre. The children in my focus group had plenty of experience of spiritual activities indoors such as termly masses at church and daily liturgies held in their classroom but they had no experience of spiritual activities in the outdoors, at least not explicitly spiritual ones, until the activities I introduced them to which were all led outdoors. When looking at all of my results and cross-referencing them, there were many common elements among the activities. There was a recurrence of the use of the following terms: *gardens, water, sky, the use of the senses, the use of natural objects and pilgrimages*. Due to the limitations of this dissertation, I will consider the first three of these only; without taking value away from the others, I have chosen to focus on these three as they were the ones which were most widely used or mentioned.

**Gardens** - I used our school gardens, or allotment, with the focus group to look closely at creation; the children took a photo something that made them think 'Wow!' to share with the rest of the group. Both spiritual directors also talked about the use of their garden at the spirituality centre where they led sensory walks and outdoor meditation with children. Both Catholic teachers talked about the use of gardens. One school had a 'prayer' garden which was used for prayer sessions at different times of the year; the other school had a 'peace' garden which was used as a place to go for quiet contemplation.

**Water** – Both teachers talked about the Year 6 residential trip to Holy Island, and the inclusion of spiritual activities beside the sea shore, including liturgies and Mass.

One of the teachers spoke about doing liturgical dance by the lake and collective worship by the water feature during their pilgrimage to the park. When I asked the children in the focus group to describe a time when they were in the outdoors and thought 'Wow!' three out of four of the children included the theme of water in their answers. One of the teachers elaborated on the importance and uniqueness of water in developing spirituality.

**Sky** - The experience of looking up at the sky was recurrent in the spiritual activities, including a visit to an observatory by one of the teachers with her class to watch the stars at night and contemplation of the daytime sky as one of the focus group activities. One spiritual director described how she herself had experienced one of her most spiritual moments when looking up at a starry night sky.

#### **4.2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors**

There were many advantages for developing spirituality in the outdoors with children, both from the adults who spoke about their prior experience and from the children in the focus group who were new to it. Recurrent advantages of outdoor spirituality that emerged from my results when cross-referencing were: the outdoors is our *natural* environment; it creates a *sense of calm* and a *feeling of freedom*; it provides *connection* with something other; it inspires *awe and wonder*, and offers the opportunity for *powerful experiences*.

**Natural environment** – All adults referred to the outdoors as being our more natural environment allowing us to be in the moment or enjoy a more open, natural state. Spiritual Director A referred to the fact that spending so much time indoors is a relatively natural phenomenon. Moreover, all children agreed that they felt more themselves when outdoors. The teachers talked about the outdoors taking us away from the distraction of modern life.

**Sense of Calm**– All participants talked about a sense of calm when doing spiritual activities outside. All four children said that they felt calm, one boy even fell asleep

because he said he felt so relaxed! I noticed in my observations of the children that they all seemed particularly calm and relaxed, more so than I would have expected doing spiritual activities indoors.

***Feeling of Freedom*** – The sense of freedom that accompanies spiritual activities in the outdoors was talked about in the adults' interviews and the children's focus group interview. The benefit of the free space to move around in as opposed to being confined to the classroom was described and all children said that they felt freer doing spiritual activities outdoors than indoors. One of the teachers spoke about how the outdoors provides the opportunity for children to own the space. Three of the adults mentioned how the outdoors gives leaders and children so much choice, as it provides a vast amount of resources.

***Connection*** – All participants talked about the outdoors enabling us to connect to God, nature, the earth or the Universe. All of the adults spoke about how we can connect to God very deeply in the outdoors. Two of the four children said that they felt closer to God when doing spiritual activities outdoors and three children liked the fact that they could connect with nature. For leaders, observing children connect with something other was seen as an advantage.

***Awe and Wonder*** – A sense of awe and wonder was inspired by doing spiritual activities in the outdoor environment proved to be a great advantage. Three of the adults gave examples of children experiencing moments of awe and wonder at the world around them. I myself benefitted from witnessing the openness of the children in my focus group to a sense of awe and wonder when they were doing the outdoor activities I set.

***Powerful Experiences*** – All four adults suggested that the outdoors offers a deeper spiritual experience than indoors and they gave examples of how the outdoors has had a very deep impact on individuals. The two teachers gave specific striking examples of how being outdoors had been an incredibly holy experience and had

had a lasting, transformative effect on children they had led; witnessing the children have such powerful experiences had, in turn, a hugely beneficial impact on the teachers, as leaders. The children in the focus group said that they had all been moved by the experience of doing spiritual activities outdoors.

All four adults spoke about the numerous advantages and enhanced experiences of doing spiritual activities in the outdoors with children. The children in the focus group responded positively to the experience of doing spiritual activities in the outdoors and the whole group stated that they would like to do more spiritual activities in the outdoors in the future.

As regards the disadvantages of developing spirituality in the outdoors, there were a few presented by the adults although there was only one recurrent theme: the *British weather*. Three out of the four adults interviewed saw wet weather as a disadvantage as it was something that was out of the leader's control. However, one of the teachers contradicted this common view of 'bad' weather being an inconvenience for leading spiritual activities outdoors and instead perceived it as an advantage. Two of the adults mentioned that outdoor spirituality is not for everyone: a spiritual director said that not everyone likes nature and a teacher said that not all teachers like using the outdoors. It was also suggested that some people feel closer to God indoors and it was agreed that there is a time and a place for indoor spiritual activity. Other disadvantages included teacher inexperience in this area and practical logistics, such as group size and lack of quality outdoor space. None of the children in my focus group communicated any disadvantages following the spiritual activities they completed outside.

#### **4.2.3 Leadership**

The two teachers I interviewed are excellent examples of leaders who have developed spirituality using the outdoors in a variety of forms in their school setting. However, both teachers agreed that in general not enough was being done in Catholic primary schools as regards developing spirituality in the outdoors. It

seems that there are a lot of schools that have developed or are developing their outdoor area for the curriculum but have yet to use it for explicitly spiritual purposes. My current school, St. Jude's, is one such school which is currently developing its outdoor area but spiritual activities in the outdoors have been very limited thus far.

Both teachers said that the possibility of developing spirituality in the outdoors in Catholic primary schools depended on the leaders in the school and their vision. They both agreed that the sharing of good practice would counteract the inexperience of staff in this area and encourage a whole-school approach. One of the teachers added that leaders and teachers in school need to be in touch with their own spirituality if they are to encourage children to develop spiritually. I observed very positive leadership styles in all four adults interviewed. One of the teachers explained how she had involved pupils in leading spiritual activities outdoors.

In this next section, I will interpret my results, discussing my findings using theories and models drawn from the literature and apply these to data derived from the investigation. Do my findings confirm or contrast with the opinions expressed in the literature? What do they tell us?

### **4.3 Interpretation of Results**

#### **4.3.1 The Use of the Outdoors for Spiritual Activities**

I presented common elements that emerged from the activities described in the research. These were: gardens, water, and the sky. These are all landscapes which feature in Margaret Silf's book 'Landscapes of Prayer' which I quoted in my literature review with reference to mountains and the seashore. She talks about the power of landscape: "we can become part of a landscape and allow it to become part of us. We can let it penetrate us with something of its spirit, and from then on

we will carry that spirit with us wherever we go” (2011:4). Let us look at these three landscapes individually and discuss these in the light of the literature review.

Gardens feature significantly in the activities described or tried out by my participants and they also appeared in my reading. In both practice and theory, gardens are seen to be a source of joy and delight. The school allotment is a beautiful oasis set at the back of the school field which is cared for by the children in Gardening Club. When the children in the focus group were asked to look closely at God’s creation in the allotment, they really enthusiastic and took delight in what they found. Pupil B explained why it was her favourite activity: “you could just explore nature and it just showed you how beautiful the earth really is”. This reminds me of the Creation story where God gave the Garden of Eden as an idyllic gift to Adam and Eve. I also noticed during this activity, that Pupil A and Pupil B, both members of the Gardening Club, were very pleased with the outcomes of their hard work in looking after the plants and vegetables and were keen to tell me what they had used in their cooking sessions at the Club. This shows that the girls had tended to the earth and used it, obeying God’s command; their interest also mirrors the Benedictines who cared for the earth in a loving and self-sufficient way. Gardens were also the location of the sensory walks described by Spiritual Director A and Spiritual Director B in which they led groups of children in sensory awareness, smelling flowers, tasting blackcurrants and feeling the grass on the ground.

Gardens however, are also a place to go to for quiet reflection and in times of sorrow. In Teacher A’s school, we see their ‘prayer’ garden being used for reflective prayer: lunchtime rosary sessions during the months of May and October, Stations of the Cross once a week during Lent; and a remembrance tree during November, for example. Teacher B’s schools ‘peace’ garden was created in memory of a child from the school who had died and was built as a sacred space where children can go in times of sadness to pray or to spend a quiet moment in. In Chapter 2, I referred to the garden in the New Testament as a landscape where Jesus liked to pray and where, for the last time, he went to pray to His Father before His death.

Water also featured heavily in the activities. Teacher B spoke about the powerful presence of water as she described its soothing and spiritual effect on children she led in liturgy on the seashore on Holy Island. In her opinion, and through her pupils' experience, there was something about being next to the water that held the presence of God. Similarly, Teacher A talked about the power of water and also referred to the experience of being next to it with a group of children at the Holy Island residential:

So when we go to Holy Island, we don't choose to sit on the field in the middle, we always choose to be at the water. Water is life- giving: it's the sound of it, the feel of it. Being next to it I think immediately, in my opinion, puts people at peace and you get a lot more from them... and they are more open.

The scene of sitting by the sea at Holy Island that they both describe evokes the scenes of Jesus teaching by the Sea of Galilee mentioned in Chapter 2. It also reminds me of the practice of Celtic spirituality which feels the presence of God in nature and the elements, including water and the sea. If we remember, St. Cuthbert immersed himself in the sea at night to recite psalms and Silf explained how the sea is a sacred space where one meets the immanent and transcendent God.

Three out of four of the children recalled their biggest moment of wonder and awe involving water. Pupil A spoke of the beauty of being in the Lake District, standing on a bridge and looking at the shimmering stream below; Pupil D talked about when he dived into the sea on a holiday in Greece and the water was really clear and he could see colourful fish below; Pupil C described being on holiday in Greece watching a dolphin swimming in a pool. Water connects us to our Creator. Water in itself is powerful and beautiful, and yet we know its Creator is even more powerful and beautiful – we remember God's life-saving power over it, as seen in the Old Testament stories of Noah's Ark and the Exodus. We also see His mystery through His Son, Jesus, who walked on water, turned water into wine and calmed the storm. Both practice and theory point to the fact that water is very poignant in outdoor spiritual development because through it, we feel a sense of God's

presence, power, healing and mystery. As Teacher A confirms, “water is a massive thing for spirituality outside”.

