The Salary of the Soul: A Human Resource Stewardship Model for Forming Gen-Z Catechists, Inspired by the Witness of the Vietnamese Martyrs

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DECLARATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CBCV	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CI	Confidence Interval
CMB	Common Method Bias
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences
GLV	*Giáo lý viên* (Vietnamese: Catechist)
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRS	Human Resource Stewardship
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IV	Independent Variable
MMR	Mixed Methods Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NVivo	Qualitative data analysis software (QDA)
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares (regression)
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
Q1	First-quartile journal ranking (e.g., Scopus/Journal Metrics)
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
REC	Research Ethics Committee
RQ	Research Question
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SD	Standard Deviation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SMU	St Mary's University (Twickenham, London)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Abbreviation	Definition
SWB	Spiritual Well-Being (Fisher's model)
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
VN	Vietnam / Vietnamese

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church in Vietnam's largest diocese (Ho Chi Minh City) relies on Generation Z volunteer catechists (lay faith instructors) but faces a crisis in how these young leaders are trained and supported. Despite their strong intrinsic motivation, often described as a "salary of the soul" or deep spiritual fulfilment, many Gen Z catechists feel unprepared by current training, leading to frustration and burnout that threaten the future of this lay ministry. This study addresses that gap by proposing a new Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model for catechist formation. Using a mixed-methods design, the study first conducted 33 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and then surveyed 305 catechists to gather quantitative data. Key findings highlight that intrinsic spiritual rewards drive commitment: feeling aligned with the Church's mission was the strongest predictor of volunteer happiness ($p < 0.001$), while external factors like training and leadership offered only secondary support. In response, the HRS model holistically supports volunteers by combining stewardship-based pastoral care, servant leadership principles, intrinsic motivation theory, and a narrative pedagogy inspired by stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs. This evidence-based framework reframes volunteer management as a form of pastoral care, provides practical strategies to nurture and retain young catechists, and offers the Church in Vietnam and beyond a sustainable path to a resilient and flourishing lay ministry.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Catholic Church in Vietnam, with nearly 7 million Catholics (approximately 7.4% of the national population as of 2020), ranks fifth in size among Asian national churches (Gaetan, 2024). Despite this significant presence, the Church faces a severe shortage of ordained clergy and thus depends heavily on lay catechists (faith educators) to sustain its evangelising mission. For instance, in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) - Vietnam's largest metropolitan see - over 700,000 Catholics (around 8.5% of the local population) are ministered to by fewer than 400 secular priests (Cheney, 2024). For context, the global average is about 3,408 Catholics per priest (Agenzia Fides, 2024). In Ho Chi Minh City, that equates to roughly 1,880 Catholics per diocesan (secular) priest (722,098 Catholics / 384 diocesan priests); if all priests are counted (diocesan + religious = 959), the ratio is about 753:1 (Chow, 2025). Catechists, defined by canon law as "lay members of the Christian faithful, duly instructed and outstanding in Christian life, who devote themselves to setting forth the teachings of the Gospel under the direction of a missionary" (Evangelization, 2020), fulfil an indispensable role in forming children and adult converts, leading prayer services when clergy are unavailable, and actively supporting parish life.

Contemporary Generation Z (born roughly between 1997 and 2010) presents distinctive characteristics and spiritual needs (Wajdi et al., 2024; Topalova, 2024) that pose substantial challenges to traditional catechetical methods. In Vietnam, as elsewhere globally, Gen Z is often described as the first "post-Christian" generation, influenced significantly by rising secularisation and religious disaffiliation (Tien, 2017). Having grown up as digital natives immersed in internet and social media platforms, Gen Z's worldview and communication patterns differ markedly from previous generations. They value authenticity, meaningful community connections, and purpose-driven lives (Aluthgama, Nguyen & Lokuge, 2021). Surveys indicate that approximately 65% prioritise personal happiness and overall well-being in their life decisions (Barna Group et al., 2022). Concurrently, many Vietnamese Catholics across generations continue to draw spiritual inspiration from the heroic witness of the country's 117 Martyrs, canonized in 1988, who occupy a prominent place in Vietnam's collective spiritual consciousness (Hoang, 2024).

Given this context, the effective formation (training and development) of young volunteer catechists emerges as an urgent pastoral priority. Traditional catechetical programmes in Vietnam, following national and global Church guidelines, have primarily emphasized doctrinal instruction, the systematic transmission of faith (Ung, 2023). However, pastoral observations and anecdotal evidence suggest these programmes currently fall short of adequately addressing Gen Z catechists' specific spiritual, emotional, and vocational needs (Vu *et al.*, 2024). Although empirical studies explicitly examining Gen Z catechists' experiences and perceptions regarding training in Vietnam remain limited, pastoral ministries increasingly regconise significant concerns about the internal spiritual resilience required to sustain effective ministry. Church documents consistently highlight that a catechist's effectiveness is rooted in their authentic witness rather than merely their teaching capabilities (cf. Catechesis Tridentate, 41). The Directory for Catechesis (2020) further stresses the *"dimension of being"* as foundational in catechist formation, preceding even the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Directory for Catechesis, 139). Additionally, theologians and pastoral researchers emphasize that insufficient holistic spiritual formation significantly contributes to ministerial burnout and reduced effectiveness, underscoring the necessity of nurturing catechists' personal vocations and relationships with Christ (Pope Francis, Antiquum Ministerium, 8).

This doctoral study addresses this critical research gap by proposing a holistic training framework explicitly designed for the unique needs of Gen Z volunteer catechists in Vietnam. The introductory chapter outlines the study's background, clearly articulates the research problem and rationale, specifies research questions and objectives, clarifies the study's focus and scope, defines key terms, and explains the thesis structure and organisation.

1.2 Background to the Study

The Second Vatican Council (1964) reaffirmed that the laity shares Christ's mission, with lay catechists serving as indispensable mediators of the Gospel. In Vietnam, where clergy numbers are limited, catechists are often the backbone of parish education. Their ministry can include teaching catechumens, leading Sunday liturgies in the absence of a priest, and serving as community leaders in remote areas. The Church's official directives (e.g.

Catechesi Tradendae, *Evangelii Gaudium*) highlight the dignity and missionary vocation of catechists and call for their thorough formation. In practice, however, "formation" has tended to focus on imparting doctrinal content (the what of faith) rather than on developing the catechist's own spirituality, pastoral sensitivity, and capacity for ongoing service. Many experienced leaders note that traditional pedagogy (lecture-driven, authority-based) fails to nurture the deep personal commitment needed for sustained ministry (Ricciuti, 2003; Chiroma and Cloete, 2015; Nugraha, Wibowo and Hendrawan, 2024).

Generation Z catechists in Vietnam grew up in an era of rapid social change and technological connectivity. Studies indicate that Gen Z is more globally connected, individualistic, and technology-oriented than previous cohorts (Seemiller and Grace, 2018; Barna Group *et al.*, 2022; Twenge, 2023). At the same time, Gen Z in Vietnam navigates a unique setting: a one-party state with traditional Confucian and Buddhist cultural influences, alongside growing consumerism (Kleinen, 2015; Ho, Progler and Vuong, 2021). In Catholic circles, these youth often identify strongly with Vietnam's heritage of faith (e.g. veneration of the martyrs as role models), yet many also feel "held back" from expressing their faith authentically in a society where secularism and scepticism are rising (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2020).

While the notion of fixed "digital native" learning styles is debated, cumulative evidence shows that, for most learners, interactive and experiential pedagogies and well-designed multimedia outperform rote memorisation on understanding and transfer (Mayer, 2021; Clark and Mayer, 2016; Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004; Kolb, 1984). Therefore, for cohorts often described as Gen Z, who have been educated in technology-saturated contexts, such approaches are pedagogically defensible, provided we avoid generational essentialism (Kirschner and De Bruyckere, 2017). They prefer mentorship and peer dialogue over didactic lectures, and they ask searching "how-to-live" questions rather than abstract theological ones (Dominikus Sukristiono, 2024). For catechesis, this implies a mismatch: conventional training in Vietnam has remained largely content-centric, whereas Gen Z catechists yearn for relational, reflective formation that resonates with their life experience. Without addressing this gap, the Church risks losing a generation: global surveys find that Gen Z has the highest rate of religious *"nones"* (no affiliation) of any age group (Bullivant, 2018; Barna Group *et al.*, 2022; Schaffner, Ansolabehere and Shih, 2023). In Vietnam's

volatile context, ministries that fail to engage young people meaningfully may quickly become irrelevant.

These challenges have prompted scholars and pastors to call for a paradigm shift in lay formation. Rather than treating catechists as vessels into which knowledge is poured, experts propose a holistic model that integrates spiritual, emotional and vocational dimensions (Sullivan, 2022). In practical terms, this means framing catechesis as formation of the whole person – nurturing their spiritual well-being (SWB) so they, in turn, can effectively nurture others. Spiritual well-being can be understood as a foundational dimension of health that permeates all aspects of life (Fisher, 2011). It includes one's relationship with self (sense of purpose and inner life), with community (belonging and loving relationships), with creation, and with the transcendent. In this view, a catechist's own SWB is not a luxury but a prerequisite for genuine ministry; if their well-being falters, so will their teaching.

Another emerging perspective draws on management theory to strengthen ministry. Volunteer organisations and social enterprises have increasingly applied Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to support volunteers' motivation and retention. However, well-known nonprofit scholars (Brudney and Meijs, 2009) caution that volunteers differ fundamentally from paid workers: volunteer "energy" is a human-created renewable resource that must be nurtured (not managed instrumentally) (Bittschi, Pennerstorfer and Schneider, 2019; Ata *et al.*, 2023). The present study adopts an interdisciplinary concept called Human Resource Stewardship (HRS), which adapts secular HRM principles through a theological lens. In essence, HRS treats catechists' dedication as a gift to be cultivated: it integrates organisational best practices (clear roles, mentorship, recognition) with Christian theology of vocation (stewardship, community) so that catechists flourish. By re-framing HR tools as "pastoral care" for volunteers, HRS seeks to bridge the gap between sound management and the sacred nature of ministry.

A key innovation of this research is the use of culturally resonant narratives – specifically, the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs – as a pedagogical tool. Narrative pedagogy (learning through stories and role models) is grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986): observing role models inspires learners by showing virtues in action. In Vietnam, the 117 Martyrs (17th–19th century Catholics canonized in 1988) symbolize courage, hope and community under persecution. Integrating their stories into catechist training can provide

contextualized role models that Gen Z can identify with. For example, a catechist who hears about Saint Andrew Dũng-Lạc's service may internalize a deeper sense of mission and resilience. By blending HR strategies (like training and mentoring) with this narrative formation, the study aims to create a pedagogy of resilience – a contextually attuned way of transmitting faith that resonates both psychologically and spiritually with young people.

In summary, this study is situated at the intersection of theology, psychology, education and organisational management. It addresses a vital pastoral question: How can the Church in Ho Chi Minh City form its Gen Z catechists so that they thrive spiritually, serve effectively, and remain engaged long-term? The following sections spell out the research problem and how this project proposes to answer it.

1.3 The Research Problem

Current catechist formation in the HCMC Archdiocese exhibits systemic shortcomings when viewed against the needs of Generation Z volunteers. The core problem, therefore, is not a lack of commitment among catechists, but a systemic failure to steward that commitment. This creates a 'paradox of service' in which dedicated volunteers derive profound personal fulfilment from their ministry even as they are being demotivated by the very structures designed to support them. This manifests in three interrelated ways:

1. Deficit in Holistic Formation: Traditional training has emphasized doctrinal instruction (what to teach) while neglecting the catechist's own spiritual, emotional and vocational formation. Vietnamese Church leadership has acknowledged the same pattern. In a 2017 address, Bishop Giuse (Joseph) Nguyễn Năng, then Chair of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam's Commission for Doctrine of the Faith (2013–2016) and now Archbishop of Saigon, observed (from the commission's assessment of catechetical practice) that catechesis had too often been *"only a class… many times we cram too much knowledge… much theory with little effect because it stays at the level of the intellect and does not move to the heart and action."* (Nguyễn Năng, 2017). Consequently, many young catechists lack the inner resources to endure ministry pressures. As the original research notes, catechists are often "equipped with what to teach, but not with the interior spiritual fortitude needed to sustain their ministry". This gap leads to a possibility of burnout risk: volunteers thrive on meaning and relationship, but current programs have

historically failed to attend to personal spiritual well-being, resilience and discernment.

2. Generational and Pedagogical Mismatch: There is a fundamental disconnect between traditional educational methods and Gen Z learning preferences. Gen Z is characterized as a true digital native cohort (born into ubiquitous technology) that learns best through experiential, dialogical and multimedia approaches. In contrast, catechist programs remain heavily lecture-based and authority-driven. As the literature highlights, Gen Z catechists "respond more effectively to experiential, dialogical, and relational modes of learning" (Choudhary and Pandita, 2023; Hammad, 2025) that foster authenticity and community, whereas "current models often fail to leverage" such methods. This mismatch also means that catechists' own burning questions – about meaning, identity and faith – go under-addressed. Many young volunteers perceive training as outdated or irrelevant, which undermines their engagement.

3. Lack of Theologically Integrated Support Systems: Finally, the Archdiocese lacks a systematic framework that guides the entire lifecycle of volunteer catechists. Secular HRM principles (e.g. recruitment, training, retention) offer useful tactics, but they cannot be applied "uncritically" in a faith setting where motives are sacred. Without an integrated model, there is no coherent strategy to recruit Gen Z volunteers, sustain their formation, or mentor them spiritually. In practical terms, this means diocesan leaders operate with ad hoc approaches rather than a unified vision. One critic observes that no model currently aligns organisational support with the theological and spiritual dimensions of the catechetical vocation in a systematic way.

Together, these factors create a critical gap between the Church's mission and its capacity to form future lay ministers. On one hand, the archdiocese needs dynamic catechists to educate new generations in the faith; on the other hand, it lacks a formation system attuned to today's young people. In short, the Archdiocese currently lacks a comprehensive formation framework that addresses these interrelated challenges for Gen Z catechists – a gap this research aims to fill. If unaddressed, this gap not only weakens individual volunteers, but also jeopardizes the long-term vitality of the Church's evangelizing efforts. In short, the problem is the absence of a comprehensive, contextually appropriate formation

framework for Generation Z catechists. This study takes that deficit as its starting point, seeking to design an HRS-informed, spiritually centred training program to bridge the gap.

1.4 Research questions

To address these complex issues, this research explores the overarching question:

How can a structured training programme grounded in spiritual well-being effectively equip Gen Z volunteer catechists in HCMC to carry forward the mission exemplified by the Vietnamese martyrs?

To provide a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous answer, this central inquiry is investigated through three focused, sequential research questions. Each question builds upon the last, moving from diagnosis to solution-oriented synthesis.

First, to establish a clear empirical foundation, the study seeks to identify the specific difficulties that catechists currently face. The research therefore asks:

Research Question 1:

What specific challenges affect the spiritual well-being and training of Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, given their distinct generational traits, parish leadership structures, and the broader Vietnamese socio-political context?

Second, building on this diagnostic understanding, the research explores potential solutions by examining established best practices from relevant fields. This leads to the exploration of theoretically and empirically validated strategies through the following question:

Research Question 2:

What Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies can effectively address these identified challenges, specifically focusing on aspects of training methodology, mentorship practices, and strategies for retaining volunteer catechists?

Finally, the study moves toward practical application, aiming to synthesize the insights from the preceding questions into an actionable framework. The third question therefore focuses on integration and implementation:

Research Question 3:

How can these insights be practically integrated into a structured, contextually relevant training program that enhances Generation Z catechists' spiritual well-being, draws inspiration from Vietnamese martyrs as role models, and promotes their sustained engagement within the Church?

To answer these questions, this study critically engages with literature from multiple disciplines, including Catholic theology, organisational behavior, NGO management, and human resource management. Through this interdisciplinary approach, this study aims to construct an innovative and effective training framework tailored specifically to the unique requirements of Generation Z volunteer catechists within Vietnam's contemporary context, contributing to broader scholarly discourse on generational religious education and faith-based organisational management.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this study stems from its systemic response to a multifaceted crisis confronting the Catholic Church's evangelizing mission: the growing inadequacy of formation models for Generation Z volunteer catechists. Situated within the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, this research proposes a necessary paradigm shift, addressing a critical gap between the Church's mission and its capacity to nurture its essential human resources. Traditional approaches, which have historically prioritized doctrinal instruction, increasingly encounter limitations when faced with the holistic needs, spiritual values, and vocational challenges of today's young adults. This problem is diagnosed as systemic, not merely pedagogical, manifesting as a deficit in holistic formation, a generational and pedagogical mismatch, and a lack of theologically integrated support systems. This study's original contribution is the design of a Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model for volunteer catechist development – the first integrated framework aligning ecclesial training with modern motivational and pedagogical principles.The proposed HRS model offers a cohesive, holistic, and systemic solution, integrating insights from theology, psychology, education, and management.

Beyond its pastoral utility, this study makes original contributions to academic discourse by forging new connections between practical theology, volunteerism, and religious education. A primary theoretical contribution is its demonstration of how to thoughtfully integrate secular management and psychological theories with robust theological principles. The research achieves theological re-appropriation, reframing Human Resource Management as a ministry of pastoral care and anchoring stewardship in foundational theological principles such as *Imago Dei*, Vocation, Grace, and *Koinonia* (community). This transformation is not superficial, as evidenced by reframing psychological needs like relatedness through the theological reality of community.

Furthermore, this research significantly advances the academic understanding of faith-based volunteerism. Faith-based volunteerism differs from non-ecclesial settings in its motivational core, exchange structure, organisational context, and outcomes. Religiosity, especially worship attendance/commitment is one of the strongest, most consistent predictors of volunteering across societies, shaping both entry and sustained participation (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2023; Son, 2012; Kim, 2017; Nakamura *et al.*, 2025). Unlike secular contexts, motivation is often framed as vocation/calling and transcendent or eschatological reward ("God will remunerate"), which helps explain high perseverance despite weak extrinsic incentives (Faletehan, 2023). Organisationally, congregations and FBOs rely more heavily on volunteers, embed religious practices (e.g., prayer, witness) into service, and thus need management approaches that integrate pastoral/spiritual support, not just generic HR techniques (Unruh & Sider, 2005; Hager et al., 2004; Coleman, 2017). It provides a rich, context-specific model that accounts for the complex interplay of spiritual motivation, vocational identity, and organisational support, moving beyond generic volunteer management models. The study integrates psychological drivers, such as the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness from Self-Determination Theory, with spiritual concepts including vocation, calling, and spiritual well-being. By framing the HRS model's goal as the cultivation of volunteer energy as a "renewable resource" (Brudney and Meijs, 2009), it offers a sustainable, long-term vision for volunteer engagement, fostering a thriving ecclesial ecosystem.

The study also innovates pedagogical theory through a "pedagogy of resilience" by operationalizing Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) through the culturally potent narratives of the Vietnamese Martyrs. This synthesis creates a formative method that

is culturally resonant, psychologically astute, and spiritually profound, designed to counteract contemporary pressures on Generation Z. The martyrs serve as symbolic role models, enabling catechists to observe, internalize, and emulate virtues of courage, perseverance, and hope, equipping them with spiritual fortitude for ministry and secular life.

The HRS model's primary practical significance lies in its capacity to effect tangible, positive change within the Church. It provides a direct and comprehensive solution to the empirically identified challenges facing catechist formation in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese. The model's integrated facets directly correspond to the diagnosed problems, offering a unified response that addresses pastoral, pedagogical, and organisational dimensions. This research profoundly re-centers the catechist's spiritual well-being as the foundation, means, and goal of formation, representing a fundamental shift from an instrumental approach to a pastoral one. By adopting and operationalizing Fisher's Four Domains Model of Spiritual Well-Being (2011), the study provides concrete tools for diocesan leaders.

While born from the HCMC context, the HRS model's principles are universally applicable, offering an adaptable template for any religious institution. The HCMC Archdiocese serves as a high-intensity crucible for testing formation models, enhancing the study's global relevance due to its acute challenges. The HRS model's core tenets, tested under significant pressure, are robust and transferable to other cultural and pastoral contexts.

Finally, the study carries important implications for societal and community development. By fostering empathy, integrity, resilience, and a commitment to service, the HRS model contributes to forming young people equipped to be ethical leaders and positive agents of change in the wider community. It champions a counternarrative to contemporary youth pressures, promoting service over self-interest and authentic community over isolation. The ultimate philosophical contribution is the redefinition of "management" within a sacred context, replacing a utilitarian logic of resource management with a pastoral logic of human flourishing and stewardship. This study champions a vision of human development rooted in dignity, purpose, and communion, offering a deeply hopeful framework for the future of lay ministry.

1.6 Focus of the Study

This research focuses specifically on Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City. These are lay Catholics (typically young adults aged roughly 21–28, born 1997–2004) who devote their time to teaching the faith without pay. By concentrating on this cohort, the study responds to the twin realities of Vietnam's Church: a disproportionately young population (Gen Z forms the largest generational segment worldwide) and the Church's strategic need to train them as future leaders.

Geographically, the scope is the southern ecclesiastical province of Saigon (HCMC archdiocese plus its suffragan dioceses), chosen for its large Catholic community and dynamic church activities. Theoretically, the study is interdisciplinary, drawing on Catholic theology, pastoral care, organisational management, and educational psychology. The content of interest centres on spiritual well-being, resilience and vocational identity, as well as pedagogical methods that leverage storytelling and community engagement. Empirically, the study employs a sequential mixed-methods design (pilot interviews followed by surveys; see Methodology) to gather data from active and aspiring Gen Z catechists, trainers (priests, religious and lay leaders), and experts.

The remit of this study is to focus specifically on volunteer (non-ordained) catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). It also focuses on current formation processes and needs, rather than historical trends beyond the living memory of participants. Moreover, while it engages with universal theological and psychological theories, it does not extend to non-Catholic settings or to paid religious educators. This focused scope ensures depth of analysis on the phenomena most relevant to the research questions.

1.7 Scope of the study

The scope of this study is defined along several dimensions:

- Population: The primary subjects are volunteer catechists from Generation Z (approximately ages 18–27 during research) in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese. This includes both active catechists currently teaching in parishes and those undergoing training. Insights from older catechists, catechist trainers (like DREs and priests), and pastoral leaders are included only to inform the perspective on Gen Z experiences.

- Geographical Boundaries: The setting is the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City and its neighbouring dioceses in southern Vietnam. This region has about 722,000 Catholics out of an 8.46 million population. While some findings (e.g. on youth engagement) may have broader relevance, the study's recommendations are tailored to this cultural and institutional context.
- Conceptual Focus: The study concentrates on formation rather than on liturgy, catechism content, or parish administration. Specifically, it examines how catechists are formed, supported, and sustained. Key concepts like spiritual well-being, volunteer motivation, and educational methods (e.g. narrative pedagogy) are in focus. It does not delve deeply into unrelated aspects (e.g. catechism curriculum in schools, sacramental theology, or general diocesan governance), except where they intersect with volunteer training.
- Time Frame: Data collection and analysis pertain to contemporary experiences (mainly 2024–2025). While historical factors inform the background (e.g. the legacy of martyrdom), the empirical investigation examines current programs and attitudes. The framework to be developed is intended for immediate application in the post - 2020 pastoral setting.
- Methodology: this study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach: an initial qualitative phase (interviews with key stakeholders) to explore themes, followed by a quantitative phase (survey) to test and generalize findings. This approach allows the research to first gain in-depth insights and then evaluates their prevalence across a broader sample. Chapter 4 will detail the methodology, but in brief, the rationale for this design is to combine the strengths of qualitative exploration with quantitative validation.
- Limitations: The study acknowledges certain limitations. It relies on self-reported data, which can be influenced by social desirability (especially in a religious context). Also, given logistical constraints, only a subset of parishes and catechist training centres can be surveyed, which may affect generalizability even within the archdiocese. Finally, while the HRS framework is designed to be adaptable, the research cannot fully test it beyond proposing the model; practical adoption would depend on diocesan initiative.

By clearly defining these boundaries, the study ensures that its conclusions are grounded in the specified context. It aims to produce actionable insights for the HCMC Church while contributing to broader understanding of faith-based volunteer formation.

1.8 Conceptual Clarification

Several key terms and concepts in this study warrant clarification:

Catechist: In this context, a catechist is a *lay volunteer* who is specifically tasked with instructing others in the Catholic faith. As canon law puts it, catechists are "lay members of the Christian faithful, who devote themselves to setting forth the teachings of the Gospel" (Evangelization, 2020). Organisationally, the instituted lay Ministry of Catechist was established by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Letter Antiquum Ministerium (2021) and subsequently given a Rite of Institution by the Pontifical Council for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) in December 2021. This ministry involves formal discernment, theological formation, and episcopal institution by the diocesan bishop. In the UK, the Bishops' Conference welcomed the motu proprio and noted they would determine how best to support and incorporate the ministry; as of this writing, no national norms on admission/formation appear to have been issued, and practice remains diocesan (CBCEW, 2021a; 2021b). In Vietnam, the Bishops' Conference published the documents and coverage of the Rite; dioceses continue to run catechist formation programs (e.g., Saigon's multi-level courses), with implementation of the instituted ministry developing locally (HĐGMVN, 2021a; 2021b; TGPSG, 2025). Within Vietnam, catechists typically assist priests by preparing children and adults for sacraments and by leading liturgies and outreach when clergy are unavailable. Importantly, they serve on a *voluntary* basis: their motivation is faith-driven rather than professional.

Volunteer vs. Employee: A volunteer catechist differs fundamentally from a paid employee. Volunteers "give themselves" freely out of conviction and sense of mission, not for salary. Management scholars note that volunteer "energy" is a special kind of resource: it can be cultivated or diminished by organisational practices, but it is never an obligation. For example, Brudney and Meijs (2009) describe volunteer commitment as a renewable resource that requires intentional stewardship. This study assumes that strategies effective for volunteers may differ from those for staff; thus, "Human Resource Stewardship" (HRS)

will frame HR practices in a participatory, mission-focused way rather than a purely transactional one.

Generation Z: Following sociological consensus, Generation Z is defined here as those born roughly between 1997 and 2010. This generation is often characterized as highly connected, having grown up with smartphones and social media ("digital natives"), and as highly diverse in outlook. Notably, recent research labels them the first "post-Christian" generation in the West; many in this cohort have no formal religious background. Even in religious families, Gen Z tends to question inherited beliefs and prioritize personal spirituality over institutional affiliation. In Vietnam, this means that young catechists may combine cultural respect for religious heritage (e.g. the Vietnamese Martyrs) with a selective, personal approach to faith.

Spiritual Well-Being (SWB): Spiritual well-being refers to a person's integrated sense of meaning, purpose, and connection with the divine and community. In John Fisher's Four Domains model, spiritual health is "a fundamental dimension of people's overall health and well-being," permeating all other aspects (Fisher, 2011). It includes (a) the personal domain (intra-personal relationship with self), (b) the communal domain (in-depth relationships with others), (c) the environmental domain (connection with nature), and (d) the transcendental domain (relationship with a higher power). For catechists, SWB might manifest as a strong sense of vocation, inner peace, and resilience amid challenges. The study treats SWB not as an abstract concept, but as a measurable outcome of formation (for instance, via established spiritual well-being scales).

Human Resource Stewardship (HRS): This term is coined by the study to describe an approach to managing volunteers that is stewardship-oriented rather than purely managerial. HRS blends insights from Catholic social teaching (on human dignity, vocation and community) with secular volunteer management. It implies that diocesan leaders and catechetical coordinators act as stewards of their volunteers: they invest in formation programs, career-path support, pastoral care, and communal formation. In practice, HRS might involve training structures like corporate HR (clear goals, feedback, career development) but infused with theological values (e.g. framing work as ministry). The goal of HRS is to renew volunteers' energy and commitment over time, akin to Brudney and Meijs's (2009) idea of "volunteer energy" as a renewable resource.

Narrative Pedagogy and Martyr Role Models: By *narrative pedagogy*, it means teaching through stories and examples rather than just abstract principles. In this study, the most significant narratives are the lives of the Vietnamese Martyrs. Pedagogically, these stories serve as role models: catechists can internalize virtues (courage, faithfulness, service) by contemplating how the martyrs lived. This idea is supported by Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), which holds that individuals learn behaviour and attitudes by observing models. Here, culturally potent narratives (e.g. accounts of Saints Andrew Dũng-Lạc and companions) are integrated into training to inspire Gen Z catechists. In essence, martyr narratives are treated as a form of theology-meets-psychology: they connect spiritual ideals with relatable human stories.

These clarifications will guide terminology in subsequent chapters. Whenever the study refers to "catechists," "Gen Z," "spiritual well-being," or "HRS," it is in the specific senses defined above.

1.9 Researcher Motivation and Rationale for Focusing on the Vietnamese Martyrs

This study is situated within pastoral engagement with young catechists in Ho Chi Minh City. Over several years, a recurrent pattern was observed: abundant goodwill alongside uneven formation; sustained energy for service but limited pathways for growth; and a strong attachment to Catholic identity that was only weakly connected to the concrete pressures of urban life, study, work, and digital culture. Informal conversations and ministry observations indicated that what most engaged Generation-Z volunteers was narrative, especially Vietnamese narratives perceived as proximate and authentic.

The Vietnamese Martyrs emerged as a focal lens for two reasons. First, their witness embodies a dual-value system salient within Vietnamese moral imagination, filiality, loyalty, and compassion, while also speaking to modern agency, including discernment, public courage, and social responsibility under constraint. Second, their lives lend themselves to narrative pedagogy: when presented as fully human (with fear, doubt, and growth), the martyrs function as credible and attainable models rather than distant icons. This aligns with Social Cognitive Theory, attention is captured by relatable exemplars; memory is reinforced by concrete, emotionally resonant scripts; self-efficacy develops

through vicarious and mastery experiences; and motivation is supported by valued outcomes. It also coheres with the FABC Pastoral Spiral, which calls for formation that begins from lived experience, analyses social realities, reflects in faith, and plans actionable responses appropriate to the context.

On this basis, the thesis investigates whether re-storying the martyrs, embedding their virtues within the everyday dilemmas of Generation-Z catechists, can provide a mechanism-rich and context-appropriate approach to holistic formation in Ho Chi Minh City. The focus is pastoral utility rather than antiquarian interest: connecting heritage to contemporary vocation, deepening spiritual well-being, and strengthening resilient service. Naming this motivation forms part of the researcher's positionality as a practitioner-researcher seeking explanations that are also operationally useful for the young catechists served.

1.10 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters, each building logically upon the last to move from the initial research problem to the final proposed solution. The structure follows a sequential path: establishing the theoretical and conceptual foundations, presenting the empirical findings from the mixed-methods inquiry, integrating and discussing these findings, and finally, offering conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 1: Introduction establishes the context and rationale for the research. It articulates the core research problem, specifies the research questions and objectives, and outlines the study's significance and scope.

Chapter 2: Literature Review critically examines scholarship across several interdisciplinary fields. It explores the theological and historical foundations of the catechist's ministry, the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z in Vietnam, and theoretical perspectives on volunteer management, leadership, and motivation. The review reveals a specific gap: Vietnam-based research rarely integrates theological accounts of catechist identity with empirical evidence on Gen Z volunteers' motivation and leadership dynamics, and extant studies are largely extrapolated from Western contexts. The present study addresses this by offering a Vietnam-specific, mixed-methods analysis that links theological foundations to motivational and leadership mechanisms among Gen Z volunteer catechists.

Chapter 3: The Human Resource Stewardship Model – A Conceptual Framework presents the intellectual heart of the thesis. It constructs and defends the integrated HRS model,

which synthesizes four primary theoretical lenses: Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory. This chapter explains how these secular theories are "baptized" and re-appropriated within a Catholic theological context to form a cohesive framework for catechist formation.

Chapter 4: Methodology details the research design and methods employed in the study. It justifies the use of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, underpinned by an abductive logic of inquiry. This chapter describes the procedures for both the initial qualitative phase (semi-structured interviews) and the subsequent quantitative phase (survey), including sampling strategies, data collection instruments, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings presents the rich, narrative data gathered from the in-depth interviews with catechists, trainers, and leaders. Through a systematic thematic analysis, this chapter gives voice to the lived experiences of participants, exploring the core challenges and aspirations related to pedagogy, spiritual well-being, leadership, and the role of narrative in formation.

Chapter 6: Quantitative Analysis presents the statistical findings from the survey administered to 305 catechists. This chapter provides a demographic profile of the respondents and uses descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and hierarchical regression analyses, to test and generalize the key themes that emerged from the qualitative phase.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Integration of Findings serves as the primary site of synthesis. It weaves together the qualitative and quantitative results, placing them in a critical dialogue with the literature and the HRS model. This chapter demonstrates how the integrated evidence provides a comprehensive answer to the research questions and validates the proposed framework.

Chapter 8: General Conclusion summarizes the entire research journey. It revisits the research aims, synthesizes the key findings, and articulates the study's theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations and offering final recommendations for both pastoral practice and future academic research.

1.11 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, the groundwork has been laid for the thesis by articulating the context, problem, and purpose of the research. Generation Z volunteer catechists in the HCMC Archdiocese stand at the crossroads of change: they carry forward a rich missionary heritage but live in a rapidly evolving cultural and technological milieu. The chapter has shown that current formation models are not fully meeting their needs, creating a pressing need for a new approach. The author presented the research questions and objectives that will guide inquiry into solutions, and have defined key concepts (such as spiritual well-being and Human Resource Stewardship) that frame the study. Finally, the chapter outlined the plan and structure of the thesis. The next chapter will turn to the literature, critically examining existing scholarship and Church teaching on catechesis, Generation Z, volunteer formation, and narrative pedagogy. By doing so, it will set the theoretical and practical foundation needed to develop an innovative formation framework tailored to Vietnam's young catechists.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Catechists hold a pivotal role in the life and mission of the Catholic Church, responsible not only for imparting doctrinal knowledge but also for guiding spiritual growth and nurturing faith within communities. Historically rooted in the early Christian communities, the ministry of catechists has evolved significantly, reflecting broader theological, cultural, and pastoral shifts within the Church. Today, the formation and ongoing support of catechists, particularly within volunteer-driven contexts, demands comprehensive, spiritually grounded, and contextually sensitive strategies.

In the context of the Vietnamese Church, particularly the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, the role of the catechist acquires unique dimensions due to historical, socio-political, and cultural influences. Catechists in Vietnam, many of whom belong to Generation Z, navigate a challenging environment characterized by limited formal theological education opportunities, state oversight, and diverse pastoral needs. Their formation is often informal, relying on unstructured mentoring, communal tradition, and lived witness rather than structured theological and pedagogical training (Agenzia Fides, 2025). This informal nature of training poses significant challenges related to catechist retention, spiritual depth, and effectiveness in teaching.

Recognizing these challenges, this chapter critically examines existing literature across multiple interdisciplinary fields to propose a holistic formation framework specifically tailored to Generation Z catechists in Vietnam. It integrates insights from theological foundations, generational characteristics, spiritual psychology, educational theory, and human resource management. Key theoretical perspectives, such as servant leadership, stewardship theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), are explored to identify effective strategies that enhance volunteer catechists' motivation, spiritual resilience, and vocational commitment.

This literature review also highlights the essential role of spiritual well-being as a foundational element for sustaining long-term catechist ministry. By focusing on the holistic spiritual, psychological, and communal dimensions of catechist formation, the chapter argues that enhancing spiritual well-being directly impacts catechists' effectiveness,

commitment, and overall happiness in their ministry roles. Additionally, the review emphasizes the pedagogical potential of role-model narratives, particularly stories of Vietnamese martyrs, as powerful tools for inspiring and reinforcing catechist identity and resilience. These narratives provide culturally and spiritually resonant examples of lived faith, perseverance, and sacrifice that deeply align with the historical and contemporary experiences of Vietnamese catechists. The review will further establish that servant leadership is not merely an ethical ideal but a practical method for fostering this spiritual well-being, as its core behaviours directly address the innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness that underpin sustained volunteer motivation.

Finally, this chapter argues that the acute formational challenges facing Generation Z catechists in Vietnam, rooted in a fundamental disconnect between their psycho-spiritual needs and the limitations of current training models - necessitate a new, integrated framework. It will demonstrate that by synthesizing spiritual well-being as a foundational goal, narrative pedagogy as a culturally resonant method, and stewardship-based support as a sustainable structure, a 'Human Resource Stewardship' model can be constructed that is theologically authentic, psychologically informed, and pastorally effective for this specific context.

2.2 Theological and Contextual Foundations for Catechist Formation

2.2.1 Church Teaching and Historical Background

The origins of catechist ministry are deeply embedded in the earliest expressions of Christian community life. From the apostolic period, lay believers played an essential role in passing on the faith, especially in contexts where ordained clergy were scarce or absent. In the early Church, catechists provided systematic instruction to new converts, especially catechumens, on core beliefs, moral teachings, and sacramental life. This instruction was not only intellectual but also spiritual and communal, guiding individuals through a process of conversion and preparation for full initiation into the Christian life (Pasquier, 2018). While the term “catechist” did not always appear formally, the function has long existed. "According to Catechesi Tradendae (1979), 'the Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks'" (John Paul II, 1979, §1).

Church documents consistently affirm the essential role of catechists in the mission of evangelisation. Lumen Gentium (Vatican II, 1964) underscores the laity's share in Christ's prophetic office, teaching that the faithful *"are called to be witnesses and to teach the faith"* in everyday life. Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, 1975) and Evangelii Gaudium (Francis, 2013) further develop this vision of catechesis as "a journey of personal encounter with Christ." Francis (2013, para. 3) invites *"all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ,"* framing catechists as facilitators of transformation rather than mere instructors. Reflecting this, Evangelii Nuntiandi affirms that *"modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"* (Paul VI, 1975, para. 41). Blackwell (2023) argues that catechists' spiritual maturity directly enhances their ability to guide authentically and foster faith-based relationships.

The Directory for Catechesis (2020) offers a comprehensive theological vision of catechesis as a "comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith." It identifies six essential tasks: promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, prayer life, communal belonging, and missionary spirit. Catechists are called to embody these dimensions and guide others in living them out, which requires not only doctrinal knowledge but also spiritual depth and pastoral skills. The Church consistently teaches that catechist formation must be holistic, encompassing not only doctrinal knowledge but also spiritual maturity, personal vocation, and pastoral competence (Directory for Catechist, 2020).

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) is explicit that catechist formation is intrinsically practical, a synthesis of being, knowing, and savoir-faire that is verified and matured in praxis. Beyond doctrinal content, the GDC calls for supervised ministry practice, ongoing mentoring, and feedback within the Christian community so that catechists "learn by doing," reflect theologically on experience, and progressively acquire pedagogical competence (GDC secs. 238, 240–243, 245–247). The more recent Directory for Catechesis (2020) renews the same emphasis on apprenticeship, accompaniment, and discernment in practice, urging structured pathways that integrate spiritual life, doctrine, and methodological proficiency through concrete ministerial tasks (DC 2020 secs. 132–136, 139). Read together, the directories define formation not as information transfer but as habit- and skill-formation tested in real catechetical settings (planning, co-teaching, observation, iterative improvement).

Despite the Magisterium's clear and consistent call for holistic catechist formation, encompassing doctrinal knowledge, spiritual maturity, personal vocation, and pastoral competence (Congregation for the Clergy, 2020), diocesan and parish programs in Vietnam frequently fall short due to governmental restrictions, limited resources, and personnel shortages (U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2024; UCA News, 2023). Pastoral exigencies frequently lead to a default towards more easily measurable didactic approaches, prioritising doctrinal content over the less tangible, yet equally essential, spiritual and personal formation of the catechist. This persistent gap between official teaching and pastoral reality constitutes a central problem that this thesis seeks to address.

While theology and spirituality form the backbone of catechist formation, the ability to communicate faith effectively is equally important. Catechists must be equipped with pedagogical tools that enable them to engage learners of different ages, backgrounds, and spiritual needs. Manning (2014) calls for a holistic pedagogical model that addresses cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The Directory for Catechesis (2020) reaffirms the need for formation that integrates method and content, encouraging catechists to act not as lecturers but as facilitators of dialogue and spiritual growth. Finally, formation must foster an ecclesial and missionary identity, stressing collaboration, service, and openness to lifelong learning (Camilleri, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Reaves, 2024).

2.2.2 Historical Evolution of Catechist Formation

In the modern and contemporary eras, the Church's evolving approach to evangelisation, formation, and lay participation has significantly reconfigured the role of catechists. During medieval times the responsibility of teaching catechesis fell to clergy members and religious figures who operated within parish environments and monastic educational institutions. After the Council of Trent (1545–1563) the Church intensified efforts in systematic religious education by implementing standardised catechisms to combat Protestant Reformation impacts (Old, 1992). The modern revival of catechetical awareness began in the 20th century, with the Second Vatican Council marking a key turning point. *Christifideles Laici* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975) re-emphasised the mission of laypeople as active participants in evangelisation, not passive recipients of doctrine. Vatican II's renewed vision

of the Church as the "People of God" reshaped catechist formation, calling for a more integrated model encompassing doctrinal, spiritual, and pastoral elements (Franchi, 2024).

In recent decades, this vision has crystallised further. In 2021, Pope Francis issued the motu proprio Antiquum Ministerium, establishing the instituted lay ministry of catechist and locating it within the baptismal vocation and the Church's missionary mandate (Francis, Antiquum Ministerium, secs. 1–3). The letter clarifies that catechists are lay, non-clerical ministers charged with evangelization, catechesis, and pastoral accompaniment under the bishop's authority; candidates are to be discerned, formed, and formally instituted according to criteria set by each bishops' conference (secs. 6–8). The Holy See then approved a Rite of Institution of Catechists, giving liturgical expression to this ministry (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree, 2021). In this sense, the reform both honours the historic contribution of lay catechists and elevates co-responsible lay leadership by providing canonical recognition, a liturgical rite, and a mandate for structured formation (secs. 6–9). As Blackwell (2023) argues, this juridical recognition represents a shift toward deeper theological and pastoral accountability in lay ministry. This trajectory reflects a growing institutional commitment to catechist training. The contemporary Church envisions formation not as an optional resource but as an essential mission priority, especially in contexts like Vietnam, where lay catechists form the backbone of faith transmission.

This historical trajectory, culminating in Pope Francis's institution of the lay Ministry of Catechist, signals a strengthened institutional commitment to formation. In practice, this is visible in (i) the Directory for Catechesis (2020) articulating catechist identity, competencies, and requirements for initial and ongoing formation; (ii) episcopal conference norms that establish certification frameworks, supervised practicum, and continuing-education hours; (iii) the expansion of diocesan catechetical institutes and structured curricula (biblical–theological, pedagogical, and pastoral) with assessment; and (iv) the adoption of formal rites of institution alongside mentoring and appraisal for novice catechists. It is a commitment that acquires a unique urgency and complexity within the pastoral context of Vietnam, where lay catechists have long formed the resilient backbone of faith transmission under extraordinary pressures.

2.3 The Pastoral Context of the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese

2.3.1 The Asian Pastoral Vision: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)

To understand the pastoral context for catechist formation in Vietnam, one must first situate it within the broader backdrop of the Asian Catholic vision and methodology. The normative theological and methodological framework for pastoral work in Asia has been articulated with profound clarity by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). This framework provides the primary critical lens for evaluating the existing formation models in HCMC.

Established following Pope Paul VI's historic 1970 meeting with Asian bishops in Manila, the FABC has consistently articulated a "New Way of Being Church" in Asia. This vision is a direct response to the continent's unique realities and the historical perception of the Church as a "foreign body". The core of this vision is a Church committed to a threefold dialogue: a dialogue with the diverse cultures of Asia (inculturation), a dialogue with the great religions of Asia (interreligious dialogue), and a dialogue with the vast numbers of the poor in Asia (integral human development). The ultimate goal, as expressed by the Asian bishops, is to foster "genuine Christian communities in Asia, Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others".

Central to the FABC's approach is the Pastoral Spiral methodology, also known as the pastoral circle or cycle (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1989). This is not presented as merely a useful planning tool but as the normative Asian process for evangelization and catechesis, the fruit of decades of pastoral experience and discernment. The elevation of the Pastoral Spiral from a mere "method" to a "normative process" signifies a profound ecclesiological commitment. It suggests that the FABC does not view the Spiral as one option among many, but as the fundamental way of "being Church" in Asia. Consequently, any pastoral program, especially one for forming pastoral agents like catechists, that deviates from this bottom-up process is not just methodologically different; it is ecclesiologically misaligned with the continent's own discerned vision. This framework consists of four interconnected stages:

1. **Exposure–Immersion:** Grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation, this first step calls for immersing oneself in the concrete life experiences of the community. Catechists and pastoral workers are to engage in a "dialogue of life," sharing in the daily realities, struggles, and joys of the people. This ensures that ministry begins with real human experience rather than abstract theory.
2. **Social Analysis:** The second step requires the community to analyse the social, economic, cultural, and political factors shaping those lived experiences. By critically discerning the "signs of the times," the Church seeks to uncover the root causes of suffering or injustice, connecting faith with the concrete social challenges people face.
3. **Faith Reflection:** Third is a contemplative stage of theological reflection, bringing the fruits of analysis into dialogue with Scripture, Church teaching, and prayer. The community asks: *Where is God present in this situation? What might the Gospel be saying?* This stage integrates human experience with the truths of Tradition, guarding against a merely secular activism by rooting action in spiritual discernment.
4. **Pastoral Planning (Action):** Only after the preceding steps comes the stage of planning and action. The insights from immersion, analysis, and faith reflection are translated into concrete pastoral responses. The Spiral is open-ended, as this action leads to new experiences, beginning the cycle anew in a continuous process of learning and growth.

The Pastoral Spiral, therefore, embodies an ecclesiology for a participatory, context-responsive, and bottom-up Church. Within this vision, the FABC has developed a robust theology of the laity. Laypeople are affirmed not as mere helpers to the clergy but as “full-fledged members” whose vocation is lived in the secular world. Their spirituality is described as an “involvement spirituality,” one immersed in the realities of Asian society and dedicated to building God’s Kingdom in that context. When the FABC established its Office of Laity in 1986, it identified the formation of lay people as a top pastoral priority, posing the very question that drives this study: “How do we prepare our lay people for greater involvement?”. This may indicate a powerful, high-level mandate for developing new, integrated formation models grounded in Asia’s pastoral reality.

In the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, this vision takes a distinctive form: catechesis is parish-centred and decentralised, with most training delivered locally through apprenticeship and short modular courses coordinated at deanery level; formal centres exist but remain uneven in reach and resources. A youth-led volunteer pipeline, fed especially by the Eucharistic Youth Movement, supplies large numbers of late-teen and early-twenties catechists who teach peers and near-peers across very large, multi-Mass parishes shaped by rapid urbanisation and inward migration. Day-to-day planning must navigate a cautiously opening yet regulated environment (permissions, registration and, at times, property sensitivities), which favours scalable initiatives that are low-cost, locally owned, and feasible within bureaucratic constraints. The resource landscape is patchy: access to theological libraries, stable curricula, and specialist trainers is concentrated in a few hubs, so most parishes rely on mentoring, shared materials, and periodic workshops from religious congregations or diocesan teams. The religiously plural and culturally diverse urban setting further requires catechists to integrate inculturation, interreligious tact, and Gen-Z-appropriate pedagogy (interactive, multimedia, experiential) rather than rote methods alone. Read through the Pastoral Spiral, HCMC's context makes the sequence especially salient: immersion in parish and migrant realities, analysis of regulatory and social constraints, faith reflection that deepens young catechists' theological grounding and discernment, and action plans calibrated to large cohorts, volunteer timetables, and measurable follow-up, cycling back through evaluation using simple parish data and mentoring feedback to drive improvement.

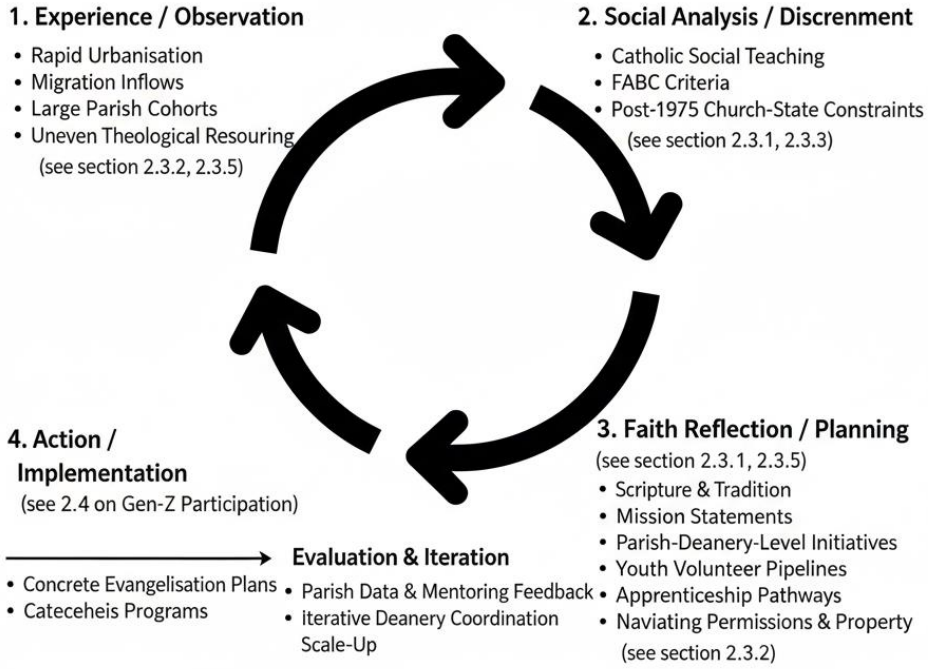

Figure 2.1 The pastoral spiral as applied in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City. Source: adapted from Cimperman (2015); adaptation by the author.

The intersection of theology and psychology in catechist formation demands not only well-grounded spiritual content but also a structured process that facilitates authentic personal growth. One powerful but underexplored opportunity lies in integrating the FABC Pastoral Spiral, a hallmark of Asian ecclesial pedagogy, with Fisher's (1998, 2010) empirically grounded model of spiritual well-being, which articulates four interrelated domains: *Personal*, *Communal*, *Environmental*, and *Transcendental*. When carefully aligned, the Pastoral Spiral offers more than a methodological tool; it becomes a transformative spiritual journey that cultivates wholeness across these four domains:

The *Experience* stage represents the pastoral starting point: a conscious attentiveness to the lived realities of individuals and communities before any theological interpretation or strategic planning takes place (FABC, 1991). In the context of faith-based volunteer ministry, this involves actively listening to volunteers' personal narratives, observing their ministerial contexts, and recognising the socio-cultural conditions that shape their service. It is more than passive reception; it is a disciplined, reflective encounter with reality that honours the dignity of those involved (Groome, 2011). In relation to Fisher's (2010) Four

Domains of Spiritual Well-Being, *Experience* primarily nourishes the *Personal* and *Communal* domains. On the *Personal* level, articulating one's own story and recognising God's presence in ordinary life deepens self-awareness and affirms personal identity. On the *Communal* level, sharing lived experiences fosters empathy, solidarity, and mutual understanding within the volunteer community. This stage therefore serves as both the empirical "entry point" for pastoral discernment and a formative moment in spiritual well-being: by naming and valuing what is happening, volunteers begin to see themselves as part of a larger narrative of God's work in the world.

The Faith Reflection stage, which is foundational to the Pastoral Spiral, directly engages both the *personal* and *transcendental* dimensions of spiritual well-being. Fisher (1998) defines personal well-being as involving a sense of meaning, purpose, and inner peace, while transcendental well-being concerns one's relationship with God or a higher power. In the Faith Reflection stage, catechists are encouraged to discern God's presence in their lived experience, often through prayer, scriptural meditation, and theological dialogue. This reflective praxis not only helps individuals clarify their interior values but also deepens their encounter with the divine, a process that strengthens their spiritual identity and sense of calling (Fisher, 2010; FABC, 1991). For catechists, especially those still in formation, this integration is crucial because it binds theological identity to the concrete conditions in which they actually serve.

In Vietnam's post-1975 parish-centred system, catechists are formed and deployed locally rather than through fully institutionalised, degree-granting routes; hence formation must connect doctrine and spirituality with apprenticeship, mentoring, and short modular training. A predominantly youthful volunteer pipeline (late teens and early twenties) requires integration that shapes motivation, boundaries, and pedagogy for inexperienced ministers who often teach peers or near-peers. Rapid urbanisation and migration produce very large, diverse parish cohorts; integrated formation, therefore, must translate theology into age-appropriate, multilingual/multimedia, and crowd-manageable methods. Uneven access to theological resources and the archdiocese's decentralised delivery mean catechists need a common theological core that can be contextualised with locally available materials rather than assumed specialist libraries. Finally, a cautiously opening yet regulated environment (permissions, registration, property/land sensitivities) requires catechists who can plan and act within real constraints, designing feasible evangelisation and catechesis initiatives,

documenting outcomes, and iterating responsibly. In short, integrated formation is not ornamental; it is the operational precondition for credible teaching, resilient service, and sustainable pastoral action in Ho Chi Minh City today. A sustained practice of theological reflection allows Gen Z catechists to connect their daily struggles and cultural context with a larger salvific narrative, thereby reinforcing both self-understanding (personal domain) and their faith-based worldview (transcendental domain). As the FABC notes, "Faith is not merely taught but awakened, interpreted and re-interpreted in the light of lived experience" (FABC, 1997, p. 18). This hermeneutic loop becomes the crucible in which spiritual well-being is forged.

The second phase of the Pastoral Spiral, Social Analysis, contributes powerfully to the *communal* domain of Fisher's framework. This stage invites catechists to examine the socio-political, economic, and cultural structures that affect their communities. By critically engaging with these realities through a Gospel lens, catechists are formed not only as teachers but as empathetic companions, rooted in solidarity with others. This aligns closely with Fisher's definition of communal well-being as "the quality of interpersonal relationships within family, community, and the broader society" (Fisher, 1998, p. 20). In practice, such formation fosters emotional intelligence, empathy, and an ecclesial sense of belonging, all crucial traits for effective ministry in youth catechesis.

The third stage, Pastoral Planning and Action, maps onto Fisher's *environmental* domain of spiritual well-being, which refers to a person's sense of connectedness with nature and the physical world. Though often overlooked in ecclesial training, this connection is increasingly recognised as part of holistic spiritual formation, particularly considering Catholic social teaching on ecology (e.g., *Laudato Si'*). When catechists engage in practical ministry planning, especially activities involving creation care, community-building, or environmental stewardship, they move beyond abstract reflection to lived discipleship that honours God's creation. The FABC has consistently called for "a spirituality of ecology rooted in the Asian reverence for nature," seeing ecological awareness as integral to Christian formation (FABC, 2008, p. 11).

In this sense, the Pastoral Spiral is not only inward and communal but outward facing, drawing catechists into practical engagements that reinforce their moral agency and environmental responsibility. For Gen Z, a generation particularly attuned to ecological and

justice concerns, this emphasis on responsible action enhances both their vocational clarity and their sense of interconnectedness, essential ingredients in Fisher's environmental domain.

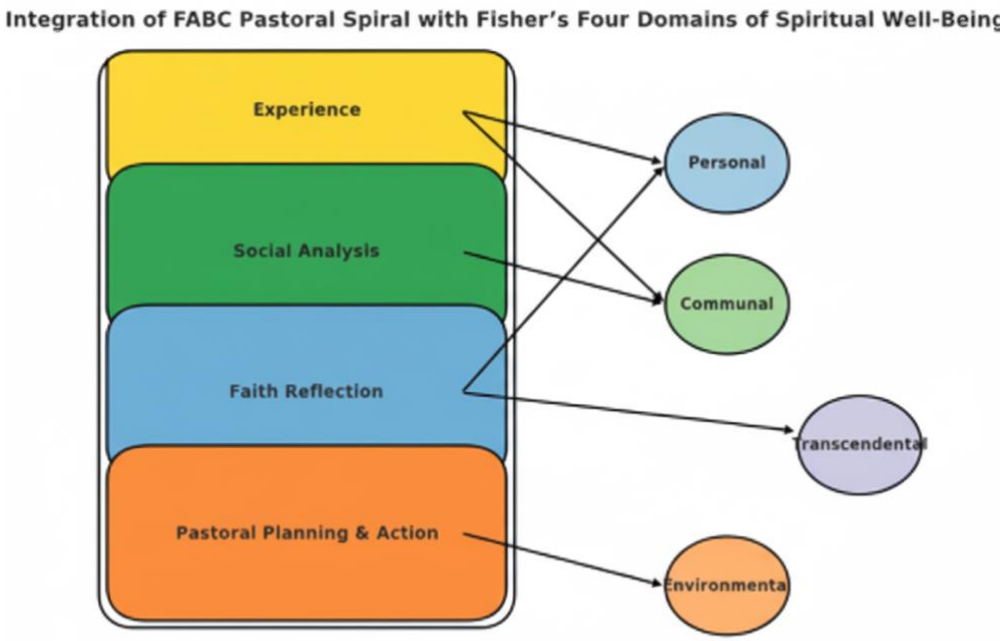

Figure 2.2 Integration of FABC Pastoral Spiral with Fisher's Four Domains of Spiritual Well-Being

This study proposes a novel integration, mapping the stages of the FABC's 'Pastoral Spiral' directly onto Fisher's four domains of SWB. This synthesis creates a holistic framework for formation that is both theologically grounded in Asian pastoral methodology and psychologically robust. By aligning each stage of the FABC Pastoral Spiral with one or more of Fisher's four domains, a more cohesive, actionable framework for catechist development emerges. This synthesis bridges the theological and psychological dimensions of formation, making abstract ideals measurable and experiential. More importantly, it highlights that catechetical training is not merely about transmitting doctrine but about shaping spiritually well-grounded individuals who can minister from a place of integration, resilience, and relational wisdom.

Such a model also responds directly to the specific needs of Generation Z catechists, whose faith formation must engage both the intellect and the spirit, both social realities and

transcendental longings. A process grounded in the Pastoral Spiral, but intentionally designed to foster Fisher's four domains, could thus serve as both a diagnostic and developmental framework, guiding catechist trainers in nurturing volunteers who are not only theologically informed, but spiritually well.

2.3.2 Vietnam's Political, Legal and Ecclesial Context

Zooming in from the pan-Asian vision to the national context of Vietnam, one finds a Catholic Church that has had to operate under unusual pressures. The Vietnamese Catholic Church has historically been under tight state control, particularly since the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established in 1975. Following the communist reunification of the country, the Church was regarded by the Marxist state as ideologically suspect due to its ties to foreign powers and to the defeated South Vietnamese regime, leading to systematic restrictions on Church activities, communications, and leadership appointments (e.g. requiring state approval) (Hai P., 2012; Thi Lien, 2013). Catholicism's earlier association with French colonial rule and later with U.S.-backed South Vietnam had placed the Church in a precarious political position after 1975. The Archdiocese of Saigon, vocal in humanitarian aid and implicitly aligned with the anti-communist cause during the war, became an immediate target of suspicion for the new regime (Hai P., 2012). In the late 1970s and 1980s, numerous priests were imprisoned, Church properties (including schools and hospitals) were confiscated, and religious activities (like catechesis) were closely monitored. Church leaders navigated a delicate relationship with the atheist government, often exercising a "controlled tolerance", maintaining a low profile and confining religious instruction to the private sphere. Formally, the socialist constitution acknowledged religious freedom, but in practice all religious education (seminary training, catechist training, etc.) had to be registered and was subject to oversight by state agencies. Scholars have described this adaptive modus vivendi as "negotiated religiosity," whereby the Church found small but meaningful ways to continue pastoral and catechetical work within narrow, state-tolerated boundaries (Hai P., 2012; Thi Lien, 2013).

In concrete terms, after 1975 the Church in Vietnam shifted heavily from formal institutions to parish-based and lay-led ministry. Catholic schools were nationalised and lay associations curtailed, so the parish catechist emerged as the critical agent for faith transmission (Nguyen, 2019). Throughout the late twentieth century, thousands of volunteer catechists,

many of them young women and men, kept religious education alive in local communities, often teaching CCD classes or preparing children for sacraments in informal settings. Training usually took place through small parish groups, one-on-one mentoring by veteran catechists or priests, and discreet support from religious orders operating semi-clandestinely (Nguyen, 2019). The Church effectively relied on lay networks and family catechesis to pass on the faith while avoiding direct confrontation with the authorities. Remarkably, even under such constraints the catechetical ministry flourished in sheer numbers: by the early 2000s, there were over 6,000 active catechists serving in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City alone (UCA News, 2010), and local priests estimated this had grown to nearly 10,000 by 2020, many serving large urban parishes with minimal material support (Ung, 2023). This reliance on an essentially lay-led "catechetical corps" at metropolitan scale, in the absence of a parallel Catholic school system, makes Vietnam a distinctive case; while parallels exist elsewhere (e.g., parts of Eastern Europe or China), the scale, longevity, and urban growth of Ho Chi Minh City render the catechists' impact unusually pronounced (Nguyen, 2019; UCA News, 2010; Ung, 2023).

In the past decade, Vietnam's religious climate has begun to show cautious openings, even as significant restrictions remain. The Law on Belief and Religion (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016) and its implementing Decree No. 95/2023/ND-CP (Government of Vietnam, 2023) introduced clearer procedures for registering religious activities and training institutions, defining pathways for permissions (e.g., large catechetical gatherings, recognition of Church-run educational facilities). High-level dialogue with the Holy See also progressed, culminating in a 2023 agreement to appoint a resident papal representative in Hanoi, symbolizing improved channels for engagement (Holy See Press Office, 2023; Vatican News, 2023). In parallel, authorities have been more predictable in permitting certain charitable initiatives and youth activities when aligned with social welfare priorities. The Church, for its part, has emphasized contributions to national goals, education, healthcare, moral education, and cultural preservation, presenting itself as a partner for social good rather than an oppositional force (Vietnam News, 2023).

Despite these improvements, the legacy of state control still heavily shapes Vietnam's catechetical landscape. Catechist formation remains largely parish-centred and apprenticeship-based, a direct outcome of decades when centralised Catholic training could not operate freely. Formal theological credentials are not uniformly required for lay

catechists; many are commissioned based on parish need and prior involvement, supplemented by short diocesan courses where available (Nguyen, 2019). This configuration, heavy reliance on on-the-job training and short courses, is not unprecedented globally but is distinctively pronounced in Vietnam given the multi-decade gap in institutional support. Rapid urbanisation and population mobility further stretch resources as booming parishes require more volunteer teachers; many programmes remain under-resourced or depend on religious congregations and Catholic NGOs for materials and workshops (Ung, 2023). The resilience and adaptability shown by Vietnamese catechists during periods of repression are a point of pride within the local Church, yet they also underscore the urgency, amid gradual openings, of providing more systematic, high-quality formation (UCA News, 2010; Ung, 2023).

Historical hindsight also reveals a nuanced picture of Church–state relations. During the twentieth century, the Catholic Church in Vietnam was not merely a passive victim but an active (and sometimes controversial) social actor. Before 1975, the Archdiocese of Saigon was closely linked with the South Vietnamese government, providing humanitarian aid to refugees and publicly criticising the communist regime; critics later accused Church leaders of entanglement with foreign powers and insufficient attention to social injustice in the South (Hai P., 2012). In the current climate, engagement is pragmatic and negotiated: local authorities routinely permit large catechetical events when framed as community or charity activities, while the archdiocese expands social ministries, drug rehabilitation, disaster relief, scholarships, as credible public goods. Frictions persist (e.g., property disputes, discretionary delays in approving church construction), and bureaucratic discretion keeps the Church cautious; the relationship is best described as negotiated rather than settled, with ongoing recalibration as Vietnam modernises and civic expectations evolve (Thi Lien, 2013).

In summary, Vietnam's national context has forged a Catholic community that is highly contextualised and resilient. Political–legal constraints decentralised catechesis to the grassroots and empowered lay catechists as indispensable ministers. Any discussion of training volunteer catechists in Ho Chi Minh City must account for the lingering regulatory effects, uneven access to formal training, and a culture of improvisation and adaptability in pastoral work. At the same time, emerging openings create an opportunity to systematically

enhance formation on the strong foundation of lay service already in place (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2016; Government of Vietnam, 2023; Holy See Press Office, 2023).

2.3.3 Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City: Demographics and Catechetical Structure

Shifting focus to the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) itself, one encounters the largest and most dynamic Catholic jurisdiction in Vietnam. As of the early 2020s, the archdiocese serves over 700,000 Catholics across approximately 200 parishes in greater Ho Chi Minh City, a substantial Catholic presence in a metropolis of roughly nine million inhabitants (UCA News, 2010; Ung, 2023). To meet the pastoral needs of this flock, the archdiocese relies on an estimated 10,000 volunteer catechists, who form the backbone of its faith-formation programmes (UCA News, 2010; Ung, 2023). These catechists teach catechism classes for children, prepare youth and adults for sacraments (Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, RCIA), lead Bible-study or prayer groups, and assist in liturgical and service ministries. In effect, they are the front-line teachers of the faith for all age groups, an essential workforce without whom the Church's evangelising mission in this metropolis would struggle to function (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023).

A striking feature of the catechist demographic in HCMC is its youthfulness. The vast majority of volunteer catechists are young lay people, often in their late teens or twenties, many beginning service soon after high school or during university and juggling ministry with study or early professional life (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023). This youth-driven character is not accidental; it flows from how the Church in Vietnam engages and forms its young members. In particular, the Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM) (Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể) has become a primary pipeline for new catechists, offering faith-based activities, leadership training, and strong peer communities in most urban parishes (Nguyen, 2019). By their late teens, many participants become huynh trưởng (youth leaders), receiving structured training in catechesis, liturgy, and apostolic skills; by young adulthood, a significant number transition into parish catechist roles. Local bishops frequently describe the EYM as the Church's "strongest and most vital youth force," a breeding ground for future ministries including catechists, lay missionaries, and religious vocations (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023). The prevalence of Gen-Z catechists in HCMC is thus partly explained by

this near-peer dynamic of youth evangelising youth, a clear strength that nevertheless raises questions about ensuring adequate depth of training (Ung, 2023).

Structurally, the Archdiocese of HCMC operates a decentralised model of catechesis. Most catechist training and instruction are organised at the parish or deanery level rather than through a single diocesan institute (Nguyen, 2019). A diocesan catechetical office and several formal centres offer courses, but their capacity and scope remain limited, a legacy of historical restrictions and uneven access to theological resources (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023). Consequently, clusters of parishes often run their own workshops, retreats, and on-the-job apprenticeship for new catechists, with short evening classes in Scripture, doctrine, or pedagogy when diocesan teams or religious congregations are available. This decentralisation is highly adaptable, it mobilises large numbers of volunteers and tailors provision to local needs, yet the absence of a unified formation strategy yields wide disparities in quality and depth across parishes (Ung, 2023). Some communities with well-formed clergy or religious offer robust initial and ongoing formation; others provide only minimal preparation before entrusting volunteers with classes. As Ung (2023) notes, passion is abundant, but pedagogical consistency is uneven; there is no archdiocese-wide, standardised curriculum for catechist certification, and outcomes depend heavily on local resources (Ung, 2023; Nguyen, 2019).

This situation presents both opportunity and challenge. On one hand, the sheer size and vitality of the catechist community is a tremendous asset, tens of thousands of young Catholics willing to teach the faith is a sign of ecclesial energy that many dioceses elsewhere might envy (Ung, 2023). On the other, without coherent training, volunteers may not reach their full potential as evangelisers, and formation gaps can hamper the overall effectiveness of religious education (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023). As this study develops a new training model, an intimate understanding of HCMC's demographics and decentralised structure is essential. Any proposed solution must be scalable and flexible, capable of supporting a large volunteer force spread across diverse parishes, and cognisant that many catechists are very young and still maturing in their own faith. In summary, the archdiocesan context is one of great dynamism with underlying fragmentation: a thriving, youth-led catechetical movement operating with uneven guidance. This calls for a contextualised yet more coordinated approach to catechist training, one that unifies core standards and deepens theological-pastoral formation without stifling local energy (Nguyen, 2019; Ung, 2023).

In summary, Vietnam's national context has forged a Catholic community that is highly contextualized and resilient. The political and legal constraints led to the decentralization of catechesis to the grassroots level and the empowerment of lay catechists as indispensable ministers. This history explains why any discussion of training volunteer catechists in Ho Chi Minh City must account for the lingering effects of state regulation, the uneven access to formal training, and the ingrained culture of improvisation and adaptability in pastoral work. At the same time, it highlights an opportunity: with greater openness emerging, the Church can now begin to build on this strong foundation of lay service by systematically enhancing the formation of its volunteer catechists.

2.3.4 Formation Pathways and the Role of the Eucharistic Youth Movement

Given this context, the operational pathways shaping the formation of Generation Z catechists in HCMC warrant close examination, with particular attention to the strengths and limitations of the Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM). Formation opportunities across the city remain uneven: a large share of young catechists receive their initial preparation through youth ministry programs such as EYM or through ad hoc parish workshops. Formal, longer-term programmes, such as multi-year evening courses in theology or pedagogy, are relatively scarce, and many volunteers commence teaching after only a brief orientation.

The Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM) deserves particular attention, as it has become de facto the largest source of trained youth leaders for the Church in Vietnam. The EYM, originally inspired by the international Eucharistic Crusade, centers on devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist, formation in virtue, and apostolic service. In Vietnam, it has been inculturated and expanded such that most sizable parishes have an EYM chapter. The EYM's method of formation includes regular weekly activities, annual training camps, and a tiered badge system that young members progress through. By late adolescence, those who stay become youth animators, responsible for teaching and mentoring younger members. In effect, the EYM provides leadership training, catechetical instruction, and liturgical formation in a package that is very appealing to youth. Many catechists in their late teens credit the EYM for having taught them how to pray, how to share the faith with children, and how to work in a team.

However, research and feedback from local clergy indicate that the EYM's formation model, while excellent for building community and enthusiasm, has notable gaps when it comes to deeper theological and spiritual development. Studies by Tien (2017) and Ung (2023) note that EYM training heavily emphasizes discipline, routines, and group activities. The program often involves marching drills, memorized slogans or prayers, team-building games, and organizing large events or camps. These elements instill solidarity and a strong work ethic, and they certainly keep young people engaged. Yet, there is limited space for critical reflection or personal discernment in the typical EYM curriculum. For instance, time dedicated to studying Scripture in depth or grappling with questions of doctrine is relatively short compared to time spent on planning performances or learning organisational skills. The catechetical literature cautions that events and projects should serve, not replace, sustained doctrinal and biblical formation and recommends integrating retreats and activities within a planned catechetical pathway. This literature-noted tension also surfaces in Vietnam and is explored in the empirical chapters of this thesis (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 2020; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997; John Paul II, 1979).

Analyzing this through the lens of the FABC Pastoral Spiral offers a clarifying perspective. It appears that the current formation model (exemplified by EYM) tends to short-circuit the pastoral process by jumping straight to the "Action". In the Pastoral Spiral, genuine pastoral action should be the fruit of prior exposure, analysis, and faith reflection. By contrast, an activity-centered formation emphasizes doing – planning events, running classes, leading groups – but often without having led the young leader through a process of seeing and judging before acting. In other words, if catechist formation prioritizes constant activity and execution of tasks without cultivating the preceding stages of immersion in life, social analysis, and theological reflection, it "skips" essential steps of the spiral. The EYM model, as it currently operates, can inadvertently encourage this skipping. A young volunteer might learn how to organize a retreat (action) but not have had the chance to deeply ponder why the retreat matters in light of the Gospel and the lived realities of the youth attending. The formation thus risks producing doers more than thinkers or discerners.

Viewed through the FABC Pastoral Spiral, activity-centred formation consistently short-circuits the process: programmes prioritise execution and routine, "Pastoral Action", while

bypassing Exposure–Immersion, Social Analysis and Faith Reflection, thereby falling short of integral evangelisation (FABC, 1991; 1997; 2001). In this light, the EYM pathway's strengths in discipline, community-building and event leadership can inadvertently suppress personal discernment and ownership of faith, producing loyal, hardworking catechists who nevertheless feel underprepared as spiritual guides; many young catechists in HCMC self-describe as "task-doers," signalling compliance without empowerment to initiate or adapt (Ung, 2023). The issue is not a stylistic preference for "more theology," but a pastoral–theological misalignment with Asia's accepted methodology: the "hands" of ministry are being formed without the corresponding "head" and "heart." What is needed is a holistic pathway that engages lived experience, enables contextual and social analysis, leads into prayerful faith reflection, and only then supports intentional pastoral action. This imbalance helps explain Gen Z catechists' desire to move beyond being well-drilled volunteers toward becoming well-rounded ministers with spiritual depth and contextual intelligence, and it clarifies the need for the integrated model proposed in this thesis (FABC, 1997; 2001; Ung, 2023).

2.3.5 Synthesis: Pastoral Spiral Analysis and Key Challenges

Bringing the discussion from the Asian level down to the archdiocesan ground, we can now synthesize how these contextual layers impact the training and spiritual development of Gen Z volunteer catechists in Ho Chi Minh City. The FABC Pastoral Spiral introduced earlier provides a useful analytical lens to make sense of the situation as a whole (FABC Secretariat, 2010). By "reading" the pastoral context through the Spiral's stages, one can discern where the most pressing needs lie. For instance, on the level of Exposure–Immersion, we see catechists operating in a society with lingering political constraints and rapid cultural change – have we fully immersed formation in those realities? (Vu, 2018). On the level of Social Analysis, questions arise about how well catechetical training addresses social inequalities or religious pluralism in the city (Lê, 2019). In terms of Faith Reflection, the challenge is whether young catechists are being helped to integrate their ministerial experiences with a deeper understanding of Scripture and Catholic tradition, instead of just carrying out routines (Trần, 2021). Finally, regarding Pastoral Action, the issue is whether current formation produces catechists who can plan and act proactively, or if they are simply following predetermined scripts (Nguyễn, 2020). The pastoral spiral invites us to see the gaps: e.g., skipping "immersion" can lead to out-of-touch teaching, skipping "analysis" can

lead to uncontextualized content, skipping “reflection” can lead to shallow spirituality, and skipping “planning” leads to reactive rather than strategic ministry (FABC Secretariat, 2010).

In summary, catechists within the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese face specific and multifaceted challenges arising from the area’s unique political climate, cultural diversity, and urban complexities. Their role is crucial in preserving and transmitting the Catholic faith amidst these demanding conditions, but the context presents obstacles that any training program must directly address. These challenges can be grouped into a thematic roadmap of three interlocking domains, which will structure the concerns of this thesis:

(1) Regulatory–Institutional Challenges: Ongoing communist governance and legal constraints shape what the Church and catechists can do. Government oversight of religious education means catechist programs often require approvals, registration, and careful navigation of regulations, which can limit content and outreach methods. Issues around church property and the need for official permissions also affect long-term planning. Catechists must exercise caution and creativity to operate within these bounds (Đào, 2020).

(2) Demographic–Cultural Challenges: Ho Chi Minh City’s rapidly urbanizing, youthful, and pluralistic society demands an adaptive pedagogy. Catechists are ministering in a dynamic multicultural setting, expected to respect and integrate local Vietnamese culture (language, customs, values) into Church teaching. At the same time, they encounter diverse religious landscapes – significant Buddhist, Cao Đài, and other faith communities – requiring skills in interreligious dialogue and respect. Moreover, Gen Z learners themselves bring a mix of traditional and globalized values, short attention spans, and digital connectivity. Thus, catechists must find innovative, relevant ways to communicate the faith and address the contemporary questions and doubts prevalent among young people (Hoàng & Phạm, 2022).

(3) Scale and Resourcing Challenges: The metropolitan scale of HCMC Catholicism, combined with uneven resource distribution, creates challenges of its own. Parishes are often very large, with hundreds of catechism students, but there is an imbalance in trained personnel and material support. A persistent shortage of adequately trained catechists means many volunteers have to step in without sufficient preparation. The apprenticeship model,

while keeping things running, sometimes sacrifices quality for quantity. Huge class sizes, lack of standardized textbooks or curricula, and minimal ongoing formation can strain catechists and lead to burnout or inconsistent teaching (Đào, 2020). This domain highlights issues of organisational capacity: how to sustain catechesis at scale, how to improve training and retention, and how to better coordinate between the archdiocese and parishes to support volunteers.

Understanding these three domains of challenge – institutional, cultural, and structural – is essential for developing an effective response. The analysis in this thesis will show that each challenge domain corresponds to particular needs in catechist formation: for instance, regulatory constraints call for formation in prudent leadership and resilience; cultural diversity calls for training in inculturation and dialogue; resource gaps call for more systematic pedagogy and support mechanisms. By applying the pastoral spiral to "see–judge–act" on each of these fronts, the Church in Ho Chi Minh City can move towards a more holistic solution.

In conclusion, the pastoral context of the HCMC Archdiocese is complex but filled with potential. The Generation Z volunteer catechists here inherit a legacy of faith passed on under trial, and they stand at a crossroads of rapid societal change and ecclesial renewal. Appreciating the context – from the broad Asian theological vision to the nitty-gritty local realities – allows us to hear the "call for pastoral renewal" implicit in the challenges. It is a call to move from a status quo of reactive, task-focused ministry to a more integrated, person-centered, and contextually grounded formation for these young catechists.

2.4 Generation Z – Characteristics, Spirituality, and Implications for Catechesis

2.4.1 Defining Generation Z

People born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s known as Generation Z matured during a time characterized by exceptional digital connectivity along with widespread cultural globalization and swift societal changes. The unique socio-political and religious environment in Vietnam influences how young Catholic catechists develop spiritually while facing specific motivational factors and challenges. Developing effective training frameworks requires a deep understanding of how Generation Z forms within the Vietnamese Catholic context to ensure both theological integrity and contextual relevance.

Members of Gen Z are often referred to as “digital natives” due to their fluency with online tools and platforms (Buzzetto-Hollywood and Quinn, 2024). In Vietnam, this generation has come of age during the country’s rapid transition from a war-scarred, closed economy to a dynamic, globally connected society (Anh, Duong and Van, 2005). Their formation, both social and spiritual, has been deeply influenced by exposure to online content, social media networks, and mobile technology (Soukup et al., 2019; Roberto, 2018). While this access creates opportunities for innovative catechesis and digital evangelisation, it also exposes Gen Z to secular ideologies, relativism, and misinformation about the Church.

2.4.2 Beyond Western Models: The Dual-Value System of Vietnamese Youth

While Western research on Generation Z's relationship with religion offers useful contrasts, applying its models directly to Vietnam is problematic. Recent scholarship reveals a more complex and paradoxical value system, a critical insight that should become the organizing principle for understanding this demographic. The core of this paradox is a dual-value system: Vietnamese youth demonstrate a strong and simultaneous commitment to both traditional, collectivist values and modern, individualistic ones.

This is not a generation abandoning tradition for modernity, but one seeking to integrate them into an authentic, personal synthesis. A study by Nguyen (2024) on 500 Gen Z students highlights this dynamic. There was overwhelming affirmation for traditional principles such as patriotism (95.8%) and solidarity (86.2%), alongside a powerful commitment to modern values like proactiveness and eagerness to learn (85.8%), personal responsibility (78.8%), and respect for cultural diversity (74.2%). Their “quest for authenticity” is best read as selective continuity with Asian communitarian ideals, filial duty, social harmony, and disciplined self-cultivation, rather than wholesale rejection. In the Asian values debate, Lee Kuan Yew famously framed such norms as strengths for modernisation (1994); subsequent voices cautioned that authentic appropriation also requires space for critique, participation, and rights (Kim Dae-jung, 1994; Sen, 1997). For Gen-Z Catholics in Vietnam, authenticity thus involves reinterpreting inherited virtues through the Church’s triple dialogue, in family, parish, and city, so that communal loyalties deepen personal vocation rather than override it (FABC, 2001).

This dual-value system has profound implications for catechist formation. A model that is exclusively "modern" and dismissive of tradition will fail to resonate with their deep-seated sense of solidarity and cultural identity. Conversely, a purely "traditional" model that is dogmatic and authoritarian will be rejected as outdated and coercive by a generation that prizes proactivity and personal agency. The key to effective formation, therefore, is not a choice between tradition and modernity, but a creative and dynamic integration of both.