The use of the sky in spiritual activities outdoors was recurrent. One of the teachers described taking her class on a cross-curricular trip to Kielder Observatory to watch the stars at night where the connection with spirituality was very present. I used the landscape of the sky in one of my activities with the children in my focus group. They were asked to lie on the grass looking up to the blue sky and contemplate on its vastness and beauty while I read Psalm 19. Afterwards, I spoke to them about the immense proportions of the universe and size of the sun and stars in comparison to the earth. They thought it was mind-blowing and said that they felt very lucky to be part of such a beautiful world, and looking up at the sky inspired them to think of other moments in nature when they had experienced a sense of wonder and awe. This amazement at the sky was also shared by St. Patrick, St. Francis and St. Cuthbert as seen in Chapter 2: I referred to St. Patrick and his hymn in which he exalts the brilliance and beauty of the sky; Ramon told of the joy that St. Francis would be filled with when he gazed up at the stars in the sky and we learnt how he referred to ‘Brother Sun’ and ‘Sister Moon’ in his canticle; and, St. Cuthbert would look up at the sky from his hermitage surrounded by a wall that blocked out views of everything except the sky. Spiritual Director A described a deeply personal and spiritual experience looking up at the starry night sky: “Just that experience of being at home in the universe and having a place in the universe and having a kind of calling in the universe that was uniquely mine”. I also had a very spiritual moment with the sky - getting off a broken down bus in the middle of Peru and looking up at the pure night sky studded with thousands upon thousands of stars, more than I had ever seen before – it gave me a glimpse into the depth of the universe and the majesty of God.

#### **4.3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors**

The idea of the outdoor world being our natural environment was very recurrent in the adult interviews. Spiritual Director A stated: “From an anthropological point of view, most of our evolution was outdoors and spending so much of our time indoors is a relatively modern phenomenon, really. So it’s just taking us out into what some would see as a more natural environment”. In fact, if we think back to the Garden of Eden, we were made to be outdoors. Spiritual Director B said about the outdoors: “It’s a much more natural place to be. I think we lost a lot of our spirituality when we started meeting inside buildings”. This reflects the historical shift that I described in Chapter 2 when monotheistic religions pushed away from outdoor-based worship to indoor-based worship. As Teacher A said:

to be outside and to be part of the natural world and the universe to me is about what spirituality is. Because spirituality is the essence of something, it’s the essence of the person, it’s the essence of the soul. So why wouldn’t it take place in the essence of the world, rather than a manmade structure?

Spiritual Director B added: “I think that children are more natural outdoors...I think they become more open”. Indeed, all of the children said that they felt ‘more themselves’ doing spiritual activities outdoors than indoors. They expressed liking the fact that being outdoors is a time “just to be”. Teacher A made a further point “...the background noise of the inside world doesn’t put you off; you’re at one with nature ...you actually connect with the world in its natural form with no hidden agenda”. Similarly, Teacher B reinforced the idea of being outdoors away from the distractions of modern life: “there is no big PowerPoint, there is no music system, there is no being distracted by the trophy cabinet in the hall and it is just about appreciating what’s within us... it strips it back to just them and nature and who made the world”.

Teacher B described the setting for the liturgy she led with a group of children:

We were on the beach. We were on St. Cuthbert’s Island, looking out on St. Cuthbert’s beach. The tide was coming in. The island was closed down. There was nobody else around. It was a beautiful evening. It was just a real sense of calmness and I think that helped it create the right atmosphere for children to get in that zone.

The sense of calm of outdoor spiritual experience was seen in the children in my focus group. Pupil B explained why she had liked the activities: “they were just really calm and quiet and peaceful and you could just be as comfortable as you wanted to be”. Likewise, Pupil A experienced the same sense of calm:

I was really calm and peaceful and it was just time to think about me and there was no distraction, it was just me. I couldn't see or hear or feel anyone else around me...It felt really good cos it was just really peaceful and calm. And you could have time to think about things.

On comparing doing outdoor spiritual activities with indoor ones, she later said: “you feel a lot more serene and it's really nice. It's a bit more peaceful than inside”. Pupil C reflected: “liked it because you could just feel really calm through all the things”. Pupil C was relaxed to the point that he fell asleep on the grass during our last activity!

In the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, we see in Gerard Manley-Hopkins' poem a definite sense of calm and the gentle approach of Ignatian spirituality as he enjoyed being surrounded by nature and contemplating God. We see the same in St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures. Through its words and gentle flow, we too experience the sense of serenity that he felt in the presence of God's creation. Celtic spirituality was also explored in Chapter 2 and, similarly, depicts a sense of peace in the outdoor world through its verses. Pope John Paul II referred to our contact with nature as imparting peace and serenity. Likewise, Pope Francis asks us in his encyclical letter to approach life with serene attentiveness and discover God in all of creation; he encourages us to experience the deep sense of calm in the outdoors that St. Francis modelled so well.

A feeling of freedom was another feeling that all participants said they experienced when doing spiritual activities outdoors. For example, Teacher A explained why she thinks that certain children prefer the outdoor environment: “when you're out, as soon as you leave the classroom, you're not formal. So these people are not restrained. They don't have to follow the same rigorous set of rules as they do

inside. I think it gives them a freedom that being inside doesn't". The children agreed. Pupil D said: "You can move around more, you don't have to stay in one place in the corner when we're doing the liturgy". Pupil A gave her reason for wanting to do more spiritual activities outdoors as: "it's a bit different from liturgy or Mass...it's a bit more relaxed because you're in your free space and you're not all cramped up together, it's your free space". The children all said they felt freer doing spiritual activities outdoors rather than indoors. Teacher A talked about the rosary session held in the prayer garden at school:

It's extra special. It's exciting. They get to own it. They can choose where they sit or stand, they can lie on the grass. They can be picking up a daisy as they're doing it. They're taking charge, they're taking the lead...If it's outside, it belongs to them. It's our world, it belongs to us.

That's why, she continued, she has a turn-out of eighty to ninety children show up for the session every time, whereas, if she held it indoors, she feels it would only attract four or five children.

If we think back to the Bible, it was in the outdoors where a massive sense of freedom would have been felt or given to people: the Creation story in which God offers the free space of the Garden of Eden; the Exodus story in which God frees the Israelites with His power over the Sea; the Noah story, in which he sets Noah and his family free from the flood, and, the Sermon on the Mount, given from a mountain top, which offers us rules to live by to guarantee a free and meaningful life.

The outdoors also offers leaders the freedom of choice of a vast array of natural resources. Spiritual Director A said: "When you're outside, you've got all of what is. It's not that you've made a choice to bring this flower into chapel and put it in a vase. It's everything". Speaking about the benefits of the outdoors, Teacher B said: "There are so many resources as well. You can pick up anything. ...I could set up a little session in this park and be like 'Let's look around at everything that we've got to be thankful for'". Indeed, the created world is an infinite resource. As teachers and leaders in school, in the indoor setting we are limited to the resources we have

on offer. As soon as we step outside, we have the whole world available to us. Likewise, in Chapter 2, we examined Jesus as a spiritual leader and His use of the natural resources around Him to teach through. The freedom of choice was also apparent for children when, during the focus group activity in the allotment, some struggled to photograph just one thing as they saw so many things which made them think 'Wow!' This reminded me of the bountiful Garden of Eden that God first gifted us with and in which He gave us free choice.

One of the themes that emerged from my research was the idea of 'connection' when doing spiritual activities outside. The adults described the connection that children made. Teacher B described leading her group in a liturgy by the sea at Holy Island. While singing 'Be still for the presence of the Lord', a well-known hymn to them, some of the children started saying "I can feel the presence of the Lord, moving in this place". Teacher B described how she immediately got goose-bumps at their reaction and realised: "you've opened their spirituality...they're connecting". Following the outdoor experience of the children's focus group activities, Pupil C concluded: "You could feel the connection to God more than inside of school".

In the literature review, we learned through the Old Testament that God connects to us through nature and how we can connect to God through nature; the psalms remind us of this. Likewise, the Jesuits, the Catholic bishops and Pope Francis wrote about finding God in nature. This echoes what Spiritual Director A thinks: "creation is one of the main ways to experience the divine...creation is God-revealed". From my observations of the focus group, it was very special to see children connect to God or something Other in the outdoors. They seemed very open to it. Perhaps, it is their innate ability to be completely present, in the here and now, as Hay and Nye described in Chapter 2.

A sense of awe and wonder was another theme which emerged many times in the research when describing the reaction of children to the outdoor world. A pupil

who Teacher A had led in outdoor spiritual activity at Holy Island had been asked to describe his most amazing moment of the year in an end of year Mass and he had said “It was the moment when I realised that I could be spiritual”. His experience of awe and wonder is too detailed to describe within the limits of this section, but please take the time to read about it in Appendix 3: 77-79. In my focus group, awe and wonder was very obvious especially when the children marvelled at the small details of things they found in the allotment. The children found it difficult to choose just one thing to photograph as they were excited by lots of things that they saw. Pupil C photographed a bee on a poppy and exclaimed in wonder: “I don’t get how they can fly with such small wings!” Pupil B photographed a dandelion leaf and it was the holes on it made by a caterpillar that attracted her to it: It made her think “Wow, it’s given something life, it’s helped keep something alive!” This mirrors the same ‘wonderful and ineffable joy’ that St. Francis showed when contemplating nature and St. Ignatius’ view of finding God in even the smallest of things, as described in Chapter 2. Osborn described this sense of awe and wonder as a basic human experience; Hay and Nye suggested that children have an inherent sense of awe and wonder which makes them more open to spirituality.

At the end of the focus group session outside, Pupil B remarked how grateful she felt that she belonged to such a beautiful world: “it just made me feel how lucky am I to have such a good earth that we don’t really realise how good it is until you take the time to be calm and peaceful and do outdoor things”. This gratefulness of slowing down and noticing things in the world around us reflects Pope Francis’ advice in his encyclical of approaching life with ‘serene attentiveness’ if we are to care for the world. Children naturally do this as the focus group proved. It was great to be able to witness the sense of awe and wonder in the children I led in the focus group activities. Likewise, Spiritual Director A said that because being in the outdoors is a really key way for her to encounter God personally, “it’s lovely to be able to share that with others and see them just delighting and in awe and all those things that happen”.

Teacher A and Teacher B talked about powerful and transformational experiences which occur or have occurred outdoors when doing spiritual activities with groups of children. Teacher A said, when discussing her rosary group which meet in the school's prayer garden:

It's holy. It's incredibly holy. Most of the time when the children are outside they're playing. And they're running around and they're screaming and they're using their outdoor voice. When they come outside to do prayer and they know they're doing it, or they're going on a spiritual experience, immediately they're quieter. They find it very powerful.