This insight provides a stronger warrant for adopting narrative pedagogy centred on the Vietnamese Martyrs, because it aligns intrinsically with the Pastoral Spiral's movements and with the FABC's distinctively Asian vision of enculturated evangelisation. In Exposure–Immersion, learners encounter locally resonant stories, family memories, parish shrines, pilgrimage sites, situating faith in Vietnam's lived history. Through Social Analysis, the narratives become lenses on concrete structures (colonial rule, post-1975 controls, communal resilience), inviting critical reading of injustice and courage in Vietnamese social worlds. Faith Reflection then receives these stories in dialogue with Scripture and Tradition (martyr-witness, beatitudes, discipleship), deepening personal discernment rather than mere admiration. Finally, Pastoral Action translates memory into practice, acts of reconciliation, civic-minded service, and peer catechesis that witness publicly yet prudently. Read this way, the Martyrs are not simply "inspiring"; they are culturally precise pedagogical instruments that operationalise an Asian ecclesial style, communitarian and narrative, respectful of ancestral memory, hospitable to interreligious neighbours, and oriented to the poor, exactly the participatory, bottom-up formation envisaged by the FABC's Spiral (see Figure 2.1). They can be framed as resonant exemplars of this very value synthesis, combining traditional virtues like courage and solidarity with a modern sense of proactive, personal witness and integrity. This approach directly addresses the core identity tension of the target audience, presenting a faith that is both deeply rooted in their heritage and personally empowering.

Furthermore, the civic context of Vietnam shapes how this generation expresses its desire to be "change agents." Their idealism often manifests not as overt protest, but through "everyday actions," ethical consumption, and building civic responsibility (Mai, 2024). A successful formation program must tap into this pragmatic, action-oriented mindset, framing catechesis not as a passive "duty" but as a meaningful way to contribute to the betterment

of their society, thereby aligning faith with their modern value of personal and social responsibility.

2.4.3 Faith, Authenticity, and Digital Life in a Collectivist Society

While often labelled "digital natives," the digital engagement of Vietnamese Gen Z is more accurately understood as an extension of their collectivist cultural roots. Research indicates their online activity is primarily driven by gratifications of information-seeking and socializing, using digital platforms to acquire knowledge, maintain relationships, and build community (Hai & Xiong, 2025). Their desire for connection is matched by a high value placed on authenticity, making them receptive to messaging that reflects genuine cultural values and verifiable trust (Veenashree & Shreevamshi, 2025).

This digitally mediated life, however, presents a profound challenge for faith formation. The central issue is not necessarily exposure to specific "secular ideologies," but rather the formational impact of the digital medium itself. The very architecture of social media can foster a psychological environment that is inhospitable to deep reflection. For instance, the "fear of missing out" (FoMO) can motivate compulsive sharing behaviour based on engagement rather than a genuine concern for truth or credibility (Dinh and Lee, 2024; Al-Abyadh, 2025). Consequently, this creates a fast-paced echo-chamber environment that emphasises superficial interaction rather than substantive discourse, resulting in a fragmented and surface-level existence as widely noted in social-media research and digital-religion studies (Flaxman, Goel & Rao, 2016; Cinelli et al., 2021; Papacharissi, 2015; Boyd, 2014; Kristofferson, White & Peloza, 2014; Campbell, 2013).

Therefore, the core challenge is not ideological corruption but the cultivation of superficiality and psychological fragmentation inherent in the medium. An effective formation strategy must act as a spiritual antidote to these pressures. It must transcend the mere adoption of digital tools and instead focus on cultivating "digital discernment", the capacity for interior depth and critical engagement in a world that militates against it. The goal is to equip young Vietnamese Catholics to transform their innate digital social skills into instruments for deeper, more authentic faith sharing, moving beyond performative online activity towards a faith that is thoughtfully integrated into their digital identity. This

approach is affirmed by global trends showing a generation hungry for depth and authenticity, seeking relational support and meaningful purpose over shallow answers or rigid institutional compliance.

2.4.4 Faith and Values of Gen Z Catholics

Generation Z's relationship with religion is marked by ambivalence, complexity, and searching. Many young people are open to spirituality but sceptical of religious institutions. Smith and Denton (2005) describe this pattern as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, a worldview in which God exists to support personal happiness, moral behaviour is emphasised over doctrinal truth, and religious practice is primarily therapeutic. While this model offers comfort, it lacks the depth and challenge of a fully embodied Catholic faith.

In the Catholic context, Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) identify a group they call "exiles": young Christians who remain engaged but feel alienated by rigid structures, outdated language, or moral inconsistency in Church leadership. These exiles are not leaving the Church altogether, but they are reimagining their faith in digital, relational, and justice-oriented ways.

Gen Z values authenticity, justice, and community. They are energised by causes such as climate change, mental health, anti-racism, and gender inclusion, values which they seek to integrate with their spiritual beliefs (Allen & Fry, 2023). However, they are quick to reject hypocrisy or superficiality, making catechesis that relies solely on doctrine or authority less effective. Instead, they are drawn to faith that is experiential, dialogical, and visibly connected to the Gospel's call to love, mercy, and justice.

However, it is crucial to critically assess the context of these sources. Most prominent studies on Generation Z's religious attitudes, including those from respected sources like the Pew Research Centre and the Barna Group, are based on Western, predominantly post-Christian, contexts. While insightful, their findings may not be directly generalisable to the Vietnamese context, where young Catholics navigate a different set of cultural, political, and spiritual realities. Furthermore, the very characteristics identified, such as being open-minded yet sceptical of institutions, point to an inherent complexity that defies simple categorisation. These apparent paradoxes warn against an uncritical application of broad

generational labels and underscore the need for a formation approach grounded in the specific, lived experience of young Vietnamese Catholics.

The implications for catechist formation are significant. Abo-Zena and King (2021) show that exposure to spiritual role models, especially those who embody everyday holiness, can foster virtue, purpose, and hope. Both Tisdell (2003) and D'Souza (2012) propose that youth spiritual development reaches a more comprehensive level through the connection of personal identity to cultural context and ethical engagement.

Gen Z catechists' formation requires more than knowledge transmission; it must cultivate spiritual authenticity and ethical maturity grounded in Vietnam's own witness. Framed by narrative pedagogy, the lives of the Vietnamese Martyrs become not merely "inspiring" history but formative texts: through guided questioning and dialogue, catechists learn to discern courage, fidelity, forgiveness, and love of neighbour in concrete Vietnamese stories, and to translate those virtues into parish life. Read through the Pastoral Spiral, this means (1) exposure to local memory (family testimonies, parish devotions, the annual martyrs' feast), (2) analysis of the social forces behind persecution and of contemporary pressures on youth, (3) faith reflection that places martyr-witness alongside Scripture and Tradition, and (4) pastoral action, community-based, relevant, and responsible practices such as reconciliation initiatives, service to the marginalized, and peer catechesis that integrate faith meaningfully into daily life. In this way, Vietnamese catechists learn to appropriate their heritage authentically, not by repeating it, but by discerning and enacting its evangelical core in today's Ho Chi Minh City.

2.4.5 Learning Styles and Engagement

The hyperconnected digital environment in which Generation Z was raised influences their educational preferences. Studies demonstrate that Generation Z achieves highest educational success through visual methods combined with interactive engagement and experiential activities (Roberto, 2018). Extended lectures and rote memorisation as traditional teaching methods struggle to maintain student attention and engagement. Gen Z students achieve better learning outcomes through education systems that offer personalised approaches alongside collaborative opportunities and technological integration.

Catechist training for Generation Z requires a design that reflects their preferences. Amherdt (2023) identifies important obstacles in developing e-catechesis for digital natives and stresses the significance of short-form content integration with multimedia and participatory platforms. Similarly, Emmeria Tarihoran et al. (2024) advocate for integrating tools such as mobile apps, gamification, and blended learning environments into catechetical education to increase accessibility and engagement. Digital tools influence both the reception and internalization of content beyond their function as delivery mechanisms. According to Stuart-Buttle (2013), digital pedagogy fosters essential reflective thinking and peer-based meaning-making which are critical for developing mature faith leaders. However, D'Souza (2012) cautions that technological innovation must remain rooted in spiritual formation goals: Any media used in catechesis must serve to engage participants rather than divert their attention.

Moreover, Gen Z values continuous feedback and participation. Franchi and Rymarz (2017) propose catechist training should transition from static certification methods to dynamic practice-based learning models. Learning becomes both more effective and spiritually formative when educational programs include discussion opportunities, peer mentoring sessions, real-world teaching experiences and online reflection journals. Vietnamese Gen Z Catholics often use online communities to explore and discuss faith-related questions, find resources for catechesis, and build peer support networks (Do and Wiggins, 2024). Yet, their engagement is frequently fragmented, unstructured, and lacking in theological depth. Effective formation programmes must not only embrace digital platforms but teach catechists how to critically engage with online content, navigate faith in the digital public sphere, and maintain doctrinal clarity.

The pedagogical crisis in Vietnamese catechesis can be powerfully analysed through Paulo Freire's (1973) critical pedagogy. His work offers a profound critique of traditional educational models and a vision for a truly liberatory education. Freire (1970) critiques the dominant paradigm as the "banking model of education," where teachers "deposit" knowledge into passive students, who are treated as empty "containers". This model inhibits creative power and critical thought, encouraging conformity rather than transformation. By negating students as active subjects, this approach fosters a "culture of silence," (Freire, 1985) where individuals learn to adapt to their reality rather than question it.

In contrast, Freire proposes a problem-posing education rooted in dialogue and learners' lived experience, whose aim is to awaken critical consciousness (conscientização), the capacity to perceive social and political contradictions and to act upon them (Freire, 1970, ch. 2). This process is inseparable from praxis, the reflective synthesis of thought and action oriented to transforming reality (Freire, 1970, pp. 51–55). On this view, education becomes the "practice of freedom," not the banking transmission of facts (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 81). This framework offers a strong theoretical grounding for the proposed critical pedagogy of martyrdom. The desire among catechists to "re-story" the Vietnamese Martyrs may be read as an intuitive move toward a problem-posing model in which the martyrs' narratives function as generative themes that open critical reflection on contemporary struggles (Freire, 1973, pp. 79–98). In dialogical work with such themes, catechists learn to "read the word and the world," situating faith-motivated action within a larger narrative of justice and hope (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In this way, they are formed not as passive recipients but as active subjects of their own development, cultivating the critical consciousness needed to live faithfully in a complex world, education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1970).

In sum, the formation of Gen Z catechists must be as adaptive as the generation it serves. Designing training around their digital fluency and participatory instincts is not a compromise on rigour, but a contextualisation of catechesis to contemporary learners.

2.4.6 Challenges for Generation Z Catechists in Vietnam

Generation Z catechists in Vietnam offer great promise for the Church's future. They are digitally literate, idealistic, and eager to connect faith with meaning, justice, and mission (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Many are deeply committed to serving their communities, even amidst competing pressures. However, beneath this surface enthusiasm lie a number of structural and spiritual challenges that limit their development and long-term engagement. These challenges stem not only from generational characteristics but also from broader sociocultural, ecclesial, and pedagogical factors.

Most Gen Z catechists serve on a voluntary and part-time basis while pursuing full-time studies or employment. The growing demands of Vietnam's academic and economic environment , driven by a culture of performance, comparison, and upward mobility , often leave little time for spiritual reflection, formation, or sustainable service. As Tien (2017)

observes, many young Vietnamese Catholics practise their faith through devotional participation but receive little structured theological or pastoral training. This reality is reflected in catechist training across parishes, where programs are often short-term, doctrinally focused, and lack the depth to address the personal vocation or spiritual maturity of the catechist (Ung, 2023). Catechists are frequently assigned teaching duties without adequate preparation or mentoring, expected to "learn by doing" under tight timelines and minimal supervision.

In her recent study, Ung (2023) found that young catechists often feel disconnected from their ministry roles, perceiving themselves as task-doers rather than spiritual guides. This functional model of catechist formation , which emphasises content delivery over interior growth , can lead to disengagement and burnout. Catechists may continue serving out of obligation or community expectation, but without a strong sense of spiritual purpose or identity. In the Vietnamese context, this is further complicated by traditional cultural dynamics such as deference to authority, discomfort with open reflection, and the expectation to avoid questioning Church practices , all of which can hinder the development of an integrated, vocationally grounded ministry identity (Hai, 2019; Nguyen, 2024).

However, one might argue that these limitations are a temporary phase of transition. Proponents of the current system may point to the sheer number of catechists being trained each year, the growth of youth ministries in urban dioceses, or the enthusiasm seen during parish activities as evidence that formation is “working.” (Agenzia Fides, 2025). They might argue that the community-based, experiential nature of catechist work in Vietnam provides precisely the kind of relational and grassroots formation that Gen Z values, even if it lacks formal structure. Moreover, in a Church context still recovering from decades of suppression, gradual improvements may be more realistic than rapid overhauls.

An overly positive view may neglect both the fundamental formation requirements and the enduring viability of Gen Z catechists. Community participation and parish bonding offer specific formation advantages but fail to replace the necessity for intentional accompaniment and structured training paired with personal growth opportunities. The risk is not immediate disengagement but slow erosion of purpose: Catechists who outwardly continue their service but suffer from spiritual dryness and lack internal support or formation experience a slow erosion of purpose. The Church risks cultivating a generation of Gen Z

leaders who will lack confidence and resilience because it neglects their spiritual and developmental needs.

Taken together, the Archdiocese's catechetical system is overwhelmingly volunteer-driven. Even the lower-bound historical figure of ~6,000 catechists reported in HCMC (c.2010) across ~200 parishes implies ≈30 volunteers per parish (UCANews, 2010). Local clergy subsequently estimated ~10,000 catechists by 2020, which, against ~200 parishes and ~700,000 Catholics, translates to ≈50 volunteers per parish and roughly 14 catechists per 1,000 Catholics, a striking indicator of scale (Ung, 2023). On this basis, and assuming conservative class sizes of 20–30 learners, the volunteer corps facilitates on the order of 200,000–300,000 learner-sessions per catechetical cycle, underscoring how little of the system could function without lay service. These ratios also explain the persistent formation gaps noted earlier: a large, youthful workforce mobilised locally, but with uneven access to structured training and mentoring.

This situation demands a formation approach which surpasses standard doctrinal teaching and program execution. A new framework is required to nurture both the spiritual depth and professional direction of Gen Z catechists while addressing both societal demands and their internal search for meaning. In the following section we examine spiritual well-being to understand its potential as a fundamental element in designing new catechist training approaches for the modern generation.

2.4.7 Implications

The preceding analysis of Generation Z catechists in Vietnam reveals a paradox: Despite their strong dedication to their mission, they receive inadequate support from traditional formation systems. The spiritual and developmental needs of these young catechists are shaped by a rapidly changing cultural environment (digital immersion, performance pressure, moral fragmentation). This generation strongly seeks authenticity along with relational belonging and meaningful engagement which can become valuable assets for catechetical ministry when properly developed (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

These insights suggest that a didactic, one-size-fits-all training model is unlikely to cultivate resilience or spiritual maturity among Generation Z catechists. Instead, formation

frameworks necessitate a shift toward approaches that are more holistic, adaptable, and intentionally developmental. Specifically, effective catechist training should prioritize experiential learning, enabling young catechists to integrate theological content with lived experience. Furthermore, it should incorporate community-based mentoring to provide relational support and foster reflective dialogue within peer and intergenerational networks. Such frameworks must also harness digital tools and platforms, aligning with Generation Z's learning preferences and communication habits. Finally, the integration of spiritual and vocational discernment processes is crucial to assist catechists in articulating their identity and purpose within ministry.

Formation, in this context, is not merely instructional, it must become formative in the full sense of the term: a process that cultivates the interior life, moral vision, and vocational fidelity of the catechist.

In order to move towards such an approach, it is first necessary to examine a foundational yet often overlooked dimension of catechist development: spiritual well-being. The following section explores this concept from both psychological and theological perspectives, situating it as the cornerstone of any formation model that aims to be sustainable, meaningful, and contextually grounded.

2.5 Human Resource Management in Faith-Based Volunteer Organisations

Managing volunteers effectively is crucial for both secular nonprofits and faith-based organisations. Volunteers constitute a significant human resource – the United Nations estimated their work value at over $1 trillion globally (Starnes, 2015) - and thus require structured management akin to paid staff. Scholarship on volunteer management indicates it has been strongly influenced by classical HRM approaches (Read, 2021; Faletehan, 2024). In other words, many best practices for recruiting, developing, and retaining employees apply equally to volunteers. However, because volunteers are intrinsically motivated and unpaid, effective volunteer management also adapts to their unique needs (Prats López *et al.*, 2024; Nguyen and Dao, 2025)**.** This section reviews core HRM principles as applied to volunteer settings, highlighting how successful nonprofits treat volunteers with the same strategic care as paid staff. Key theories (e.g. volunteer motivation and role theory) will be

discussed to explain what encourages long-term commitment. This provides a secular HRM baseline before bridging into the church context.

2.5.1 Volunteer Management Principles

Volunteer management research emphasizes that organisations should invest in volunteers with the same rigor as in employees – from clear role design to ongoing support (Alonso, 2014; Einolf, 2018; Gürbüz, 2024). Recruitment and screening are foundational: just as in HR hiring, nonprofits carefully select volunteers whose skills, values, and availability fit the role and mission (Stevenson, 2013; Hopkins and Dowell, 2022). Hager and Brudney's (2011) landmark study found that agencies using formal screening (interviews, background checks) and matching volunteers to suitable tasks saw higher retention. Aligning a volunteer's assignment with their skills and interests increases satisfaction and commitment (Zheng *et al.*, 2021; Windon, Robotham and Echols, 2022). Role clarity is also critical – volunteers who have clear role descriptions and expectations experience less frustration and are more effective in their service (Bang *et al.*, 2023). In contrast, role ambiguity can lead to burnout or conflicts, echoing role theory insights that people commit longer when they confidently understand their responsibilities (Singh, 2020). Indeed, volunteers often develop a **"**volunteer role identity**,"** integrating the volunteer role into their self-concept, which deepens commitment over time (as suggested by role theory). Providing clear and meaningful roles helps foster this identity, encouraging long-term service.

Once onboarded, training and development are essential. Effective charities treat volunteer orientation and training as seriously as employee onboarding (Einolf, 2018; Retzer *et al.*, 2023). They equip volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed, whether through initial workshops or ongoing development opportunities. Just as paid staff benefit from professional development, volunteers value chances to grow in their roles. Well-trained volunteers feel more confident and perform better, which boosts their satisfaction and likelihood to continue. Ongoing support and supervision further enhance the experience (Alfes, Shantz and Bailey, 2016). Nonprofits often designate volunteer coordinators or supervisors who provide guidance, regular check-ins, and feedback to volunteers (Hager, Brudney & Moynihan, 2004; Letts, Ryan & Grossman, 1999). Such support systems make volunteers feel part of the team and address issues early, thereby improving retention. Clear communication channels between staff and volunteers help integrate volunteers into organisational life (Bortree and Waters, 2014). Studies note that effective communication

and inclusion of volunteers in team meetings or updates can strengthen their commitment by fostering a sense of belonging (Fernandes and de Matos, 2023).

Another core principle is recognition and reward for volunteer contributions. While volunteers by definition are not paid, successful programmes ensure volunteers feel appreciated – through formal recognition (certificates, awards events) and informal thanks. Hager and Brudney (2011) observe that organisations with recognition practices (e.g. volunteer appreciation events) tend to retain volunteers at higher rates. Recognition meets volunteers' socio-emotional needs, reinforcing that their work is valued and making them more likely to continue donating their time. In essence, robust volunteer management systems mirror HRM functions – recruitment, placement, training, supervision, evaluation/feedback, and reward – adapted to an unpaid workforce.

Underlying these practices are key theories explaining volunteer engagement. Volunteer motivation theory offers insight into why individuals serve without pay and what keeps them committed. One influential framework is the functional approach (Clary *et al*., 1998), which identifies multiple motivations: for example, Values (altruism and desire to help others), Understanding (learning and personal growth), Social (building relationships), Career (gaining experience), Protective (reducing guilt or addressing personal issues), and Enhancement (boosting self-esteem). In volunteer settings generally, altruistic and social motives often dominate. Volunteers frequently cite a desire to "give back" or contribute to a cause as their primary drive (Omoto and Snyder, 2008). Notably, in faith-based volunteering, altruistic motives grounded in faith are especially salient – studies show that *"values" motivations (e.g. compassion, sense of calling) are the most common among religious volunteers*. For instance, Erasmus and Morey (2016) found that volunteers in an Australian faith-based organisation were strongly driven by mission attachment and values of service, more so than by social or career motives. This suggests that appealing to volunteers' higher ideals and desire to fulfil a calling can be a powerful retention strategy, particularly in church contexts.

Meanwhile, role theory contributes a complementary perspective: volunteers are more likely to remain long-term when they experience clarity, support and fulfilment in their organisational roles (Einolf, 2022). Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) demonstrated that effective organisational socialization – integrating volunteers into the organisation's culture and

clarifying their role – significantly increases their intention to remain. Conversely, if volunteers feel neglected or confused about what is expected, their commitment wanes. Research by Studer (2016) underscores principles like *balance of interest* (finding win-win alignment between volunteer interests and organisational needs), *strategic commitment to volunteers* (treating volunteer programs as strategically important), *team spirit*, and *mutual respect*, all of which complement traditional HRM practices in boosting volunteer retention. In practical terms, volunteers want to feel respected and "in on" the organisation's goals, rather than like second-class helpers. When nonprofits cultivate a supportive, inclusive climate – addressing volunteers' motivations, ensuring role clarity, providing feedback and recognition – volunteer satisfaction and loyalty increase, just as employee engagement rises under good HR management (Millette and Gagné, 2008; Cruickshank and Pye, 2018). In short, the secular literature establishes that volunteers thrive when managed with professionalism, planning, and care: clear roles, training, feedback, recognition, and opportunities for growth. Organisations that apply these principles essentially treat volunteers "like paid staff" in terms of strategic support, which leads to better performance and long-term commitment.

2.5.2 Adapting HRM to Ecclesial Mission – Toward "HR Stewardship"

While secular HRM frameworks provide a strong foundation for managing volunteers, faith-based organisations must adapt these practices to align with their theological ethos and mission. Churches and other religious nonprofits operate under a spiritual mandate, which can make standard corporate-style HRM seem too transactional or secular if applied without adaptation (Ngwenya, Moyo and Sibanda, 2021; Nsakwa *et al.*, 2025). Indeed, some faith communities have been hesitant to fully embrace formal HR management, viewing it as a poor fit for the "biblical and spiritual" nature of ministry. A study of church organisations in Zimbabwe by Ngwenya et al. (2021) found that the HR function was often not given much attention nor professionally practiced within churches. The authors note that many clergy lack training in HRM and may undervalue structured volunteer management for fear it conflicts with faith values. They recommend that seminaries include HRM in the curriculum to "enlighten the church on the need for professional human resource management" alongside theology. This highlights a crucial point: *effective ministry and sound management need not be at odds*. Instead, secular HR best practices can be "baptized"

– thoughtfully adapted – to serve a church's mission in a manner consistent with Christian principles. The emerging concept of Human Resource Stewardship encapsulates this approach.

HR Stewardship in a church context means viewing the recruitment and development of people not as utilitarian manpower management (Ortiz-Gómez, Ariza-Montes and Molina-Sánchez, 2020), but as an act of stewardship under God's mandate. Theologically, *stewardship* refers to responsibly managing resources (including people) that are ultimately entrusted by God. Applying this to volunteers, church leaders become *stewards of their volunteers' gifts and growth*. Rather than treating volunteers as free labour to be used up, leaders nurture them as partners in the mission. This entails a shift in mindset from command-and-control management to pastoral leadership. For example, secular HRM might implement performance evaluations; a church can adopt this practice in the form of compassionate feedback and mentoring sessions that help volunteers discern and improve their gifts in service. Similarly, training programs in a faith context can integrate spiritual formation (e.g. linking a volunteer's role to their personal calling and discipleship) alongside skill training. Recognition takes the form not just of thanking volunteers for hours worked, but celebrating the ministry impact of their service (connecting their work to the faith community's mission). In these ways, corporate HR tools are reframed in servant-oriented, faith-informed ways.

A key element of HR stewardship is developing a leadership style that reflects Christian values. Many scholars advocate servant leadership as especially suited to faith-based volunteer mobilisation (Sendjaya, Sarros and Santora, 2008; Barge and Fairhurst, 2010; van Dierendonck, 2011; Chevalier, 2023). Servant leadership, modelled on Jesus, emphasizes humility, listening, empowerment, and caring for others' growth – essentially *leading by serving*. Research confirms that this style is effective: A recent doctoral study by Chevalier (2023) across 28 churches found strong correlations between servant leadership behaviours and volunteer satisfaction. When church volunteers perceived their leaders were empowering them, showing genuine care, and "standing back" to let volunteers take ownership, the volunteers reported higher satisfaction and commitment. Importantly, servant leadership also fostered greater intent to continue volunteering, echoing findings in secular contexts that supportive leadership boosts retention. In practice, this means church leaders should act less like bosses and more like shepherds of their volunteer flock. Rather

than merely assigning tasks, they invest in relationships of trust and compassion: getting to know volunteers personally, praying with them, and helping them find roles that align with their God-given talents. Such an environment resonates with volunteers' sense of calling. As Schneider (2012) observed, many congregations emphasize volunteering as an expression of personal call to service and a fulfilment of religious duty. Volunteers in churches often see their work as both *spiritual* and *practical* – a way to live out their faith ("faith without works is dead") while supporting the organisation's ministry needs (Denning, 2021; Short and Plummer, 2024). Recognizing this dual nature, HR stewardship honours the volunteer not just as a worker, but as a minister. Church volunteers are thus treated as co-labourers in the Gospel mission, worthy of guidance, encouragement, and care.

By adopting a stewardship mindset, faith-based organisations can implement best practices from corporate HRM in a values-centric way. For instance, a secular nonprofit might hold mandatory trainings; a church can similarly require trainings for volunteers (e.g. child safety training for youth ministry) but frame them as equipping saints for service, referencing scriptural principles of excellence and accountability. Performance feedback in a corporate setting might focus on metrics, whereas in a church it can be a loving conversation about how a volunteer's service is going, what challenges they face, and how the church can support them better – thus upholding unity and love alongside effectiveness. This approach helps avoid the pitfall of viewing volunteers purely as "free labour" to exploit (a concern raised in critiques of some megachurches' volunteer cultures). Instead, volunteers are individually valued members of the Body of Christ, each with unique gifts (1 Cor. 12) that leaders are responsible to cultivate. In congregational settings especially, lay volunteers often take on significant leadership (teaching, governance, outreach), essentially becoming stewards of the local church alongside clergy (Schneider, 2012). It is crucial that ministers equip these volunteers through shared leadership and clear role definition, so that ministry is sustainable and aligned. As Sengupta and Joshi (2023) note, in more decentralised churches the local pastor's role includes conveying a shared understanding of volunteers' roles and engaging members in stewardship of the community. This underscores that applying organisational theory in a faith context not only improves efficiency but also empowers the laity, which is a theological ideal (the "priesthood of all believers").

In summary, *adapting HRM to ecclesial mission* means translating technical management practices into a "Kingdom" idiom. Through HR stewardship, church leaders borrow the best

from corporate HR – structured recruitment, training pathways, mentoring, feedback, recognition – and implement these in a manner that upholds Christian values of service, compassion, and vocation. This approach legitimizes the use of organisational best practices in volunteer ministry by demonstrating that they can be consonant with, rather than contrary to, the church's spiritual mission. Far from importing a cold corporate mentality, strategic volunteer management, done with a servant's heart, enables the church to care for its people (volunteers) even as they care for others. It builds a healthy, sustainable volunteer culture where individuals grow in faith *through* their service. In essence, HR stewardship reframes volunteers as partners in mission to be nurtured, not just workers to be managed. Embracing this perspective is both a practical necessity and a theological imperative for faith-based organisations that rely on volunteers to fulfil their calling. As the literature shows, applying HRM principles with a stewardship ethos leads to more committed, joyful volunteers – which ultimately furthers the ministry's impact and longevity (Starnes, 201; Chevalier, 2023). This bridge between secular HR wisdom and ecclesial values reinforces that effective volunteer management is a ministry, and a vital part of building up the Church's human resources for service.

2.6. The Steward's Trust: Forging a Golden Thread of Volunteer Motivation from Theology to Psychology in the Church

2.6.1 Stewardship Theory: Principles of Trust and Care

Stewardship theory in organisational management argues that, under the right conditions, leaders will do what is best for their organisation and stakeholders not because they are compelled by external controls or personal incentives, but because they genuinely want to uphold trust and achieve collective goals. This stands in contrast to the traditional agency theory, which assumes managers are self-interested agents who must be closely monitored and incentivized to act in the owners' interest. Stewardship theory, by contrast, paints a more optimistic picture of human motivation within organisations: it assumes intrinsic motivation**,** trust, and shared interest between leaders and those they serve (Miller-Millesen, Buse and Bilimoria, 2016; Batool and Jan, 2024). Stewardship theory posits that managers and leaders, when afforded trust and empowerment, will naturally align their objectives with the organisation's mission and the long-term welfare of its stakeholders. Stewards are thus motivated by organisational success and collective good, rather than solely by personal gain.

As Donaldson and Davis (1991) articulated, executives who are empowered through trust will "align their actions with organisational goals," seeking to operate in the best interests of the collective entity.

Stewards thrive within an environment characterized by trust, involvement, and decentralization, rather than one founded on suspicion and stringent oversight. Collaboration and trust, rather than control and distrust, are presumed to prevail in stewardship relationships. Consequently, instead of relying on extensive monitoring mechanisms or punitive contracts, stewardship theory advocates empowering leaders through autonomy and expecting them to act responsibly. This approach is believed to not only reduce costly oversight but also to foster innovation and enhance morale. This theoretical perspective prioritizes trust, pro-organisational behaviour, and intrinsic motivation, contrasting with agency theory's emphasis on control and self-interest (Batool and Jan, 2024)

Underpinning stewardship theory is the premise that individuals can derive personal satisfaction from contributing effectively to their organisation or cause. Intrinsic rewards, such as pride in the organisation, a desire to contribute, and a sense of duty, are central motivators. Stewards often develop a sense of psychological ownership over the mission, perceiving the organisation's success as their own. Therefore, they do not require external incentives or the threat of punishment to perform. Their motivation to excel stems from their identification with the mission and their acceptance of responsibility for its outcomes. For example, within many non-profit organisations or charitable institutions, staff and volunteers often work diligently, even with modest or no remuneration, due to their profound belief in the cause. Stewardship theory explains this through internalized commitment to the organisational mission.

Stewards prioritize the long-term health of the organisation and its stakeholders, rather than focusing on short-term personal metrics. Stewardship theory posits that leaders will act to maximize long-term value creation for all stakeholders, encompassing owners, employees, clients, and the broader community. This orientation frequently entails an emphasis on sustainability, social responsibility, and the careful management of resources. In corporate governance, for instance, a stewardship-minded chief executive officer might reinvest profits into employee development or community projects, trusting that such investments

will cultivate a stronger company and society in the long term. Similarly, in a faith-based context, a stewardship-oriented leader might prioritize initiatives that strengthen the congregation's spiritual growth and service over time, even if these do not yield immediate tangible results.

The term "steward" itself implies holding something in trust for the benefit of another. Leaders are therefore viewed as caretakers of the organisation's mission, reputation, personnel, and resources. They exercise responsible management and ethical oversight, akin to an individual entrusted with managing a household on behalf of its owner. Crucially, stewards are not passive placeholders; they actively seek to cultivate and protect what has been entrusted to them. In non-profit and faith-based settings, this often carries spiritual connotations, with leaders serving as stewards accountable for the care of their people and mission. As Hernandez (2012) described, stewardship reflects "an ongoing sense of obligation or duty to others" (Waldkirch & Nordqvist, 2016), embodying a moral commitment to serve the interests of those who have placed their trust in the leader.

In practice, adopting a stewardship philosophy in a mission-driven group means fostering a high-trust culture with participative leadership. For example, boards and supervisors assume that staff and volunteers are committed to the cause, so they grant them more autonomy and input in decisions. Leaders focus on mentorship and providing resources rather than micromanaging. The organisation emphasizes shared values, transparency, and mutual accountability. When successful, this approach can yield numerous benefits: higher trust and loyalty, lower turnover, and reduced need for bureaucratic controls. Research has found that organisations embracing stewardship principles often enjoy lower monitoring costs and healthier governance, as people act more on honour and commitment. For instance, a study of nonprofit staff suggested that stewardship-oriented leadership led to increased organisational commitment and performance, in part because employees felt respected and "owned" the mission (Erdurmazlı, 2018).

Stewardship theory's emphasis on trust and service is naturally appealing in faith-based contexts. Churches and ministries frequently exhort their leaders to be *faithful stewards*. A pastor, for example, is entrusted with the care of the congregation ("the flock"), and is expected to serve the church's needs over his own. Theological teachings reinforce that leaders will be judged on how they stewarded the authority and resources God gave them

(e.g., 1 Corinthians 4:2: “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful”). Thus, secular stewardship theory dovetails with religious principles of *servant leadership, accountability to God,* and *prioritizing the common good*. Both frameworks reject a view of leaders as mere powerholders or hirelings and instead cast them as responsible guardians working for a higher purpose.

While stewardship is often presented as a positive ideal, significant critiques exist regarding its practical implementation and its theological implications. In congregational contexts, although "stewardship" is frequently discussed, for example, concerning money, time, or the environment, some scholars contend that it has become an imprecise term that may obscure underlying issues. Concurrently, governance scholars caution that stewardship theory can oversimplify human behavior and undervalue the necessity of accountability. Several key criticisms are considered below.

Critics of stewardship theory contend that it relies upon optimistic assumptions concerning leader motives. Not all managers or volunteers consistently exhibit intrinsic loyalty or selflessness. By presuming that individuals will always act in the best interest of others, one risks overlooking the genuine possibility of self-interest or misconduct. Proponents of agency theory argue that trust must be balanced with verification. Even strong advocates of stewardship acknowledge its limitations, noting that "extreme applications of either agency or stewardship theory present limitations – agency theory fosters excessive oversight and risk aversion, while stewardship theory may overlook necessary control mechanisms" (Batool and Jan, 2024). Consequently, if an organisation naively embraces stewardship to the extent that it eliminates all oversight, it may become vulnerable to mismanagement by individuals who do not uphold the implicit trust. Empirical research supports this concern. For instance, a study by Pastoriza and Ariño (2008) observed that stewardship theory, in its pure form, tends to be static, assuming a fixed stewardship relationship, whereas in practice, the development of trust is a dynamic process. Organisations have consequently regconised the importance of retaining certain accountability structures even when operating under stewardship principles. Keay (2017) remarked that "board accountability remains essential regardless of theoretical perspective – even under stewardship, where directors are presumed loyal, mechanisms like reporting and oversight are needed to ensure transparency and guard against incompetence or conflict of interest". Therefore, a purely trust-based approach carries inherent risks unless tempered with prudent checks.

Stewardship theory has been critiqued for its near-exclusive focus on a leader's intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, often neglecting other situational factors. Some characterize it as psychologically reductionist, arguing that not every well-intentioned leader will succeed, nor is every failure attributable to self-interest. External pressures, resource constraints, and skill deficits can impede a steward's effectiveness, even when intentions are positive. Furthermore, stewardship theory does not fully account for truly altruistic or sacrificial behaviors. One major critique of stewardship theory is its failure to incorporate an explicit moral dimension (Waldkirch and Nordqvist, 2016). This oversight limits its explanatory power to collectivistic behaviours, leaving true benevolence and altruism unexplained. In a faith context, this critique is particularly salient. From a Christian perspective, a leader's motivation to care for others may stem not merely from psychological alignment with a mission, but from a deeper spiritual or moral calling, such as love or obedience to divine will. Stewardship theory, as a secular analysis, does not inherently incorporate such theological motivations, speaking instead in terms of organisational alignment and trust. While compatible with religious ethics, this distinction suggests that for religious organisations, an additional layer of moral or spiritual reasoning often complements the stewardship model.

Within religious contexts, "stewardship" as a theological term has faced critique for becoming a cliché that may lack substantive meaning. Although religious organisations frequently discuss stewardship, for example, concerning financial resources or environmental care, some theologians argue that this framing is inadequate in contemporary contexts. Rienstra (2022) contended that "stewardship and 'creation care' can easily become toothless concepts, masking our indifference." One concern is that the steward metaphor implies an absent owner. If God is depicted as the distant owner of creation and humans as stewards, religious adherents might subconsciously assume God is not actively involved, potentially leading them to perceive a greater latitude for their actions. In extreme cases, almost any action can be justified if labeled "good stewardship." For instance, a developer might claim to be "stewarding" a piece of land by developing it for profit, even if such action harms the community or environment, thereby appropriating the moral language of stewardship for self-serving objectives. The term can thus devolve into a "self-deluding piety," enabling individuals to self-congratulate while perpetuating harmful behaviors. Another theological critique suggests that stewardship language may not effectively

motivate individuals. Despite decades of instruction on environmental stewardship, many congregations remain disengaged from environmental action. Some propose that the term "stewardship" feels overly managerial or uninspiring, failing to evoke genuine affection or passion. New paradigms, such as viewing humans as integral to the community of creation rather than merely managers of it, have been proposed by eco-theologians who find the stewardship concept insufficient. In summary, the theological critique urges caution, emphasizing that "stewardship" should not become an empty trope. Its application must be coupled with genuine accountability to divine purposes and an awareness that God remains the true, active owner, deeply concerned with how resources and people are treated.

Even when stewardship values are fully embraced, their implementation within an organisation can present significant challenges. Leaders attempting to practice stewardship may encounter skepticism from governing boards or followers accustomed to more stringent oversight. Cultivating a culture of mutual trust requires considerable time, and any missteps can impede its development. Furthermore, a transition to a stewardship model often necessitates training and developing leaders in a new mindset, as not all managers inherently possess the skills to be effective stewards. Tension can also arise between stewardship ideals and external accountability demands. For example, a non-profit organisation might deeply trust its staff, aligning with stewardship principles, yet a funder might require detailed performance metrics and controls, reflecting an agency logic. Navigating these mixed expectations represents a real-world complexity. In faith-based volunteer programs, a stewardship approach would entail granting volunteers genuine voice and responsibility, treating them as co-owners of the ministry. While empowering, this also requires leaders to invest in volunteers' training and buy-in, and to be prepared for occasional setbacks or conflicts to be managed with grace rather than through autocratic directives.

In conclusion, stewardship theory offers an appealing framework of trusted, mission-focused leadership, very much in harmony with faith-based values. But it should be applied with eyes open to its limitations. A balanced approach likely works best: fostering trust and intrinsic commitment, while also maintaining clear accountability and not shying away from authority when needed for the good of the mission. Theologically, stewardship language should be revitalized with genuine spiritual accountability (reminding that God is ever-present and we cannot bend "stewardship" to mean whatever we want). These critiques do not dismiss stewardship but rather refine it – ensuring it remains a meaningful and effective

guiding philosophy for mission-driven organisations. For our purposes, stewardship underscores the importance of leaders holding their role *"in trust"* and focusing on service over self-interest, which will be a component of our integrated approach, even as we heed the cautions noted above.

2.6.2 Servant Leadership in Ministry

Mission-driven and volunteer-based contexts often favour leadership approaches that prioritize service, ethics, and the well-being of followers. Two prominent models discussed in this regard are servant leadership – the idea of leaders as servants first – and stewardship – the idea of leaders as caretakers or trustees of an organisation's mission and people. These models align with the ethos of service-oriented organisations (such as churches or nonprofits) by shifting focus away from leader privilege and towards responsibility for others. Below, we explore the principles of servant leadership and then examine its critiques and limitations.

Robert K. Greenleaf's (1970, 1977) concept of *servant leadership* introduced a paradigm shift by defining the true leader as *servant-first* – one who leads out of a desire to serve others rather than a desire for power or control. Greenleaf famously wrote that *"the servant-leader is servant first… The best test is: do those served grow as persons…more likely themselves to become servants?"* In other words, servant leadership entails a fundamental inversion of typical power dynamics: the leader's primary role is to serve the needs, growth, and well-being of followers, thereby inspiring them to develop and serve others in turn. This philosophy resonates strongly with religious values of humility, altruism, and community. Indeed, many see servant leadership as *"an ideal leadership form"* in Christian organisations and note that its core traits *"are found throughout the Bible"*, reflecting Christ-like leadership ideals. Larry Spears, a protégé of Greenleaf, distilled Greenleaf's writings into ten core characteristics of servant leaders. These ten principles (often cited as the pillars of servant leadership) highlight the leader's ethical, empathetic, and people-centred approach (Spears, 2010). They can be summarized as follows:

- Listening: A servant leader actively listens to others, showing receptivity to their ideas and needs.
- Empathy: The leader strives to understand others' perspectives and emotions, demonstrating genuine care.

- Healing: A commitment to the emotional and spiritual well-being of followers, helping to "heal" and support them.
- Awareness: Self-awareness and general awareness of context, enabling the leader to perceive issues and ethics clearly.
- Persuasion: Reliance on influence and dialogue rather than coercive authority – convincing others through reason and trust.
- Conceptualization: The ability to envision long-term goals and think beyond day-to-day realities – providing a sense of mission.
- Foresight: Anticipating future outcomes and consequences, learning from the past to act responsibly for the future.
- Stewardship: Acting as a caretaker of the organisation and its people – holding their trust and serving the greater good (this links to stewardship theory, see below).
- Commitment to the Growth of People: A genuine dedication to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of everyone.
- Building Community: Fostering a strong sense of belonging, teamwork, and familial community among followers.

These servant leadership principles closely mirror virtues esteemed in ecclesial contexts. Leaders who listen, empathize, and put others first exemplify the "last shall be first" ethos found in scripture. It is no surprise that servant leadership has been embraced by many faith-based organisations as a model aligning with their values. Empirical research is increasingly validating its benefits for volunteer-driven groups. Studies have shown that adopting a servant leadership style can yield higher volunteer satisfaction, commitment, and retention. For example, servant leadership was found to be positively correlated with volunteers' job satisfaction and organisational commitment in nonprofit settings. Erdurmazlı (2019) observed that in voluntary organisations, when volunteers perceived high servant leadership in their leaders, their motivation, satisfaction, and commitment were significantly greater. Another study in a faith-based context found that servant leadership behaviours by church leaders *predicted* stronger organisational commitment among both paid staff and volunteers (Deno, 2017). In a multi-generational U.S. church study, Chevalier (2023) found that volunteers across all age cohorts (Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z) reported greater satisfaction and intent to continue serving when they observed their leaders practicing servant-leader behaviours such as empowering followers, "standing back" (putting volunteers first), and holding people accountable in a supportive way. Such findings

reinforce Greenleaf's premise: by serving and valuing their followers, leaders can inspire greater loyalty and performance. Evans (2023) analysis noted, servant leadership "involves others in decision making, is strongly based in ethical and caring behaviour, and enhances the growth of workers while improving the quality of organisational life" – outcomes highly relevant to sustaining a volunteer workforce.

It is worth noting that despite its promise, servant leadership remains under-explored in certain cultural and demographic contexts particularly relevant to this study. Much of the servant leadership literature to date has focused on Western contexts or on business and education settings (Parris and Peachey, 2013). Fewer studies have examined how servant leadership plays out in non-Western church communities or among younger generations of volunteers. For instance, it is unclear whether the positive impacts of servant leadership observed in U.S. churches hold true for, say, Vietnamese Catholic parish contexts, or how Gen Z volunteers perceive and respond to servant-leader behaviours. Chevalier (2023)'s U.S. study included some Gen Z participants, but similar research is lacking in Asian contexts. This generational and cultural gap in the literature means we cannot assume that servant leadership will automatically produce the same benefits (e.g. satisfaction or commitment) for Vietnamese youth catechists. Investigating servant leadership in this specific context will help determine if any adaptation or emphasis is needed to address local expectations. In short, while servant leadership provides a valuable framework, more globally nuanced research is needed – a gap this study aims to help fill.

Although servant leadership is often lauded, it is not without its critics and practical limitations. Scholars have identified several challenges or concern with this model, encompassing both theoretical foundations and applied contexts. One common criticism is that servant leadership may be overly idealistic or impractical in high-stakes or fast-paced environments. Northouse (2013) observed that servant leadership can appear "utopian," suggesting it might not align with settings that demand rapid, assertive decision-making. In crisis situations or highly competitive industries, a leader who prioritizes consensus and follower needs could be perceived as indecisive. Some studies suggest that the servant leadership style is "not suitable for all organisations, especially those characterized by a fast-changing environment where decisions have to be made quickly" (Kim, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, some followers accustomed to authoritarian leadership may initially perceive a servant leader as excessively lenient or lacking authority. This highlights the

importance of context, as servant leadership likely functions optimally in cultures that embrace a collaborative, people-centered approach. It may also necessitate significant cultural change in organisations founded upon hierarchical structures.

Servant leaders endeavour to share power and delegate responsibility to others, yet this approach can prove counterproductive if not managed effectively. Critics note that servant leadership can obscure lines of authority and result in role confusion. For instance, if a leader consistently disengages from direct oversight, subordinates might misinterpret this as laissez-faire management or an absence of guidance. Furthermore, a heavy emphasis on serving others may lead leaders to overlook their own needs or the broader organisational objectives. Concerns have been raised that staff may be given greater responsibility than they can adequately manage under servant leadership, and that few leaders possess the experience to balance this style effectively (Canavesi and Minelli, 2022). Servant leaders themselves risk burnout if they continuously prioritize others without sufficient self-care or delegation. McDaniel (2023) cautioned that while servant leadership offers numerous advantages, it can also create a susceptibility to exploitation, as unscrupulous followers might take advantage of an overly trusting leader, or the leader may struggle to maintain efficacy when confronted with the narcissism or self-centeredness of others. Consequently, servant leaders must establish boundaries and cultivate support systems to sustain their well-being and authority while serving others.

When Greenleaf's concept first emerged, it was not formulated as a testable theory, and for many years, empirical research on servant leadership lagged its popular appeal. Northouse (1997) noted that a primary criticism of servant leadership was the "lack of support from published, well-designed empirical research" validating its effectiveness. Only within the last one to two decades have rigorous studies begun to address this deficit. Likewise, the concept itself has occasionally been criticized as inadequately defined or as overlapping with other leadership theories. Questions arose regarding what differentiates servant leadership from general "good leadership" or from transformational leadership. In response, researchers such as Spears (2002, 2010) and Eva et al. (2019) have sought to clarify the construct and develop consistent measures. Nevertheless, debates persist, particularly concerning the extent to which servant leadership's emphasis on virtue and morality is unique or whether it could be subsumed under other ethical leadership frameworks. Ongoing

scholarship continues to refine the theory, but this initial lack of clarity made it a target of critique.

Another significant critique originates from feminist and critical scholars who question whether servant leadership, as conventionally described, harbours implicit biases. Intersectional analyses, such as that by Liu (2019), argue that the rhetoric of the "leader as servant" might inadvertently reinforce certain stereotypes or expectations. Historically, servanthood has been more frequently expected of marginalized groups, for example, women and people of colour have often been cast in subordinate, serving roles. Liu (2019) contended that servant leadership literature has largely disregarded how factors such as gender, race, and class intersect with the concept of serving, potentially overlooking power imbalances (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). In essence, who is lauded as a humble servant leader may depend upon social context, as behaviour perceived as noble in one individual might be expected or even demanded of another due to prejudice. This critique advocates for a more nuanced understanding of servant leadership that is sensitive to issues of identity and power, ensuring that the encouragement of leaders to "serve" does not inadvertently excuse exploitation or unequal expectations.

Many critics concede that servant leadership espouses admirable ideals but caution against an extreme implementation that neglects organisational accountability. If interpreted to mean that leaders should exclusively appease followers or avoid exercising authority, servant leadership can undermine performance. A purely servant leader might hesitate to discipline a low-performing individual, for instance, out of excessive empathy. Recognizing this, scholars have argued that effective servant leadership must be paired with robust accountability and oversight mechanisms, thereby blending service with stewardship. As one governance scholar articulated, even under stewardship or servant assumptions where leaders are presumed to act with integrity, "accountability remains crucial for legitimacy, transparency, and performance" (Batool & Jan, 2024). Appropriate checks and balances, including feedback systems and evaluations, are necessary to prevent the abuse of a servant leader’s trust and to ensure that organisational goals are met. In practice, successful servant-led organisations frequently possess clear values and standards to which all individuals, including the leader, adhere, thereby maintaining a healthy balance between compassion and high expectations.

In summary, while servant leadership is inspiring and well-suited to volunteer and faith contexts, these critiques highlight that it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Implementing it requires cultural readiness, prudent judgement, and self-awareness on the part of leaders. Servant leaders must ensure they do not become ineffective "people-pleasers," and organisations may need to retain some structures of accountability and authority even as they foster a service-oriented culture. By acknowledging these limitations, leaders can better adapt servant leadership principles to their specific environment. The criticisms also point to areas for further research – for example, understanding how servant leadership can be practiced in non-Western cultures or how it can be taught without reinforcing gender or racial stereotypes. These remain important considerations as we integrate servant leadership into the broader framework for developing volunteer catechists.

2.6.3 Self-Determination Theory

2.6.3.1 The Three Psychological Needs: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a leading theory of human motivation developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000, 2017). It distinguishes between autonomous (self-driven) and controlled (externally driven) forms of motivation and specifies the social and contextual factors that foster self-sustained engagement and growth. SDT posits that while people have an inherent tendency for optimal functioning, this potential thrives only under supportive conditions (Martela and Riekki, 2018). At the heart of SDT is the idea that all humans have three universal, innate psychological needs, the satisfaction of which is essential for psychological well-being, high-quality motivation, and performance (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2017). These needs are:

- **Autonomy:** The need to feel that one's actions are self-endorsed and volitional – in other words, that one has choice and personal agency in what one does, rather than feeling controlled by external pressures. When autonomy is satisfied, a person feels their actions emanate from their true self and values, instead of from external demands.
- **Competence:** The need to feel effective in one's interactions with the environment – having opportunities to exercise and expand one's skills, and to experience mastery. When competence is satisfied, a person feels capable of achieving goals and handling challenges successfully.

- **Relatedness:** The need to feel socially connected to others – to care for others and be cared for, and to have a sense of belonging in a community or group. This involves feeling valued by others and forming meaningful relationships.

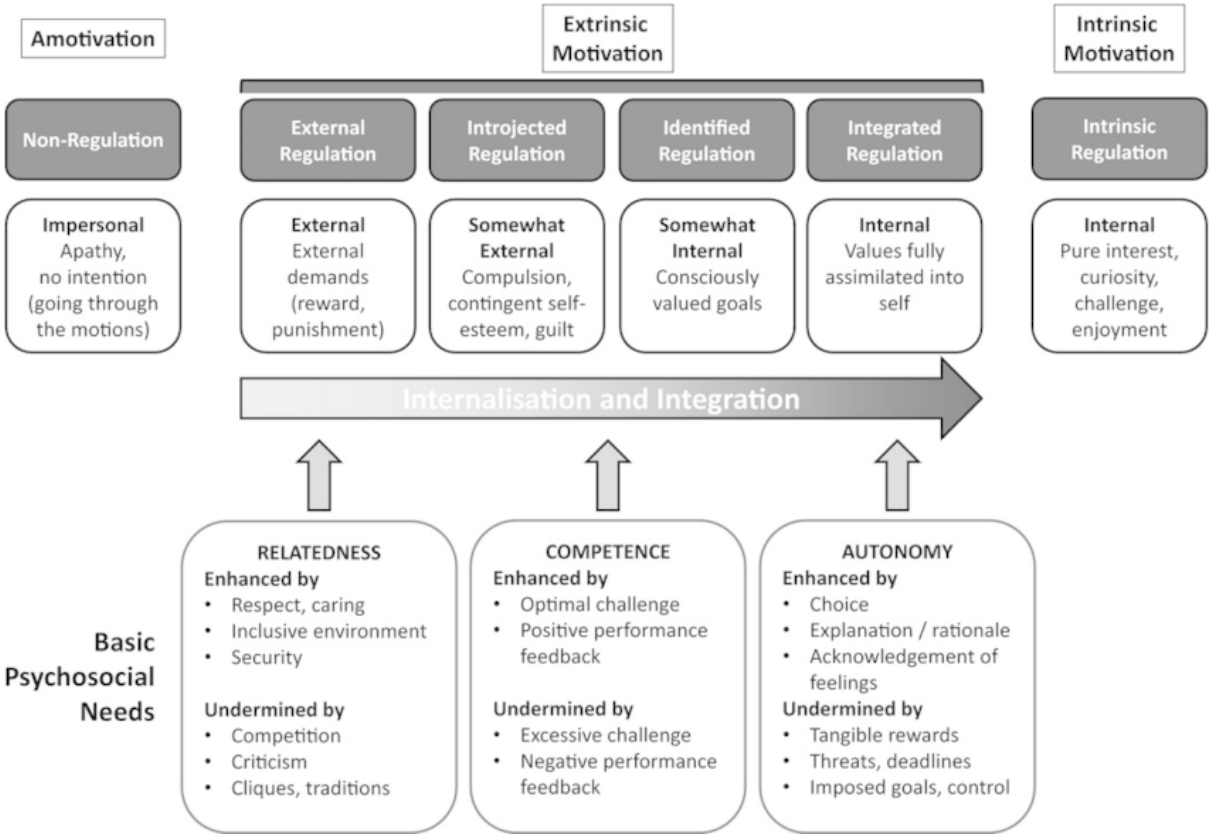

Figure 2.3 Self-determination theory Internalisation and Integration (Cook and Artino, 2016)

According to SDT, the degree to which these needs are supported or thwarted has powerful consequences for motivation. When the social environment supports a person's autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the individual is more likely to internalize the value of an activity and experience high-quality, self-driven motivation (Ryan *et al.*, 2023). In such need-supportive contexts, people tend to show enhanced performance, persistence, creativity, and well-being. Conversely, if these basic needs are chronically frustrated – for example, if a person feels controlled, ineffective, or alienated – SDT predicts diminished motivation, disengagement, and even negative effects on mental health (e.g. burnout or stress) (Martela and Riekki, 2018; Fernandes and de Matos, 2023). In essence, SDT argues that people are naturally drawn to roles and activities that allow them to exercise choice (autonomy), feel a sense of growth or accomplishment (competence), and connect with others (relatedness) (Martela and Riekki, 2018). These *intrinsic satisfactions* can be more powerful in sustaining long-term engagement than extrinsic rewards like money or status.

A comprehensive meta-analysis by Deci et al. (1999) found, for instance, that while external incentives can sometimes undermine intrinsic motivation, provide positive feedback and satisfy people's need to feel competent enhances their voluntary engagement. In the volunteer context – especially church or ministry volunteering, which is typically unpaid and discretionary – understanding these internal motives is paramount.

2.6.3.2 Applying SDT to Volunteer Programme Design

Research guided by SDT has consistently shown that volunteers exhibit the greatest commitment and energy when their involvement fulfills the three basic needs (Gagné, 2003; Oostlander, Güntert and Wehner, 2014; Li, Hecht and Chancellor, 2022). In practical terms, this means volunteer programs should strive to make volunteers feel autonomous, competent, and related. For example, a sense of autonomy in volunteer work can be fostered by giving individuals a voice in how they contribute. When volunteers feel they have ownership over their tasks – such as being allowed to introduce a new idea for a youth event or adapt a lesson plan to their personal teaching style – they are likely to feel more invested than if they are micromanaged. Studies confirm that an autonomy-supportive climate (where leaders offer choice, encourage initiative, and minimize controlling directives) is associated with higher autonomous motivation and commitment among volunteers (Fernandes and de Matos, 2023). In one study of 349 volunteers, those who felt they were "the source of their own volunteering behaviour" (i.e. acting out of personal choice) showed significantly greater work engagement and were less inclined to quit (Haivas, Hofmans and Pepermans, 2013). In contrast, if volunteers perceive that they are being pressured or guilt-tripped into helping, they might comply temporarily but are much more susceptible to burnout or dropping out once that external pressure is removed. Thus, maximizing volunteers' sense of autonomy – for instance by aligning tasks with their personal calling and giving them flexibility in execution – is a critical factor for sustained motivation.

Volunteers must also experience a steady sense of competence in their roles to maintain motivation. This means they should feel effective and see tangible results or improvements stemming from their service. Providing proper training, constructive feedback, and matching individuals to tasks suited to their skills are key management practices here. When volunteers feel they are learning new skills, successfully helping others, or achieving goals, their intrinsic motivation and satisfaction increase (Boezeman and Ellemers, 2009; Li, Ge and Li, 2022). Empirical evidence indicates that volunteers highly value opportunities to

develop and use skills; many church volunteers, for example, seek to become better teachers, counsellors, or organizers as part of their service (Chan, 2020). A qualitative study of ministry volunteers noted that feeling *"skilled and knowledgeable"* in their ministry was a significant motivator for continued service (Moore, 2019). Success experiences can powerfully reinforce competence. For instance, when a catechist sees their students grasp a difficult concept, or when a ministry team successfully runs a retreat, it boosts the volunteer's confidence that *"I can do this,"* encouraging further effort. Research shows that placing volunteers in roles that provide an optimal challenge – enough to grow, but not so overwhelming as to ensure failure – deepens their commitment (Locke, 1997; Artino, 2012). Regularly acknowledging volunteers' contributions and improvements is also crucial. Results from Matos and Fernandes (2021) study indicated positive feedback from the organisation significantly enhanced volunteers' sense of competence and was *"crucial in engagement"*. In short, volunteers who feel adequately prepared and appreciated for their work are far more likely to stay motivated than those who feel underutilized or ineffective. Conversely, volunteers who continually feel lost, untrained, or as if their talents are going to waste will likely disengage. By investing in training, offering resources, and celebrating small victories, leaders can fulfil the competence need. As one analysis summarized, *"the more volunteers feel effective (competence) in their work, the more they develop engagement and the less they consider leaving"*.

The social dimension of volunteering often serves as a primary draw, underscoring the importance of relatedness. Particularly in faith communities, volunteering is as much about fellowship and belonging as it is about completing tasks. SDT posits that humans have an inherent need to connect with others and feel cared for. Volunteering provides a fertile context for this: it creates camaraderie, shared purpose, and meaningful relationships. Many church volunteers report that being part of a *"ministry family"* or close-knit team is deeply fulfilling. They often forge friendships and find mentors in the course of service, and they begin to perceive the church as a supportive community rather than just an obligation.

2.6.3.3 The Role of Leadership in Fostering Motivation

Building on Self-Determination Theory, leadership that cultivates relatedness, a felt sense of belonging and mutual care, strengthens volunteers' motivation and persistence. In congregational settings this often takes the form of a family-like climate intentionally modelled by leaders. A qualitative study of African-American church volunteers, for

example, found that many described the church community as "like a family," and identified this pervasive belonging as a primary reason they kept returning to serve (Moore, 2019). When relatedness need is satisfied, volunteers feel *personally* valued and connected – they know that if they miss a session, they are not just leaving a slot unfilled but are *personally missed* by others. This emotional bond can powerfully sustain long-term commitment. Indeed, several studies have found that the opportunity to form relationships is among the most common motivations volunteers give for church-based service. In some cases, volunteers rank *social connection* as an equal or even greater motivator than the work itself or personal development (e.g. having a sense of *"fellowship"* often came out as a top motivator in church volunteer surveys – (Smith, 2023). Practices that enhance relatedness include team-building activities, prayer or reflection groups for volunteers, leaders taking genuine interest in volunteers' lives, and cultivating an inclusive, appreciative culture. Research supports these practices: when volunteers build personal relationships and share experiences with fellow members, a strong sense of belonging to a community develops, which in turn elevates their engagement. For example, one study noted that when volunteers interact more with the beneficiaries of their work or with each other, they find the experience more rewarding and become more deeply involved. The notion of *"serving God together"* in a ministry can create spiritual and social ties that are highly resilient. In summary, fulfilling the relatedness need – making volunteers feel part of a supportive team and mission – is just as vital as supporting their autonomy and competence.

According to SDT, motivation that arises from satisfying these needs is either intrinsic (doing an activity for the inherent enjoyment or meaning) or well-internalized identified motivation (doing an activity because one personally endorses its value). Volunteers driven by enjoyment of the work, alignment with their personal values, or a sense of calling and love for the community are likely to exhibit greater effort, creativity, and persistence than those motivated by external rewards or pressures (Bidee *et al.*, 2023). This aligns with broader volunteer management findings: individuals who volunteer out of personal passion or conviction tend to put in more hours and remain longer in service compared to those who volunteer primarily due to external obligations or to pad their résumé. Moreover, when volunteers perceive their activities as self-chosen and meaningful, they report higher satisfaction and lower burnout (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Costello, Homberg and Secchi, 2020). A recent review on volunteer engagement concluded that if volunteers "see sufficient value in their volunteer efforts," they invest more and are less likely to lose interest or leave

(Chorus, 2019). In contrast, controlled motivation – such as feeling compelled by guilt or fear of criticism – often leads to resentment and dropout once the external prods are removed. For example, a person who volunteers only because their pastor pressured them might quit as soon as that pressure is lifted. Thus, fostering autonomous motivation (through need satisfaction) is critical for retention, whereas relying on control is unsustainable.

Servant Leadership Behaviour	**Primary Need Satisfied**	**Mechanism and Supporting Evidence**
Empowering; Sharing Power; Offering Choice	**Autonomy**	Provides volunteers with a sense of volition and control over their actions. Leaders grant autonomy, provide opportunities to act independently, and create a "volunteering menu" from which individuals can choose roles that align with their interests (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Jiang & Wei, 2024). This allows volunteers to feel their actions emanate from the self and are willingly enacted (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011)..
Developing Abilities; Providing Feedback; Matching Skills to Tasks	**Competence**	Helps volunteers feel effective and grow. Leaders are committed to followers' growth (Liden et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck, 2011), provide training, offer skills-based volunteering opportunities, and give positive feedback that leverages a sense of competence (Jiang & Wei, 2024). This satisfies the innate need to master tasks, learn new skills, and feel effective in one's efforts (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016).
Listening; Empathy; Building Community; Fostering Psychological Safety	**Relatedness**	Creates a sense of connection, belonging, and being cared for. Leaders are relationship-oriented, show genuine concern for followers' well-being (Jiang & Wei, 2024), and intentionally foster a sense of community (Spears, 2010; Van Dierendonck, 2011). This enhances psychological safety, allowing volunteers to feel secure and strengthen their sense of belonging within the organisation (Ma et al., 2021).
Humility; Treating Followers as Equals	**Autonomy & Relatedness**	Reduces the feeling of being controlled (supporting Autonomy) and fosters trust and connection (supporting Relatedness). By taking a humble position as a servant and treating followers as equal partners, leaders

		dismantle hierarchical barriers, fostering mutual trust and a greater sense of psychological freedom (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Spears, 2010). This egalitarian approach also enhances volunteers' perceived autonomy and relatedness needs satisfaction (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Liden et al., 2008).
Commitment to Holistic Growth (Personal, Professional, Spiritual)	**Autonomy, Competence, & Relatedness**	Integrates all three needs by demonstrating a holistic concern for the individual. This commitment communicates that the volunteer is valued as a whole person (Relatedness), supports their development of new skills (Competence), and respects their personal goals and values (Autonomy) (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Schowalter et al., 2024).

Table 2.1 How Servant Leadership Satisfies Basic Psychological Needs

Leadership behaviour plays a significant role in meeting SDT needs in volunteers. Leaders who act in need-supportive ways – for instance, by providing choices (supporting autonomy), offering encouragement and feedback (supporting competence), and building a welcoming team spirit (supporting relatedness) – effectively nurture volunteers' internal motivation. Studies in volunteer organisations show this clearly. One study found that an autonomy-supportive organisational climate was associated with greater volunteer engagement, an effect explained by volunteers' basic needs being met and their motivation becoming more self-driven (Fernandes and de Matos, 2023). In practice, a church leader can apply SDT principles in many simple ways: allowing volunteers to have input in planning events or lessons (giving them ownership), pairing novice volunteers with experienced mentors and acknowledging improvements (boosting competence and confidence), and organizing social gatherings or prayer meetings for the volunteer team (strengthening relatedness). Consider a concrete example: instead of dictating every detail of a youth retreat, a servant leader might invite the youth volunteers to brainstorm themes or activities, encourage a newer volunteer to take the lead on one segment with guidance, and make time during the retreat for volunteers to reflect together on their experiences. This leader might also regularly highlight each volunteer's contributions (*in example:* "*I want to thank Maria for the creative game she introduced, and John for calmly handling the unexpected power outage*"). Such actions align with SDT's recommendations.

2.6.3.4 Generation Z and Faith-Based Motivation: New Frontiers for SDT

By contrast, a more controlling approach (e.g. giving orders without explanations, never soliciting input, or only criticizing mistakes) would likely thwart autonomy and competence, leading to poorer outcomes. In fact, evidence suggests that when volunteer coordinators adopt an autonomy-supportive style, volunteers report significantly higher self-determined motivation, which then translates into stronger commitment and lower intentions to quit. For instance, a study in Romania found that volunteers under autonomy-supportive coordinators were much more likely to intend to continue volunteering, largely because they felt more autonomous and competent in their roles (Haivas et al., 2013). In sum, SDT provides a *robust framework* for designing volunteer programs that cultivate intrinsic motivation: ensure that volunteers *experience choice and agency, feel effective and growing, and feel socially connected and appreciated*.

While SDT has been fruitfully applied to understanding general volunteerism (Gagné and Deci, 2005), a notable gap exists in the research: very little is known about the motivations of Generation Z volunteers in faith-based roles. Most volunteer motivation studies have focused on older adults or mixed-age samples, leaving the youngest generation under-studied (Clary et al., 1998; Stukas, Hoye & Nicholson, 2014).Generation Z (born roughly 1997–2012) is often described as having distinct traits – for example, being highly value-driven, pragmatic, and motivated by a desire to make a tangible social impact (Seemiller and Grace, 2018). If this characterization holds, Gen Z's satisfaction of basic needs in volunteering might take unique forms. Their need for relatedness, for instance, might not only be about forming friendships in a local church, but also about feeling part of a broader cause or *mission* that aligns with their values (such as social justice or community change). Likewise, autonomy for Gen Z might involve having greater creative control or flexibility (since this generation values personalization and independent work), and competence might involve rapid skill-building (as they are accustomed to fast-paced learning environments).

Furthermore, the spiritual dimension of serving as a catechist (a volunteer religion teacher) introduces motives beyond those typically studied in secular volunteering. These can include a sense of divine calling, a feeling of duty to God or the church, and the pursuit of spiritual growth.

2.6.3.5 Spirituality, Vocation, and the Sacred Dimension of Motivation

SDT can conceptually accommodate such motives through the idea of *identified regulation* – where an individual consciously values an activity and integrates it into their sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the case of young catechists, one might hypothesize that a strong sense of vocation or calling could greatly enhance a volunteer's feeling of autonomy. For example, if a young person truly believes "this is *my* God-given mission," then teaching catechism is not seen as an external obligation but as a deeply personal, self-endorsed choice – thus satisfying autonomy at a profound level. Similarly, volunteering in religious education might imbue routine tasks with a greater sense of meaning or sacred significance, which can reinforce the volunteer's sense of competence and impact ("what I'm doing matters *eternally*, not just in the here and now"). Relatedness in a spiritual context might also be amplified by the notion of *spiritual fellowship*: volunteers may feel bonded not only by working together, but by shared faith, prayer, and a collective connection to the Church's mission. These possibilities remain largely unexamined by empirical research. A recent review pointed out the scarcity of data on how young volunteers internalize their religious mission (Beyerlein, Trinitapoli and Adler, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2019). Do Generation Z catechists feel more committed because they see their volunteer work as part of their identity as Christians? Does hearing a sense of *calling* make them more resilient to challenges? Such questions have yet to be answered in the literature.

This intersection of SDT with faith-based motivation suggests several testable propositions. A strong sense of vocation could indeed function like a turbo-boost to autonomy, framing service as a free and *meaningful* choice rather than an imposed duty. Serving God and the community might satisfy competence by providing an extra layer of significance to every achievement (teaching a child a prayer might feel like *spiritual* success, not just a teaching success). Relatedness might be experienced not only in peer friendships but also in feeling part of the *Body of Christ* or a global church community working towards a higher purpose. All these could profoundly shape motivation. To give a concrete example: a Gen Z catechist in Vietnam might derive relatedness from knowing they are part of a worldwide Catholic community – the sense of connection might extend beyond their local parish to a feeling of unity with the Church's mission everywhere. These nuances mean that while SDT's basic needs are universal, the *way* they are satisfied can be context dependent. Generation Z's

unique cultural and spiritual context could influence what autonomy, competence, and relatedness look like for them. Recognizing this is important for applying SDT effectively.

In summary, SDT offers a valuable lens for analysing volunteer engagement and designing interventions to sustain it. It underscores that to keep volunteers motivated over the long term; faith-based organisations must go beyond external incentives and address the core *human needs* of their volunteers. For Generation Z catechist development, applying this framework will require sensitivity to their aspirations and the spiritual context of their work. This study helps fill the current gap by exploring the motivations of Gen Z volunteer catechists in Vietnam – examining how well their basic needs are being met (or unmet) and how this impacts their commitment. The findings will inform strategies for training and supporting the next generation of volunteer catechists in ways that genuinely resonate with them. Ultimately, nurturing volunteers' autonomy, competence, and relatedness is not only theoretically sound according to SDT, but in a ministry setting it can be seen as respecting the God-given dignity, gifts, and community-oriented nature of each person. With these insights, we can better craft programs that inspire young volunteers to joyfully and persistently serve in the Church's mission.

2.7 Observational Learning and Narrative Pedagogy (Social Cognitive Theory)

2.7.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Complementing the internal formation provided by Spiritual Well-being, Narrative Pedagogy serves as an essential external resource for catechist development. The Catholic Church has historically relied on storytelling and lived witness, utilizing narratives to educate, inspire, and shape the identity of believers across generations. The Catholic Church presents saints' lives and Jesus' parables alongside martyrs' testimonies not just as historical records but as frameworks for living through example, thoughtful reflection, and ethical understanding (DelFra, 2005; Rule, 2017). Narrative pedagogy operates as the framework behind this method through its use of stories to shape identity and convey values while promoting transformative experiences. Brelsford (2007) describes such narratives as "living catechisms": The narratives showcase individuals who struggle with doubt while practicing forgiveness and living out Gospel values in everyday situations. Young people find their moral imagination expanded by these stories which allow them to see themselves as part of

a greater spiritual narrative. Moreover, these martyr stories are the perfect pedagogical tool for this specific generation because they embody the synthesis of traditional Vietnamese virtues (courage, sacrifice, solidarity) and a modern form of proactive, personal witness that resonates with Gen Z's desire for authenticity and impact.

Scientific research demonstrates how narratives about role models contribute to spiritual growth and personal character building especially in teenagers and young adults. According to Abo-Zena and King (2021), developmental psychology and educational studies reveal that young people develop moral values through observing moral exemplars in action rather than through abstract lessons. When individuals read about real people who show faith and courage even through failures and hardships they develop empathy and hope alongside awareness of their personal moral responsibility. The researchers discovered within their longitudinal study on religious youth engagement that personal accounts of struggle and transformation produced stronger long-term spiritual dedication compared to traditional doctrinal catechesis (Manning et al., 2019). The Directory for Catechesis (2020) describes catechists as witnesses who share both their beliefs and their teachings. Witnessing takes place through individual stories and collective memories along with shared testimonies. The Catholic Church uses the veneration of saints through their canonisation and integration into liturgy and catechesis as a central pedagogical strategy. These stories are not neutral examples but formative texts: These narratives promote imitation among individuals while also stimulating reflection and developing moral discernment.

In the context of catechist formation, especially among Generation Z, the use of narrative pedagogy offers a compelling approach. As explored earlier, Gen Z learners are often disengaged by traditional didactic methods but respond positively to authenticity, lived experience, and story-based learning. Narrative approaches allow them to engage with complex moral themes - suffering, sacrifice, fidelity - in ways that are emotionally resonant and personally applicable. Moreover, when narratives reflect local or culturally proximate figures, their pedagogical impact is significantly increased (Howard, 2003; Gay, 2010). In this light, the lives of the Vietnamese Martyrs offer not only historical memory but formational capital - a resource for inspiring identity, resilience, and spiritual well-being in young catechists.

For catechists of Gen Z, martyrs provide more than inspiration - they provide spiritual identity and historical affiliation. Many Gen Z volunteers are motivated by a deep yearning to connect meaning, justice, and mission and faith (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). Still, their affiliation with the historical Church is tenuous while their affiliation with the Catholic tradition is superficial. Martyr stories of the Vietnamese can fill that gap by introducing young catechists to concrete models of heroes in their locale who synthesized faith and bravery, frequently at a high personal cost. Gen Z engages positively with story-based development that includes justice, resistance, and authenticity as per findings in research (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). Martyr narratives should be reframed so that these saints are seen as bold leaders who fought for religious liberty and human dignity in the cause of moral truth, values and ideals that resonate strongly with this generation's global interests.

2.7.2 A Foundational Narrative: The Witness of the Vietnamese Martyrs

Narrative pedagogy refers to an instructional approach that places story at the centre of learning, on the grounds that humans construe experience narratively; stories organise meaning, transmit values, and invite identification and imitation (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). Within religious education, story has long functioned as a privileged locus for formation, engaging memory and imagination, locating doctrine in life, and inviting praxis (Groome, 1991; Directory for Catechesis, 2020). Interpreted through Social Cognitive Theory, narratives operate as symbolic models: credible, relatable accounts capture attention, provide vivid scripts that aid retention, present attainable patterns for reproduction, and strengthen motivation/self-efficacy through vicarious and mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Accordingly, narrative pedagogy is not ornamental but a psychologically and theologically grounded method for forming disciples.

The Vietnamese Catholic Church stands on a profound legacy of witness forged through centuries of persecution, missionary sacrifice, and lay fidelity. Between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, an estimated 130,000 Vietnamese Christians were martyred, many enduring public tortures and executions rather than renounce the faith (Hai, 2019). Of these, 117 were canonised by John Paul II in 1988, priests, bishops, lay people, and catechists, underscoring that witness is shared across vocations. Two figures frequently referenced in Vietnamese Catholic education are Saint André Dũng-Lạc, a diocesan priest executed in

1839, and Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, who spent thirteen years imprisoned under the communist regime (nine in solitary). While only Dũng-Lạc is formally a martyr, Văn Thuận's writings and testimony of hope under persecution have shaped contemporary Vietnamese spirituality (Nguyen, 2023; Keith, 2012).

These narratives are more than historical records; they constitute formation resources. When told in a humanised, situated, and dialogical manner, the martyrs' lives offer a grammar of discipleship, fidelity, courage, discernment, and joy amid adversity. As narrative pedagogy, such lives function as "exemplar scripts" that Gen-Z catechists can notice, remember, rehearse, and appropriate within Ho Chi Minh City's contemporary conditions (Bandura, 1997; Groome, 1991; Directory for Catechesis, 2020). The task is therefore not merely to retell deaths, but to re-story lives so that virtues and practices become psychologically accessible and pedagogically usable today.

2.7.3 Bridging the Gap: Making Martyrdom Relatable and Resonant

Martyr narratives are undeniably powerful, but without careful framing they risk becoming idealised legends that feel distant to younger generations. Gen Z learners, shaped by globalisation, postmodern scepticism, and digital media (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2012), do not automatically connect with martyrdom as a meaningful framework for their lives. If such stories are presented only as one-dimensional heroic myths, without context or invitation to reflect, they may fail to inspire the very audience they aim to form. In other words, young people are unlikely to be moved by "sugar-coated" hagiography; they respond more to real, relatable accounts that acknowledge struggle and complexity rather than fairy-tale perfection (Hoel, 2024).

It is essential, therefore, to introduce the Vietnamese martyrs not as unreachable icons, but as relatable human beings who lived and died in identifiable roles. In reality, these martyrs came from all walks of life – among the canonized were priests and religious, but also lay catechists, teachers, parents, and even youth. They lived their Christian vocation fully within the social and political contexts of their time. Emphasizing this diversity and humanity shows that holy witness is not confined to the sanctuary or classroom; it is lived out in the world, in ordinary families and communities, even under hostile conditions. The martyrs'

example thus reinforces that faith formation is not just about absorbing doctrines but about courageous living in one's context, whatever the cost. However, caution is necessary in how these narratives are translated for today's young catechists. If the stories are delivered in a purely historical or triumphal tone without cultural and pastoral sensitivity, Gen Z Catholics may find them either irrelevant or too extreme. This generation already tends to feel like spiritual "exiles" – they might be affiliated with the Church, but they are often deeply distrustful of triumphalist or authoritarian rhetoric (Barna Group *et al.*, 2022). Research on Gen Z attitudes confirms that they are less trusting of traditional authority figures and religious institutions than previous generations (Pew Research Centre, 2021; Barna Group *et al.*, 2022). Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) similarly observe that today's young Christians inhabit a "digital Babylon" marked by a *crisis of authority*, meaning they won't simply accept inherited wisdom without question. Considering this mindset, martyrdom stories must be contextualised and presented with humility, not as tales of unreachable super-saints or tools of guilt-inducement.

2.7.4 From Inspiration to Integration: Practical Formation Strategies

To engage Gen Z effectively, martyr narratives should be linked to present realities and struggles that young catechists regconise in their own lives. The values exemplified by the martyrs, faith, integrity, courage, self-sacrifice, need to be explicitly connected by catechists to contemporary forms of witness. For example, a martyr's steadfastness under persecution can be related to standing up for one's faith in the digital public square; their solidarity with the oppressed can inform advocating for the marginalized today; their sacrifice can challenge the throwaway culture and peer conformism that young people face. In a hyper-connected yet spiritually fragmented society, Gen Z catechists are bombarded with competing narratives of consumerism, secularism, and relentless self-optimisation. Stories of sacrifice, humility, and fidelity provide a compelling counter-narrative – a very different picture of what true success and purpose look like. Such counter-cultural examples can be powerfully attractive. Indeed, in an era so driven by consumerism and materialism, the witness of radical faith and generosity tends to be "disarming" and intriguing to young people (Nedumaran and Kaviya, 2024). By offering coherence, direction, and a sense of higher calling amid social uncertainty, the martyrs' stories can contribute positively to the spiritual health of Gen Z catechists.

Not every young catechist will immediately resonate with these historical narratives, of course. Some might initially perceive the martyrs as remote figures, over-romanticized heroes who bear little relevance to pressing personal anxieties or the complexities of modern life. This is a signal that formation programs must present martyr narratives dynamically rather than statically. Instead of enshrining the martyrs as distant legends, educators should facilitate active engagement and personalization of their stories. Reflective practices can help bridge the gap here. For instance, journaling exercises might invite catechists to compare a martyr's context with their own challenges in living the faith. Group discussions or guided conversations can allow young people to voice their reactions, doubts, or admiration, making the learning process dialogical rather than one-sided. Even creative digital storytelling – for example, short videos or social media projects about a martyr's life – can enable Gen Z catechists to "translate" these witnesses into their own idiom. Such methods encourage young believers to incorporate the martyrs' witness into their personal sense of vocation, rather than dismissing it as archaic lore.

While the martyrs of Vietnam remain central as timeless exemplars, it is also vital to complement their witness with up-to-date role models that Gen Z catechists can observe in real life. Young people benefit from seeing faith lived out not only in history but in the present day. Exposure to contemporary mentors – be they dedicated catechists, youth ministers, priests or religious, or lay leaders – helps to reinforce the lessons of the martyrs by showing continuity of faithful witness in today's world. Studies on ministry to emerging adults highlight the *crucial role of mentors and "faith champions"* in nurturing resilient faith (Brailey and Parker, 2021; David *et al.*, 2024). These are trusted individuals who build authentic relationships with young Christians and model what steadfast faith looks like amidst modern pressures. In practice, ministry experts recommend using peer and intergenerational mentors who embody integrity, compassion, and balance in their lives. For example, a parish youth leader who upholds Christian values with love, while also juggling work obligations and family life responsibly, can be a powerful living witness that holiness is attainable and relevant. Such mentors personify the same virtues celebrated in the martyr stories, but in a context that Gen Z catechists directly relate to. Their lives make tangible the idea that one can strive for holiness and integrity even amid career challenges, family responsibilities, and the complexities of contemporary society.

Formation strategies should thus intentionally pair historical and current role models. When young catechists learn about a martyr's courage *alongside* seeing a respected mentor's daily fidelity, they receive a more complete vision of their vocation. The past and present witnesses together offer a composite identity for catechists to emulate, one rooted in the rich tradition of the Church yet also attuned to present-day realities and struggles. This holistic approach helps prevent the martyrs from being seen as antiquated anomalies; instead, they become part of a living continuum of Christian witness that includes people the catechists know and admire. Such an approach can deepen the sense of belonging to a *community of witness*, inspiring catechists-in-training to locate their own story in the broader narrative of the faith.

2.7.5 Integrating Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Determination Theory in Catechist Formation

The proposed Human Resource Stewardship model rests on a deliberate synthesis of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to explain both *how* Generation Z catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City develop their vocational identity and *why* they sustain it over time. This integration of narrative and psychological needs will form one pillar of the proposed HRS model in Chapter 3.

Catechists acquire ministerial knowledge, pastoral skills, and dispositions through modelling – by observing and imitating both live models (e.g., servant leaders within their parish, senior catechists, clergy) and symbolic models (e.g., narratives of the Vietnamese Martyrs). Observational learning enables catechists to internalise not only technical competencies but also the attitudes, values, and theological imagination that define their role. In this way, SCT accounts for the *formation pathway* through which novices become more confident and skilled ministers: they see ministry enacted, mentally rehearse it, and then perform it within supportive communities.

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) complements this by explaining the *motivational engine* that sustains catechists in that identity once initial learning has occurred. SDT posits that human beings flourish when their environments support three basic psychological needs:

- Autonomy – a sense of volition and ownership over one's ministry.

- Competence – a feeling of effectiveness and growth in catechetical tasks.
- Relatedness – a sense of belonging and mutual care within the faith community.

When the catechist formation environment actively nurtures these needs – for example, by granting teaching discretion, providing constructive feedback, and fostering a supportive peer network – catechists are more likely to remain engaged, resilient, and joyfully committed to their vocation.

In the integrated model, SCT and SDT function in tandem:

- SCT explains the origins of vocational identity – catechists first *see* ministry embodied in trusted models and *learn* through guided participation.
- SDT explains the persistence of that identity – catechists *stay* in ministry when the community continues to meet their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The interplay is cyclical. Exposure to compelling role models (SCT) can directly enhance perceptions of competence and relatedness (SDT), while a need-supportive environment (SDT) increases receptivity to further modelling and skill refinement (SCT). Within the Vietnamese context, the Vietnamese Martyrs function as enduring symbolic models whose witness integrates traditional virtues with proactive personal agency, aligning with the dual-value system of Gen Z. Servant leaders within parishes then translate these symbolic ideals into concrete, observable practices, offering real-time demonstrations of ministry that young catechists can emulate.

By explicitly linking SCT and SDT, the framework underscores that effective catechist formation is not achieved solely through theological instruction or activity-based training. It requires an intentional pairing of inspirational modelling (to form identity) and structural support (to sustain motivation), creating a virtuous cycle where catechists are both inspired and empowered to live out their vocation over the long term. This dual-theory integration provides a psychologically robust explanation for how catechists can be formed into resilient, spiritually mature leaders who embody the Church's mission in a challenging socio-cultural environment.

2.8 Spiritual Well-being (SWB) as the outcome of Sustainable Volunteerism

2.8.1 Defining Spiritual Well-being and Its Relevance to Catechist Formation

To build a formation model that addresses the interior needs of Gen Z catechists, it is essential to move beyond purely doctrinal or pedagogical metrics. The concept of spiritual well-being (SWB) provides a holistic and empirically grounded framework for this purpose. This study adopts Fisher's (2011) Four Domains Model of Spiritual Well-Being, an internationally regconised framework that posits spiritual health as a dynamic state reflected in the quality of a person's relationships across four interconnected domains: Personal, Communal, Environmental, and Transcendental. The argument that SWB is a core component of resilience, ministry effectiveness, and volunteer retention is well-supported by the literature (Bili and Indradewa, 2021; Alahri *et al.*, 2023; Rudolph and Barnard, 2023).

DOMAINS OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING	PERSONAL	COMMUNAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	TRANSCENDENTAL
Knowledge aspect - filtered by worldview - Inspirational aspect - essence and motivation - filtered by beliefs	meaning, purpose, and values - human spirit creates awareness - self-consciousness	morality, culture (and religion) - in-depth inter-personal relations - reaching the heart of humanity	care, nurture and stewardship of the physical, eco-political and social environment connectedness with Nature/Creation	Transcendent Other - ultimate concern Tillich - cosmic force New Age - God, for theists - Faith

Expressed as	- joy, fulfilment, - peace, patience, - freedom, - humility - identity, integrity, creativity, intuition - self-worth	- love - forgiveness - justice - hope & faith in humanity - trust	- sense of awe and wonder - valuing Nature/Creation	adoration & worship, being: - at one with Creator - of the essence of the universe - in tune with God

Table 2.2 Four Domains Model of Spiritual Health and Well-Being. Sources: The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Well-Being (Fisher, 2011)

To fortify this framework within the Vietnamese context, an explicit link can be forged between Fisher's SWB model and the FABC's Pastoral Spiral (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, 1990; Lakshmanan, 2019). This connection elevates SWB from a useful psychological concept to a direct theological and pastoral outcome of the "Asian way of being Church." This study proposes a contextual linkage between Fisher's model and the stages of the FABC Pastoral Spiral, mapping spiritual well-being onto the theological-pastoral process of the Asian Church as follows:

- The Personal and Transcendental domains of SWB, which involve meaning, purpose, values, and one's relationship with God are the primary fruits of the Pastoral Spiral's third stage: Faith Reflection. It is in this contemplative moment that the community and the individual discern God's will and find their purpose within their lived reality.
- The Communal domain of SWB, which encompassing interpersonal relationships, love, forgiveness, and justice is built and expressed through the participatory and dialogical nature of the entire spiral process. The Church becomes a community of support and shared mission.
- The Environmental domain of SWB, which defined as care and stewardship for the physical, social, and political environment - is the direct objective of the Social Analysis and Pastoral Action stages. This stage moves the faith community from internal reflection to external engagement for the betterment of society.

This review suggests a new way to train Catholic catechists in Asia by combining two powerful ideas: Fisher's model of Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) and the FABC's "Pastoral Spiral" methodology. This approach treats spiritual health not just as a psychological benefit, but as a fundamental goal of faith itself. This gives church leaders a strong, theologically grounded reason to make SWB a priority in their training programs. It also provides a new lens for viewing the shortcomings of current training in Vietnam, which often focuses heavily on rules and sacraments. The study argues that this oversight is a failure to follow the accepted pastoral approach for Asia. Although Fisher's model is used in health and education, this is one of the first efforts to apply it to faith formation and spiritual life, particularly within the Vietnamese context.

2.8.2 Importance of SWB for Generation Z Catechists

Generation Z has emerged as one of the most mentally and emotionally burdened cohorts in recent history. Across global and Vietnamese contexts alike, young people born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s report increasing levels of anxiety, depression, isolation, and spiritual confusion (Twenge, 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). These phenomena are often linked to the digital saturation of their daily lives, the pressures of performance culture, and the erosion of stable moral narratives. In response, there is growing academic and pastoral interest in spiritual well-being (SWB) as a framework for supporting youth resilience, identity formation, and long-term flourishing. In psychological literature, SWB is defined as a state of perceived harmony between the self and the transcendent, including relationships with others, nature, and one's inner purpose (Fisher, 2011). Among young adults, higher levels of SWB have been positively associated with increased self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social empathy (Allen & Fry, 2023). Both Stukas et al. (2016) and Luque-Suárez et al. (2021) emphasise the enduring effect of intrinsic spiritual meaning in sustaining youth volunteerism, though the former highlights long-term retention in secular settings, while the latter focuses on the role of personal values in faith-based volunteering. Their convergence strengthens the case for framing SWB as a key motivational driver in catechist formation. Volunteering, in this sense, becomes a means not only of external contribution but of interior growth.

Within the Vietnamese Catholic context, these findings take on added significance. Young catechists are often entrusted with moral and spiritual leadership roles while still navigating their own developmental struggles. They are expected to witness to the faith, teach Church

doctrine, and accompany others - often with limited training and minimal accompaniment (Ung, 2023). Without adequate support structures, such expectations may lead to spiritual fatigue, role confusion, or disillusionment. However, when catechists experience interior integration, which means their teaching role aligns with their personal vocation and sense of meaning , they are more likely to remain engaged, resilient, and spiritually fulfilled. Therefore, fostering spiritual well-being is not a peripheral concern in youth catechist training but it is foundational. For Generation Z, whose relationship with institutional religion is often marked by ambivalence or detachment (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019), SWB offers a language of purpose, relationship, and identity that can bridge the gap between personal longing and ecclesial mission. When formation attends to this dimension, catechists are not only better equipped to teach , they are better able to live the message they proclaim.

For catechists, spiritual well-being is not merely a private benefit but a public necessity. Their task is not only to explain doctrine but to embody the Gospel. As the Directory for Catechesis (2020) affirms, the catechist must be a "witness and companion," someone whose life reflects the very truths they teach. Without spiritual well-being, their formation risks becoming performative, fragmented, or overly intellectual. Research supports this theological vision. Allen and Fry (2023) show that spiritual maturity fosters moral courage, discernment, and resilience, all key qualities in catechetical leadership. Keimig (2018) found that catechists who experienced spiritual mentoring during training were significantly more likely to remain in ministry, report deeper motivation, and express confidence in leading others.

Spiritual well-being also correlates with volunteer motivation and sustainability. Studies by Stukas et al. (2016) and Hager & Brudney (2008) show that volunteers who perceive their work as spiritually meaningful are more likely to stay committed, persevere through difficulties, and derive personal growth from their service. Spiritual well-being also enables catechists to withstand external pressures, particularly in contexts like Vietnam, where the Church operates under ideological suspicion and limited institutional support. Many catechists are lay volunteers balancing ministry with education, family obligations, or employment (Egpan and Billones, 2024). Their capacity to persevere depends not only on knowledge but on inner conviction, prayer life, and meaningful connection to the faith community (Nguyen, 2023; Chu, 2009). Without spiritual depth, catechists risk becoming

performative rather than transformative, delivering content without conviction or burning out from emotional strain. Especially for Gen Z catechists, who are already navigating existential questions and cultural tensions, spiritual well-being enables them to integrate personal authenticity with ecclesial responsibility.

Formation programmes must therefore address SWB as a priority. This includes nurturing habits of personal prayer, sacramental life, discernment, and reflective practice. It also involves building supportive peer communities where catechists can process spiritual challenges and celebrate shared growth. The integration of SWB into formation is not optional; it is a necessary condition for sustainable and effective catechetical ministry.

While Smith & Snell (2009) documented early signs of this disengagement in North American youth, Kinnaman & Matlock (2019) suggest this has now evolved into a deeper scepticism of institutional structures. This generational shift challenges catechetical models that assume trust in ecclesial authority and necessitate a reframing around personal meaning and relational authenticity - themes central to SWB and narrative pedagogy. While they are open to spirituality, many exhibit low indicators of sustained religious practice. For catechists from this cohort, the gap between "doing ministry" and "being spiritually well" is often wide. Da Silva (2019) argues that Gen Z's digital saturation and constant performance culture make it difficult to cultivate silence, depth, or sustained prayer life - all essential to SWB. Formation models must therefore include guided spiritual practices, theological reflection, and time for interior development, not just skills training. This is particularly urgent in Vietnam, where youth catechists are often recruited for their energy and visibility but may lack a solid foundation in personal spirituality.

2.8.3 Deficiencies in Current Catechist Formation in Vietnam

Despite its recognised value, spiritual well-being remains underdeveloped in many catechist training programmes - particularly in developing or politically constrained contexts like Vietnam. As Ung (2023) notes, catechesis often emphasises rule-following, sacramental preparation, and loyalty, while neglecting spiritual reflection, personal prayer, or emotional formation. One core challenge is measurement and standardisation. Spiritual well-being is inherently personal and cannot be evaluated by tests or certificates. This leads some training programmes to deprioritise it in favour of content delivery and administrative efficiency

(D'Souza, 2012). Yet ignoring it risks producing technically competent catechists who lack resilience, passion, or credibility. Another issue is cultural discomfort with emotional or interior language. In many Vietnamese settings, especially among young people, spiritual experience may be genuine but unarticulated - formed through action and community, not through theological reflection. As Tisdell (2003) argues, educators must respect learners' spiritual narratives and offer formation that invites meaning-making, not just behaviour compliance. Finally, the Church's institutional tendency toward structural rather than relational formation limits the space for mentorship and spiritual accompaniment. Keimig (2018) argues that without prayer-based mentoring, catechists may never internalise their calling as vocation.

While EYM's structured, team-based formation model has been praised for its discipline and scalability (Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, n.d.), critiques by Chu (2009) and Ung (2023) point to a lack of intentional interior formation. This contrast reflects a broader tension in volunteer catechist development: between functional training and formative spiritual development - a gap this study addresses by integrating SWB. Parishes depend greatly on the use of EYM to train catechists, and there are ongoing conflicts between its style of formation and more traditional theologically oriented approaches. Nevertheless, while its significance grows, spiritual well-being continues to fall short of being adequately integrated into current catechist formation frameworks. Spiritual growth is usually dealt with in devotional or abstract terms in the majority of faith formation literature, while practical formation models tend to embrace secular volunteer training models devoid of theological context. In contrast, Human Resource Management (HRM) literature - even in nonprofit settings - seldom considers the spiritual aspect of volunteer motivation. This inbuilt dichotomy points towards a significant gap: the lack of an integrated formation approach that integrates spiritual well-being, vocational identity, and systematic training models. Bridging this gap is the focal point of the current study's contribution.

Spiritual well-being is both a practical consideration and a theological necessity of effective ministry, and research in nonprofit fields indicates that spiritually fulfilled volunteers also exhibit increased volunteer retention, resilience, and engagement (Stukas et al., 2016; Allen & Fry, 2023). While nurturing spiritual well-being provides the necessary internal foundation for resilient catechists, sustaining and enriching this internal dimension also requires external sources of inspiration and motivation. One powerful approach to achieve

this, especially resonant within Vietnamese Catholic tradition, is through narrative pedagogy, particularly leveraging the compelling stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs.

In sum, Spiritual Well-being and Narrative Pedagogy together address the interior and exterior dimensions necessary for effective catechist formation among Vietnamese Generation Z. SWB provides the internal foundation, fostering resilience, meaningful relationships, and personal integration within catechists. Narrative Pedagogy complements this foundation externally, offering inspiring role models and relatable spiritual exemplars through the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs. Integrating these two dimensions is essential for forming spiritually mature, motivated, and resilient young catechists capable of navigating contemporary pastoral challenges in Vietnam.

2.9 Toward an Integrated Human Resource Stewardship Model

This section synthesises insights from all the above themes to propose the conceptual framework for a Gen Z catechist formation model. It begins by identifying the gaps in current approaches (e.g. purely doctrinal training, or activity-focused youth programs) and shows how each gap can be addressed by an integrated solution. The proposed Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model is then outlined as a holistic approach that combines spiritual, educational, and management principles. Five key facets are highlighted:

- Spiritual Well-Being as Foundation: Catechist formation should explicitly aim to nurture the spiritual health and interior life of volunteers, making it a core success metric (ensuring catechists are spiritually growing, not just academically trained).
- Generation Z–Tailored Training: The design and delivery of training must align with Gen Z's characteristics – leveraging interactive, purpose-driven learning, offering mentorship, and valuing everyone's voice and talents. This ensures formation is attractive and relevant to the young volunteers.
- Narrative Role Models (Vietnamese Martyrs): Incorporating stories of Vietnamese martyrs and local faith heroes as part of the curriculum, to inspire and teach through example. This provides cultural resonance and concrete illustrations of lived faith, embedding identity and resilience through narrative pedagogy.
- Robust Theological and Pedagogical Formation: Maintaining rigorous content grounded in Church teachings and sound pedagogy. Rather than abandoning

doctrinal depth, the model integrates it with modern methods – ensuring catechists are both theologically knowledgeable and skilled in teaching methods.

- Stewardship-Based Support Structures: Implementing HRM practices (recruitment, structured training pathways, ongoing feedback, mentoring, recognition) in a manner suited to a volunteer church context. The model stresses caring for the "human resources" of the Church by investing in volunteers' development and well-being, all framed as stewardship of the Church's mission and people.

Together, these facets form a comprehensive framework that reconceives catechist formation as a holistic ecosystem rather than a series of ad-hoc activities. The narrative explains that this HRS model is not a secular import but a transformation of organisational best practices through a theological lens – essentially merging management science with ministry. By comparing this proposed model to existing models (traditional doctrinal training, the youth movement approach, and the FABC pastoral spiral), the review demonstrates how HRS uniquely integrates their strengths while mitigating their weaknesses. This comparative insight solidifies the argument that an integrated stewardship-oriented approach is both novel and necessary for the Vietnamese context.

This integrated framework reconceives catechist formation as a holistic ecosystem, one that shapes not only the mind, but also the heart, habits, and community identity of volunteer catechists. Rather than importing corporate management models wholesale, it seeks to "baptize" the best of organisational insights through a stewardship lens, aligning them with a theology of service, communion, and mission.

Having established the precise nature of the problem, the proposed framework can be presented as the unique and comprehensive solution. The following comparative analysis positions the proposed model against existing alternatives, synthesizing the entire argument of the literature review.

Dimension	Traditional/Didactic Model	Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM) Model	FABC "Pastoral Spiral" Model	Proposed "HR Stewardship" Model
Primary Goal	Doctrinal knowledge transmission.	Community building, discipline, participation in activities.	Integral evangelization; a participatory, enculturated Church in dialogue.	Holistic formation for sustained, spiritually resilient, and effective ministry.
View of Catechist	Instructor of doctrine.	Youth leader, activity facilitator.	Disciple, animator, companion in a dialogue-of-life.	Vocationally affirmed spiritual guide, mentor, and mission steward.
Methodology	Classroom lecture, memorization, sacramental prep.	Camps, routines, group projects, liturgical formation.	See-Judge-Act: Exposure-Immersion, Social Analysis, Faith Reflection, Pastoral Action.	Integrated: Servant Leadership (as practice), SDT (as motivational framework), SCT (via narrative pedagogy), structured support, and the reflective

				cycle of the Pastoral Spiral.
Strengths	Doctrinal clarity, fidelity to tradition.	Strong community bonds (satisfies Relatedness), high participation rates, energetic.	Contextually grounded, socially engaged, fosters deep theological reflection.	Integrates the doctrinal clarity of the Traditional Model, the community focus of the EYM, and the contextual depth of the FABC Spiral within a psychologically informed and sustainable support structure.
Weaknesses	Lacks spiritual/personal formation; disengaging for Gen Z; fails to foster autonomy or competence.	Often lacks theological depth; can stifle autonomy and competence by being overly prescriptive; activity-focused rather than	Can be complex to implement consistently; less focused on the individual volunteer's management, support, and long-term motivation.	Requires significant leader training, cultural shift, and long-term institutional buy-in to implement effectively.

		person-focused.		

Table 2.3 A Comparative Analysis of Catechist Formation Models

This table serves as a analytical tool, demonstrating briefly why a new model is necessary. The proposed model is thus presented not as a rejection of what has come before, but as a synthesis that integrates the strengths of each approach while addressing their limitations. It takes the doctrinal fidelity of the traditional model, the community-building energy of the EYM, and the contextual depth of the FABC model, and weaves them together within a supportive, psychologically informed, and stewardship-oriented structure. This integrated framework reconceives catechist formation as a holistic ecosystem that shapes not only the mind, but also the heart, habits, and community identity of volunteer catechists.

2.10 Conclusion of the Literature Review

2.10.1 Summary of Key Insights

This literature review has navigated a wide and interdisciplinary terrain, synthesizing insights from five critical areas: the theological foundations of catechesis, the unique socio-spiritual identity of Vietnamese Generation Z, the psychology of spiritual well-being and motivation, the pedagogy of narrative and modelling, and the principles of stewardship-based organisational support. Theologically, the analysis confirms that authentic Catholic catechesis is an ecclesial and spiritual vocation, not merely a technical task of instruction. Foundational Church documents, culminating in *Antiquum Ministerium*, call for catechists who are first and foremost witnesses, formed holistically in doctrine, spirituality, and pastoral competence. The specific history of the Vietnamese Church, forged in persecution and sustained by lay resilience, underscores the vital importance of spiritually mature and vocationally grounded catechists.

Sociologically, the review moves beyond generic descriptions of Generation Z to a nuanced portrait of young Vietnamese Catholics. This generation navigates a complex value system, integrating deep-seated traditional virtues with modern aspirations for authenticity, personal responsibility, and social impact. This paradox presents a unique challenge and opportunity

for formation, demanding an approach that is neither dismissively modern nor rigidly traditionalist.

Psychologically, the review establishes spiritual well-being (SWB) as the cornerstone of resilient ministry and sustained volunteerism. Furthermore, it demonstrates a powerful causal link between leadership style and motivation: the behaviours of a Servant Leader create a need-supportive environment that fulfils the innate psychological needs for Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness (SDT), thereby fostering the autonomous motivation essential for long-term commitment.

Pedagogically, the review highlights the power of modelling, as explained by Social Cognitive Theory. It proposes a "spiritual apprenticeship" model where formation occurs through observing and imitating both live models (servant leaders) and symbolic models. The stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs are presented as a particularly potent form of symbolic modelling, offering culturally resonant exemplars of courage, integrity, and faith that speak directly to the value system of young Vietnamese catechists.

Finally, the review argues that these theological, psychological, and pedagogical elements must be supported by a coherent organisational structure. It proposes a Human Resources Stewardship Model that adapts best practices in volunteer management, such as clear roles, structured training, and meaningful recognition, and filters them through a theological lens of service, trust, and co-responsibility, avoiding a sterile corporate mentality.

2.10.2 Contribution to Research and Research Questions

In a period of rapid socio-cultural transformation, the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City faces significant challenges in sustaining the spiritual growth and theological formation of its younger parishioners. Central to addressing these challenges is the effective training and development of volunteer catechists from Generation Z. Historically, catechists have served as indispensable educators of the Catholic faith, embodying the legacy of the Vietnamese martyrs. Today, however, Generation Z volunteer catechists encounter distinctive obstacles shaped by their generational characteristics and Vietnam's socio-political environment.

When this study was first conceptualised, its central inquiry was framed as follows: *How can a structured spiritual well-being training programme effectively equip Generation Z*

volunteer catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese to uphold and advance the mission exemplified by the Vietnamese martyrs? This was initially approached through three broad, sequential research questions: (1) What specific challenges affect the spiritual well-being and training of Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, given their distinct generational traits, parish leadership structures, and the broader Vietnamese socio-political context? (2) What Human Resource Management strategies can effectively address these identified challenges, with particular attention to training methodology, mentorship practices, and retention strategies? (3) How can these insights be practically integrated into a structured, contextually relevant training programme that enhances Generation Z catechists' spiritual well-being, draws inspiration from Vietnamese martyrs as role models, and promotes sustained engagement within the Church?

In light of the Chapter 2 literature review, the formal research questions remain as stated in Chapter 1. What changes is the study's conceptual approach, which is clarified through three complementary lenses appropriate to the HCMC context:

1. Formation process lens**.** The study adopts the FABC Pastoral Spiral as a context-sensitive way of understanding ecclesial formation and reads it within Fisher's four domains of spiritual well-being (SWB). This pairing provides a coherent frame for thinking about catechist formation as both *process* (Spiral) and *plenitude* (balanced attention to God, self, others, and environment).

2. Narrative pedagogy lens**.** Given empirical accounts of a Vietnamese Gen-Z **"**dual-value" orientation (traditional virtues alongside proactive modern witness), the study emphasises martyr narratives as pedagogical bridges that transmit identity and practice across generations. Social Cognitive Theory functions here as an interpretive grammar (modelling, meaning, and purpose) for how such narratives shape vocational identity, confidence, and resilience.

3. Leadership–motivation lens. The study treats Servant Leadership as the practical expression of a Human Resource Stewardship ethos and aligns this with Self-Determination Theory to foreground intrinsic, faith-anchored motivation. This lens articulates what supportive leadership looks like in a sacred, volunteer context and why it matters for commitment over time.

These lenses do not replace or multiply the research questions; they specify how the questions are theoretically grounded and contextually interpreted. In short, the study's

focus is unchanged; its approach is now more explicitly ecclesial, narrative, and stewardship-oriented, providing clearer conceptual traction on what "effective formation," "spiritual well-being," and "sustained volunteer commitment" mean for catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City.

2.10.3 Establishing the Foundation for Future Chapters

This fortified literature review now serves as a robust and defensible foundation for the subsequent chapters of the dissertation. It has systematically surveyed the relevant intellectual territory, critically engaged with existing scholarship, and identified a clear and compelling research gap. It has moved beyond a simple summary of existing work to construct a novel conceptual framework, the Human Resources Stewardship model, that is theologically grounded, sociologically nuanced, psychologically informed, and pedagogically creative. The chapter has established the theoretical and contextual warrant for the research, demonstrating not only *what* will be studied but *why* it is essential to study it in this, integrated way. The refined research questions flow logically and directly from this synthesis. This work thus provides a solid intellectual launching pad for the methodology chapter to follow, which will outline the practical steps for exploring and refining the proposed formation framework within the lived reality of the Generation Z catechists, their trainers, and their leaders in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City.

Chapter 3: The Human Resource Stewardship Model – A Conceptual Framework for Catechist Formation

3.1 Introduction: The Mandate for an Integrated Conceptual Framework

The Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) faces a critical inflection point in its mission of faith transmission. As established in Chapter 1, the current paradigm of catechist formation suffers from three interconnected problems: (1) a deficit in holistic formation that prioritises doctrinal instruction at the expense of the catechist's spiritual well-being and resilience, (2) a generational and pedagogical mismatch between traditional, authority-driven methods and the learning preferences of digitally native, authenticity-seeking Gen Z youth, and (3) a lack of theologically-integrated support systems for volunteers, resulting in ad-hoc management and an uncritical importation of secular HR practices. Vietnamese Gen Z volunteer catechists – the Church's most vital resource for future ministry – are thus being formed and supported by paradigms increasingly ill-suited to contemporary realities (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Ung, 2023). Many young catechists emerge well-versed in *what* to teach (doctrine) but not equipped with the interior spiritual fortitude (*how* to pray, persist, and flourish) needed to sustain a demanding ministry (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Ung, 2023). This gap not only endangers the well-being and retention of individual catechists but ultimately threatens the long-term vitality of faith transmission in the archdiocese.

Addressing this multifaceted challenge requires more than incremental adjustments to existing practices. No single theoretical lens – whether from theology, management, psychology or pedagogy – is sufficient to diagnose the problem and prescribe a viable solution (Hou, Li and Song, 2022; Reinecke et al., 2024). Theology provides the *telos* (ultimate purpose) and mission but often lacks concrete organisational and psychological tools for effective implementation in daily ministry. Secular management and psychology offer powerful models for leadership and motivation, but without integration they risk being spiritually shallow or misaligned with ecclesial values. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous approaches to volunteer management in the Church have sometimes borrowed corporate frameworks uncritically, leading to tension between secular practices and the Church's

pastoral ethos. There is, therefore, a mandate for a new, comprehensive theoretical framework – one that can integrate insights from disparate disciplines into a coherent model tailored for the faith-based context. This framework must be *theologically grounded* (honouring the Church's self-understanding and spiritual mission), *psychologically informed* (accounting for human motivation and well-being), *pedagogically compelling* (effective in teaching and inspiring youth), and *practically applicable* to the organisational reality of a large volunteer-driven ministry. In presenting this integrated framework, the thesis now draws on Pope Francis's image of the polyhedron as a way of imagining unity that preserves diversity. In Evangelii Gaudium (§236), Francis contrasts the sphere, in which every point is equidistant and individuality is flattened, with the polyhedron, whose distinct faces keep their own shape while forming one solid figure. The Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model is therefore introduced as a polyhedral framework for catechist formation. Rather than four rigid "pillars" standing side by side, Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive/narrative theory are treated as interrelated facets of a single whole. Each facet offers a different angle: theological, leadership-oriented, psychological, and pedagogical, yet they converge to form one integrated, spiritually grounded approach to the formation of Generation Z catechists. The rest of this chapter will unfold these facets in turn and then recombine them into a single polyhedral HRS framework.

This chapter is presented as a conceptual framework rather than a theoretical framework because the HRS model is not derived from or intended to test a single formal theory. Instead, it synthesises multiple theoretical perspectives – from theology, psychology, leadership, and pedagogy – into a unified conceptual model constructed abductively. The model is tailored to the specific context of catechist formation in Vietnam and will be further refined through empirical investigation. As such, it serves as a guiding lens for the study, rather than a definitive or testable theory.

This chapter constructs and defends an integrated framework: the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model. The HRS model is proposed not as a definitive theory to be tested, but as a guiding framework composed of several sensitizing concepts. This approach, rooted in the work of Herbert Blumer (1954), uses concepts to "suggest directions along which to look" rather than to provide "prescriptions of what to see". This allows for an open-

ended, exploratory inquiry where the framework can be refined by the data. The HRS model synthesises four such sensitizing concepts into a single architecture:

- Stewardship Theory provides a lens for exploring the foundational organisational philosophy of pastoral care.
- Servant Leadership Theory offers concepts to investigate the leadership ethos and behaviours that enact this philosophy.
- Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a framework for understanding the psychological drivers of intrinsic motivation and well-being.
- Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), enriched by narrative identity insights, offers a way to examine the pedagogical power of inspirational role models.

Each of these facets will be treated not as a rigid category to be confirmed, but as a compass that orients the analysis toward key dynamics in the lived experience of HCMC catechists. The goal of the subsequent empirical chapters is to use the data to specify, enrich, and ultimately refine our understanding of how these concepts manifest in this unique context. Crucially, these facets have been "baptised" into the Catholic context: secular concepts are reinterpreted in light of Scripture, Catholic social teaching, and the lived reality of the Vietnamese Church (for example, "stewardship" is grounded in *Imago Dei* and pastoral care, and servant leadership is explicitly linked to the model of Christ). In this way, the HRS model bridges the traditional divide between spiritual formation and strategic volunteer development, ensuring that *sound organisational, psychological and educational principles are placed in service of a profound theological vision*.

Methodologically, the construction and use of the HRS model follow an abductive logic of inquiry in the sense first articulated by Charles S. Peirce (1931–1958). Rather than beginning deductively from a fully specified theory or inductively from patterns in raw data, this study starts from a "surprising fact": the paradox of service among Gen Z catechists in Ho Chi Minh City – a cohort that is highly motivated yet frequently experiences burnout, frustration, and inadequate support. **Stage 1** of the abductive process (developed in this chapter) involves proposing a provisional explanatory framework for that paradox: the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model. In Peirce's terms, this is an abductive "guess" or hypothesis that could render the puzzling situation intelligible. **Stage 2** of the abductive process is then enacted in Chapters 4–7, where the model is scrutinised and refined through empirical engagement. Here, the thesis moves toward what contemporary philosophers call

an “inference to the best explanation”: the qualitative and quantitative findings are used to judge whether the HRS framework offers a more comprehensive, coherent, and practically useful explanation of Gen Z catechist experience than plausible alternatives.

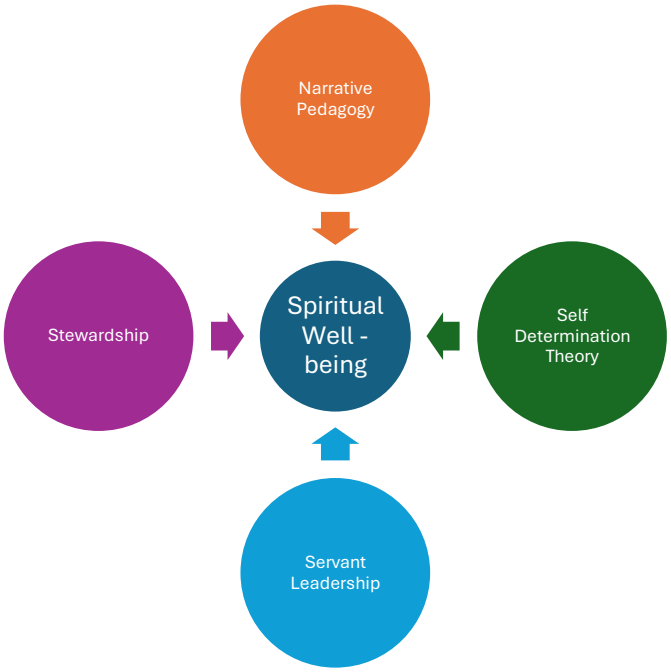

Figure 3.1 Human Resource Stewardship Model (developed by the author)

Systematically, the HRS model was not selected a priori but was constructed abductively as Stage 1 of the inquiry. Confronted with the anomaly of motivated yet unsupported volunteers (Chapter 1), the study moved iteratively between empirical indications and theoretical resources (Chapter 2) to formulate a plausible explanatory framework. The HRS model emerged as the most coherent inference to the best explanation for the paradox of service, uniquely capable of integrating the observed need for pastoral care (Stewardship), relational leadership (Servant Leadership), intrinsic motivation and spiritual well-being (Self-Determination Theory), and inspirational formation (Social Cognitive/Narrative Theory). In this stage, abduction operates in Peirce’s sense as the only logical move that introduces a new idea: the conjecture that “stewardship of persons” can reframe faith-based volunteer management in this context. The framework presented in this chapter is therefore deliberately provisional – a structured hypothesis about how the different dimensions of catechist formation hang together.

Stage 2 of the abductive process unfolds in Chapters 4–7. The empirical design there is not aimed at mechanically "proving" the model, but at subjecting it to critical scrutiny through mixed-methods evidence. The qualitative strand (Chapter 5) explores whether the lived experiences, language, and expectations of catechists and formators resonate with, challenge, or extend the proposed HRS components. The quantitative strand (Chapter 6) then examines whether the model's key relationships – for example, between servant leadership, need-supportive environments, and volunteer happiness – are borne out across a wider population. Chapter 7 integrates these findings in dialogue with the HRS framework to judge whether it functions as the best available explanation for the complex pattern of data. In this way, the thesis enacts a two-stage abductive strategy: Stage 1 proposes the HRS model as a creative, theory-informed response to an empirical puzzle; Stage 2 tests and refines that model through systematic engagement with evidence, moving from an initial conjecture toward an empirically grounded "best explanation".

The remainder of this chapter elaborates and justifies each of the four conceptual facets of the polyhedral HRS model in turn (Sections 3.2–3.5), showing how each facet contributes essential insights to the whole framework. In line with Pope Francis's polyhedron metaphor (Evangelii Gaudium, §236), these facets are presented not as separate columns but as distinct faces of a single, integrated model. Section 3.6 then synthesises these elements, illustrating the integrated HRS model and how it systematically responds to the identified problems. Finally, Section 3.7 concludes by reflecting on the coherence and significance of the framework, setting the stage for its application in subsequent chapters.

3.2 The Foundational Philosophy: Re-appropriating Stewardship as a Ministry of Pastoral Care

The starting point for the HRS model proposes a fundamental re-conception of the relationship between the Church and its volunteer catechists. This view invites a move beyond a utilitarian 'volunteer management' mindset, which can unwittingly treat catechists as unpaid employees or replaceable resources, towards an organisational philosophy rooted in pastoral care and sacred trust. To guide this exploration, Stewardship Theory is employed as the primary sensitizing concept. By re-appropriating stewardship as a 'ministry of pastoral care,' the HRS model puts forward a guiding ethos in which Church leadership views itself as a 'steward of persons.' This concept sensitizes the inquiry to focus not only on what volunteers do (their 'output') but fundamentally on who they are becoming (their well-being,

growth, and vocation), an idea that will be explored and specified through the empirical data in subsequent chapters.

3.2.1 Core Principles of Stewardship Theory

Stewardship Theory, first articulated in management literature as a challenge to the prevailing Agency Theory, offers a more optimistic and relational view of organisational behaviour. Agency Theory (rooted in economics) assumes individuals ("agents") are inherently self-interested and thus must be monitored, controlled, and incentivised by principals (owners) to act in line with organisational goals (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). This perspective begets governance structures based on tight control, distrust, and extrinsic motivation. By contrast, Stewardship Theory posits that leaders (as "stewards") can be intrinsically motivated to act in the best interests of the organisation and its stakeholders, especially under conditions that foster identification with the organisation's mission. Drawing on psychology and sociology, it assumes individuals are capable of "pro-organisational, collectivistic behaviours" whereby their identity and sense of fulfilment are aligned with the success of the collective (Davis et al., 1997a, p.24). In other words, a steward is not a shirking agent to be controlled, but a trusted caretaker of the organisation's resources, people and purpose.

Core Principle	Stewardship Theory	Agency Theory
Trust vs. Control	Promotes trust-based relationships, granting leaders autonomy and responsibility to foster a collaborative, innovative environment. Research suggests this yields better outcomes than micromanagement (Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2019; Yukl & Gardner, 2023).	Advocates strict oversight and control mechanisms to curb self-interest. (Jensen & Meckling, 1976, p. 308)
Motivation	Driven by intrinsic motivators such as achievement, satisfaction, and commitment to the mission. Stewards derive personal fulfilment from the collective's success (Kim & Kim, 2023).	Driven by extrinsic motivators and external rewards, such as material or financial gain. (Eisenhardt, 1989); Gagné & Hewett, 2024)
Ownership	Develops a sense of "psychological ownership" over the mission and organisation, feeling responsible in the way an owner might (Brudney & Meijs, 2009).	No inherent sense of ownership; acts as a hired agent for the principal (owner). (Jensen & Meckling, 1976)

Orientation	Long-term, collective orientation focused on the sustainable health and success of the organisation and all its stakeholders (García-Sánchez et al., 2021).	Short-term orientation that may fixate on personal gains over long-term collective health. (Pepper & Gore, 2015).

Table 3.1 Core principle of Stewardship Theory vs Agency Theory

This stewardship ethos has clear resonance in nonprofit and volunteer-driven contexts, where financial incentives are absent and commitment is rooted in shared values and mission. In such settings, moving from an "agency" mindset to a stewardship mindset means shifting from simply administering tasks to actively nurturing the growth, motivation and long-term commitment of volunteers, treating them as indispensable partners in the mission. For example, rather than viewing catechists as free labour to be efficiently scheduled, a stewardship approach would see the diocese investing in each catechist's development, fostering their gifts, and empowering them with meaningful responsibility – on the premise that, as stewards, these volunteers genuinely *want* to advance the Church's mission. This approach aligns with Van Slyke's (2006) observation that public/nonprofit contexts benefit from governance based on trust and shared mission, rather than the compliance-centric models of corporate principal-agent dynamics.

3.2.2 Theological Re-appropriation and Ecclesial Grounding

While Stewardship Theory provides a powerful secular framework, its application in the Church context requires *"baptising" the concept* – i.e. grounding it in Catholic theological principles so that it becomes an authentic expression of ecclesial values rather than a foreign import. In Catholic understanding, stewardship is not merely an effective management strategy, but a profound theological imperative: it reflects how God entrusts creation and the Church's mission to human beings, and calls leaders to be *faithful stewards* of those gifts (cf. 1 Cor 4:1-2). The HRS model argues that the core tenets of Stewardship Theory align with, and are elevated by, foundational principles of Catholic anthropology and ecclesiology.

Theological Lens	Core Theological Principle	Reframing of the Relationship	Practical Implications for Stewardship
Imago Dei (Image of God)	Volunteers are not "human resources"	"HR management" is transformed into a	The parish or diocese, as steward, must ask: are we

	to be expended, but persons created in the Imago Dei, the image and likeness of God. Each catechist possesses inherent dignity and worth that demand reverence and care.	ministry of pastoral care. The focus shifts from maximising output to honouring personhood and enabling full human and spiritual flourishing.	caring for these individuals as children of God, helping them grow in holiness and wholeness through their service?
Vocation (Divine Calling)	Every baptised person has a vocation. A volunteer catechist's commitment is more than a hobby; it is a response to God's call.	The Church's role is not to "use" volunteers instrumentally but to be a faithful steward of their vocation. A stewardship approach sees the Church serving the volunteer as much as the volunteer serves the Church.	Create an environment where each catechist's unique gifts and calling can be discerned, nurtured, and joyfully offered. This aligns with Church documents (e.g., General Directory for Catechesis 1997) that insist catechists be holistically formed and supported, not treated as mere functionaries.
Koinonia (Communion/Fellowship)	The trust-based, collaborative community envisioned by Stewardship Theory is a direct reflection of the theological reality of koinonia, the communion that binds the Church together as the Body of Christ.	Volunteers are seen as co-workers in a communion rather than as subordinates in a hierarchy. This mirrors the ecclesial vision of the People of God journeying together.	Building a culture of collaboration, mutual responsibility, and belonging is not just good organisational practice; it is an enactment of the Church's very nature. This addresses Gen Z's craving for authentic belonging (Springtide Research, 2024) and counters volunteer isolation.
Grace (Gift of the Spirit)	The energy, passion, and commitment of volunteers are not "assets" to exploit or mere human capital, they are gifts of	Leadership develops an attitude of gratitude and humility. Volunteer dedication is seen as a grace to be	Leaders must realise volunteer enthusiasm is a renewable resource only if nurtured; if overworked or mismanaged, it will be depleted. This echoes

	grace entrusted to the Church. This frames volunteerism as part of God's providence.	cherished, not taken for granted.	Brudney & Meijs (2009). The Church must steward this gift carefully through prayer, support, and prudent management.

Table 3.2 Four key theological lenses reframe the Church–catechist relationship

By grounding the secular concept of stewardship in these theological principles, the HRS model ensures its foundational philosophy is an *authentic extension of Church teaching*. It provides a robust theological justification for treating volunteer catechists with utmost care, trust and respect. Rather than importing a business mindset, it recovers an ecclesial vision: the Church as a community of disciples where leaders are shepherd-stewards of God's people. This mindset sets the cultural foundation upon which all other facets of the HRS model build.

3.2.3 Addressing Critiques and Ensuring Responsible Stewardship

No theoretical/conceptual perspective is without limitations. A credible framework must acknowledge potential weaknesses. A primary critique of Stewardship Theory is its potential naiveté: it rests on optimistic assumptions about human motivation that may not always hold. Critics warn that by de-emphasising control and assuming virtuous motives, a pure stewardship model could become vulnerable to mismanagement, incompetence, or the occasional bad actor – making it appear *"utopian"* (Pastoriza & Ariño, 2008). Indeed, corporate governance research notes that even when directors are presumed loyal stewards, *accountability remains essential* for transparency and performance (Keay, 2017). In short, a purely trust-based approach, with no oversight mechanisms, would be practically risky and academically weak.

The HRS model confronts this critique by arguing that accountability is not antithetical to stewardship, but an essential component of *responsible* stewardship. However, the nature of accountability must align with the overall philosophy of care. The model rejects the punitive, control-based oversight of Agency Theory, and instead incorporates *"soft" accountability* mechanisms that are pastoral and developmental in nature. In broader

management terms, this is akin to the idea of *stewardship control* – maintaining standards and feedback, but in a supportive rather than coercive manner. Within the HRS framework, accountability is enacted through several interconnected practices designed to foster development and commitment. Mentorship and accompaniment involve regular one-on-one dialogue between catechists and experienced mentors, fostering relational accountability by supporting personal and ministerial growth while ensuring adherence to expectations. Collaborative goal setting and review invite catechists to co-create personal and ministry goals, promoting shared responsibility and offering a mutual check-in on progress rather than a top-down evaluation. Peer support and communities of practice establish horizontal accountability, encouraging volunteers to share challenges, best practices, and collaboratively find solutions, thereby motivating consistent effort and continuous improvement. Finally, clear roles and expectations, communicated through detailed ministry role descriptions, time commitments, and conduct guidelines, provide a foundational form of accountability by preventing confusion and empowering catechists to meet defined objectives proactively.

By framing accountability in pastoral and developmental terms, the HRS model maintains its core philosophy of trust and care while still building in structures to ensure effectiveness and integrity. Trust is extended, but not blind; volunteers are *empowered* but also supported and guided. This balanced approach addresses the "naïveté" critique: it recognises human fallibility and the need for oversight, yet does so in a way consistent with treating volunteers as valued stewards rather than suspected agents. In sum, the stewardship foundation of the HRS model is made both theologically sound *and* practically robust. It sets a tone where catechists are truly cared for and trusted but also accompanied by accountability so that the mission does not suffer from neglect or drift. With this firm foundation in place, we turn to the next pillar – which operationalises stewardship in the daily leadership style of those guiding the catechists.

3.3 The Leadership Ethos: Servant Leadership as Stewardship in Action

If the stewardship philosophy explores the 'why' (the overarching ethos of care and trust), then Servant Leadership Theory is utilized as a sensitizing concept to explore the 'how', the concrete leadership ethos and behaviours through which stewardship might be enacted by formators. This pillar proposes that servant leadership is stewardship in action, posing a

central question for the inquiry: what kind of leadership enables a true stewardship of persons? The framework hypothesizes that the answer lies in a leader who is first and foremost a servant to those they lead, a proposition that the empirical data will be used to explore, specify, and nuance.

Within the HRS model, the ideal formator is therefore conceptualized as one who leads like Christ the Servant, nurturing, empowering, and accompanying catechists, rather than merely directing or commanding them. This ideal serves as an analytical benchmark against which the lived realities of leadership in the HCMC archdiocese will be examined in the subsequent analysis.

3.3.1 Principles and Empirical Validation of Servant Leadership

The modern concept of servant leadership was articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s as a radical inversion of traditional power-centric leadership models (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf proposed that a true leader's primary motivation should be an innate desire to serve others; the aspiration to lead arises only to serve more effectively. In other words, leadership is *not* about accruing power or hierarchy for its own sake, but about using one's influence to uplift and enable others. Greenleaf's ultimate test of a servant leader was: *do those served grow as persons* – becoming "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants"? (Greenleaf, 1977, p.13). This focus on followers' growth and well-being is the central tenet of the theory.

Building on Greenleaf, Larry Spears distilled servant leadership into ten key characteristics: *listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community* (Spears, 2010). These attributes describe a leadership style that is deeply relational, ethical, and other-focused. Notably, "stewardship" appears as one of the core characteristics, underscoring the intrinsic link between servant leadership and stewardship: the servant leader naturally behaves as a steward, holding their position in trust for the benefit of those they lead. In essence, whereas stewardship (previous section) frames the leader's mindset towards the organisation and people (as caretakers, not owners), servant leadership articulates the leader's day-to-day posture: *humble service, active listening, empowering others,* and building a community of trust.

In religious and nonprofit contexts, this philosophy resonates powerfully. An ethos of service aligns with core Gospel values and the mission-driven nature of such organisations. In the Church, servant leadership is not just a management technique but a spiritual practice, reflecting Jesus's example – *"Whoever wants to be first must be the servant of all"* (Mark 10:44). Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13) provides the paradigmatic model: the leader takes the lowliest role to care for others. Thus, adopting servant leadership in a Catholic context carries an inherent legitimacy and inspiration, as it imitates Christ the Servant.

Importantly, the benefits of servant leadership are not merely theoretical or devotional; a growing body of empirical research validates its effectiveness, particularly in volunteer-driven organisations. Studies consistently show positive correlations between servant leadership and outcomes like higher volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. For example, Benevene *et al.* (2020) found that volunteer managers' servant leadership behaviours were associated with greater volunteer satisfaction and affective commitment to the organisation. Erdurmazlı (2019) similarly observed that perceived servant leadership significantly boosts volunteers' emotional commitment and sense of obligation (normative commitment) to the cause. Such volunteers are more likely to "go the extra mile" and remain longer in service. Research in nonprofit settings also links servant leadership to higher job satisfaction and performance for staff and volunteers (Hines, 2017; Sokoll, 2014). The mechanism is straightforward: by fostering a culture of trust, authenticity, and shared purpose, servant leaders inspire loyalty and engagement. People feel valued and empowered, so they invest more of themselves. These findings reinforce that servant leadership is not only morally attractive but *pragmatically effective*, especially where motivating and retaining people is crucial (as in volunteer ministries).

Of course, servant leadership is not without critique. Some organisational scholars argue it can be challenging in cultures or situations that expect authoritative leadership, or that servant leaders risk burnout if they overextend in serving others (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016; Eva et al., 2019). There is also the question of maintaining clear authority and decision-making while being servant-first. However, these concerns can be managed by balancing service with healthy boundaries and by organisational support for servant leaders. In voluntary church settings, the cultural fit of servant leadership is so high that these critiques are less problematic – humility and service are esteemed virtues, and authority is often moral

rather than coercive. In voluntary church settings, the cultural fit of servant leadership is so high that critiques regarding authority expectations and leader burnout are less problematic, humility and service are esteemed virtues, and authority is often moral rather than coercive. Indeed, research comparing leadership styles found servant leadership especially well-suited to voluntary service organisations compared to more authoritarian models (Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997; Patterson, 2003). The HRS model embraces servant leadership as the leadership paradigm that best *embodies the stewardship ethos* and yields the desired outcomes of volunteer growth, commitment, and flourishing.

3.3.2 Contextualising Servant Leadership for Vietnamese Gen Z Catechists

While servant leadership principles are compelling in general, their application must consider the specific cultural and generational context. A key strength of the HRS model is the argument that servant leadership is not just a universally "good" style, but is uniquely well-suited to forming Generation Z volunteer catechists in Vietnam. This suitability stems from servant leadership's ability to directly address several needs and challenges identified for this cohort (from literature and from local observations, as discussed in Chapter 2):

First, Gen Z craves mentorship and guidance. Growing up amid rapid change and information overload, today's young people highly value leaders who act as coaches and mentors rather than distant authority figures. They respond to relational guidance over top-down orders (Prodoscore, 2022; HRnetRimbun, 2024). Servant leadership, with its *"commitment to the growth of people"*, inherently positions the leader as a mentor dedicated to each person's development. In a church setting, this is vital: intentional mentoring has been shown to significantly foster faith development, character formation, and skill acquisition in young adults (Brailey & Parker, 2021; Roberto, 2012; Streit, 2002). Under the HRS model, a servant-leader catechetical coordinator doesn't just allocate teaching assignments – they accompany each catechist on their vocational journey. For example, a parish priest might meet monthly with the team of catechists to discuss their experiences, encourage them, and teach by example, rather than only convene them for administrative briefings. This hands-on mentorship fulfils Gen Z's desire for supportive, authentic role models.

Second, Gen Z insists on authenticity from leaders. This generation, keenly attuned to hypocrisy (especially through social media's constant scrutiny of public figures), quickly disengages from leaders perceived as self-serving or inauthentic. Servant leadership's hallmarks – humility, empathy, and prioritising others – *embody* the authenticity and integrity that Gen Z seeks. A servant leader "walks the talk," demonstrating congruence between words and actions and between professed values and actual behaviour. In a Catholic context, this is particularly powerful: a servant pastoral leader shows young catechists that the Gospel values of love and service are *truly lived*, not just preached. For instance, when a priest or lay leader is willing to do mundane tasks alongside volunteers or listens patiently to a 19-year-old catechist's ideas, it signals genuine respect and humility. Such witness can inspire deep trust. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) note that young Christians are more likely to follow leaders who are real and relational, not authoritarian or aloof. Servant leadership thus provides credible leadership that earns the buy-in of Gen Z.

Third, servant leadership helps bridge traditional cultural hierarchies. Vietnam's society – and the Vietnamese Catholic Church – often has strong hierarchical and deferential tendencies, especially toward elders and clergy (Hai, 2012). While respect for authority is generally positive, it can inadvertently create a distance that alienates younger generations who increasingly value equality and voice. A priest or senior catechist who adopts a *servant posture* effectively "flattens" the hierarchy in a healthy way. By listening to youth, empowering them in decision-making, and working *with* them rather than merely giving directives, the leader builds bridges of trust and mutual respect. Importantly, this is *not* a rejection of authority, but a preconception of authority as service. It shows that one can be a figure of authority and still be approachable, compassionate, and collaborative. For young Vietnamese catechists, this approach is far more inspiring than a purely top-down style. It allows them to feel heard and valued, mitigating the generational gap. In effect, servant leadership can transform the culture of the parish: rather than reinforcing a rigid clericalism, it nurtures a family-like atmosphere where all (priest, religious, lay, young, old) work side by side in shared mission.

In summary, servant leadership in the HRS model is the engine that brings the stewardship philosophy to life. It operationalises trust and care in every interaction between formators and catechists. Under servant leaders, the relationship becomes fundamentally relational (person-to-person, not boss-to-worker), fundamentally developmental (focused on growth,

not just task completion), and fundamentally pastoral (concerned with the whole person and their spiritual journey). This creates the environment of trust and psychological safety in which young volunteers can truly flourish. Only in such an environment will the next pillar – the cultivation of deep intrinsic motivation – fully take root. Servant leadership thus paves the way for volunteers' basic needs to be met and for their hearts to be engaged. We now turn to that psychological pillar of the framework.

3.4 The Psychological Engine: Cultivating Intrinsic Motivation and Spiritual Well-being

While the preceding facets shape *how* volunteers are treated externally, this facet delves into *what drives them from within*. To explore this internal world of motivation, engagement, and well-being, the HRS model employs Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as its guiding psychological framework. Developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, SDT offers a robust, empirically validated set of concepts for understanding the conditions under which people thrive.

Specifically, its three universal psychological needs, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness, are utilized here as powerful sensitizing concepts. They provide a lens to investigate what drives individuals to commit their time and energy. The analytical goal is therefore not merely to confirm the presence of these needs, but to explore and articulate their specific manifestations within the unique spiritual and cultural context of HCMC catechists. SDT thus serves as the bridge connecting the supportive environment created by stewardship and servant leadership to the desired outcome: catechists who are intrinsically motivated, resilient, and spiritually well. It allows the research to scientifically investigate and enrich the pastoral intuition that a joyful, flourishing catechist is a more effective and enduring one.

3.4.1 The Three Basic Psychological Needs of Self-Determination Theory

At the core of SDT is the proposition that all human beings, regardless of culture, have three innate and universal psychological needs. Decades of research have identified these needs as essential nutrients for optimal motivation, functioning, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). The three needs are:

1. Autonomy – the need to feel a sense of volition, choice, and psychological freedom in one's actions. Experiencing autonomy means one's behaviour is self-endorsed and aligned with one's values and interests, rather than feeling controlled or coerced by external pressures. It is not mere independence, but the sense that "I am doing this because *I* truly want to." For a catechist, autonomy might manifest as feeling that volunteering is *their* chosen vocation and creative contribution, not an obligation thrust upon them.
2. Competence – the need to feel effective, capable, and masterful in one's interactions with the environment. It involves developing skills, meeting challenges, and experiencing growth or accomplishment in one's activities. In our context, competence means the catechist feels they *can* successfully teach and mentor – that they have the knowledge and skills to make a difference. Feedback, training, and small "wins" contribute to this feeling.
3. Relatedness – the need to feel socially connected to others, to belong to a community, and to experience mutual care. It is the desire for meaningful relationships, to love and be loved, and to feel part of something larger. For a volunteer catechist, this means feeling connected to fellow catechists, supported by church leadership, and appreciated by students – basically, feeling *part of a family* of faith.

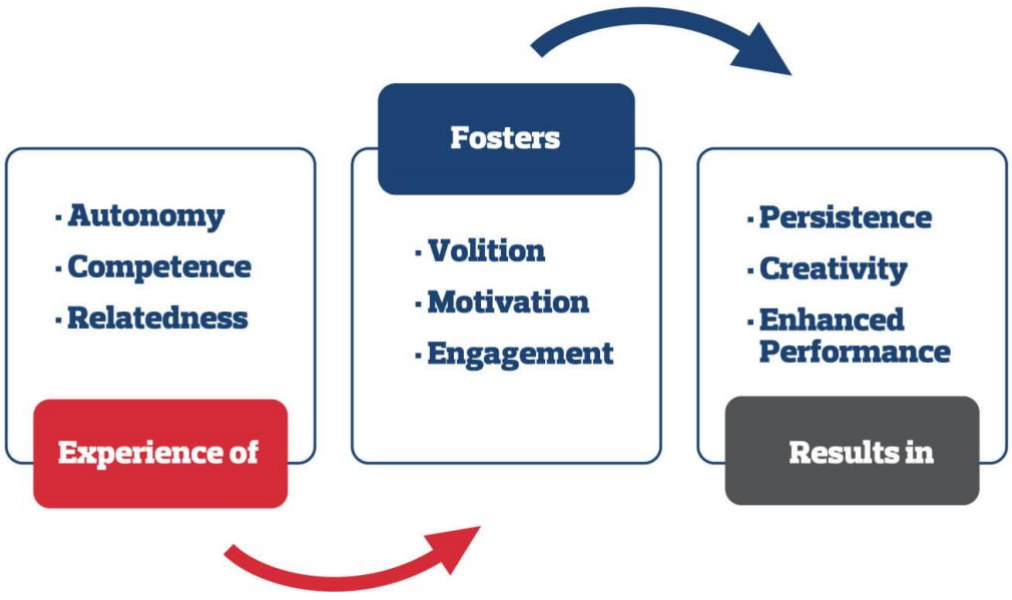

Figure 3.2 Determination Theory (Sources: UK Coaching)

According to SDT, when an environment supports the satisfaction of these three needs, individuals are far more likely to be intrinsically motivated – engaging in activities for their inherent interest, enjoyment, and personal value. This kind of autonomous motivation is associated with greater persistence, creativity, and overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Conversely, when an environment thwarts these needs – for example, if it is overly controlling (undermining autonomy), constantly critical or offers no room to succeed (undermining competence), or cold and excluding (undermining relatedness) – motivation often becomes extrinsic (driven purely by rewards or fear of punishment) or can vanish entirely, leading to disengagement and burnout. In short, the three needs are key leverage points: nurture them and you unleash energy; neglect them and you get minimal compliance or dropout.

3.4.2 Designing a Need-Supportive Environment in the HRS Model

SDT has been widely and successfully applied to understanding volunteer motivation, since volunteers are not driven by pay and thus depend on other satisfactions (Millette & Gagné, 2008; Haivas *et al*., 2012). A major goal of the HRS model is to *intentionally design* a ministry environment that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness – not as a happy by-product, but as a systematic outcome of its core principles. Here the earlier facets come into play: the stewardship culture and servant leadership ethos jointly create fertile ground for need satisfaction. Concretely, the HRS model implements need-support in ways such as:

- Fostering Autonomy: Rather than a top-down "assign and control" approach to volunteer roles, the model promotes what we might call *vocation-based volunteering*. This means discerning each catechist's unique gifts and passions and aligning their role accordingly. A stewardship mindset refuses to treat volunteers as cogs to be slotted wherever needed; instead, it asks, "Where does this person *feel called* to serve? What gives them life?" Servant leaders then empower volunteers with voice and choice – involving them in planning, giving them ownership of projects, and trusting them with real responsibility. For example, a young catechist with talent in music might be given freedom to incorporate music into class or help lead youth choir, rather than strictly following a preset curriculum. When catechists feel their service is an authentic expression of themselves and their faith (not just fulfilling someone else's assignment), their need for autonomy is satisfied. They

minister not because they *must* but because they *get to*, in a way that is "their own." This dramatically increases joy and commitment.

- Building Competence: The HRS model's commitment to holistic and ongoing formation directly addresses volunteers' need for competence. In a stewardship paradigm, investing in people is paramount – so robust training and skill-building are provided, not as an afterthought but as a core practice. Catechists receive workshops on scripture and doctrine, sessions on pedagogy and class management, and opportunities for spiritual retreats to deepen their relationship with God. Servant leaders also play a key role by giving constructive feedback and mentorship, helping volunteers see their progress and celebrate improvements. For instance, a servant leader might sit in on a catechist's class and later share affirmations and gentle suggestions. This systematic development ensures catechists feel increasingly capable and confident in their roles. As they witness their own growth – perhaps successfully handling a difficult question from a student or seeing their class become more engaged after applying a new method – they experience the satisfaction of competence. This is a powerful internal motivator for continued service.
- Nurturing Relatedness: The need for relatedness is met through an emphasis on authentic community. The stewardship philosophy views the parish or catechetical team as a *koinonia* – a communion – not just a workplace. Servant leaders are explicitly tasked with *"building community"* (one of Spears' ten traits) – for example, by organizing regular team gatherings, prayer meetings, or simple shared meals to bond the group. The HRS model implements practices like intentional peer support groups, where catechists can share experiences; team-building activities and retreats; and fostering a culture of mutual encouragement. A simple but important tactic is ensuring no catechist works in isolation – for instance, pairing new catechists with experienced "buddies." All this ensures that volunteers feel deeply connected – that they have comrades in the journey and are part of a "ministry family" rather than lone contractors. This is especially crucial for Gen Z, which often expresses a longing for genuine belonging in an era of digital rather than personal connections (Springtide Research, 2024). When young catechists feel embraced by a supportive community that cares about them, their relatedness need is fulfilled, and their commitment is reinforced. Volunteering then becomes not just an individual task but a *shared mission* with friends.

By deliberately cultivating this need-supportive climate, the HRS model creates the psychological conditions for volunteers to thrive. Catechists in such an environment are far more likely to exhibit intrinsic motivation – they serve out of love, passion and calling, rather than obligation or external reward. They also are more likely to experience satisfaction and lower burnout. In short, stewardship + servant leadership *creates* a context that meets autonomy, competence, and relatedness; SDT tells us that context will in turn produce joyful, engaged, and resilient catechists. Next, we explore how meeting these natural needs also connects to deeper spiritual outcomes, linking psychology to theology.

3.4.3 From Psychological Needs to Spiritual Well-being

Notably, the HRS model posits a strong connection between satisfying these basic psychological needs and fostering spiritual well-being (SWB) among catechists. This is a critical integrative insight: it shows that *sound psychology can directly serve profound theological ends*. Literature in pastoral psychology and spirituality indicates that spiritual well-being, a state of wholeness and flourishing in one's relationship with God, self, others, and creation, is a core goal of faith formation and is linked to positive life outcomes (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Fisher, 2011; Chen & VanderWeele, 2018). Meanwhile, SDT provides a well-validated pathway to psychological health and thriving (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The HRS model *connects these two streams*: by creating conditions for psychological need satisfaction, we simultaneously create conditions for spiritual growth and well-being.

Specifically, each of SDT's three needs can be seen as a gateway to one or more domains of spiritual well-being, as defined in Fisher's (2011) four-domain model of SWB:

- Autonomy → Personal Spiritual Domain: When a catechist's need for autonomy is met – that is, they feel their service is freely chosen and aligned with their core values – it fosters a sense of personal meaning and purpose, and integrity between faith and action. This corresponds to the *Personal domain* of SWB: an inner sense of purpose and identity. In theological terms, a volunteer who serves autonomously is responding to God's call *authentically*, which enhances their personal vocation and spiritual fulfilment.
- Competence → Transcendental & Communal Spiritual Domains: Satisfaction of competence – feeling effective and impactful in ministry – allows a catechist to *experience the joy of contributing meaningfully to God's mission and to others'*

lives. This amplifies their sense of connection to a higher purpose (Transcendental domain, i.e. relating to God) and to the community they serve (Communal domain, relating to others). For example, seeing students grow in faith due to one's teaching can deepen one's own faith in God's work (*"God is using me, unworthy as I am"*) and one's love for the community of believers.

- Relatedness → Communal Spiritual Domain: The satisfaction of relatedness – feeling part of a loving community – *is itself a spiritual experience* of Church. It directly manifests the *Communal domain* of SWB, the experience of koinonia or fellowship in Christ. When volunteers say, "My fellow catechists are like family to me," that relational fulfilment strengthens their sense of the Church as a place of belonging and grace, contributing to their spiritual well-being.

In sum, a need-supportive, person-centred environment does more than motivate volunteers to perform tasks; it nurtures their souls. By meeting the God-given psychological needs for freedom, mastery, and connection, the HRS model helps catechists experience their ministry not as a draining obligation but as a *life-giving activity* that nourishes their own faith even as they nourish others. Their service becomes integrated with their personal identity and spiritual journey, rather than a compartmentalised "chore." This emphasis on cultivating intrinsic motivation *and* well-being is the psychological heart of the HRS model, ensuring that the formation process is sustainable, joyful, and truly transformative for the volunteers themselves. A motivated, spiritually healthy catechist will naturally be a more effective evangeliser – radiating the joy of the Gospel and resilient in the face of challenges. With this psychological engine in place, we turn to the final pillar: the pedagogical core that will shape how and what we teach these catechists, leveraging the power of inspirational narratives.

3.5 The Pedagogical Core: A Critical Pedagogy of Martyrdom

The final conceptual pillar of the HRS model addresses the content and method of formation, exploring what and how to teach and inspire the catechists themselves. While the previous facets establish a supportive environment, this section proposes a pedagogical core for investigation, one that is both spiritually profound and psychologically astute. To guide this inquiry, the framework draws upon Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and theories of narrative identity as its key sensitizing concepts.

These theories provide a lens through which to explore the potential of leveraging the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs as powerful, identity-shaping narratives for Gen Z catechists. The central proposition to be explored is that these culturally potent stories can serve as formative tools to shape values and build resilience. Crucially, this is not a simplistic or hagiographical approach. The model puts forward a "critical pedagogy of martyrdom" as the specific conceptual tool for this exploration. This means the subsequent analysis will investigate how these stories can be used in a thoughtful, context-sensitive way that maximizes their motivational power while navigating potential psychological risks (such as fostering unhealthy guilt or a martyr complex).

3.5.1 The Power of Modelling: Social Cognitive and Narrative Identity Theories

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits that human beings learn not only through direct personal experience but also by observing others – a process Bandura called *observational learning* or modelling (Bandura, 1977; 1986). People can acquire new behaviours, attitudes, and values vicariously, by watching the actions of a model and the consequences that follow. Bandura identified four subprocesses required for observational learning to occur:

1. Attention: One must *notice* the model's behaviour. We pay most attention to models who are salient, attractive, respected, or similar to us in some way.
2. Retention: One must *remember* what was observed, encoding it in memory (often through imagery or verbal description) for later recall.
3. Reproduction: One must have the *ability* to reproduce the behaviour (including the physical capabilities or skills required).
4. Motivation: One must be *motivated* to imitate the behaviour, which can be enhanced by seeing the model rewarded (vicarious reinforcement) or by valuing the outcomes of the behaviour.

Crucially, SCT recognises that models can be symbolic (e.g. characters in stories, historical figures) and need not be physically present. Fictional or distant role models can powerfully influence an observer's beliefs about what is possible and desirable, including their sense of self-efficacy ("If *they* could do it, maybe I can too") and their aspirations. This is why narratives of heroes, saints, and exemplars have such a lasting impact on communities: they

provide templates for what a meaningful life looks like and what kind of person one should strive to be.

This idea is extended by Narrative Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals form their identity by internalising and integrating life experiences into an evolving personal story (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Cultural and religious narratives – like the lives of saints or biblical figures – serve as *"frames" or archetypal scripts* that people can draw on when constructing their own life story. As sociologist Jerome Bruner (1987) noted, narratives provide "recipes for structuring experience," guiding people on what a meaningful, virtuous life entails. As sociologist Nancy Ammerman (2003) noted, religious narratives function as interpretive frameworks that guide people on what a meaningful, virtuous life entails, providing what Bruner termed "recipes for structuring experience."When a young person engages deeply with a heroic story, they may begin to see *their own challenges* in light of that narrative and adopt similar virtues or purposes. In short, inspirational stories can become part of one's identity – *"I want to be brave and faithful like Saint X, even in my smaller trials."*

Applying SCT and narrative identity to catechist formation, we see a potent strategy: present the catechists with compelling role models (through stories) that capture their attention, remain memorable, and provide motivating, identity-shaping examples to emulate. The Catholic tradition is rich with saints and martyrs whose lives exemplify profound faith, courage, and love. Among these, the stories of the 117 Vietnamese Martyrs canonised by the Church stand out as *especially resonant* for Vietnamese Catholics. These men and women – foreign missionaries and local believers, bishops, priests, and lay catechists – suffered torture and death in witness to their faith in Vietnam during the 18th–19th centuries. Their feast day is celebrated collectively on 24 November. They are part of the living heritage of Vietnamese Catholicism, often invoked in preaching and piety. For Gen Z catechists, the Vietnamese Martyrs can serve as culturally proximate exemplars who demonstrate what radical commitment and resilience in faith look like.

3.5.2 The Vietnamese Martyrs as Culturally Potent Exemplars

The HRS model posits that the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs are not merely historical lessons to be briefly mentioned, but powerful, culturally potent narratives that can function as symbolic models for Gen Z catechists. Their local relevance (Vietnamese heroes of faith)

and dramatic witness (extreme courage and sacrifice) give them exceptional pedagogical potential for observational learning. Consider how the four SCT subprocesses play out with these martyrs in the role of models:

- Attention: The martyrs' stories *naturally command attention*. They involve heroism, high stakes (life and death for the faith), and often include ordinary people – even lay catechists – performing extraordinary acts of courage. For young Vietnamese Catholics, there is an inherent intrigue and pride in hearing about their ancestors in faith who stood up to emperors or endured tortures rather than deny Christ. Such stories are far from dull; they are gripping and inspiring, which is crucial in a media-saturated age where attention is scarce.
- Retention: The vivid imagery and memorable anecdotes from these stories aid *retention*. Many martyr stories are filled with powerful scenes (e.g. a teenage catechist forgiving his executioners, or a priest calmly singing a hymn on the way to martyrdom) that stick in one's mind. These concrete examples of virtues like courage, hope, and forgiveness can be recalled in times of difficulty. They become mental reference points: "What would the martyrs do in this situation?" By embedding such stories in formation (through storytelling, dramatizations, etc.), catechists carry with them a treasury of memories to draw strength from.
- Motivation: The martyr narratives provide strong motivation through *vicarious reinforcement*. Although the martyrs suffered terribly, the outcome of their story is framed as a *spiritual triumph* – they received the "crown of glory" and their blood became the seed of the Church in Vietnam. In other words, the narrative emphasizes that their sacrifice had profound meaning and honour in God's eyes and in history. This demonstrates to the catechist that *sacrifice for a higher cause leads to a meaningful and honoured outcome*, which can motivate them to emulate that commitment in their own service. The idea isn't that they seek martyrdom, but that they develop a willingness to suffer inconveniences or opposition in ministry, knowing it serves a greater purpose.
- Reproduction (Emulation of Virtues): Finally, while catechists obviously are not expected to *reproduce* the martyrs' deaths, they can emulate the martyrs' spirit and virtues. The formation emphasis here is: *practice the same virtues in daily life*. The martyrs' courage in face of social pressure can inspire a young catechist to boldly share faith even if it's unpopular. Their perseverance amidst trials can encourage

sticking with ministry through discouragement. Their love of God and neighbour can be translated into daily acts of charity and dedication in teaching. By highlighting these virtues as the takeaway (rather than the gore of their sufferings), catechists learn *how to live with courage, not how to die*.

In sum, the Vietnamese Martyrs serve as exemplars who are both relatable and ideal. They were not superheroes from foreign lands – many were local laypeople, teachers, parents, even youths – which helps young catechists see them as *people like me*. Yet their level of faith and love is something to aspire to, providing a horizon of spiritual heroism. The *cultural resonance* ensures the stories truly hit home: these martyrs walked the same ground, spoke (some of) the same language, and planted the faith that the catechists inherit. There is a lineage of witness that today's volunteers can claim and continue. Many modern Vietnamese catechists indeed see their ministry as a vocation rooted in the legacy of sacrifice and fidelity exemplified by the martyrs.

However, to fully leverage these narratives, they must be taught and discussed in a way that connects to contemporary challenges. A critical pedagogy of martyrdom involves helping Gen Z catechists draw parallels between the martyrs' context and their own. The martyrs faced imperial persecution; today's young believers face more subtle pressures – a secular culture that may mock their faith, peer pressure to conform, or personal hardships. The formation should explicitly link the virtues: *for example, a martyr's steadfastness under threat can inspire a young catechist's courage to stand up for Christian values in the "digital public square"; the martyrs' solidarity with the oppressed can translate to advocating for the marginalised today; their ultimate sacrifice can challenge the throwaway culture and selfishness prevalent now*. By drawing these connections, the catechists see the *relevance* of martyrdom not as antiquated stories but as guiding lights for living faithfully amid modern "white martyrdom" – the daily dying to self-required to live the Gospel in a consumerist, relativistic society.

3.5.3 Navigating Psychological Risks: Towards a Pedagogy of Resilience

For all their inspirational power, martyr narratives must be used carefully. An uncritical glorification of martyrdom could carry psychological and spiritual risks, especially for the young. In popular psychology, terms like *"martyr complex"* or *"martyr syndrome"* describe

a dysfunctional pattern where an individual *seeks out suffering or self-sacrifice* in order to feel noble, to gain sympathy, or to manipulate others. This pathology – characterized by pride, resentment, or self-righteousness behind the façade of service – is the antithesis of the joyful, free self-gift that Christian service should be. Another modern trope is the overworked "martyr teacher" who sacrifices any personal life for students, often lionised in media but prone to burnout and bitterness. Indeed, research warns that idealising constant self-sacrifice in roles like teaching can lead to burnout – a dynamic our project explicitly aims to prevent (Fan, 2021).

Therefore, a core innovation in the HRS model is the proposal of a "critical pedagogy of martyrdom." This approach consciously *avoids* glorifying suffering for its own sake and actively guards against fostering a martyr complex in volunteers. Instead, it uses martyr narratives as tools for building *resilience and meaning*, making several key distinctions in emphasis:

1. Modelling Virtues, Not Suffering: The pedagogical focus is on the virtues demonstrated by the martyrs – their courage, integrity, hope, love – rather than the graphic details of their tortures or death. The suffering is contextualised as the price they were willing to pay out of fidelity, *not* as an end. We want catechists to learn *how to live with courage, not how to seek suffering*. For example, instead of gruesomely describing executions, formation sessions might highlight how a martyr forgave his persecutors or remained steadfast in faith – virtues that can be imitated without any persecution.
2. Meaningful Sacrifice vs. Martyr Complex: The framework draws a sharp line between healthy, prosocial sacrifice and the unhealthy self-victimisation of a martyr complex. It highlights research on the *"martyrdom effect,"* which shows that people can find greater meaning in efforts or sacrifices made for a valued cause. Pain or effort, freely chosen for a noble purpose, can indeed enhance one's sense of meaning (Olivola & Shafir, 2013) – this is part of why volunteering can be so fulfilling, even when difficult. The HRS model *frames the catechist's service as a meaningful, joyful offering*, not a begrudging duty. Any sacrifices involved (time, energy, dealing with challenges) are to be seen in light of love – "I give this because it's worth it" – rather than "I suffer and therefore I'm virtuous." This helps prevent the development of prideful self-sacrifice or resentment.

3. Building Resilience, Not Guilt: The aim of using these narratives is to inspire and equip catechists with spiritual fortitude for their own contemporary challenges. It's about encouragement, not intimidation. The martyrs are presented as *models of resilience and hope* that counter today's performance-oriented, comfort-seeking culture. Importantly, no catechist should feel *guilted* that they are "not heroic enough" because they haven't shed blood. That would be counterproductive. Rather, the message is: *each of us can live the martyrial virtues in our state of life*. The goal is to foster inspiration, not guilt. For instance, if a catechist feels discouraged by a lack of results, recalling the patience of martyrs who didn't see the fruits of their witness can encourage perseverance, rather than make them feel ashamed for struggling.

By adopting this critical, psychologically informed approach, the HRS model harnesses the inspirational power of the martyr narratives while mitigating their potential pitfalls. The martyr stories thus are transformed from static legends of the past into *dynamic, living tools* for formation. They inspire catechists to be spiritually resilient, morally courageous, and joyfully committed to their vocation – precisely the qualities needed for effective ministry in a challenging modern environment. At the same time, by addressing the risks (martyr complex, burnout), the approach ensures these stories uplift rather than overwhelm the young volunteers. In practice, this might involve structured reflections after learning about a martyr: *How can their example help you with a difficulty you face?* or *What does faithfulness look like for you, since probably you won't be executed?* It can also involve presenting *contemporary "martyrs"* or heroes of faith (even if not killed) to complement historical ones, so that youth see a spectrum of ways to live sacrificially without necessarily dying.

With all four facets now elaborated – a stewardship culture of care and trust, a servant leadership ethos of mentoring and humility, a need-supportive climate fostering intrinsic motivation and well-being, and a critical narrative pedagogy drawing on powerful models – we have assembled the components of the Human Resource Stewardship model. The final task of this chapter is to synthesise these parts and show how they interlock as an integrated solution to the research problem.

3.6 Synthesis and Exposition: The Integrated Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) Model

3.6.1 HRS Conceptual Framework

The four conceptual facets, Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive (narrative) Theory, do not function in isolation in this framework. They are designed to interlock and reinforce one another, forming a cohesive system for catechist formation. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the overall architecture of the HRS model as a series of nested, mutually reinforcing layers – essentially a *virtuous cycle* that continually fosters and renews volunteer engagement.

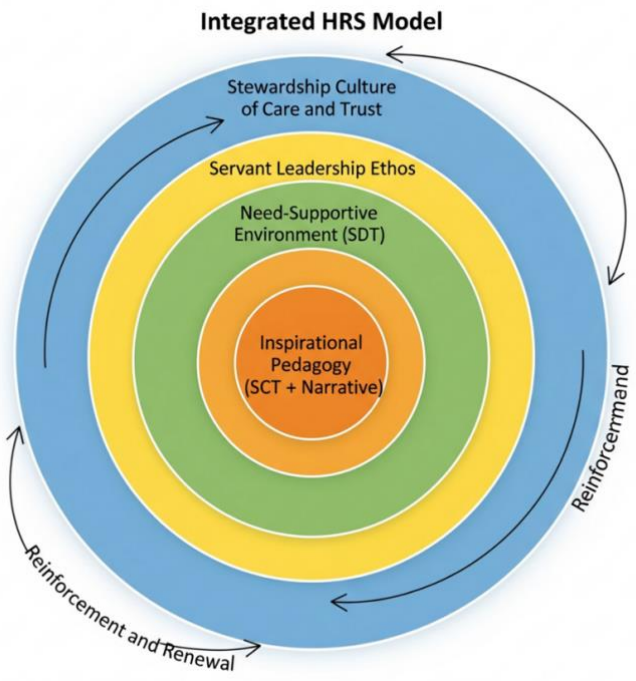

Figure 3.3 The Integrated Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) Conceptual Framework (developed by the author).

This diagram depicts the HRS model's nested structure. Stewardship Theory provides the outermost layer – a culture of trust and care – within which Servant Leadership defines the leaders' ethos of service. This servant-led environment, in turn, fulfils volunteers' basic psychological needs according to Self-Determination Theory, leading to intrinsic motivation and well-being. At the core, Social Cognitive Theory (via the Vietnamese martyr narratives as role models) functions as a pedagogical engine that inspires identity formation

and vocational commitment. The overall effect is an ongoing cycle of growth and renewal in the volunteer ministry.

In operation, the cycle can be described in six steps (corresponding to the numbered elements in Figure 3.1):

1. Stewardship Culture (Outer Layer): The process is grounded in a *stewardship culture*, reframing the entire formation system as a ministry of pastoral care rather than a utilitarian management exercise. Leadership at all levels approaches catechists with an attitude of trust, appreciation, and responsibility for their holistic growth. This establishes the fundamental climate: the catechist feels valued as a person and co-worker in the Gospel, not a means to an end.
2. Servant Leadership Ethos: Within this culture, a servant leadership ethos is enabled and expected of all formators and coordinators. Leaders enact stewardship through their relational, empowering, and other-focused behaviour. They mentor, listen, and serve their teams. This means, for example, parish priests, sisters, or lay leaders model humility and are attentive to volunteers' needs. The servant leadership translates the principle of care into daily practice.
3. Need-Supportive Climate: A servant-led environment naturally creates a need-supportive climate that fulfils volunteers' basic psychological needs (SDT) for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Because servant leaders give catechists voice and responsibility, volunteers feel ownership and *autonomy*. Because training and feedback are emphasised, they gain *competence*. Because a community of love and support is built, they experience *relatedness*. This climate doesn't happen by accident – it is *systematically cultivated* as described in Section 3.4.2.
4. Intrinsic Motivation Unleashed: When those needs are met, intrinsic motivation is unleashed. Catechists who feel free, capable, and connected are far more likely to be joyful, enthusiastic, and resilient in their ministry. Instead of needing constant external encouragement or monitoring, they *self-drive* their engagement. They find meaning and satisfaction in the service itself (and in the growth it engenders in them and others). This intrinsic motivation is a key outcome of combining SDT with the supportive leadership environment.
5. Inspirational Pedagogy (Core): A motivated and spiritually nourished catechist is *highly receptive* to the inspirational pedagogy at the model's core. Here we

specifically leverage the Vietnamese Martyrs' narratives and other exemplars (SCT and narrative identity) to shape the catechist's vocational identity and deepen their commitment. In practical terms, when a catechist is already positively engaged, introducing them to these powerful stories and reflecting on virtuous examples can ignite an even greater sense of mission and courage. They begin to see themselves as part of the story – heirs of the martyrs – which reinforces why their service matters. It's at this core stage that we aim to form resilient, mission-driven identities in the catechists.