She continued later in her interview to describe her pupil's powerful experience as mentioned above (see Appendix 3): "when you do an experience like that with spirituality outside, it's practical, it's exciting, it's different, it sticks with people. So it's very powerful". She also described another example of the transformative power of outdoor spirituality when she spoke about the effect that praying outdoors at Holy Island had had on a different pupil years later: the pupil was then a teacher and decided to move back into the Catholic sector because of its power (read more about this in Appendix 3: 77-78). Spiritual Director A confirmed the power of outdoor spirituality from a personal perspective: "I think in my own experience, it's something that I see outside that can sometimes trigger a kind of very deep journey inside that I might not have made without that trigger".

Teacher B's liturgy at dusk by the sea on Holy Island was a deeply powerful experience when the children felt the presence of the Lord while singing a hymn. She concluded "it was a feeling of spirituality...they were moved by what had gone on in the liturgy and you really felt the sense that it had affected them. It touched something. They'd really kind of appreciated that". Teacher B also explained how she feels as a leader when witnessing children experiencing powerful moments and reacting spontaneously: "It's like 'Wow!'...you get something out of it as well...I feel that I've learnt a lot from the children through their experience of being outside in the environment as opposed to being inside". And so, the powerful experience becomes shared between the children doing spiritual activity outside and the adult leader. When I asked the children in my focus group if there was a particular activity

which moved them, all replied positively with examples, and I sensed during my observations of them, that they had been moved by the experiences they described. For example, Pupil A described the serenity she felt while lying down on the grass looking up at the sky and being aware of all her senses.

Deeply powerful experiences of outdoor spirituality were observed in the literature review such as the Old Testament stories showing God's power over nature and Jesus' miracles in the New Testament. Jesus' transformation on the mountain-top and its effect on witnesses proved to be a tremendously powerful outdoor experience. Subtle yet deeply powerful and personal experiences are responded to through the psalms, Celtic verses and Gerard Manley-Hopkins poetry. Likewise, if we look to St. Ignatius, he found the smallest thing very spiritually powerful and transformational: "and from each little thing he drew doctrine and the most profitable counsels for instruction in the spiritual life".

All four adults spoke about the numerous advantages and enhanced experiences of doing spiritual activities in the outdoors with children. All four children said that they had really enjoyed trying out spiritual activities outdoors and said that they would like to do more. For example, Pupil B concluded: "I like being outside and doing this kind of stuff 'cos you can use your senses a lot more whereas inside all you can do is listen. You can't really move around or be freer. And it was just really calm. And you can reflect on what was happening and what was being said". In my opinion, the children are at the centre of this subject and if they are inspired by it, then that will only serve to bring momentum to it.

The main disadvantage about developing spirituality in the outdoors that emerged from the results was the weather, or more precisely "the British weather!" as Spiritual Director A lamented. Whereas clement weather was seen as something positive - Spiritual Director B, for example, said: "The actual breeze on your hands and face; that is quite special. And you get the heat from the sun, sometimes" – inclement weather was seen as an inconvenience by three of the adults. However,

Teacher A did not see it as a disadvantage. When asked what she thought the disadvantages were, she alluded to the 'bad' weather but with a different outlook:

...there are not many cons. I just see all the pros. If it's raining, we put waterproofs on. That's the massive con that people often say Oh, you haven't got the weather for it. Actually it just adds to it, and it's sometimes rather special when it rains or in the snow because you really get to feel the elements then.

Personally, I agree with Teacher A as some of my most spiritually invigorating experiences with school children have been in 'bad' weather. For example, going into the woods on a snowy day at a previous school with my Year 1 class to write winter-inspired poetry encouraged a deep connection to the world around us and the changing seasons. Listening to the snow crunching under our wellies and seeing the tree branches draped with blankets of soft fluffy snow, I felt that the children appreciated the beauty of the world around them and the preciousness of the moment, whether they described it as the presence of God or not. If we think back to Chapter 2 and the Celts, they feel a strong connection with the elements and a sense of God's presence therein. To recall St. Patrick's hymn, he drew spiritual inspiration from bad weather itself: "The flashing of the lightning free, the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks". Something of God's essence is to be found in weather of all descriptions. And so, in order not to miss out on the opportunity of a deeply spiritual experience on a rainy day, I agree with Teacher A to put the waterproofs on and get outside!

Other disadvantages were based on the fact that outdoor spirituality is not for everyone. Teacher A and Teacher B quoted knowing teachers and leaders in school who did not like "doing the outdoor thing". Spiritual Director A knew of some people who did not like the outdoor experience because they did not like nature: "It's not for everyone. Some people don't like the idea of birds and insects, they find them a bit distracting, kind of a nuisance, and so it's not for everyone". I understand that some people do not like certain animals or creepy crawlies but I believe that there are many natural resources outdoors that everyone can connect with, it being our natural environment. Spiritual Director B referred to people who prefer indoor-

based spiritual experiences: “Some people like the quiet of the indoors and some people like the quiet of church indoors, and that’s where they find their inspiration, their meeting with God, the Holy Spirit”. She did continue however, by saying that perhaps that is due to the fact that they haven’t had much experience of outdoor spirituality and they have been brought up doing spiritual things indoors, as has been the tradition for many in the West, as explained in Chapter 2. Spiritual Director A continued by saying that the outdoors can be distracting for other reasons, for example if you wish to narrow the focus more, such as for meditating. She herself says that she is more successful meditating when indoors, and I can understand that, without taking anything away from outdoor meditation. That is why I believe that there is a time and a place for indoor-based spirituality. Teacher B agrees:

There’s definitely a time and place for both...I’ve had lovely spiritual experiences taking place inside. And it’s not always practical to say ‘Right, everybody outside!’ You could overdo it. You’ve got to keep it sacred, keep it special. So there’s definitely a time and a place for both.

Another disadvantage was teacher inexperience of developing spirituality in the outdoors and fear of doing something new. However, it was suggested that the sharing of good practice was a way forward for this, and I agree. Other disadvantages were logistical. Spiritual Director B concluded that larger groups do not always work in the outdoors as sound does not travel well and I agree that smaller groups may possibly work better for certain activities. Likewise, Teacher A suggested some schools may not be blessed with a good outdoor space in which to carry out spiritual activities. I comprehend that not all schools have great outdoor areas but all schools have some outdoor space. Therefore, although an outdoor area may be less attractive or show less potential, that is not to say that spiritual activities cannot be carried out there. After all, following the Ignatian way, all you need to do is look at the sky or pick up a blade of grass to find God. None of the children in my focus group communicated any negative views after having experienced spiritual activities in the outdoors – they liked them all and only had positive things to say about their experience.

#### **4.3.3 Leadership**

From the evidence of the data, both Teacher A and Teacher B, as leaders of spirituality in their schools, are undoubtedly providing lots of outdoor spiritual experiences for their pupils. However, both teachers believe that not enough spiritual development is happening outdoors in primary Catholic schools in general. Teacher B said: “There are some schools that are not using the outdoor space at all and I think the children are missing out massively”. The teachers did talk about some school leaders developing their outdoor space for the development of spiritual activity. For example, several schools in the diocese have followed recommendations from the diocese to create a sacred space outdoors. The teachers also spoke about a lot of schools in the diocese planning visits to the Youth Village or Holy Island for retreats days or residential trips where spiritual outdoor experience is strong. Although Spiritual Director B and Spiritual Director A did not know much about the situation as regards spiritual development in the outdoors within Catholic primary schools, they both implied that they think that schools should do more spiritual activities outside. Spiritual Director B said: “because it’s probably from that age that they learn that they do that inside and that’s why as adults we think that’s why we should do that kind of stuff inside because we haven’t had experience of it”. This reflects what was said in Chapter 2 about indoor-based spirituality and the fact that old habits stay put unless change is implemented.

And so, more needs to be done in Catholic primary schools generally as regards using the outdoors for spiritual development. Teacher A believes that the success of this is down to leaders. She said: “I think it depends on who your R.E. lead is in the school and who are the individuals leading it... it’s got to be...the vision of the person leading it”. She reinforced her point saying: “I do think it’s down to who are the lead people in the school responsible for that area and are they actively doing something about it?” I agree with this point from my own personal experience. It has to be down to leaders who have the vision to lead it, and the ability to be

proactive and inspire others: people who are charismatic leaders, as described in Chapter 2.

Both teachers mentioned the fact that the inexperience of staff to lead spiritual activities in the outdoors has meant that not enough has been done so far. They both felt that in order to lead others in developing spirituality using the outdoors, there is a need to share good practice. Both Teacher A and Teacher B invite teachers to take part in experiences they lead in the outdoors, especially Teacher A who works closely with Newly Qualified Teachers. This reflects both the transformational and collegiate styles of leadership as highlighted in Chapter 2. Teacher A also addressed the idea of pupils leading spiritual activities outdoors and how, by watching her modelling, they were able to lead the rosary sessions in the prayer garden. This reflects my experience in schools of how everyone can be a leader and it reminds me of Murphy (1997:136) when he refers to the idea of a 'community of leaders' and quotes Barth (1990:124) who realised that within all organisations, including schools, there is a huge pool of 'untapped' leadership talent, which can and should be explored and used. In fact, everyone has leadership potential and deserves a chance.

Moreover, Teacher B pointed out how important it is as a leader of spiritual activities to know your own spirituality well. She said:

I think if the class teacher's not comfortable in their own spirituality and leading the children then I do think that then becomes a bit of an issue...even if someone is willing, if they haven't got that deepness of spirituality within themselves then you can't possibly expect to get the children there.

Teacher B clearly demonstrates her belief in the importance of authentic leadership which was another leadership style referred to in Chapter 2.

When speaking to Teacher A and Teacher B, they both had elements of many of the leadership styles outlined in the literature review. They are both transformational and charismatic leaders as they are people-oriented and encourage staff within

their school to share their vision for outdoor spirituality with passion and enthusiasm. All of the adults in my study seem to be servant leaders, just like Jesus, serving others in spiritual development and demonstrating many of the characteristics that Larry Spear identified from Greenleaf's original writings on servant leadership.

#### **4.4 Summary**

I have presented the results of my findings through themes which emerged from my research. I have then scrutinised these in the light of my literature review and own experience, finding a vast amount of correlation between the theory outlined in Chapter 2 and the practice that has emerged from the interviews and focus group activities. This included spiritual activities and the use of the outdoors: the main ones were using gardens, water and the sky, and these overlapped with the theory in Chapter 2. It also included the advantages and disadvantages of developing spirituality in the outdoors – the advantages were vast and recurrent: the outdoors is our natural environment; it creates a sense of calm and a feeling of freedom; it allows us to connect with something other; it inspires awe and wonder, and provides the opportunity for powerful experiences. These all reflected theories in Chapter 2. The disadvantages were much fewer – only one disadvantage was repeated and that was the British weather although one teacher, and I, contradicted this and viewed the positive potential of inclement weather on developing spirituality. The state of play in Catholic primary schools was confirmed in that generally there is not enough that is being done as regards developing spirituality in the outdoors and this was seen as a massively missed opportunity. Correlation between theory and practice was seen in aspects of leadership, where the leadership styles necessary for developing spirituality in the outdoors in Catholic primary schools matched those which were evident in the people discussed in the literature review.

There were many consistencies found amid the theory outlined in Chapter 2 and the practice that has emerged from the interviews and focus group activities. As

mentioned in Chapter 3, had I had longer to gather and analyse data, I could have interviewed a larger sample of people to receive an even broader spectrum of response. However, within the time scale and limits of this dissertation, I am very pleased with my results and I believe that they have provided substantial evidence.

In the final chapter, I am going to conclude by summarising the main findings of my research and the principle outcomes of the analysis of these findings. I will provide recommendations for developing spirituality in the outdoors which will offer practical steps for my own school, St. Jude's, and also for Catholic primary schools in general.

## **Chapter 5 – Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation was to enquire about the use of the outdoors for spiritual development as a mission for the primary Catholic school. In Chapter 1, I emphasised the fact that there seems to be a predominance of indoor-based spirituality within schools despite the fact that many people claim to feel more spiritual in the outdoors and that, within the national and Catholic educational contexts, there is no expectation for spirituality to be developed in the outdoors despite the fact that spirituality and the outdoors are deemed very important as separate entities. In Chapter 2, I highlighted that only some definitions of spirituality refer to a relationship with the outdoor world and yet for our ancestors long ago the outdoor world was such an important factor in their spirituality. I described how our habits changed over time in that we moved away from connecting spiritually to the natural world, with the arrival of monotheistic religions and the creation of indoor places of worship. However, I explored many examples in which our Catholic faith has in fact always been creation-centred: biblical origins and teachings which focus on the outdoor world for spiritual development, and also Catholic spiritual traditions, such as the Franciscans and the Jesuits, whose practices involve connecting with the outdoor world in various ways. I also drew attention to recent Church teaching, centring on Pope Francis' recent encyclical on the environment in which he urges us to reconnect with the outdoor world and discover God's mystery and beauty in all things. He stresses that this approach to spirituality is essential if we are to protect the earth from further environmental damage.

From my research, it was evident that not enough is being done in Catholic primary schools in general to develop spirituality in the outdoors. However, I learnt a lot about how spirituality in the outdoors can be developed with children. The teachers and spiritual directors gave strong examples of how the outdoors space could be utilised in order to nurture spirituality. Along with my focus group activities, there

were common themes which emerged: gardens, water and the sky, for example, and these themes were also evident in the literature review. There were also many common advantages of developing spirituality in the outdoors based on the participants' experiences and these far outweighed any disadvantages: the outdoors is our natural environment; the outdoors encourages a sense of calm and freedom; developing spirituality in the outdoors allows us to connect to something other, increases awe and wonder and offers the possibility for very powerful experiences. When interpreted against the theories from the literature review, there was substantial evidence that the same advantages of outdoor-based spirituality were present in the Catholic teachings and traditions that I had discussed. This clarified to me how important developing spirituality in the outdoors is for people in general and for the Catholic primary school in particular. Along with Pope Francis' recent calling to us in his encyclical, it confirmed to me that it is indeed a mission that Catholic school leaders, if not already doing so, need to address.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the implications for leadership in Catholic schools. I will also look back over this study and consider the limitations. I will end by giving a series of recommendations that will provide practical steps for developing spirituality in the outdoors, that can serve my own school, St. Jude's, and help leaders of any other school, Catholic or otherwise, who wish to embark on developing spirituality in the outdoors in their current setting.

## **5.2 Implications for Leadership**

If leaders within schools are to redefine their school's idea of spirituality by taking on the mission of developing spirituality in the outdoors, it would be useful for them to share with staff the theory behind it; the historical context of our changing relationship with the outdoor world, as well as learning from Jesus, the saints and various traditions of how they developed spirituality in the outdoors. I also think that it would be worthwhile for leaders to read Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* to see how a relationship with the natural world can enhance care for the

environment, an area that most schools already include in their curriculum, and share this with staff too.

Leaders also need to be knowledgeable about the benefits of outdoor-based spirituality so that they understand the reasons behind what they are embarking on and can encourage the interest of others. The various benefits, as detailed in Chapter 4, including a more natural and deeper spiritual experience, are widely recognised by those who participated in the research and are also mirrored in Catholic teachings and traditions. As well as the benefits to children participating in outdoor-based spirituality, it is also important to remember that adult leaders also benefit from the outdoor experience: they witness and observe the response of children connecting to the natural world and they also have an abundance of natural resources at hand which lends to the possibility of being more spontaneous. Leaders need to share all benefits with their teams to foster a whole-school approach and passion for this mission.

Leaders in schools need to encourage teachers to plan to use the outdoor space for explicitly spiritual purposes. Many teachers already use outdoor areas in which to teach but many will be new to using the space with a spiritual aim. Chapter 4 summarised key ways to use the outdoor space, looking in detail at gardens, water and the sky, and I also mentioned the use of the senses, the use of natural objects and pilgrimages. However, these were just a few common examples found across my research and although they would offer a good starting point, there are many other ways of using the outdoor space for developing spirituality.

Shared practice and a collaborative approach is really important to help teachers learn different methods of developing and leading spiritual activities in the outdoors. Leaders need to give teachers time to spend together, in staff meeting time or lesson observations, to share best practice. Shared practice could happen not just within your own school but also further afield; for example, with other schools in the diocese or area which deliver excellent practice in this field. Ideas for

activities could also be shared in a common place, such as a shared folder on the school network or they could even be collated into a handy booklet or CD Rom for teachers to use.

Leaders need to be aware of the possibilities and the limitations of their outdoor space for spiritual activities and when planning general outdoor improvements within their school grounds, need to keep in mind the potential for spiritual purposes. If schools do not already have a quiet outdoor area in the form of a peace of prayer garden, perhaps this could be an area to start developing. Not all schools, in fact rather few, have a view of a beautiful landscape from their school grounds. However, it is important that leaders realise the power of the landscape at helping to develop spirituality in pupils and organise visits accordingly. Therefore, pupils should have the opportunity to visit places on retreat days or residential trips where they can be in the presence of a beautiful, natural backdrop, be it hills, mountains, sea or lakes, for example, as some children may never get this experience at home. And when surrounded by the beauty of a natural backdrop, leaders should involve the pupils in connecting to the landscape in a spiritual way.

Inclement weather was the main disadvantage which was suggested for leading spiritual activities in the outdoors. However, leaders in school need to see the benefit of so-called 'bad' weather for spiritual development, just as they see the advantages of it in the Early Years environment where they are encouraged to expose children to a wider experience of weathers and seasons. In keeping in mind the Celts who felt the essence of God in the elements, spiritual activities should not be postponed or brought indoors just because it is raining or snowing. Obviously, leaders will need to ensure that there is a stock of waterproofs or an outdoor shelter under which to keep cover and teachers need to plan accordingly for potential change in the weather.

Head teachers need to make sure that the person or people leading spiritual development in the outdoors (it may be themselves) are transformational and

charismatic leaders who will share their vision and inspire commitment to it. They should also know themselves and their own spirituality if they are to nurture the spirituality of others, therefore leading in an authentic way. Leaders also need to bear in mind that they have the ability to encourage pupils to become leaders in their own right, as well as other staff. In this way, they can really nurture a 'community of leaders'. Through teacher modelling, pupils can learn how to take the lead, as demonstrated by Teacher A whose Year 6 pupils led the rosary during Holy week after they had watched her share good practice throughout Lent. At St. Jude's, the Year 5/6 pupils have become very adept at preparing their indoor class liturgies following modelling from their teacher; they now just need encouragement to transfer these skills to plan liturgies or other spiritual activities in the outdoor environment.

It would be great if all leaders in Catholic primary schools begin to realise that developing spirituality in the outdoors is a mission and start to practise, encourage and redefine spirituality with an outdoor focus.

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

Although I think that I have gathered significant data within the time constraints of this dissertation, I know that there are some things that could have been improved in my research. Firstly, had I started to collect my data earlier, I could have approached and interviewed more people. I would have liked to have interviewed head teachers or teachers from more settings to strengthen, or not, my results. I would have also liked to have created more focus groups in different settings, again to widen my results and to increase validity.

I had planned to visit a particular Catholic primary school in the diocese which is also a Forest School to see how it incorporates the spiritual dimension into their Forest School work but it did not happen as time ran out at the end of the summer term. However, I have heard that they combine spirituality into their Forest School activities in many ways; for example, during Advent, each class in the school goes

into the Forest School area to help build an outdoor Nativity crib with twigs and leaves and then they hold their carol service around the outdoor crib. I still hope to visit the school at some point in the near future to learn more about their work.

The idea for using an outdoor setting in which to carry out my research only came to me following my first two interviews. I felt that an outdoor setting would be more appropriate given the nature of the area of study. Therefore, in my subsequent interviews, I ensured that I undertook them in the outdoors. I feel that these participants may have been inspired more being in the outdoor setting and perhaps the natural backdrop improved their responses. Also, I would have preferred to have used the same outdoor location when carrying out research. Had it been logistically possible, I would have carried out all my research on the same day at the same outdoor location, to improve consistency and therefore validity.

There were ideas that I could not explore within the limits of the word count of this dissertation. When looking at themes which emerged from discussion about the use of the outdoors for spiritual activities, three of them had to be mentioned but then discarded: use of the senses, use of natural objects and pilgrimages. Had I had a larger word count, I would have given details about each of these. Personally, and aside from this dissertation, I would like to explore more deeply the theme of pilgrimages with children and how they could be used within my school setting and beyond. Another limitation with the word count was that Teacher A described in detail some very moving and powerful experiences of outdoor spirituality and due to their depth and richness, I felt that I could not summarise them; my alternative was that I referred the reader to Appendix 3 to read that section of the interview that described the experiences.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

I am going to conclude by providing a list of practical steps or general recommendations that will help leaders at St. Jude's and any other Catholic, or non-Catholic primary school, to begin to embed spiritual development in the outdoors.