6. Reinforcement and Renewal: The final step of the cycle is that this deepened commitment and stronger identity feed back into making the catechists themselves better stewards of the faith and potential servant leaders for others, thus *reinforcing the entire cycle*. Over time, today's well-formed, inspired catechists can grow into tomorrow's mentors and leaders. For example, a young catechist inspired by the model might eventually take on coordination roles, in which they will hopefully practise the same stewardship and servant leadership they experienced – thereby sustaining the model's culture. In this way, the HRS model aims for long-term sustainability: it not only forms volunteers for the present, but also cultivates the next generation of leaders who will perpetuate and improve the system.

In summary, the HRS model works as an integrated, virtuous cycle. Each layer feeds the next: *stewardship culture enables servant leadership; servant leadership fulfils psychological needs; need satisfaction drives motivation; motivated volunteers embrace formative narratives; inspired identities lead to even greater stewardship.* It's a self-reinforcing loop oriented toward continuous growth and renewal of the catechetical ministry.

3.6.2 The HRS Model as a Systemic Solution

The true strength of the HRS model lies in its capacity to provide a systemic, interdisciplinary solution to the multifaceted problems identified in Chapter 1. Each pillar of the framework directly corresponds to – and offers remedies for – a specific dimension of the problem. In other words, the model was consciously constructed to align conceptual tools to practical needs. To summarise this alignment:

- Problem Dimension 1: Deficit in Holistic Formation (spiritual well-being and resilience neglected). The HRS solution comes primarily from the Foundational Philosophy (Stewardship) and the Psychological Engine (SDT) facets. Stewardship Theory refocuses formation as a *"ministry of care"* that prioritises the person of the catechist, not just their doctrinal knowledge. Self-Determination Theory then operationalises caring for the person by ensuring the environment supports their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs – which directly enhances their spiritual well-being. Together, these facets ensure the catechist's *inner life and personal growth* are at the centre of formation, addressing the previous neglect of those areas.
- Problem Dimension 2: Generational & Pedagogical Mismatch (methods ill-suited for Gen Z's learning style and values). The solution here emerges from the Pedagogical Core (SCT with narrative identity) and the Leadership Ethos (Servant Leadership) facets. Social Cognitive Theory, via the Vietnamese martyr narratives, provides a *culturally resonant, story-based pedagogy* that is interactive and dialogical – precisely the kind of learning that appeals to Gen Z's search for authenticity and meaning. Instead of dry catechesis, it offers inspiring real-life examples and engages students in making meaning. Meanwhile, Servant Leadership in practice means a mentorship-focused leadership style that values young people's input and builds relationships of trust. This counters the overly authoritarian approaches that alienate many youths. Essentially, we *teach differently* (through narrative and example) and *lead differently* (through mentoring and inclusion), thus bridging the generational gap.
- Problem Dimension 3: Lack of Theologically Integrated Support Systems (reliance on ad-hoc or secular HR practices). This issue is solved by the Foundational Philosophy (Stewardship) combined with the Leadership Ethos (Servant Leadership) facets. We implement a *systematic, theologically grounded support structure* based on stewardship principles. For example, clear volunteer roles, ongoing training programs, spiritual retreats, and recognition rituals are put in place – all under the notion of caring for stewards of the faith. These structural elements provide what was missing: an organised "volunteer lifecycle" management that aligns with church values. And it is enacted through servant-leader mentorship, not corporate-style HR. A servant leader coordinator ensures each catechist gets ongoing development and accompaniment (as described in Section 3.2.3's accountability

measures), instead of the previous ad-hoc oversight. Thus, the model replaces uncritical secular HRM with a pastoral HRM – stewardship-driven and service-oriented.

As the above alignment shows, the HRS model is *not* a collection of disparate ideas, but a unified architecture custom-built to the research context. It tackles the holistic formation deficit by centring the person (spiritual well-being, intrinsic motivation). It remedies the generational mismatch by adopting pedagogies and leadership styles that "fit" Gen Z and honour Vietnamese Catholic heritage. And it fills the support system gap by providing structure and leadership that are spiritually and culturally consonant. In doing so, the model bridges domains (theology, psychology, education, management) in an interdisciplinary way – yielding a framework more robust than any single-discipline solution.

3.7 Conclusion: The Framework as an Inference to the Best Explanation

This chapter has completed **Stage 1** of the abductive process by articulating the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model as a provisional inference to the best explanation for the paradox of service among Gen Z catechists. The framework now stands as a structured hypothesis that will be examined and refined in **Stage 2**, through the empirical work reported in Chapters 4–7. By synthesising insights from Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory (with narrative identity), and by grounding these secular theories in a rich Catholic theological context, the HRS model offers a novel, integrated solution to a pressing pastoral and organisational challenge. It stands as a logically coherent whole: each component supports the others in cultivating catechists who are well-formed, intrinsically motivated, and resilient in faith.

The model's unique contribution lies in its ability to bridge the traditional divide between spiritual formation and strategic volunteer development. It avoids the pitfall of simply importing corporate HR models into the Church (a practice that can treat volunteers as utilitarian resources devoid of spiritual considerations). Instead, it reframes and "baptises" the best of organisational and psychological theory, situating them within a *pastoral vision of human flourishing*. In doing so, it champions a vision of human development rooted in dignity, vocation, and communion – replacing a utilitarian logic of managing human resources with a pastoral logic of stewarding human souls towards fullness of life.

Practically, this means the framework doesn't just ask, "How can we get volunteers to teach better or stay longer?" but also, "How can we help these young people encounter Christ more deeply and grow as disciple-leaders through their service?" – recognising that these goals are interdependent.

Moreover, the HRS model is presented as the most robust and contextually appropriate framework to make sense of and address the complex phenomena we face. Simpler frameworks would leave critical aspects untouched (for instance, focusing only on curriculum would miss motivational factors; focusing only on spirituality might miss organisational issues). This abductively derived model emerged by iteratively considering empirical observations (from chapters 1 and 2) and theoretical concepts until an integrative explanation that accounted for all dimensions took shape. It thus provides a comprehensive lens through which to interpret the current catechist formation problems and a roadmap for action.

Importantly, the HRS model is contextually tailored to the Vietnamese Catholic milieu. It deliberately incorporates the cultural-religious symbol of the Vietnamese Martyrs and responds to the characteristics of Vietnamese Gen Z. This ensures that the framework is not only theoretically sound but also *culturally resonant and feasible* on the ground. By grounding leadership in service (very much in line with the humility valued in Vietnamese culture), grounding motivation in community (echoing Vietnamese communal values), and using local faith heroes as exemplars, the model speaks the "heart language" of the stakeholders. Such contextualisation increases the likelihood of acceptance and success in practice.

This chapter has also emphasised the interdisciplinary synthesis at work: theology informed by psychology, leadership shaped by spirituality, and pedagogy enriched by narrative identity theory. This integrative quality is a strength, as complex human formation requires drawing on all relevant fields. The result is a framework that is theologically grounded (loyal to Church teachings on dignity, vocation, community), psychologically informed (leveraging evidence on motivation and learning), and pedagogically compelling (using stories and relationships, which are how values and faith are often best transmitted). It is, in essence, a *holistic catechetical framework* for the modern age – one that cares as much for the catechist as for the content they teach.

Going forward, this HRS framework will serve as the conceptual foundation and guiding lens for the empirical phases (Chapters 4 - 7). The model's four core facets will directly inform the design of data collection instruments, for example, interview protocols and survey questionnaires will be structured to probe each key dimension (stewardship practices, servant leadership behaviours, SDT need support, and impacts of martyr narratives). Likewise, the framework provides a set of thematic categories for analysis: the facets and their sub-concepts will serve as initial coding categories when examining interview transcripts and survey data. In this way, the HRS model offers an interpretative lens that ensures coherence between what we conceptualize and what we investigate. The empirical chapters will thus test and refine this provisional model, using its concepts to organize findings and interpret catechists' experiences. By designing instruments and coding schemes around the HRS facets, we make the framework operational – demonstrating how it can be applied in practice and iteratively improved based on real-world data. As a conceptual framework, the HRS model provides the scaffold through which both qualitative and quantitative instruments are designed, ensuring that data collection and interpretation are grounded in a coherent yet flexible conceptual structure. This conceptual model is provisional; the next chapters describe how it was empirically examined and refined through qualitative and quantitative inquiry.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design

4.1. Introduction: Charting a Methodological Path

This chapter articulates and justifies the methodological architecture underpinning this doctoral study. Its purpose is to provide a transparent, rigorous, and coherent account of the research design, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies employed to investigate the formation of Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City. The research is animated by a central empirical puzzle, identified in Chapter 1 as the "paradox of service": the observation of a deeply committed, intrinsically motivated cohort of young catechists who nonetheless feel unsupported and at risk of burnout within the very formation structures designed to sustain them. To explore this paradox, the study is guided by three refined research questions that seek to understand the efficacy of current formation models, the potential of narrative pedagogies, and the role of leadership in fostering sustained volunteer motivation.

RQ1 (diagnosing formation challenges and supports) is addressed qualitatively through semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis. RQ2 (identifying organisational and pedagogical strategies aligned with HRS) draws on both phases: practice exemplars in interviews and prevalence patterns in the survey. RQ3 (testing relationships explaining volunteer flourishing) is examined quantitatively via hierarchical multiple regression, using variables operationalised from Phase-1 themes and the HRS framework. This sequencing follows our abductive, pragmatic logic: depth and meaning first (QUAL), then pattern and scope (QUAN).

Addressing the complexity of these questions, which span individual psychology, pedagogical practice, organisational culture, and theological meaning-making, demanded a research design capable of integrating both depth of understanding and breadth of validation. Consequently, this study adopts an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. This approach was selected as the optimal strategy for two primary reasons. First, the phenomenon of Gen Z catechist formation in the specific socio-political context of Vietnam is relatively under-researched, necessitating an initial phase of deep qualitative exploration to give voice to participants lived experiences, uncover culturally specific nuances, and identify key thematic domains. Second, the insights generated from this

qualitative inquiry were then used to develop and administer a quantitative survey, allowing for the measurement of key constructs, the statistical testing of emergent relationships, and the generalisation of findings to a broader population of catechists within the archdiocese.

This study is anchored in a pragmatic worldview, which prioritizes a problem-centred, real-world approach to research. As this thesis addresses a tangible pastoral crisis, the 'paradox of service' among Generation Z catechists, pragmatism offers the most suitable philosophical lens. It moves beyond abstract theoretical debates to focus on 'what works' in practice, seeking not just to understand the problem but to generate actionable solutions. This aligns perfectly with the study's ultimate goal of developing a practical and effective formation framework.

The intellectual engine driving this pragmatic inquiry is abductive logic. Unlike deductive logic, which tests pre-existing theories, or inductive logic, which builds theory from the ground up, abduction operates as an 'inference to the best explanation'. It begins with a surprising or puzzling observation and moves iteratively between empirical data and existing theory to generate the most plausible explanatory hypothesis.

This abductive process provides the definitive justification for the study's entire mixed-methods design, which unfolded as follows:

1. The research began with an 'empirical puzzle': the observation that highly motivated catechists felt profoundly unsupported by the very structures designed to help them. This is the classic starting point for abductive reasoning.
2. To understand this puzzle, an initial phase of deep qualitative exploration was necessary to uncover its nuances and the lived experiences of participants.
3. Through an iterative dialogue between the qualitative findings and established/contemporary theories in theology, psychology, and management, a best-fit explanation emerged. This abductive synthesis is articulated as the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model**.**
4. Because the HRS model was a new, conjectured explanation, its key propositions then required testing and assessment across a wider population, necessitating a subsequent quantitative phase.

Therefore, the abductive logic of inquiry leads directly and necessarily to the selection of an exploratory sequential (QUAL→QUAN) mixed-methods design. This sequence is not merely a methodological preference but the most logical and rigorous pathway to move from a real-world pastoral problem to a theoretically grounded and empirically tested solution.

This chapter will demonstrate that this methodological choice was not arbitrary but was a direct and logical consequence of the study's philosophical stance and its abductive logic of inquiry. The following sections will systematically unfold this methodological narrative. Section 4.2 establishes the philosophical foundations of the research, detailing the pragmatic worldview and abductive reasoning that guided the entire project. Section 4.3 provides a detailed exposition of the exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, justifying the sequence and integration strategy. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 offer a granular account of the procedures for the qualitative and quantitative phases, respectively, from sampling and data collection to analysis. Section 4.6 consolidates the measures taken to ensure the rigour and ethical integrity of the research. Section 4.7 presents a reflexive discussion of the researcher's positionality and the study's limitations. Finally, Section 4.8 concludes by synthesising the chapter's key points, affirming the coherence and appropriateness of the chosen methodological framework.

4.2. Research Philosophy and Logic of Inquiry

Every research project is implicitly or explicitly guided by a set of philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). This section makes these assumptions explicit, arguing that a pragmatic worldview, combined with an abductive logic of inquiry, provides the most robust and appropriate foundation for this mixed-methods study.

4.2.1. A Pragmatic Worldview

This research is grounded in a pragmatic worldview. As articulated by methodologists such as John W. Creswell (2018), pragmatism is a problem-centred philosophy that prioritises the research question over any single methodological dogma. Rather than being committed to one way of knowing, a pragmatic approach embraces pluralism, allowing the researcher to draw upon multiple methods, assumptions, and worldviews to find the most effective and practical solution to the problem at hand. In the context of this study, pragmatism provides

the essential philosophical license to integrate methods from two distinct paradigms, interpretivism and post-positivism, that are typically seen as being in opposition. This flexibility is not a sign of philosophical incoherence but a deliberate choice to use "what works" to generate a comprehensive and useful understanding of catechist formation.

4.2.2. Paradigm Integration

The study's two phases are rooted in different, yet deliberately complementary, philosophical paradigms.

The qualitative strand is grounded in an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm that treats reality as multiple, situated, and socially constructed through meanings participants create and share. Its aim is understanding rather than law-seeking explanation. Through in-depth interviews, this phase co-constructed what it means to be a Gen Z catechist in Vietnam, recognising each narrative as a valid, context-laden account of lived reality.

In contrast, the quantitative strand aligns with a positivist orientation (often termed neo-positivist in the social sciences): it assumes there is an objective reality that can be approximately known via careful operationalisation, measurement, and statistical inference. On this view, theory is evaluated by its empirical adequacy, identifying patterned relations among variables and making probabilistic claims about those relations. Accordingly, the survey operationalised key constructs from the qualitative phase (e.g., leadership support, intrinsic motivation, spiritual well-being) and tested the provisional relationships proposed by the HRS model across a wider population of catechists. This use of measurement and model testing is precisely what distinguishes a positivist logic from post-positivist or purely interpretive approaches in the philosophy of social science.

A pragmatic worldview provides the warrant for holding these paradigms together in one design. Rather than privileging a single way of knowing, pragmatism licenses methodological pluralism ordered to the problem at hand, deep, contextual meaning (QUAL) and generalisable patterns (QUANT), so as to generate useful, credible answers to the pastoral problem under study. This is exactly the integrative role pragmatism plays elsewhere in your chapter.

4.2.3 Ontological Position: A Layered, Relational Realism

This study proceeds from an ontological stance that is layered and relational. "Layered" signals that reality is not exhausted by one plane (e.g., individual cognition), but includes personal–psychological, social–institutional, ecclesial–theological, and ecological dimensions that are distinguishable yet interdependent. "Relational" underscores that persons and practices are constituted in and through relationships, familial, communal, ecclesial, and with God, rather than as atomised units. This stance coheres with the thesis's Asian pastoral framing (FABC's Pastoral Spiral), its integration with Fisher's spiritual well-being (SWB) domains, and the HRS model's emphasis on stewardship, community, and vocation.

(1) Persons as meaning-making, agentive beings (personal–psychological layer).

The qualitative strand treats catechists as meaning-makers whose lived narratives are valid interpretations of reality; their experiences are not mere opinions but situated disclosures of how ministry is encountered and inhabited (e.g., desire for authenticity, dialogical accompaniment, and modern pedagogy). Ontologically, persons are capable of agency and moral growth; their interior life (identity, purpose, vocation) is a real site of change, tracked in this study through SWB as a legitimate (and measurable) property of persons-in-community.

(2) Social structures as real and causally efficacious (social–institutional layer).

Vietnam's church–state regime, parish organisational patterns, and training arrangements are treated as real structures that enable and constrain action (e.g., decentralised delivery, permissions/registration, uneven resources). These are not only "contexts" but generative conditions shaping who becomes a catechist, how formation occurs, and which practices are viable at scale in HCMC. The study therefore infers mechanisms (e.g., apprenticeship pipelines; variability without standardised curricula) that causally pattern observed outcomes.

(3) Ecclesial reality and theological claims (ecclesial–theological layer).

The thesis assumes the real (not merely metaphorical) character of ecclesial life and divine address as they appear within Catholic self-understanding: the Pastoral Spiral is received as

the Church-in-Asia's normative way of discerning and acting in reality; grace, vocation, and lay "involvement spirituality" name genuine aspects of how Christians exist and act. This theological layer does not negate empirical analysis; it frames it, by specifying what counts as flourishing (e.g., growth in SWB domains; formation as persons, not just competence acquisition).

(4) Creation and place (ecological layer).

Following both Catholic social teaching and the Spiral's outward orientation, environmental relatedness is part of what there is. Gen-Z catechists' moral agency is formed not only in classrooms but through embodied practices (service, creation care, city-facing initiatives) that bind persons, communities, and places, corresponding to Fisher's environmental domain.

This layered realism grounds the study's main design choices:

- Ontology → Pastoral Spiral × SWB integration. If reality is layered, then formation must address multiple domains of being (personal, communal, environmental, transcendental). Mapping the Pastoral Spiral's stages onto Fisher's domains is thus ontologically apt rather than merely convenient pedagogy.
- Ontology → HRS model. If social structures are real and causally efficacious, leadership is not only interpersonal style but an enabling environment, stewardship that invests in formation, feedback, and pathways so that volunteers can sustainably flourish (the HRS construct).
- Ontology → mixed methods + abduction. A layered reality warrants multiple ways of knowing. The study therefore moves abductively between lived accounts (revealing meanings and mechanisms) and measurement (estimating patterned relations across a population) to infer a best explanation, the HRS model, and to test its components.

This thesis avoids reductive monism (e.g., collapsing reality into either subjective meaning or brute variables). It holds that (a) there are mind-independent structures and communal goods that shape ministry; (b) persons access and mediate these through interpretive horizons; and (c) ecclesial–theological claims make ontological assertions about God, grace, and vocation that are live for participants and therefore legitimate to include in explanation

and design. Such modest realism aligns with the study's pragmatic orientation, truth is what proves fit-for-purpose in accounting for the layered phenomena and guiding life-giving practice, without lapsing into mere instrumentalism.

In sum, the study's ontological commitment is to a layered and relational world in which persons, practices, structures, and grace co-inhere. Formation that ignores any layer misdescribes what there is; formation that addresses all layers, as in the Pastoral Spiral × SWB synthesis under HRS, matches the way reality is, thereby offering a credible path toward sustainable, context-true catechist development in Ho Chi Minh City.

4.2.4 The Abductive Logic of Inquiry: The Methodological Linchpin

The intellectual engine driving this entire research project is an abductive logic of inquiry. Unlike deduction (which tests a pre-existing theory) or induction (which generates a theory from raw data), abduction begins with a "surprising fact" or an empirical puzzle and seeks to find the most plausible explanation for it. This process, often described as an "inference to the best explanation," involves an iterative dialogue between empirical observations and existing theoretical concepts.

The choice of abductive logic is the central organizing principle of this thesis, explaining precisely *why* the research unfolded in its specific sequence. The process began with the identification of the study's core empirical puzzle: the "paradox of service," where highly motivated Gen Z catechists reported feeling demotivated and unsupported by the very structures meant to form them. This paradox could not be adequately explained by any single, off-the-shelf theory from theology, management, or psychology alone.

The study begins from a practical anomaly, the "paradox of service", and iteratively seeks the most plausible explanation. Early field insights and literature converged on a provisional Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model. Pragmatism legitimates combining interpretivist interviewing (to surface local meanings) with post-positivist survey testing (to examine patterned relations). Abduction therefore necessitates an exploratory sequential sequence: Phase 1 refines the candidate explanation from lived accounts; Phase 2 operationalises and probes its relationships at scale.

This abductive move makes the exploratory sequential design a logical and methodological necessity. The HRS model was not a fixed theory to be proven but a provisional solution to be empirically explored, tested, and refined. The qualitative phase was therefore designed to *explore the components* of this conjectured explanation in the lived reality of HCMC catechists, grounding its abstract concepts in their specific experiences. The subsequent quantitative phase was designed to *test and refine the relationships* between these components across a larger sample. This entire methodological structure, from the sequence of its phases to the design of its instruments, is a direct and necessary consequence of the abductive approach to theory development that lies at its heart.

4.3. An Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design (QUAL → QUANT)

This study employs an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, a two-phase approach where qualitative data collection and analysis are followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. This design is particularly well-suited for research where the initial goal is to explore a phenomenon in-depth to identify key themes and variables, which then inform the development of a quantitative instrument for broader testing and generalisation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The sequence is often denoted as QUAL → QUANT, indicating the primary role of the initial qualitative phase in shaping the subsequent quantitative phase.

4.3.1. Rationale for the Sequence

The decision to place the qualitative phase first was strategic and necessary. A careful review of the literature revealed no contextually validated instruments for assessing the formational experiences, motivational drivers, and perceptions of leadership among Vietnamese Gen Z volunteer catechists. Therefore, importing a ready-made survey normaly designed in Western and secular contexts - would have risked cultural misfit and conceptual drift. Beginning with qualitative inquiry allowed catechists, trainers and leaders to articulate their experiences in their own terms, grounding the study in lived reality; it also surfaced locally resonant language and metaphors, such as the *"salary of the soul"* and the *"yellow-light regime"*, which are indispensable for interpretation. Crucially, this phase enabled the theoretical facets of the Human Resource Stewardship model to be examined in practice, translating abstractions into observable phenomena. On that basis, the qualitative corpus informed and justified the development and piloting of the quantitative instrument, ensuring

that items were relevant, comprehensible, and faithful to local meaning. This sequencing strengthens face, content and construct validity while remaining consistent with the study's abductive, problem-driven logic.

4.3.2. The Two-Phase Process and Integration Strategy

The selection of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design is highly appropriate for this study's objectives. This design is ideal when a topic is under-researched and when the primary goal is to develop a new theory or instrument from initial qualitative data, conditions that perfectly describe this research. A careful review of the literature revealed no contextually validated instruments for assessing the specific formational experiences and motivational drivers of Vietnamese Gen Z catechists.

Therefore, beginning with a quantitative phase, as in an explanatory sequential (QUAN→QUAL) design, was not feasible. Such an approach would have required imposing pre-existing, likely Western-centric, constructs that may not have been relevant to the participants' lived reality. By starting with qualitative inquiry, this study ensured that the subsequent quantitative instrument was grounded in the authentic voices, experiences, and locally resonant concepts (e.g., the 'salary of the soul') that emerged from the participants themselves, thereby strengthening the validity of the entire study.

Importantly, the Phase 1 interview guide did not emerge in isolation from the earlier chapters. It was explicitly constructed as a bridge between the conceptual gaps and theoretical prompts identified in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) and the emerging HRS framework. The review highlighted four interrelated domains that were insufficiently addressed in existing work: (1) the spiritual well-being and holistic formation of catechists, drawing on Fisher's four domains and the FABC pastoral spiral; (2) pedagogical practice and the limited use of narrative, particularly the formative potential of the Vietnamese Martyrs; (3) leadership and human resource management in faith-based volunteer settings, including the absence of a stewardship-oriented HR model; and (4) the specific generational profile, motivations, and socio-cultural pressures faced by Gen Z volunteers. These domains were translated directly into sections of the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix D). For example, because the literature identified spiritual well-being and psychological accompaniment as neglected, the guide begins by asking participants to define spiritual well-being and to describe what supports or undermines it in their context. Likewise,

evidence of a pedagogical crisis and under-used narrative resources informed detailed questions on training quality, teaching methods, and the perceived impact of martyr stories on vocation and resilience. The lack of robust parish HR frameworks led to questions about recruitment, role clarity, supervision, recognition, and reasons for leaving, while the theoretical emphasis on Gen Z's quest for authenticity and agency shaped questions on motivation, identity, and balancing ministry with study and work. In this way, the interview instrument operationalised the conceptual and empirical gaps identified in Chapter 2, demonstrating that Phase 1 data collection was a direct outgrowth of prior research insights rather than a free-standing exploration.

The research unfolded through a clear, two-phase process with integration occurring at key junctures:

- **Phase 1 (QUAL):** In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of participants to explore the core themes of the research, using an interview guide structured around the key conceptual domains identified in the Literature Review (Chapter 2) and detailed in Appendix D.
- **Connecting Step (Integration Point 1):** The thematic analysis of the qualitative data directly informed the design of the quantitative survey. Emergent themes were used to create new, context-specific scales (e.g., measuring the perceived impact of martyr narratives), while the language used by participants helped to refine the wording of all survey items for clarity and cultural appropriateness.
- **Phase 2 (QUAN):** The survey instrument, developed from the qualitative findings, was administered to a larger sample of catechists to explore the prevalence of the identified themes, investigate the relationships between key variables, and further refine the explanatory power of the provisional HRS model.
- **Final Interpretation (Integration Point 2):** In the final stage of analysis (Chapter 7), the findings from both phases were brought into a comprehensive "dialogue." Qualitative narratives were used to explain, illustrate, and provide depth to the quantitative patterns, while the statistical results were used to confirm, generalise, and provide a broader context for the qualitative insights. The use of joint displays was a key technique for visualizing and synthesizing these integrated findings.

This structured, sequential design ensures that the study benefits from the complementary strengths of both methodologies, the depth and contextual richness of qualitative inquiry

and the breadth and generalisability of quantitative analysis. The following table provides a concise overview of this design.

Integration occurs (i) between phases, where Phase-1 themes and participant language directly shaped item wording and new context-specific scales, and (ii) after analysis, where joint displays and side-by-side narrative–statistical weaving interpret how qualitative mechanisms illuminate quantitative patterns and vice versa. This ensures constructs remain culturally faithful while still analytically tractable.

Phase	Purpose	Method	Sample	Analysis	Outcome
Phase 1 (Qualitative)	To explore lived experiences, identify key themes, ground the HRS model, and inform instrument development.	Semi-structured interviews with catechists, trainers, leaders, scholars, and government officials.	33 participants selected via purposeful and snowball sampling.	Systematic thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023).	A rich, contextualized understanding of catechist formation and a validated survey instrument.
Phase 2 (Quantitative)	To explore the prevalence of key constructs, investigate relationships within the provisional HRS model, and elaborate on qualitative findings across a broader population.	Structured survey questionnaire with Likert-scale items.	305 catechists recruited via convenience and stratified sampling.	Descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation, hierarchical multiple regression).	Statistical exploration of the HRS model's key relationships and a generalizable profile of Gen Z catechists.

Table 4.1 Overview of the Exploratory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design

4.4. Phase One: Qualitative Exploration of the Catechist Experience

The first phase of the research was dedicated to a deep, qualitative exploration of the formational landscape for Gen Z catechists. This section provides a detailed account of the participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedures employed during this crucial exploratory stage.

4.4.1. Participant Recruitment and Sampling

To ensure the collection of rich and relevant data, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed to select "information-rich" cases, individuals who, due to their roles and experiences, could offer deep insights into the research questions. The recruitment process was supplemented by snowball sampling, where initial participants recommended other potential interviewees who met the study's criteria.

The final sample consisted of 33 participants drawn from five key stakeholder groups: Gen Z catechists (13), experienced catechists (5), trainers and scholars (5), clergy and diocesan leaders (5), and a government official (5). Within these groups, diversity was actively sought. For instance, catechists were selected from parishes of varying sizes (urban and rural) and with different levels of experience. A particularly strategic sampling criterion was the inclusion of catechists from different "Primary Formation Pathways", specifically, those formed predominantly within the highly structured Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM) system versus those formed through other parish-based or reflective programmes. This allowed for a comparative analysis of different formational experiences and their perceived impacts. The interview process continued until thematic saturation was achieved, the point at which new interviews ceased to generate new or significant insights.

Overall, thirty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive variation to capture role, tenure, and parish context. In qualitative inquiry, adequacy is judged by information power rather than a fixed N; with a focused aim, a specific sample, and strong dialogue quality, fewer interviews can yield sufficient analytic depth (Malterud et al., 2016). Empirical guidance suggests many studies reach code saturation within 9–17 interviews (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink et al., 2017). Given the heterogeneity of stakeholders here (catechists, trainers, clergy) and the abductive, reflexive thematic approach (Braun &

Clarke, 2006; 2019), an N=33 was appropriate to ensure both breadth and depth while enabling iterative checking of developing interpretations.

4.4.2. Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary method of data collection in Phase One was the in-depth, semi-structured interview. This method was chosen for its ability to combine a consistent line of inquiry across participants with the flexibility to probe emergent themes and follow individual narratives. In line with the study's abductive and exploratory nature, the initial interview guide was not designed to test a pre-existing theory. Instead, it was developed from a broad review of the literature in related fields, including non-profit organisation management, volunteerism, human resource management in the volunteer sector, and role model pedagogy. Concretely, Chapter 2's identification of gaps in spiritual well-being and holistic formation informed the section of the guide that asks participants to define spiritual well-being and to reflect on what nurtures or erodes it in their own lives and among their peers. The literature on narrative pedagogy and hagiography, especially the under-utilised potential of the Vietnamese Martyrs as culturally resonant role models, led to targeted questions about how martyr stories are currently presented in training and how they affect catechists' sense of vocation and resilience. Likewise, scholarship on volunteer management and stewardship, together with studies on Gen Z's expectations of leadership, shaped the blocks of questions on recruitment, training, leadership style, feedback, recognition, and reasons for staying or leaving ministry. The questions were open-ended, designed to elicit rich narratives about the catechists' experiences, motivations, challenges, and perceptions of leadership and formation, without being constrained by a specific theoretical framework. This approach ensured that the inquiry remained grounded in the participants' own perspectives, allowing for the subsequent emergence of the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model during the data analysis phase, as described in the following section. The full semi-structured interview schedule is provided in Appendix D, where the clustering of questions mirrors the conceptual domains highlighted in Chapter 2, making the literature–instrument alignment transparent.

All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese (≈45–60 minutes), recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Key excerpts used for instrument wording were translated and back-checked for meaning-equivalence; uncertainties were resolved by returning to audio and, where needed, brief member-checks with participants.

4.4.3. Data Analysis: A Reflexive and Abductively Oriented Thematic Approach

The qualitative data were examined through reflexive thematic analysis, adhering to Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because it acknowledges that themes do not passively 'emerge' from data but are actively interpreted by the researcher. A critical component of this process was reflexivity, the ongoing examination of how my own positionality as a Vietnamese Catholic and former catechist shaped the analysis. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research to document how my background influenced which patterns were noticed, how codes were generated, and how themes were interpreted. This process of critical self-awareness was essential for ensuring the analytical narrative remained grounded in the participants' experiences while transparently acknowledging the interpretive lens through which it was constructed. The coding process proceeded iteratively, engaging with the data at both semantic (surface meaning) and latent (interpretive) levels. This involved a constant and dynamic movement between the empirical data and relevant mid-range theories that informed the HRS model, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), servant leadership, and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as applied through narrative pedagogy. Candidate themes were developed from these codes and were then rigorously stress-tested against deviant cases and refined to yield a coherent and robust explanatory account.

To ensure methodological transparency and preclude HARKing (hypothesizing after the results are known), a rigorous procedural protocol was strictly adhered to (Kerr, 1998). Theoretical refinements were time-stamped, and crucially, the quantitative survey instrument was finalised and "frozen" before the deeper, formal qualitative analysis proceeded. This ensures that themes that emerged later in the qualitative analysis did not retroactively alter the survey or its analysis plan, clarifying the exploratory and developmental status of the quantitative phase.

The final outputs comprise an analytic narrative, a thematic map, and an abductively inferred, working explanatory model. This model tentatively aligns qualitative themes with the quantitative constructs developed from them and will be examined and refined through joint displays and the integrated discussion in Chapter 7 (with attention to convergence, complementarity, and divergence). This rigorous and iterative analytical process ensured

that the rich narrative data from the interviews were transformed into a credible and insightful understanding of the phenomenon under study.

4.5. Phase Two: Quantitative Exploration and Elaboration

The second phase of the research was designed to quantitatively explore, elaborate upon, and assess the prevalence of the key themes that emerged from the qualitative exploration. This section details the development of the survey instrument, the sampling and data collection procedures, the operationalization of key variables, and the statistical strategy used for analysis.

4.5.1. Instrument Development

A structured survey questionnaire was created to serve as the primary data collection tool for Phase Two. The development of this instrument was a critical point of integration in the mixed-methods design, directly reflecting the study's abductive and exploratory sequential nature. It was constructed through a multi-stage process that occurred *after* initial qualitative data familiarization but *before* the final conceptualization of the HRS model.

- **Generation from Early Qualitative Insights:** The initial pool of items was generated from themes that emerged during the first and second steps of the qualitative analysis, data familiarization and initial coding. For example, recurring narratives about feeling unsupported or the inspirational role of martyr stories were translated into Likert-scale items to explore their prevalence. This process was guided by the initial literature review on volunteer management and pedagogy, not the fully formed HRS model.
- **Adaptation of Validated Scales:** For well-established psychological constructs identified in the initial literature review, such as the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness from Self-Determination Theory, items were adapted from existing, validated scales to ensure psychometric robustness.
- **Creation of Context-Specific Items:** New, context-specific items and scales were developed to operationalize key concepts emerging from the early qualitative data. This included items to assess the perceived impact of the Vietnamese Martyr narratives and to measure perceptions of leadership support and training quality.

Crucially, these scales were developed to explore the emergent themes from the ground up, prior to their synthesis into the final facets of the HRS model.

- **Pilot Testing and Refinement:** The draft questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese and then back translated to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence. It was then pilot tested with a small group of catechists to assess its clarity, length, and face validity. Feedback from the pilot phase was used to make final revisions to the instrument before its full deployment.

Need Support was captured with two indicators aligned to Phase-1 themes: (a) availability/quality of mentorship and (b) peer learning opportunities within formation (e.g., "Peer learning is part of my ongoing development"). These indicators complement *Training Quality* (relevance; balance of pedagogy with spiritual growth) and *Leadership Support* (care; transparent communication).

A key strength of the exploratory sequential design is the development of a contextually grounded survey instrument. To ensure transparency in this process, the following table provides examples of how specific themes and quotes from the qualitative phase directly inspired the creation of items for the quantitative survey.

Qualitative Theme/Quote	Inspired Quantitative Survey Item (Q#)
Theme: The "Salary of the Soul" (Intrinsic Motivation). Quote: "When you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay."	Item: "I am happy for my contribution not to be regconised except by God alone." (Q13.15)
Theme: Pedagogical Mismatch. Quote: "The formator just stands at the front and talks... no interaction... It feels like being back in a history class..."	Item: "Training content is adapted to Gen Z's needs and learning styles." (Q11.2)
Theme: Untapped Potential of Martyr Narratives. Quote: "When telling martyrs' stories, we should not focus on their death but on their life journey... a very human life."	Item: "Stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in the training to inspire my sense of mission and spiritual resilience."

Table 4.2 Qualitative Themes and Quotations Mapped to Survey Items

This direct mapping provides concrete evidence of the integration between the research phases and enhances the survey's content and construct validity.

4.5.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for the quantitative phase was the entire cohort of catechists in the HCMC Archdiocese, estimated to be approximately 5,300 individuals. While a true random sample was not feasible due to logistical constraints, a multi-pronged recruitment strategy was employed to achieve a large and reasonably representative sample. The survey was distributed online via the JISC platform and in paper form where necessary. Parish coordinators, diocesan offices, and catechist social media groups were utilized to disseminate the survey link widely. Using convenience and stratified sampling across deaneries, a final sample of 305 was obtained. This sample size provides sufficient statistical power for the planned analyses, including descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The sampling frame was the archdiocesan catechist cohort (≈5,300). A priori calculations suggested ~350 responses for ±5% precision at 95% confidence; the achieved N=305 provides adequate power for the planned regression models and descriptive aims.

With population $N \approx 5{,}300$, sample $n = 305$, worst-case proportion $p = 0.50$, and 95% confidence ($z = 1.96$), the margin of error is:

$$e = z\sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n} \cdot \frac{N-n}{N-1}} = 1.96\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{305} \cdot \frac{5{,}300-305}{5{,}300-1}} \approx 0.0545,$$

i.e., ±5.45% at 95% (about ±4.57% at 90%). For comparison, the size needed for ±5% at 95% under the same assumptions is ~358; thus 305 is near-target precision for population-level proportions. Using Green's (1991) criteria:

$$\text{overall } R^2\text{: } n \geq 50 + 8m \text{ and individual predictors: } n \geq 104 + m,$$

where m is the number of predictors. Even with $m = 10 - 15$, thresholds are 130–170 (overall) and 114–119 (individual). $n = 305$ comfortably exceeds both, indicating adequacy for the planned regression models.

Note: Because recruitment was not a pure simple random sample, the MOE above should be read as a benchmark; representativeness is supported by broad coverage across deaneries.

Overall, The survey yielded N=305, which is adequate for the planned ordinal logistic models. Rules of thumb for regression recommend at least 10 events per predictor (EPV) to

mitigate small-sample bias (Peduzzi et al., 1996), with later work showing many models remain stable at lower EPV when effects are moderate and predictors are not highly collinear (Vittinghoff & McCulloch, 2007; Harrell, 2015). Using Green's (1991) heuristic for multiple regression ($N \geq 50 + 8m$) as a conservative benchmark, our sample exceeds the requirement for models with up to ~32 predictors. For scale work, N=300+ is commonly regarded as "good–very good" for factor-analytic checks (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Henson & Roberts, 2006).

4.5.3. Variables and Measures

Dependent variable. The outcome is *Happiness in ministry*: "I am happy to be a catechist" (Q13_17), a five-point Likert item. Chapter 6 shows the distribution is strongly ceiling-skewed (≈80% in the top category). For modelling, the DV is treated as ordinal and, to stabilise cells, collapsed to three ordered categories (Unhappy = 1–2; Neutral = 3; Happy = 4–5).

Theory-driven composite predictors. Guided by the qualitative phase and the HRS framework, five multi-item indices were constructed and demonstrated acceptable-to-excellent reliability ($\alpha \approx .79–.91$): Personal Spiritual Growth (Q10_1–Q10_6), Training Fit–Balance (selected Q11 items), Vocation Clarity (Q11_14–Q11_16), Leadership Care & Communication (Q13_10–Q13_14), and Psychological Accompaniment (selected Q11 items). Conceptual definitions and alphas are reported in Chapter 6 (Table 6.6).

Item-level predictors. In addition to composites, individual items were retained as candidate predictors to capture granular effects (e.g., pride in serving, meaning despite challenges from Q10; training adaptation from Q11; leadership communication/trust from Q13; community bonding/commitment from Q15). These item pools are the same sets later examined in Chapter 6 so that Ch.4 and Ch.6 remain aligned. Demographics include age, gender, and years of catechist experience. Their inclusion is justified in Chapter 6 and retained in the specification of models described below.

Qualitative Theme/Quote	Inspired Quantitative Survey Item (Q#)
Theme: The "Salary of the Soul" (Intrinsic Motivation). Quote: "When you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay."	Item: "I am happy for my contribution not to be regconised except by God alone." (Q13.15)

Qualitative Theme/Quote	Inspired Quantitative Survey Item (Q#)
Theme: Pedagogical Mismatch. Quote: "The formator just stands at the front and talks... no interaction... It feels like being back in a history class..."	Item: "Training content is adapted to Gen Z's needs and learning styles." (Q11.2)
Theme: Untapped Potential of Martyr Narratives. Quote: "When telling martyrs' stories, we should not focus on their death but on their life journey... a very human life."	Item: "Stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in the training to inspire my sense of mission and spiritual resilience."

Table 4.3 Key Constructs and Measures in the Quantitative Survey

4.5.4. Statistical Analysis Strategy

The dependent variable is the item *"I am happy to be a catechist"* (Q13_17), measured on a five-point Likert scale. Because the distribution is extremely ceiling-skewed (≈80% in the top category; see Chapter 6, Table 6.5), responses were collapsed to three ordered categories (Unhappy = 1–2; Neutral = 3; Happy = 4–5) and analysed with ordinal logistic regression (PLUM). Given the dominance of the highest category, all models used the negative log–log link, which improves discrimination when the top category is most probable.

To connect theory-level constructs with item-level signals and a comprehensive specification, the analysis proceeds in three comparative stages reported in Chapter 6:

1. **Model 1 (composites):** five theory-driven composite indices as predictors (with demographics considered);
2. **Model 2 (items):** the constituent survey items entered individually.
3. **Model 3 (comprehensive):** a wide candidate set refined to a parsimonious specification.

The proportional-odds (parallel lines) assumption was checked for each model. As reported in Chapter 6, Model 1 returned a borderline result (p = .019) and is interpreted cautiously; Model 2 and Model 3 were non-significant on the Test of Parallel Lines (p = .508 and p = .982), supporting proportional odds. Goodness-of-fit tests (Pearson/Deviance) were acceptable across models.

All three models were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Explanatory power increased from theory-level composites to item-level and comprehensive specifications: Nagelkerke $R^2 \approx 0.353$ (Model 1) → 0.606 (Model 2) → 0.631 (Model 3), with corresponding improvements in −2LL and McFadden's R^2 (see Chapter 6, Table 6.8).

Predictor sets (brief alignment with Chapter 6).

- **Composites (Model 1):** Personal Spiritual Growth; Training Fit–Balance; Vocation Clarity; Leadership Care/Communication; Psychological Accompaniment (reliabilities ≈ .79–.91; Table 6.6).
- **Items (Model 2):** granularity from Q10 (personal/spiritual impact), Q11 (training), Q13 (leadership & support), and Q15 (community/commitment), enabling detection of suppressor/hygiene patterns (e.g., leadership communication/trust items behaving context-sensitively).
- **Comprehensive (Model 3):** full candidate pool pruned to a stable, interpretable set with the highest overall fit reported in Chapter 6.

Age, gender, and years of catechist experience were explored; where they lacked independent predictive value, they were omitted from final specifications for parsimony (retained in tables when estimated). All multi-item scales were coded so higher scores reflect a greater presence of the construct; negatively worded items were reverse scored prior to modelling.

A supplementary, atheoretical "kitchen-sink" attempt using an alternative outcome (Q10_5: prayer growth) failed to converge due to quasi-separation, underscoring the value of theory-guided, parsimonious specifications documented above. *(For full estimates, diagnostics, and fit indices, see Chapter 6: Sections 6.9.4–6.10.6; Tables 6.5–6.11.)*

It is important to acknowledge a methodological consideration in the quantitative phase: the use of single-item measures for several key constructs, including the primary dependent variable ('Happiness') and the core motivational predictors ('Mission Alignment' and 'Intrinsic Satisfaction'). While multi-item scales are generally preferred for their psychometric robustness, single-item measures were deemed appropriate in this context to reduce respondent burden in a lengthy survey administered to a volunteer population. The items were designed for high face validity, capturing the core essence of the constructs as

they emerged from the qualitative data. This choice, however, has implications for reliability and the variance that can be captured. The potential impact of this limitation will be discussed further in the study's concluding chapter.

4.6. Ensuring Rigour and Ethical Integrity

A commitment to methodological rigour and ethical integrity was paramount throughout this research. Specific strategies were employed in both the qualitative and quantitative phases to ensure the quality, trustworthiness, and ethical conduct of the study.

4.6.1. Qualitative Trustworthiness

In keeping with the interpretivist orientation of the qualitative phase, rigour was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness. Credibility was addressed through triangulation: interview accounts were systematically corroborated with field notes and pertinent documents (e.g., parish training curricula), enabling convergence across data sources. Transferability was supported by providing thick description of participants, setting, and the cultural–ecclesial context of the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, so that readers can judge the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail that records the entire research pathway, interview protocols, coding decisions, analytic memos, and key methodological choices, thereby rendering the process transparent and reviewable. Confirmability was promoted through an explicit programme of reflexivity (see §4.7) to monitor researcher influence, complemented by external peer debriefing in which an independent reviewer examined the coding framework and thematic interpretations to provide an arm's-length check on analytic plausibility. In parallel, quantitative quality was underwritten by internal-consistency checks for composite measures, diagnostics of model assumptions for regression analyses, and sensitivity analyses that substituted a composite support index and an alternative outcome (Personal Spiritual Growth), mirroring the triangulation and audit logic employed in the qualitative strand.

4.6.2. Quantitative Reliability and Validity

For the quantitative phase, rigour was established using standard psychometric criteria. Reliability was examined via internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha computed for all

composite scales and values at or above .70 treated as acceptable for established measures. Validity was addressed on multiple fronts. Content validity was built into instrument design through expert review by pastoral educators and theologians, who assessed item relevance, coverage, and clarity. Construct validity was then probed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA): items on newly developed scales were evaluated for coherent, theoretically meaningful loadings, with attention to sampling adequacy, factor retention, cross-loadings, and interpretability. Together, these procedures provide evidence that the scales are both consistent and aligned with the constructs they are intended to measure.

4.6.3. Ethical Protocols

The study was conducted in strict accordance with the Belmont Report's principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Formal ethical approval was granted by the St Mary's University, Twickenham Research Ethics Committee and by the relevant authorities of the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City.

Participants received a comprehensive information sheet and gave informed consent prior to any data collection, written consent for interviews and implied consent for the survey through completion. Participation was explicitly voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by removing direct identifiers from transcripts and datasets and by storing all materials securely on encrypted drives with restricted access. The protocol was designed to minimise harm: sensitive topics were approached with care, and participants were reminded that they could decline to answer any question.

4.7. Researcher Positionality and Study Limitations

I approached the field as a Vietnamese Catholic and former catechist. This insider status facilitated access, rapport, and a nuanced reading of cultural–theological cues; it also introduced risks of assumption, over-familiarity, and deference in interviews. To surface and mitigate these risks, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis, engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues outside the Vietnamese cultural context, and used member-checking of thematic interpretations with participants to ensure

that meanings remained grounded in their accounts. These steps formed an explicit reflexive practice to enhance trustworthiness.

The quantitative sample was recruited through non-probability channels in one archdiocese (HCMC), which constrains statistical generalisability beyond this setting and carries a risk of self-selection bias despite broad parish/deanery coverage. All measures are self-report and the design is cross-sectional, so observed relationships are associational rather than causal. The primary outcome ("I am happy to be a catechist," Q13_17) displays a pronounced ceiling (≈80% selecting the top category), which restricts variance; analyses therefore treated the outcome as ordinal and used an asymmetric link to model the upper-skewed distribution. Several theoretically central constructs (e.g., Mission Alignment, Intrinsic Satisfaction, Happiness) are single-item indicators, which limits reliability relative to multi-item scales; this is balanced by the acceptable-to-excellent internal consistency of the composite indices used elsewhere in the analysis. Future work should employ probability sampling where feasible, track behavioural outcomes (e.g., retention) longitudinally, and expand single-item constructs to fuller scales to strengthen inference and generalisability.

4.7.1. Researcher Positionality

The researcher approached this study from the position of a "cultural and religious insider", a Vietnamese Catholic and a former catechist with direct experience of the formational context under investigation. This insider status offered significant advantages, including facilitating access to participants, establishing a high degree of trust and rapport, and enabling a nuanced understanding of the cultural and theological subtleties within the data.

However, this positionality also carried potential risks, including the possibility of unconscious bias in data interpretation or the risk that participants might provide socially desirable answers. To mitigate these risks, several reflexive strategies were systematically employed. A detailed reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research process to document personal assumptions and emotional responses. Peer debriefing with academic supervisors and colleagues from outside the Vietnamese cultural context provided a crucial external check on the analysis. Finally, the rigorous use of member checking ensured that

the interpretations remained grounded in the participants' intended meanings. This ongoing process of critical self-reflection was essential for enhancing the study's trustworthiness.

4.7.2. Study Limitations

This study's conclusions should be read within several boundaries. First, generalizability is constrained by the setting: the research was conducted in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City. Although the principles may be transferable, the specific results may not extend to other Vietnamese dioceses or cultural contexts without careful adaptation. Second, sampling relied on non-probabilistic procedures (purposeful and convenience), yielding information-rich but non-representative samples; self-selection bias was mitigated through recruitment across multiple parishes and roles, yet it cannot be ruled out. Third, the research design was cross-sectional, offering a useful snapshot but not permitting definitive causal inference; observed links among leadership, motivation, and happiness are therefore correlational. Fourth, measurement depended on self-report, which is susceptible to common-method variance and social-desirability effects. In addition, the primary dependent variable in the quantitative strand, self-reported "happiness", displayed a marked ceiling effect, with most respondents reporting very high scores; this restricted variance likely attenuated the estimated effects of some predictors. Taken together, these limitations delineate the scope of inference and point to priorities for future work (e.g., probabilistic sampling, longitudinal designs, multi-method measures, and outcomes with greater dispersion).

4.8. Conclusion: A Coherent Methodological Framework

This chapter has detailed the methodological framework designed to navigate the complexities of researching Gen Z catechist formation in Vietnam. The choice of an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, grounded in a pragmatic philosophy and driven by an abductive logic of inquiry, has been shown to be a coherent, rigorous, and uniquely appropriate strategy for addressing the research questions.

The methodology was not a rigid, pre-determined template but a flexible and responsive architecture. The abductive process of moving from an empirical puzzle to a conjectured theoretical solution (the HRS model) logically necessitated the QUAL → quan sequence. The initial qualitative phase provided the rich, contextual data needed to ground the theory in lived experience and to develop a valid quantitative instrument. The subsequent

quantitative phase then allowed for the testing and refinement of the model's key relationships across a broader sample.

By systematically integrating deep qualitative understanding with robust quantitative exploration, the methodology successfully provided a solid empirical foundation for the development of the Human Resource Stewardship model. The detailed procedures for data collection, analysis, and ethical conduct described in this chapter demonstrate a commitment to transparency and rigour, ensuring that the findings presented in the subsequent chapters are both credible and trustworthy. This coherent methodological framework has thus enabled the study to move beyond mere description to offer a nuanced, evidence-based, and theoretically innovative contribution to the field.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Findings: Voices from the Field on Catechist Formation in Vietnam

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings derived from a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Generation Z (Gen Z) volunteer catechists, experienced catechetical formators, including clergy, religious, and lay leaders, and socio-political experts within the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The primary objective of this chapter is to move beyond a mere description of participant responses to offer a deep, interpretive analysis of the lived realities, systemic challenges, and profound aspirations that define the landscape of contemporary catechetical ministry in Vietnam. As established in the preceding chapters, the formation of young catechists stands at a critical juncture, caught between the inertia of traditional paradigms and the complex needs of a digitally native, authenticity-seeking generation. This chapter gives voice to those on the front lines of this challenge, providing the empirical foundation upon which a renewed model of catechist formation can be built.

The analysis is grounded in a rigorous methodological framework, employing an abductive logic of inquiry as outlined in Chapter 3. This approach facilitates an iterative dialogue between the empirical data gathered from the field and the theoretical constructs of the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model. Following the systematic six-step thematic analysis process proposed by Naeem et al. (2023) and deeply informed by the reflexive approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), this chapter seeks to generate an "inference to the best explanation" for the complex phenomena observed in the data. The analytical process unfolds through six distinct yet interconnected stages: (1) deep immersion in the transcribed data and the careful selection of significant quotations; (2) the identification of keywords that encapsulate core concepts; (3) the systematic coding of data segments to capture their essential meaning; (4) the clustering of codes into broader, emergent thematic domains; (5) the conceptual interpretation of these themes in light of the HRS theoretical framework; and finally, (6) the development of an integrative conceptual model that synthesizes the findings into a coherent whole. This process is not linear but recursive, involving constant movement

between the dataset and the evolving analysis to refine themes and ensure they are robustly grounded in the participants' own words.

To ensure analytical transparency and to honour the authenticity of participants' experiences, this chapter includes extensive verbatim quotations. All excerpts were translated from Vietnamese into English by the author (with occasional minor edits for readability), and are presented as the primary evidence for the thematic claims advanced. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality; brief bracketed clarifications and ellipses indicate the author's additions or omissions without altering meaning. This commitment to "thick description" and "multivocality" is a cornerstone of high-quality qualitative research, aiming to provide readers with a resonant and credible account of the participants' world (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Each quotation is attributed to an anonymized participant code (e.g., GZC-03 = Gen-Z Catechist 03; CLG-02 = Clergy 02; SCH-05 = Scholar 05), rather than to names or identifiable roles. This coding preserves confidentiality while still signalling the speaker's perspective (catechist, clergy, scholar, government). All quotations were translated by the author; minor bracketed clarifications and ellipses indicate non-substantive edits.

The findings of this chapter are systematically organized to directly address the three refined research questions that guide this study. The analysis begins by answering the first research question, exploring the extent to which current formation models meet the needs of Gen Z catechists for holistic spiritual well-being. It examines the profound disconnect between outdated pedagogical methods and the catechists' yearning for a more integrated, person-centred approach. The chapter then addresses the second research question, investigating how narrative pedagogies, particularly those that "re-story" the Vietnamese Martyrs, can shape vocational identity and resilience. Finally, the analysis turns to the third research question, providing a detailed examination of how a leadership ethos grounded in Stewardship and Servant Leadership is critical for satisfying volunteers' core psychological needs and fostering long-term, autonomous motivation.

The chapter culminates in a comprehensive conceptual synthesis that weaves these distinct lines of inquiry together. This synthesis demonstrates, through abductive inference, the powerful alignment between the empirical findings and the four facets of the HRS model, Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social

Cognitive/Narrative Theory. Ultimately, this chapter provides a robust, data-driven justification for the HRS framework, setting the stage for the detailed discussion and practical recommendations presented in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The participant codes in Table 5.1 follow a one-to-one correspondence with the interviewees (n = 33). Each code (e.g., GZC-03, EC-02, SCH-05, CLG-01, GOV-04) uniquely identifies an anonymized participant and indicates their group (Gen Z Catechist, Experienced Catechist, Scholar, Clergy, Government). All quotations and analytic references map to a single coded participant, ensuring clarity and auditability while preserving confidentiality; no names, parishes, or other direct identifiers are reported.

Participant Code	Participant Group	Anonymized Descriptor
GZC-01	Gen Z Catechist	University student (Communications); runs parish social media; peer-to-peer digital evangelization; advocates hybrid learning modules.
GZC-02	Gen Z Catechist	Female undergraduate (Education); focuses on classroom pedagogy, lesson planning, parent communication; requests regular feedback/mentoring.
GZC-03	Gen Z Catechist	Male engineering student; EYM *huynh trưởng* pipeline to catechesis; balances study/work; seeks flexible scheduling and clearer pathways.
GZC-04	Gen Z Catechist	Young professional (business/retail); reports burnout and time-pressure; asks for autonomy and role clarity to avoid "task-doer" trap.
GZC-05	Gen Z Catechist	LGBT-identifying volunteer; emphasises safe spaces, accompaniment, and theology of vocation; promotes inclusive language in catechesis.
GZC-06	Gen Z Catechist	Migrant from Mekong Delta; teaches children of migrant workers; notes socio-economic barriers and irregular attendance.
GZC-07	Gen Z Catechist	Post-COVID digital adopter; proposes blended/online catechist training; highlights inflexibility of fixed, offline-only systems.
GZC-08	Gen Z Catechist	Returning catechist after a pause; shares doubts and vocational discernment; values spiritual mentorship and retreats.
GZC-09	Gen Z Catechist	Choir/music ministry lead; integrates music, storytelling, and media; promotes narrative pedagogy to engage attention.
GZC-10	Gen Z Catechist	RCIA aide for youth/young adults; focuses on identity, belonging, and "white martyrdom" as a resilience frame.

Participant Code	Participant Group	Anonymized Descriptor
GZC-11	Gen Z Catechist	Catechist in industrial-zone parish; teaches children from interfaith families; emphasises practical ethics and family outreach.
EC-01	Experienced Catechist	Head catechist (15+ years); coordinates parish-level training; mentors young volunteers; sees EYM as leadership pipeline.
EC-02	Experienced Catechist	Former catechist who left due to burnout/conflict; critical on leadership culture; calls for servant leadership and clearer roles.
EC-03	Experienced Catechist	Parish training coordinator; organises monthly workshops; limited materials; collaborates with religious orders for content.
EC-04	Experienced Catechist	RCIA coordinator; develops adult catechesis; urges narrative use of Vietnamese Martyrs linked to contemporary dilemmas.
EC-05	Experienced Catechist	Retired schoolteacher; brings pedagogy and child-protection practices; advocates classroom observation and feedback loops.
EC-06	Experienced Catechist	Former rural mission catechist now urban; mediates cultural adaptation; focuses on migrant youth and parents.
EC-07	Experienced Catechist	Deanery-level moderator; collates parish data; pilots shared curriculum and mentoring across parishes.
SCH-01	Scholar	HR/leadership scholar; advises on volunteer lifecycle and Human Resource Stewardship; emphasises trust and inclusion.
SCH-02	Scholar	Historian/sociologist; analyses Vietnamese Church–state history and civic contribution; frames “negotiated religiosity.”
SCH-03	Scholar	Education/pedagogy specialist; critiques rote methods; promotes experiential and dialogical learning.
SCH-04	Scholar	Psychologist; studies media/KOL influence; applies Bandura/SCT to catechist modelling and identity formation.
SCH-05	Scholar	Political scientist; examines Law on Belief and Religion and administrative pathways for permissions/registration.
CLG-01	Clergy	Parish priest; extensive youth formation; integrates the Pastoral Spiral in parish planning; supports servant leadership.
CLG-02	Clergy	Religious priest; focuses on spirituality, discernment, accompaniment; develops retreats on “white martyrdom” resilience.
CLG-03	Clergy	Religious nun; oversees training/certification; navigates permissions and property issues.

Participant Code	Participant Group	Anonymized Descriptor
CLG-04	Clergy	Seminary/formation faculty; comments on curriculum, Scripture foundations, and mentoring of lay leaders.
CLG-05	Clergy	Deanery youth chaplain; organises large events; critiques "camp & projects" culture vs. theological depth.
GOV-01	Government Official	Journalist at a state-affiliated outlet; covers religion/social policy; perspective on media guidelines affecting church activities.
GOV-02	Government Official	Public school teacher (primary); comments on after-school activity rules and parish–school coordination.
GOV-03	Government Official	Public school teacher (secondary); notes moral/values education and permissions for student participation.
GOV-04	Government Official	Public school teacher (civics/literature); experience with parent engagement and extracurricular approvals.
GOV-05	Government Official	Youth Union representative & Education–Training liaison; coordinates permissions and youth programmes involving parishes.

Table 5.1 Participant Demographics and Codes

This approach was selected to facilitate a rigorous and compelling analysis focused on identifying patterns across cases. With 33 individually coded participants, the chapter can trace themes both within and across groups (e.g., Gen-Z catechists, clergy, scholars), enhancing thematic clarity and analytic depth (Willig, 2008). Illustrative quotations are drawn from specific anonymized codes (e.g., GZC-03, CLG-02, SCH-05) to exemplify recurring viewpoints while preserving auditability from evidence to claim. The analysis moves beyond description to interpretation and synthesis, comparing convergences and divergences across participants to delineate the core perspectives that structure the field (Barbour, 2014). Using stable codes also maintains confidentiality while allowing readers to follow how individual voices contribute to cross-case regularities and to the thematic map presented in this chapter.

The data unequivocally indicates that what catechists desire is not a reduction in theological substance but a fundamental reorientation of the entire formational process. They articulate a deep-seated frustration with models they perceive as abstract, disconnected from their lived realities, and insufficient to equip them for the complex challenges of ministering to Gen Z in a rapidly modernizing society. Their aspirations for a more meaningful, relevant, and integrated spiritual journey can be interpreted as a bottom-up articulation of the

principles embodied in the FABC's pastoral methodology, which champions a deeply contextual, experiential, and action-oriented approach to faith. This "New Way of Being Church," as the FABC terms it, begins with the concrete realities of people's lives, analyses these realities critically, reflects upon them through the lens of faith and the Gospel, and moves toward integrated, transformative action.

To aid navigation, this chapter is structured to show clearly how the qualitative evidence answers the three research questions. Section 5.1 sets out the analytic conventions used throughout: excerpts are presented in the original Vietnamese with a meaning-preserving English translation; speaker identifiers are anonymised composite codes; and each excerpt is briefly contextualised before analysis. Section 5.2 addresses RQ1 using the FABC Pastoral Spiral as the organising lens, with four subsections: 5.2.1 Exposure–Immersion (critiques of abstract, outdated pedagogy and calls for psychological accompaniment); 5.2.2 Social Analysis (a desire for a socially conscious faith that interrogates structures); 5.2.3 Faith Reflection (a preference for experiential spiritual depth over detached academicism); and 5.2.4 Pastoral Planning & Action (moving beyond “task-doer” roles towards integrated, empowering ministry). Section 5.3 (RQ2) examines how “re-storying” the Vietnamese Martyrs through narrative pedagogy shapes vocational identity, self-efficacy, and resilience. Section 5.4 (RQ3) analyses how stewardship- and service-oriented leadership sustains volunteers’ core psychological needs and long-term motivation. Each subsection opens with a short roadmap and closes with an interim conclusion to signpost the contribution to the overall argument, and the chapter ends with a brief synthesis that prepares the ground for the discussion chapter.

Through this methodical presentation of evidence, the report will argue that the collective voice of these catechists is not merely a series of disparate complaints but a coherent, intuitive call for a pastoral renewal. It is a call to move from a top-down, content-delivery model of formation to a bottom-up, person-centred, and deeply incarnational process that awakens, nourishes, and empowers the faith of the faithful for mission in the world.

5.2 Answering RQ1: The Search for Holistic Formation and Spiritual Well-being

This section addresses the original Research Question 1, using a refined analytic lens to make the analysis more specific to the HCMC parish–deanery context. The refinement does

not alter the question; it operationalises it by reading participant accounts through the intentional integration of the FABC's Pastoral Spiral with Fisher's four domains of spiritual well-being (personal, communal, environmental, transcendental) as a way of evaluating formation practices in this setting. Participants did not speak in technical terms, yet their descriptions of current deficits and aspirations map closely onto the Pastoral Spiral × SWB logic, calling for immersion in lived realities (Exposure), structured engagement with social conditions (Social Analysis), authentic prayerful discernment (Faith Reflection), and mentored, planned action (Pastoral Planning/Action) that deepens SWB across all four domains.

5.2.1 The Neglected Starting Point: A Cry for Exposure and Immersion in Lived Reality

The foundational principle of the FABC's Pastoral Spiral, and indeed of an incarnational theology, is that God's salvific action begins within the concrete, often messy, reality of human life. The first stage, Exposure-Immersion, insists that any meaningful pastoral process must start not with abstract doctrines or pre-packaged programs, but with a genuine encounter with the lived experiences of the people it seeks to serve. The qualitative data from Vietnamese catechists reveals that the neglect of this starting point is the primary source of their frustration. They describe a formation system that is dangerously detached from their daily struggles, their cultural context, and their foundational psychological needs, rendering much of their training irrelevant and ineffective.

5.2.1.1 Critiques of an Abstract and Outdated Pedagogy

A pervasive theme throughout the interviews is the characterization of current catechetical formation as rigid, anachronistic, and fundamentally misaligned with the realities of modern life in Vietnam. Participants perceive a chasm between the static, traditional methods employed by the Church and the dynamic, fast-paced world inhabited by the young people they are meant to serve. This disconnect is not merely a matter of style but points to a systemic failure to engage with the actual context in which faith must be lived.

One scholar highlight this disconnects by contrasting the vibrant faith life in more traditional regions with the challenges faced in a modern, secularized metropolis like Ho Chi Minh City. As SCH-02 put it, in areas like Xuân Lộc or the Central Highlands, Catholicism visibly shapes *"daily life, values, and perspectives" (đời sống, giá trị và quan điểm sống)*. In

contrast, in Ho Chi Minh City, this influence is perceived as *"more faint" (mờ nhạt hơn)*. The reason cited is structural: the urban environment, with its multitude of choices and opportunities, does not naturally facilitate the kind of parish-centred community life that nurtures faith in rural areas. This observation underscores a critical pastoral challenge: the existing model of faith transmission is context-dependent and appears to falter when removed from its traditional socio-cultural container. It has not adapted to the lived reality of urban youth.

This failure to adapt is most evident in the pedagogical methods themselves. The dominant approach is consistently described in terms that evoke rigidity and obsolescence. One participant characterizes the current methodology as *"quite old and traditional, strict, and harsh" (*GZC-02; *cách dạy và cách làm hiện tại trong môi trường Công giáo của mình vẫn còn khá truyền thống, khắt khe và khắc nghiệt)*, a style that makes it "*very difficult for young people... to integrate" (rất khó hòa nhập)* in today's social conditions. This critique goes beyond simple preference; it suggests that the very process of formation is alienating to its target audience. The system seems trapped in a singular, inflexible mode of operation, as one individual laments:

"But our system has almost only one option: offline teaching, using old textbooks from a long time ago, with a one-way and dry delivery. "(*"Nhưng hệ thống của mình thì gần như chỉ có một lựa chọn duy nhất: dạy offline, theo sách vở cũ kỹ từ lâu đời, với lối truyền đạt một chiều và khô khan."*) *(GZC-07)*

This statement is a powerful indictment of a system that has failed the first test of the Pastoral Spiral. A "one-way and dry delivery" is the antithesis of a process that starts from lived experience. It is a top-down imposition of information that precludes any genuine dialogue with the learner's world, questions, and struggles. It is a pedagogy of abstraction, detached from the concrete realities it is meant to illuminate.

This critique is further sharpened by a catechist with a professional background in education, who contrasts the dynamism of secular pedagogy with the stasis within the Church. As GZC-02 observed, pedagogical methods in other education institutions are *"researched and updated continuously" (luôn được nghiên cứu và cập nhật liên tục)* based on two fundamental principles: the needs of the learner and their changing psychological landscape. The Church's approach, however, appears frozen in time:

Meanwhile, the pedagogical methods in catechesis have remained almost unchanged for decades. There has been no innovation or improvement at all, whether in the Eucharistic Youth Movement or other catechetical programs. ("Trong khi đó, phương pháp sư phạm trong giáo lý gần như không thay đổi gì trong suốt hàng chục năm nay. Không có sự đổi mới hay cải tiến nào cả, dù là trong Thiếu Nhi Thánh Thể hay các chương trình giáo lý khác.") (SCH-03)

This expert testimony reveals the depth of the problem. The failure is not merely one of individual catechists lacking creativity; it is an institutional inertia that prevents the adoption of modern, learner-centric approaches that are standard in other educational fields. The refusal to update methods based on the *"psychological changes of the learner according to the era" (sự biến đổi tâm lý của người học theo thời đại)* – according to SCH-03, represents a direct and systemic neglect of the Exposure-Immersion principle. The formation process, by failing to immerse itself in the world of the learner, begins on a foundation of irrelevance.

One academic expert, a sociologist specializing in religion in Vietnam, captured this sentiment succinctly, observing that the Church's approach to both training catechists and conducting catechesis remains *"still quite old-fashioned and strictly traditional"* (SCH-02; *còn khá cũ và mang tính truyền thống*). His view was echoed powerfully by a young catechist who described the programs *"too dry, too academic"* (GZC-09; *quá khô khan, mang tính hàn lâm*), a sentiment that points to a curriculum detached from the lived experience and affective needs of the learners. The primary mode of instruction was frequently criticized, with another participant lamenting the prevalence of a passive, lecture-based model summarized as *"sitting in class, copying notes"* (GZC-03; *ngồi lớp - chép bài*). Another Gen Z catechist elaborated on this, providing a "thick description" of the classroom atmosphere:

"The formator just stands at the front and talks, and we just listen. Sometimes for two hours. There is no interaction, no asking if we understand, no activities. We are just expected to absorb it. It feels like being back in a history class from my childhood, not like something that is alive." (GZC-02)

These critiques highlight a pedagogical philosophy that appears to prioritize the transmission of information over the formation of persons. A priest with extensive experience in catechetical leadership diagnosed the problem at a systemic level, stating:

"The current training programs neglect the pedagogical aspect. They don't understand the children's psychology and haven't applied modern teaching methods at all" (CLG-03)

This neglect of pedagogy, the art and science of teaching, was seen as a critical failure. Another young leader, active in promoting innovation, painted a stark picture of the post-

pandemic reality, where the Church seems stuck with only *"one old option: offline teaching from ancient textbooks, with one-way dry delivery"* (*dạy offline, theo sách vở cũ kỹ từ lâu đời, với lối truyền đạt một chiều và khô khan*) (GZC-07). This pedagogical inertia creates a significant barrier for the very individuals the Church needs most. As one participant noted:

Furthermore, the persistence of these outdated pedagogical models cannot be seen as an isolated failure of curriculum design. It is, rather, a visible symptom of a deeper institutional inertia. The inability to update teaching methods to reflect contemporary educational and psychological insights suggests a broader resistance to change within the Church's hierarchical and culturally conservative structures. The "old wineskins"[1] of traditional pedagogy are preserved not because they are effective, but because they are familiar, safe, and aligned with a top-down, control-oriented institutional culture. Therefore, any meaningful pedagogical reform must necessarily involve a corresponding shift in institutional mindset and leadership style, a conclusion that points directly toward the integrated approach of the HRS model. This provides direct empirical evidence for the need for the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)/Narrative Pedagogy pillar of the HRS model, which advocates for engaging, story-based, and experiential learning over didactic instruction.

Ultimately, for Gen Z catechists and young Catholics in general, knowledge is not passively received but actively co-constructed through experience, dialogue, and collaboration. Their rejection of *"dry"* and *"academic"* lectures is therefore not simply a desire for entertainment; it is a rejection of a pedagogical model that feels inauthentic and ineffective for their way of learning and being in the world. They seek what educational theorists call experiential or transformative learning, where concepts are connected to life and integrated through reflection and action. This yearning for a more holistic, person-centred approach resonates with the vision of catechesis presented in key Church documents like the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), which calls for formation that integrates knowledge with spiritual, moral, and communal dimensions, moving beyond mere instruction to a true "journey of personal encounter with Christ".

[1] *The phrase "old wineskins" is a biblical metaphor (Mt 9:17; Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37–38) used here to denote inherited forms resistant to new pastoral realities.*

5.2.1.2 The Unmet Need for Psychological and Emotional Accompaniment

Perhaps the most poignant and recurring theme in the data is the cry for psychological and emotional support, a need that participants feel the Church systematically overlooks in its focus on spiritual direction. This is identified not as a peripheral issue, but as a critical failure in the ministry of accompaniment, a foundational element of pastoral care. The testimonies suggest that by ignoring the psychological ground on which spirituality is built, the Church is attempting to construct a house without a foundation.

One participant articulates this limitation with striking clarity, framing it as a matter of proper sequencing in human development. He argues that spiritual maturity cannot be achieved without first addressing the psychological turmoil of youth:

A limitation: The Church still focuses on the spiritual life but has not sufficiently accompanied them on a psychological level. In my opinion, before a young person can mature in their spiritual life, they need psychological support, especially during the crises of youth such as choosing a career, relationships, or self-awareness. ("Còn điểm hạn chế: Giáo hội vẫn chú trọng đến đời sống thiêng liêng mà chưa đồng hành đủ về mặt tâm lý. Theo anh, trước khi một người trẻ trưởng thành trong đời sống thiêng liêng, họ cần sự hỗ trợ về tâm lý, đặc biệt trong các khủng hoảng tuổi trẻ như lựa chọn nghề nghiệp, tình cảm hay nhận thức bản thân." (SCH-04)

This perspective reframes psychological support not as a secular alternative to spiritual guidance, but as its necessary precursor. It is an incarnational approach that regconises the human person as an integrated whole, where spiritual health is inseparable from psychological well-being. This sentiment is echoed with even greater force by another participant, who describes the situation as a systemic and "regrettable" neglect of a core responsibility:

Our Church is truly lacking a network of adequate psychological care, first for the children, and then for the leaders themselves... There is no clear direction from the Church on psychological development, while this should be the Church's responsibility, and the Church truly has many opportunities to do it. But regrettably, it has been forgotten. ("Giáo hội mình thực sự đang thiếu một mạng lưới quan tâm đúng mức đến tâm lý , trước hết là của các em thiếu nhi, sau đó là của chính các huynh trưởng... Không có một định hướng rõ ràng nào từ phía giáo hội về việc phát triển tâm lý, trong khi điều này lẽ ra phải là trách nhiệm của giáo hội , và giáo hội thật sự có rất nhiều cơ hội để làm điều đó. Nhưng điều đáng tiếc là nó đã bị bỏ quên.") (CLG-05)

The consequences of this neglect are profound. One catechist recount how his entire approach to ministry was transformed only after a chance encounter with the psycho-pedagogical methods of the Salesians of Don Bosco. He realised that this psychological understanding was the missing piece, but lamented*, "not everyone has the opportunity to encounter such 'fortunate chances'" (Nhưng không phải ai cũng có cơ hội tiếp cận với những "cơ duyên" như vậy) – (ECH-03).* This suggests that access to psychologically informed ministry is currently a matter of luck rather than a standard component of formation.

Crucially, the participants articulate this need not as a desire to be "fixed" or "led," but as a fundamental human need to be seen, heard, and validated. The problem with the current model is that it often positions the Church as a dispenser of answers rather than a companion on the journey. One participant draws a sharp distinction:

But the issue is, everyone needs to be understood, not everyone needs to be led. These two things are very different. I sometimes see the Church thinking that young people need to be led, while forgetting that what they need first is to be understood. ("Nhưng vấn đề là, ai cũng cần được hiểu, chứ không phải ai cũng cần được dẫn dắt. Hai điều này rất khác nhau. Anh thấy đôi khi Giáo hội cứ nghĩ rằng giới trẻ cần được dẫn dắt, mà quên mất rằng điều họ cần trước tiên là được thấu hiểu.") (CLG-02)

This insight cuts to the heart of the Exposure-Immersion stage. A ministry of "leading" begins with the leader's agenda, while a ministry of "understanding" begins with the other person's reality. The latter requires a posture of deep listening, empathy, and a willingness to enter the other's world without judgment. The failure to adopt this posture leads to a didactic, moralizing approach that alienates rather than attracts. As one participant concludes, the Church must shift its perspective and see young people *"as people with a great need, to be understood, to be sympathized with, and to be understood correctly. Not always assuming they are a group that needs to be guided, to be taught" (như những người đang có một nhu cầu rất lớn – được hiểu, được cảm thông, và được hiểu đúng. Chứ không phải lúc nào cũng mặc định họ là những người cần được hướng dẫn, cần được dạy dỗ) – (CLG-02).* The key, therefore, is not more effective proclamation, but more authentic listening. *"The Church doesn't need to talk too much, just listen" (Giáo hội không cần nói quá nhiều – hãy lắng nghe) – (GZC-08).*

A closer examination of these twin critiques, of outdated pedagogy and psychological neglect, reveals that they are not separate issues but are deeply intertwined. The pedagogical failure is, in fact, a direct and predictable consequence of the psychological failure. An

educational model that does not begin by immersing itself in the emotional and psychological world of the learner will inevitably resort to abstract, one-way, and "dry" methods of information delivery. Effective pedagogy is contingent on understanding the learner, their context, their questions, their fears, and their aspirations. By prioritizing the transmission of content (the "what") over the establishment of a relational and psychological foundation (the "who" and "why"), the current formation model effectively skips the first and most crucial stage of the Pastoral Spiral. Therefore, the call for psychological support is not a request for an optional add-on to catechesis; it is a demand for the prerequisite for any meaningful catechesis to occur.

This systemic flaw has a devastating long-term consequence: it creates a *"brain drain"* of the very leaders the Church in Vietnam most desperately needs. The data shows that the current system actively repels talented, dynamic, and modern-minded young people. One scholar state bluntly, *"those with knowledge, understanding, and a modern mindset will find it difficult to stay with the church" (những bạn có tri thức, có hiểu biết và có tư duy tiếp cận hiện đại sẽ khó lòng gắn bó với nhà thờ) – (SCH-02).* Another concurs, noting that *"dynamic individuals who tend to develop themselves... will almost certainly leave the Catholic Church, because out there are more attractive things that meet their personal expectations" (những bạn năng động, có xu hướng phát triển bản thân... gần như chắc chắn sẽ rời khỏi Giáo hội Công giáo, vì ở ngoài kia có những điều hấp dẫn và đáp ứng được kỳ vọng cá nhân của họ nhiều hơn) – (SCH-04).* This is not merely about losing members; it is about losing a specific and vital demographic: the potential future leaders who are most attuned to the needs of their generation. If this trend persists, the leadership pool for catechists will increasingly consist of those who are "*very stable, with no need to go anywhere" (rất ổn định, không có nhu cầu đi đâu cả) – (SCH-04)*, fostering a self-perpetuating cycle of stagnation and increasing insularity. The neglect of Stage 1 of the Pastoral Spiral is thus not just a formational weakness; it is a long-term strategic threat to the vitality and relevance of the Church, systematically driving away its most promising young talent.

5.2.1.3 Engaging the Cultural Context of Gen Z

The disconnect from lived reality also manifests as a cultural dissonance. The operational rhythm, values, and structures of parish life are perceived as being profoundly out of sync with the world of Gen Z, a generation shaped by digital immediacy, social media, and a

desire for flexibility and authenticity. A participant notes that the Church's traditional approach is *"somewhat slower than the rhythm of their lives" (có phần chậm hơn so với nhịp sống của các bạn) – (GZC-01)*. This *"slowness"* is not merely about a failure to adopt new technologies; it signifies a deeper cultural gap. The institutional Church appears to operate on a different clock and in a different cultural language, one that does not resonate with the digitally native world of the young people it aims to serve.

This clash is particularly evident in the rigidity of parish structures, a reality thrown into sharp relief by the societal shifts following the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant observes:

After the Covid pandemic, the value of mobility, the nomad lifestyle, digital work, and remote work has become increasingly popular. But our system has almost only one option: offline teaching... the system is inflexible. The operating time is very fixed, requiring high commitment. Everything happens at a fixed time, repeatedly... There are no other options, no more flexible ways. ("Sau đại dịch Covid, giá trị của việc di chuyển, lối sống du mục (nomad lifestyle), làm việc số (digital) và làm việc từ xa (remote) ngày càng phổ biến. Nhưng hệ thống của mình thì gần như chỉ có một lựa chọn duy nhất: dạy offline... hệ thống hiện nay thiếu tính linh hoạt. Thời gian hoạt động rất cố định, yêu cầu cam kết cao. Mọi thứ đều diễn ra vào một khung giờ cố định, lặp đi lặp lại... Không có lựa chọn nào khác, không có cách thức linh hoạt hơn.") – (GZC-07)

This inflexibility creates significant barriers to participation for young people whose lives, whether due to study, work, or personal circumstances, do not conform to a rigid, weekly, in-person schedule. A formation model that demands such high, inflexible commitment without offering adaptable alternatives fails to immerse itself in the actual logistical and lifestyle realities of its participants. It implicitly communicates that service to the Church requires a withdrawal from, rather than an integration with, the patterns of modern life. This failure to meet people in their real-world circumstances is a fundamental violation of the principle of Exposure-Immersion, creating a system that is inaccessible and unattractive to the very generation it needs to engage.

5.2.2 The Prophetic Call: A Desire for Critical Social Analysis

The second stage of the Pastoral Spiral, Social Analysis, calls for a critical examination of the social, political, economic, and cultural structures that shape people's lives. It moves beyond addressing individual problems to understanding their root causes within the broader societal context. The testimonies of Vietnamese catechists reveal a profound, albeit often

implicit, yearning for this prophetic dimension of faith. They express a desire to move beyond insular, purely devotional activities and to engage with the complex structural realities of their society. This is not a call for the politicization of faith, but for a faith that is socially conscious, critically aware, and empowered to be a leaven for justice and transformation in the world.

5.2.2.1 Faith in the Public Square: Navigating Complex Social Structures

Participants demonstrate a striking level of sophistication in their awareness of the complex socio-political landscape in which the Vietnamese Church operates. This context is not viewed as a separate, secular concern but as an integral part of their lived faith reality, a reality that their formation often fails to address. They feel a pressing need for tools to understand and navigate the structural power dynamics that define their existence as Catholics in a socialist state.

One of the most powerful articulations of this reality comes through a potent metaphor describing the relationship between the Church and the government:

A frequently used metaphor is that the relationship between the state and the Catholic Church is like a 'forced marriage.' Both sides are not truly happy with each other because they have different value systems, ideologies, political views, and philosophies of life. However, they are forced to 'live together,' in the context of pressure from international organisations, economic expansion agreements, and growing integration demands.(“Một hình ảnh thường được ví von là mối quan hệ giữa nhà nước và Công giáo giống như một cuộc “hôn nhân bị ép buộc”. Hai bên không thực sự hài lòng về nhau vì có hệ giá trị, tư tưởng, quan điểm chính trị và triết lý sống khác biệt. Tuy nhiên, họ vẫn buộc phải “sống chung”, trong bối cảnh có những áp lực từ các tổ chức quốc tế, các hiệp định về mở rộng kinh tế, và yêu cầu hội nhập ngày càng lớn.”) – (SCH-05)

This metaphor of a "forced marriage" is profoundly insightful. It captures the tension, the lack of genuine harmony, and the pragmatic necessity of co-existence that defines the Church's public life. A formation program that ignores this complex and often fraught relationship is a formation that fails to equip catechists for the real world. This is a direct, intuitive call for Social Analysis, for a framework that helps them understand the historical, political, and ideological forces at play.

This need for analytical tools is further emphasized by the description of the operational reality as a "yellow light regime," a state of perpetual ambiguity that requires constant discernment and strategic navigation:

We often use the concept of a 'yellow light regime' to describe the current situation, that is, it's not completely banned (red light), but it's also not fully free to operate (green light). This means we must comply with the law, still pursue the ideals, methods, and philosophy of the organisation, but at the same time avoid elements that could get us 'banned'. ("Chúng tôi hay dùng khái niệm "chế độ đèn vàng" để nói về tình trạng hiện tại – tức là không bị cấm hoàn toàn (đèn đỏ), nhưng cũng không được tự do hoạt động đầy đủ (đèn xanh). Điều đó có nghĩa là phải tuân thủ pháp luật, vẫn theo đuổi lý tưởng, phương pháp và triết lý của tổ chức, nhưng đồng thời tránh những yếu tố có thể khiến bị "cấm".) – (GOV-05)

Living under a "yellow light" demands a high degree of critical awareness. Catechists and youth leaders are not operating in a vacuum; they are navigating a complex field of social control where the boundaries are intentionally kept unclear. A formation model that provides them with the tools to critically analyse these structures, to understand the unwritten rules, and to strategize their actions accordingly would be of immense practical value. It would empower them to be prudent and effective agents of mission, rather than either naive actors or paralyzed subjects.

5.2.2.2 Beyond Pious Activities: A Hunger for Tangible Social Impact

Complementing the desire to understand societal structures is a palpable frustration with parish activities that are perceived as repetitive, inward-looking, and lacking tangible real-world impact. This critique is not directed against piety itself, but against a form of piety that remains disconnected from the pressing needs of the world. It reflects a deep hunger for a faith that *does* something, a faith that is socially engaged and transformative.

One scholar captures this sentiment when describing why dynamic and talented young people often leave the Church:

I don't know what to call it exactly, but for many years, the activities still revolve around familiar things like performing plays, offering flowers, giving gifts, and studying catechism. This is a bit subjective, but I see that dynamic individuals who tend to develop themselves will often leave the organisation... because out there are more attractive things that meet their personal expectations. ("Anh không biết gọi chính xác là gì, nhưng trong nhiều năm, các hoạt động vẫn xoay quanh những việc quen thuộc như đóng kịch, dâng hoa, tặng quà, học giáo lý. Điều này hơi chủ quan, nhưng anh thấy những bạn năng động, có xu hướng

phát triển bản thân, thường sẽ rời tổ chức... vì ở ngoài kia có những điều hấp dẫn và đáp ứng được kỳ vọng cá nhân của họ nhiều hơn.") – (SCH-04)

The *"attractiveness"* of the outside world lies in its promise of relevance and impact. The repetitive cycle of insular parish activities fails to satisfy the yearning of a generation that wants to see their faith make a concrete difference. This points to a desire to move from a faith of maintenance to a faith of mission, a transition that requires the analytical skills to identify where and how the Gospel can be brought to bear on societal issues.

This desire for impact is not merely about external projects; it is seen as the very goal of catechesis itself. The role of the catechist is envisioned as that of a catalyst for positive social change, beginning with the formation of the young. One catechist beautifully articulates this vision of an "involvement spirituality":

I want to help their faith become strong so that when they step out into society, in their relationships with friends, they can become a living example. From there, each child will become a 'small explosion,' spreading holiness and contributing to changing the state of society. ("Tôi muốn giúp đức tin của các em vững mạnh để khi bước ra ngoài xã hội, trong các mối tương quan với bạn bè, các em có thể trở thành một tấm gương sống động. Từ đó, mỗi em sẽ trở thành một "vụ nổ nhỏ", lan tỏa sự thánh thiện và góp phần thay đổi hiện trạng xã hội.") – (GZC-11)

The imagery of a "*small explosion" (vụ nổ nhỏ)* that contributes to *"changing the state of society" (thay đổi hiện trạng xã hội)* is profoundly indicative of a desire for social transformation. This vision elevates the purpose of catechesis beyond individual moral instruction to the formation of agents of social change. To achieve this, however, requires a deep understanding of the "state of society" that needs changing. It necessitates the skills of social analysis to identify injustices, understand their structural roots, and discern how the Gospel calls for a response.

The yearning for a socially engaged faith is not an abstract ideological preference; it emerges as a direct response to the perceived irrelevance of a faith that remains disconnected from the pressing social and political realities of Vietnam. When participants critique parish activities as repetitive and insular ("plays, offering flowers") while simultaneously demonstrating a keen awareness of complex issues like the "forced marriage" of Church and State, a clear connection emerges. The frustration with inward-looking activities is fueled by the knowledge that there are significant, real-world issues that their faith is not being equipped to address. For Gen Z catechists, who see a world rife with complex problems, a

faith that offers only pious activities without providing tools to understand and engage with those problems feels hollow and inadequate. The call for social analysis is therefore fundamentally a call for relevance. It is a demand to connect the Gospel to the headlines and the structural realities that shape their lives, thereby making faith a powerful force for understanding and transformation, not just a private devotion.

This points to a significant generational shift in the understanding of what it means to be Catholic. The data suggests a movement away from a "Church of Obligation," where participation is defined by fulfilling duties within the parish, toward a "Church of Mission," where the parish is seen as a base for transformative action *in the world*. The traditional model is defined by its internal activities, "studying catechism," "offering flowers", while the desired model is defined by its external impact, "spreading holiness," "changing the state of society." The frustration of being a "task-doer," which will be explored in Section IV, stems directly from being trapped in this older, maintenance-focused model. Without equipping its members with the tools for social analysis, the Church in Vietnam risks failing to make this crucial transition. It will continue to be a "Church of Obligation" for an aging demographic while losing the very generation that is seeking a "Church of Mission." The intuitive call for Social Analysis is therefore a prophetic call for the Church to reimagine its identity in society, not merely as a preserver of tradition, but as an active, critical, and transformative agent for justice and the common good, fully embodying the FABC's vision of a "New Way of Being Church."

5.2.3 The Contemplative Heart: A Yearning for Authentic Faith Reflection

The third stage of the Pastoral Spiral, Faith Reflection, is the crucible where experience and analysis are brought into dialogue with the Word of God and the tradition of the Church. It is a contemplative process of discernment, seeking to understand "what the Spirit is saying to the churches" through the realities of people's lives. The qualitative data from Vietnamese catechists reveals a profound hunger for this stage. They articulate a deep dissatisfaction with formation models that are purely academic, rote, or impersonal, and express a powerful yearning for a "deep soul connection", an experiential faith that is personally discerned and integrated into their own life stories.

5.2.3.1 "A Deep Soul Connection": The True Reward of Ministry

The interviews make it unequivocally clear that the ultimate motivation and reward for catechists is not social recognition, status, or any tangible benefit, but an intrinsic, spiritual connection with God. In essence, participants regard this profound spiritual fulfilment as the *"salary of the soul"* – an intangible yet invaluable compensation that nourishes their commitment to ministry. The absence of this connection is identified as the primary cause of burnout and the principal reason for leaving the ministry. This reality places the facilitation of authentic faith reflection at the very centre of any sustainable formation program.

One participant, a professional with experience in human resources, analyses the motivational structure of ministry with keen insight. He contrasts the extrinsic rewards available in secular organisations with the intrinsic reward that is unique to religious service:

In Catholicism, the reward is a spiritual connection, in terms of the soul and personal values. When you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay. Therefore, this connection is the greatest reward to regconise and nurture the spirit of service. It helps you overcome other difficulties in your work and in your life. ("Trong khi đó, ở Công giáo, phần thưởng là sự kết nối thiêng liêng – về mặt tâm linh và giá trị cá nhân. Khi em phục vụ nhà thờ, em nhận được một sự kết nối rất sâu về tâm hồn. Còn nếu không có kết nối đó, em sẽ không ở lại. Vậy nên, sự kết nối này chính là phần thưởng lớn nhất để ghi nhận, nuôi dưỡng tinh thần phục vụ. Nó giúp em vượt qua những khó khăn khác trong công việc và trong cuộc sống.") – (*SCH-01)*

One experienced catechist went further, likening God's grace to being paid in a currency beyond money:

"The feeling of God's grace, the feeling that I am being paid. It's not something I can explain clearly with material things, but when I look back at my life... I clearly see that without God's grace, I would have suffered great losses, both spiritually and materially." – (EC-01)

This statement is the cornerstone of this section's analysis. It posits that the entire enterprise of voluntary ministry hinges on the catechist's ability to attain and sustain this *"deep soul connection" (sự kết nối rất sâu về tâm hồn)*. This heartfelt reflection underscores that what sustains him is not any worldly benefit, but a sense of divine reward – essentially the "*salary of the soul"* paid in grace and meaning. This is not a secondary benefit; it is the fundamental *"reward"* that makes the sacrifices of time, energy, and personal resources meaningful. A formation program that fails to facilitate this personal, contemplative encounter with God is

failing in its most essential function, regardless of how much doctrinal content it successfully transmits. The "difficulties in work and in life" are bearable only when they are contextualized within this profound spiritual relationship.

5.2.3.2 Critique of Dry Academicism and Impersonal Formation

Given that a deep, personal connection with God is the ultimate goal and reward, it is unsurprising that participants level their sharpest critiques against formation programs they perceive as overly academic, theoretical, and disconnected from their personal spiritual journeys. They describe a system that often prioritizes intellectual mastery of doctrine over the cultivation of a living faith.

One catechist identifies a fundamental imbalance in the current approaches, where programs fall into one of two extremes: either superficial activities or sterile academicism. He critiques the latter with particular force:

One side lean too much into activities, while the other leans so much into doctrine that it becomes too dry, too academic... The issue is that the students are not learning to teach theology later, but to teach catechism to children. Thus, the training perspective needs to be different. ("Một bên thì quá nghiêng nhiều về sinh hoạt, một bên lại quá nghiêng về giáo lý đến mức quá khô khan, mang tính hàn lâm... Nhưng vấn đề là các em học không phải để đi dạy thần học sau này, mà là để dạy giáo lý cho thiếu nhi. Như vậy, góc nhìn đào tạo cần phải khác.") – (CLG – 03)

This critique highlights a fundamental mismatch between the goal of the formation (forming pastoral ministers for children) and its method (academic theology). The "*dry, academic" (khô khan, mang tính hàn lâm)* approach fails because it treats faith as a subject to be mastered rather than a relationship to be nurtured. This academicism is not just seen as ineffective but can be experienced as actively harmful, creating an environment that feels coercive rather than invitational.

This is powerfully illustrated by a story recounted by a participant about a catechist who offered a critical comment on a model class video posted on the official Catechism Board's social media page. The class felt staged and inauthentic, prompting the catechist to write a comment that led to him being blocked:

'This is no longer a classroom, it's more like a brainwashing place, you come in, say yes, and that's it.' And after that, the Catechism Board representative blocked [him] on social

media"'Cái này đâu còn là lớp học nữa đâu, giống như một nơi tẩy não vậy – vô nói xong rồi dạ, vậy thôi.' Và sau đó, Ban Giáo lý đã chặn (block) anh luôn." (EC-02)

The use of the term *"brainwashing place" (nơi tẩy não)* is a severe indictment. It signifies a process that seeks to impose information and demand assent, rather than to awaken faith and invite discernment. This is the very antithesis of authentic Faith Reflection. The spiral's third stage is about creating a space for a free, personal, and honest encounter between one's life and the Gospel. A "brainwashing" model, by its nature, forecloses this possibility, replacing personal discernment with rote compliance. It is a pedagogy of control, not of liberation.

5.2.3.3 The Hermeneutic of Lived Experience: Finding God in Personal Narratives

In contrast to the impersonal, academic model they critique, participants articulate a desire for a formation process that helps them interpret their own life experiences through the lens of faith. This creates a dynamic hermeneutic loop where personal story and sacred story illuminate one another, forging a faith that is resilient, mature, and deeply personal.

One participant conceptualizes this integrated approach by arguing that doctrinal knowledge is only half of the equation. The other, more challenging half, is the integration of that knowledge with lived experience:

Therefore, what I want to say is that catechism only accounts for about 50% of the faith education process. The program must update the other 50%, which is the difficult part, the experiences of the students. That faith experience must be appropriate for each age group. ("Vì vậy, điều anh muốn nói là giáo lý chỉ chiếm khoảng 50% trong quá trình giáo dục đức tin. Chương trình phải cập nhật được 50% còn lại, cũng là phần khó đó là những trải nghiệm của các em. Trải nghiệm đức tin đó phải phù hợp với từng độ tuổi.") – (SCH-03)

This perspective calls for a radical shift in focus from content delivery to meaning making. It suggests that the role of the formator is not just to teach doctrine, but to help the catechist develop the skills to reflect on their own *"faith experience" (trải nghiệm đức tin)* and discern God's presence and action within it.

A powerful, concrete example of this hermeneutic loop in action is provided by a clergy who found profound personal meaning in a familiar Scripture passage, a discovery that reshaped his understanding of himself and his entire ministry:

My own turning point, when I understood that my emotions were also important and needed to be regulated, was when I read a sentence in the Bible. When Jesus was in the Garden of Olives, He prayed: 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will.' From that sentence, I understood that I had to regconise and accept my own emotions and then choose the right action to take. ("Bản thân anh ngày xưa, khi hiểu được rằng cảm xúc của mình cũng quan trọng và cần được điều tiết, là lúc anh đọc một câu trong Kinh Thánh. Khi Chúa ở vườn Cây Dầu, Ngài đã cầu nguyện: 'Lạy Cha, nếu có thể được, xin cất chén này khỏi con, nhưng đừng theo ý con, một theo ý Cha'. Từ câu đó, anh hiểu rằng mình phải nhận biết và chấp nhận cảm xúc của bản thân, rồi sau đó chọn hành động đúng đắn nhất để thực hiện.") – *(CLG-02)*

This testimony is a perfect illustration of Stage 3 of the Pastoral Spiral. The catechist's breakthrough did not come from learning a new theological fact about Christ's agony in the garden. It came when that sacred narrative became a mirror for his own inner life, illuminating his personal struggle with emotions and providing a model for psychological and spiritual integration. It is in this intersection of personal narrative and sacred narrative that a mature faith is forged. This is the contemplative work that transforms doctrine from abstract information into living wisdom.

The feeling of being an unmotivated "task-doer," which will be explored in the next section, can be understood as a direct result of the failure to provide the intrinsic spiritual reward of a "deep soul connection." The current system, as described by participants, often relies on extrinsic motivators such as duty, social expectation, or the desire for a title. However, as principles of human motivation suggest, sustainable engagement in demanding, voluntary roles depends almost entirely on intrinsic motivation, the internal satisfaction derived from the activity itself. The "soul connection" is the primary intrinsic motivator for a catechist. When formation is purely academic and fails to facilitate this personal encounter with God, it strips the ministry of its core spiritual reward. The work then devolves into a series of tasks performed out of obligation, not out of a lived experience of love. The crisis in catechist retention and motivation is therefore not a crisis of laziness or lack of commitment, but a crisis of spiritual nourishment. The solution lies not in better management techniques or more engaging activities alone, but in a profound shift toward a contemplative, experiential formation that provides the intrinsic spiritual reward that makes the sacrifices of ministry meaningful.

Furthermore, the participants' critique of academicism should not be misconstrued as a rejection of intellect. Rather, it is a call to redefine what "knowledge" means in the context of faith formation. They push back against a tendency where faith is equated with possessing

the correct information and instead advocate for a model where "to know" implies intimate, personal experience. This is not a contradiction; they are not rejecting substance, but a specific *mode* of knowing. They reject knowledge-as-information, which they experience as *"dry" (khô khan)*, and embrace knowledge-as-encounter, which they describe as a *"deep soul connection" (kết nối sâu về tâm hồn)*. This reflects a profound theological intuition, a move from a purely intellectual assent to propositions toward a more holistic, relational knowledge of God. This implies the need for a revolution in catechetical epistemology. Future formation must integrate intellectual learning with practices that foster personal encounter: contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, spiritual direction, and the structured sharing of faith experiences. The goal must shift from simply knowing *about* God to truly *knowing* God personally, in the very fabric of one's own life.

5.2.4 The Empowered Agent: Integrating Formation with Pastoral Action

The culmination of the Pastoral Spiral is the fourth stage: Pastoral Planning and Action. This stage is not merely an outcome but an integral part of the cyclical process, where the insights gained from immersion, analysis, and reflection are translated into concrete, strategic, and responsive action. The testimonies from Vietnamese catechists reveal a deep frustration with the disconnect between their formation and their actual ministry. They feel reduced to the role of passive "task-doers" or functionaries within a rigid system that offers no clear pathway for growth or meaningful contribution. Their collective voice advocates for a model that empowers them as agents of mission, where action is not an afterthought but a central component of the learning process itself, ensuring their service is a meaningful expression of a faith that has been personally discerned and communally reflected upon.

5.2.4.1 From Functionary to Co-Creator: The Crisis of a Missing Pastoral Pathway

A significant source of demoralization among catechists is the feeling of being a functionary in a system that lacks a clear vision for their long-term development and contribution. They describe a ministry that often feels like a dead end, with no clear sense of purpose or progression beyond the initial commitment. This absence of a "pastoral pathway" leads to stagnation and burnout.

One participant, applying a human resources perspective, articulates this crisis with precision. He points to the lack of a "roadmap" for catechists after their initial period of service:

Especially the 'next' stage: after you have committed, after you have contributed, what will you do next? There is no roadmap, no clear direction. Being asked to commit for 10, 20, 30 years without seeing any innovation or opportunity for development will greatly affect your motivation and sense of newness, no matter how talented or dedicated you are. ("Đặc biệt là giai đoạn "tiếp theo": sau khi em đã dấn thân, đã cống hiến, thì tiếp theo em sẽ làm gì? Không có lộ trình, không có định hướng rõ ràng. Việc bảo em gắn bó 10 năm, 20 năm, 30 năm mà không thấy đổi mới hay cơ hội phát triển thì động lực và sự mới mẻ trong em sẽ bị ảnh hưởng rất nhiều, dù em có giỏi và tâm huyết đến đâu.") – *(SCH-01)*

This is the voice of an individual who feels like a cog in a machine, not a co-creator of the mission. The lack of a "*roadmap" (lộ trình)* is a fundamental failure of Pastoral Planning. It reveals a system that treats catechists as a temporary resource to be utilized for specific tasks, rather than as members of the community to be holistically developed and empowered for a lifelong journey of discipleship and mission. This short-term, task-oriented approach is inherently unsustainable.

The unsustainability of the current model is further highlighted by its reliance on the fleeting energy of a few key individuals rather than on structured, systemic approaches to ministry. This creates a fragile ecosystem where pastoral activities are perpetually at risk of collapse:

Therefore, it needs to be organized and systematized. Otherwise, things only stand out temporarily when a few dedicated and capable individuals are present. But when they are no longer there, due to getting married, having children, moving, or simply going away to study, the activity quickly declines... It disappears in a matter of days or weeks, not years. ("Vì thế, nó cần có tổ chức và hệ thống hóa. Nếu không, mọi thứ chỉ nổi bật nhất thời khi có vài cá nhân cống hiến và có năng lực. Nhưng khi họ không còn hiện diện , do lập gia đình, sinh con, chuyển chỗ ở, hay đơn giản là đi học , thì hoạt động sẽ nhanh chóng đi xuống... Nhanh đến mức chỉ tính bằng ngày, bằng tuần, chứ không phải năm.") – *(EC-07)*

This critique points to a critical failure in pastoral planning: the inability to build resilient and sustainable structures. Ministry becomes a series of ad-hoc, personality-driven events rather than a coherent, strategic plan that can outlast any single individual. This leaves catechists feeling that their hard work is ephemeral and that they are part of a constantly collapsing and rebuilding effort, rather than contributing to a lasting legacy. It is the very definition of being a "task-doer" in a system without a long-term vision.

5.2.4.2 Action as Formation: The Call for Integrated and Empowered Ministry

In response to this feeling of being a passive functionary, participants express a strong desire for opportunities to become active agents in their ministry. They yearn for a model where they can use their unique, God-given talents to contribute meaningfully, moving beyond generic, pre-packaged roles into a space of co-creation and genuine pastoral response.

One participant powerfully captures this desire using a biblical metaphor. He argues that the Church must create an environment where young people can actively invest their gifts:

So, the Church needs to create space, create an environment for young people to express themselves, a place for them to affirm themselves, to use their abilities to create value... The important thing is to give them the opportunity to 'throw that silver into the market'. ("Vậy thì, Giáo hội cần tạo ra không gian, tạo ra môi trường để các bạn trẻ có thể thể hiện chính mình – một nơi để các bạn khẳng định bản thân, sử dụng khả năng của mình để tạo ra giá trị... Điều quan trọng là phải cho các bạn cơ hội để "ném bạc" đó.") – (*CLG-01)*

The allusion to the Parable of the Talents - *"throwing that silver into the market" (ném bạc ra chợ)*, is incredibly insightful. It reframes ministry not as the fulfilment of a predetermined duty, but as the active and creative investment of one's gifts for the growth of the Kingdom. An integrated pastoral model, following the spiral, would first identify these unique gifts (through Exposure-Immersion and Faith Reflection) and then create concrete pastoral plans that allow those gifts to be utilized for the good of the community. This approach transforms the catechist from a mere task-doer into an empowered steward of their own charisms.

The ideal model envisioned by participants is one where action is not the end-product of formation but is an integral part of the learning process itself. Formation and ministry become a single, unified activity of action-reflection. One catechist uses the metaphor of a blacksmith to describe this integrated process:

From that model, the catechist can be seen as a blacksmith, knowing how to combine 'hot' and 'cold,' using the doctrine they are teaching plus their own social experiences to shape the students... The training program should have sessions for leaders to speak honestly about their faith experiences with the youth, instead of just teaching doctrine. ("Từ mô hình đó, có thể xem người giáo lý viên là người thợ rèn, biết kết hợp giữa"nóng" và"lạnh" và sử dụng giáo lý mà các bạn đang giảng, cộng với trải nghiệm xã hội của bản thân để định hình các em... chương trình đào tạo nên có những buổi để huynh trưởng nói thật về những trải nghiệm đức tin của họ nhiều hơn với thiếu nhi, thay vì chỉ dạy suông về giáo lý.") – (EC-05)

This *"blacksmith"* metaphor perfectly captures the essence of integrated pastoral action. The catechist is not simply delivering a pre-made lesson plan (a cold, static object). Instead, they are actively forging faith by combining the "*heat" of lived social experience (trải nghiệm xã hội)* with the *"cold" water of doctrine (giáo lý)*. This is a dynamic, creative, and responsive act. It requires the catechist to be fully engaged, drawing on their own life, analysing the context of their students, reflecting on the tradition, and then acting in a way that is tailored to the specific moment. This is action-reflection in its purest form, and it is the very opposite of being a passive task-doer.

The feeling of being a "task-doer" is the ultimate symptom of a broken pastoral spiral. It is the logical and inevitable endpoint of a formation process that neglects the preceding three stages. A systemic analysis reveals the deep interdependence of the four stages: if a formation program does not begin by exposing catechists to the real needs of their community and their own inner lives (Stage 1), it cannot possibly equip them to critically analyse those needs (Stage 2). Without a basis in lived reality and critical analysis, any subsequent faith reflection (Stage 3) will remain abstract, disembodied, and spiritually unsatisfying. Finally, without a solid foundation, analysis, and personal reflection, any resulting pastoral action (Stage 4) will inevitably feel arbitrary, disconnected, and meaningless. This reduces the catechist to a mere functionary executing someone else's plan, a plan that has no organic connection to their own faith journey or the context of their ministry. The Pastoral Spiral is not a checklist of four separate items but an integrated, dynamic ecosystem of faith in action. The crisis of motivation and purpose described by the participants is a systemic failure rooted in the very first step: the failure to listen to and start from lived reality.

While the intuitive call for this new paradigm is a bottom-up phenomenon, participants astutely regconise that its successful implementation requires a significant structural and cultural shift initiated from the top. One individual notes that while many parish initiatives are bottom-up, *"major changes can only happen in a top-down direction... if there is no movement from the higher levels, then significant transformations are almost impossible" (những thay đổi lớn chỉ có thể diễn ra theo hướng top-down – từ trên xuống... Nhưng nếu không có chuyển động từ cấp cao, thì những chuyển đổi quan trọng gần như không thể xảy ra) – (CLG-03).* This reveals a sophisticated understanding that the current parish structure, often highly dependent on the personality and openness of the parish priest, is insufficient

to create systemic change. Individual good cannot overcome a flawed system. The call for the Pastoral Spiral is therefore also an implicit call for a new model of ecclesial leadership. It requires leaders, bishops, priests, and diocesan directors, who see their role not as dictating plans from on high, but as creating the structures, providing the resources, and fostering the culture that *enables* grassroots communities to engage in the spiral for themselves. The ultimate success of this desired paradigm shift depends on a "pincer movement" of change: a continued, Spirit-led push from the bottom, as articulated by these catechists, met by a courageous and visionary commitment from the top to restructure formation, decentralize pastoral planning, and truly empower the laity as co-responsible agents of the Church's mission.

5.2.5 Conclusion

The qualitative evidence gathered from Vietnamese catechists and youth ministers presents a clear and compelling case. Their collective frustrations, desires, and aspirations converge to form an intuitive, grassroots articulation of the FABC's Pastoral Spiral. They are not merely asking for new techniques or updated content; they are calling for a fundamental reorientation of the entire process of faith formation, a shift from a static, top-down, content-delivery model to a dynamic, person-centred, and integrated spiritual journey. This "New Way of Being Church" is not a foreign concept imposed from without, but a deep yearning rising from within the lived experience of those on the front lines of pastoral ministry in Vietnam.

The analysis shows how participants' critiques and hopes align with the four stages of the Pastoral Spiral:

- Exposure–Immersion: Participants' rejection of outdated, one-way teaching and their call for psychological and emotional accompaniment signal a need to immerse formation in the concrete realities of their lives.
- Social Analysis: Participants' desire for a faith that engages complex socio-political conditions and makes a tangible difference reflects a hunger for structured social analysis.
- Faith Reflection: Participants' yearning for a "deep soul connection" over dry academicism, and for finding God within personal stories, is a plea for authentic faith reflection.

- Pastoral Planning/Action: Participants' frustration at being treated as "task-doers" and their demand for clear growth pathways indicate the need for integrated pastoral planning and action that empowers them as co-creators of the mission.

The following table synthesizes this alignment, providing a concise summary of the report's central findings.

Pastoral Spiral Stage	Core Theme from Analysis	Key Participant Codes/Themes	Representative Participant Quote (Vietnamese)
1. Exposure-Immersion	Detachment from lived reality; Lack of psychological support.	"Outdated methods," "Psychological neglect," "Need to be understood."	*"Giáo hội mình thực sự đang thiếu một mạng lưới quan tâm đúng mức đến tâm lý..."* (Our church is truly lacking a network of adequate psychological care...)
2. Social Analysis	Desire for a socially engaged and transformative faith.	"Social structures," "Church-State relations," "Making a difference."	*"Mối quan hệ giữa nhà nước và Công giáo giống như một cuộc 'hôn nhân bị ép buộc'."* (The relationship between the state and the Catholic Church is like a 'forced marriage.')
3. Faith Reflection	Yearning for personal spiritual depth over dry academicism.	"Deep soul connection," "Experiential faith," "Critique of academicism."	*"Khi em phục vụ nhà thờ, em nhận được một sự kết nối rất sâu về tâm hồn. Còn nếu không có kết nối đó, em sẽ không ở lại."* (When you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay.)
4. Pastoral Action	Frustration with being a "task-doer"; Need for integrated action.	"No clear pathway," "Lack of agency,"	*"Sau khi em đã dấn thân, đã cống hiến, thì tiếp theo em sẽ làm gì? Không có lộ trình, không có định hướng rõ ràng."* (After you have committed... what will you do next?

		"Systematized ministry."	There is no roadmap, no clear direction.)

Table 5.2 Mapping Participant Aspirations to the FABC Pastoral Spiral

The yearning for an integrated spirituality is not a new phenomenon, but the voices of these Vietnamese catechists give it a fresh and urgent clarity. By listening attentively to their intuitive call for a pastoral methodology that is grounded in reality, critically engaged with society, rooted in personal encounter with God, and expressed in meaningful action, the Church in Vietnam has a profound opportunity to renew its mission of forming disciples for the 21st century.

5.3 Answering RQ2: The Power of Narrative Pedagogy and the Witness of the Martyrs

This section addresses the second research question, how narrative pedagogies that present the Vietnamese Martyrs as exemplars of a "dual-value system" (integrating traditional virtues with modern, proactive witness) shape the vocational identity, self-efficacy, and resilience of Gen-Z catechists, and how such effects are explained by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), but applies it more specifically to the HCMC parish context and to the Pastoral Spiral's formation logic. Reading the data through core SCT mechanisms, modelling (vicarious learning from credible, proximate exemplars), self-efficacy calibration (mastery/vicarious experiences, persuasion, affect regulation), outcome expectancies, and moral agency, the findings indicate that the martyrs constitute a powerful yet under-utilised spiritual–pedagogical resource.

Participants judged current presentations of the martyrs to be thin and hagiographical, often emphasising death over lifeworld narratives that connect to youth dilemmas (study–work pressure, migration, digital life, intergenerational conflict). At the same time, they articulated concrete ways to "re-story" the martyrs, foregrounding human struggle, discernment, and everyday virtue; linking stories to practice (pilgrimage, service, peer mentoring); and sequencing them through Exposure/Immersion → Social Analysis → Faith Reflection → Pastoral Action. Such re-storying would, in SCT terms, supply credible near-peer models, create efficacy-building experiences (guided practice, feedback, small wins),

and strengthen resilient identity commitments by aligning traditional filiality, solidarity, and courage with contemporary forms of public witness in HCMC. In short, the martyrs' witness, told this way, functions not merely as inspiration but as a mechanism-rich pedagogy for vocational identity, self-efficacy, and resilience among Gen-Z catechists.

5.3.1 From Distant Icons to Relatable Role Models: A Call to "Re-story" the Martyrs

A consistent theme in the data is the psychological distance between Gen-Z catechists and the Vietnamese Martyrs. While esteemed, the martyrs are often received as abstract, far-removed heroes, difficult to map onto the complex, urban lifeworld of Ho Chi Minh City. Participants linked this gap not only to historical remove but to a pedagogical paradigm that renders the martyrs psychologically inaccessible. Several proposed practices that would reduce that distance, for example, a pilgrimage-style learning pathway to sites linked to specific martyrs, so that *"walking where they walked"* could inspire in ways a classroom cannot (GZC-09).

Crucially, participants did not frame these concerns as matters of taste. Read through Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), their critiques amount to a diagnosis of why the current approach fails as observational learning. In SCT, symbolic modelling changes attitudes and behaviour through a sequence, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, strengthened when models are credible, relatable, and attainable, and when contexts provide guided practice, feedback, and vicarious reinforcement (Bandura, 1986/1997). The present *"old-school"* approach breaks this chain at the first link, attention: narratives were repeatedly described as *"unattractive," "dry,"* and *"old school,"* such that modelling never begins. As one experienced catechist put it, the stories as presented are *"not content that's attractive, even for Catholics, let alone Gen-Z youth"* (EC-04). Another young catechist admitted, "Until I researched it, I knew nothing about André Phú Yên except his name", remarkable given he is the patron of catechists (GZC-10).

When attention falters, retention follows suit. Narratives delivered as dates, feats, and hagiographical hyperbole lack the concrete, emotionally resonant scripts that stick in memory; traditional telling often render saints *"superhuman, to the point of being unimaginable,"* making it difficult to encode actionable patterns for later recall (SCH-03).

The deficit then carries into reproduction: learners need graded practice and attainable templates to enact what they observe, but flawless heroism offers no visible steps to imitate. Participants therefore argued for humanised narratives, including uncertainty, fear, discernment, and growth, so specific virtues can be rehearsed in age-appropriate ways (classroom routines, family ethics, peer service). Finally, motivation depends on self-efficacy and valued outcomes; stories that surface near-peer struggle and small wins elevate efficacy, while practices such as pilgrimage, service projects, and mentored leadership supply the vicarious and mastery experiences that sustain effort. Participants' language about a *"deep soul connection"* and meaningful belonging captures precisely the kinds of outcomes that keep volunteers engaged. In short, participants' critiques are not mere stylistic preferences. They are an intuitive SCT analysis: the current mode fails at attention, undermines retention, offers little to reproduce, and weakly supports motivation/self-efficacy. A re-storying of the martyrs that (i) spotlights credible, proximate, human exemplars; (ii) attaches concrete practices to each virtue; and (iii) builds guided opportunities for enactment would restore the full modelling sequence.

5.3.1.1 The "Old School" Paradigm: A Crisis of Connection and Attention

Participants repeatedly described the prevailing hagiographical style as "old school (lỗi thời)", a mode that recounts dates and peak heroics while omitting the human and spiritual drama of ordinary days. Read through Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), this is not merely a stylistic quibble but a mechanism failure across the modelling sequence of attention → retention → reproduction → motivation (Bandura, 1986; 1997). First, attention collapses: narratives were judged "not attractive, even for Catholics, let alone Gen-Z youth" (EC-04), with some catechists admitting they knew only the name of key figures such as André Phú Yên (GZC-10). With attention unmet, symbolic modelling cannot begin. Second, retention suffers because "superhuman, to the point of unimaginable" portrayals (SCH-03) lack concrete, emotionally resonant scripts that stick in memory (e.g., how the saint prayed, reconciled, persevered, decided).

Third, reproduction (enactment) is impeded by a model–observer mismatch: learners are given flawless icons rather than attainable, credible, proximate exemplars. Without visible intermediate steps or graded practices, novices cannot translate ideals into behaviour.

Finally, motivation/self-efficacy remains low: when stories do not show struggle, small wins, and supportive feedback, they fail to supply the mastery and vicarious experiences that raise efficacy and sustain effort. In short, the “old-school” paradigm inflates the model (distant hero) and deflates the learner (no next step), depressing all four SCT processes at once.

Consequently, the crisis of connection participants name is best understood as a social-cognitive deficit. Their remedies, humanising the martyrs’ journeys (fear, doubt, discernment, growth), linking virtues to concrete practices (pilgrimage, service, peer mentoring), and creating guided opportunities for enactment, are mechanism-level fixes. Such re-storying restores attention (engaging, relevant narratives), supports retention (memorable, practice-ready scripts), enables reproduction (clear, graded behaviours), and strengthens motivation/self-efficacy (credible models + feedback in HCMC’s real conditions). Thus, the path forward is not more facts about saints, but SCT-informed narration and practice that convert distant icons into relatable role models.

5.3.1.2 The Participant-Driven Vision: A Pedagogy of Humanization

In response to the perceived shortcomings of the current approach, participants did not merely offer criticism; they articulated a clear and constructive vision for a new narrative pedagogy. This vision represents a call to "re-story" the martyrs by radically shifting the focus from their glorious deaths to their relatable, complex, and deeply human lives.

A scholar participating in the study urged a fundamental change in narrative emphasis, arguing for a focus *"on the values or virtues of the saint... that will connect with the youth's life, rather than just telling their names or events" – (SCH-03)*. This proposal represents a move from a fact-based, historical catechesis to a value-based, existential one. The goal is not for young people to memorise what the martyrs *did*, but to understand *who they were* and *what they stood for* in a way that resonates with their own moral and spiritual questions.

This sentiment was powerfully echoed by a catechist who articulated the core of the "re-storying" project: *"When telling martyrs' stories, we should not focus on their death but on their life journey before that - they lived, had families, friends, a very human life" – (GZC-09)*. This quote encapsulates the deep-seated desire to encounter the martyrs not as abstract

symbols of faith but as whole persons, embedded in the same web of relationships, responsibilities, and daily realities that define human existence. By highlighting their humanity, their roles as parents, children, friends, and workers, the narratives become psychologically proximate, and their virtues appear more accessible.

Crucially, this humanisation extends to acknowledging their struggles and vulnerabilities. The traditional hagiographical model often presents the martyrs as fearless and unwavering from the outset. However, participants advocated for a more honest portrayal that includes their moments of fear, doubt, and hardship. As one respondent explained, this is a more accurate and ultimately more inspiring narrative:

Before accepting death, they also fled, they were also afraid... At a certain point, after a personal transformation between them and God, they finally had enough courage not to run anymore ("Trước khi chịu chết, các ngài cũng từng chạy trốn, từng sợ hãi... Đến một lúc nào đó, sau sự biến đổi cá vị giữa họ với Chúa, họ mới đủ can đảm để không trốn nữa".) – (EC-04)

This insight is profoundly important for modelling resilience. It shifts the ideal from *"fearlessness"*, an unrealistic and often intimidating state, to *"courage,"* which is more accurately defined as the act of proceeding *despite* fear. This presents a psychologically healthier and more attainable model for Generation Z catechists, who navigate a world rife with anxiety and pressure. By showing that the martyrs were not exempt from fear but found the strength to overcome it through their faith, the "re-storied" narrative provides a practical, imitable script for confronting one's own challenges. It teaches that faith is not the absence of struggle, but the ultimate resource one draws upon to act with integrity in the face of it. The following table summarises the key pedagogical shifts proposed by the participants.

Feature	**Traditional Approach (As Perceived by Participants)**	**Proposed 'Re-storied' Approach (As Articulated by Participants)**
Primary Focus	The moment of death; hagiography; historical facts.	The "life journey before that" [1]; the human and spiritual drama.

Core Content	Names, dates, methods of execution.	"Values or virtues" [1]; struggles, fears, relationships, family life.	
Portrayal of Martyr	Distant icon; "superhuman, to the point of being unimaginable".[1]	Relatable human: a person who "lived, had families, friends".[1]	
Psychological Impact	"Unattractive" [1]; "	dry and uninteresting" [1]; creates distance.	Psychologically engaging; connects with "the youth's life".[1]
Pedagogical Goal	Veneration; memorization of facts.	Connection; imitation of virtues; building resilience and identity.	

Table 5.3 The key pedagogical shifts proposed by the participants.

5.3.2 The Martyrs as a "Spiritual Antidote" to Contemporary Challenges

When framed through this renewed pedagogical lens, the narratives of the martyrs can serve as a powerful "spiritual antidote" to the specific psycho-spiritual challenges confronting Gen Z catechists in Vietnam. This approach moves beyond mere inspiration to become a practical pedagogical tool for navigating the complexities of modern life, building resilience, and forging a robust vocational identity.

As established in the literature review, this generation navigates a complex "dual-value system," seeking to integrate traditional collectivist virtues with modern individualistic aspirations for authenticity and personal witness. The stories of the martyrs, when properly interpreted, provide a culturally specific and spiritually potent script for resolving this tension. Their unwavering faith and loyalty to the community are traditional virtues, yet

their conscious, personal choice to bear witness in the face of overwhelming state power is a profoundly modern act of individual integrity and proactive responsibility. They thus model a faith that is both deeply rooted in heritage and personally empowering. This synthesis of values is precisely what makes their stories relevant and applicable to the lives of young people today.

The most powerful application of the martyrs' stories lies in their ability to frame contemporary struggles as a form of *"tử đạo trắng" (white martyrdom)*, thereby imbuing everyday challenges with spiritual meaning and purpose. This is not merely a theoretical concept but a pedagogical practice already being employed by catechists. One catechist provided a concrete example of this in action, recounting how she used the story of a young martyr to counsel a student struggling to balance life's demands:

"I told the students: don't say you don't have time to pray. In the past, he went kite flying... but still made time to pray... In the old days, Mass was not public like now but was held in secret at night, yet he still attended Mass and prayed regularly." – (GZC-02)

Here, the martyr is not a distant figure to be admired, but a relatable peer whose example provides a practical script for navigating a contemporary problem, in this case, time management and spiritual discipline. The martyr's historical context of persecution serves to reframe the student's modern context of being *"too busy,"* suggesting that if faithfulness was possible under extreme duress, it is certainly possible amidst the pressures of school and social life.

This *"critical pedagogy of martyrdom"* helps build resilience by framing current struggles within a larger narrative of faith and perseverance. It offers a powerful counter-narrative to the pressures of a secular *"performance culture"* by modelling a life oriented toward a higher purpose. One participant perfectly articulated the essence of this modern-day martyrdom, noting that for young people today, *"mỗi ngày sống vẫn là một cuộc đấu tranh bền bỉ cho niềm tin vào Chúa Kitô"* (every day lived is still a persistent struggle for faith in Christ) – (GZC-10). This perspective transforms mundane difficulties, academic stress, workplace conflicts, family pressures, the temptation to neglect prayer, into opportunities for witness.

Another participant, a religious sister, further refined this concept, suggesting that for the current generation, martyrdom can be understood as the fundamental, daily choice of "*sự phân định và quyết định chọn Chúa hay không chọn Chúa" (the discernment and decision*

to choose God or not to choose God) – (CLG-05). This frames everyday moral and practical decisions as spiritually significant acts. This pedagogical approach functions as a direct mechanism for building psychological resilience. By reframing personal stressors within a grand, sacred narrative of martyrdom, it facilitates a process of cognitive reappraisal. A difficult day is no longer just a *"bad day"*; it becomes an opportunity for *"tử đạo trắng,"* (white martyrdom) an act of faithful endurance. This cognitive shift reduces the psychological distress associated with the stressor and reinforces the catechist's vocational identity as someone engaged in a spiritually significant mission. By providing a rich, culturally resonant narrative that shows how to be both traditionally faithful and modernly authentic, this pedagogy directly impacts the formation of a robust vocational identity, equipping young catechists with the spiritual and psychological resources needed to sustain their ministry.

5.3.3 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter strongly suggest that the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs hold immense, yet largely unrealised, potential as a pedagogical resource for the formation of Generation Z catechists. The data reveals a clear disconnect between the current "old school" methods of narration, which present the martyrs as distant, superhuman icons, and the psychological and spiritual needs of young people today. This failure of engagement represents a breakdown at the most fundamental level of observational learning as described by Social Cognitive Theory: the failure to capture attention.

However, participants did not stop at critique. They articulated a compelling and coherent vision for a renewed narrative pedagogy, a call to "re-story" the martyrs by focusing on their relatable humanity, their life journeys, their struggles with fear, and their ultimate courage. This humanised approach transforms the martyrs into effective symbolic models whose virtues of perseverance, integrity, and faith become accessible and imitable. Furthermore, by framing contemporary challenges through the lens of "white martyrdom," this pedagogy provides a powerful, culturally resonant script for building resilience. It reframes the daily struggles of ministry and life not as meaningless burdens, but as opportunities for profound spiritual witness, thereby strengthening vocational identity and self-efficacy. This participant-driven vision offers a clear path forward for unlocking the latent power of this

precious spiritual heritage, equipping a new generation of church leaders with the resources they need to thrive in a complex modern world.

5.4 Answering RQ3: Servant Leadership Behaviours and SDT Needs for Gen Z Catechists

Volunteer Gen Z catechists in the HCMC Archdiocese consistently highlighted that servant leadership, grounded in a Human Resource Stewardship philosophy, is crucial for fulfilling their core psychological needs. Servant leaders act as stewards of their volunteers' growth – prioritizing empowerment, personal development, and genuine care – rather than relying on top-down authority. Notably, in Vietnam's traditionally hierarchical church culture (and a broader environment that values control), the choice to practice *servant leadership* is a *profoundly counter-cultural act*. Participants portrayed it as a "*courageous, almost prophetic form of leadership"* – one where a leader voluntarily sets aside top-down authority in favour of relational influence and empowerment. Such a leader, they suggested, creates precious *"pockets of trust, freedom, and innovation"* within an otherwise constrained.

This approach aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which holds that satisfying individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness nurtures internal motivation and sustained commitment. The data reveal that when parish leaders practice servant leadership (e.g. by sharing power, mentoring, and building community), young catechists experience greater autonomy in service, feel more competent in their roles, and develop a stronger sense of belonging. In turn, these fulfilled needs translate into more autonomous motivation (a heartfelt, self-driven desire to serve) and a willingness to remain long-term in the ministry despite its challenges. The following analysis, structured by SDT's three needs, illustrates how specific servant leadership behaviours foster each need – and contrasts them with more authoritarian or outdated practices that undermine volunteer motivation.

5.4.1 The Need for Autonomy: From "Task-Doer" to Empowered Steward

Autonomy refers to a person's sense of volition and agency. Gen Z catechists voiced a strong desire for empowering leadership that gives them a say in how they serve, rather than rigid, hierarchical control. Servant leadership answers this need by involving young volunteers in

decision-making, encouraging initiative, and showing flexibility in ministry methods. For example, one catechist described how in their parish the priest intentionally cultivates a *"two-way interaction"* with the catechist team rather than issuing directives top-down. When the team has new activity ideas, *"we will discuss it with the priest to get his feedback and confirmation on whether it fits the catechetical spirit and the parish context"- (EC-01)*. The pastor ultimately decides based on Church principles and local needs, but notably *"he is not someone who directly commands us to do this or that; instead, he listens to our ideas, offers input, and stands up to take responsibility for the work we do"*. This steward-like attitude – *"like a father in a family, observing, listening, advising"* – empowers catechists to propose and implement programs while knowing their leader has their back. Several respondents contrasted this empowering style with more authoritarian approaches still encountered elsewhere. In some locales, leaders cling to *"cứng nhắc" ("rigid")* rules and centralized curricula, leaving little room for local adaptation or youth input. One interviewee bluntly critiqued the *"old-fashioned, imposed"* style of religious instruction, arguing that parishes should have freedom to adapt teaching programs *"rather than rigidly sticking to the [diocesan] official program"*. They *"very much disagree with the old teaching method – the kind of forced, rote learning approach"* – (EC-02) that some official curricula mandate. Such rigidity, in their view, stifles creativity and fails to engage the new generation.

By contrast, servant-minded leaders regconise that flexibility and openness are key to keeping Gen Z engaged. As one lay leader observed, a narrow or defensive leadership mindset (lacking *"open or sincere reception"* of new ideas) becomes *"a major barrier"* to progress. *"A leader needs to have a broad, open vision… but if they just shut themselves off, nothing can develop"- (EC-07)*. Gen Z volunteers respond poorly to environments where they have no voice or where rules trump reasoning – adolescents *"are very prone to rebel against anything rigid and lacking empathy"* as one participant noted. Indeed, data show that overly strict or inflexible handling of volunteers' time can drive them away. One catechist recounted how a certain senior leader *"worked quite rigidly, not understanding the situation of catechists who were also students,"* refusing to accommodate a volunteer's mandatory school military training; this lack of flexibility meant *"many of them became discouraged, even quit"- (GZC-03)*. These experiences underscore that Gen Z catechists thrive under leaders who trust and empower them – by inviting honest dialogue, delegating

responsibilities, and adapting to their realities – rather than those who enforce compliance without question.

Servant leadership, through dialogue and flexibility, fulfils young volunteers' autonomy needs by making them feel respected as collaborators in the mission rather than subordinates. Notably, in one parish the pastor explicitly encouraged frank input from the team: *"Just speak honestly, don't worry about me being upset or angry, I need to hear the truth more than what makes me feel comfortable"- (CLG-01)*. Such assurances create psychological safety for catechists to voice concerns and ideas without fear, empowering them to take initiative. In sum, empowering behaviours – open communication, shared decision-making, and flexible guidelines – allow Gen Z catechists to experience a sense of ownership and freedom in their service. This satisfaction of autonomy bolsters their intrinsic motivation, as they feel that they *want* to serve (not that they *have* to), and are therefore more likely to remain committed volunteers over time.

5.4.2 The Need for Competence: Beyond Doctrinal Knowledge to Pastoral Mastery

The need for competence involves feeling effective, skilled, and able to make a meaningful contribution. The testimonies indicate that Gen Z catechists are highly motivated by opportunities for personal growth in their faith knowledge and teaching skills, and by leaders who invest in their development. Servant leadership, aligned with Human Resource Stewardship, manifests as a commitment to mentor, train, and affirm volunteers – helping them build the competence and confidence required for ministry. Many participants praised leaders who took on a *coaching* or *mentoring* role rather than simply delegating tasks. One priest recounted that when he was a curate, he would spend time after each catechism class to meet one-on-one with the young instructors: asking about *"their studies, family, parents…"*, and even uncovering personal struggles – *"sometimes just asking a bit would make them tear up because they were having family difficulties"*. Through these caring check-ins, he came to *"understand their life somewhat,"* and importantly, *"that presence and listening made them feel attached"* to the ministry. Personal mentorship not only deepened relational bonds but also kept the volunteers engaged long enough to grow into seasoned catechists – *"after that they continued to stay, becoming assistant instructors, then*

catechists". This illustrates how guidance and support from a servant leader can nurture a novice's sense of efficacy and commitment.

Alongside mentoring, young catechists value quality training and feedback to improve their teaching competence. However, several expressed frustration with *"hasty"* or outdated training models that leave them ill-prepared. One interviewee observed that current catechist formation in Vietnam is uneven – some places train methodically, but others rush people into teaching when *"they still haven't met basic standards" – (EC-03)*, resulting in underqualified catechists. Moreover, the content of training can lag behind modern needs. *"I really do not agree with the old way of teaching – the imposed, rote way"*, one Gen Z catechist remarked, referring to the traditional courses run by the diocesan catechetical office (GZC-03). They and others called for more up-to-date, engaging pedagogy and comprehensive formation (not just doctrinal knowledge but also attitude and soft skills) to make them effective in the classroom. Servant leaders operating as good stewards regconise these needs and seek to improve training quality – for instance, by upskilling youth in creative teaching methods or by introducing new materials – so that young volunteers feel more capable and confident. In addition, effective servant leadership provides affirmation and recognition of volunteers' contributions, reinforcing their sense of competence and worth. Gen Z catechists in the Archdiocese expressed that non-monetary rewards like praise, trust, and inclusion are powerful motivators. *"In outside organisations people get paid or at least regconised; in the Church, the reward is a spiritual connection and personal value,"* noted one leader, emphasizing that feeling valued is the primary incentive for church volunteers (SCH-01).

Tangible acknowledgments – even simple words of thanks or small tokens – signal to young catechists that their efforts are meaningful. One parish priest makes a point to publicly appreciate his catechist team at every opportunity: during important events he insists that *"the parish council must invite the youth catechists to participate as true collaborators, on par with the older leaders… Their presence also deserves to be acknowledged"* (CLG-01). He believes these gestures of respect, though small, *"make the youths feel valued and have a place in the community"*, which in turn *"keeps them staying"* in the ministry. Such recognition boosts volunteers' confidence in their own abilities and importance, fulfilling their competence need and strengthening their commitment. Conversely, a lack of growth opportunities or feedback can quickly demotivate dedicated Gen Z members. As one

interviewee warned, if after one's initial enthusiasm there is *"no clear path for what's next,"* and one is asked to *"stick around 10, 20, 30 years with no innovation or chance to develop,"* then even the most *"passionate and skilled"* catechist's motivation *"will be heavily affected"* (SCH-01). Servant leaders proactively counter this stagnation by charting development pathways – for example, rotating roles to learn new skills, offering advanced training, or increasing responsibilities as youths mature. By doing so, they help volunteers continually experience mastery and progress. In summary, servant leadership satisfies Gen Z catechists' competence needs through nurturing behaviours: providing mentorship, ensuring relevant training, and celebrating contributions. Feeling more competent and appreciated, these young volunteers develop greater professional confidence and find deeper intrinsic satisfaction in their service, which encourages them to persevere despite challenges.

5.4.3 The Need for Relatedness: The Servant Leader as the Architect of Community

The need for relatedness is the desire to belong, to feel cared for, and to connect with others in a meaningful way. In the context of church volunteering, relatedness translates into feeling part of a faith family and knowing that one's presence matters to the community. Servant leadership excels at fostering this sense of community and psychological safety by building trustful relationships, showing empathy, and cultivating an inclusive team spirit. The qualitative evidence from Gen Z catechists underscores that when leaders act as compassionate companions and servant-stewards, volunteers experience a strong sense of relational fulfilment that keeps them engaged in the ministry. A recurring theme in the interviews is the importance of leaders who listen and care. Young catechists deeply appreciate pastors or coordinators who take time to understand their personal circumstances and support them both inside and outside the classroom. For instance, the priest who met individually with each catechist (discussed above) not only enhanced their skills but also created a bond of trust. Even if he had to correct or discipline a volunteer at times, he ensured they still felt *truly cared for* – remembering birthdays, giving a small gift, or tutoring them when they struggled at school. He balanced high standards with compassion: *"what is wrong must still be corrected,"* yet the catechists knew he genuinely *"loved"* them and would stand by them. This balance made the youth feel safe and "at home" in the parish. One participant noted that such authentic presence and empathy from a leader made them *"feel attached"*

to the group, like a member of a close-knit family, and therefore more likely to remain committed.

Creating an atmosphere of psychological safety was also highlighted as a critical servant leadership behaviour. Gen Z catechists thrive when they can share ideas or admit mistakes without fear of humiliation. In one parish, the pastor (himself young enough to relate to the youth) explicitly cultivates an open, non-judgmental meeting culture: he tells his team to speak freely and promises not to take offense at critiques (CLG-01). As he explains, the goal is *"to create a space where everyone can speak up without fear of being judged or punished,"* rather than to demand blind agreement (CLG-01). He deliberately does *"not seize on their opinions to catch mistakes or put pressure,"* but instead uses dialogue to *"build trust and maturity"* in the team (CLG-01). This approach signals to the young catechists that their voices are valued and that it's safe to be honest – a hallmark of servant leadership that greatly increases their sense of belonging and mutual respect.

By contrast, authoritarian or fear-based leadership quickly erodes relatedness. A few catechists lamented that some older clergy or lay leaders rely on public scolding and punishment, which creates distance and anxiety. *"In a children's environment one shouldn't use punishment, because it easily makes them afraid and lose the sense of being loved,"* one interviewee observed (EC-05), reminding that such tactics clash with the Gospel spirit of love. Gen Z volunteers, in their sensitive adolescent and young adult years, respond especially poorly to being shamed in front of their peers: *"when a mistake is met with being brought out before the crowd to be punished, I feel pity for that person. Teenagers are very sensitive to how those around treat them,"* a young catechist reflected (GZC-02). Servant leadership avoids these pitfalls by emphasizing forgiveness, patience, and inclusive relationship-building. Indeed, many volunteers said what truly sustains them is the *camaraderie* and emotional support they find in the catechetical community. Leaders contribute by organizing fellowship activities (shared meals, outings, celebrations) that strengthen team bonds. One parish, for example, holds simple communal events on holidays and special occasions – *"just cooking together, playing together"* – which *"create a very strong cohesion"* among the catechists (EC-01). Such experiences make volunteers feel that the catechetical team is *"not just doing church work, but living out a shared calling"* with friends, which powerfully reinforces relatedness. Moreover, servant leaders regconise and affirm each volunteer as an important part of the mission, which further solidifies the

person's sense of belonging. The earlier example of inviting young catechists to sit alongside elder parish leaders at events is emblematic: it sends the message that *"the presence of the youths is also deserving of acknowledgement"* (CLG-01).

When Gen Z catechists perceive that their contributions *and* their personal selves are cherished by the community, their commitment deepens. In interviews, several noted that unlike secular volunteering, serving the Church offers a unique spiritual fulfilment – a feeling of being connected to something profoundly meaningful. *"When you serve at church, you receive a very deep spiritual connection… If you don't have that connection, you will not stay,"* one leader explained, calling this sense of sacred belonging "the greatest reward" that *"nurtures the spirit of service"* through hardships (SCH-01). In essence, the family-like environment cultivated by servant leadership meets young volunteers' relatedness needs in both human and spiritual dimensions. This fulfilment translates into a resilient commitment: even without material incentives, Gen Z catechists remain devoted because they love the community and believe they are an integral part of its mission.

5.4.4 Integration of Needs and Commitment

Ultimately, the data illustrate that servant leadership – as the practical expression of a stewardship mindset – generates a virtuous cycle of motivation for Gen Z catechists by holistically addressing their SDT needs. Empowering behaviours give them autonomy, enabling them to internalize ownership of their ministry. Mentoring, training and constructive feedback develop their competence, making them feel effective and purposeful. Empathy, trust, and inclusive community fulfil their relatedness, making service emotionally rewarding. When these needs are satisfied, volunteers report a shift from obligatory participation to autonomous motivation – they serve not due to pressure or perks but from genuine enthusiasm and identified calling. One priest noted that helping young catechists discover the true *"mission"* of their role (beyond just "doing church work") imbues them with a conviction that *"sustains them when difficulties arise,"* whereas *"if [their] motivation is only social or emotional, they will get discouraged"*. (CLG-02)

Servant leaders, by nurturing personal growth and a sense of mission, facilitate this internalization of motivation rooted in faith and values. Consequently, volunteer catechists become more resilient and long-term committed. They are willing to overcome obstacles (academic pressures, career, family duties) to continue serving, because their motivation

comes from within and is reinforced by a supportive leadership environment. In the words of one young catechist, the *"connection"* they feel and the growth they experience are far more sustaining than any external reward. Thus, servant leadership grounded in human resource stewardship proves most effective in fostering the autonomous motivation and enduring dedication of Generation Z catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese. Each act of empowering, guiding, and caring for these young volunteers not only meets their psychological needs but also cultivates a new generation of committed, mission-driven stewards for the Church's catechetical ministry.

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psychological needs but also cultivates a new generation of committed, mission-driven stewards for the Church's catechetical ministry.

SDT Psychological Need	Servant Leadership / Stewardship Behaviours (Fulfilling the Need)	Authoritarian / Neglectful Behaviours (Thwarting the Need)
Autonomy	• "Two-way interaction" and dialogue (EC-01) • Empowering with voice and choice; trusting with responsibility (CLG-01) • Flexibility with schedules and methods (GZC-03 critique)	• "Rigid" (cứng nhắc) rules and top-down commands (EC-02) • "Imposed, rote learning approach" (GZC-03) • Inflexible and unempathetic enforcement of rules (GZC-03)
Competence	• One-on-one mentoring and coaching (CLG-01) • Providing quality, relevant training • Public affirmation and recognition as "true collaborators" (CLG-01)	• "Hasty" or outdated training; rushing unprepared volunteers (EC-03) • Lack of feedback or a clear "roadmap" for development (SCH-01) • Neglecting to acknowledge contributions
Relatedness	• Personal care and accompaniment; asking about family/studies (CLG-01) • Creating psychological safety to "speak honestly" (CLG-01) • Building community through fellowship (EC-01)	• Public scolding and punishment (GZC-02) • Aloof, distant, or purely transactional interactions • Fostering a climate of fear or competition
Overall Motivation	Protects and Nurtures the "Salary of the Soul": Fosters autonomous, intrinsic motivation, leading to resilient, long-term commitment.	Depletes the "Salary of the Soul": Creates controlled or amotivated states, leading to burnout, disengagement, and quitting.

Table 5.4 The Impact of Leadership Styles on SDT Need Satisfaction and Volunteer Motivation

This table distills the rich narrative data from the preceding sections into a powerful, structured synthesis. By juxtaposing the positive, need-fulfilling behaviours of servant leadership with the negative, need-thwarting behaviours of authoritarian or neglectful styles, it provides a clear, evidence-based answer to the research question. It visually demonstrates the cause-and-effect relationships inferred from the data, making the argument for servant leadership not just a normative preference but a practical necessity for sustainable ministry.

The qualitative evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that the satisfaction of Gen Z catechists' core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is not an accidental outcome but the direct result of a deliberate, servant-oriented leadership philosophy. This finding constitutes the qualitative answer to Research Question 3, showing *how* an integrated model can provide a more effective and sustainable approach to supporting volunteer catechists. The servant leader is the "linchpin" that connects the

philosophy of stewardship to the psychological reality of the volunteer, architecting an ecosystem where intrinsic motivation can thrive. These findings, which focus on the crucial role of leadership, must now be integrated with the earlier findings on pedagogy (5.2) and narrative (5.3) to form a complete, empirically grounded picture of the Human Resource Stewardship model in action, a task that will be undertaken in the overall chapter synthesis that follows.

5.5 Synthesis: An Empirically Grounded Case for the Human Resource Stewardship Model

The analyses for RQ1–RQ3 reveal an interlocking system rather than discrete problems. At the macro level, the institutional context, best described as a *"yellow-light"* [2] environment, meaning conditional permission with selective enforcement that encourages caution, combined with an internally hierarchical, risk-averse culture, tilts practice toward control and stability rather than participation and innovation. This institutional hardware shapes and sustains a crisis in pedagogy: familiar, top-down, content-heavy methods persist because they feel safe, even as they fail to engage a digitally native generation living and learning in networked, conversational, fast-paced spaces (the "analogue Church in a digital world" problem).

This rigidity produces predictable psychological consequences for volunteers. When catechists are given little voice or flexibility (autonomy), under-resourced for the classroom and digital mission (competence), and led within climates that vary widely in trust and belonging (relatedness), their basic psychological needs are systematically thwarted. In that state, the very fuel that sustains ministry, the intrinsic, spiritual compensation participants call the "salary of the soul", is starved, and burnout follows. Finally, a demotivated and under-supported base means the system struggles to leverage its strongest assets: the formative power of narrative (e.g., re-storying the martyrs in ways Gen Z can inhabit) and the transformative effect of servant leadership, which appear only in isolated "pockets of trust, freedom, and innovation" rather than as a norm.

[2] Yellow-light is an analytic term derived from an interview with a senior scholar (SCH-01), used here to describe a permissive-but-precarious regulatory climate: initiatives may proceed, yet under close oversight, procedural hurdles, and context-dependent discretion, producing self-censorship and incrementalist change.

In short, the institution's hardware (structures, controls, habits) presently conflicts with the software of Gen Z volunteers' psychological, pedagogical, and spiritual needs. The result is a self-reinforcing loop: risk-averse structures sustain outdated pedagogy; outdated pedagogy undermines motivation; low motivation limits the uptake of narrative and digital renewal; the absence of renewal then appears to justify further control.

What participants asked for (explicitly and implicitly) maps closely onto the four facets of the Human Resource Stewardship model, making HRS the most coherent "inference to the best explanation" for this context:

- Stewardship (philosophy): Volunteers want to be treated as trusted co-workers with a clear pathway, from attraction and onboarding through development and transition. They asked for inclusion, flexibility, and lifecycle-aware practices that respect contemporary study/work/family pressures. This is stewardship as pastoral care of vocation and well-being, not extraction of labour.
- Servant leadership (ethos): Participants described the ideal leader as a companion who listens, accompanies, persuades, and stands up to take responsibility, a counter-cultural posture in a hierarchical setting. Servant leadership reliably produced the need-supportive climates where youth voice, innovation, and accountability can flourish.
- Self-Determination Theory (engine): Where autonomy, competence, and relatedness were supported, catechists reported resilient, autonomous motivation, a durable, value-aligned energy they named the "salary of the soul." Where these needs were thwarted, motivation eroded despite strong initial ideals.
- Social Cognitive & Narrative Theory (method): Participants asked for role-model-rich, story-driven formation that humanises the martyrs (virtues, choices, costs) and for a digital ecosystem that empowers bottom-up creators rather than imposing one more top-down "programme." Learning, modelling, and identity-work now occur in digital publics; formation that ignores this arena self-excludes.

Taken together, the facets of HRS do not sit on top of the data; they fall out of the data as an integrated and practicable response that aligns philosophy, leadership, psychology, and pedagogy with the realities Gen Z catechists inhabit.

Envision a Flourishing Gen Z Catechist at the centre, sustained by the synergy of the four HRS facets. Around this centre sits the Institutional and Socio-Political Context, the

"yellow-light" setting that can enable or constrain implementation. Within that boundary, the model prioritises: (1) stewardship pathways across the volunteer lifecycle, (2) servant leadership as the climate-setter, (3) SDT-aligned practices in daily ministry, and (4) narrative + digital ecosystems that amplify modelling and belonging.

HRS Pillar	Core principle	Emergent theme from data	Illustrative participant voice
Stewardship as pastoral care	Volunteers are persons to be nurtured, not resources to be used; the organisation stewards their vocation and well-being.	Fractured volunteer lifecycle; call for clear pathways, inclusion, and flexibility.	*"After you have dedicated yourself… what will you do next? There is no roadmap, no clear direction."* (SCH-01)
Servant leadership in action	Leadership enacted through service, empowerment, accompaniment; leaders share power and take responsibility.	Search for authentic accompaniment; leader as linchpin of climate and culture.	*"A friend, a father, and a true companion… listens, accompanies, and shares."* (GZC-08)
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Intrinsic motivation is fuelled by meeting needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness.	The "salary of the soul": spiritual connection, growth, and purpose sustain commitment.	*"When you serve the Church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay."* (SCH-01)
Social Cognitive & Narrative	Identity and learning shaped by modelling and story—now also in digital spaces.	Re-storying the martyrs; building a digital ecosystem (not just programmes).	*"Focus on the values or virtues of the saint… that will connect with young people's lives."* (SCH-03)

Table 5.5 Conceptual synthesis, mapping emergent themes to HRS facets

This chapter has shown what is broken and why. The core diagnosis is systemic: a risk-averse, hierarchical hardware sustains pedagogies and practices misaligned with Gen Z's psychological and cultural software, draining the intrinsic energy that keeps volunteers in ministry. Across RQ1–RQ3, participants called, consistently and concretely, for a stewardship-centred system, servant-led cultures, SDT-supportive practices, and narrative/digital formation that meets them where they live and learn.

Crucially, the HRS model did not arrive as a preconceived theory; it emerged from the data as the most coherent way to re-align philosophy, leadership, psychology and pedagogy with the lived realities of catechists in Ho Chi Minh City. This synthesis therefore establishes both the case and the conditions for change. The next chapter turns to the how: a practicable framework and concrete recommendations for operationalising HRS, building stewardship pathways, forming servant leaders, embedding SDT in everyday ministry, and cultivating the narrative-digital ecosystem required for a flourishing generation of volunteer catechists.

Chapter 6: Quantitative Analysis of Factors Predicting Catechist Happiness

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the quantitative findings from the study's second phase – a survey-based analysis of factors influencing Generation Z volunteer catechists' self-reported happiness in their ministry. Building on the qualitative insights from earlier chapters, the survey data are used to statistically test which factors significantly predict the outcome "I am happy as a catechist" (survey item Q13_17). This item serves as the dependent variable (DV) and was measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Given that self-reported happiness was extremely high on average (Mean ≈ 4.7 on a 5-point scale, with over 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing they are happy in the role), the distribution of the DV is highly skewed toward the positive end. Rather than contradicting the qualitative evidence of formational and pedagogical gaps, this pattern is interpreted as happiness amidst constraint, a hallmark of faith-based volunteering in which a strong sense of calling and spiritual reward coexists with recognition of structural shortcomings .This pronounced ceiling effect leaves limited variance to explain, but even subtle differences in happiness can be illuminating for understanding what distinguishes the most fulfilled catechists from the merely content. To accommodate the skewed distribution, an ordinal logistic regression model with an asymmetrical link function was employed. In particular, a negative log-log link function was specified, as is recommended when the outcome's distribution is skewed toward one end (in this case, the highest category) (Norušis, 2012; Smith, 2011; Chua, 2020; Sabharwal et al., 2023; IBM, 2020). This link function is appropriate for situations where higher-ordered categories dominate the responses, providing a better model fit for such data than the standard logit. All analyses were conducted in SPSS using the PLUM procedure for ordinal regression.

To ensure a robust and comprehensive assessment, a three-model analytical strategy was implemented. This multi-step approach allows for examining the data from different angles – from broad theoretical constructs to specific survey items – and for validating the consistency of findings. Model 1 examines the influence of five composite indices

representing the key thematic domains identified in the qualitative phase. Model 2 disaggregates those indices into their constituent survey items to provide a granular view of which specific aspects are driving happiness. Finally, Model 3 takes an exhaustive "kitchen-sink" approach by including a wide range of potential predictors and employing a stepwise pruning procedure to arrive at a parsimonious final model. By comparing these models, we can see how well the theory-driven composites perform relative to an item-level analysis and a data-driven selection of predictors. The chapter first describes the sample and measures (including reliability of composite scales), then presents results from the three ordinal regression models, and concludes with an integrated interpretation of the findings.

6.2 Demographic Profile of the Catechist Cohort (Section 1)

This section establishes the foundational context for the study by profiling the 305 respondents who participated in the survey. A thorough understanding of the demographic composition of this cohort, including their age, gender, catechetical experience, and geographical distribution, is crucial for accurately interpreting their subsequent responses on motivation, ministerial practice, and training needs. The data presented here are drawn from Questions 1 through 5 of the survey instrument.

6.2.1 Age Distribution (Q1)

The survey successfully targeted individuals within the Generation Z demographic. The ages of the 305 respondents range from a minimum of 16 to a maximum of 28 years old. This age bracket encompasses individuals at various life stages, including late adolescence, tertiary education, and early career phases. A detailed frequency analysis of the raw data reveals a concentration of respondents in their early-to-mid-twenties, with the most frequent ages being 22 (n=39), 21 (n=37), and 20 (n=31). This suggests that the sample is predominantly composed of university students and young professionals. This life stage is often characterized by significant personal and professional transitions, identity formation, and the negotiation of multiple demanding commitments. These contextual factors are likely to exert a considerable influence on their experiences within ministry, particularly concerning the challenges of balancing service with academic, professional, and social obligations.

6.2.2 Gender Composition (Q2)

The gender distribution among the respondents is remarkably balanced, a significant strength of the sample that allows for findings that are representative of both young men and women in this ministry. Of the 305 participants, 152 (50%) identified as male and 150 (49%) identified as female. A small minority of respondents either preferred not to state their gender (n=2, 1%) or identified as Demigender (n=1). This near-equal representation ensures that the subsequent analyses of motivation, experience, and satisfaction are not skewed by a predominantly male or female perspective, thereby offering a more holistic and robust understanding of the Gen Z catechist experience.

6.2.3 Catechetical Experience (Q3)

The data on years of service reveals a wide and diverse spectrum of experience among the Gen Z catechists surveyed. The length of service ranges from 0 to 12 years. The inclusion of respondents with zero years of experience indicates that the sample captures individuals who are new to the role or currently in training, providing valuable data on initial formation and onboarding processes. At the other end of the spectrum, the maximum reported experience of 12 years is a particularly noteworthy finding. Given the age range of the respondents (16-28), this implies that a subset of these catechists began their service at a very young age, possibly as assistants or junior leaders during their early adolescence.

Public commentary and parts of the youth-volunteering literature often portray Generation Z's institutional engagement as episodic, transactional, and short-lived. The present data qualify that narrative. Within this faith-based cohort, a distinct sub-group follows an "early-entry, long-service" pathway: they begin ministry in adolescence, log multi-year continuous service, assume progressively responsible roles (e.g., moving from youth leadership into catechesis), and report a strong intention to remain (see Table 6.1: years of service; Figure 6.3: intention to remain). Taken together, these behavioural indicators point to a stable role identity as catechist embedded in discipleship, not a short-term activity. The coexistence of novices and young veterans in the sample further enables a lifecycle reading of catechist development, from on-ramps and initial training through factors that shape retention and risks of burnout. In short, the findings do not deny that episodic volunteering exists; they

show that, in this ecclesial context, a sizeable segment of Gen Z demonstrates durable, vocation-anchored commitment that complicates the prevailing story of transience.

6.2.4 Diocesan and Parish Affiliation (Q4 & Q5)

The geographical distribution of the respondents is primarily concentrated in two major ecclesiastical territories in southern Vietnam. The majority of participants serve in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (TGP Sài Gòn), accounting for 60% (n=183) of the sample. The second-largest group comes from the neighbouring Diocese of Xuan Loc, with 33% (n=102) of respondents. The remaining 7% of participants are distributed across seven other dioceses, including Ba Ria, Can Tho, Long Xuyen, Da Lat, My Tho, Phan Thiet, and Vinh Long.

This concentration in and around Ho Chi Minh City, the nation's largest urban centre and economic hub, suggests that the survey findings are most representative of the experiences of catechists serving in urban and suburban parishes. The open-ended responses for parish affiliation confirm a wide variety of individual parishes within these dioceses, indicating a broad sample within the specified regions. This urban context is a critical interpretive lens for the data, as it may amplify certain challenges, such as balancing ministry with the fast-paced demands of higher education and competitive professional careers, which are more pronounced in metropolitan settings. The summary of the demographic profile is presented in Table 6.1.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Mean (SD)	22.5 (3.1)	
	Range	16–28	
Gender	Male	152	50%
	Female	150	49%
	Others	3	1%
Diocese	Ho Chi Minh City	183	60.00%
	Xuân Lộc	101	33.10%
	Other	21	6.90%
Years of Experience	Mean (SD)	4.1 (3.0)	

Table 6.1 Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N=305)

6.3 Pathways to Service: Vocation and Sustaining Motivations (Section 2)

This section investigates the formative journey of Gen Z catechists, analysing the factors that initially draw them into ministry and the motivations that sustain their continued service. Understanding these pathways is essential for developing effective recruitment strategies and fostering long-term commitment. The analysis is based on data from Questions 6, 7, and 8 of the survey.

6.3.1 How Respondents Became Catechists (Q6)

The pathways into catechetical ministry for this cohort are diverse, with intrinsic desires and relational influences being the most prominent drivers. In this multiple-response question, the most frequently cited reason for becoming a catechist was a "Desire to contribute to the parish community," selected by 68% (n=207) of respondents. This was followed closely by being "Inspired by previous catechists" (58%, n=178) and having "Grown up in youth movements" (52%, n=160). In contrast, external invitations from authority figures were less influential, with "Invitation from a priest" cited by 33% (n=100) and "Encouragement from family" by 26% (n=78).

These results indicate that Gen Z individuals are not primarily being conscripted into service but are actively drawn to it. They are motivated by an internal sense of purpose and a desire to make a meaningful impact on their community, a characteristic widely attributed to this generation. Furthermore, the strong influence of peer role models ("inspiration from previous catechists") highlights the critical role of social networks and positive examples in recruitment. This aligns with research demonstrating that social influence is a significant factor in shaping the volunteer intentions of Generation Z (Thoha, Al Hasir, & Ibrahim, 2024). Empirical studies have shown that peer influence significantly affects volunteer intentions among this demographic, with peer status playing a crucial moderating role, young people more strongly conform to high-status peers than to low-status ones when making prosocial behavioral decisions (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Prinstein, 2015). Research specifically examining Generation Z volunteers confirms that social networks and peer modeling serve as powerful recruitment mechanisms, with over 70% of this generation reporting volunteering as a way of meeting new individuals and building

social connections (Almashines, 2025). Additionally, studies indicate that 56% of young adults believe the best way to be a role model is by actively volunteering in their community, demonstrating the cyclical nature of peer influence in volunteer recruitment (Lottery Good Causes, 2025). The open-ended responses provide deeper, more personal context, with individuals citing profound spiritual experiences, such as feeling "called by God after a family psychological event" or a personal mission to "help children love God more".

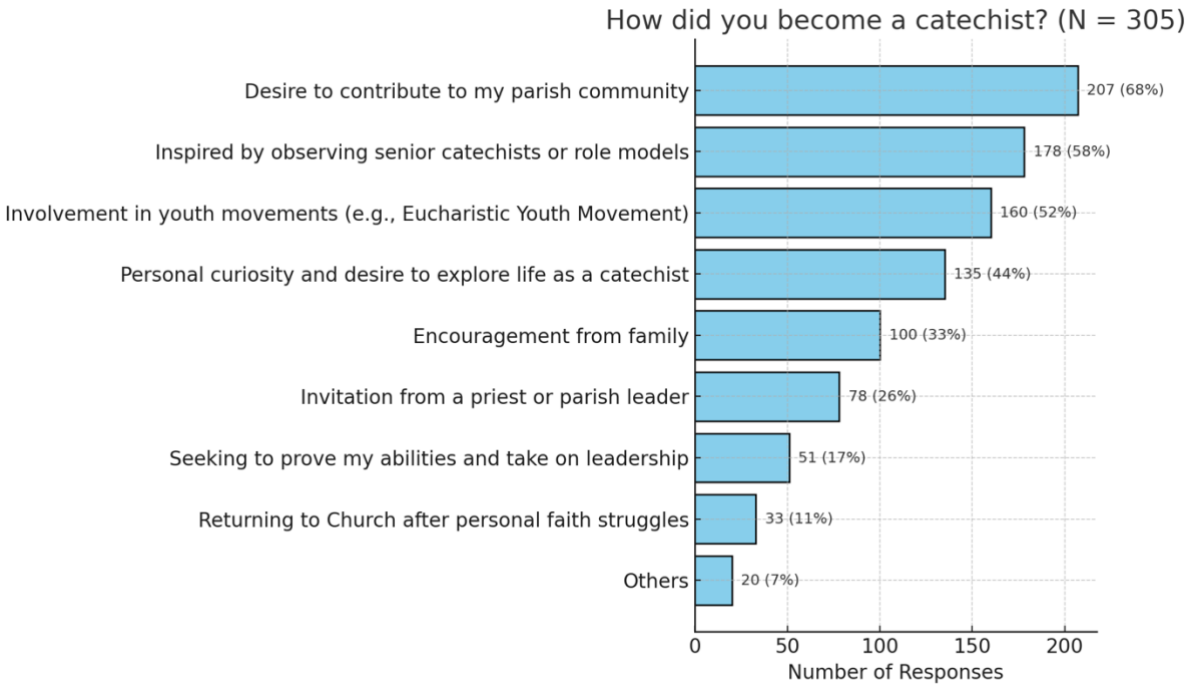

Figure 6.1 How did you become a catechist?

6.3.2 Motivations for Continued Service (Q7)

Once engaged in ministry, the factors that sustain these young catechists are overwhelmingly intrinsic, relational, and developmental. The foremost motivation for continuing to serve is "Spiritual growth and strengthening my relationship with God," cited by 79% (n=240) of respondents. This is followed by two equally powerful motivators: the "Enjoyment and inspiration from working with children" (74%, n=226) and "Developing teaching, leadership, communication and other transferable skills" (74%, n=225). In stark contrast, external forms of validation, such as "Recognition and encouragement from parish leadership," were reported as a key motivator by only 21% (n=65) of the catechists.

This data strongly resonates with established frameworks of volunteer motivation, such as the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which identifies core drivers for service. The VFI,

developed by Clary et al. (1998), represents a foundational framework in volunteer motivation research that categorizes six distinct functions served by volunteering: values, understanding, enhancement, career, social, and protective functions.

Figure 6.2 What motivates you to continue serving as a catechist?