- 1) Understand the theory and benefits behind developing spirituality in the outdoors and disseminate this with staff to promote a whole-school approach
- 2) Encourage teachers in school to plan regular spiritual activities in the outdoors, whatever the weather, giving children plenty of opportunities to be in the moment and to experience wonder and awe
- 3) Learn from others and share best practice within your own setting and beyond, creating and storing a shared resource of ideas for outdoor spiritual activities
- 4) Make best use of your school's outdoor space and develop the outdoor space with spirituality in mind
- 5) Expand outdoor spiritual experiences beyond the school gate: arrange retreat days or residential trips for pupils and staff to inspiring, beautiful settings
- 6) Lead with vision and model good practice, ensuring that you are in touch with your own spirituality; this will inspire others, adults and pupils, to become leaders in their own right, creating a 'community of leaders'
- 7) If embarking on further study, for example, the St. Mary's University MA course in Catholic School Leadership, consider further research in the area of developing spirituality in the outdoors; it is fertile ground, particularly in the light of Pope Francis' recent encyclical on the environment.

A final thought:

We plant the seeds that one day will grow...

We cannot do everything – and there is a sense of freedom in realising that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may never be complete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest...

(Archbishop Oscar Romero, 'We are Prophets'  
in Murphy and Fincham, 2012: 5.1)

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## Appendices

## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Questions for Adults (Teachers and Spiritual Directors):**

6. What would be your definition of 'spirituality'?
7. Within your work, can you tell me about activities, in particular spiritual ones, that you've led or observed using the outdoors?
8. From a leadership perspective, what do you think are the pros and cons of leading spiritual activities outside?
9. In what ways, if any, do you think that being outdoors helps children connect to their spirituality more than being indoors?
10. From your experience, in what practical ways, if any, do Catholic primary schools use the outdoors to develop spirituality in children?

### **Questions for Children in Focus Group:**

*(Before spiritual activities outside):*

- 1) What do you think is meant by the word 'spirituality'?  
*(Children will need some support with explanation)*
- 2) In what spiritual activities, if any, have you taken part in school?

*(After spiritual activities outside):*

- 3) Did you like the activities? Why/ why not?
- 4) How do you feel doing spiritual activities outdoors?
- 5) Would you like to do more spiritual activities outside? Why/ why not?

## Appendix 2

### Focus Group Activities

1. (Sitting on the grass): Play music by Enya ('Watermark') and lead children into a meditation using the senses; focus on the breath and stillness/ calmness inside (golden light); ask pupils to notice how they feel.
2. (Lying down looking up at the sky): Read children's version of Psalm 19; children listen while contemplating the sky. Afterwards, talk about the wonder of the sky: the sun, the stars and their proportions in relation to each other and the earth; and, the infinite nature of the universe. Ask pupils to notice how they feel.
3. (Sitting up on the grass): Ask pupils: "Can you think of a time when you were in awe of nature (a 'Wow!' moment)?" Allow pupils time to think and share their experiences. Tell the group that today we are going to be focusing on the smaller details of creation and looking for things that make us think 'Wow!'
4. (Everyone up on their feet): Invite the children to walk across the field with bare feet and experience the feeling of the grass and the earth beneath them.
5. Send the children into the allotment with a magnifying glass and an iPad each to find things that are small but awesome. Ask pupils to take a photo of one thing that strikes them as amazing and be ready to share their thoughts with the rest of the group afterwards.
6. (Sitting in a circle on the grass): Share photos and thoughts - "What did you choose to photograph and why?"; "What was going on inside of you when you were doing the activity?"/ "Did you notice anything happening to you?"
7. Pass a piece of bark from the allotment around the circle. Ask pupils to say a thank you prayer about Creation as they hold the piece of bark. Tell pupils that they can choose to say the prayer out loud or privately to themselves.
8. If there is enough time, play the YouTube Psalm 148 music video on an iPad – let pupils listen and watch /close their eyes/, lie down/ sit up – it is entirely up to them –ask them just to relax and let today's experience sink in.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Example of Interview Transcript: Teacher A**

#### **What would be your definition of spirituality?**

I think spirituality is about being at one with your soul and to explore your feelings of holiness through many different Medias. So spirituality is about the spirit and essence of yourself, your inner strength, your inner soul, your inner person and the world around you and the people you encounter.

#### **Lovely... and do you think that's the same for children or adults?**

Yeah, I think it's the same for children. I don't think spirituality necessarily needs to link to a specific religious belief because people can be very spiritual without being connected to a religious belief. To be spiritual means to reflect and realise that we are not just human bodies; we have a soul, a spirit, an essence that even when we are dead and gone, it's still alive in many ways.

#### **Thanks, and within your work, can you tell me about activities, in particular spiritual ones, that you've led or observed using the outdoors?**

Yes, so spirituality in my work tends to be around a Catholic ethos because we are a Catholic primary school, so therefore the spirituality does lead directly to the religious belief. In the outdoors; we're sitting in the prayer garden now and we can hear the lovely water trickling along and we deliberately plan in many things outside. And I think the reason we do it outside is because you can connect with nature outside and the natural world. And therefore all of the background noise of the inside world doesn't put you off; you're at one with nature – just like the spirit is the inside and the essence of you when you're outside, you actually connect with the world in its natural form with no hidden agenda. So, we do lots of activities outdoors to connect with spirituality. For example, in our prayer garden, each class uses it at the end of their R.E. topic so every four weeks, children will plan liturgies, they will take place out here. During the months of October and May we pray the Holy Rosary out here at playtimes. We have governors, parents and teachers involved in that. Last year we put a chalk board around the bottom of the Our Lady statue, so that when people are out here exploring their spiritualities, they can

make marks, pictures or links to scripture or their feelings to see how they are being affected by it. So we have the Rosary out here, that connects with their spirituality, it's all centred around a statue of Our Lady. We also have during Lent, the Stations of the Cross are all outdoors. So we stick them on the windows, the inside of the windows, so that the natural light shines behind the image of Jesus and it brings it alive. So we have, every lunchtime, there's a day a week, like a Wednesday lunchtime for example, where I come and lead, the Year 6's lead the rest of the school in praying the Stations of the Cross.

**And does everybody join in?**

Everybody joins in. Each class has a slot and then during Holy week Year 6 lead it. During November we have a remembrance tree out here with stars on for people we love who've died. And we also have prayer stations around the school during Lent and Advent and there's always one outside which is all about the water. And what they do is they guide children to think about how it's making them feel so there's a prompt, which sticks on the inside window there, so it shines out into the garden and when you're in the garden you're just asked to sit on the grass, you're asked to feel the earth beneath you, to close your eyes and to just be at one with nature. And to allow the nature and Christ to speak to you.

**How lovely! And can you give me an example of what one the prompts might say?**

One of the prompts might say something like, "Close your eyes. Sit and be still. Listen to the water. Let Jesus run through your heart". Right, so outside we've got the prayer garden at school, we've also got educational visits that we go on, OK. So our big one is the Year 6 Holy Island residential and that is by far the most spiritual outdoor learning experience for children. We do it at the end of year in Year 6 and we take a group of Year 6 children up there and the whole purpose of it is to develop spirituality. It's not linked to any other subject. We always follow a theme and we normally go with the theme that's been at the Youth Village that summer. So, for example, the theme this summer was transform. How can you let Christ and spirituality transform your life? And this year the image was a lighthouse. So you had to let Christ be the lighthouse and guide you safe to the shore. And it was an amazing theme this year because we were able to be on an island. You take

children, you do lots of fun activities at Holy Island but embedded into all of it, throughout the whole of it, is this word 'Transform'. And I always go with 'the dust' at Holy Island. And I talk to them weeks before about 'the dust'. And the children say to me when you go the Holy Island, "What am I going to get, what will I love?" And I always say to them, "Well, you going to come back covered in dust". And they say things to me like, "Do you mean sand? Do you mean dirt from the dormitories?" And I say, "No, it's the dust. And it will be revealed to you throughout the weekend". So, we went on the Sunday afternoon this year so we didn't start with the Mass because it had already happened in the morning. So I contacted Sister Tessa: we have a great relationship with her and she led a Eucharistic service that the children planned. And she started with how they are going to be walking in the footsteps of our Northern Saints while they're on the Island that weekend. And we're going to encourage them to transform their lives through faith and spirituality. So she asked them at some point in the weekend to find a pebble on the beach, to slyly put it in their coat pocket when nobody noticed and to come and place it the special area. And she would hold them in her hands. We always use the scripture from Matthew's Gospel of the Mustard Seed. And we talk to the children about how they are in the transition period – going from primary school to secondary school. And how the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds but it bears the greatest fruit. And that's going to be them. We end with a liturgy on St. Cuthbert's Island and it's the dust. And 'The Dust' is a song that's been written, it's like a poem that's been written to the music of Amazing Grace. It has eight verses. It's the history of the Northern Saints – how they travelled and spread spirituality throughout the whole of Northumbria. And the thing that guided them was the Holy Spirit. And 'the dust' is the Holy Spirit. There's a wonderful line in the song which says, 'It's in every single blade of grass and every grain of sand'. And the last line I think says 'When you leave the Island, the Island never leaves you'. And it's all about that you've had this opportunity to develop your spirituality, to allow yourself to grow and not be embarrassed by it and you take it with you. And we have 'the dust' written out on sheets of paper, sort of on crisp, cream sheets of paper and at the very end of it we dig them and bury them into the earth on Holy Island. We

crumple them up and we tear the edges and we put them into balls, then move them back out because this symbolises how our life can be very messed up and chaotic. But when we need to go back to the core, we need to remember the spirit and how we can grow and we've always got something to turn to. So then at the very end we ask the children to fold them up into tiny squares and they're told to bury them deep down into an old pocket or an old cagoule and one day, when they're in the midst of chaos somewhere, it could be years later, they will come across the dust. And it will re-ignite them. What was lovely was about 2 years ago when I was at the Youth Village I bumped into a girl who was an NQT, about 5 years ago. And she came running over to me and she said, "You know what, I had moved out of the Catholic Sector, and I was in a different school, and we were going on an educational visit and I put my old cagoule on, she said, and I dug way down in the pocket and I found the dust and I realised how special it felt to be playing outside on Holy Island". So she came back to the Catholic Sector.

**Oh wow!**

So that's pretty impressive. Through that, through her encounter with the dust. It had meant so much to her at the time. Now something more current this year, we had a young boy called Lee, who is not a very spiritual boy, does not like to get involved throughout the year maybe in liturgies or masses. He pays lip-service to his R.E. education. He pestered me all weekend. "What is the dust, what is the dust? I don't believe in this dust!" You know, these types of remarks. And then after he had been to Holy Island, he had a wonderful time, he was awarded camper of the weekend. And he had the biggest smile on his face. That weekend it was gorgeous sunny weather and he'd been down to the beach with his family, he'd been down to Tynemouth and he came in on the Monday and we were sharing special moments from the year. And at the very end of the year Mass, everybody had a microphone and they were sharing with whole community what was their most amazing moment of that year. And this young boy stood up and said, "It was the moment when I realised that I could be spiritual". And he said he'd been walking on Tynemouth beach. When he walked on the wet sand, he said like a light shone out from his foot. And it's probably when you walk on the sand and it goes all light

around you. But he said he was walking on the sand with his little sister who's four. And he was showing her how to walk and run. And he said the light was shining out from his feet. And he made his whole family sit down and he told them about 'the dust' and the Holy Spirit. So I think really, to sum it up, when you do an experience like that with spirituality outside, it's practical, it's exciting, it's different, it sticks with people. So it's very powerful.