The findings align particularly well with three of the VFI's six motivational functions. The predominant motivation of "spiritual growth and strengthening my relationship with God" (79%) corresponds directly to the Values function, which reflects the expression of humanitarian and altruistic values (Clary et al., 1998). The equally powerful motivators of "enjoyment and inspiration from working with children" (74%) and "developing teaching, leadership, communication and other transferable skills" (74%) align with the Enhancement function (psychological growth and positive self-regard) and Understanding function (seeking learning experiences and skill development), respectively.

This pattern of intrinsic motivations significantly outweighing extrinsic ones is well-documented in volunteer motivation literature. Finkelstein (2009) found that intrinsic motivation was positively associated with volunteer self-concept, prosocial personality, volunteer time, and motive strength, particularly for "internal" motives satisfied by the volunteer activity itself. Conversely, extrinsic orientation was most closely associated with "external" motives, such as career aspirations, which require outcomes separate from the volunteer work to be fulfilled.

The relatively low importance placed on "recognition and encouragement from parish leadership" (21%) as a motivator reflects broader research findings on volunteer satisfaction. Ferreira, Proença, and Proença (2012) demonstrated that intrinsic satisfaction is influenced by motivations related to development/learning and altruism, while extrinsic satisfaction factors like recognition from leadership had significantly lower importance to volunteers. Their research revealed that extrinsic satisfaction covers issues related to problem-solving and career development but noted very low mean scores for extrinsic satisfaction compared to intrinsic satisfaction, "materializing its minor importance to the volunteers" (Ferreira et al., 2012, p. 15).

Chacón et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of 48 studies employing the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), confirming that the Values function consistently scores highest while Career and Enhancement score lowest across diverse volunteer samples (Chacón et al., 2017). The Values factor consistently obtained the highest mean scores both overall and across different types of volunteering, while Career and Enhancement factors received the lowest scores. This meta-analysis demonstrated that "other-oriented factors (e.g., values) were more prevalent than self-oriented factors (e.g., career)" (Chacón et al., 2017, p. 311).

These findings have significant implications for understanding volunteer retention and satisfaction in catechist formation programs, suggesting that sustainable volunteer engagement depends primarily on creating opportunities for spiritual growth, meaningful relationships with those served, and skill development rather than external recognition systems.

6.3.3 Planned Duration of Service (Q8)

While motivations are strong, the future commitment of this cohort is marked by a high degree of uncertainty, reflecting their transitional life stage. A majority of respondents, 51% (n=156), indicated that they were "Uncertain" about how long they plan to continue serving as a catechist. Among those who did have a specific timeframe in mind, the largest group (18%, n=56) planned to serve for "More than 10 years," demonstrating a capacity for long-term commitment. However, a combined 18% plan to serve for shorter terms of 1-3 years (6%) or 3-5 years (12%).

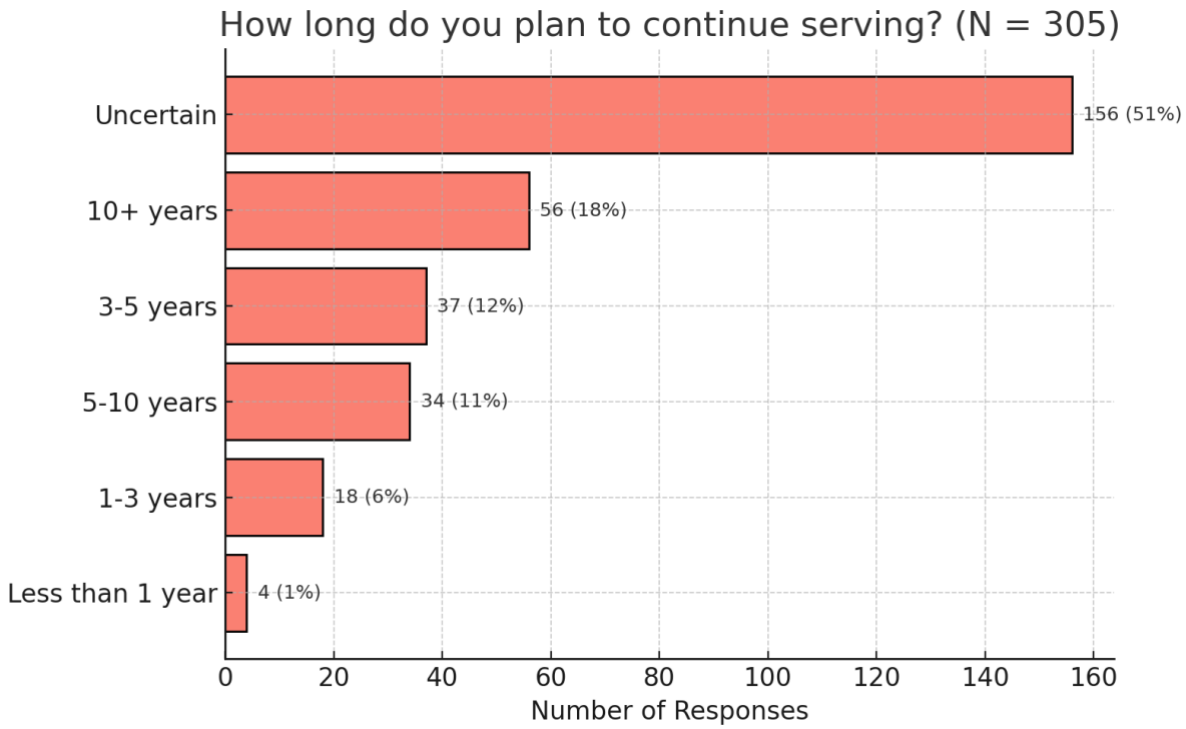

Figure 6.3 How long do you plan to continue serving?

This high level of uncertainty is a critical finding for parish leadership. It should not be interpreted as a lack of dedication but rather as a realistic reflection of the fluid and unpredictable nature of life for young adults navigating education, career launches, and new family formations. This fluidity presents both a significant risk of volunteer turnover and a crucial opportunity for intervention. Parishes that can provide flexible service options, clear pathways for growth, and a strong supportive community may be better able to convert this uncertainty into long-term commitment.

A closer examination of the data reveals a three-stage motivational journey for these catechists. The initial entry into ministry is often driven by relational factors, such as being inspired by others. Once serving, their motivation is sustained by the intrinsic and developmental benefits they personally receive, such as spiritual growth and skill acquisition. However, to secure their commitment for the long term, the focus must return to the relational dimension. When asked directly what would improve long-term commitment, the most selected answer was "Stronger community bonds among catechists" (83%). This indicates that while personal fulfilment keeps them engaged in the short-to-medium term, a sense of belonging and peer support is the crucial ingredient for retaining them for the long haul. Lowenberg-DeBoer (2018) argues that while self-fulfilment and

personal satisfaction drive volunteers' engagement in the short- to medium-term, socialization factors, such as a strong sense of belonging and peer support, are crucial for retaining them over the long haul. Therefore, parishes cannot assume the inherent rewards of the ministry are sufficient for retention; they must actively cultivate a vibrant and supportive community among their catechists.

6.4 The Gen Z Catechist: Generational Identity and Its Influence on Ministry (Section 3)

This section delves into the specific characteristics of Generation Z and how these traits influence their approach to catechetical ministry. The analysis is based on responses to a series of 11 statements in Question 9, where participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The findings, summarized in Table 6.2, reveal a cohort that is proud of its generational identity and expects its unique characteristics to be acknowledged and integrated into its ministry work.

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
My sense of purpose is influenced by my desire to make a positive impact.	4.54	0.72	64	30	5	1	1
I value having the freedom to be flexible and creative.	4.5	0.75	61	31	6	1	1
I prefer interactive and experiential learning over traditional lectures.	4.44	0.81	59	28	10	2	1
I expect training programs to be adapted to the unique learning styles of Gen Z.	4.36	0.91	52	31	12	1	2
I feel proud to be part of Generation Z.	4.22	0.92	42	34	19	1	2
I value the freedom to be myself and speak openly.	4.14	0.88	35	44	16	2	1
I rely heavily on digital tools and social media.	4.05	0.96	38	35	20	5	1
My identity as a Gen Z catechist influences how I approach teaching.	4.04	0.96	32	45	14	6	2
I regularly seek feedback and appreciation from senior catechists and the priest.	3.71	1.19	24	26	32	8	5
I often compare myself to other catechists.	3.32	1.32	15	25	28	18	10

I find it challenging to balance my responsibilities.	3.27	1.27	14	29	29	13	12

Table 6.2 Agreement Levels on Statements Regarding Gen Z Identity and Ministry Approach (N=305)

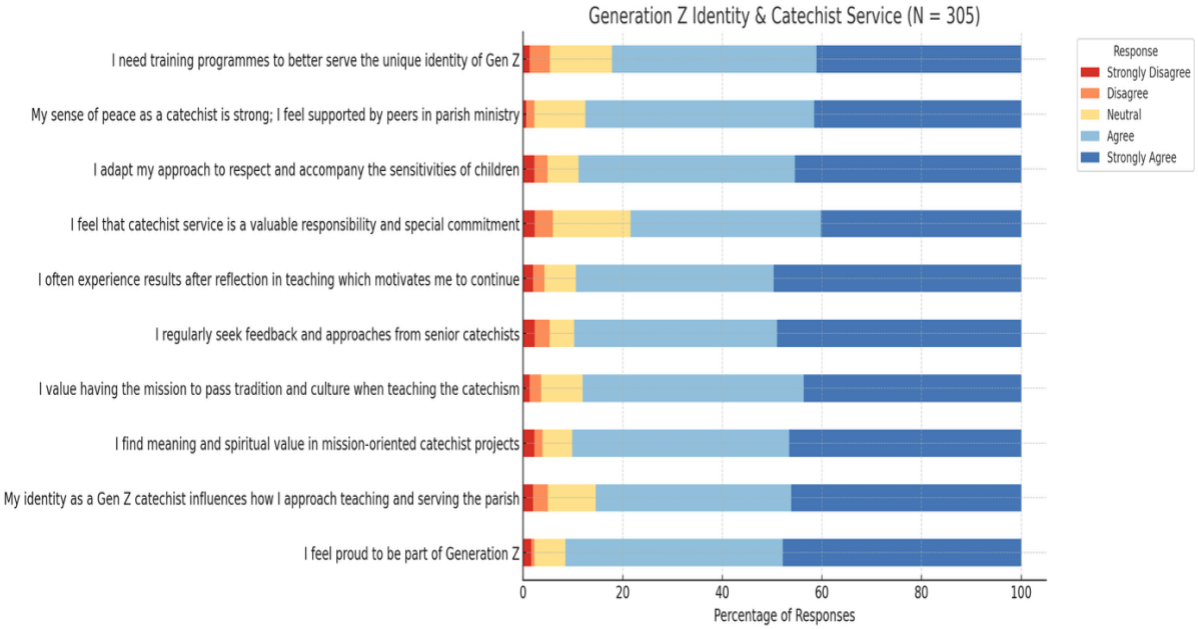

Figure 6.4 Gen Z Identity & Catechist Service

6.4.1 Core Purpose and Generational Pride

The data reveals a strong sense of mission-driven purpose. The statement with the highest level of agreement was, "My sense of purpose as a catechist is strongly influenced by my desire to make a positive impact on younger generations," with a mean score of 4.54 out of 5. This finding powerfully underscores that their volunteerism is not a casual pastime but a deeply held conviction to contribute meaningfully to the faith formation of others, aligning with the "Values" function of the VFI. This is complemented by a strong sense of generational pride ("I feel proud to be part of Generation Z," M=4.22) and a clear belief that their identity shapes their work ("My identity as a Gen Z catechist influences how I approach teaching," M=4.04). This cohort does not seek to simply replicate the methods of previous generations; they see their unique perspective as a valuable asset to their ministry.

6.4.2 Pedagogical Preferences and Technological Integration

A clear and consistent theme emerges regarding pedagogical style: these catechists have an overwhelming preference for modern, dynamic, and participant-centred teaching methods.

The highest-rated value related to teaching was the "freedom to be flexible and creative" (M=4.50), closely followed by a preference for "interactive and experiential learning over traditional lectures" (M=4.44). These catechists are digital natives who "rely heavily on digital tools and social media to connect with students and/or prepare lessons" (M=4.05).

These findings are highly consistent with academic literature on the learning preferences of Generation Z, which emphasize active participation, co-creation of knowledge, and the seamless integration of technology into the learning environment. The extremely high value placed on creativity and flexibility is a direct signal to parish and diocesan leaders that rigid, top-down, and script-based catechetical curricula are likely to be met with low engagement and may even demotivate this group of volunteers. There is a clear need for training that equips them not just with doctrinal content, but with the skills of digital pedagogy and critical media literacy to effectively engage their students in the digital age.

6.4.3 Interpersonal Needs and Expectations of Leadership

The respondents express a clear desire for an authentic and collaborative relationship with parish leadership. They strongly "value the freedom to be myself and speak openly when working with parish leaders" (M=4.14). This reflects a generational preference for flat, non-hierarchical communication structures and authentic leadership. This expectation extends to their formation, with a high level of agreement that "training programs to be adapted to the unique learning styles and needs of Gen Z" (M=4.36).

Interestingly, while they value open communication, the need for external validation is more moderate. The statement "I regularly seek feedback and appreciation from senior catechists and the priest" received a more neutral mean score of 3.71. This suggests a nuanced desire for "structured freedom." They do not want to be micromanaged, but they also do not want to be completely abandoned. They seek the autonomy to be creative and authentic in their ministry, but within a supportive framework of mentorship and guidance that affirms their efforts and provides direction. This calls for a coaching style of leadership that empowers volunteers rather than a directive style that controls them.

6.4.4 Acknowledged Challenges and Pressures

The survey also sheds light on the internal and external pressures faced by these young catechists. Among the “pressures” items, “I often compare myself to other catechists” had the mean closest to the midpoint (M≈3.32) and the largest dispersion (SD≈1.32). The responses were almost evenly split, 40% agree/strongly agree, 28% neutral, 28% disagree/strongly disagree, which indicates ambivalence within the cohort, not consensus. This wide dispersion of scores indicates a significant tension within the cohort, likely reflecting the double-edged nature of a highly connected, social media-driven culture that fosters both peer learning and social comparison.

Furthermore, respondents find it moderately difficult to manage their various life roles, with the statement "I find it challenging to balance my responsibilities as a catechist with academic, work, and social commitments" receiving a mean score of 3.27. While not rated as an overwhelming difficulty, this work-life-ministry imbalance is a regconised pressure point that likely contributes to the high percentage of catechists who are uncertain about their long-term service plans.

6.5 The Transformative Impact of Service: Experience as a Catechist (Section 4)

This section examines the personal and spiritual impact of the catechetical ministry on the Gen Z volunteers themselves. The data, derived from a series of Likert-scale statements in Question 10, indicates that the experience of serving as a catechist is profoundly positive and formative. The responses, summarized in Table 6.3, show overwhelmingly high levels of agreement with statements about the personal and spiritual rewards of their role.

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Teaching the catechism has strengthened my understanding of Church teachings.	77	19	2	0	1
Despite challenges, I feel that being a catechist is meaningful and rewarding.	70	24	4	0	2
My experience has helped me develop valuable skills (public speaking, etc.).	69	28	2	1	1

I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God.	69	25	4	0	2
I feel proud and honoured to serve as a catechist.	64	20	5	0	2
I find it fulfilling to contribute to the faith formation of younger generations.	59	33	6	1	1

Table 6.3 Agreement Levels on the Personal and Spiritual Impact of Catechetical Service (N=305)

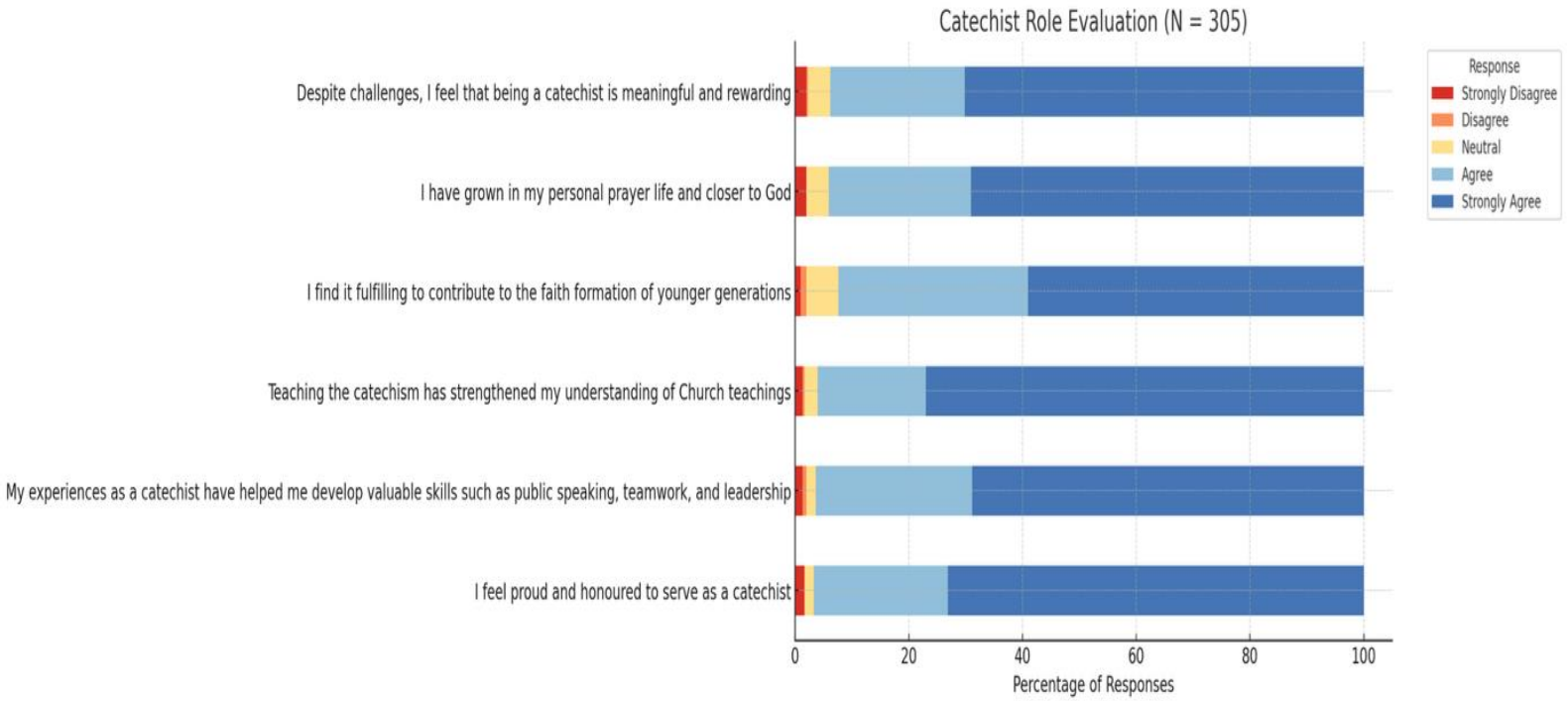

Figure 6.5 Catechist Role Evaluation

6.5.1 Spiritual and Intellectual Growth

The role of a catechist serves as a powerful catalyst for the respondents' own faith development. An overwhelming 96% of participants agree or strongly agree that "Teaching the catechism has strengthened my understanding of Church teachings," with 77% strongly agreeing. This suggests that the act of preparing and teaching lessons compels them to engage more deeply with doctrine, moving from passive reception to active understanding and articulation. This intellectual growth is mirrored by profound spiritual development. A similarly high proportion (94%) agree or strongly agree that through their service, they have

"grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God." This finding reinforces the data from Section 6.3, where personal spiritual growth was identified as the primary motivator for continued service. For these young people, teaching the faith is intrinsically linked to living and deepening it.

6.5.2 Personal Fulfilment and Skill Development

The ministry provides a strong sense of purpose and personal satisfaction. Nearly all respondents (92%) find it "fulfilling to contribute to the faith formation of younger generations," and 94% affirm that "Despite challenges, I feel that being a catechist is meaningful and rewarding." This sense of fulfilment is a powerful intrinsic reward that sustains them in their volunteer work.

Beyond the spiritual and emotional rewards, the role is also a significant vehicle for practical skill development. A remarkable 97% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their "experience as a catechist have helped me develop valuable skills such as public speaking, teamwork, and leadership." This aligns perfectly with the finding in Section 6.3 that skill development is a primary motivator for service. It demonstrates that Gen Z catechists perceive their ministry not as a siloed religious activity, but as an integrated experience that contributes directly to their professional and personal competencies. This dual benefit, serving the community while building one's own human capital, is a key aspect of meaningful engagement for this generation.

In summary, the experience of being a catechist is not merely an act of giving; it is a deeply reciprocal and transformative process. The Gen Z catechists in this study are not just teachers of the faith; they are also its primary learners, growing intellectually, spiritually, and professionally through the very act of their service.

6.6 Formation and Enablement: Training and Development for Gen Z Catechists (Section 5)

This section evaluates the effectiveness and relevance of current training programs from the perspective of Gen Z catechists. The analysis focuses on identifying the strengths of existing formation efforts as well as significant gaps where training fails to meet the specific needs

and learning styles of this digitally native generation. The data is drawn from a series of Likert-scale statements in Question 11 and a multiple-choice question on valuable training features in Question 12.

6.6.1 Assessment of Current Training Programs (Q11)

The responses indicate a mixed but generally positive assessment of current training, with clear strengths in spiritual and peer-based learning but notable weaknesses in areas related to digital pedagogy and psychological support.

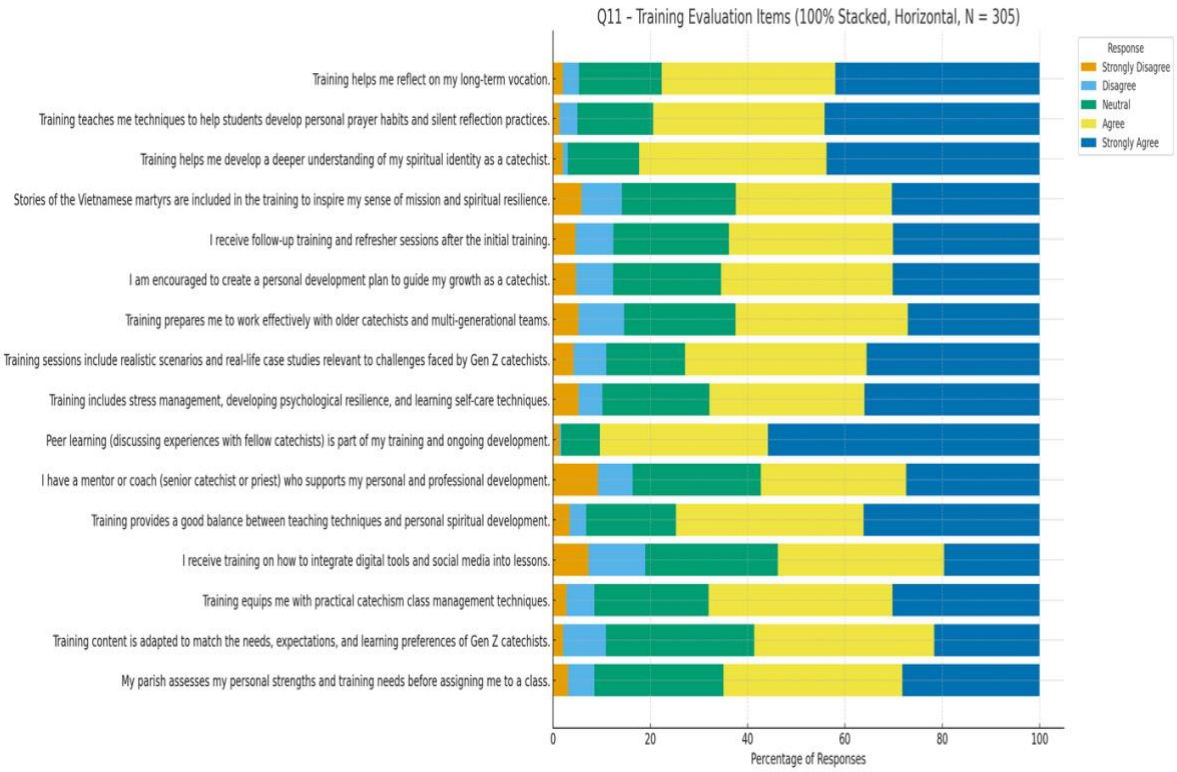

Figure 6 6 Training Evaluation Items

There is strong agreement that training successfully fosters spiritual identity and practical prayer skills. A combined 81% agree or strongly agree that "Training helps me develop a deeper understanding of my spiritual identity as a catechist," and 79% affirm that it "teaches me techniques to help students develop personal prayer habits." Furthermore, the value of collaborative learning is exceptionally high, with 89% agreeing that "Peer learning (discussing experiences with fellow catechists) is part of my training and ongoing

development." This highlights a significant preference for social and relational learning environments.

However, the data also reveals critical gaps. There is considerably less confidence in how well training is adapted to their generation's needs. Only 57% agree or strongly agree that "Training content is adapted to match the needs, expectations, and learning preferences of Gen Z catechists," with 30% remaining neutral. An even more significant deficiency is found in technological training. A mere 51% agree that they "receive training on how to integrate digital tools and social media into lessons," with 26% neutral and a combined 18% disagreeing. This represents a major disconnect, given that catechists themselves report a heavy reliance on these tools (as seen in Section 6.4.2) and that effective faith formation for Gen Z learners necessitates digital literacy.

Another area needing improvement is holistic support. While a majority (64%) feel training includes "stress management, developing psychological resilience, and learning self-care techniques," a significant portion (21%) are neutral, suggesting this content is not universally or adequately provided. This is a crucial component for preventing volunteer burnout and ensuring the long-term well-being of young ministers.

6.6.2 Most Valuable Training Features (Q12)

Figure 6.7 Most valuable training features

When presented with a menu of training components, respondents prioritised experiential, relational, and spiritually formative modes over classroom-style or administrative provision. By a wide margin, the top-rated component was the immersive “Sa Mạc” training camp (Các kỳ huấn luyện Sa Mạc), selected by 71% (n = 218). Participants understand Sa Mạc as a setting that combines hands-on skills practice, small-group community building, and structured spiritual exercises, thereby sustaining engagement and strengthening a sense of belonging. This pattern underscores the cohort’s preference for practice-based formation rather than purely academic inputs.

Other highly valued features reinforce this theme. "Group discussions and peer sharing" (63%), "Spiritual mentoring from priests or senior catechists" (63%), and "Conflict resolution and teamwork skills" (63%) all point to the importance of relational and practical learning. The integration of faith stories, such as "stories about the saints" (61%) and "stories about the Vietnamese martyrs" (42%), is also considered valuable for inspiring a sense of mission. In contrast, more administrative elements like "Personal development plans" (49%) and "Access to digital resources, online platforms, and online lesson plans" (43%) were valued by a smaller percentage, though still a substantial number.

The collective findings from this section present a clear mandate for those responsible for catechetical formation. While the spiritual core of training is strong, programs must evolve to become more responsive to the generational characteristics of their participants. This requires a deliberate shift towards more experiential and collaborative methodologies, a significant upgrade in training for digital pedagogy, and a more holistic approach that includes psychological and self-care support to ensure the sustainable and effective ministry of these young catechists.

6.7 Parish Ecosystem: Recruitment, Retention, and Volunteer Management (Section 6)

This section examines the organisational context in which Gen Z catechists serve, assessing the effectiveness of parish-level practices related to recruitment, ongoing support, recognition, and leadership. The quality of this parish ecosystem is a critical factor in volunteer satisfaction and long-term retention. The analysis is based on responses to Likert-

scale statements in Question 13 and multiple-choice questions regarding feedback and commitment in Questions 14 and 15.

6.7.1 Recruitment and Onboarding Practices (Q13)

Parishes appear to be effective in actively encouraging young people to serve and in communicating the expectations of the role. There is very strong agreement that "Parish leadership actively encourages Gen Z youth to become catechists" (81% agree or strongly agree). Furthermore, 74% of respondents feel their parish "clearly explains the expectations, responsibilities, and challenges of being a catechist at the recruitment stage." This suggests that recruitment efforts are both proactive and transparent. There is also strong agreement (69% agree or strongly agree) that parishes have a "clear and structured process for selecting, onboarding, and supporting new catechists". These positive findings indicate that the initial stages of the volunteer lifecycle are generally well-managed.

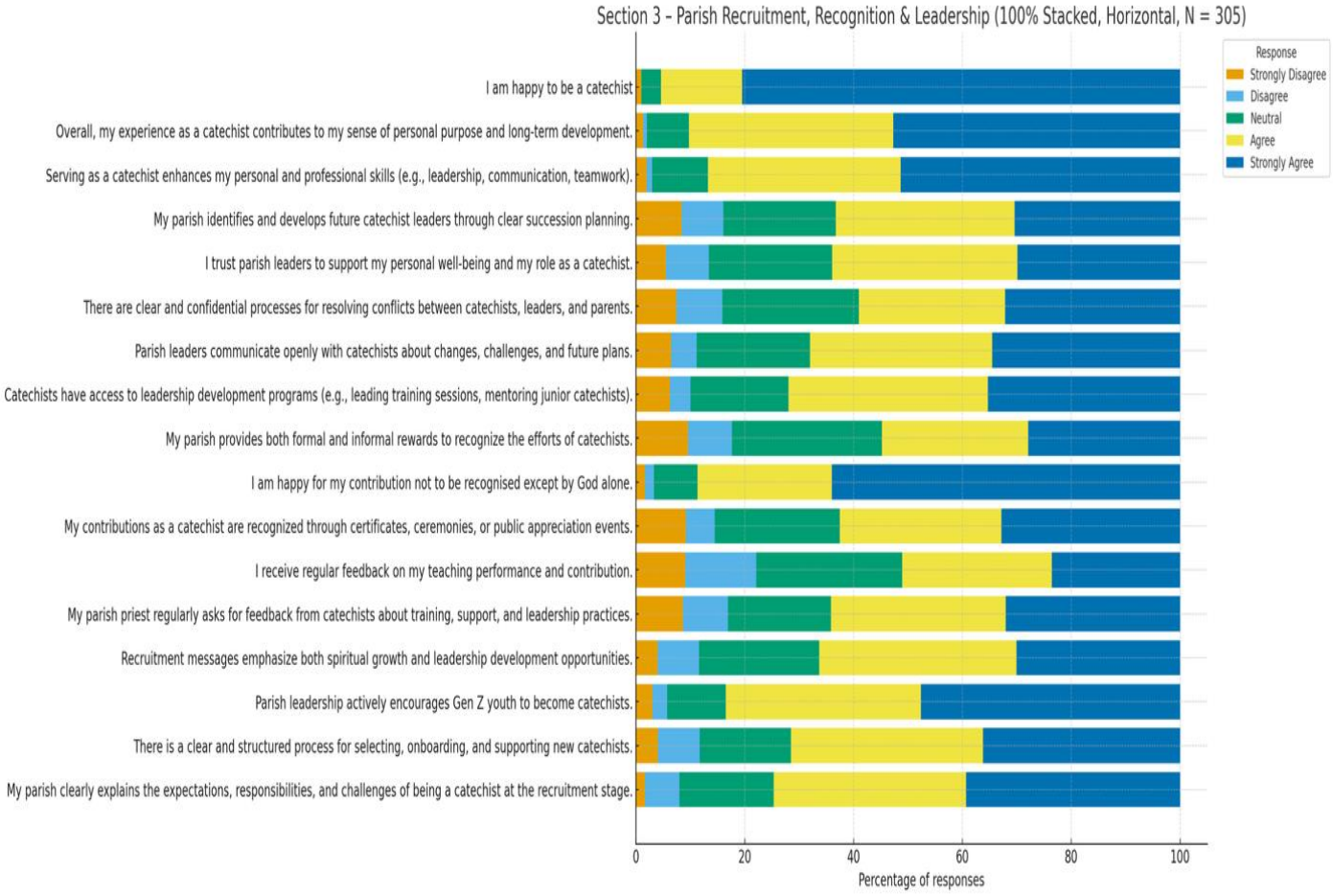

Figure 6.8 Parish Recruitment, Recognition & Leadership

6.7.2 Leadership, Communication, and Feedback

The relationship with parish leadership is a more complex area, with strengths in trust but weaknesses in formal feedback mechanisms. A majority of respondents (61% agree or strongly agree) "trust parish leaders to support my personal well-being and my role as a catechist." Similarly, 61% feel that "Parish leaders communicate openly with catechists about changes, challenges, and future plans".

However, a significant gap exists in the area of performance feedback. Only 47% of catechists agree or strongly agree that they "receive regular feedback on my teaching performance and contribution," while 24% are neutral and a combined 20% disagree. This lack of structured feedback can hinder skill development and may leave catechists feeling unsupported or uncertain about their effectiveness. This finding is critical, as research on volunteer management consistently highlights regular supervision and communication as key practices for retention.

6.7.3 Recognition and Intrinsic Motivation

The data on recognition reveals the profoundly intrinsic and faith-centered motivation of this cohort. While a majority (58% agree or strongly agree) feel their contributions are "regconised through certificates, ceremonies, or public appreciation events," their personal need for such external validation is low. An overwhelming 87% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement, "I am happy for my contribution not to be recognised except by God alone," with 63% strongly agreeing. This is one of the most powerful findings in the survey. It suggests that while formal recognition is appreciated, the primary reward system for these volunteers is spiritual. Their service is an offering to God, and the ultimate recognition they seek is divine. This aligns with studies on faith-based volunteering which find that religious motivations and a sense of "work calling" are powerful drivers that can supersede the need for secular rewards.

6.7.4 Helpful Feedback Mechanisms (Q14)

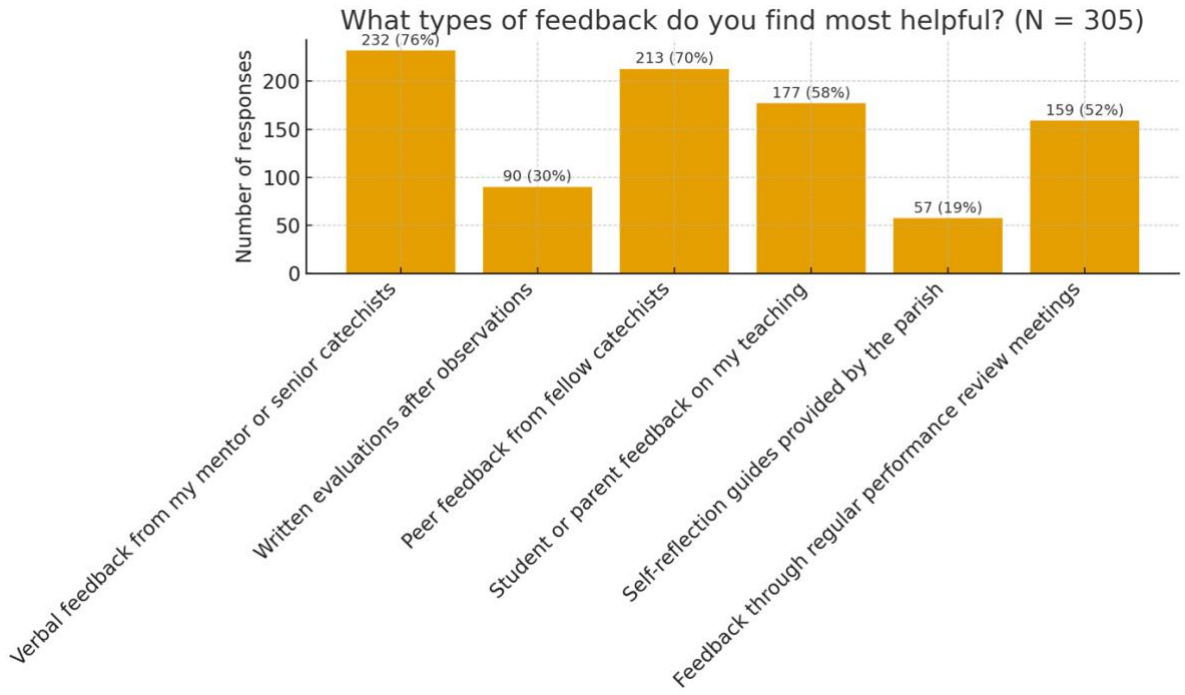

Figure 6.9 Types of feedback that Gen Z catechists find most helpful

When asked what types of feedback they find most helpful, respondents overwhelmingly favoured relational and spiritual channels over formal, institutional ones. The most helpful source of feedback was perceived to be "from God through events, prayer or other means," selected by 78% of participants. This was followed by "Verbal feedback from my mentor or senior catechists" (76%) and "Peer feedback from fellow catechists" (70%). In contrast, formal methods like "Written evaluations after observations" (30%) and "Self-reflection guides provided by the parish" (19%) were seen as far less helpful. This reinforces the need for a management style based on mentorship, dialogue, and peer support, rather than bureaucratic evaluation.

6.7.5 Practices for Long-Term Commitment (Q15)

The final question in this section asked catechists to identify which parish practices would improve their long-term commitment. The responses provide a clear roadmap for retention. The single most important factor is relational: "Stronger community bonds among catechists" was selected by 83% of respondents. This confirms the critical role of peer community in sustaining volunteers for the long term. The second most important factor

was "Clearer communication from parish leadership" (69%), highlighting the need for transparency and trust. This is followed by "Better access to training and development opportunities" (60%) and a tie between "More frequent feedback and mentoring" and "More recognition and appreciation" (both 56%).

Collectively, these findings emphasize that retaining Gen Z catechists requires a holistic approach that prioritizes building a strong peer community, fostering transparent and supportive leadership, and providing continuous opportunities for growth. While formal recognition has its place, the core drivers of long-term commitment are the quality of relationships and the opportunities for personal and spiritual development.

6.8 Final Thoughts and Reflections (Section 7)

The concluding section of the survey provides a capstone perspective on the overall experience of the Gen Z catechists, capturing their satisfaction with the role, their views on the essential qualities of a good catechist, and their open-ended reflections on the ministry. The data is drawn from Questions 16, 17, and 18.

6.8.1 Overall Satisfaction and Willingness to Recommend (Q16)

The data indicates a remarkably high level of overall satisfaction with the catechetical ministry. When asked if they would recommend the role to their peers, an overwhelming 91% (n=277) responded "Yes." Only 1% (n=2) responded "No," with the remaining 9% (n=26) being "Uncertain". This strong endorsement serves as a powerful summative indicator of a positive and rewarding volunteer experience. Despite the challenges and pressures identified elsewhere in the survey, the vast majority of these young people find their service so fulfilling that they would actively encourage others to join them.

6.8.2 Essential Qualities of a Successful Catechist (Q17)

Respondents were asked to identify the most important qualities for a successful catechist from a given list. The quality deemed most essential was "Strong faith," selected by 95% (n=289) of participants. This underscores the foundational belief that effective catechesis flows from a deep, personal relationship with God. This was followed by key interpersonal and dispositional virtues: "Patience" (90%), "Adaptability" (81%), and "Communication

skills" (76%). Other important qualities included "Understanding youth culture" (68%), "Teamwork skills" (65%), "Creativity" (62%), and "Leadership ability" (55%).

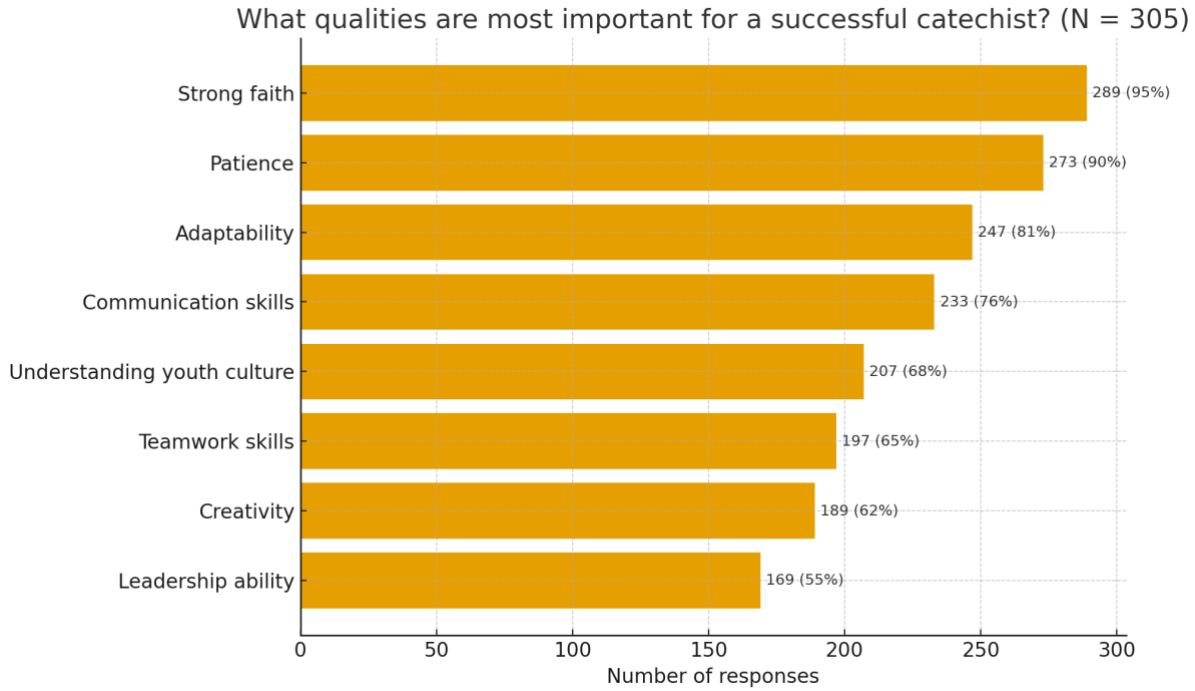

Figure 6.10 The most important qualities for a succesful catechist

The open-ended responses provided additional, nuanced qualities, emphasizing virtues of humility and relationship-building. Terms such as "Listening and accompaniment," "Love," "Humility," "Empathy," and being "open-minded" were frequently mentioned. This composite picture describes a catechist who is not merely a dispenser of information but a faithful, patient, and adaptable mentor who can listen, empathize, and walk with young people on their faith journey.

6.8.3 Synthesis of Open-Ended Comments (Q18)

The final open-ended question invited participants to share any other comments, yielding 36 rich, qualitative responses that add depth and context to the quantitative data. Several key themes emerged from these reflections:

1. **The Need for Authenticity and Empowerment:** A prominent theme was the desire for a ministry environment where Gen Z catechists are trusted, heard, and given the freedom to be themselves. One respondent articulated this powerfully: "What Gen Z needs... is a space to be listened to and to be themselves... Not to be stereotyped

or forced to 'do it the way it's always been done.'" They seek "a 'peer who walks with them,' not just a 'superior-inferior' relationship." This echoes the quantitative data on the high value placed on authenticity and creativity.

2. **Frustration with Outdated Methods:** Several comments expressed frustration with pedagogical approaches that are perceived as "too outdated and not progressive." This reinforces the strong preference for interactive, experiential, and digitally integrated teaching methods identified in Section 6.4.
3. **The Centrality of Relationship and Mission:** Many comments reiterated the core purpose of their ministry: to guide young people to a personal relationship with Jesus. One catechist wrote that the goal is not just for students to know *about* God, but "so that later, when they are lost in the currents of life... the person they turn to is God, and the place they return to is His house."
4. **Structural and Systemic Challenges:** Some respondents pointed to systemic issues, such as a lack of standardized curriculum across parishes, insufficient training in key areas like "sex education," and a shortage of personnel in parish leadership.
5. **Profound Spiritual Meaning:** Finally, many comments spoke to the deep personal and spiritual significance of the role. One individual shared that their five years as a catechist led them to discern a higher calling to consecrated life. Another beautifully summarized the spirit of service: "Even though there are many things to worry about in life... I still hope that the flame of enthusiasm will continue to burn brightly to contribute a small part of myself to help the future generation."

These final reflections provide a powerful voice to the statistics, illustrating a generation of catechists who are deeply faithful, mission-driven, and eager to serve, while also clearly articulating their need for a supportive, empowering, and modern ministry environment.

6.9 Methodology: Sample, Measures, and Analytical Approach

6.9.1 Sample Characteristics

The survey was completed by N = 305 volunteer catechists serving in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, all of whom belong to the Generation Z age cohort. The mean age of respondents was 22.5 years (SD ≈ 3.1), with ages ranging from 16 to 28 years. The sample was approximately balanced by gender (about 50% female and 50% male). Participants represented a broad cross-section of the archdiocese: they hailed from over 200 distinct parish communities, indicating wide geographic coverage and diversity of contexts in the data. In terms of experience, the catechists had an average of about 4 years of volunteering (Mean ≈ 4.1 years, SD ≈ 3.0), though with considerable individual variation. Table 6.4 (below) summarizes key demographic characteristics of the sample:These characteristics confirm that the respondents are young adults typical of Gen Z, and that the sample captures a wide array of parish settings. This diversity is valuable for the generalizability of the findings.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Age:	305	16	28	22.45	0.176	3.077	0.274	0.140
Gender:	305	0	1	0.50	0.029	0.501	0.007	0.140
Years of experience as a catechist:	305	0	23	4.21	0.185	3.238	1.315	0.140
Diocese (in total):	305							
Ho Chi Minh Archdiocese	183							
Ba Ria Diocese (suffragan diocese)	6							
Can Tho Diocese (suffragan diocese)	3							
Da Lat Diocese (suffragan diocese)	2							
Long Xuyen Diocese (suffragan diocese)	4							
My Tho Diocese (suffragan diocese)	2							
Phan Thiet Diocese (suffragan diocese)	2							
Vinh Long Diocese (suffragan diocese)	1							
Xuan Loc Diocese (suffragan diocese)	102							
How did you become a catechist? Invitation from a priest or parish leader	305	0	1	0.26	0.025	0.437	1.125	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Encouragement from family	305	0	1	0.33	0.027	0.470	0.737	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Personal curiosity and desire to explore life as a catechist	305	0	1	0.44	0.028	0.498	0.232	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Inspired by observing senior catechists or role models	305	0	1	0.58	0.028	0.494	-0.341	0.140

How did you become a catechist? Involvement in youth movements (e.g., Eucharistic Youth Movement)	305	0	1	0.52	0.029	0.500	-0.099	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Returning to Church after personal faith struggles	305	0	1	0.11	0.018	0.311	2.535	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Seeking to prove my abilities and take on leadership	305	0	1	0.17	0.021	0.374	1.792	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Desire to contribute to my parish community	305	0	1	0.68	0.027	0.468	-0.769	0.140
How did you become a catechist? Others	305	0	1	0.07	0.014	0.248	3.527	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Spiritual growth and strengthening my relationship with God	305	0	1	0.79	0.023	0.410	-1.408	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Passion for teaching	305	0	1	0.45	0.029	0.499	0.192	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Passion for transmitting the faith	305	0	1	0.54	0.029	0.499	-0.179	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Building close bonds with fellow catechists and parishioners	305	0	1	0.40	0.028	0.491	0.410	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Personal pride and sense of responsibility to the parish	305	0	1	0.42	0.028	0.494	0.341	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Enjoyment and inspiration from working with children	305	0	1	0.74	0.025	0.439	-1.106	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Recognition and encouragement from parish leadership	305	0	1	0.21	0.023	0.410	1.408	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Developing teaching, leadership, communication and other transferable skills	305	0	1	0.74	0.025	0.441	-1.086	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Sense of belonging and contributing to the parish youth community	305	0	1	0.52	0.029	0.500	-0.086	0.140
What motivates you to continue serving? Others	305	0	1	0.01	0.006	0.099	9.983	0.140
How long do you plan to continue serving?	305	1	6	4.93	0.078	1.360	-1.045	0.140
I feel proud to be part of Generation Z.	297	1	5	4.17	0.052	0.890	-1.011	0.141
My identity as a Gen Z catechist influences how I approach teaching and serving in the parish.	301	1	5	4.01	0.054	0.938	-1.027	0.140
I rely heavily on digital tools and social media to connect with students and/or prepare lessons.	303	1	5	4.04	0.055	0.954	-0.811	0.140
I value having the freedom to be flexible and creative when teaching the catechism.	304	1	5	4.50	0.043	0.749	-1.862	0.140
I regularly seek feedback and appreciation from senior catechists and the priest to feel motivated in my role.	290	1	5	3.59	0.065	1.100	-0.411	0.143
I prefer interactive and experiential learning over traditional lectures.	304	1	5	4.43	0.046	0.810	-1.512	0.140
I often compare myself to other catechists in deciding what to do in classes and how to behave in general.	291	1	5	3.19	0.071	1.210	-0.156	0.143
I find it challenging to balance my responsibilities as a catechist with academic, work, and social commitments.	298	1	5	3.20	0.071	1.217	-0.312	0.141
I value the freedom to be myself and speak openly when working with parish leaders and fellow catechists.	299	1	5	4.11	0.049	0.845	-0.945	0.141

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I find it challenging to balance my responsibilities as a catechist with academic, work, and social commitments.	298	1	5	3.20	0.071	1.217	-0.312	0.141
I value the freedom to be myself and speak openly when working with parish leaders and fellow catechists.	299	1	5	4.11	0.049	0.845	-0.945	0.141

My sense of purpose as a catechist is strongly influenced by my desire to make a positive impact on younger generations.	305	1	5	4.54	0.041	0.720	-2.031	0.140
I expect training programs to be adapted to the unique learning styles and needs of Gen Z.	299	1	5	4.32	0.051	0.885	-1.502	0.141
I feel proud and honoured to serve as a catechist.	304	1	5	4.63	0.042	0.733	-2.641	0.140
My experiences as a catechist have helped me develop valuable skills such as public speaking, teamwork, and leadership.	305	1	5	4.62	0.039	0.683	-2.652	0.140
Teaching the catechism has strengthened my understanding of Church teachings.	304	1	5	4.70	0.038	0.659	-3.134	0.140
I find it fulfilling to contribute to the faith formation of younger generations.	303	1	5	4.49	0.042	0.736	-1.803	0.140
I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God.	304	1	5	4.59	0.043	0.748	-2.607	0.140
Despite challenges, I feel that being a catechist is meaningful and rewarding.	305	1	5	4.60	0.043	0.760	-2.620	0.140
My parish assesses my personal strengths and training needs before assigning me to a class.	294	1	5	3.82	0.059	1.005	-0.680	0.142
Training content is adapted to match the needs, expectations, and learning preferences of Gen Z catechists.	295	1	5	3.67	0.057	0.977	-0.410	0.142
Training equips me with practical catechism class management techniques.	294	1	5	3.87	0.058	1.000	-0.748	0.142
I receive training on how to integrate digital tools and social media into lessons.	290	1	5	3.47	0.067	1.147	-0.500	0.143
Training provides a good balance between teaching techniques and personal spiritual development.	293	1	5	4.01	0.058	0.997	-1.059	0.142
I have a mentor or coach (senior catechist or priest) who supports my personal and professional development.	281	1	5	3.59	0.073	1.222	-0.644	0.145
Peer learning (discussing experiences with fellow catechists) is part of my training and ongoing development.	301	1	5	4.43	0.044	0.766	-1.676	0.140
Training includes stress management, developing psychological resilience, and learning self-care techniques.	286	1	5	3.88	0.066	1.113	-0.907	0.144
Training sessions include realistic scenarios and real-life case studies relevant to challenges faced by Gen Z catechists.	284	1	5	3.93	0.064	1.079	-1.004	0.145
Training prepares me to work effectively with older catechists and multi-generational teams. - I am encouraged to create a personal development plan to guide my growth as a catechist.	288	1	5	3.70	0.066	1.121	-0.683	0.144
I am encouraged to create a personal development plan as a catechist.	275	1	5	3.79	0.066	1.101	-0.772	0.147
I receive follow-up training and refresher sessions after the initial training.	282	1	5	3.77	0.066	1.103	-0.718	0.145
Stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in the training to inspire my sense of mission and spiritual resilience.	290	1	5	3.73	0.068	1.152	-0.711	0.143
Training helps me develop a deeper understanding of my spiritual identity as a catechist.	299	1	5	4.21	0.051	0.874	-1.243	0.141
Training teaches me techniques to help students develop personal prayer habits and silent reflection practices.	301	1	5	4.17	0.053	0.915	-1.059	0.140

Training helps me reflect on my long-term vocation.	300	1	5	4.12	0.055	0.944	-1.065	0.141
Which training features do you find most valuable? Clear learning goals and expectations	305	0	1	0.56	0.028	0.498	-0.232	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Practical catechism class simulations and role-playing	305	0	1	0.46	0.029	0.499	0.165	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Group discussions and peer sharing	305	0	1	0.63	0.028	0.483	-0.554	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Spiritual mentoring from priests or senior catechists	305	0	1	0.63	0.028	0.483	-0.554	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Access to digital resources, online platforms, and online lesson plans - online	305	0	1	0.43	0.028	0.496	0.286	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Flexible scheduling to accommodate academic, work and family commitments	305	0	1	0.44	0.028	0.498	0.232	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Integration of stories about the Vietnamese martyrs	305	0	1	0.42	0.028	0.494	0.327	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Integration of stories about the saints	305	0	1	0.61	0.028	0.489	-0.453	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Training on personal spiritual resilience and self-care	305	0	1	0.55	0.029	0.499	-0.192	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Conflict resolution and teamwork skills	305	0	1	0.63	0.028	0.485	-0.524	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Personal development plans	305	0	1	0.49	0.029	0.501	0.046	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Regular refresher and follow-up training sessions	305	0	1	0.42	0.028	0.495	0.313	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Training Camp	305	0	1	0.71	0.026	0.452	-0.956	0.140
Which training features do you find most valuable? Others	305	0	1	0.01	0.005	0.081	12.288	0.140
My parish clearly explains the expectations, responsibilities, and challenges of being a catechist at the recruitment stage.	300	1	5	4.04	0.057	0.986	-0.910	0.141
There is a clear and structured process for selecting, onboarding, and supporting new catechists.	298	1	5	3.92	0.063	1.095	-0.939	0.141
Parish leadership actively encourages Gen Z youth to become catechists.	296	1	5	4.22	0.056	0.959	-1.481	0.142
Recruitment messages emphasize both spiritual growth and leadership development opportunities.	276	1	5	3.81	0.065	1.073	-0.766	0.147
My parish priest regularly asks for feedback from catechists about training, support, and leadership practices.	290	1	5	3.71	0.073	1.240	-0.789	0.143
I receive regular feedback on my teaching performance and contribution.	276	1	5	3.43	0.074	1.236	-0.408	0.147
I am happy for my contribution not to be recognised except by God alone.	300	1	5	4.48	0.049	0.844	-1.928	0.141
My parish provides both formal and informal rewards to recognize the efforts of catechists.	272	1	5	3.56	0.075	1.244	-0.567	0.148
Catechists have access to leadership development programs (e.g., leading training sessions, mentoring junior catechists).	289	1	5	3.91	0.066	1.114	-1.079	0.143
Parish leaders communicate openly with catechists about changes, challenges, and future plans.	278	1	5	3.85	0.069	1.143	-0.944	0.146

There are clear and confidential processes for resolving conflicts between catechists, leaders, and parents.	283	1	5	3.68	0.072	1.217	-0.647	0.145
I trust parish leaders to support my personal well-being and my role as a catechist.	291	1	5	3.75	0.066	1.131	-0.748	0.143
My parish identifies and develops future catechist leaders through clear succession planning.	286	1	5	3.69	0.072	1.218	-0.777	0.144
Serving as a catechist enhances my personal and professional skills (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork).	302	1	5	4.33	0.049	0.853	-1.566	0.140
Overall, my experience as a catechist contributes to my sense of personal purpose and long-term development.	298	1	5	4.40	0.045	0.773	-1.610	0.141
I am happy to be a catechist	302	1	5	4.74	0.036	0.622	-3.178	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Verbal feedback from my mentor or senior catechists	305	0	1	0.76	0.024	0.427	-1.228	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Written evaluations after observations	305	0	1	0.30	0.026	0.457	0.903	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Peer feedback from fellow catechists	305	0	1	0.70	0.026	0.460	-0.869	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Student or parent feedback on my teaching	305	0	1	0.58	0.028	0.494	-0.327	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Self-reflection guides provided by the parish	305	0	1	0.19	0.022	0.390	1.614	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Feedback through regular performance review meetings	305	0	1	0.78	0.024	0.415	-1.361	0.140
What types of feedback do you find most helpful? Others	305	0	1	0.01	0.005	0.081	12.288	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? Clearer communication from parish leadership	305	0	1	0.69	0.027	0.464	-0.818	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? Better access to training and development opportunities	305	0	1	0.59	0.028	0.492	-0.382	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? More frequent feedback and mentoring	305	0	1	0.55	0.029	0.498	-0.219	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? More recognition and appreciation for my service	305	0	1	0.55	0.029	0.498	-0.219	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? Opportunities for leadership and decision-making	305	0	1	0.42	0.028	0.494	0.341	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? A clearer pathway for long-term service and personal growth	305	0	1	0.54	0.029	0.499	-0.165	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? Stronger community bonds among catechists	305	0	1	0.83	0.022	0.380	-1.730	0.140
Which parish practices would improve your long-term commitment as a catechist? Others	305	0	1	0.01	0.005	0.081	12.288	0.140

Would you recommend the catechist role to your peers? Patience	305	1	3	1.18	0.032	0.563	2.911	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Strong faith	305	0	1	0.90	0.018	0.307	-2.591	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Communication skills	305	0	1	0.95	0.013	0.223	-4.035	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Creativity	305	0	1	0.76	0.024	0.425	-1.249	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Leadership ability	305	0	1	0.62	0.028	0.486	-0.495	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Adaptability	305	0	1	0.55	0.029	0.498	-0.219	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Teamwork skills	305	0	1	0.81	0.023	0.393	-1.587	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Understanding youth culture	305	0	1	0.65	0.027	0.479	-0.613	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Others	305	0	1	0.68	0.027	0.468	-0.769	0.140
What qualities do you think are most important for a successful catechist? Others	305	0	1	0.06	0.014	0.236	3.761	0.140
Valid N (listwise)	195							

Table 6.4 Descriptive Statistics of Respondent Characteristics (N=305)

6.9.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the five-point Likert item “I am happy as a catechist” (Q13_17). Frequency analysis (valid n = 302, 3 missing) shows: Strongly disagree = 3 (1.0%), Disagree = 11 (3.6%), Neutral = 45 (14.9%), Agree = 0 (0.0%), and Strongly agree = 243 (80.5%) (valid percentages, see table 6.5). This pronounced ceiling confirms that most respondents endorsed the top category. For modelling, responses then collapsed into three ordered categories, Unhappy (1–2), Neutral (3), and Happy (4–5), to ensure adequate cell sizes and to reflect the conceptual progression from dissatisfaction to satisfaction. This is standard practice in ordered logit/probit when categories are thin (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005; Greene & Hensher, 2010). In proportional-odds models, collapsing adjacent categories affects only the cut-points, not the slope effects (Murad et al., 2003). Given the pronounced pile-up in the highest category of Q13_17, all ordinal regressions used a negative log–log cumulative link (with the outcome coded in descending order), an asymmetric link recommended for end-loaded ordinal outcomes to sharpen separation near the top of the scale (Greene & Hensher, 2010; Cameron & Trivedi, 2005). The proportional odds (parallel lines) assumption was examined via the SPSS Test of Parallel Lines: All models satisfied the

proportional-odds assumption: the Test of Parallel Lines was non-significant in every specification, including Model 1 (which had the smallest p-value), which is the desired result (p = .019); Model 2 and Model 3 were non-significant (p = .508 and p = .982, respectively), supporting proportional odds.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	11	3.6	3.6	4.6
	4	45	14.8	14.9	19.5
	5	243	79.7	80.5	100.0
	Total	302	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.0		
Total		305	100.0		

Table 6.5 Tôi hạnh phúc khi là một giáo lý viên - I am happy to be a catechist – Frequencies

This distribution (Table 6.5) indicates that an overwhelming majority find joy in their ministry, which is a testament to the generally positive experience of these catechists. However, it also poses a statistical challenge – the ceiling effect means there is limited variance left to be explained. To address this, as noted above, we utilized a negative log-log link function in the ordinal regression models. Such a link is well-suited for situations where the upper category is the most probable. In essence, this link function stretches out the upper tail of the distribution, improving the model's ability to distinguish factors that might tip a person from merely "neutral" to "happy" in an environment where most are happy. The models used this link function, and model-fit comparisons showed it provided a better fit than a standard logit link given the data's skew (results in Appendix VI – Table A5.4).

This implies that the effect of at least one predictor might not be perfectly constant across the two cut-points of the DV (i.e. between Unhappy–Neutral and Neutral–Happy thresholds). Given the borderline nature of this result and the theoretical rationale for treating the outcome as ordinal, we proceeded with the ordinal models but acknowledge this limitation. The Model 2 and Model 3 analyses did not produce significant parallel-lines tests ($p > .05$), indicating no severe assumption violations in those cases. Where relevant, any non-proportional effects are noted in the interpretation.

6.9.3 Independent Variables and Scale Reliability

Five composite predictors, constructed from qualitative themes, were used in Model 1: Personal Spiritual Growth, Training Fit–Balance, Vocation Clarity, Leadership Care/Communication, and Psychological Accompaniment. All demonstrated acceptable-to-excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α ≈ .79–.91). Full scale descriptions and alphas are reported in Table 6.6. Each composite scale aggregates several survey items into a single measure, providing a broad indicator of a conceptual factor. Before using these scales in Model 1, their internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All five scales demonstrated good reliability, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.91, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 for research instruments (Ursachi, Horodnic and Zait, 2015). Table 6.6 ("Composite Variables and Reliability") below provides an overview of these composite variables, including their conceptual definitions, number of items, and reliability:

- **Personal Spiritual Growth (PersSpirit_Growth):** This scale consists of 6 items (Q10_1 through Q10_6) capturing the catechist's sense of growing in faith and spirituality through their service. An example item is *"My ministry deepens my personal faith."* This scale had an **α ≈ 0.90**, indicating excellent reliability.
- **Training Fit–Balance (Training_FitBalance):** A 7-item scale drawn from the training and formation section (selected Q11 items) measuring perceptions of the training program's quality, relevance, and its balance with the catechist's other life commitments. For example, an item addresses whether *"The training program is relevant to my needs."* Reliability was **α ≈ 0.88**, very good.
- **Vocation Clarity (Vocation_Clarity):** A 3-item scale (Q11_14 to Q11_16) reflecting how clearly the catechist understands their calling and purpose in this ministry. An example item is *"I have a clear sense of my calling as a catechist."* Reliability was **α ≈ 0.84**, indicating good internal consistency.
- **Leadership Care and Communication (Lead_CareComm):** A 5-item scale (Q13_10 to Q13_14) assessing the catechist's experience of support, care, and transparency in communication from their parish leaders. An example item is *"Parish leaders show genuine care for the catechists' well-being."* This scale showed **α ≈ 0.91**, excellent reliability.

- **Psychological Accompaniment (Psych_Accompaniment):** A 5-item scale (selected Q11 items: Q11_1, Q11_4, Q11_7, Q11_10, Q11_11) representing the presence of mentoring, encouragement, and emotional support (e.g., having a mentor or supportive peer community). This scale's reliability was $\boldsymbol{\alpha \approx 0.79}$, acceptable and approaching the good range (Table 6.6).

All predictors, both composite scales and single items, were oriented so that higher scores always mean "more of the construct." Composite indices (e.g., Personal Spiritual Growth, Leadership Care & Communication, Training Fit–Balance, Vocation Clarity, Psychological Accompaniment) were computed as the mean of their items on the 1–5 Likert scale after reverse-coding any negatively phrased statements; thus, for example, a higher Training Fit–Balance score reflects better fit and less perceived overload/irrelevance, and a higher Leadership Care & Communication reflects more perceived support and openness. Single-item predictors retain the same 1–5 anchors (1 = strongly disagree … 5 = strongly agree) and the same "higher = more" orientation. Given this coding, positive coefficients in the ordinal models indicate greater odds of being in the higher happiness category per one-point increase in the predictor, while negative coefficients indicate the opposite. For interpretability, some negatively worded survey items were reverse scored before analysis so that their direction aligns. To keep interpretation consistent, any item phrased so that agreement meant "less" of the construct was reverse scored so that higher numbers always mean "more" of the construct. On a 1–5 Likert scale the transformation is: reversed score $=$ $6 -$ original score (e.g., 1→5, 2→4, 3→3). After reversal, composite scales were computed as item means. Consequently, in all tables and models, a positive coefficient means "more of the construct is associated with higher odds of being happier," and a negative coefficient means the opposite.

With these measures defined, we next turn to the results of the ordinal regression models. Demographic controls were explored in preliminary blocks and, where non-predictive, were excluded from final tables for parsimony.

Composite Scale	No. of Items	Components	Example Item (Conceptual)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Personal Spiritual Growth	6	Q10_1 – "I feel proud and honoured to serve as a catechist." Q10_2 – "My experiences as a catechist have helped me develop valuable skills such as public speaking, teamwork, and leadership." Q10_3 – "Teaching the catechism has strengthened my understanding of Church teachings." Q10_4 – "I find it fulfilling to contribute to the faith formation of younger generations." Q10_5 – "I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God." Q10_6 – "Despite challenges, I feel that being a catechist is meaningful and rewarding."	"My ministry deepens my personal faith."	≈0.90
Training Fit–Balance	7	Q11_2 – "Training content is adapted to match the needs, expectations, and learning preferences of Gen Z catechists." Q11_3 – "Training equips me with practical catechism class management techniques." Q11_5 – "Training provides a good balance between teaching techniques and personal spiritual development." Q11_8 – "Training includes stress management, developing psychological resilience, and learning self-care techniques." Q11_9 – "Training sessions include realistic scenarios and real-life case studies relevant to challenges faced by Gen Z catechists." Q11_12 – "I receive follow-up training and refresher sessions after the initial training." Q11_13 – "Stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in the training to inspire my sense of mission and spiritual resilience."	"The training program is relevant to my needs."	≈0.88
Vocation Clarity	3	Q11_14 – "Training helps me develop a deeper understanding of my spiritual identity as a catechist." Q11_15 – "Training teaches me techniques to help students develop personal prayer habits and silent reflection practices." Q11_16 – "Training helps me reflect on my long-term vocation."	"I have a clear sense of my calling as a catechist."	≈0.84

Leadership Care/Comm.	5	Q13_10 – “Catechists have access to leadership development programs (e.g., leading training sessions, mentoring junior catechists).” Q13_11 – “Parish leaders communicate openly with catechists about changes, challenges, and future plans.” Q13_12 – “There are clear and confidential processes for resolving conflicts between catechists, leaders, and parents.” Q13_13 – “I trust parish leaders to support my personal well-being and my role as a catechist.” Q13_14 – “My parish identifies and develops future catechist leaders through clear succession planning.”	"Parish leaders show care for my well-being."	≈0.91
Psych. Accompaniment	5	Q11_1 – “My parish assesses my personal strengths and training needs before assigning me to a class.” Q11_4 – “I receive training on how to integrate digital tools and social media into lessons.” Q11_7 – “Peer learning (discussing experiences with fellow catechists) is part of my training and ongoing development.” Q11_10 – “Training prepares me to work effectively with older catechists and multi-generational teams.” Q11_11 – “I am encouraged to create a personal development plan to guide my growth as a catechist.”	"I receive regular encouragement and mentoring."	≈0.79

Table 6.6 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Composite Scales

6.9.4 Analytical Procedure

The primary statistical method employed was Ordinal Logistic Regression, using the PLUM (Polytomous Universal Model) procedure in SPSS. The analysis was conducted in three stages to ensure a comprehensive examination of the data:

1. Model 1: An ordinal regression with the five composite scales as predictors.
2. Model 2: An ordinal regression with all individual items from the five scales entered as separate predictors.

3. Model 3: A comprehensive model including all candidate variables, which was then refined using a systematic backward elimination process to derive a final, parsimonious “kitchen sink” model.

This structured approach allows for a multifaceted assessment of the predictors, testing their influence at both the broad construct level and the specific item level, and confirming the most robust predictors through a data-driven reduction technique in case of model 3.

6.10 Ordinal Regression Models of Catechist Happiness

This subchapter presents the results of a multi-stage quantitative analysis designed to identify the factors that significantly predict self-reported happiness among Generation Z volunteer catechists. The dependent variable for this analysis is the survey item Q13_17, "I am happy to be a catechist," measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Because the dependent variable is an ordered categorical Likert item (1–5), an ordinal logistic regression (ordered logit) is appropriate. The strong concentration in the highest category informed modelling choices within this ordinal framework: responses were collapsed to three ordered levels (1–2 / 3 / 4–5) to stabilise cell counts, and a skew-sensitive cumulative link was used, specifically, the negative log–log link with descending outcome coding (equivalently, a complementary log–log with ascending coding) to reflect the top-heavy distribution (Greene & Hensher, 2010; Agresti, 2010). These steps address asymmetry while preserving the proportional-odds interpretation of coefficients. This method is well-suited for ordered categorical outcomes. As noted above, the SPSS PLUM models used an asymmetrical negative log–log link to accommodate the dominance of the highest response category.

To ensure a comprehensive and robust analysis, a three-model comparative strategy was implemented. This approach allows for a triangulated examination of the data, moving from broad theoretical constructs to granular, item-level predictors, and culminating in a comprehensive, data-driven model.

- **Model 1** examines the influence of five theory-driven composite indices and demographic variables.
- **Model 2** disaggregates these indices into their constituent survey items for a more detailed view.

- **Model 3** employs a comprehensive approach, including a wide range of potential predictors to build a statistically robust model.

By comparing the results across these three models, it is possible to build a multi-layered understanding of the complex dynamics that underpin volunteer happiness.

6.10.1 Analytical Strategy and Model Fitness Comparison

The three models were evaluated based on their statistical significance and explanatory power. Table 6.8 provides a comparative overview of the key fit statistics for each model. All three models are statistically significant ($p<.001$), indicating that the predictors included in each model provide a significantly better explanation of catechist happiness than a model with no predictors (i.e., an intercept-only model). The goodness-of-fit tests (Pearson and Deviance) for all models were non-significant, suggesting that the models adequately fit the data.

The primary metric for comparing explanatory power is the Nagelkerke pseudo-R2, which provides an estimate of the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the predictors. The analysis reveals a clear progression in explanatory power across the models. Model 1, based on broad theoretical composites, explains approximately 35.3% of the variance. Model 2, which uses individual items, explains a substantially larger portion at 60.6%. Model 3, the comprehensive data-driven model, demonstrates the highest explanatory power, accounting for 63.1% of the variance in catechist happiness.

As reflected in the superior fit of the item-level (Model 2) and comprehensive (Model 3) specifications relative to the composite-only Model 1, broad theoretical constructs are useful for framing, but reported happiness is more tightly accounted for by specific, concrete indicators. The superior performance of the item-level models (2 and 3) suggests that particular actions, perceptions, and environmental characteristics are more influential than aggregated themes. This validates the study's mixed-methods design, which used qualitative inquiry to identify broad themes and quantitative analysis to pinpoint the specific, granular drivers within those themes.

Fit Statistic	Model 1 (Composites)	Model 2 (Individual Items)	Model 3 (Comprehensive)
-2 Log Likelihood	230.26	139.83	150.26
Model Chi-Square (χ2)	71.31	120.59	142.13
Degrees of Freedom (df)	8	29	26
Model Significance (p-value)	<.001	<.001	<.001
Cox & Snell R2	0.246	0.416	0.438
Nagelkerke R2	0.353	0.606	0.631
McFadden's R2	0.236	0.463	0.486
Note: Data for this table are compiled from the SPSS outputs for each respective model.			

Table 6.7 Summary of Model Fit Statistics for Three Ordinal Regression Models

6.10.2 Model 1: The Influence of Theory-Driven Composite Factors

Model 1 tested the predictive power of five composite variables derived from the study's Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) framework, while controlling for demographic factors (age, gender, and years of experience). The overall model was statistically significant ($\chi2(8)=71.31, p<.001$) and explained 35.3% of the variance in happiness (Nagelkerke R2=0.353).

The parameter estimates for this model, shown in Table 6.9, reveal a dominant finding: the primary driver of happiness, at this broad theoretical level, is the catechist's internal sense of spiritual fulfilment. As detailed in the user's prior analysis, the composite variable for 'Personal Spiritual Growth' was the only predictor to demonstrate a strong, statistically significant positive effect. In contrast, the other composite variables, representing the quality of training, leadership support, vocational clarity, and psychological accompaniment, did not emerge as significant independent predictors once spiritual growth was accounted for.

This result provides strong, theory-level evidence for the "salary of the soul" concept that emerged from the qualitative phase of this research. It suggests that the fundamental source of a catechist's happiness is not primarily what the parish or its leaders do *for* them in terms of external support, but rather what the ministry experience does *within* them in terms of fostering a deeper relationship with God and a stronger sense of purpose. This challenges a

purely managerial approach to volunteer retention and underscores the centrality of the spiritual dimension. The role of external support systems, such as training and leadership, appears to be that of creating an environment where this intrinsic spiritual growth can occur, rather than being direct drivers of happiness themselves.

Predictor	Estimate (β)	Wald $\chi 2$	df	Sig. (p)	95% Confidence Interval
Demographics					
Q1: Age	-0.056	2.377	1	0.123	[-0.128, 0.015]
Q2: Gender	0.19	1.205	1	0.272	[-0.149, 0.530]
Q3: Years of experience as a catechist	0.059	2.496	1	0.114	[-0.014, 0.131]
Composite Factors					
Personal Spiritual Growth	1.326	33.008	1	<.001	[0.873, 1.778]
Training Quality & Balance	0.071	0.113	1	0.737	[-0.343, 0.485]
Vocation Clarity	0.053	0.104	1	0.747	[-0.269, 0.375]
Leadership Support & Communication	-0.068	0.339	1	0.561	[-0.297, 0.161]
Psychological Accompaniment	0.188	0.73	1	0.393	[-0.243, 0.619]
Note: Estimates are from the full model presented in the SPSS output. The dependent variable is Q13_17 ("I am happy to be a catechist").					
Model Statistics: LR $\chi 2(8) = 71.31$, $p < .001$; McFadden's R2 = 0.236; Nagelkerke R2 = 0.353; N = 253.					

Table 6.8 Parameter Estimates for Ordinal Regression Model 1 (Composite Predictors)

6.10.3 Model 2: A Granular Item-Level Analysis of Predictors

Model 2 provides a more detailed picture by disaggregating the composite variables into 29 individual survey items, alongside demographic controls. The model was highly significant ($\chi^2(29)=120.59$, $p<.001$) and showed a substantial rise in explanatory power (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.606$), adding considerable nuance to Model 1 (see Table 6.10). No demographic predictors reached conventional significance in Model 2: gender showed a positive near-significant association ($\beta=0.436$, $p=.083$), age showed a negative trend ($\beta=-0.086$, $p=.104$), and years of experience was non-significant ($\beta=0.069$, $p=.231$). For context, in Model 3 age became significantly negative ($\beta=-0.128$, $p=.017$) and experience significantly positive ($\beta=0.147$, $p=.012$), while gender remained non-significant (see Table 6.11).

Consistent with the first model, items related to intrinsic reward and personal fulfilment were among the strongest positive predictors. Specifically, feeling "proud and honoured to serve as a catechist" (Q10_1) had a large and highly significant positive coefficient (β=1.086,p<.001), as did the sense that the ministry is "meaningful and rewarding despite challenges" (Q10_6; β=0.592,p=.017). These findings empirically confirm that feelings of pride, purpose, and spiritual significance are powerful drivers of happiness. Model 2 confirms that intrinsic rewards are the strongest positive signals, but it also surfaces relational and contextual effects. Positively, pride in serving (Q10_1, β=1.086, p<.001) and finding the ministry meaningful despite challenges (Q10_6, β=0.592, p=.017) were robust predictors. Beyond intrinsic items, two relational/role features also mattered: preparation to work effectively with older catechists and multi-generational teams (Q11_10, β=0.472, p=.013) and stronger community bonds among catechists (Q15_1, β=0.553, p=.034). Leadership signals were mixed: access to leadership development opportunities rose to the threshold of significance (Q13_10, β=0.337, p=.050), whereas open communication from leaders (Q13_11, β=−0.477, p=.033) and trust in leaders' support (Q13_13, β=−0.394, p=.038) showed significant negative coefficients, consistent with a "hygiene factor" pattern in which these issues become salient in strained contexts rather than functioning as direct motivators. Near-significant trends pointed in expected directions: skills development from ministry (Q10_2, β=0.429, p=.096) was positive, while practical class-management training (Q11_3, β=−0.341, p=.080) trended negative, again echoing the hygiene interpretation. By contrast, several training items that might have been expected to help, e.g., balance of technique and spirituality (Q11_5), scenario/case-based training (Q11_9), and follow-up/refresher sessions (Q11_12), were not significant in this model, nor were doctrinal understanding (Q10_3) or digital-tool training (Q11_4). Taken together, the item-level results (Table 6.10) refine Model 1's conclusion: intrinsic meaning and belonging are the primary correlates of happiness, while leadership and training mainly register as contextual enablers (or frictions) rather than direct drivers.

The model also reveals a more complex role for leadership. While some leadership actions, such as providing leadership development opportunities (Q13_10), were positively associated with happiness, two other items presented a paradoxical result. Both "Parish leaders communicate openly with catechists about changes, challenges, and future plans" (Q13_11) and "I trust parish leaders to support my personal well-being and my role as a catechist" (Q13_13) were associated with *lower* happiness, with significant negative

coefficients. This counterintuitive finding does not suggest that communication and trust are detrimental. Rather, it may reflect that these issues become particularly salient in challenging or unstable parish environments. Frequent communication about "challenges and future plans" may be a symptom of underlying problems, and a focus on "trusting" leaders may be more pronounced among catechists who feel unsupported. The negative signs on “open communication about challenges/future plans” and “trust in leaders” are best read as context signals, not as evidence that communication or trust are harmful. In practice, problem-oriented communication increases when parishes are under strain, and talk about “trusting leaders” becomes salient precisely where trust feels fragile or support is lacking. Thus higher agreement on these items likely marks turbulent contexts, where overall happiness is lower, rather than reflecting the causal effect of good leadership. In other words, they behave like hygiene indicators: their prominence flags underlying problems, while their quiet background presence is consistent with happier settings. This aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, suggesting that good leadership functions as a "hygiene factor": its absence causes dissatisfaction, but its presence merely creates a neutral ground upon which the true "motivators", the intrinsic rewards of the ministry, can flourish. The role of leadership, therefore, is to create a stable, supportive ecosystem that protects a volunteer's intrinsic motivation from being eroded by environmental friction.

Predictor	Estimate (β)	Wald χ^2	df	Sig. (p)	95% Confidence Interval
Demographics					
Q1: Age	-0.086	2.65	1	0.104	[-0.190, 0.018]
Q2: Gender	0.436	3.011	1	0.083	[-0.057, 0.929]
Q3: Years of experience as a catechist	0.069	1.437	1	0.231	[-0.044, 0.181]
Personal & Spiritual Impact (Q10)					
Q10_1: I feel proud and honoured to serve as a catechist.	1.086	18.717	1	<.001	[0.594, 1.578]
Q10_2: My experiences as a catechist have helped me develop valuable skills such as public speaking, teamwork, and leadership.	0.429	2.77	1	0.096	[-0.076, 0.934]
Q10_3: Teaching the catechism has strengthened my understanding of Church teachings.	0.207	0.795	1	0.373	[-0.248, 0.662]
Q10_4: I find it fulfilling to contribute to the faith formation of younger generations.	-0.125	0.246	1	0.62	[-0.617, 0.368]
Q10_5: I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God.	0.386	2.598	1	0.107	[-0.083, 0.855]
Q10_6: Despite challenges, I feel that being a catechist is meaningful and rewarding.	0.592	5.722	1	0.017	[0.107, 1.077]

Training & Formation (Q11)					
Q11_1: My parish assesses my personal strengths and training needs before assigning me to a class.	-0.209	1.476	1	0.224	[-0.545, 0.128]
Q11_2: Training content is adapted to match the needs, expectations, and learning preferences of Gen Z catechists.	0.17	0.825	1	0.364	[-0.197, 0.538]
Q11_3: Training equips me with practical catechism class management techniques.	-0.341	3.069	1	0.08	[-0.723, 0.041]
Q11_4: I receive training on how to integrate digital tools and social media into lessons.	0.075	0.202	1	0.653	[-0.251, 0.401]
Q11_5: Training provides a good balance between teaching techniques and personal spiritual development.	0.092	0.223	1	0.636	[-0.289, 0.473]
Q11_7: Peer learning (discussing experiences with fellow catechists) is part of my training and ongoing development.	-0.073	0.109	1	0.741	[-0.509, 0.363]
Q11_8: Training includes stress management, developing psychological resilience, and learning self-care techniques.	0.095	0.3	1	0.584	[-0.245, 0.434]
Q11_9: Training sessions include realistic scenarios and real-life case studies relevant to challenges faced by Gen Z catechists.	-0.17	0.851	1	0.356	[-0.530, 0.191]
Q11_10: Training prepares me to work effectively with older catechists and multi-generational teams.	0.472	6.169	1	0.013	[0.099, 0.845]
Q11_11: I am encouraged to create a personal development plan to guide my growth as a catechist.	0.08	0.266	1	0.606	[-0.225, 0.386]
Q11_12: I receive follow-up training and refresher sessions after the initial training.	-0.07	0.189	1	0.664	[-0.388, 0.247]
Q11_13: Stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in the training to inspire my sense of mission and spiritual resilience.	-0.118	0.56	1	0.454	[-0.427, 0.191]
Q11_14: Training helps me develop a deeper understanding of my spiritual identity as a catechist.	0.18	0.513	1	0.474	[-0.312, 0.672]
Q11_15: Training teaches me techniques to help students develop personal prayer habits and silent reflection practices.	-0.34	2.496	1	0.114	[-0.761, 0.082]
Q11_16: Training helps me reflect on my long-term vocation.	0.184	0.954	1	0.329	[-0.185, 0.554]
Leadership & Parish Support (Q13)					
Q13_10: Catechists have access to leadership development programs (e.g., leading training sessions, mentoring junior catechists).	0.337	3.843	1	0.05	[0.000, 0.674]
Q13_11: Parish leaders communicate openly with catechists about changes, challenges, and future plans.	-0.477	4.533	1	0.033	[-0.917, -0.038]
Q13_12: There are clear and confidential processes for resolving conflicts between catechists, leaders, and parents.	0.275	1.745	1	0.186	[-0.133, 0.682]
Q13_13: I trust parish leaders to support my personal well-being and my role as a catechist.	-0.394	4.298	1	0.038	[-0.767, -0.022]
Q13_14: My parish identifies and develops future catechist leaders through clear succession planning.	0.05	0.063	1	0.802	[-0.344, 0.445]

Note: Estimates are from the full model presented in the SPSS output. The dependent variable is Q13_17 ("I am happy to be a catechist").					
Model Statistics: LR $\chi 2(29) = 120.59$, $p < .001$; McFadden's R2 = 0.463; Nagelkerke R2 = 0.606; N = 224.					

Table 6.9 Parameter Estimates for Ordinal Regression Model 2 (Individual Item Predictors)

6.10.4 Model 3: A Comprehensive, Data-Driven Model of Happiness

The final model was the result of a comprehensive 'kitchen sink' approach followed by a three-round pruning procedure. This data-driven process started with a wide range of potential predictors, which were systematically removed if they did not meet significance thresholds ($p>=.90$, $p>=.80$, and $p>=.70$ across the three rounds). The resulting parsimonious model included 26 predictors and yielded the highest explanatory power (Nagelkerke $R2=0.631$) and was highly significant ($\chi 2(26)=142.13, p<.001$). The results, detailed in Table 6.11, provide the most sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the drivers of volunteer well-being.

This analysis reveals a developmental trajectory to volunteer happiness. A catechist's age (Q1) has a significant negative relationship with happiness ($\beta=-0.128, p=.017$), while their years of experience (Q3) has a significant positive relationship ($\beta=0.147, p=.012$). This seemingly contradictory finding points to a life-course dynamic. As Gen Z volunteers grow older, they encounter increasing life pressures from career, education, and relationships, which can compete with their ministry and modestly decrease happiness. However, this is counteracted by a powerful positive effect of tenure; for each year they remain in service, they build mastery, competence, and a more integrated vocational identity, which significantly boosts their happiness. This highlights a critical retention window in the early-to-mid-twenties, where pastoral support is essential to help catechists navigate external pressures and reap the internal rewards of experience.

Model 3 underscores the primacy of intrinsic and relational motivators. The strongest positive predictor is Q13_15 ("Serving as a catechist enhances my personal and professional skills"; $\beta = 1.095$, $p < .001$), indicating that concrete skill development is a major source of

fulfilment. Intrinsic spiritual rewards also register strongly, Q10_5 (growth in prayer life) and Q13_8 (content with God's recognition alone), as do relational factors such as Q6_4 (inspired by previous catechists) and Q15_1 (stronger bonds among catechists). Together, these results point to happiness that is rooted in meaning, growth, and belonging (see Table 6.11).

By contrast, coefficients on impersonal, managerial-style tools are negative. Formal strengths audits (Q11_1; $\beta = -0.577$, $p = .001$) and generic self-reflection guides (Q14_5; $\beta = -1.137$, $p < .001$) are associated with lower happiness. This does not imply that assessment or reflection are intrinsically harmful; rather, in practice these instruments appear to signal a bureaucratic, top-down climate experienced as evaluative and thin on genuine pastoral care, an interpretation consistent with the qualitative critiques of "dry" and "academic" approaches. Read together, the pattern provides quantitative support for the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) claim that effective volunteer support is stewardship- and care-centred, not the result of uncritical importation of secular management tools.

Predictor	Estimate (β)	Wald $\chi 2$	df	Sig. (p)	95% Confidence Interval
Demographics					
Q1: Age	-0.128	5.686	1	0.017	[-0.232, -0.023]
Q2: Gender	0.164	0.486	1	0.486	[-0.297, 0.626]
Q3: Years of experience as a catechist	0.147	6.321	1	0.012	[0.032, 0.262]
Pathways to Service (Q6)					
Q6_1: Invitation from a priest or parish leader	0.707	4.904	1	0.027	[0.081, 1.334]
Q6_4: Inspired by observing senior catechists or role models	0.759	9.159	1	0.002	[0.268, 1.251]
Q6_6: Involvement in youth movements (e.g., Eucharistic Youth Movement)	-0.694	3.81	1	0.051	[-1.390, 0.003]
Sustaining Motivations (Q7)					
Q7_6: Enjoyment and inspiration from working with children	0.572	4.332	1	0.037	[0.033, 1.110]
Q7_10: Sense of belonging and contributing to the parish youth community	0.618	0.286	1	0.593	[-1.648, 2.884]
Generational Identity (Q9)					
Q9_4: I value having the freedom to be flexible and creative when teaching the catechism.	-0.303	2.78	1	0.095	[-0.659, 0.053]
Q9_5: I regularly seek feedback and appreciation from senior catechists and the priest to feel motivated in my role.	0.318	5.109	1	0.024	[0.042, 0.593]

Q9_7: I often compare myself to other catechists in deciding what to do in classes and how to behave in general.	-0.053	0.205	1	0.651	[-0.285, 0.178]
Q9_8: I find it challenging to balance my responsibilities as a catechist with academic, work, and social commitments.	0.056	0.257	1	0.612	[-0.160, 0.271]
Personal & Spiritual Impact (Q10)					
Q10_5: I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God.	0.782	16.469	1	<.001	[0.405, 1.160]
Training & Formation (Q11)					
Q11_1: My parish assesses my personal strengths and training needs before assigning me to a class.	-0.577	10.524	1	0.001	[-0.926, -0.229]
Q11_3: Training equips me with practical catechism class management techniques.	-0.132	0.849	1	0.357	[-0.412, 0.149]
Q11_12: I receive follow-up training and refresher sessions after the initial training.	0.284	4.16	1	0.041	[0.011, 0.556]
Q11_15: Training teaches me techniques to help students develop personal prayer habits and silent reflection practices.	-1.016	16.99	1	<.001	[-1.499, -0.533]
Q11_16: Training helps me reflect on my long-term vocation.	0.628	10.621	1	0.001	[0.250, 1.006]
Valuable Training Features (Q12)					
Q12_4: Spiritual mentoring from priests or senior catechists	-0.2	0.735	1	0.391	[-0.656, 0.257]
Q12_10: Training camp	0.256	1.075	1	0.3	[-0.228, 0.740]
Parish Ecosystem (Q13, Q14, Q15)					
Q13_8: I am happy for my contribution not to be recognised except by God alone.	0.669	12.235	1	<.001	[0.294, 1.044]
Q13_15: Serving as a catechist enhances my personal and professional skills (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork).	1.095	26.7	1	<.001	[0.680, 1.511]
Q14_3: Peer feedback from fellow catechists	-0.508	3.646	1	0.056	[-1.029, 0.013]
Q14_5: Self-reflection guides provided by the parish	-1.137	12.471	1	<.001	[-1.768, -0.506]
Q14_8: I feel I receive feedback from God through events, prayer or other means.	-1.14	0.649	1	0.421	[-3.913, 1.634]
Q15_1: Stronger community bonds among catechists	0.553	4.513	1	0.034	[0.043, 1.063]
Note: Estimates are from the full model presented in the SPSS output. The dependent variable is Q13_17 ("I am happy to be a catechist").					
Model Statistics: LR $\chi 2(26) = 142.13$, $p < .001$; McFadden's R2 = 0.486; Nagelkerke R2 = 0.631; N = 247.					

Table 6.10 Parameter Estimates for Ordinal Regression Model 3 (Comprehensive Model)

6.10.5 Synthesis of Findings Across Models

The three-model analysis converges on a robust and multi-layered conclusion. Catechist happiness is primarily a function of intrinsic spiritual and developmental rewards, which are nurtured within a relational, community-focused environment and moderated by the volunteer's life stage.

- **Model 1** established the foundational importance of the internal spiritual dimension, showing that "Personal Spiritual Growth" is the dominant factor at a broad theoretical level.
- **Model 2** added granularity, confirming that specific intrinsic rewards like pride and a sense of meaning are key drivers, while also revealing the complex role of leadership as a "hygiene factor" that primarily prevents dissatisfaction.
- **Model 3** provided the most sophisticated picture. It quantified the developmental dynamic between age and experience, highlighted the powerful positive impact of skill development and relational inspiration.

Taken together, the quantitative evidence provides a compelling empirical foundation for the thesis's central argument. To foster a flourishing and sustainable ministry, formation must move beyond simple instruction and bureaucratic management. It requires a holistic stewardship that actively cultivates the catechist's inner vocational calling, facilitates tangible skill development, and embeds them within a supportive, relational community of peers.

6.10.6 Supplementary Analysis: Alternative Dependent Variable: “I have grown in my personal prayer life and feel closer to God.”

To further test the robustness of the study's main conclusions, a supplementary analysis was conducted. This involved shifting the focus to an alternative but closely related dependent variable: Q10_5, “I have grown in my personal prayer life and closer to God.” This item, which measures intrinsic spiritual fulfilment, was a strong predictor of happiness in the main models. Treating it as an outcome in its own right allows for an exploration of whether the

same factors that drive happiness also explain variations in catechists' personal spiritual growth.

As part of this supplementary check, a comprehensive “kitchen sink” model was attempted. This atheoretical, brute-force approach involved entering virtually all measured survey variables as predictors in a single ordinal regression to see if any unexpected factors would emerge as significant predictors of spiritual growth (Q10_5).

However, this exhaustive model failed to produce valid results. The statistical software was unable to converge on a stable solution, issuing several critical warnings. The output indicated a classic case of quasi-complete separation in the data, a problem that can occur in logistic-type regressions when a model is over-saturated with predictors relative to the sample size. This issue allows certain combinations of variables to perfectly predict the outcome for subsets of respondents, causing the maximum-likelihood estimation process to break down.

The diagnostic signs of this model failure were unambiguous in the output:

- The software issued a warning stating, "There may be a complete separation in the data. The maximum likelihood estimates do not exist."
- The final -2 Log Likelihood value was effectively zero.
- The Nagelkerke and McFadden pseudo-R2 values rose to 1.0, which in this context signals model collapse rather than a perfect fit.

Because of its theological significance, a supplementary analysis treated Q10_5 (“I have grown in my personal prayer life and feel closer to God”) as an alternative outcome. The available predictors, however, did not provide meaningful explanatory power for this construct and the models were unstable, indicating that the survey did not include the right variables to account for changes in felt closeness to God. Accordingly, estimates are not reported, and the chapter focuses on the happiness outcome for which the instrument offers stronger explanatory leverage. Future research should add direct measures of spiritual practice and accompaniment (e.g., intensity of mentoring/discipleship, prayer disciplines, sacramental participation) to model Q10_5 appropriately.

6.11 Summary of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis of survey data from 305 Generation Z catechists provides robust empirical evidence identifying the key drivers of their self-reported happiness. Through a comparative analysis of three distinct ordinal regression models, a consistent and multi-faceted narrative emerges.

The most powerful and unequivocal finding across all models is that catechist happiness is overwhelmingly predicted by intrinsic motivational factors. The internal rewards of the ministry, what the qualitative data termed the "salary of the soul", are the primary source of fulfilment. Specifically, catechists who feel a strong sense of pride in their service, who experience personal growth in their prayer life, who believe their service enhances their skills, and who are content with spiritual rather than worldly recognition report significantly higher levels of happiness.

While intrinsic motivation is the core driver, its expression is shaped by a clear developmental dynamic. The data-driven analysis reveals that the life pressures associated with aging have a modest negative impact on happiness, but this is strongly counteracted by the positive effect of gaining experience and mastery in the role. This suggests that volunteer well-being follows a life course, and that long-term retention depends on supporting catechists through the challenges of young adulthood while enabling them to grow in competence and vocational identity.

Finally, the analysis clarifies the role of the external support environment. Relational factors, such as being inspired by role models and feeling a strong sense of community with fellow catechists, are significant positive predictors of happiness. Conversely, formal, impersonal, HR-style practices, such as standardized needs assessments and self-reflection guides, were found to be strongly and negatively associated with happiness. This indicates that a top-down, managerial approach can be counterproductive in a volunteer ministry context.

In sum, the quantitative findings provide strong empirical support for the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model. They point to the necessity of a formation approach centered not on bureaucratic management, but on pastoral care, relational support, and the intentional cultivation of the volunteer's inner vocational calling within a vibrant community.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Integration of Findings

7.1 Introduction: Bridging a Paradox through Stewardship

This chapter serves as the primary site of synthesis for the entire study, weaving together the qualitative and quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions. The research was animated by a central empirical puzzle, the 'paradox of service,' where deeply committed Generation Z catechists feel unsupported by the very structures designed to sustain them. The preceding chapters presented the two streams of evidence gathered to investigate this paradox: the rich, narrative data from in-depth interviews (Chapter 5) and the statistical patterns from a broad survey (Chapter 6). This chapter now places these findings into a direct and critical dialogue.

The primary analytical tool for this integration is the Joint Display presented below (Table 7.1). This table moves beyond a simple summary of findings; it is the organizing framework for this discussion. It presents four core 'integrated conclusions', conclusions drawn from the convergence of both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

The subsequent sections of this chapter are structured to correspond to each row of this table. Each section will explore a meta-inference in detail, first by examining the depth of the qualitative themes, then by presenting the corroborating quantitative evidence, and finally by synthesizing these insights in dialogue with the theoretical framework and existing literature. This integrated approach demonstrates how the combination of methods provides a more robust, nuanced, and actionable understanding of catechist formation than either method could achieve alone. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that resolving the 'paradox of service' requires a fundamental shift toward the Human Resource Stewardship model proposed in this thesis.

Integrated Conclusions	Integration Type	Core Qualitative Theme	Illustrative Quote (Participant)	Quantitative Evidence (Ordinal Logistic)
Primacy of Intrinsic Motivation	Convergence	"Salary of the Soul": Intrinsic spiritual reward as core driver.	"When you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay."	In the ordinal logistic models (negative log–log link), intrinsic-reward items were the strongest predictors of happiness. For example, feeling proud and honoured to serve had a large effect (β=1.086, p<.001), as did finding the ministry meaningful despite challenges (β=0.592, p=.017). In the final model, growth in prayer life (β=0.782, p<.001) and valuing God's recognition alone (β=0.669, p<.001) also significantly increased the odds of higher happiness. These intrinsic factors jointly explain a large portion of variance in the model (Nagelkerke R2≈0.606 for Model 2), confirming that internal motivation drives catechist commitment.
The Pedagogical Crisis	Convergence	Mismatch: rigid, outdated pedagogy vs. active, experiential needs.	"The formator just stands at the front and talks… no interaction. It feels like being back in a history class from my childhood."	Survey data show a large gap between need and practice: 87% of catechists prefer interactive, experiential learning, but far fewer report that their training meets this need. In the ordinal regression, once intrinsic factors were controlled, most training-related items were not significant. Only one training item – that sessions prepare catechists to work with older volunteers – showed a modest positive effect (β=0.472, p=.013, Odds Ratio≈1.60). In contrast, formal, impersonal training practices had negative associations with happiness: for example, "assessing personal strengths" (β=–0.577, p=.001) and "providing self-reflection guides" (β=–1.137, p<.001) were linked to lower happiness. These results suggest that the outdated, "banking model" pedagogy undermines competence and intrinsic motivation.

Leadership as an Enabling Condition	Complementarity	Leadership matters as support but not as a primary motivator.	"He is not someone who directly commands us… he listens to our ideas, offers input, and stands up to take responsibility." (Positive example)	Qualitatively, catechists demanded servant-leaders who listen, empower, and "accompany" them. Quantitatively, however, leadership items played a secondary role. Model 2 found only weak effects: having access to leadership development programs had a small positive effect (β=0.337, p=.050), whereas trust in leaders (β=–0.394, p=.038) and open communication (β=–0.477, p=.033) surprisingly predicted slightly lower happiness. In the final model no leadership variables emerged as top predictors. This pattern suggests leadership functions as a "hygiene factor" (Herzberg's theory): good leadership can prevent dissatisfaction but does not itself create intrinsic satisfaction.
The Untapped Power of Narrative	Discordance	Desire to "re-story" martyrs as human models for identity-building.	"When telling martyrs' stories, we should not focus on their death but on their life journey… a very human life."	A large majority (61%) believe Vietnamese martyr stories could inspire their ministry, but few feel these narratives are currently integrated into training. In the ordinal models, no martyr-related item significantly predicted happiness (the martyr-story item had β=–0.118, p=.454), reflecting this gap. There is an implementation gap and a measurement gap. First, while a majority believe martyr narratives could inspire ministry (61%) and many would value their inclusion in training (e.g., "stories about the Vietnamese martyrs" selected by 42%), only a minority perceive these narratives as actually integrated into current programmes, hence the lack of traction in practice. Second, the martyr item in the models (Q11_13: "stories of the Vietnamese martyrs are included in training") did not predict happiness (β = −0.118, p = .454), which

				likely reflects that the survey captured presence/absence of stories rather than dosage, quality of facilitation, or depth of personal engagement, the mechanisms by which narrative pedagogy would plausibly influence well-being. Together, these two gaps explain why respondents see potential in martyr narratives, yet the current, limited integration shows no statistical association with the happiness outcome. Overall, this discordance implies a lost opportunity: catechists intuitively see narrative pedagogy as powerful, but it remains underused.

Table 7.1 The Joint Display of qualitative and quantitative evidence

The integrated results of the sequential mixed-methods study painted this problem in sharp relief. The qualitative interviews (Chapter 5) gave voice to catechists lived experiences, describing a "crisis in pedagogy" (with rote teaching methods that felt "too dry" and irrelevant), a generational "digital disconnect" between tech-savvy youths and tech-averse formators, and a lack of clear pathways for growth. Participants highlighted how intrinsic motivations – such as deepening their faith and serving the community – drive their commitment, yet they lamented the Church's "rigid" structures and insufficient support that make it hard to sustain that commitment. The quantitative survey (Chapter 6) affirmed these themes with hard data: for example, 87% of Gen Z catechists prefer interactive, experiential learning, yet only 39% are satisfied with the training they receive in this regard, and 79% cited "developing my faith life" as a primary motivator, vastly outweighing extrinsic motivators like leader recognition (21%).

The picture that emerges is of a ministry powered by volunteers' personal passion despite the formal system rather than because of it. Addressing this systemic misalignment calls for more than minor tweaks to curricula or volunteer management techniques. This chapter argues that a fundamental shift in organisational philosophy is required – from an implicit model of command-and-control to an explicit model of trust, care, and empowerment rooted in Human Resource Stewardship. The primary contribution of this thesis is the development

of such a model, integrating insights from theology, education, psychology, and management. Replacing the prevailing transactional approach with a "ministry of stewardship" reframes volunteer formation as an act of pastoral care, aligning institutional practices with the ethos of service and community that motivates the volunteers themselves. In doing so, formation can be transformed from a top-down transmission of religious content into a holistic cultivation of discipleship and human flourishing.

This chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the study's key findings, placing them in dialogue with relevant academic literature. Section 7.2 systematically examines the major themes that emerged, from pedagogical shortcomings to motivational dynamics and leadership, analysing how the results support, extend, or challenge existing research. Building on this analysis, Section 7.3 explicates the proposed Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model as the study's primary theoretical contribution and answer to the research questions. This section details how the model's facets, grounded in Stewardship Theory, Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, offer an integrated solution to the issues identified. Subsequently, Section 7.4 translates this theoretical framework into practical recommendations for the archdiocese. The study's limitations and avenues for future research are addressed in Section 7.5. Finally, Section 7.6 provides a concluding synthesis, envisioning how a stewardship paradigm can foster a more sustainable catechetical ministry. Throughout this chapter, the discussion maintains a critical and reflective stance to demonstrate how the findings advance both theory and practice.

7.2 Discussion of Key Findings in Theoretical Context

This section deconstructs the central paradox identified in the study, the coexistence of a deeply committed, intrinsically motivated cohort of Generation Z catechists with a formational system that often leaves them feeling unsupported and frustrated. To address this puzzle, the discussion advances four integrated conclusions that reconcile the qualitative and quantitative evidence - the primacy of intrinsic motivation, the pedagogical crisis, the enabling role of leadership, and the untapped power of narrative, a coherent picture emerges that points directly toward the need for a new, integrated paradigm of volunteer formation: the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model.

7.2.1 The Primacy of Intrinsic Motivation: The 'Salary of the Soul' as the Core Driver

Across the dataset, the most potent driver of catechist commitment is intrinsic and spiritual, not material. Participants repeatedly named this inner compensation the "salary of the soul": a felt sense of purpose and communion with God that makes sacrifice meaningful. One experienced catechist said, *"When you serve the Church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don't have that connection, you won't stay."* This "soul connection" is the currency of ministry for Gen Z volunteers, nourishing them from within and sustaining perseverance. This reward is multi-layered: the joy of seeing children grow in faith, the personal maturation that comes through teaching, and the conviction of answering a divine call. Survey results corroborate the pattern: 79% cited "developing my faith life" as a primary motivation. The metaphor (“salary of the soul”), the quotation, and the multi-layered description all come from the interviews; the strength of this theme is then corroborated by the survey. Taken together, these data define the core psychological contract between volunteer and Church: catechists invest time, energy and talent; in return, they expect meaning, purpose and spiritual growth. Initial zeal is likely to be strained when systems fail to "pay" this salary.

Both the interviews and survey analysis demonstrate unequivocally that intrinsic, spiritual rewards are the primary drivers of Gen Z catechists’ commitment. This Convergence of evidence is the study's most powerful finding. Qualitatively, participants coined the metaphor “salary of the soul” to express that serving God provides a deep internal reward that sustains them through challenges. One catechist explained that unlike secular jobs, “when you serve the church, you receive a very deep soul connection. If you don’t have that connection, you won’t stay.”

The quantitative ordinal regression corroborates this theme with high statistical confidence. In the final comprehensive model (Nagelkerke R2=0.631), intrinsic factors dominated. For example, growth in personal prayer life was strongly associated with higher happiness (β=0.782, p<.001), as was valuing recognition by God alone (β=0.669, p<.001). These internal rewards consistently emerged as the most powerful predictors, whereas external “support environment” variables contributed less explanatory power once spiritual factors were in the model. This finding reframes the institution's role: it need not manufacture

motivation but must steward the spiritual fulfilment that catechists already possess and make full use of this motivation.

These convergent findings align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and underpin the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model advanced in this thesis. SDT holds that autonomous motivation flourishes when activities cohere with one's values and identity (De Clerck et al., 2022). The research data's salience of "mission alignment" exemplifies identified and integrated regulation in practice. In HRS terms, the Church does not need to manufacture motivation; it must steward what God has already kindled. Formation and management should pivot from incentives and control to stewardship of vocation. Practically, this means building settings that keep “paying” the salary of the soul: protect time for prayer, strengthen mission alignment, and strip out needless structural frictions, so intrinsic motivation can endure and deepen.

7.2.2 The Pedagogical Crisis: A Profound Mismatch Between Need and Reality

The second meta-inference is that there is a statistically significant and experientially profound gap between the pedagogy catechists need, interactive, relevant, and transformative, and the pedagogy they receive, predominantly didactic, abstract, and outdated. This mismatch actively undermines their sense of competence and engagement.
Catechists consistently described their formation sessions in terms that evoke a rigid and ineffective educational philosophy. The qualitative data is replete with descriptions of a "one-way and dry delivery" and the feeling of being in an "old history class," where the primary activity is to "just sit in class, copying notes". One catechist vividly depicted the experience: "The formator just stands at the front and talks... no interaction... It feels like being back in a history class from my childhood, not like something alive".

This approach is a textbook illustration of the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire termed the "banking model of education" (Freire and Ramos, 1970). In this model, the instructor acts as a depositor of information, filling passive students' "empty" minds. This method discourages critical thinking, creativity, and personal ownership of knowledge, maintaining the status quo rather than liberating the learner (Freire, 1985). The catechists' intuitive rejection of this model is evident in their yearning for a more relevant and participatory form

of learning. They are not asking for entertainment, but for what adult learning theorist Jack Mezirow called "transformative learning", an educational process that facilitates a genuine shift in a learner's perspective through critical reflection and dialogue (Mezirow, 1978). Their plea for relevance is fundamentally a plea for transformation, not just information. Stark survey data quantify the experiential gap described in the interviews. Approximately 87% of catechists preferred interactive and experiential learning methods, yet only 39% reported being satisfied with the current provision. This statistical chasm represents a clear mandate for pedagogical reform. Further reinforcing this theme of outdated methods is the "digital disconnect": while nearly three-quarters of these digital-native catechists regularly use digital tools in their personal lives, barely half feel that their training equips them to use them in their ministry.

Conversely, two formal training practices were significantly negatively associated with happiness: “Parish assesses my strengths before assigning me” (β=–0.577, p=.001) and “Parish provides self-reflection guides” (β=–1.137, p<.001). These counterintuitive results suggest that bureaucratic, impersonal processes might be perceived as demotivating. This failure impairs catechists’ sense of competence and erodes motivation. The pedagogical crisis is not merely an educational failure; it is a psychological one that directly thwarts the basic needs identified by Self-Determination Theory. The "banking model" of education treats learners as passive objects, which undermines the psychological nutrients required for motivation to thrive. First, it denies learners the need for autonomy by removing their agency and voice from the learning process. When catechists are expected to receive and repeat information, their sense of volition and self-endorsement is stifled. Second, it undermines the need for
competence. By failing to equip them with the practical, modern, and relational skills they need to feel effective when teaching Generation Z, the outdated pedagogy can leave them feeling inadequate and ill-prepared for the realities of the classroom (Alamer and Al Sultan, 2022). Therefore, the pedagogical mismatch is not just "boring" but actively demotivating on a deep psychological level. It starves the volunteers of the psychological support they need to flourish, which helps to explain why this issue is so central to their experience of frustration.

7.2.3 Leadership as an Enabling Condition: Protecting, Not Producing, Motivation

The third meta-inference reveals a nuanced role for leadership. While poor leadership is a key source of frustration and demotivation, the mere presence of good leadership is not a primary driver of happiness. Its main function is to create a supportive environment that protects and enables the catechist's intrinsic motivation, acting as an essential "enabling condition" or, in organisational terms, a "hygiene factor." The qualitative data powerfully illustrate the profound impact of leadership style on the volunteer experience. While intrinsic/spiritual factors remain the strongest positives, the quantitative models show that leadership climate conditions the volunteer experience, supportive, stewardship-oriented practices help, whereas managerial or problem-centred signals correlate with lower happiness (see Tables 6.10–6.11). Catechists painted a clear picture of the ideal leader as a servant-leader who embodies empowerment, stewardship, and deep listening (Hall, 2020). This ideal was captured in descriptions of leaders who "*listen to our ideas... and stand up to take responsibility*" and act as a "*father in a family, observing, listening, advising*". This posture of accompaniment, where the leader walks alongside the volunteer as a mentor and guide, fosters a climate of trust and psychological safety.

This empowering style was consistently contrasted with authoritarian or neglectful approaches cited as significant sources of frustration, often leading dedicated volunteers to consider quitting. The quantitative results, however, provide a different perspective. At the unadjusted level (leadership-support items considered on their own), higher perceived leadership support is associated with greater happiness; however, in the multivariable ordinal regressions this association becomes non-significant once intrinsic/spiritual predictors are included (Model 1), and at the item level several leadership signals behave more as “hygiene” markers than drivers (Models 2–3; Tables 6.10–6.11). This pattern suggests that leadership influences happiness through intrinsic/relational experiences rather than in addition to them. In an intermediate model, two leadership items even had small negative associations: trusting leaders for personal support (β=–0.394, p=.038) and open communication about plans (β=–0.477, p=.033) were linked to lower happiness, likely reflecting that catechists become acutely aware of these issues only in troubled contexts.

This apparent contradiction, where catechists say leadership is crucial, but the statistics show it is not a primary driver of their happiness compared to their sense of mission, requires a more nuanced interpretation of leadership's role. In this view, leadership is a background condition: good leadership prevents dissatisfaction but is not itself the source of intrinsic satisfaction. Its role is protective rather than generative. This paradox can be effectively resolved by reframing the role of leadership through the lens of Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg's theory distinguishes between "motivators" (factors that actively create job satisfaction, such as achievement and the work itself) and "hygiene factors" (factors that do not create satisfaction but prevent dissatisfaction, such as good supervision and working conditions) (Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl and Maude, 2017).

Applied to this context, the “salary of the soul” (deep mission-alignment and intrinsic satisfaction) functions as the primary motivator, consistent with Self-Determination Theory’s emphasis on intrinsic need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness) as the engine of well-being and persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Baard, Deci & Ryan, 2004). In faith-based volunteering specifically, qualitative and comparative studies likewise show that transcendent or spiritual rewards are central to commitment (Faletehan & van Burg, 2023; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Leadership, training, and other supports operate chiefly as enablers/hygiene conditions: when configured poorly they become dissatisfiers, but when configured well they create a stable, need-fulfilling climate that lets intrinsic motives do their work, precisely the pattern Herzberg described (Herzberg, 1966; 1968). Within that climate, servant-leadership behaviours, removing obstacles, providing resources, and fostering belonging, are associated with higher satisfaction and commitment, largely by supporting followers’ needs rather than “manufacturing” motivation (van Dierendonck, 2011; Eva et al., 2019; see also Bogler, 2001 on leadership and satisfaction). Read together, these literatures align with the mixed-methods evidence here: meaning is primary; stewardship-oriented leadership sustains it by shaping the climate, not by substituting for it.

7.2.4 The Untapped Power of Narrative: A Call to 'Re-Story' the Martyrs

The final meta-inference is a strong desire for a renewed narrative pedagogy centred on the Vietnamese Martyrs. However, the current approach fails to connect with Generation Z. A humanised, virtue-focused approach could be a powerful, culturally resonant tool for

building resilience and vocational identity. Interviewees consistently described a humanised, virtue-centred formation (relational accompaniment, witness of exemplary catechists/martyrs, growth in prayer) as culturally resonant and identity-forming. The survey partly corroborates this: items tapping intrinsic meaning and spiritual growth (e.g., pride/meaning; growth in prayer), inspiration from exemplar catechists and stronger community bonds are positively associated with happiness (Tables 6.10–6.11). By contrast, a simple checkbox that "martyr stories are included in training" does not predict happiness, suggesting that how such narratives are facilitated matters more than mere inclusion. Accordingly, it is more precise to say that a humanised, virtue-focused approach is warranted and culturally resonant, with partial quantitative support (mainly through intrinsic/relational indicators) and strong qualitative support; direct effects on "resilience" were not assessed, so this remains a testable implication for future work.

The qualitative data revealed a significant psychological distance between young catechists and the historical narratives of the Vietnamese Martyrs. The current "old-school" paradigm of hagiography was criticised for presenting the martyrs as distant, unrelatable, and "*superhuman, to the point of being unimaginable*" icons (SCH-03, scholar, interview; author's translation of *"phi thường, đến mức không tưởng"*). This approach, focused on dates and miracles, fails to capture the attention of a generation seeking authenticity and connection. Participants articulated a clear vision for a "pedagogy of humanisation." They called for a "re-storying" of the martyrs that moves beyond their glorious deaths to focus on their "very human life", their families, their communities, and, crucially, their struggles with fear and doubt. By portraying the martyrs as individuals who found courage *despite* their fear, the narrative becomes a more powerful and accessible model of resilience.

The survey data reveal a significant gap in practice. While 61% of respondents agree that martyrs' stories could be an inspirational resource, the analysis indicates they are not currently leveraged as such. In the ordinal models, the item about including martyrs' stories in training had no significant effect on happiness (β=–0.118, p=.454), reflecting that few catechists see these stories effectively integrated. This discordance suggests a missed opportunity. According to Social Cognitive Theory, observing relatable models boosts self-efficacy and motivation. By implementing the requested "re-storying," the Church could deploy a powerful formative tool that is currently underused. However, this is contrasted by the widespread qualitative sentiment that these narratives are not effectively integrated into

training programs. This gap between perceived potential and actual practice highlights a significant untapped resource in catechist formation.

The call to "re-story" the martyrs is fundamentally a request for usable identity resources, a process best explained by integrating Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1999) with Dan McAdams's Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams, 2018).
First, SCT explains that for observational learning to occur, a model must be perceived as relatable and similar to the observer; a "superhuman" model is a poor model because it lowers the observer's self-efficacy. Humanising the martyrs transforms them from distant icons into effective symbolic models whose virtues can be realistically emulated. Second, Narrative Identity Theory posits that individuals form their identity by integrating cultural "master scripts" into their personal life stories (McAdams and Albaugh, 2010). The Vietnamese Martyrs represent a powerful cultural and religious master script for Vietnamese Catholics. The current "old-school" hagiography presents a script that is difficult for Generation Z to integrate into their contemporary lives (Mitchell and Howcroft, 2015). The call to "re-story" is a demand for a revised master script, one that highlights relatable themes of agency (courage), communion (love for community), and redemption from suffering. This allows a young catechist to weave the martyrs' narrative into their own, seeing their own small, daily struggles for faith as part of that larger, heroic story. This process strengthens their vocational identity and builds the spiritual resilience needed for sustained ministry.

These four integrated conclusions are deeply interconnected. The analysis reveals a system where the external environment, characterized by a pedagogical crisis and inconsistent leadership, is actively depleting the intrinsic motivation that serves as the catechists' primary resource, while simultaneously leaving powerful formative tools like narrative pedagogy underutilized. These integrated findings collectively diagnose a systemic problem that requires a systemic solution. This provides a seamless and logical transition to the next section, which will formally present the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model as that comprehensive solution.

7.3 The Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) Model: Integrating Theory and Practice

In light of these findings, this study proposes the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model as a comprehensive framework for forming and supporting Gen Z catechists. The HRS model is the principal theoretical contribution of the thesis, an integration of stewardship/servant leadership with SDT and narrative pedagogy, purpose-built to address the formational and organisational deficits evidenced in the qualitative interviews and survey analyses (Chapters. 5–6). It represents a shift from viewing volunteer management as a utilitarian task (managing "human resources") to viewing it as a pastoral responsibility (stewarding human persons with dignity and potential). In essence, the model calls for reimagining the Church's relationship with its volunteers from one of command-and-control agency to one of trust-and-care stewardship. This addresses Research Question 2's focus on which strategies can effectively tackle the challenges, and RQ3's focus on integrating them into a coherent programme.

7.3.1 From Agency to Stewardship: A Philosophical Shift

At the heart of the HRS model is a foundational philosophical shift inspired by Stewardship Theory as contrasted with traditional Agency Theory in management. Agency Theory, widely used in secular organisational contexts, assumes individuals are self-interested "agents" who may shirk responsibilities unless tightly monitored or incentivised; thus it advocates control mechanisms to align agents with the principal's goals (Eisenhardt, 1989). Stewardship Theory offers an alternate view: it posits that people can be intrinsically motivated to do what is best for the organisation, especially when they identify with its mission and are given trust and autonomy (Donaldson and Davis, 1991). A steward, in this view, doesn't need constant supervision or external rewards – their reward is in the accomplishment of shared goals and the fulfilment of personal growth through work.

The research provides compelling evidence that the Gen Z catechists function as natural stewards of the Church's mission. They volunteer not for personal gain (indeed, there is no material gain) but out of a genuine commitment to their faith and community. They derive satisfaction from the service itself, aligning with the organisation's (Church's) evangelising purpose as their own purpose. However, the current organisational culture and structures often treat them more like untrusted agents: layers of approval for new ideas, lack of inclusion in planning, rigid rules – all these send a message that the "principals" (clergy or

administrators) don’t fully trust the volunteers and must retain tight control. This mismatch – intrinsically mission-driven volunteers in an extrinsically controlled system – is at the crux of the problem.

The HRS model therefore begins by explicitly embracing a Stewardship mindset. In practical terms, this means the Archdiocese and parishes would recognise volunteers as co-responsible partners, echoing the theological notion that by baptism all the faithful share in the Church’s mission. It means articulating policies that value trust over suspicion, empowerment over micromanagement. The researcher acknowledges a deliberate conceptual tension in the model's title, specifically in the retention of the term "Human Resource." This term, rooted in the language of management science, can appear to contradict the model's core philosophy, which argues passionately against treating volunteers as instrumental "resources" to be managed or expended. However, this choice of nomenclature is strategic. By retaining the "Human Resource" label, the model intentionally builds a bridge to the researcher's formal discipline of Business Management, speaking its language in order to challenge its conventional assumptions from within. It makes the framework legible to a secular HRM audience, inviting a critical dialogue and presenting a theologically informed, pastoral alternative to the dominant utilitarian paradigms. While "Human Resource" serves as the disciplinary anchor, the model's true philosophical heart is better captured by the proposed alternative: "Human Resourcefulness Stewardship." This telling renaming shifts the focus from stewarding people as resources to stewarding the God-given resourcefulness within them, their unique gifts, creativity, spiritual energy, and vocation. This reframing is not merely semantic; it is a pastoral and theological declaration. It emphasizes that what the Church is called to steward is not a stock of fungible volunteers, but the sacred potential and dignity inherent in each person. Therefore, while the HRS model uses the conventional term for strategic and interdisciplinary purposes, its spirit and application are entirely oriented toward this deeper meaning of stewarding human resourcefulness.

This linguistic shift helps underline a pastoral vision: volunteers are not means to an end (to run parish programmes) but ends in themselves in terms of pastoral care (their growth and well-being is a goal of the Church). Adopting this stewardship philosophy answers the call for a paradigm change identified in Section 7.1 and sets the tone for all subsequent strategies. It also contributes to theory by showing a concrete case where stewardship theory’s

assumptions hold true and yield benefits: the data aligns with research that when individuals are trusted and their intrinsic motives embraced, they often rise to the occasion, displaying loyalty and creativity that a punitive agency model could never generate (Slemp et al., 2018; McAnally and Hagger, 2024). In a non-profit religious setting, this is even more apt, since extrinsic incentives (salaries, etc.) are minimal or absent; motivation lives or dies on intrinsic fulfilment and commitment.

7.3.2 Facets of the HRS Model: Theoretical Integration

Building on the stewardship foundation, the HRS model consists of four interrelated facets. Each pillar corresponds to a domain of the problem identified and draws on a specific theoretical lens, yet they work in concert. The facets are:

1. **Servant Leadership (Leadership Ethos):** This pillar addresses the leadership deficit highlighted in the findings. By adopting Servant Leadership principles, those in charge (priests, coordinators) focus on serving the volunteers – through active listening, empathy, mentorship, and empowering others to lead. The servant leader creates an environment of high trust and psychological safety, which operationalises the stewardship philosophy in day-to-day interactions. This pillar directly responds to the cry for better accompaniment and communication (Section 7.2.3). It also situates itself in leadership theory literature as a proven approach to increase team members' growth and engagement (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2022); (Usman, Hanif and Majeed, 2024), with this study reinforcing its relevance in a ministry context. Adopting servant leadership in parishes can be seen as enacting the Gospel teaching "the greatest among you must be the servant of all" in a concrete organisational form.
2. **Need-Supportive Environment (Volunteer Experience, via Self-Determination Theory):** This pillar focusses on shaping the volunteer experience such that the core psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are consistently met. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), it implies redesigning training and volunteer management processes to provide meaningful choices and voice (autonomy), skill-building and feedback (competence), and community bonding and spiritual fellowship (relatedness). The SDT needs are partly met by the ministry itself: competence and meaning are reflected in strong positives for skill development (Q13_15), pride/meaning despite challenges (Q10_1, Q10_6), and growth in prayer (Q10_5), while relatedness is seen in positives for being inspired by exemplar catechists (Q6_4) and stronger bonds among catechists (Q15_1) (see Tables 6.10–

6.11). At the same time, organisational features often thwart these needs: autonomy/voice is signalled as strained where problem-centred "open communication about challenges/future plans" (Q13_11) and the salience of "trusting leaders" (Q13_13) carry negative coefficients (Table 6.10); competence is undercut by weak or misfitted training, the practical class-management item (Q11_3) trends negative and several training items are non-significant (Table 6.10); relatedness/belonging is dampened by bureaucratic tools, generic self-reflection guides (Q14_5) and strengths audits (Q11_1) show strong negative associations (Table 6.11). These quantitative patterns align with interview testimony in Chapter 5 (reports of limited voice and "dry/academic" training), showing that SDT needs are nourished by the ministry itself but frustrated by organisational practice. By intentionally crafting roles, feedback mechanisms, and community events that nurture these needs, the Church can effectively "pay" the volunteers their salary of soul in a reliable way. Theoretically, this pillar extends SDT into the realm of church volunteerism, illustrating the practical steps for an environment to foster high-quality motivation (Haivas, Hofmans and Pepermans, 2012; Stukas et al., 2016). It underscores that pastoral care for volunteers includes attention to their psychological well-being, which in turn sustains their service. In management terms, it is akin to internal marketing: treating volunteers as valued "internal customers" whose needs must be satisfied for the mission to succeed.

3. **Narrative and Social Learning (Formation Content, via Social Cognitive and Narrative Identity Theories):** To resolve the crisis in pedagogy, this pillar infuses Narrative Pedagogy into formation, supported by Social Cognitive Theory's emphasis on learning through models (Bandura, 1999) and Narrative Identity Theory's insights into how stories shape self-understanding (McAdams, 2018). Practically, this means overhauling the curriculum to be experience- and story-centred. Instead of solely doctrinal modules, incorporate workshops on the lives of the Vietnamese Martyrs (and other relatable role models), using methods like storytelling, testimonies, group reflection, and creative media. The idea is to enable catechists to observe and emulate virtuous behaviours (through historical and contemporary role models) in a way that connects to their own challenges. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is relevant: seeing someone "like me" who persevered in faith under adversity can boost a catechist's confidence in doing the same (Credo and del Castillo, 2019). Meanwhile, engaging with these narratives helps catechists construct their own faith story, integrating the martyr script into their personal identity as a "catechist-disciple." This pillar thus

addresses the call for a critical pedagogy of martyrdom and for interactive learning (Section 7.2.1 and 7.2.3). In academic terms, it contributes a model of religious education that marries traditional hagiography with modern educational psychology – showing one way to renew catechetical pedagogy by making it narrative, participatory, and reflective.

4. **Systemic Support and Empowerment (Organisational Processes, via Volunteer Management best practices and Freirean perspective):** While not a single theory, this pillar combines insights from volunteer management research (e.g., lifecycle models, psychological contract theory) and a critical pedagogy lens to ensure that the organisational system (from diocesan level to parish routines) is set up to continuously support and empower volunteers. This includes concrete measures: clear role descriptions to set expectations (honouring the psychological contract (Taylor et al., 2006; Hager and Renfro, 2020), structured recruitment and onboarding to welcome and socialise new catechists, ongoing training and mentoring (addressing the "no clear path" issue), regular appreciation and feedback loops, and offboarding processes when volunteers leave to capture learnings and express gratitude. It also includes creating forums where volunteers can voice concerns safely (e.g., periodic "open forums" with the parish priest or a suggestion system), which injects a bit of dialogue in a hierarchical system – a nod to Freire's insistence on dialogue for liberation (Freire, 1970). In essence, this pillar is about institutionalising stewardship: moving from ad-hoc, personality-dependent support to a consistent, standard of care for all volunteers. The theoretical contribution here is demonstrating how the abstract idea of stewardship can be translated into organisational practice, drawing from both secular volunteer management know-how and the Church's own ethos of communion and subsidiarity, as affirmed by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pope Pius XI, 1931) and endorsed for ecclesial governance by Pope Pius XII in his Address to the Consistory of New Cardinals (Pope Pius XII, 1946), and more recently implemented by Pope Francis in his curial reforms. It also touches on the often-neglected area of how to manage the relationship (the unwritten contract) with volunteers over time, thereby directly addressing the retention problem identified in Section 7.2.2. By clarifying obligations and providing growth opportunities, the Church signals it is fulfilling its promises to those who serve – which should in turn reinforce volunteers' commitment.

These four facets are mutually reinforcing. For instance, a servant leader will naturally cultivate a need-supportive climate (because they listen and respond to volunteers' needs); a strong narrative pedagogy builds competence and relatedness (as catechists gain knowledge and feel part of a story community), etc. The integrative nature of the model is one of its strengths – piecemeal fixes (e.g., just doing one training workshop or just thanking volunteers more) would not fully solve the complex problem, but a coordinated approach can. The conceptualisation of HRS as an integrated model is one distinctive contribution of this thesis. It demonstrates how one can blend theological principles (e.g., servant leadership resonates with Christ-like service), psychological theories (SDT, SCT) and management strategies (volunteer lifecycle planning) into a unified framework. By doing so, it answers the research questions in a holistic way: RQ1 (challenges) are addressed not in isolation but via systemic change; RQ2 (strategies) are embodied in each pillar; RQ3 (integration into a programme) is essentially this model as a blueprint for a new training and support programme.

7.3.3 Contributions to Theory and Ecclesial Practice

The HRS model carries several broader implications. Theoretically, it extends the discourse in practical theology and church management by providing an example of how secular theories can be "baptized," or reinterpreted, within a faith context. For instance, HRM language of "resource management" was reframed into a theology of "stewardship of persons", grounding it in the Christian concepts of Imago Dei (each person's God-given dignity and gifts) and the Church as *communio* (a community of co-responsibility). In short, this is theological synthesis: taking what is best in organisational science and infusing it with spiritual purpose. The approach models how the Church can learn from management without losing its soul, and indeed, nurture it.

In addition, the model adds to volunteer management literature by illustrating the importance of spiritual and narrative factors (rarely considered in secular frameworks) in volunteer motivation and retention. It suggests that concepts like vocation and calling, or shared narratives of meaning, can significantly enhance volunteer engagement beyond what standard HR practices achieve. This is a novel contribution, bridging a gap between religious studies and management.

In terms of ecclesial practice, adopting the HRS model would represent a tangible step toward implementing calls from recent Church teachings for greater co-responsibility of

laity and a pastoral conversion of structures. Popes and synods have spoken about empowering lay people and moving away from clericalism; HRS provides a concrete roadmap in one ministry domain to do exactly that. If the Archdiocese of HCMC embraces even part of this model, it could serve as an exemplar for other dioceses in Vietnam and beyond, demonstrating how to invigorate youth ministry in an era of rapid change. Importantly, the model is contextually adapted – it uses local strengths (like the Martyrs' witness) – but it's also adaptable to other contexts (the general principles of stewardship, servant leadership, SDT, SCT are widely applicable).

To sum up this section, the HRS model provides an answer to the research problem: a systemic solution for a systemic issue. It is designed to realign the institutional paradigm with the lived reality and needs of Gen Z catechists, effectively "cultivating the salary of the soul" so that volunteers are continually nourished rather than depleted by their service. By validating this model through both qualitative and quantitative findings, this study has not only proposed an ideal but shown its feasibility and expected benefits. What remains is to discuss how, in practical terms, an Archdiocese might implement these ideas. Therefore, the discussion now turns to concrete recommendations – the actionable steps for policy and practice that flow from the HRS framework.

7.4 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

While the HRS model provides a conceptual framework – a polyhedron of interlocking facets rather than a set of isolated pillars – its impact will depend on how it is put into practice. This section outlines practical recommendations for the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City (and by extension, similar faith-based organisations) to enact the changes suggested by the findings of this study. The recommendations are organised into three levels – (1) strategic leadership and culture, (2) curriculum and pedagogy, and (3) operational volunteer management – echoing the domains of the model. They are grounded in the evidence gathered and are meant to be realistic for the context. Implementing these recommendations would move the Archdiocese towards the stewardship approach, addressing the research questions by directly tackling the identified challenges with targeted actions.

(1) Strategic Leadership and Cultural Change

To embed the Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) approach at the highest level, the Archdiocese should adopt a "Stewardship Charter" for Lay Ministry. This formal declaration (e.g. a pastoral letter or diocesan policy) would recognize volunteer catechists as "co-responsible partners in mission", making their spiritual well-being a pastoral priority. By publicly affirming volunteers' dignity and role, the Charter would signal a decisive break from the old paradigm that treated catechists as mere helpers. For Gen Z catechists, hearing their contributions valued in an official document can be profoundly validating and motivating. It addresses a key mindset issue: moving from viewing volunteers as a means to an end toward honoring them as an end in themselves. Clergy, in turn, would have clear guidance and theological rationale to trust and empower young lay ministers, rather than managing them with a control-oriented mindset.

In tandem, mandatory servant-leadership training is recommended for all parish priests and catechist coordinators. The study found that many young catechists become "discouraged, even quit" under inflexible, top-down leadership. Gen Z volunteers thrive under leaders who "trust and empower them – by inviting honest dialogue, delegating responsibilities, and adapting to their realities". Therefore, workshops should be instituted to cultivate practical skills in active listening, mentorship, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution – essentially training clergy and lay leaders to "lead by serving." This ongoing formation (not a one-off workshop) would gradually shift parish culture toward one of trust and co-responsibility. Young catechists in interviews noted that rigid rules and exclusion from planning "send a message that the 'principals'… don't fully trust the volunteers". Servant-leadership development directly tackles this, fostering a culture where youth feel heard, supported, and included. Over time, parishes can expect to see higher volunteer satisfaction and retention, as the qualitative evidence suggested: when leaders create psychologically safe and supportive environments, catechists report greater happiness and commitment. Indeed, survey data in this study showed that catechists' sense of growth, community, and support – hallmarks of servant-led communities – strongly predicted their overall satisfaction.

Finally, the Archdiocese should establish a Diocesan Office (or Task Force) for Lay Ministry Development to drive these reforms. Currently, the volunteer management system is ad-hoc and lacking a "roadmap" for catechists' ongoing development. One Gen Z interviewee lamented: "After you have committed, after you have given of yourself, what's

next? There is no roadmap, no clear direction." The new Office would address this gap by serving as a central hub to plan and coordinate catechist formation and support. Its mandate could include developing standardized training curricula (so that each parish does not reinvent the wheel), rolling out the servant-leadership programs, setting up mentorship networks, and monitoring volunteer satisfaction and retention. Even a small dedicated team (one part-time staff or committee) can make a difference by championing volunteer care within the archdiocesan structure. This structural change ensures continuity: rather than relying on individual parishes alone, it institutionalizes the stewardship model's principles. In practice, catechists would notice concrete support – for example, diocesan-run enrichment workshops or an annual "Catechist Day" of retreat and appreciation – which makes them feel seen and valued. The Office can also gather feedback (e.g. annual surveys, as done in this study) to continually improve the volunteer experience. In short, creating this dedicated body makes it clear that the Archdiocese "places serious value on its catechists", addressing the systemic failure to steward volunteer talent and vocations.

(2) Redesigning Curriculum and Pedagogy:

A comprehensive overhaul of the catechist formation curriculum is needed to engage Gen Z's learning style and nourish their spiritual growth. Rather than the current lecture-based, doctrinal instruction, the new curriculum should be experiential, interactive, and narrative-driven. This means incorporating adult learning principles and methods that Gen Z catechists find most meaningful – something strongly echoed in the data (87% of surveyed catechists expressed preference for interactive learning). For example, training sessions can be structured around real-life scenarios and problem-solving: start with a practical challenge a catechist might face (e.g. a disengaged student or a tough faith question), let participants discuss and brainstorm, then introduce Church teaching as a resource, and finally have them formulate an action plan. Such an approach, inspired by Mezirow's transformative learning theory, turns training into a process of reflection and personal growth rather than a rote transmission of facts. Catechists repeatedly voiced that current training often feels disconnected from real challenges ("outdated methods" and "psychological neglect" were phrases used by participants). By grounding formation in lived experience, the program will equip young catechists with practical skills and a sense of personal development. The Archdiocesan Office can support this by publishing a "Catechist Formation Handbook" full of sample interactive lesson plans and by training the trainers in facilitation techniques. The

real-world impact will be immediately tangible: instead of enduring mandatory classes, Gen Z volunteers will feel that training sessions genuinely help them thrive in ministry (a shift already implied by many catechists' yearning for more relevant, life-giving formation).

Within the revamped curriculum, a dedicated module – a "Critical Pedagogy of Martyrdom" – should be developed to tap into the inspirational power of the Vietnamese Martyrs for today's youth. The research uncovered that while martyr stories are often told, they are not yet truly integrated into formation in a way that affects volunteers' spiritual well-being (simply including martyr narratives had "no significant impact" on catechist happiness in the survey). To change this, the module would invite catechists to actively engage with the martyrs' stories through dialogue, reflection, and creative application. For example, in an annual retreat or multi-session course, catechists could read or watch dramatized stories of several martyrs, then break into small groups to discuss the virtues and struggles they see – relating those to modern challenges. They might write personal reflections or even role-play scenarios: How can a young catechist today embody the courage and faith of a martyr when facing peer pressure or societal indifference? By drawing explicit parallels between the past and present, this narrative pedagogy helps Gen Z catechists see their service as part of the Church's heroic story. One interviewee described how recalling the patience of the martyrs in adversity could encourage a catechist who feels discouraged by lack of immediate results. Such testimony underscores that martyrs can become powerful role models when presented in a relatable way. The new module therefore moves beyond perfunctory storytelling to a transformative encounter with these witnesses: catechists articulate their own "martyr moments" in ministry and derive strength and meaning from them. This not only deepens their spiritual resilience (finding purpose in sacrifice and perseverance) but also rekindles a sense of mission – seeing catechesis as more than teaching requirements, but as participating in the Church's legacy of witness. The development of this module can draw on local Church historians and creative pedagogues to ensure authenticity and engagement. By the end of such a program, Gen Z catechists should be able to say that the martyrs' courage lives on in their own approach to challenges, thus directly linking historical faith witness to contemporary lived experience.

In addition, the Archdiocese must bridge the digital disconnect that currently hinders catechetical engagement. Participants highlighted a noticeable "disconnect" between tech-savvy youths and tech-averse formators in the Church. To address this, a "Digital

Catechesis Initiative" should train and empower catechists in the effective use of technology and social media for evangelization. In practice, this could take the form of a "Digital Bootcamp" – a weekend workshop where young, tech-proficient Catholics coach their peers (and even older catechist trainers) on using modern tools in ministry. This responds to an expressed need: many Gen Z catechists are eager to utilize digital media to connect with their students, yet they often lack guidance or face resistance from older program leaders. Topics might include creating engaging religious content on social platforms, using presentation software or interactive Bible apps in class, setting up online support groups for catechists, and basic audiovisual skills for ministry. By showing concrete ways technology can enhance (not undermine) orthodoxy and community, the initiative seeks to win over skeptics while equipping volunteers. The real-world application is clear – imagine a catechist who can seamlessly incorporate a Catholic YouTube video or an interactive quiz into a lesson, or who moderates a Facebook group for their class parents – these are enhancements that make the faith more accessible to the digital generation. Our survey findings suggested that training in digital tools was one of the weaker points in the current program (many catechists didn't feel it improved their experience significantly), which implies an untapped opportunity. Moreover, several innovative catechists reported creating their own online content (like YouTube songs or visuals) for classes. The Church should recognize these innovators and leverage their expertise to help others. Over time, closing the tech-gap will not only improve teaching effectiveness and young student engagement, but will also affirm Gen Z volunteers by valuing the skills they already possess. In a society where digital life is integral to youth identity, this initiative shows that the Church is willing to meet Gen Z where they are, using modern means to proclaim ancient truths.

(3) Strengthening Operational Volunteer Management

At the parish operational level, a shift from informal volunteer administration to a structured volunteer lifecycle system is recommended. Currently, many catechists feel there is "no clear path" for their service progression and growth. To remedy this, parishes should delineate clear stages in a catechist's "life cycle": recruitment, onboarding, ongoing development/support, recognition, and exit. In practice, this means proactively inviting new volunteers (e.g. personally encouraging promising young parishioners, rather than waiting for self-signups) and providing a warm, formative onboarding experience. For instance, when a Gen Z Catholic finishes a youth program or sacramental prep, the parish could host

a “Come and See” orientation about becoming a catechist – framing it as a valued vocation, not just a task to fill. During onboarding, instead of simply handing a new catechist a textbook, the parish might organize a commissioning retreat or workshop: new recruits meet the team, learn the mission and expectations, and receive an inspirational charge from a pastoral leader or a veteran catechist who shares their personal story. Each newcomer should also be paired with an experienced mentor for at least the first year. This formal mentorship addresses the common anxiety young catechists expressed about not knowing where to turn with challenges. Regular check-ins (say, quarterly one-on-one conversations) should be scheduled to ask the catechist how things are going, what support they might need, and to proactively adjust their role if they are struggling. Such intentional accompaniment ensures that no volunteer feels invisible or dispensable. Notably, participants in the study stressed that lack of guidance and feedback left them feeling “unsupported or uncertain”. Implementing one-on-one support and mid-course corrections can prevent small frustrations from snowballing into burnout.

An important element of this lifecycle is frequent and sincere recognition of volunteers, rather than a single annual thank-you. Many parishes hold an appreciation Mass or gathering once a year – which is good, but not sufficient. Young catechists today crave a culture of appreciation in the day-to-day, even if they humbly insist they serve for God’s glory alone (indeed, 63% of survey respondents said they’re happy for their contributions “not to be recognised except by God”). In practice, creating a supportive culture means integrating gratitude into routine interactions. Pastoral leaders should make it a habit to thank catechists after each class or meeting – a simple “I appreciate what you do for our youth” can be deeply encouraging. Parishes could spotlight a “Catechist of the Month” in the bulletin or parish Facebook page, highlighting a bit of their story and contributions. Another idea is to invite feedback from students and parents: perhaps setting up a box or online form where learners can submit notes of thanks or highlight something they enjoyed in class, which are then shared with the catechists. These gestures cost little but pay huge “soul salary” dividends, as they remind volunteers that their efforts matter. Moreover, when a catechist needs to step back or end their service (the exit stage), the parish should conduct a friendly exit interview or survey. Rather than simply noting their resignation, a leader meets with them to express gratitude, understand their reasons for leaving, and learn from their experience. This practice closes the loop respectfully: the volunteer feels heard and appreciated even as they depart, and the parish gains feedback to improve. It also leaves the door open – if circumstances

change, that catechist will know they are welcome to return. As one experienced catechist advised, it's crucial to handle departures graciously so that "your zeal doesn't burn out for lack of support" and former volunteers might reengage in the future. By institutionalizing these life-cycle stages (recruitment, onboarding, support, recognition, exit), the Archdiocese addresses multiple pain points identified in the study: unclear expectations, feelings of neglect, and volunteers drifting away without ever being asked why. A structured system professionalizes volunteer management in a spiritually-minded way, ensuring no catechist is lost through preventable causes.

To support this lifecycle, every parish should implement clear role descriptions and mutual expectations for catechists. A written Catechist Role Description given at the start of service can spell out the responsibilities (e.g. teaching commitment, preparation time) and the support the volunteer can expect from the parish. For example, it might state: "5th Grade Catechist – commit to 2 hours/week teaching + 1 hour prep; in return, the parish provides initial training, a teaching manual, and the Religious Education Director will mentor you and observe one class per term to give feedback." By articulating "what we ask of you, and what you can expect of us" upfront, such documents function as a psychological contract. They empower Gen Z volunteers to ask for help when needed, because support is not implied as a favor but promised as policy. This directly tackles a subtle issue noted in interviews: young catechists sometimes hesitated to ask for assistance, worrying it would be seen as incompetence or burdening busy clergy. Making support an official promise flips that narrative – seeking help becomes a normal part of one's role. These role agreements should be reviewed together with the volunteer at onboarding and revisited perhaps annually. They are not meant to be rigid checklists, but conversation tools that can be adjusted as life circumstances evolve (for instance, if a catechist's work schedule changes or they become a new parent, the role can be adapted accordingly). The goal is transparency and trust: when expectations are clear, volunteers feel secure in their roles and parishes are better able to meet volunteers' needs. The survey data affirmed that lack of communication and feedback was a problem (only a minority reported regular performance reviews or mentoring). Instituting clear agreements and annual review conversations for catechists will fill this gap, giving young volunteers a sense of direction and helping them improve in their ministry.

Furthermore, the Archdiocese should create opportunities for growth and progression to keep volunteer ministry rewarding over the long term. The research revealed that many Gen Z catechists become demotivated if, after their initial enthusiasm, there is "no clear path for what's next," and they feel destined to "stick around 10, 20, 30 years with no innovation or chance to develop." This stagnant outlook is exactly what a tiered progression system would counter. Parishes (with diocesan guidance) can establish a tiered catechist development track: for example, a new volunteer starts as "Assistant Catechist", then after a year of experience and training can become "Catechist Level I" (fully responsible for a class), later "Level II Catechist" (with additional expertise, perhaps able to train others or lead special programs), and eventually one could be recognized as a "Master Catechist" or mentor who takes on leadership in training or curriculum development. Each level could have certain formation milestones (e.g. completion of advanced courses or years of experience) and a commissioning ritual or certificate. This concept resonates strongly with Gen Z's desire for personal growth and validation of their skills. It also leverages intrinsic motivations: achievement and impact. One interviewee cautioned that asking young volunteers to remain committed with no progression or fresh challenges would cause even the most dedicated to lose steam. On the other hand, offering new challenges and roles – like leading a workshop, mentoring a junior catechist, or spearheading a community project – can re-energize experienced volunteers. Even if not everyone aspires to climb a "ministry ladder," simply knowing that the Church invests in their development can inspire greater loyalty. Horizontal growth should be encouraged too: catechists might diversify their skills (for instance, a catechist could also train in youth ministry, music ministry, or social media evangelization). The diocese can facilitate this by providing short courses like "Special Needs Catechesis 101" or "Using Drama in Teaching the Faith," open to any interested catechist. Such continuous learning opportunities signal that stagnation is not an option – there is always a next step to take in one's ministry journey if desired. Importantly, the formal mentorship program mentioned earlier is itself a key progression step: becoming a mentor is a new challenge and honor for a seasoned catechist, which keeps them engaged and passes on their wisdom. Participants in the study affirmed the need for exactly this kind of pathway: they spoke of uncertainty in how to grow, and pointed out a "lack of flexibility and a clear path for ongoing development" in the current system. By creating clear pathways for advancement, the Archdiocese will show young volunteers that their service is not a dead-end duty but a pilgrimage of growth – one that can even lead to deeper vocations (some catechists, through such engagement, may discern calls to professional ministry or religious

life). In sum, operational clarity and development measures – from clear onboarding to continuous training to advancement – will convert what is now a casual, one-step volunteer stint into a truly nurtured ministry career, albeit an unpaid one. This concretely "pays the salary of the soul" by ensuring each catechist's gifts and aspirations are continually nourished, not taken for granted. Through these reforms, the systemic issues identified (lack of support, unclear expectations, one-size-fits-all roles) are addressed with targeted, real-world solutions that emerged from the catechists' own lived experiences and suggestions.

7.4.1 Strategic Leadership and Cultural Change

Adopt a "Stewardship Charter" for Lay Ministry: First and foremost, the Archdiocesan leadership (e.g., the Archbishop's office or pastoral council) should formally articulate a commitment to Human Resource Stewardship in a guiding document or charter. This could be a pastoral letter or policy that declares volunteers are "co-responsible partners in mission, whose spiritual growth and well-being are a priority." Such a charter would set the tone that volunteers are to be trusted and nurtured, not just managed. It would serve to embed the stewardship philosophy at the highest level and give permission to parishes to innovate accordingly. Symbolically and practically, this addresses the mindset issue identified – it signals a break from the old agency mindset (where volunteers are a means to an end) towards seeing them as an end in themselves. For catechists, hearing this officially acknowledged can be hugely validating and motivating. Additionally, for priests, it can provide a theological rationale to change old habits of leadership.

Mandatory Servant Leadership Training for Clergy and Coordinators: Since leadership style proved pivotal, the Archdiocese should invest in training programmes for servant leadership. This can be integrated into ongoing formation for priests and also offered to lay leaders (such as head catechists or volunteer coordinators). Workshops could cover skills like active listening, empathic communication, conflict resolution, mentoring, and team-building – essentially the practical skills to "lead by serving." There is a wealth of church-related leadership development materials that could be adapted here, but what's crucial is that it's not optional or one-off. It should be an expectation that anyone overseeing volunteers regularly hones these skills. To encourage uptake, the Archdiocese could link it to incentives like recognition (e.g., an annual Servant Leader Award for those who exemplify the qualities). Over time, this should shift parish culture toward a high-commitment, stewardship-oriented HR stance: priests, acting as line managers, intentionally create psychologically safe, empowering climates with voice, coaching, and resource support, practices consistently linked to learning, engagement, and commitment in HR research (Edmondson, 1999; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Detert & Burris, 2007; Gagné & Deci, 2005). The data show direct gains in satisfaction: in the ordinal models, development and community variables (e.g., skills growth, intergenerational teamwork preparation, stronger bonds) significantly increase the odds of being happier, while impersonal, managerial tools are negative (Tables 6.10–6.11). For retention, the survey does not model intention to remain as an outcome; however, respondents' top motivations to

continue (spiritual growth, skill development, working with children) and the presence of a supportive community align with the HRS practices proposed (Figures 6.2–6.3). Interview testimony further links servant-leadership climates to staying. Taken together, the evidence indicates that HRS-style supports raise satisfaction directly and target the drivers of continued service, suggesting a likely retention benefit that future work should test explicitly.

Establish a Diocesan Office or Task Force for Lay Ministry Development: A structural recommendation is to create a dedicated body (an office with staff, or at least a task force/committee) focused on volunteer catechist formation and support. This body would take ownership of implementing the HRS model across parishes. Its duties could include: developing standardised training resources (so each parish doesn't reinvent the wheel), coordinating the servant leadership training above, setting up mentorship networks, and acting as a hub for sharing best practices. It could also monitor volunteer retention statistics and conduct periodic surveys to keep a pulse on volunteer morale (thus institutionalising the kind of research this thesis undertook). Having such an office counters the current ad-hoc approach and addresses the "no clear path" issue by ensuring someone is tasked with planning long-term pathways for volunteers. It would be the steward of stewardship, so to speak – championing the cause of volunteer care within the chancery structure. Given resource constraints, this might start small (even one part-time layperson or religious could spearhead it), but the key is visibility and mandate. This office would make it clear that the Archdiocese places serious value on its catechists, translating into concrete support.

7.4.2 Redesigning Curriculum and Pedagogy for Catechist Formation

Transformative, Learner-Centred Training Programmes: It is recommended that the entire catechist training curriculum be redesigned on principles of adult learning and transformative education. Instead of lecture series on catechetical content alone, the programme should employ workshops, group discussions, problem-solving activities, and reflective exercises. For example, incorporate Mezirow's transformative learning approach: start sessions by posing real dilemmas a catechist might face (a disengaged student, a moral question from a youth, etc.), and let catechists discuss and reflect, then introduce Church teaching in response, and finally have them plan ways to apply solutions (Mezirow, 1978; (Hoggan, Mälkki and Finnegan, 2017). Use methods like role-playing or case studies rather

than only didactic presentations. The survey showed catechists want this kind of engagement (87% prefer interactive learning), so it's likely to be well-received. To support parishes in this, the Archdiocesan office (as above) can develop a "Catechist Formation Handbook" with sample interactive lesson plans, and train formators (those who train the catechists) in facilitation skills. The aim is to make training sessions something catechists look forward to as enriching experiences, rather than endure as mandatory chores. Interactive pedagogy will also serve community-building (catechists get to know each other better when they collaborate in training), feeding the relatedness need.

Implement the "Critical Pedagogy of Martyrdom" Module: In concrete terms, design a specific module or retreat focusing on the Vietnamese Martyrs, approached through narrative, dialogue, and critical reflection. This could be a multi-session course or an annual retreat where catechists explore stories of several martyrs in depth. Activities could include: reading or watching dramatized accounts of a martyr's life, then breaking into small groups to discuss which virtues or struggles stood out and how those resonate today; creative projects like writing a letter from the perspective of a martyr, or composing a modern "martyrdom" scenario one might face (e.g., standing up for faith in a university or workplace context); and personal reflection where each catechist writes their own spiritual journey and identifies moments where they needed courage or faith akin to the martyrs'. The idea is to help them draw parallels between the past and present, internalising the "martyr script" as part of their narrative identity. By doing so, they may find greater meaning in their sacrifices (time, effort in teaching) and strength in the face of discouragement. This also can rekindle a sense of mission – seeing catechesis not just as teaching children, but as part of the Church's heroic witness through the ages. From a practical standpoint, this module can be developed with input from church historians and local experts on the martyrs to ensure accuracy and depth. It would modernise what is currently "telling the martyrs' stories" into "living the martyrs' legacy."

Bridge the Digital Disconnect – Launch a Digital Catechesis Initiative: The Archdiocese should proactively close the technology gap by training both catechists and formators in effective use of digital tools for ministry. Concretely, a "Digital Catechesis Bootcamp" (e.g., a weekend workshop where young, digitally skilled catechists act as co-trainers) would directly respond to an unmet training gap. Survey results show that while catechists highly value practical and experiential methods, the specific item on training in digital tools and

social media (Q11_4) was not a significant predictor of happiness (Table 6.10), indicating that this need is not yet well met. At the same time, respondents identified skill development and working with children among their top motivations to continue serving (Figure 6.2). A bootcamp format would therefore align with catechists' preferred learning style (practical, relational, collaborative) and strengthen both competence and commitment. Topics could include using social media for evangelisation (what platforms are youth on and how to share faith content there), designing simple religious education videos or podcasts, using projectors or interactive apps in catechism class, and setting up online communities (like a Facebook group or Zalo group for catechist sharing). By empowering catechists in this way, the Church not only becomes more relevant to the digital generation of students they teach, but it also values the existing skills many Gen Z volunteers have. One interviewee mentioned that some catechists independently create YouTube songs or visuals for their classes – these innovators should be recognised and their expertise leveraged to help others. The initiative might also include slowly upgrading infrastructure: ensuring each parish has at least basic multimedia equipment and internet access for ministry purposes. The cultural hurdle is convincing some older clergy of the importance – linking it to the idea of meeting Gen Z where they are and showing how digital tools can actually enhance orthodoxy (for example, by giving access to rich Church resources online) might help. Over time, a successful digital initiative can transform the catechetical landscape into one that resonates with young learners, thereby easing catechists' jobs and improving student engagement too.

7.4.3 Strengthening Operational Volunteer Management

Adopt a Structured Volunteer Lifecycle System: Parishes should move from informal volunteer handling to a structured lifecycle approach, as briefly alluded to in Section 7.2.2. This means delineating clear stages: recruitment, onboarding, ongoing development/support, recognition, and exit. For recruitment, instead of waiting passively for volunteers, parishes can actively invite promising youths (perhaps confirmation graduates) to consider catechist service, emphasising it as a valued vocation. During onboarding, a welcome session or retreat can be held where new catechists learn not just their duties but are introduced to the parish team, the mission, and given an inspiring charge (possibly from the parish priest or a veteran catechist sharing testimony). Each new catechist could be paired with a mentor (an experienced catechist) for the first year – providing a go-to person for questions and moral support. Ongoing support should include at least quarterly one-on-one check-ins (even brief chats) to ask how they are doing, what challenges they

face, etc., and to adjust roles if needed. Regular supervision here does not mean micromanaging their teaching but ensuring they feel someone cares about their progress.

For recognition, move beyond the typical once-a-year "thank you" Mass. While annual gratitude events are good (and should be maintained, perhaps made more creative or personal), recognise that volunteers crave more frequent and genuine appreciation. Simple practices can be instilled: leaders making it a habit to thank catechists after each class or meeting; spotlighting a "catechist of the month" in the parish bulletin with a short bio and praise for their contribution; perhaps a system where parents or students can write notes of thanks to catechists, facilitated by the parish. The key is consistency, so that gratitude is felt continually, not as a perfunctory ceremony. When a catechist decides to step back or has to leave (the exit stage), the parish should conduct an exit interview or survey – a respectful conversation to learn from their experience. This both honours their service (they see the Church cares to hear their views even as they leave) and provides valuable feedback for improvement. It also leaves the door open – part of stewarding people is recognising seasons of life; a catechist who leaves now might return in the future if their departure was handled gracefully (for example, if the exit interview surfaces that they need a break due to work or family, the parish can say "you will be missed, thank you for all you've done, and know you're welcome back anytime"). Implementing this lifecycle approach addresses many gaps: it clarifies expectations (reducing psychological contract breaches through explicit communication), ensures regular care points, and systematises learning from volunteers' experiences to refine the system.

Clear Role Descriptions and Mutual Expectations: As an immediate step, every catechist role should come with a written role description that outlines not only tasks and time commitments but also what support the catechist can expect from the parish. For example, it might say: "Role: 5th Grade Catechist. Time: 2 hours/week teaching, 1 hour prep. Support: The parish will provide initial training, a teaching guide, and the DRE (Director of Religious Ed) will be available for questions and will observe one class per term to give feedback. You are encouraged to request any materials or help needed." This kind of clarity prevents many misunderstandings. It also gives volunteers permission to ask for help because it's explicitly promised. It was found that some catechists didn't want to complain or ask for support because they felt it might be seen as weakness or bothering busy clergy – a formal document stating "it's our policy to support you in X ways" flips that narrative. These

documents should be reviewed together when a volunteer starts (a little orientation meeting), functioning as a psychological contract negotiation in positive terms: "Here's what we ask of you, and here's what you can expect of us – do we both agree?" Naturally, these should be flexible and revisited, say annually, to adjust to new circumstances (volunteer had a baby, etc.).

Opportunities for Growth and Progression: A vibrant volunteer programme keeps people engaged by offering them chances to grow and take on new challenges. In this context, this could involve creating a tiered system of catechists: for instance, "Assistant Catechist" (new volunteers co-teach or help a lead catechist), "Catechist Level I" (independent teacher after one year), "Catechist Level II" (after extra training can handle more complex tasks or train others), and perhaps "Master Catechist" or "Catechist Mentor" (veterans who lead in developing curriculum or mentoring new catechists). These levels can be tied to additional training modules or certifications (the Diocesan office could certify someone as a Master Catechist after, say, 5 years and certain training hours). This creates a clear pathway for those who want to advance, which was a noted gap. Not everyone will climb all levels (some may be content teaching one class for years), but knowing the ladder exists helps maintain a sense of direction. Moreover, identify leadership potential among volunteers and foster it: e.g., invite a seasoned catechist to lead a session in the training programme, or to represent the catechists in a parish council meeting. Some may even discern vocations to professional ministry or religious life through such engagement – an added benefit to the Church. Additionally, consider horizontal growth: encouraging catechists to diversify skills. For example, one might take additional training in youth ministry, or music, and thus be able to contribute in new ways. Parishes can also rotate roles occasionally (someone who taught primary school kids might try teens, etc., if they wish, to keep things fresh). The Archdiocese can support this with specialized short courses (like "Special Needs Catechesis 101", "Using Drama in Catechesis", etc.) to continually enrich the volunteers' skill sets. A structured mentorship programme offers a natural growth pathway in the catechist lifecycle: serving as a mentor is itself a developmental step for experienced catechists, sustaining their engagement by providing a renewed sense of purpose beyond classroom teaching. Framed as intentional accompaniment (with clear goals, regular check-ins, and supervision), it also strengthens community bonds and transmits tacit pedagogy to newer volunteers. At the same time, the Archdiocese can signal priorities by explicitly affirming personal spiritual growth and closeness to the Holy Spirit as hallmarks of catechist formation - e.g., through pastoral

letters, commissioning rites, and formation guidelines that tie mentoring to prayer, discernment, and ongoing growth.

In implementing all the above, it's helpful to approach it not as a bureaucratic imposition but as a pastoral endeavour. Communication when rolling out new processes should emphasise why – e.g., "We value our catechists and want to support you better, so we're introducing these new measures." Getting buy-in from current volunteers by perhaps having a small working group of catechists consult on these plans can ease transitions. The Archdiocesan office can pilot some of these ideas in a few parishes first, gather feedback, then refine and expand. Collectively, these recommendations aim to create a virtuous cycle: volunteers feel valued and supported, so they serve with greater joy and commitment, which improves the ministry's effectiveness and encourages more people to volunteer, and so on. It moves the situation from one where the ministry succeeds in spite of structures to one where it succeeds because of them. Having laid out these recommendations, the discussion now turns to the limitations of the study that should temper these proposals and the generalisations drawn and then suggest areas for future research.

7.5 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

No study is not without limitations, and it is important to acknowledge the constraints and context within which the findings and recommendations of this study should be interpreted. By doing so, opportunities for further investigation that could extend or refine this work are also uncovered.

Limitations: First, generalisability is a key limitation. This research was conducted in a very specific setting – the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam – which has unique cultural, political, and ecclesial characteristics. The socio-political environment (a one-party state with tight religious oversight) and the particular history and demographics of Vietnamese Gen Z mean that the exact mix of issues and feasible solutions identified may not directly mirror those in other regions. Even within Vietnam, a rural diocese or one in the north might have different dynamics. And internationally, while young catechists in, say, the UK or Philippines might also crave interactive learning and supportive leaders, the way those needs manifest and can be addressed will differ. Thus, the HRS model and recommendations, while grounded in universal principles, would require contextual

adaptation elsewhere. A one-size-fits-all solution is not claimed; rather, the model is presented as a template that others can adapt.

Second, in terms of methodology, the study utilised an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design with a qualitative phase (interviews/focus groups) followed by a quantitative survey. The qualitative sampling was purposive – information-rich cases were sought – and the research inevitably engaged mostly the more active or accessible volunteers and leaders. This means perspectives of those who had already dropped out or who are less engaged might not have been fully captured. The survey, with N=305, was quite robust for the population size, but it was not a random sample; it relied on volunteer participation and snowball distribution (through parish contacts and online links). Therefore, there could be self-selection bias: perhaps those who responded are the ones more passionate about the topic, or conversely those with more grievances to air – it's hard to know. This was mitigated by checking demographics of respondents and comparing early vs late responses (finding no major differences), but still, caution is warranted in treating the numeric findings as precise parameters. They are indicative of trends, not exact facts about all catechists. Also, all data were self-reported, raising possibilities of common-method bias and social desirability effects (though anonymity was provided to reduce the latter). The study's cross-sectional nature provides a snapshot; it cannot definitively establish causal relationships (e.g., it is inferred that servant leadership would improve retention, but this was not experimentally tested). These methodological limits mean that the interpretations and the HRS model, while plausible, remain somewhat tentative and need further validation.