**And from a leadership perspective, what do you think are the pros and cons of leading spiritual activities outside for the leader of the group and also (you've mentioned it quite a lot already) for the children that you're leading?**

So, I'm normally the person who leads it because I happen to be the R.E. co-ordinator and the deputy head, so I'm leading all of the R.E. So, from my perspective, there are not many cons. I just see all the pros. If it's raining, we put waterproofs on. That's the massive con that people often say Oh, you haven't got the weather for it. Actually it just adds to it, and it's sometimes rather special when it rains or in the snow because you really get to feel the elements then. I think the inexperience of other young teachers and professionals leading it. Some people are almost scared to do things that are not in a book and are not planned out for them. So, I spend a lot of time encouraging people. So I've had two NQTs this past year. So I've encouraged them to use the outdoor areas. They'd just never thought about it. So, they come to watch and I model lessons for them. They come into all my liturgies and session and they use it. So I don't think there are many cons but I'm a very outdoor person. The massive pros... I suppose is what I've said. Just being outside, being at one with nature. All of our educational lives, mostly 90% of them, are inside. And we do a lot of spirituality inside so they get that. But to be outside and to be part of the natural world and the universe to me is about what spirituality is. Because spirituality is the essence of something, it's the essence of the person, it's the essence of the soul. So why wouldn't it take place in the essence of the world, rather than a manmade structure?

**In what ways, if any, do you think that being outdoors helps children connect to their spirituality more than being indoors? I know you've mentioned some things already, but what do you think it is about being outdoors?**

I think when children are outdoors, they don't feel trapped or inhibited by, maybe, their educational status. So whether they can do something or whether they are able to perform. There are a lot of children even simple physical tasks with some children, especially boys in school, they need to lean against things. They find it very hard to sit up in a chair and look at the board and have a pen in their hand and write because their body hasn't developed yet actually. And when I was in Early Years I discovered all of this. They quite liked to have one leg sticking out the side of them or leaning against something. And when you're out, as soon as you leave the classroom, you're not formal. So these people are not restrained. They don't have to follow the same rigorous set of rules as they do inside. I think it gives them a freedom that being inside doesn't.

**What are your observations when you see the kids outside, let's say doing a liturgy? What's the difference that you notice as compared to being indoors?**

It's holy. It's incredibly holy. Most of the time when the children are outside they're playing. And they're running around and they're screaming and they're using their outdoor voice. When they come outside to do prayer and they know they're doing it, or they're going on a spiritual experience, immediately they're quieter. They find it very powerful. I can't tell you how I'm inundated with people coming outside on a playtime, to use their playtime to pray the Rosary. If I led the Rosary in my classroom I might get five or six people because you've got to give up your break, basically. And no child wants to give up their break to run around. I do it for ten minutes, so you have a five minute break left to go to the toilet.

**And how many come?**

Eighty, ninety children here, in this garden.

**Wow! And how often is that?**

It's during the months of October and May on a Wednesday playtime. I just choose the day and we do it. We've got sets of rosary beads, we've got Year 6s holding baskets. People come to do Stations of the Cross out here. But this has now infiltrated really....because I use the outdoors a lot with prayer we've got some of the special needs teachers are now bringing children to read one to one in the prayer garden. They are reflecting on the fact that actually they get a better quality

of a one-to-one reading session outside. So it's not just spirituality, it changes the whole perspective no matter what you're dealing with. So we have people doing small group work out here now because it's different and we've actually just spent a lot of money in Reception class to encourage all seven areas of the Early Years curriculum to be taught outside because you get that higher quality.

**That's great...And, just within that same question, why do you think eighty come along to the Rosary outside but you would only get a few coming to a classroom? Is it just because it's extra special outdoors?**

It's extra special. It's exciting. They get to own it. They can choose where they sit or stand, they can lie on the grass. They can be picking up a daisy as they're doing it. They're taking charge, they're taking the lead and they know that I then ask people to lead it outside. I wouldn't really then ask someone to lead my class and teach my class. If it's outside, it belongs to them. It's our world, it belongs to us. We always make that link of 'this is our world, we've got to look after it', just as it's our soul. And we talk a lot about, within the school, about how we're always focused on exercise: we keep our bodies safe, we eat healthily. But we often neglect looking after our soul and our spirit. And that's what we do when we go outdoors. And you know yourself, when you've been inside for a whole day, you need to be outdoors, you need to be back at one with the Universe, shall we say.

**From your experience, in what practical ways, if any, do Catholic Primary Schools use the outdoors to develop spirituality in children? Obviously you're doing quite a bit here at your school, but do you know any other ways that you've seen?**

I know some schools use prayer gardens, they use quiet spaces. Some schools have little outdoor classrooms, sort of like tepees and wooden structures so that you can do all of your lessons outside. The Early Years is a big area where outdoors is coming. It's very big in the outdoors. And that's because you get a better quality of learning outside. People often go on pilgrimages – when I was at my last school we actually walked across Pilgrims' Way on Holy Island. That was a wonderful spiritual thing to do because the children were in shorts with bare feet and actually your feet sink right down to mid-calf and you sing hymns as you're going. And you get people singing hymns that have never sang hymns. And they feel transformed, they feel

quite unique. I did it with my husband who's not a Catholic, or claims to have no spirituality at all, and he sings the loudest! And he loves it.

So I think, I don't have far to go here but when we process to Church here we always process in a certain way and we go in holy state. And I suppose as we're walking it's a visual sign that we are going to pray. So it's a journey. When I used to be at my last school we had quite a walk to church and I remember doing the Passion play. The two soldiers and Jesus actually carried the cross the way that Jesus carried the cross. And we had to cross a main road and the cars just stopped. People on the street stopped because it looked like Jesus was carrying the cross through the streets. It was very powerful. So I think schools use it, they use it on trips: Holy Island residential, the Youth Village. When we go to the Youth Village the Year 6s do a big festival every summer. It's been running for four years now. This year was 'Transform' like I said, the year before was 'Ignite the Flame Inside of You.' So it's all about spirituality. And when you go to the Youth Village it's set in acres of outdoor land. And they have a big tent with music. Again, it's all about dance, music and being outside. So the children travel through the outside, they sit in the long grass and they talk about their feelings, they explore nature. I'm trying to think how else we do it. .... I'll tell you one more thing. We go to Kielder and they go to the observatory. And they look at where it all began. And they stare at the stars. So that's an outdoor opportunity for spirituality, I suppose.

**And is that linked to their Science as well?**

Yes. Geography, Science, History and English.

**Lovely. And do you think that Catholic primary schools use the outdoors for spirituality enough?**

I think it depends who your R.E. lead is in the school and who are the individuals that are leading it. I know I got on the bus to go to the Youth Village with another lead in R.E. from another school and her comment to me was, 'I don't like this outdoor stuff, I don't know what I'm doing'. But you get the same with a lot of things: some people don't like dancing, they don't like music, so they choose not to do it. They are promoting it through the diocese, you are promoted for spirituality but there are so many different things being promoted at the moment. I do think it

depends on the individual and the school you're at. And whether you're blessed with the space and how you utilise it and use it. You see, within the constraints of a school, when you get inspected for R.E., you're inspected under Catholic Life, Collective Worship, and R.E. Education but nowhere in that collective framework does it claim that it has to be outdoors. However, it's a massive missed opportunity and I suppose it's got be...the vision of the person leading it.

**And is the Diocese encouraging it?**

They do encourage prayer spaces. Yeah, they do have prayer spaces and prayer gardens. Yes they do encourage that.

**So, what do you think is the solution to this, for schools, if we want to encourage them to use the outdoor space more? Do you think it's a case of training or ....?**

I think it's the sharing of ideas. It's probably a time thing again. So there's lots of things that come round in waves through schools and through the diocese. You know, everybody is trying to be a Fair Trade School, or everybody's trying to be a Rights Respecting School. About five years ago, maybe six years now, it was when I was at my old school, everybody wanted an outdoor space. So people were building outdoor classrooms...they come in waves. I don't think they're being neglected but I do think it's down to who are the lead people in the school responsible for that area and are they actively doing something about it? There doesn't need to be a training need but it's a sharing of best practice, I believe.

**And is there anything else you'd like to add that maybe I haven't asked in the questions? Something else you'd like to share?**

Water, I think water is a massive thing for spirituality outside. So when we go to Holy Island, we don't choose to sit on the field in the middle, we always choose to be at the water. Water is life- giving: it's the sound of it, the feel of it. Being next to it I think immediately, in my opinion, puts people at peace and you get a lot more from them... and they are more open... so water, water is my big thing.

**Thank you so much.**

Was that helpful?

**That was really helpful, thanks.**



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors – A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools

Main investigator and contact details: Anne-Marie McQuillin, email: [102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk)

Parent/ Guardian:

1. I agree for my child to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my child's role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information my child provides will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which my child has supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of parent/ guardian (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 13/7/15

Name of witness (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 13/7/15

Child:

I have been explained the research project and details above in language I understand and I agree to take part.

Name of child (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 13/7/15

Name of witness (print): \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 13/7/15

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If you wish for your child to withdraw from the research or your child wishes to withdraw, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

I WISH FOR MY CHILD TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

## St Mary's University

Ethics Sub-Committee

Application for Ethical Approval (Research)

This form must be completed by any undergraduate or postgraduate student, or member of staff at St Mary's University, who is undertaking research involving contact with, or observation of, human participants.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students should have the form signed by their supervisor, and forwarded to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. Staff applications should be forwarded directly to the School Ethics Sub-Committee representative. All supporting documents should be merged into one PDF (in order of the checklist) and clearly entitled with your **Full Name, School, Supervisor**.

Please note that for all undergraduate research projects the supervisor is considered to be the Principal Investigator for the study.

If the proposal has been submitted for approval to an external, properly constituted ethics committee (e.g. NHS Ethics), then please submit a copy of the application and approval letter to the Secretary of the Ethics Sub-Committee. Please note that you will also be required to complete the St Mary's Application for Ethical Approval.

Before completing this form:

- Please refer to the **University's Ethical Guidelines**. As the researcher/supervisor, you are responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in this review.
- Please refer to the Ethical Application System (Three Tiers) information sheet.
- Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions and Commonly Made Mistakes sheet.
- If you are conducting research with children or young people, please ensure that you read the **Guidelines for Conducting Research with Children or Young People**, and answer the below questions with reference to the guidelines.

**Please note:**

**In line with University Academic Regulations the signed completed Ethics Form must be included as an appendix to the final research project.**

If you have any queries when completing this document, please consult your supervisor (for students) or School Ethics Sub-Committee representative (for staff) .

Approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014.



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

### St Mary's Ethics Application Checklist

The checklist below will help you to ensure that all the supporting documents are submitted with your ethics application form. The supporting documents are necessary for the Ethics Sub-Committee to be able to review and approve your application.

Please note, if the appropriate documents are not submitted with the application form then the application will be returned directly to the applicant and may need to be re-submitted at a later date.

Document	Enclosed? (delete as appropriate)		Version No
	Yes	Not applicable	
1.Application Form	✓		
2.Risk Assessment Form		✓	
3.Participant Invitation Letter		✓	
4.Participant Information Sheet	✓		
5.Participant Consent Form	✓		
6.Parental Consent Form	✓		
7.Participant Recruitment Material - e.g. copies of Posters, newspaper adverts, website, emails		✓	
8.Letter from host organisation (granting permission to conduct the study on the premises)	✓		
9. Research instrument, e.g. validated questionnaire, survey, interview schedule	✓		
10.DBS included	✓		
11.Other Research Ethics Committee application (e.g. NHS REC form)		✓	

I can confirm that all relevant documents are included in order of the list and in one PDF document entitled with you: **Full Name, School, Supervisor.**

Signature of Applicant: 

Signature of Supervisor:



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

Ethics Application Form

1) Name of proposer(s)	Anne-Marie McQuillin
2) St Mary's email address	102075@live.smuc.ac.uk
3) Name of supervisor	David Fincham

4) Title of project - Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors: A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools
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5) School or service	St. Bede's R.C. Primary School, Jarrow
6) Programme ( if undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research )	Postgraduate research
7) Type of activity/research ( staff / undergraduate student research / postgraduate student )	Postgraduate student

8) Confidentiality	
Will all information remain confidential in line with the Data Protection Act 1998	YES

9) Consent
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Will written informed consent be obtained from all participants / participants representatives?	YES
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10) Pre-approved protocol	
Has the protocol been approved by the Ethics Sub-Committee under a generic application?	Not applicable Date of approval:

11) Approval from another Ethics Committee	
a) Will the research require approval by an ethics committee external to St Mary's University?	Not applicable
b) Are you working with persons under 18 years of age or vulnerable adults?	YES

12) Identifiable risks	
a) Is there significant potential for physical or psychological discomfort, harm, stress or burden to participants?	NO
b) Are participants over 65 years of age?	NO
c) Do participants have limited ability to give voluntary consent? This could include cognitively impaired persons, prisoners, persons with a chronic physical or mental condition, or those who live in or are connected to an institutional environment.	NO
d) Are any invasive techniques involved? And/or the collection of body fluids or tissue?	NO
e) Is an extensive degree of exercise or physical exertion involved?	NO

f) Is there manipulation of cognitive or affective human responses which could cause stress or anxiety?	NO
g) Are drugs or other substances (including liquid and food additives) to be administered?	NO
h) Will deception of participants be used in a way which might cause distress, or might reasonably affect their willingness to participate in the research? For example, misleading participants on the purpose of the research, by giving them false information.	NO
i) Will highly personal, intimate or other private and confidential information be sought? For example sexual preferences.	NO
j) Will payment be made to participants? This can include costs for expenses or time.	NO If yes, please provide details
k) Could the relationship between the researcher/supervisor and the participant be such that a participant might feel pressurised to take part?	NO

13) Proposed start and completion date
<p>Please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the study is due to commence.</li> <li>• Timetable for data collection.</li> <li>• The expected date of completion.</li> </ul> <p>Please ensure that your start date is at least 3 weeks after the submission deadline for the Ethics Sub-Committee meeting.</p>
<p>I intend to begin to collect my data the week commencing Monday 13<sup>th</sup> July. I expect data collection to take around two weeks. My timetable is as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Focus group of 4 children in school</u>- trying out spiritual activities in the outdoors followed by interview - week commencing Monday July 13th</li> </ol>

2. Interviews with two spiritual directors - week commencing Monday July 13<sup>th</sup>

3. Interviews with two teachers - week commencing Monday July 20<sup>th</sup>

#### 14) Sponsors/Collaborators

Please give names and details of sponsors or collaborators on the project. This does not include your supervisor(s) or St Mary's University.

- Sponsor: An individual or organisation who provides financial resources or some other support for a project.
- Collaborator: An individual or organisation who works on the project as a recognised contributor by providing advice, data or another form of support.

Not applicable

#### 15. Other Research Ethics Committee Approval

- Please indicate whether additional approval is required or has already been obtained (e.g. the NHS Research Ethics Committee).
- Please also note which code of practice / professional body you have consulted for your project
- Whether approval has previously been given for any element of this research by the University Ethics Sub-Committee.

Not applicable

#### 16. Purpose of the study

In lay language, please provide a brief introduction to the background and rationale for your study.

- Be clear about the concepts / factors / performances you will measure / assess/ observe and (if applicable), the context within which this will be done.
- Please state if there are likely to be any direct benefits, e.g. to participants, other groups or organisations.

I am intending to interview adults (two teachers and two spiritual directors) who have experience of working with children in the outdoors or in the field of spirituality. I intend to collect information about their observations and personal experiences of using the outdoors especially with children and directly for spiritual purposes. I want to find out what they have felt is the impact of the outdoors on the spirit and in particular on that of children. I am also hoping to carry out a focus group of four children within my school with whom I will pilot spiritual activity in the outdoors and find out their responses as regards experience and feelings as well as making my own observations.

## 17. Study Design/Methodology

In lay language, please provide details of:

- a) The design of the study (qualitative/quantitative questionnaires etc.)
- b) The proposed methods of data collection (what you will do, how you will do this and the nature of tests).
- c) You should also include details regarding the requirement of the participant i.e. the extent of their commitment and the length of time they will be required to attend testing.
- d) Please include details of where the testing will take place.
- e) Please state whether the materials/procedures you are using are original, or the intellectual property of a third party. If the materials/procedures are original, please describe any pre-testing you have done or will do to ensure that they are effective.

I plan to interview four adults (two teachers and two spiritual directors). I will record all interviews on a voice recorder at St. Antony's Priory, an ecumenical spiritual centre in Durham. The study will be qualitative rather than quantitative as the questions will ask about feelings, experience and observations. However, I will remain open to the fact that the data may also lend itself to some form of quantitative analysis. The interview will consist of five questions and should take no longer than half an hour with fifteen minutes either side to set up the interview and close it. So, I will be asking for no more than an hour of their time.

My focus group will consist of 4 Year 5/6 pupils at the school where I teach. I have chosen these pupils, two boys and two girls, as they have no experience of spiritual activities in the outdoors. I will therefore try out some spiritual activities in the outdoors with them, within the school grounds and during normal lesson time. I will also ask them a set of five questions to find out about their experience so far of spiritual activities and their feelings about the activities carried out outside. I will ask for written consent from the children's parents and from the children themselves that they wish to be involved in the study, explaining clearly what would be involved and for what purposes. I hope to use a whole session (around one hour) with them in order to talk to them, do some short activities and gather feedback. I will also take note of my own observations. I estimate however that the study may take a little longer and run into two teaching sessions.

My materials will be original and I will test them out first with a friend who is a nun, a former teacher and RE advisor and now a spiritual director.

## 18. Participants

Please mention:

- a) The number of participants you are recruiting and why. For example, because of their specific age or sex.
- b) How they will be recruited and chosen.
- c) The inclusion / exclusion criteria.
- d) For internet studies please clarify how you will verify the age of the participants.
- e) If the research is taking place in a school or organisation then please include their written agreement for the research to be undertaken.

I am hoping to recruit four adults to interview - two members of teaching staff and two spiritual directors, four children for a focus group to pilot some spiritual activities in the outdoors and find out about their experience of them.

The adults I hope to interview are people that I know or have heard of who may be helpful towards my findings as they have experience in using the outdoors in their chosen area. Upon ethical approval, I will contact each of them to ask them if they would like to participate and will provide them with a participant information sheet. I will also hand them a consent form, if they agree to take part.

The children I hope to involve are four children from the Year 5/6 class in my school. They are a group of children who I feel will respond well to the activities and questions and have no experience of spiritual activities in the outdoors so far. Therefore this study will act as a preliminary to the piloting process. I attach a written agreement from the head teacher for the research to be undertaken in my school.

## 19. Consent

If you have any exclusion criteria, please ensure that your Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet clearly makes participants aware that their data may or may not be used.

- a) Are there any incentives/pressures which may make it difficult for participants to refuse to take part? If so, explain and clarify why this needs to be done
- b) Will any of the participants be from any of the following groups?
  - Children under 18
  - Participants with learning disabilities
  - Participants suffering from dementia
  - Other vulnerable groups.
- c) If any of the above apply, does the researcher/investigator hold a current DBS certificate? A copy of the DBS must be included with the application.
- d) How will consent be obtained? This includes consent from all necessary persons i.e. participants and parents.

Some of the participants are under 18, primary school children from my current school. I am a teacher at the school and so I already hold a DBS certificate, a copy of which is attached.

Written consent will be sought from the parents firstly after the purpose of the study has been explained. Written consent will also be sought from the children themselves once the study has been explained to them in language they understand.

## 20. Risks and benefits of research/ activity

- a) Are there any potential risks or adverse effects (e.g. injury, pain, discomfort, distress, changes to lifestyle) associated with this study? If so please provide details, including information on how these will be minimised.
- b) Please explain where the risks / effects may arise from (and why), so that it is clear why the risks / effects will be difficult to completely eliminate or minimise.
- c) Does the study involve any invasive procedures? If so, please confirm that the researchers or collaborators have appropriate training and are competent to deliver these procedures. Please note that invasive procedures also include the use of deceptive procedures in order to obtain information.
- d) Will individual/group interviews/questionnaires include anything that may be sensitive or upsetting? If so, please clarify why this information is necessary (and if applicable, any prior use of the questionnaire/interview).
- e) Please describe how you would deal with any adverse reactions participants might experience. Discuss any adverse reaction that might occur and the actions that will be taken in response by you, your supervisor or some third party (explain why a third party is being used for this purpose).
- f) Are there any benefits to the participant or for the organisation taking part in the research (e.g. gain knowledge of their fitness)?

There would be benefits gained from participating in this project and there will be no risk, adverse reactions or harm taking place. The benefits to the participants will be a greater knowledge of developing spirituality in the outdoors. Also, the children may encounter a gentle or deeper spiritual experience while taking part in the spiritual activity outdoors.