Third, researcher bias and positionality must be acknowledged. The researcher is an "insider" to the Catholic context, and indeed to the Vietnamese Church milieu. This had advantages – rapport with participants, understanding of nuanced language and references – but also risks. There is also the possibility that the researcher may have unconsciously interpreted data in ways that align with a hopeful narrative of improvement, or that participants, aware of the researcher's church membership, either withheld certain critiques or, conversely, magnified them to make a point. The researcher engaged in reflexive practices (keeping a journal, discussing with peers) to try to remain objective, but true neutrality is elusive in social research. There may have been an inclination to see stewardship as the answer from the get-go and then to find what confirmed that. To counter this, care was taken to ground conclusions in direct quotes and statistical evidence, and to

remain open to negative or contradictory evidence (and indeed some was reported, like the fact that some support factors lost significance in regression analysis). Still, readers should consider that another researcher might have drawn slightly different emphases. This doesn't negate the findings, but healthy scepticism and perhaps replication by others would strengthen confidence in them.

Fourth, the scope of this study was limited to volunteer catechists. The Catholic Church's volunteer base extends far beyond catechists: choir members, youth group leaders, social outreach volunteers, etc. It is believed that many of the study's insights (about motivation, need for support, etc.) apply to those groups too, but they were not studied directly. For example, are Gen Z volunteers in a Catholic charity programme experiencing the same frustrations or the same spiritual rewards? Possibly, but factors could differ (the content of their work, the formation they receive, etc.). Therefore, while the term "volunteer management in faith contexts" is used broadly, the empirical evidence of this study is actually narrower. The HRS model is transferable in principle, but it is not a plug-and-play template. Different ministries will require contextual tailoring, for example, in service-project settings the narrative pillar may centre on saints of charity or contemporary witnesses rather than martyrs. Here, "over-extrapolate" denotes assuming that the same levers, weights, and effects will operate unchanged in other ministries without adaptation or local testing. Applications beyond catechesis should therefore be treated as provisional, adapted to purpose and audience, and verified through pilots, feedback, and outcome checks before broader claims about effectiveness are made.

Fifth, several methodological limitations related to the quantitative measures warrant discussion. Firstly, the primary dependent variable, "I am happy as a catechist," exhibited a significant ceiling effect, with a mean score of approximately 4.7 on a 5-point scale. While this reflects a genuinely positive and committed cohort, the resulting lack of variance presents a statistical challenge, making it more difficult to detect the full impact of predictor variables. The fact that the regression analysis still identified strong, significant predictors despite this compressed variance is a testament to the powerful influence of intrinsic motivation. However, future research could benefit from employing alternative outcome measures with a potentially wider range of responses. For instance, beyond the global happiness item, the survey already includes a retention-proximal outcome: Q8 "How long do you plan to continue serving?" (Figure 6.3). This can be operationalised as an intention-

to-remain dependent variable (e.g., >3 years vs. ≤3 years, or ordinal categories) for modelling long-term sustainability. A complementary outcome that is not in the current instrument is a brief ministerial burnout scale; adding such a measure in future waves would capture the strain side of sustainability alongside intention to remain. Moreover, the study relied on single-item measures for key motivational constructs such as "Mission Alignment" and "Intrinsic Satisfaction." This choice was justified by the conceptual clarity of these themes as they emerged from the qualitative phase. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the psychometric trade-offs involved. Single-item measures, while parsimonious, are generally considered to have lower reliability and validity than well-developed, multi-item scales. While the strong predictive power of these items in the regression model suggests they effectively captured the core of the intended constructs, future studies could strengthen these findings by developing and validating multi-item scales for these specific, context-rich motivational factors.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a strong starting point for understanding and improving Gen Z catechist formation. To build on this foundation, several future research directions emerge:

Longitudinal Studies: A clear next step would be to conduct longitudinal research that tracks catechists over time. For instance, following a cohort of new catechists over 2–3 years to see how their motivation, performance, and retention outcomes evolve, and what factors (e.g., their relationship with leaders, changes in life, etc.) predict who stays engaged versus who leaves. This would help establish causal inferences: do those who receive more need-supportive environments actually report sustained intrinsic motivation? Does the introduction of a narrative module later show up as increased resilience? Additionally, a pre-post intervention study would be invaluable. For example, one could implement elements of the HRS model in a few pilot parishes (like training priests in servant leadership and rolling out the new curriculum) and then compare volunteer satisfaction and retention rates in those parishes to control parishes over a couple of years. This kind of field experiment or quasi-experiment would provide stronger evidence for the efficacy of the model. It would also surface practical challenges in implementation that research can document and analyse.

Comparative Research: It would be enlightening to replicate similar research in different contexts to compare and contrast. Within Vietnam, one could study a rural diocese to see if

Gen Z there have different needs (maybe less digital disconnect if rural youth are less tech-oriented, or maybe even more frustration if resources are scarcer). Another comparison could be the experience of Vietnamese Catholic youth in diaspora communities (say Vietnamese-American parishes) – they have Gen Z traits but in a very different Church context (one with more freedom but also more competing attractions). Understanding what is cultural vs generational would be helped by such comparisons. On a broader scale, research in other countries' catechist programmes – e.g., in Western countries where secularisation is high, or in other Asian countries with similar minority Church situations – could test the robustness of the HRS model's components. Perhaps in some places extrinsic factors do play a bigger role (if, say, some places offer stipends to catechists, then the dynamic might shift). Comparative studies could use the same survey instrument (with local adaptation) and then it would be possible to see, for instance, if the % preferring interactive learning is universally high or if the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation found in this study is unique or not. Such research would refine the model, identifying which parts are universal principles and which are context-sensitive strategies.

Extension to Other Ministries: As noted, studying other volunteer roles in the Church through a similar lens would be beneficial. Are choir members or youth leaders experiencing psychological contract breaches too? How do their motivations differ (maybe music volunteers have more personal passion for music, etc.)? The HRS model might be extended into a more general "Lay Volunteer Stewardship Model" covering various ministries. Research could also examine if implementing the model in one ministry has spill-over effects on others (for example, does a well-supported catechist also end up volunteering in other areas or encouraging peers to join, indicating a culture change in the parish?). By broadening the scope, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive theory of volunteer stewardship in faith-based settings, and practitioners can streamline support across all volunteer programmes (which often share resources).

Deeper Theoretical Investigations: Some micro-level questions arising from this work could also be probed. For example, psychological mechanisms of narrative: one could use psychological measures to see if catechists who undergo the martyrdom pedagogy exhibit measurable increases in, say, self-efficacy or hope or stress tolerance compared to those who don't. That would empirically validate (or nuance) the claim that narrative identity work builds resilience. Another interesting angle is to explore the intersection of SDT with

spirituality: this study hints that what SDT calls "relatedness" overlaps with spiritual community, "autonomy" with personal calling, etc. A targeted study could look at how spiritual experiences or theological beliefs influence the satisfaction of SDT needs. This might contribute to both psychology of religion and to making volunteer management approaches more attuned to faith motivations. Likewise, investigating Freirean pedagogy in a Church context further: perhaps action-research where catechists themselves are engaged in planning changes (truly embodying dialogue and co-creation). Documenting such a process could yield insights into how far participatory approaches can go in a hierarchical church before encountering pushback, and how to manage that boundary.

Impact on Outcomes: Future research could also broaden the outcomes studied. This study focused on volunteer satisfaction/retention. But what about the effectiveness of catechesis delivered? Do students of catechists who are well-formed in HRS principles fare better (in terms of engagement, faith knowledge, etc.)? It stands to reason a happy, well-trained catechist will teach better, but it would be useful to have evidence. Also, are there ripple effects on parish vitality (do these empowered Gen Z become leaders in other areas, thus renewing the parish)? Such outcomes relate to the practical ultimate goal: a flourishing ministry that actually transmits faith well.

In summary, this study opens many avenues. It would be gratifying if future scholars, perhaps some of the very Gen Z catechists studied in this research, take up the mantle to explore these questions. The challenges of engaging young people in faith are global and pressing, and while this work makes a significant contribution, it is by no means the final word. It is hoped that it sparks not only immediate action but also further inquiry. Having discussed what this research has achieved and what remains to be explored, this chapter now concludes (and thesis) with a reflection on the broader vision that emerges – a vision of a sustainable, life-giving catechetical ministry built on genuine stewardship of the Church's human riches.

7.6 Conclusion: Towards a Flourishing and Sustainable Ministry

This thesis began by highlighting a poignant paradox at the heart of the Archdiocese's catechetical ministry: an enthusiastic new generation of catechist volunteers is labouring within an outdated support system that risks dampening their fervour. Over the preceding

chapters, this paradox has been unpacked in detail – diagnosing its facets and proposing a remedy. In closing, the destination can be stated plainly: a catechetical ministry that truly values the "salary of the soul" and invests in its people is one that orders structures, training, and leadership to protect prayerful meaning, strengthen mission alignment, and sustain belonging.

The research provided a rich, empirical window into the world of Gen Z catechists. The research showed clearly that these young men and women are, in many ways, ideal volunteers: tech-savvy, values-driven, eager to make a difference. Their frustration with rote memorisation and their plea for interactive, relevant formation that speaks to their context as digital natives were evident. It was also evident that they serve from the heart – finding great personal fulfilment in sharing faith and belonging to a community, even calling it "meaningful and rewarding despite challenges." Yet, simultaneously, it was documented how the current structures often fail to reciprocate that dedication. Volunteers spoke of feeling unsupported, unheard, and at times directionless. The survey numbers reinforced this: intrinsic motives high, but satisfaction with training and leadership low. This dissonance answers the research questions about challenges: the issues are not superficial or singular but systemic, pedagogical, motivational, managerial, and contextual, and they are further shaped by the state policy environment (e.g., oversight of religious activities, constraints on church-run education/associations, and administrative requirements that limit time, resources, and training flexibility). In short, catechist formation operates within an ecclesial system that is internally strained and externally conditioned by regulatory limits.

Crucially, this study did more than diagnose; it pointed the way forward with a cohesive solution – the Human Resource Stewardship model. This model's development and validation is the central contribution of the thesis. It represents a fundamental reimagining of how the Church can engage its human resources, shifting from a paradigm of control to one of empowerment and care. In doing so, it integrates insights from theology (the Church as a nurturing mother, not just an instructing authority), from leadership theory (the power of servant leadership to transform relationships (Greenleaf, 1991; Chan, 2020)), from psychology (the importance of meeting human needs for growth), and from educational theory (the role of narrative in forming identity (Wallace, 2021; Fernandes and de Matos, 2023)). Each piece of this model was not plucked from thin air, but emerged from the data – the voices of catechists and the patterns in the survey – and was then dialogued with

existing theory to ensure robustness. Applied to this context, the HRS framework offers a structured response to the overarching research question, how to equip Generation Z catechists effectively, by combining context-appropriate innovation with principles grounded in established theory and evidence.

What would it look like, concretely, if the recommendations based on HRS are implemented? It would mean a catechetical ministry where volunteers feel truly valued at every step. A new catechist would be warmly welcomed, clearly guided, and mentored – never left to sink or swim alone. Training sessions would buzz with activity, creativity, and deep reflection – catechists engaging in group discussions, learning from each other's experiences, perhaps even laughing and enjoying the process (imagine, religious training that people find enjoyable!). Leaders, from priests to coordinators, would be seen not as taskmasters but as companions on the journey – approachable figures who listen to feedback, who know each catechist by name and care about their life outside of teaching as well. There would be regular moments of communal bonding – a yearly retreat, social gatherings – forging a sense of family among the volunteer team. And crucially, the stories of faith's heroes (the martyrs and saints) would become a living inspiration – not just pictures on a wall or paragraphs in a textbook, but narratives that catechists discuss, emulate, and draw strength from in their own trials (big or small).

In such an environment, the "salary of the soul" – that inner reward – would not be left to chance or individual grit; it would be intentionally cultivated by the community. Catechists would likely experience less burnout because their spiritual and psychological needs are being met alongside their giving of service. They would have avenues to voice frustrations before those become resignations. They would see a path for growth – meaning they could envision themselves contributing for years, evolving into master catechists or mentors, rather than burning out after a short stint. And as they flourish, the ripple effect would touch the very purpose of their work: the children and youth they teach would receive more enthusiastic, creative, and confident instruction in the faith. In turn, those young learners might be inspired to become the next generation of catechists – creating a sustainable cycle of vocation.

Stepping back, the implications extend beyond catechesis. A Church that practices stewardship of its people in this way is one that is future-ready. It would have a model to engage young adults not only as catechists but in any apostolate, harnessing their idealism

and energy rather than squandering it. In a time when many institutions struggle to attract and retain volunteers, with formal volunteering participation falling to historic lows of 23.2% in 2021 and over 60% of organisations reporting recruitment difficulties, religious institutions face particularly acute challenges, as church volunteerism dropped from approximately 40% of membership in early 2020 to 20% by March 2022 while 61% of church leaders report insufficient volunteers for their desired social action activities (U.S. Census Bureau & AmeriCorps, 2024; Institute of Fundraising, 2024; Faith & Leadership, 2024; Church Urban Fund, 2021), the approach outlined here could serve as a beacon. It says: invest in young people's growth, listen to their voices, trust in their goodwill, and they will excel in mission.

From a theological standpoint, the findings and proposed model cohere with an ecclesiology of communion that is relational and life-giving. They are consonant with Pope Francis's image of the Church as a "field hospital" (Francis, 2013), a community whose first task is to heal wounds and warm hearts rather than to impose rigid structures. In such a Church, those who serve are themselves cared for, strengthened, and accompanied; ministry is not the extraction of labour but the stewardship of persons for the sake of the Gospel. It recalls Jesus's multiplication of loaves: if you offer what little you have with trust, it can be multiplied to feed many – in this context, if volunteers offer their talents and the Church offers its care and guidance, together that partnership can "feed" the spiritual needs of many more.

In closing, the salary of the soul is a beautiful phrase provided by the participants. It serves as a reminder that at the core of volunteer service, especially in ministry, is something priceless and transcendent – the joy of giving, the growth in faith, the bonds of fellowship. Those are things no money can buy, and they are the reason the Church's mission continues generation after generation. The work of this thesis has been about making sure that salary is paid in full – that the well does not run dry. By adopting a stewardship model, the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City has the opportunity to create an environment where serving God and the community becomes a source of abundant life for young people. In such an environment, Gen Z catechists not only remain but thrive, and their witness forms others in faith. As the Lord teaches, "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:35). When love is made visible in a supportive, joy-filled parish culture, young people see it; some will later say, "*I became a catechist because I saw*

how joyful and supported they were in my parish". That, ultimately, is the vision: a flourishing, self-sustaining catechetical ministry – one where the flame of faith is passed on eagerly, and where those who pass it on are themselves illuminated and warmed by its light. This, it is concluded, is the promise of embracing stewardship in the realm of human resources, and it offers a hopeful path forward for the Church in Vietnam and indeed anywhere seeking to engage the next generation in the work of the Gospel.

Chapter 8: General Conclusion

8.1 Overview of Research Aims and Approach

This doctoral study set out to address a critical pastoral challenge: how to more effectively form and sustain Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. At its core lay a paradox of service – a new generation of catechists rich in faith and intrinsic zeal faced institutional formation structures that often seemed outdated and misaligned with their needs. The thesis aimed to investigate the specific challenges affecting these young catechists' spiritual well-being and training, explore human resource strategies to meet those challenges, and develop a holistic framework for catechist formation drawing inspiration from the witness of the Vietnamese Martyrs. In response, the study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. A qualitative phase of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 33 Gen Z catechists, formators, and Church leaders provided rich insights into lived experiences and emerging themes. Building on these insights, a quantitative survey of 305 catechists was conducted to test and generalise the findings. This integration of qualitative and quantitative strands allowed the research to ground theoretical development in empirical evidence, resulting in a comprehensive formation model tailored to the context.

8.2 Synthesis of Key Findings

Through this mixed-method inquiry, the study generated a succinct yet comprehensive portrait of the formation landscape for Gen Z catechists. The qualitative interviews revealed deep-seated frustrations with a "crisis in pedagogy" – many participants described current training as *"too dry, too academic"* and heavily based on rote learning, which they felt failed to engage or inspire them. Alongside this, a pronounced **"**digital disconnect**"** emerged: despite being digital natives, young catechists found little integration of modern media or interactive methods in their formation. They voiced an urgent yearning for more *experiential, relevant, and transformative learning opportunities*, as well as for personal mentorship and pastoral accompaniment. Gen Z catechists also highlighted a lack of flexibility and a *"clear path"* for their ongoing development, feeling uncertain how to progress or grow in their ministry over time. Crucially, participants affirmed that their motivation is driven by intrinsic, spiritual rewards – described by one interviewee as the

"deep soul connection" or *"spiritual fulfilment"* that ministry provides – rather than by any external recognition or material benefits. Indeed, this intrinsic reward was often characterised as the "salary of the soul," an intangible yet invaluable compensation that sustains their commitment. However, many felt this *inner salary* was at risk of depletion due to insufficient institutional support and nurturing, leading to burnout or attrition if not addressed.

The quantitative findings resonated strongly with these narratives, providing firm evidence of the gaps and needs identified. An overwhelming 87% of surveyed catechists expressed a preference for *interactive and experiential learning*, yet only 39% felt that current training was designed in a way that suited their generational learning style. This stark mismatch quantitatively confirms the pedagogical disconnect raised in interviews. Likewise, the survey showed that *intrinsic motivators* – such as *"developing my faith life"* (cited by 79% of respondents as a key motivator) – far outweighed *extrinsic motivators* like *"recognition by leaders"* (cited by only 21%). In other words, young catechists derive motivation predominantly from spiritual growth and a sense of purpose, rather than titles or praise. Yet the data also underscored how this motivation persists *in spite of* the official support system rather than because of it. For example, only 26% of these volunteers had ever been *formally invited or encouraged* by clergy to take on their role, even though more than half indicated they yearn for a clearer, long-term vocational pathway in their ministry. Similarly, 78% of respondents wanted more frequent feedback and accompaniment from their leaders, while a mere 30% "strongly agreed" that their current leader actually listens to them regularly. Such figures reveal a notable leadership and communication gap. The study also found strong latent support for drawing on the Church's rich narrative heritage: about 61% of catechists affirmed that the stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs could be a valuable inspiration for their mission, yet few felt these narratives are effectively integrated into their training at present. In sum, the findings portray a dedicated cohort of young ministers whose personal faith and commitment are high, but whose formation experiences are marred by methodological mismatches, generational gaps in leadership approach, and underutilisation of spiritual and narrative resources. These insights provided the empirical foundation for developing a new model of catechist formation that intentionally addresses these shortcomings.

8.3 Revisiting the Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent are Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City intrinsically motivated in their ministry, and how is this motivation sustained or undermined by current formation practices?

The study's findings reveal a profound pedagogical crisis in current formation approaches, which are consistently described by catechists and leaders as *"old-fashioned," "too dry, too academic,"* and reliant on a passive, lecture-based model where "the formator just stands at the front and talks… no interaction." This experiential disconnect is quantitatively confirmed: while 87% of catechists prefer interactive and experiential learning, only 39% feel their current training is aligned with their generational learning style. This mismatch indicates a system that transmits information but struggles to form persons, failing to cultivate the holistic spiritual well-being (SWB) that catechists need.

The proposed framework, which intentionally integrates the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) Pastoral Spiral with Fisher's four domains of SWB, offers a more effective, pastorally actionable solution. This model aligns the Spiral's stages (Experience → Social Analysis → Faith Reflection → Pastoral Action) with Fisher's domains (Personal, Communal, Environmental, Transcendental), grounding formation in lived reality rather than abstract content. The framework's effectiveness is evidenced in two ways. First, it directly answers the catechists' stated need for a cyclical pedagogy of experience, reflection, and action. Second, the mixed-methods synthesis confirms that spiritual growth , the "salary of the soul" , is the primary motivator for service; the integrated Spiral-plus-Fisher model is purpose-built to cultivate this inner life across all four domains, addressing both the pedagogical crisis and the holistic SWB deficit documented in this study.

Research Question 2: What are the main formational challenges faced by these catechists, spiritually, pedagogically, and organisationally, and how do these challenges impact their resilience and long-term commitment?

The research identified a strong but underutilised formative potential in the witness of the Vietnamese Martyrs. Survey data revealed a latent demand for a narrative approach, with 61% of catechists believing the martyrs' stories could be a valuable source of inspiration, yet few experiencing them as being effectively integrated into their training. Qualitatively,

participants called for a "re-storying" of the martyrs, shifting the focus from their deaths to their relatable humanity, emphasizing that "we should not focus on their death but on their life journey… a very human life." Social Cognitive Theory helps explain the powerful impact of this pedagogical shift. By presenting the martyrs as credible, culturally proximate exemplars who struggled with fear and doubt, this approach facilitates vicarious modelling, which builds self-efficacy ("people like me faced what I face") and resilience. This "critical pedagogy of martyrdom," operationalized through dialogue, reflection, and contemporary application, directly answers the qualitative call and closes the quantitative gap. When the martyrs are taught as living scripts embodying a synthesis of traditional virtues and modern witness, rather than as distant heroes, catechists report deeper meaning-making and a stronger sense of vocational identity and mission.

Research Question 3: How might an integrated model of catechist formation, drawing on theological, pedagogical, and motivational frameworks, provide a more effective and sustainable approach to supporting volunteer catechists in this context?

Qualitatively, catechists repeatedly identified specific Servant Leadership behaviours as crucial to their motivation and long-term commitment. They spoke highly of leaders who listen, invite their voice, mentor with care, and decide humbly. As one catechist explained, the ideal leader "is not someone who directly commands us… he listens to our ideas, offers input, and stands up to take responsibility." Conversely, authoritarian, "command-and-control" leadership styles were described as deeply discouraging, leaving volunteers feeling undervalued and alienated. These testimonies point to a strong preference for leadership that is relational, empowering, and grounded in stewardship rather than hierarchy.

Quantitatively, the picture is more nuanced and underscores the indirect role of leadership. In the composite model (Model 1), Leadership Care/Communication shows no significant effect on catechist happiness once intrinsic factors are included; instead, Personal Spiritual Growth emerges as the strongest positive predictor. In the item-level specification (Model 2), leadership items begin to differentiate: opportunities for leadership development (Q13_10) hover at the threshold of significance, suggesting that creating pathways for involvement and growth can have positive effects, while problem-centred communication about challenges/future plans (Q13_11) and the salience of "trusting leaders" (Q13_13) are significant negative predictors. These negative signs are best interpreted as hygiene indicators: they become salient where contexts are strained and trust is fragile, thereby

correlating with lower happiness. The comprehensive model (Model 3) confirms this reading: the strongest positive predictors of happiness are skills growth (Q13_15), growth in prayer (Q10_5), inspiration from previous catechists (Q6_4), and stronger community bonds (Q15_1). By contrast, formalised, bureaucratic instruments associated with leadership, such as generic self-reflection guides (Q14_5) and up-front strengths audits (Q11_1), are strongly negative, suggesting that when leadership is experienced as evaluative and impersonal, it undermines volunteer motivation.

Taken together, the mixed-methods evidence points to a consistent conclusion: leadership does not function as a primary, direct source of catechist happiness but as an indirect enabler or inhibitor. Good leadership operates as a hygiene and contextual factor: it removes friction, fosters safety and belonging, and protects intrinsic rewards from being eroded. Poor leadership, by contrast, introduces dissatisfaction that can quickly corrode motivation. In terms of Self-Determination Theory, servant-leadership behaviours contribute indirectly by securing autonomy (through listening and giving voice), competence (through mentoring and developmental opportunities), and relatedness (through care and trust). When these needs are met, the volunteer's intrinsic drivers, the "salary of the soul", are safeguarded and allowed to flourish. In conclusion, the impact of leadership is therefore best understood as indirect but essential: it does not create motivation in itself but sustains the relational and organisational climate in which intrinsic, faith-driven motivation can endure and grow.

8.4 Theoretical Contributions and Integration with Management Theory

This research makes several significant contributions to knowledge, offering both an interdisciplinary theoretical integration and a fresh perspective on classic management theories. The thesis proposes a novel framework that bridges secular organisational science and Catholic pastoral theology. By integrating theories of human resource management, psychology, and education (e.g. Servant Leadership, Self-Determination Theory, Transformative Learning, Social Cognitive Theory) with rich theological principles (e.g. stewardship, vocation, Imago Dei, koinonia), the study reframes volunteer management as a form of pastoral care. This is a pioneering theoretical contribution: it demonstrates how concepts like motivation and leadership can be reinterpreted through a theological lens – for instance, viewing the satisfaction of SDT's psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy as fundamentally aligned with nurturing community, charism

development, and co-responsibility in the Church's mission. The Human Resource Stewardship (HRS) model put forward by this thesis is itself an original contribution to the literature on religious leadership and ministry formation. It extends Stewardship Theory into a new context while challenging the assumptions of traditional Agency Theory: the findings show that volunteer catechists act not as self-interested "agents" requiring tight control, but as intrinsically motivated stewards of the mission who thrive on trust and empowerment. This evidence of mission alignment and pro-social motivation in the absence of extrinsic contracts exemplifies the stewardship ethos and provides a concrete example of how empirical research and doctrinal insights can inform one another. Additionally, by highlighting volunteers as the Church's vital human capital, the study resonates with the Resource-Based View of the firm – treating committed Gen Z catechists' spiritual commitment and skills as a valuable, inimitable resource for sustainable ministry impact. At the same time, the need for cultural and structural change identified here reflects an Institutional Theory perspective: overcoming the "old wineskins" of inflexible, top-down structures and mitigating institutional inertia is essential for new practices to take root. In summary, the thesis not only bridges theology and management but also enriches management theory by demonstrating how concepts like stewardship, trust, and intrinsic motivation can drive performance in a volunteer-centric, faith-based setting.

The motivational dynamics observed in this study also validate and refine classic motivation theories. The dominance of intrinsic motivation among catechists confirms that higher-order needs are the primary drivers of their engagement – in Maslow's terms, the catechists are seeking esteem, self-actualisation, and even transcendence through service, once basic needs are met. Consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, supportive leadership and good organisational climate functioned as "hygiene factors" that prevent dissatisfaction but do not by themselves create satisfaction. The true "motivators" for these volunteers are the meaningful work of ministry, personal growth, and spiritual fulfilment – factors inherent to the role itself. We also see echoes of Vroom's Expectancy Theory: Gen Z catechists continue to invest high effort in their ministry because they perceive a clear linkage between their efforts and valued outcomes. In other words, their expectancy and instrumentality evaluations remain positive – they believe that serving well will lead to growth in faith, community impact, and a deep sense of purpose, outcomes they highly value. By explicitly incorporating Self-Determination Theory throughout its analysis, the study further demonstrates how fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness sustains

long-term volunteer motivation. Overall, the findings weave these theoretical strands into a coherent understanding of volunteer catechist motivation and behaviour, showing that even in a non-profit religious context, well-established management theories hold explanatory power when appropriately "translated" to the mission-driven environment.

Beyond theory, this work also contributes methodologically and contextually. It stands as an example of employing an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach in a Catholic ministry setting, illustrating how qualitative pastoral insights can be rigorously tested and extended with quantitative data. This bridging of positivist and constructivist paradigms underscores the value of evidence-based approaches in practical theology. Contextually, the study provides one of the first comprehensive scholarly documentations of Gen Z Catholics in Vietnam engaging in ministry, giving voice to a new generation within a rapidly changing society. While the HRS model must be prudently adapted for different cultures, its underlying principles have broad relevance. In particular, the research offers a prophetic mirror for other faith communities facing similar generational and volunteer challenges: it suggests that authentic renewal of volunteer engagement will require listening to young people, modernising pedagogical methods, empowering emerging leaders, and integrating inspiring narratives into formation. These theoretical and contextual insights position the HRS model as both a product of its unique environment and a potentially generalisable blueprint for volunteer stewardship in other settings.

8.5 Implications for Human Resource Management in Faith-Based Organisations

A key mandate of this concluding chapter is to translate the study's insights into clear implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) practice. Although the catechists in this study are unpaid volunteers, the principles of effective HRM – from attracting the right people to sustaining their engagement – are highly applicable. The findings inform several HR functions as follows, each tailored to the faith-based volunteer context:

- **Recruitment and Selection:** The evident lack of proactive recruitment calls for more strategic outreach to potential young catechists. The data showed that only about one-quarter of current volunteers had ever been formally invited by Church leaders to serve, despite many youths being willing if encouraged. Parish and diocesan leaders should thus actively identify and *call forth* potential Gen Z

catechists, emphasizing the vocational nature of the role. Clear role descriptions and discernment processes can help ensure a good fit between the volunteer's gifts and the ministry's needs. Selection in this context is less about "hiring" and more about mutual discernment – ensuring the candidate's values and intrinsic motivation align with the Church's mission. By front-loading discussions about spiritual commitment and growth opportunities, the Church can attract those volunteers most likely to thrive in and sustain the catechist role.

- **Training and Development:** The training implications are profound, given the documented "crisis in pedagogy." There is a clear mandate to redesign catechist training curricula to be more interactive, experiential, and relevant to Gen Z. The vast majority of young catechists prefer hands-on learning with modern methods, yet only 39% feel current training meets this need. Incorporating workshops, role-playing, service-learning projects, and digital media can greatly enhance engagement and skill acquisition. Development should be continuous: the study underscores the importance of structured mentorship and ongoing pastoral accompaniment. Setting up mentoring schemes (pairing novice catechists with experienced ones) and regular reflection sessions can address the desire for personal guidance. The idea of a "critical pedagogy of martyrdom" introduced by this research can be applied in training programs – using inspiring narratives (such as stories of the Vietnamese Martyrs or other local saints) in a dialogical, relatable manner to build resilience and vocational identity. Ultimately, training and development initiatives should aim to nurture not only catechetical skills but also personal spiritual growth, echoing the integrated model of formation that balances knowledge, practice, and spiritual well-being.
- **Performance Management and Feedback:** In a volunteer setting, performance management should focus on growth, recognition, and supportive feedback rather than formal appraisals. The findings reveal that 78% of Gen Z catechists crave more regular feedback and accompaniment from their leaders, yet very few currently feel heard by those in charge. This implies that faith-based organisations need to implement more systematic feedback loops. Practically, this could include periodic one-on-one check-ins or spiritual direction meetings where catechists can discuss challenges, receive encouragement, and set goals for their ministry. Rather than top-down performance reviews, a stewardship-oriented approach would use developmental evaluations – for example, self-assessment questionnaires aligned

with spiritual and pedagogical competencies, coupled with constructive input from mentors or coordinators. Any feedback given should be framed in terms of the volunteer's personal growth and service effectiveness, not as managerial critique. By creating a safe and nurturing feedback culture, the organisation can address issues early, prevent burnout, and reinforce each catechist's sense of purpose. This approach aligns with the study's insight that servant leadership – listening, coaching, and caring – is pivotal for sustaining volunteer commitment.

- **Compensation and Rewards:** While volunteer roles do not offer salaries, the concept of rewards and recognition is crucial. The notion of the "salary of the soul" highlights that what catechists value most is spiritual fulfilment and the sense of making a difference. Thus, HRM in this context should emphasise intrinsic rewards and meaningful recognition. External rewards like public acknowledgment, certificates of appreciation, or small tokens can still play a role in showing appreciation, but they must be handled in line with volunteers' value systems. The survey confirmed that extrinsic motivators (e.g. formal recognition by leaders) paled in comparison to intrinsic ones. Therefore, Church leaders might, for instance, organise annual commissions or blessing ceremonies for catechists, highlighting the spiritual significance of their work. Providing opportunities for retreats, advanced formation courses, or pilgrimages can also serve as valuable rewards that enrich the volunteer spiritually – essentially "paying" them in personal growth and community esteem. Importantly, any compensation strategy should avoid a transactional feel; instead of material stipends, focus on creating an environment where volunteers feel valued, loved, and integral to the mission. This approach nurtures the inner reward system (joy, meaning, spiritual growth) that the catechists in this study identified as their primary compensation.
- **Engagement and Retention:** Volunteer engagement in a faith-based setting is about cultivating a strong sense of community, belonging, and shared mission. The findings depict a cohort that is highly intrinsically motivated; the challenge for HRM is to keep that motivation from being "snuffed out" by frustration or neglect. One implication is to actively involve catechists in decision-making processes related to their ministry – this collaborative approach makes them feel heard and respected, boosting engagement. Regular gatherings, spiritual sharing groups, or online forums (leveraging Gen Z's digital connectivity) can help build peer support and keep enthusiasm high. The data also point to the importance of relatedness and

relationships: catechists remain committed when they experience fellowship and mutual support. Thus, investing in team-building activities, communal prayer or worship opportunities, and fellowship events will strengthen bonds. Retention will naturally follow from high engagement; nevertheless, specific retention strategies could include creating clear volunteer pathways so individuals see how they can grow and take on new challenges over time. For example, a catechist might progress to become a youth group leader, trainer of new catechists, or coordinator, if they desire – providing such pathways addresses the uncertainty many felt about "how to progress" in the ministry. In short, keeping volunteers engaged means continually kindling the fire that brought them in – recognizing achievements, listening to feedback, addressing concerns, and celebrating milestones of service. This also aligns with Maslow's higher-order needs: by ensuring volunteers feel belonging (community acceptance) and esteem (their contribution matters), the Church supports their journey toward the self-actualisation and transcendence that come from living out one's vocation.

- **Strategic HR Planning:** Finally, the study carries implications for strategic human resource planning in the Church. Faith-based organisations often rely on goodwill to supply volunteers, but this research suggests a need for more deliberate, long-term planning for volunteer roles. One aspect is succession planning: given that many catechists enter in their late teens and may move on as life circumstances change, parish leadership should plan for continuous recruitment and formation of new catechists every year. It emerged that more than half of the catechists desired a clearer long-term path in ministry – a strategic approach would map out a "life-cycle" of a catechist, from initial calling and training, through peak service years, to perhaps mentoring roles for senior volunteers. Additionally, aligning volunteer management with the Church's broader mission and future needs is critical. If, for instance, the diocese envisions expanding youth ministry or evangelisation efforts, it must invest in developing the human resources (volunteers) to sustain those goals. This may mean creating dedicated roles or committees for volunteer coordination at the diocesan level, so that functions like recruitment, training, and support are not left to ad hoc efforts. Integrating the HRS model into strategic plans would also require institutional support – as the analysis indicated, without buy-in from the hierarchy and a shift in organisational culture, new HR practices may falter. Embracing the mindset of stewardship at the leadership level (e.g. bishops, pastors,

lay directors) can lead to policies that institutionalise support for volunteers (such as setting minimum standards for training, providing materials and budgets for volunteer development, etc.). In business terms, this is akin to treating the volunteer cohort as a critical asset and planning investments to develop and retain this asset. Doing so will help the Church avoid the costs of volunteer turnover and disengagement. In summary, strategic HR planning in this context means proactively ensuring that the right people (mission-driven Gen Z individuals) are in the right roles (well-defined catechist positions with growth opportunities) at the right time (when the Church needs them), all supported by the right environment (a culture of trust, learning, and spiritual support).

By addressing these functional areas – from how volunteers are recruited to how they are nurtured and retained – the Church can operationalise the insights of this study. In practical terms, implementing these HR implications would move the Archdiocese closer to an authentic Human Resource Stewardship approach: treating volunteer catechists not as convenient free labour, but as valued partners in mission whose development and well-being are integral to the Church's success.

8.6 Limitations and Future Research

No study is without its limitations, and it is important to delineate the boundaries within which these conclusions should be interpreted. A primary limitation of this research is its contextual specificity. By design, the study focused on one archdiocese – a particular cultural, ecclesial, and political setting. The rich "thick description" gained from this focus means the findings are deeply relevant to Ho Chi Minh City and similar urban Vietnamese contexts, but they may not be directly generalisable to other dioceses or countries. The unique socio-political environment (a semi-restrictive religious context) and Vietnamese Church culture likely influenced the results; thus, care must be taken in applying the HRS model wholesale to different contexts without appropriate adaptation.

Another limitation lies in the sampling and design. The qualitative phase used purposive and snowball sampling which, while effective for exploratory insight, does not provide a statistically representative sample of all Gen Z catechists. The quantitative survey, though reaching a robust sample of 305 respondents, relied on voluntary participation and distribution through existing networks, which could introduce self-selection bias. Therefore,

the data may slightly over-represent those who are more engaged or available, potentially under-representing the views of ex-catechists or those who have quietly withdrawn from service. Additionally, the researcher's insider position as a member of the Catholic community, while helpful in building trust and understanding nuances, carries the risk of unintentional bias in interpreting responses or prioritising certain themes. Reflexive measures were taken (such as peer debriefing and maintaining an audit trail) to mitigate this, but some subjectivity is inherent in qualitative analysis. Finally, the scope of the thesis was confined to volunteer catechists; it did not directly study other types of church volunteers. As such, the conclusions of the HRS model are most applicable to the catechetical ministry and may require adjustment for different ministries (e.g. youth groups, liturgical volunteers, charitable outreach teams) that have different dynamics.

8.7 Future Research

While the above limitations temper the generality of the findings, they also open up fruitful avenues for future research that can extend and refine this work. One clear direction is to conduct longitudinal and intervention studies. Rather than a one-time "snapshot," following a cohort of Gen Z catechists over several years would provide valuable evidence of causality and long-term impact. For example, a future study could implement a pilot catechist formation program based on the HRS model in a parish and observe its outcomes over time – measuring whether changes like a new experiential curriculum or a mentorship system indeed improve retention rates, spiritual well-being scores, or other key outcomes after one, two, or more years. Such longitudinal evidence would strengthen the claims of this thesis by showing enduring effects (or revealing any fade-out of initial enthusiasm).

Another important direction is comparative research to test the transferability of the findings. Replicating the study in a different context – for instance, a rural Vietnamese diocese or among Vietnamese Catholic diaspora communities in another country – could reveal which aspects of the HRS framework are universal and which are context-dependent. Cross-cultural comparisons (perhaps examining Gen Z catechists in other Asian countries or even in Western churches) would enrich our understanding of how cultural and societal factors influence volunteer formation and motivation. If similar patterns of intrinsic motivation and the need for stewardship-minded leadership emerge elsewhere, it would suggest that the HRS model has broad applicability; if differences emerge, those could inform culturally specific adaptations of the model.

Broadening the scope to other volunteer roles in the Church is also recommended. Future research could explore whether youth group leaders, liturgy volunteers, or Catholic charity workers experience similar motivational issues and formation gaps, and if the stewardship approach would equally benefit those ministries. This would help build a more comprehensive theory of human resource stewardship across the non-profit religious sector. For instance, do the same factors that keep catechists committed (spiritual growth opportunities, community support, inspiring narratives) also retain volunteers in a social justice ministry? Investigating such questions would test the robustness of the HRS concept.

Additionally, there are opportunities to deepen the theoretical integration initiated by this thesis. Further studies could zero in on the mechanisms by which narrative inspiration builds resilience – for example, using experimental designs to measure changes in a catechist's sense of purpose or self-efficacy before and after a formation module centered on martyr stories. Similarly, research could explore the interface of critical pedagogy with church governance: how might empowering young people at the grassroots (through voice and participation) be achieved even in hierarchical or traditionally conservative institutional contexts? This touches on change management within religious organisations, a field ripe for exploration.

In summary, future research should both widen the lens (examining different groups, roles, and cultural settings) and zoom in on specific processes (to verify and elaborate how and why the HRS model works). Such efforts will not only test the generalisability of this thesis's conclusions but also contribute to an evolving conversation on nurturing volunteer vocation in the modern Church. The goal of this ongoing research trajectory would be to ensure that the insights continue to be sharpened and that practical guidance for faith communities becomes ever more evidence-based.

8.8 Final Reflections

In closing, this study returns to the evocative phrase that inspired its title – "the salary of the soul." What has been discovered and affirmed in these pages is that the true *payment* sustaining young catechists is not a monetary stipend or public accolade, but the profound spiritual fulfilment that arises when their service is authentically supported and valued. The Vietnamese Martyrs once gave their very lives in witness to the faith; their sacrifice is a testament that the ultimate reward of discipleship lies beyond material measure. In our time,

Generation Z catechists – the spiritual descendants of the martyrs in mission – are not asked to shed blood, but they do offer their time, talents, and youthful passion to the Church. It is incumbent upon the faith community and its leaders to steward these gifts with utmost care, so that these young men and women never feel that their devotion is taken for granted or their zeal "burnt out" for lack of support. The Human Resource Stewardship model advanced here envisions just such a Church: one that pays the salary of the soul in full by creating an environment where each catechist's God-given dignity, purpose, and potential are nurtured.

This concluding vision is both academic and deeply ecclesial. Academically, it demonstrates that when sound organisational principles intersect with theological virtues, the result is an evidence-based pathway to a healthier, more effective ministry. Ecclesially, it echoes a perennial Gospel truth – "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). By treasuring its young volunteers as living stones of the Church's future and by investing in their formation and well-being, the Church lays up an incalculable treasure in heaven and on earth: a new generation of catechists on fire with faith, resilient in hope, and creatively capable of carrying forward the mission exemplified by the martyrs. Such is the promise of stewardship – that the Church which cares for the souls of its servants in turn secures the vitality of its own soul for years to come. In fulfilling the mandate to form and cherish these Gen Z catechists, the Church in Vietnam (and beyond) not only honours the legacy of its holy martyrs, but also writes a new chapter in that living legacy, one in which the salary of the soul continues to yield a hundredfold for the Kingdom of God.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Participant: _____

Title of the project: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF GENERATION Z* VOLUNTEER CATECHISTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY ARCHDIOCESE (VIETNAM): LESSONS FROM THE ROLE MODELS OF VIETNAMESE MARTYRS

Principal investigator and contact details: Minh Duc Tran [redacted]

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…….....

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact the principal investigator on the contact details above.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project
Training and Development Spiritual Well-Being of Generation Z* Volunteer Catechists in Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese (Vietnam): Lessons from the Role Models of Vietnamese Martyrs

Purpose and Value of Study
The purpose of this study is to explore how the training and spiritual well-being of Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese are influenced by the role models of Vietnamese martyrs. This research aims to identify effective training strategies that enhance spiritual growth and development among young catechists.

Invitation to Participate
You are invited to participate in this study because of your active involvement as a Generation Z volunteer catechist in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese. Your experiences and insights are valuable to this research.

Who is Organising the Research
This research is being conducted by Minh Duc Tran, a PhD Candidate at St Mary's University, Twickenham. The study is part of a thesis in PhD Business Management.

What Will Happen to the Results of the Study
The findings from this study will be used to improve training programs for catechists and will be published in academic journals and presented at conferences. Your identity will remain anonymous in all publications and presentations.

Source of Funding for the Research
This study is self-funded.

Contact Details for Further Information
For any questions or further information, please contact:
Minh Duc Tran
PhD Candidate
St Mary's University, Twickenham
[redacted]

Section B: Their Participation in the Research Project

Why You Have Been Invited to Take Part
You have been invited because you are a Generation Z volunteer catechist in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese, and your experiences are crucial to understanding the impact of spiritual role models.

Whether You Can Refuse to Take Part
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline this invitation without any consequences.

Whether You Can Withdraw from the Project at Any Time, and How
You can withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. To withdraw, simply contact Minh Duc Tran at [redacted]

What Will Happen if You Agree to Take Part
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey, attend an interview, participate in a focus group. This will take approximately 1 hour.

Whether There Are Any Risks Involved
There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel any discomfort, please inform the researcher immediately, and appropriate measures will be taken to ensure your well-being.

Whether There Are Any Preparations or Special Precautions
No special preparations or precautions are required before, during, or after your participation in this study.

What Will Happen to Any Information/Data/Samples Collected
All information collected will be kept confidential and securely stored. Data will be anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

Whether There Are Any Benefits from Taking Part
While there are no direct benefits to you for participating, your involvement will contribute to enhancing training programs and supporting the spiritual well-being of future catechists.

How Much Time You Will Need to Give Up
Your participation will require approximately 1 hour.

How Your Participation in the Project Will Be Kept Confidential
All data will be anonymized and stored securely. Your personal information will not be disclosed in any publications or presentations. Only the research team will have access to the data.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. Your contribution is invaluable in advancing our understanding and support of volunteer catechists' spiritual well-being.

APPENDIX C: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Approval Sheet
(This sheet must be signed at all relevant boxes)

Name of proposer(s)	Minh Duc Tran
Name of supervisor(s)	Gherardo Girardi (DoS), Chris Wylde and Karen North
Programme of study	PhD
Title of project	Training and Development Spiritual Well-Being of Generation Z Volunteer Catechists in Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese (Vietnam): Lessons from the Role Models of Vietnamese Martyrs.

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

SECTION 1: To be completed by supervisor.(for student research projects). Doctoral/MPhil applications must be referred to and reviewed by an Ethics Representative at Section 2 below.			
☒ Approved at Level 1. ☐ Refer to Ethics Representative for consideration.			
Name of Supervisor:	Gherardo Girardi		
Signature of Supervisor:	Gherardo Girardi	Date:	28/08/2024

SECTION 2: To be completed by Ethics Representative.			
☒ Approved at Level 1 ☐ Approved at Level 2 ☐ Level 3 consideration is required by Ethics Sub-Committee.			
Name of Faculty Ethics Representative:	Cherisse Francis		
Signature of Faculty Ethics Representative:		Date:	12/11/2024

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GEN Z CATECHISTS

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Minh Duc Tran and I am conducting research on the training and development of spiritual well-being among Generation Z volunteer catechists in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese. I am particularly interested in how the role models of Vietnamese martyrs influence this process. Your insights will be invaluable for understanding these dynamics and for informing future training programs.

The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. Please feel free to share your thoughts openly. All information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study.

Background Information:

1. **Personal Background:**
    - Can you tell me about your background in catechesis? How did you become a volunteer catechist?
    - How long have you been serving as a catechist in the Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese?
2. **Understanding of Spiritual Well-Being:**
    - How do you personally define spiritual well-being?
    - What aspects of your life contribute to your spiritual well-being as a catechist?
    - How do you perceive the spiritual well-being of your peers and other Generation Z catechists?

Experiences as a Catechist:

3. **Role and Experiences:**
    - How do you find being a catechist? Could you share some of your positive experiences and challenges in this role?
    - What motivates you to continue serving as a catechist, and what do you find most rewarding about this work?
4. **Relationship with Parish Leadership:**
    - Can you describe your relationship with the parish priest? How does the parish priest view his role in relation to the catechists?
    - Does the parish priest see himself as a manager, and if so, how well does he perform in this role?

- To what extent do older catechists act as managers or mentors? How effective are they in this role?

5. **Peer Relationships and Collaboration:**
    - How would you describe your relationship with other Generation Z catechists?
    - How do you and your peers support each other in your roles as catechists?
    - Are there opportunities for collaboration or sharing experiences among catechists? How effective are these opportunities?
    - Have you faced any challenges in working with other catechists? How have you addressed these challenges?
    - How do you think the Archdiocese or parish can foster stronger relationships and collaboration among catechists?

Training and Development:

5. **Training Experience:**
    - Can you describe the training programs you have participated in as a volunteer catechist?
    - How is the training of young catechists being carried out at the parish level? What is your feedback on the quality of the current catechist training program?
    - Are there any specific challenges you faced during your training? How did you overcome them?
    - What aspects of the training programs do you feel have been most beneficial for your spiritual development?
    - Are there areas in the training program that you believe could be improved?
6. **Content of Training:**
    - In your experience, how well do the training programs address the spiritual well-being of catechists?
    - How do the training programs incorporate the teachings and experiences of Vietnamese martyrs? Can you provide examples?
    - How do you think emphasizing the role models of Vietnamese martyrs during training impacts your personal growth and the overall effectiveness of the program?
    - Are there any elements of the training that you feel are lacking or need improvement?

Role Models and Martyrs:

7. **Influence of Vietnamese Martyrs:**
    - What do you know about the Vietnamese martyrs, and how have they influenced your personal faith journey?
    - Has the Church implemented any specific programs or propaganda to promote the legacy of Vietnamese martyrs among catechists? If so, how effective do you think these efforts have been?
    - How do you think the stories of Vietnamese martyrs impact the spiritual well-being of Generation Z catechists?
    - Can you share any specific experiences where the example of a martyr has inspired your work as a catechist?
8. **Role Models in Catechesis:**
    - Who do you consider to be role models in your life, both in faith and in your role as a catechist?
    - How do these role models, including the martyrs, shape your approach to catechesis and your interactions with students?
    - How do you think future training programs could better utilize the examples of these role models?

Generational Perspectives and Social Context:

9. **Generation Z Characteristics:**
    - From your perspective, what are the key characteristics of Generation Z that affect their spiritual life and well-being?
    - How do you think these characteristics influence the way Generation Z catechists approach their roles?
10. **Cultural and Social Context:**
    - How do you think the cultural and social environment in Ho Chi Minh City influences the spiritual well-being of Generation Z catechists?
    - What concerns do you have about the Catholic Church, the State, or society? How do you see the relationship between these entities, and how does it impact your role as a catechist?
    - Are there specific societal challenges that impact your spiritual well-being? How do you address these challenges?

Organisational Dynamics:

11. **Human Resources in the Parish:**

- How does your parish handle the recruitment, retention, and management of catechists? What HR solutions have been implemented?
- What improvements could be made in how catechists are recruited and managed within the parish?

12. **Impact of the Synod:**
    - How has the current synod influenced your work as a catechist and your spiritual well-being?
    - What are the possible implications of the synod for the catechism program in your parish?

Recommendations and Reflections:

13. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
    - Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you make for improving the training and spiritual development of Generation Z catechists?
    - How can the Archdiocese better support the spiritual well-being of its volunteer catechists?

14. **Personal Reflection:**
    - Reflecting on your journey as a catechist, what have been the most significant moments in your spiritual development?
    - How do you see your role as a catechist evolving in the future?

Conclusion:

15. **Final Thoughts:**
    - Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed?
    - Do you have any questions for me or anything you would like to clarify?

Closing:
Thank you very much for your time and insights. Your contributions are incredibly valuable to this research. If you have any further thoughts after this interview, please feel free to contact me.

Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire for other groups

1. For Clergy

Assessment of the Current Situation
- How would you describe the influence of the Youth Eucharist Movement on catechists in your parish/diocese?
- What opportunities and challenges do young catechists face in their role?
- Do catechists readily collaborate in the catechism programme? Do they enjoy it?
- What are the immediate goals of training young catechists in your parish? Are they expected to take on additional roles beyond catechism?

- How effective is the communication between catechists and clergy in implementing the catechism programme?

Demographics
- What is the average age and age distribution of catechists in your parish?
- What are the general demographics of your parishioners (e.g., gender balance, social class, education level)?
- Are there notable differences in the involvement of male and female catechists?

Catechist Training and Gen Z
- Are the Vietnamese martyrs mentioned in the training programme?
- What is your general assessment of Catholic Gen Z? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How can the Church leverage technology and social media to better engage Gen Z catechists?
- Are there specific influencers or role models within the Vietnam Catholic Church who inspire Gen Z? How are they integrated into the training programme?
- What role do youth leaders or social media figures play in fostering faith among Gen Z?

Future Concerns and Organisational Learning
- What are your concerns about the future of training young catechists?
- How can the Church clergy and hierarchy learn from past and present experiences to improve training programmes?
- How do you see the role of influencers evolving in shaping the faith and mission of young catechists?

Studies and Strategies
- What have internal studies revealed about catechists?
- Regarding quantity vs. quality, which do you emphasize and why? Do you foresee any changes in strategy?

Synodal Process and Role Models
- Is the ongoing synodal process contributing to shaping catechist training?
- Do you propose any role models to catechists? How has the Pope's elevation of the role of catechist to mission level influenced training?
- Are there any success stories of young catechists who have become influential role models in your parish or diocese?

HR Solutions and Well-being
- What HR solutions do you suggest for recruitment, retention, and management of catechists?
- Burnout among catechists is a concern. What measures can improve their emotional and spiritual well-being? How about priests?
- How can the Church provide ongoing support and mentorship to young catechists?

For Communist Priests
- How do you manage being both a priest and a state officer? Are there any tensions or challenges?

2. For Experienced Catechists (Older Generation)

General Experience
- How do you feel about being a catechist? What are the positive experiences and challenges?
- How has your role as a catechist changed over the years?

Training Feedback
- How is the training of young catechists conducted at the parish level? What improvements have been made or could be made?
- Are there any specific training methods that have proven effective in engaging young catechists?

Relationship with Parish Priest
- How would you describe the relationship between the parish priest and catechists?
- Does the parish priest see himself as a manager? How well does he perform in this role?
- Do older catechists take on management roles? To what extent?
- How do you mentor younger catechists, and what challenges do you face in this role?

Concerns and Influences
- What are your concerns about the Catholic Church, the State, and society?
- How do these relationships affect the catechism programme?
- What influence does the current synod have on the catechism programme?
- How can influencers in the Catholic community positively impact the younger generation of catechists?

HR Solutions
- What HR solutions do you recommend for recruitment, retention, and management of catechists?
- How can the parish better support catechists in balancing their roles with other responsibilities?

3. For Journalists

Religious Freedom and Government Relations
- How would you evaluate the state's position on religious freedom? Is the government granting the freedoms guaranteed by law?
- How does the propaganda department interact with religious organisations? Does it interfere with the transmission of faith?
- What is your assessment of the use of "communist" priests and Buddhist monks within religious organisations?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the Church-State relationship?

Gen Z and Catholicism
- What is your general assessment of Gen Z? What are their strengths and weaknesses, particularly among Catholic Gen Z?
- How engaged is Gen Z with social issues such as politics, religion, and education?
- How do influencers in the Catholic community impact Gen Z's engagement with faith?
- Are there any prominent Catholic figures or role models that resonate with Gen Z?

General Comments and Expectations

- What are your general observations about Catholics in Vietnam? Pros and cons?
- What are your expectations for the future of Catholics in Vietnam? Is the motto “a good life and a good religion” still relevant?
- How can the Church better utilize influencers to bridge gaps between traditional practices and modern approaches?

4. For Government Officials

Religious Freedom
- How do you feel about the government’s efforts regarding religious freedom? Are there any recent updates to these regulations?
- Does the propaganda department currently observe or influence the activities of religious organisations?

Communist Priests
- What is your opinion on priests working for The Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics?

Church-State Relations
- What recommendations do you have for improving the Church-State relationship?

Gen Z and Catholicism
- What is your general assessment of Gen Z? What are their strengths and weaknesses, particularly among Catholic Gen Z?
- How engaged is Gen Z with social issues such as politics, religion, and education?
- How do influencers within the Catholic Church contribute to shaping the perspectives and faith of Gen Z?

General Comments and Expectations
- What are your general observations about Catholics in Vietnam? Pros and cons?
- Do you have any expectations for the future of Catholics in Vietnam? Should the motto “a good life and a good religion” remain, or is there a need for a new direction?

5. For Academics (Sociology and Religion Researchers)

Research on Catholicism and Vietnamese Society
- How has Catholicism historically shaped Vietnamese society, particularly among younger generations?
- What sociological trends have you observed regarding religious engagement in Vietnam?
- How does the interplay between the State and the Catholic Church impact faith communities?

Gen Z and Religious Practice
- How does Gen Z approach religious practices differently from previous generations?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities for the Church in engaging Gen Z?
- How significant is the role of influencers in fostering faith and religious identity among Gen Z?

Catechist Training and Development
- What are your thoughts on the current catechist training programmes in Vietnam?

- How can HR theories be applied to improve the recruitment, retention, and well-being of catechists?
- Do you see parallels between corporate training strategies and catechist development programmes?

Influencers and Faith Formation
- How have social media and Catholic influencers shaped religious discourse in Vietnam?
- Are there particular influencers who have had a measurable impact on the Catholic Gen Z demographic?
- How can the Church better utilize digital platforms to enhance catechist training and engagement?

Church-State Dynamics
- What role do you think the Committee for Solidarity of Vietnamese Catholics plays in shaping Church policy?
- How do State regulations impact religious research and the dissemination of findings?
- What recommendations would you give for fostering a more cooperative relationship between the Church and the State?

Future Outlook
- What are your predictions for the future of Catholicism in Vietnam?
- How can the Church adapt to sociological changes while preserving its core values?
- What role do you see for academics in supporting the growth and development of the Catholic Church in Vietnam?

APPENDIX E: QUANTITATIVE METHODS & RESULTS SUPPLEMENT

Table A5.1 First round of Kitchensink for Model 3

Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Q13_17_3	1.00	6	3.1%
	2.00	31	16.1%
	3.00	156	80.8%
Valid		193	100.0%
Missing		112	
Total		305	

Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	221.435			
Final	0.000	221.435	113	0.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	0.037	271	1.000
Deviance	0.073	271	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	0.683
Nagelkerke	1.000
McFadden	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Parameter Estimates

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Q13_17_3 = 1.00]	26.665	135.565	0.039	1	0.844	-239.037	292.366
	[Q13_17_3 = 2.00]	36.315	136.360	0.071	1	0.790	-230.946	303.577
Location	Q1	-0.626	4.274	0.021	1	0.884	-9.003	7.751
	Q2	3.127	16.835	0.034	1	0.853	-29.869	36.122
	Q3	0.201	5.041	0.002	1	0.968	-9.680	10.082
	Q5	0.109	3.086	0.001	1	0.972	-5.938	6.157
	Q6_1	-1.808	13.982	0.017	1	0.897	-29.212	25.596
	Q6_2	2.052	23.487	0.008	1	0.930	-43.981	48.085
	Q6_3	-0.053	30.250	0.000	1	0.999	-59.341	59.235
	Q6_4	3.338	17.999	0.034	1	0.853	-31.938	38.615
	Q6_5	-1.078	25.122	0.002	1	0.966	-50.316	48.161
	Q6_6	-5.380	26.427	0.041	1	0.839	-57.176	46.417
	Q6_7	-0.756	25.944	0.001	1	0.977	-51.606	50.094
	Q6_8	-2.136	20.083	0.011	1	0.915	-41.498	37.225
	Q6_9	-0.867	34.329	0.001	1	0.980	-68.150	66.417
	Q7_1	-2.559	20.738	0.015	1	0.902	-43.204	38.086
	Q7_2	3.406	23.255	0.021	1	0.884	-42.173	48.986
	Q7_3	2.422	40.831	0.004	1	0.953	-77.604	82.449
	Q7_4	1.771	27.497	0.004	1	0.949	-52.123	55.665
	Q7_5	-1.110	23.222	0.002	1	0.962	-46.625	44.405
	Q7_6	3.525	23.404	0.023	1	0.880	-42.346	49.396
	Q7_7	-3.083	32.860	0.009	1	0.925	-67.487	61.321
	Q7_8	-4.260	22.696	0.035	1	0.851	-48.743	40.223
	Q7_9	-0.781	20.001	0.002	1	0.969	-39.981	38.420
	Q7_10	13.398	83.321	0.026	1	0.872	-149.908	176.703
	Q8	0.579	6.373	0.008	1	0.928	-11.910	13.069
	Q9_1	0.042	9.918	0.000	1	0.997	-19.398	19.481
	Q9_2	-0.821	11.162	0.005	1	0.941	-22.698	21.055
	Q9_3	-0.474	18.801	0.001	1	0.980	-37.324	36.375
	Q9_4	-3.114	17.308	0.032	1	0.857	-37.036	30.809

	Q9_5	2.025	10.709	0.036	1	0.850	-18.964	23.015
	Q9_6	0.236	18.230	0.000	1	0.990	-35.495	35.967
	Q9_7	-1.860	11.616	0.026	1	0.873	-24.628	20.907
	Q9_8	1.332	8.391	0.025	1	0.874	-15.115	17.778
	Q9_9	-1.619	13.631	0.014	1	0.905	-28.336	25.097
	Q9_10	-1.174	23.602	0.002	1	0.960	-47.433	45.084
	Q9_11	1.753	26.502	0.004	1	0.947	-50.190	53.696
	Q10_1	1.410	18.144	0.006	1	0.938	-34.151	36.972
	Q10_2	1.887	25.140	0.006	1	0.940	-47.387	51.160
	Q10_3	2.247	18.254	0.015	1	0.902	-33.529	38.024
	Q10_4	-0.432	20.703	0.000	1	0.983	-41.010	40.145
	Q10_5	4.581	16.842	0.074	1	0.786	-28.428	37.590
	Q10_6	-1.303	28.639	0.002	1	0.964	-57.435	54.829
	Q11_1	-3.359	16.966	0.039	1	0.843	-36.612	29.893
	Q11_2	0.852	15.403	0.003	1	0.956	-29.338	31.042
	Q11_3	-2.563	13.389	0.037	1	0.848	-28.806	23.680
	Q11_4	-1.619	16.777	0.009	1	0.923	-34.502	31.263
	Q11_5	-1.354	20.073	0.005	1	0.946	-40.696	37.989
	Q11_6	-0.252	10.091	0.001	1	0.980	-20.030	19.525
	Q11_7	0.313	24.740	0.000	1	0.990	-48.176	48.802
	Q11_8	0.129	13.220	0.000	1	0.992	-25.781	26.038
	Q11_9	0.097	14.328	0.000	1	0.995	-27.984	28.178
	Q11_10	1.628	19.075	0.007	1	0.932	-35.758	39.014
	Q11_11	0.578	9.009	0.004	1	0.949	-17.080	18.235
	Q11_12	1.607	10.831	0.022	1	0.882	-19.621	22.835
	Q11_13	-1.225	17.035	0.005	1	0.943	-34.612	32.163
	Q11_14	3.146	26.091	0.015	1	0.904	-47.990	54.283
	Q11_15	-2.695	17.085	0.025	1	0.875	-36.181	30.791
	Q11_16	1.730	12.414	0.019	1	0.889	-22.600	26.061
	Q12_1	-0.595	12.550	0.002	1	0.962	-25.193	24.004
	Q12_2	0.383	21.037	0.000	1	0.985	-40.849	41.615
	Q12_3	0.524	18.541	0.001	1	0.977	-35.815	36.864
	Q12_4	-5.376	18.798	0.082	1	0.775	-42.219	31.467
	Q12_5	2.020	26.524	0.006	1	0.939	-49.967	54.006
	Q12_6	3.447	25.604	0.018	1	0.893	-46.736	53.629

	Q12_7	-2.843	33.843	0.007	1	0.933	-69.174	63.488
	Q12_8	1.141	48.258	0.001	1	0.981	-93.442	95.724
	Q12_9	-1.777	27.344	0.004	1	0.948	-55.370	51.816
	Q12_10	3.567	20.073	0.032	1	0.859	-35.775	42.910
	Q12_11	2.824	16.422	0.030	1	0.863	-29.363	35.010
	Q12_12	-0.571	26.042	0.000	1	0.982	-51.614	50.471
	Q12_13	1.058	26.708	0.002	1	0.968	-51.288	53.405
	Q12_14	15.393	154.641	0.010	1	0.921	-287.698	318.484
	Q13_1	0.730	16.319	0.002	1	0.964	-31.254	32.713
	Q13_2	0.934	16.475	0.003	1	0.955	-31.358	33.225
	Q13_3	2.153	23.055	0.009	1	0.926	-43.035	47.341
	Q13_4	-2.148	28.736	0.006	1	0.940	-58.469	54.173
	Q13_5	-0.231	12.538	0.000	1	0.985	-24.805	24.343
	Q13_6	-0.433	21.781	0.000	1	0.984	-43.124	42.258
	Q13_7	-0.045	14.723	0.000	1	0.998	-28.901	28.811
	Q13_8	2.698	18.111	0.022	1	0.882	-32.799	38.194
	Q13_9	-0.360	18.938	0.000	1	0.985	-37.477	36.757
	Q13_10	1.103	16.521	0.004	1	0.947	-31.278	33.484
	Q13_11	-1.375	14.837	0.009	1	0.926	-30.455	27.704
	Q13_12	1.068	12.171	0.008	1	0.930	-22.786	24.922
	Q13_13	0.012	26.328	0.000	1	1.000	-51.591	51.614
	Q13_14	-0.091	34.962	0.000	1	0.998	-68.616	68.434
	Q13_15	3.054	19.308	0.025	1	0.874	-34.789	40.896
	Q13_16	-0.262	15.762	0.000	1	0.987	-31.155	30.631
	Q14_1	0.478	34.297	0.000	1	0.989	-66.742	67.698
	Q14_2	0.945	14.201	0.004	1	0.947	-26.889	28.778
	Q14_3	-4.868	32.429	0.023	1	0.881	-68.429	58.693
	Q14_4	0.164	13.454	0.000	1	0.990	-26.206	26.533
	Q14_5	-6.005	17.163	0.122	1	0.726	-39.643	27.634
	Q14_6	0.899	30.360	0.001	1	0.976	-58.606	60.404
	Q14_7	1.666	18.826	0.008	1	0.929	-35.233	38.565
	Q14_8	-18.903	69.579	0.074	1	0.786	-155.276	117.470
	Q15_1	2.466	14.988	0.027	1	0.869	-26.909	31.842
	Q15_2	-2.897	25.719	0.013	1	0.910	-53.305	47.510
	Q15_3	0.573	21.253	0.001	1	0.978	-41.082	42.228

	Q15_4	3.543	23.291	0.023	1	0.879	-42.106	49.193
	Q15_5	0.873	30.354	0.001	1	0.977	-58.619	60.365
	Q15_6	1.428	17.071	0.007	1	0.933	-32.030	34.887
	Q15_7	1.740	23.686	0.005	1	0.941	-44.683	48.163
	Q15_8	10.613	146.532	0.005	1	0.942	-276.585	297.810
	Q16	-1.591	20.759	0.006	1	0.939	-42.277	39.095
	Q17_1	-0.808	45.718	0.000	1	0.986	-90.413	88.797
	Q17_2	4.072	28.729	0.020	1	0.887	-52.236	60.380
	Q17_3	1.660	28.861	0.003	1	0.954	-54.906	58.227
	Q17_4	-1.648	15.541	0.011	1	0.916	-32.108	28.811
	Q17_5	0.217	24.995	0.000	1	0.993	-48.771	49.206
	Q17_6	-1.688	19.354	0.008	1	0.931	-39.620	36.245
	Q17_7	1.626	28.870	0.003	1	0.955	-54.958	58.211
	Q17_8	0.530	31.130	0.000	1	0.986	-60.484	61.544
	Q17_9	-6.437	51.246	0.016	1	0.900	-106.878	94.004

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Test of Parallel Lines[a]

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	0.000			
General	.000[b]	0.000	113	1.000

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. Link function: Negative Log-log.

b. The log-likelihood value is practically zero. There may be a complete separation in the data. The maximum likelihood estimates do not exist.

Table A5.2 Second round of Kitchensink for Model 3

Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Q13_17_3	1.00	10	4.0%
	2.00	38	15.4%
	3.00	199	80.6%

Valid	247	100.0%
Missing	58	
Total	305	

Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	292.394			
Final	150.032	142.362	30	0.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	278.498	462	1.000
Deviance	150.032	462	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	0.438
Nagelkerke	0.631
McFadden	0.487

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Parameter Estimates

							95% Confidence Interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Q13_17_3 = 1.00]	3.682	1.573	5.480	1	0.019	0.599	6.765
	[Q13_17_3 = 2.00]	5.634	1.659	11.535	1	0.001	2.383	8.886
Location	Q1	-0.123	0.056	4.869	1	0.027	-0.232	-0.014
	Q2	0.164	0.236	0.483	1	0.487	-0.299	0.628
	Q3	0.145	0.060	5.799	1	0.016	0.027	0.263
	Q6_1	0.706	0.323	4.772	1	0.029	0.073	1.339

	Q6_4	0.741	0.259	8.164	1	0.004	0.233	1.250
	Q6_6	-0.716	0.362	3.916	1	0.048	-1.425	-0.007
	Q7_2	0.044	0.245	0.033	1	0.857	-0.437	0.526
	Q7_6	0.534	0.289	3.422	1	0.064	-0.032	1.100
	Q7_8	0.078	0.278	0.078	1	0.780	-0.468	0.623
	Q7_10	0.618	1.188	0.270	1	0.603	-1.711	2.947
	Q9_4	-0.295	0.182	2.624	1	0.105	-0.651	0.062
	Q9_5	0.318	0.141	5.096	1	0.024	0.042	0.594
	Q9_7	-0.052	0.121	0.186	1	0.667	-0.289	0.185
	Q9_8	0.047	0.113	0.174	1	0.677	-0.174	0.269
	Q10_5	0.786	0.196	16.084	1	0.000	0.402	1.171
	Q11_1	-0.586	0.181	10.533	1	0.001	-0.940	-0.232
	Q11_3	-0.132	0.147	0.809	1	0.368	-0.420	0.156
	Q11_12	0.289	0.141	4.230	1	0.040	0.014	0.565
	Q11_15	-1.017	0.250	16.550	1	0.000	-1.507	-0.527
	Q11_16	0.625	0.195	10.300	1	0.001	0.243	1.007
	Q12_4	-0.208	0.234	0.787	1	0.375	-0.667	0.252
	Q12_6	-0.040	0.235	0.030	1	0.863	-0.501	0.420
	Q12_10	0.242	0.269	0.805	1	0.370	-0.286	0.769
	Q12_11	0.063	0.278	0.051	1	0.822	-0.483	0.609
	Q13_8	0.672	0.193	12.124	1	0.000	0.294	1.050
	Q13_15	1.088	0.213	26.219	1	0.000	0.672	1.505
	Q14_3	-0.516	0.272	3.590	1	0.058	-1.050	0.018
	Q14_5	-1.146	0.328	12.243	1	0.000	-1.788	-0.504
	Q14_8	-1.260	1.442	0.764	1	0.382	-4.087	1.566
	Q15_1	0.586	0.265	4.896	1	0.027	0.067	1.106

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Test of Parallel Lines[a]

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	150.032			
General	142.648[b]	7.384[c]	30	1.000

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. Link function: Negative Log-log.

b. The log-likelihood value cannot be further increased after maximum number of step-halving.

c. The Chi-Square statistic is computed based on the log-likelihood value of the last iteration of the general model. Validity of the test is uncertain.

Table A5.3 Third round of Kitchensink for Model 3

Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Q13_17_3	1.00	10	4.0%
	2.00	38	15.4%
	3.00	199	80.6%
Valid		247	100.0%
Missing		58	
Total		305	

Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	292.394			
Final	150.131	142.263	27	0.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	273.209	465	1.000
Deviance	150.131	465	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	0.438
Nagelkerke	0.631

McFadden	0.487

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Parameter Estimates

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Q13_17_3 = 1.00]	3.646	1.547	5.556	1	0.018	0.614	6.678
	[Q13_17_3 = 2.00]	5.589	1.633	11.716	1	0.001	2.389	8.789
Location	Q1	-0.127	0.054	5.511	1	0.019	-0.233	-0.021
	Q2	0.165	0.236	0.487	1	0.485	-0.298	0.627
	Q3	0.149	0.059	6.362	1	0.012	0.033	0.264
	Q6_1	0.704	0.322	4.797	1	0.029	0.074	1.335
	Q6_4	0.741	0.255	8.420	1	0.004	0.240	1.241
	Q6_6	-0.709	0.356	3.954	1	0.047	-1.407	-0.010
	Q7_6	0.537	0.287	3.490	1	0.062	-0.026	1.100
	Q7_8	0.101	0.274	0.136	1	0.713	-0.437	0.639
	Q7_10	0.581	1.162	0.250	1	0.617	-1.697	2.859
	Q9_4	-0.305	0.182	2.816	1	0.093	-0.661	0.051
	Q9_5	0.318	0.140	5.126	1	0.024	0.043	0.593
	Q9_7	-0.055	0.120	0.210	1	0.647	-0.289	0.180
	Q9_8	0.056	0.110	0.256	1	0.613	-0.160	0.272
	Q10_5	0.790	0.194	16.640	1	0.000	0.411	1.170
	Q11_1	-0.582	0.179	10.612	1	0.001	-0.932	-0.232
	Q11_3	-0.128	0.143	0.795	1	0.373	-0.409	0.153

	Q11_12	0.289	0.140	4.302	1	0.038	0.016	0.563
	Q11_15	-1.024	0.250	16.772	1	0.000	-1.514	-0.534
	Q11_16	0.633	0.194	10.619	1	0.001	0.252	1.013
	Q12_4	-0.204	0.233	0.762	1	0.383	-0.661	0.254
	Q12_10	0.261	0.248	1.106	1	0.293	-0.226	0.748
	Q13_8	0.671	0.192	12.269	1	0.000	0.296	1.047
	Q13_15	1.092	0.213	26.348	1	0.000	0.675	1.509
	Q14_3	-0.519	0.268	3.751	1	0.053	-1.043	0.006
	Q14_5	-1.154	0.324	12.702	1	0.000	-1.789	-0.520
	Q14_8	-1.164	1.416	0.675	1	0.411	-3.940	1.612
	Q15_1	0.573	0.264	4.724	1	0.030	0.056	1.090

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Test of Parallel Lines[a]

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	150.131			
General	140.588[b]	9.543[c]	27	0.999

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. Link function: Negative Log-log.

b. The log-likelihood value cannot be further increased after maximum number of step-halving.

c. The Chi-Square statistic is computed based on the log-likelihood value of the last iteration of the general model. Validity of the test is uncertain.

Table A5.4 Final round of Kitchensink – Q10_5 (I feel closer to God) – Robustness Check

		N	Marginal Percentage
Q10_5_3	1	10	4.8%
	2	52	24.8%
	3	148	70.5%
Valid		210	100.0%
Missing		95	
Total		305	

Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	309.629			
Final	0.000	309.629	75	0.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	20.569	343	1.000
Deviance	31.242	343	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	0.771
Nagelkerke	1.000
McFadden	1.000

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Parameter Estimates

		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Q10_5_3 = 1.00]	45.903	11.278	16.565	1	0.000	23.798	68.008
	[Q10_5_3 = 2.00]	54.764	12.998	17.752	1	0.000	29.289	80.239
Location	Q1	0.474	0.244	3.765	1	0.052	-0.005	0.953
	Q2	-1.727	1.079	2.561	1	0.109	-3.841	0.388
	Q3	-0.465	0.217	4.585	1	0.032	-0.890	-0.039
	Q5	-0.155	0.155	0.992	1	0.319	-0.459	0.150
	Q6_1	-6.012	1.690	12.650	1	0.000	-9.325	-2.699
	Q6_2	3.680	1.337	7.577	1	0.006	1.060	6.301
	Q6_4	-2.206	1.072	4.234	1	0.040	-4.306	-0.105
	Q6_6	6.406	1.936	10.949	1	0.001	2.611	10.200
	Q6_7	6.792	2.241	9.184	1	0.002	2.399	11.184
	Q6_8	-2.511	0.997	6.346	1	0.012	-4.464	-0.557
	Q6_9	-1.402	2.913	0.231	1	0.630	-7.112	4.309
	Q7_1	1.792	1.227	2.134	1	0.144	-0.612	4.196
	Q7_2	1.383	0.964	2.057	1	0.151	-0.507	3.272
	Q7_3	1.058	1.098	0.928	1	0.335	-1.094	3.210
	Q7_4	-2.477	1.318	3.531	1	0.060	-5.060	0.107
	Q7_5	-3.612	1.159	9.711	1	0.002	-5.884	-1.340
	Q7_7	-0.073	1.088	0.004	1	0.947	-2.205	2.060
	Q7_8	-0.606	1.045	0.336	1	0.562	-2.653	1.442
	Q7_10	58.793	21.992	7.147	1	0.008	15.690	101.897
	Q9_2	1.809	0.694	6.801	1	0.009	0.449	3.168
	Q9_3	0.279	0.439	0.404	1	0.525	-0.581	1.139
	Q9_4	3.108	1.145	7.363	1	0.007	0.863	5.353
	Q9_7	0.936	0.556	2.835	1	0.092	-0.154	2.026
	Q9_8	-0.978	0.514	3.617	1	0.057	-1.987	0.030
	Q10_1	2.624	1.025	6.557	1	0.010	0.616	4.633
	Q10_2	-1.260	1.475	0.730	1	0.393	-4.151	1.630
	Q10_3	-5.627	1.624	12.008	1	0.001	-8.810	-2.444
	Q10_4	2.349	0.979	5.753	1	0.016	0.429	4.268
	Q10_6	7.894	2.086	14.326	1	0.000	3.806	11.982
	Q11_2	-2.287	0.814	7.889	1	0.005	-3.883	-0.691

	Q11_4	0.231	0.611	0.143	1	0.706	-0.966	1.428
	Q11_5	-1.668	0.776	4.618	1	0.032	-3.190	-0.147
	Q11_8	3.586	0.941	14.522	1	0.000	1.741	5.430
	Q11_9	-2.959	0.950	9.710	1	0.002	-4.820	-1.098
	Q11_10	1.972	0.757	6.790	1	0.009	0.489	3.454
	Q11_13	-3.184	1.003	10.077	1	0.002	-5.150	-1.218
	Q11_14	-3.344	1.457	5.268	1	0.022	-6.200	-0.489
	Q11_15	5.014	1.599	9.834	1	0.002	1.880	8.148
	Q11_16	1.422	0.806	3.110	1	0.078	-0.158	3.001
	Q12_2	1.249	1.156	1.167	1	0.280	-1.017	3.515
	Q12_3	-0.386	1.010	0.146	1	0.702	-2.365	1.593
	Q12_6	-5.012	1.312	14.596	1	0.000	-7.584	-2.441
	Q12_7	5.284	1.598	10.929	1	0.001	2.151	8.416
	Q12_8	7.414	1.986	13.935	1	0.000	3.521	11.307
	Q12_9	1.327	1.124	1.395	1	0.238	-0.875	3.529
	Q12_11	-4.476	1.263	12.562	1	0.000	-6.952	-2.001
	Q12_12	1.380	0.807	2.926	1	0.087	-0.201	2.962
	Q13_1	2.340	0.987	5.623	1	0.018	0.406	4.274
	Q13_2	-3.106	1.115	7.757	1	0.005	-5.292	-0.920
	Q13_3	-1.694	0.801	4.469	1	0.035	-3.264	-0.123
	Q13_4	0.583	0.547	1.136	1	0.287	-0.489	1.656
	Q13_7	-1.675	0.661	6.418	1	0.011	-2.971	-0.379
	Q13_8	-1.975	1.030	3.678	1	0.055	-3.994	0.043
	Q13_9	-1.361	0.641	4.503	1	0.034	-2.618	-0.104
	Q13_10	2.512	0.906	7.690	1	0.006	0.736	4.287
	Q13_11	2.541	0.875	8.431	1	0.004	0.826	4.257
	Q13_13	2.349	0.823	8.146	1	0.004	0.736	3.962
	Q13_14	-0.252	0.521	0.234	1	0.629	-1.273	0.769
	Q13_15	-4.965	1.390	12.763	1	0.000	-7.689	-2.241
	Q13_16	-0.057	0.944	0.004	1	0.952	-1.907	1.793
	Q13_17	6.562	1.717	14.613	1	0.000	3.197	9.926
	Q14_2	-0.882	0.947	0.867	1	0.352	-2.738	0.974
	Q14_5	2.432	1.373	3.138	1	0.076	-0.259	5.123
	Q14_6	-3.526	1.193	8.737	1	0.003	-5.864	-1.188
	Q14_7	-1.191	1.093	1.186	1	0.276	-3.334	0.952

	Q14_8	-78.750	24.872	10.025	1	0.002	-127.499	-30.001
	Q15_1	4.112	1.359	9.157	1	0.002	1.449	6.775
	Q15_3	2.343	0.997	5.525	1	0.019	0.389	4.297
	Q15_6	-3.648	1.375	7.043	1	0.008	-6.342	-0.954
	Q15_8	8.200	6.352	1.667	1	0.197	-4.249	20.649
	Q17_2	-4.928	2.277	4.682	1	0.030	-9.391	-0.464
	Q17_3	2.850	1.302	4.788	1	0.029	0.297	5.403
	Q17_6	-4.452	1.380	10.404	1	0.001	-7.157	-1.747
	Q17_7	3.997	1.319	9.187	1	0.002	1.413	6.582
	Q17_9	-3.063	1.854	2.730	1	0.098	-6.697	0.570

Link function: Negative Log-log.

Test of Parallel Lines[a]

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Null Hypothesis	0.000			
General	.000[b]	0.000	75	1.000

The null hypothesis states that the location parameters (slope coefficients) are the same across response categories.

a. Link function: Negative Log-log.

b. The log-likelihood value is practically zero. There may be a complete separation in the data. The maximum likelihood estimates do not exist.

APPENDIX F: DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Students are reminded that the work that they submit for assessment must be their own. Please read the following statements and sign and date at the bottom of this form to show that you have complied:

1. This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of your own efforts. Any ideas, data or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to the originator in the text, bibliography or footnotes.

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SIGNED:

PRINT NAME: Minh Duc Tran

DATE: September 2025