## 21. Confidentiality, privacy and data protection

- a) What steps will be taken to ensure participants' confidentiality?

- Describe how data, particularly personal information, will be stored.
  - Consider how you will identify participants who request their data be withdrawn, such that you can still maintain the confidentiality of theirs and others data.
- b) Describe how you manage data using a data management plan.
- You should show how you plan to store the data securely and select the data that will be made publically available once the project has ended.
  - You should also show how you will take account of the relevant legislation including that relating data protection, freedom of information and intellectual property.
- c) Who will have access to the data? Please identify all persons who will have access to the data (normally yourself and your supervisor).
- d) Will the data results include information which may identify people or places?
- Explain what information will be identifiable.
  - Whether the persons or places (e.g. organisations) are aware of this.
  - Consent forms should state what information will be identifiable and any likely outputs which will use the information e.g. dissertations, theses and any future publications/presentations.

I will collect data from the adult and child focus group interviews on a voice recorder. Transcripts will be typed up and analysis and conclusions drawn within the dissertation. The data results will not include information that will identify people or places. Any reference to anything they've said will be quoted anonymously (e.g. Person 1, Child A etc.) as will reference to their school or place of work, for which fictitious names will be provided.

Also, the recordings and typed transcript files will be deleted once the dissertation has been submitted and assessed. Participants will be ensured of their confidentiality prior to participation and how the data will be destroyed and when; they will also be told that they can ask for their data to be withdrawn at any time.

Only my supervisor, David Fincham, and I will have access to the data.

I will explain all of this in my consent form as well as the likely outputs which will use the information, e.g. Catholic primary schools, further study (e.g. dissertations, theses and publications/ presentations).


## 22. Feedback to participants

Please give details of how feedback will be given to participants:

- As a minimum, it would normally be expected for feedback to be offered to participants in an acceptable to format, e.g. a summary of findings appropriate written.
- Please state whether you intend to provide feedback to any other individual(s) or organisation(s) and what form this would take.

I will offer all participants a written summary of appropriate findings from the data collected from their particular participation group (e.g. adults interviewed/ children's focus group)

The proposer recognises their responsibility in carrying out the project in accordance with the University's Ethical Guidelines and will ensure that any person(s) assisting in the research/ teaching are also bound by these. The Ethics Sub-Committee must be notified of, and approve, any deviation from the information provided on this form.

Signature of Proposer(s) 	Date: 25.6.15
Signature of Supervisor (for student research projects)	Date:



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

## Approval Sheet

Name of applicant:

Name of supervisor:

Programme of study:

Title of project:

Supervisors, please complete section 1 or 2. If approved at level 1, please forward a copy of this Approval Sheet to the School Ethics Representative for their records.

### SECTION 1

Approved at Level 1

Signature of supervisor (for student applications).....

Date.....

### SECTION 2

Refer to School Ethics Representative for consideration at Level 2 or Level 3

Signature of supervisor.....

Date.....

### SECTION 3

To be completed by School Ethics Representative

Approved at Level 2

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

#### SECTION 4

To be completed by School Ethics Representative. Level 3 consideration required by the Ethics Sub-Committee (including all staff research involving human participants)

Signature of School Ethics Representative.....

Date.....

Level 3 approval . confirmation will be via correspondence from the Ethics Sub-Committee



Dear Colleague,

Re. MA Dissertation Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors: A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools

Spiritual development of children in primary schools more often takes place indoors. However, I believe that the outdoors is the natural setting which lends itself to people feeling spiritual and connecting to something ~~Other~~ I will interview teaching staff and spiritual directors to see how they use the outdoors with children and the impact the outdoors has on the individual. I will also work with a focus group of children in my school to try out some spiritual activities in the outdoors and ask for their feedback. My research will lead to a deeper understanding of the value of using the outdoors for developing spirituality and will make recommendations for Catholic primary schools on how they can use the outdoors specifically for spiritual development.

I invite you to participate in my research project which I am organising and funding myself. For further information, please contact my supervisor, Mr David Fincham, Senior Lecturer in Catholic School Leadership, Education, Theology & Leadership, St. Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London, TW1 4SX ([david.fincham@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:david.fincham@stmarys.ac.uk) Tel: 020 8240 4170).

#### Participation in the Research Project

You have been invited to take part in the project as you have experience of leading outdoor activities and I feel that your contributions would benefit my research. If you agree to take part, your participation would consist of an interview which will take between 20 and 30 minutes. There will be four or five open-ended questions. If you would like to see the questions prior to the interview or before you make a decision to take part, then please email me at [102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk). If you wish to receive feedback of my findings of my research, a written summary will be offered to all participants on completion of the dissertation project.

You can refuse to take part in the project or withdraw from the project at any time, simply by contacting me via my email address above. There are no risks or side effects involved in participating in this study and no special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study. Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights if something goes wrong. Participant confidentiality will be respected and your name and places linked to you will be anonymised within the dissertation. Information collected from you will be held until the completion of the project and destroyed once the dissertation has been assessed.

The main benefit for participants will be an appreciation of how they develop spirituality using the outdoors and knowledge that their input will inspire Catholic primary schools or further study.

I look forward to hearing your decision.

Kindest regards,

Anne-Marie McQuillin



Dear Parent/ Guardian,

Re. MA Dissertation Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors: A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools

Spiritual development of children in primary schools more often takes place indoors. However, I believe that the outdoors is the natural setting which lends itself to people feeling spiritual and connecting to something ~~Other~~ I will interview teaching staff and spiritual directors to see how they use the outdoors with children and the impact the outdoors has on the individual. I will also work with a focus group of children in my school to try out spiritual activities in the outdoors and ask for their feedback. My research will lead to a deeper understanding of the value of using the outdoors for developing spirituality and will make recommendations for Catholic primary schools on how they can use the outdoors specifically for spiritual development.

I invite your child to participate in my research project which I am organising and funding myself. For further information, please contact my supervisor, Mr David Fincham, Senior Lecturer, Education, Theology & Leadership, St. Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London, TW1 4SX ([david.fincham@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:david.fincham@stmarys.ac.uk) Tel: 020 8240 4170).

Participation in the Research Project

Your child has been invited to join a small focus group with three other children. Spiritual activity in the outdoors is something new to the group and so we will try out some activities. I feel that their participation will give a better perspective to my research. If you agree for your child to take part, the study will take place in the school grounds during normal lesson time and will take around one hour. There will be five questions following the activities and I will record their answers. If you would like to see the questions or activity descriptions before you make a decision for your child to take part, please email me at [102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk). If you wish to receive a written summary of my findings following completion of the study, please contact me.

You can refuse for your child to take part in the project or withdraw your child from the project at any time, simply by contacting me as above. There are no risks or side effects involved in participating in this study and no special precautions to take before, during or after taking part in the study. Agreement to participate in this research should not compromise your legal rights if something goes wrong. Participant confidentiality will be respected and your child's name and school will be anonymised within the dissertation. Information collected from your child will be held until the completion of the project and destroyed once the dissertation has been assessed.

The main benefit for participants will be an appreciation of how their spirituality can be developed outdoors and knowledge that their input will inspire Catholic primary schools or further study.

I look forward to hearing your decision.

Kindest regards,

Mrs A. McQuillin



# St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors . A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools

Main investigator and contact details: Anne-Marie McQuillin, email: [102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk)

Members of the research team:

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of witness (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

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If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the project: Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors . A Guide for Catholic Primary Schools

Main investigator and contact details: Anne-Marie McQuillin, email: [102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:102075@live.stmarys.ac.uk)

Parent/ Guardian:

1. I agree for my child to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my child's role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information my child provides will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which my child has supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of parent/ guardian (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of witness (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

Child:

I have been explained the research project and details above in language I understand and I agree to take part.

Name of child (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of witness (print) \_\_\_\_\_ .Signed \_\_\_\_\_ .Date \_\_\_\_\_

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If you wish for your child to withdraw from the research or your child wishes to withdraw, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

I WISH FOR MY CHILD TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Head Teacher:**

*Ofsted December 2012: is a very caring school where pupils achieve well and reach standards that are above national averages by Year 6'.*

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23 June 2015

To whom it may concern,

I confirm that I grant permission for Anne-Marie McQuillin to conduct research for the purposes of her MA dissertation, 'Developing Spirituality in the Outdoors – a Guide for Catholic Primary Schools', on the premises of our school,

She intends to work with a focus group of children trying out spiritual activities outdoors, making observations and interviewing them out about their experience of the activities.

Yours sincerely



### **Interview Questions for Adults (Teachers and Spiritual Directors):**

1. What would be your definition of 'spirituality'?
2. Within your work, can you tell me about activities, in particular spiritual, you've led or observed using the outdoors?
3. From a leadership perspective, what do you think are the pros and cons of leading spiritual activities outside?
4. In what ways, if any, do you think that being outdoors helps children connect to their spirituality more than being indoors?
5. From your experience, in what practical ways, if any, do Catholic primary schools use the outdoors to develop spirituality in children?

### **Questions for Children in Focus Group:**

*(Before spiritual activities outside):*

- 1) What do you think is meant by the word 'spirituality'?  
*(Children will need some support with explanation)*
- 2) In what spiritual activities, if any, have you taken part in school?

*(After spiritual activities outside):*

- 3) Did you like the activities? Why/ why not?
- 4) How do you feel doing spiritual activities outdoors?
- 5) Would you like to do more spiritual activities outside? Why/ why not?

## Interview/ Focus Group Schedule

1. Focus group of 4 children in school

(Trying out spiritual activities in the outdoors followed by interview)

Week commencing Monday July 13<sup>th</sup>

2. Interviews with two spiritual directors

Week commencing Monday July 13<sup>th</sup>

3. Interviews with two teachers

Week commencing Monday July 20<sup>th</sup>

Certificate Number 001413698876

Date of Issue: 02 AUGUST 2013

**Applicant Personal Details**

Surname: MCQUILLIN  
Forename(s): ANNE-MARIE  
Other Names: COLLINS, ANNE-MARIE  
Date of Birth: 17 JANUARY 1978  
Place of Birth: NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE  
Gender: FEMALE

**Employment Details**

Position applied for:  
CHILD WORKFORCE TEACHER  
Name of Employer:

**Countersignatory Details**

Registered Person/Body:

Countersignatory:

**Police Records of Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings**

NONE RECORDED

**Information from the list held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002**

NONE RECORDED

**DBS Children's Barred List information**

NONE RECORDED

**DBS Adults' Barred List information**

NOT REQUESTED

**Other relevant information disclosed at the Chief Police Officer(s) discretion**

NONE RECORDED

**Enhanced Certificate**

This document is an Enhanced Criminal Record Certificate within the meaning of sections 113B and 116 of the Police Act 1997.