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Digital Saints: How 21st century broadcasting enables the spiritual experience of hybrid new monastic communities of faith

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Digital Saints: How 21st century broadcasting enables the spiritual experience of hybrid new monastic communities of faith

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Abstract:

This study sought to assess the function of a hybrid New Monastic community utilising new media 21st-century broadcasting, focusing on the members' transition from an offline group to a hybrid Community of Practice. The aim of this study was twofold. The first; to examine the evolution and determine the effect of the digital positioning of the community through audience measurement, engagement, and media production. The second; to determine the participants' lived religious experience and their conscious process and holistic progress within the community using a phenomenological understanding of the experience and examining the influence of the livestreams on their religious development and cult culture regarding their digital presence.

In this study I report on the effectiveness of Pioneer Ministry in this hybrid space as part of the Church of England's Fresh Expressions of Church in response to the decline in church attendance, according to research, particularly among 20- to 40-year-old digital natives and immigrants.

This research determines the importance of digital technologies and how they facilitate the religious experience of these hybrid New Monastic communities of faith from a media sociological perspective focusing on the context of communication. It can be used as evidence that a hybridised community, where both physical and digital connections are valued equally, are effective in encouraging the religious development of faith communities. This gives thorough information of social media religious communities to expand the knowledge base of religious leaders who aspire to build and nurture new faith communities aimed at digital natives. The findings may teach educators about the new religious leaders and contribute to advancing digital religious studies.

Introduction

This study is an interdisciplinary work through the lens of Media and Communication, focusing on Broadcast and touching on the emerging research paradigms of Internet Studies and Digital Religion. It is essential to approach this study in this manner as the internet is now ubiquitous in most Western cultures and, in this context, normative in use and participation (Dutton 2013). Specifically, the involvement and use of Social Media Platforms for 21st-century Broadcasting to enable religious experience.

This study explores the lived experiences of the members of a hybrid digital faith community. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness of various forms of digital technology in creating a welcoming community space where participants can feel supported, valued and encouraged. Hybrid communities are here to stay and, especially post-pandemic, have become part of people's lives in many areas, including education, work, and religion. I examine Digital Saints' growth and use of livestreaming to enhance their experience of sacred space, prayer and cohesion as a Community of Practice as they seek to serve their local community with Christian social justice. Finally, the study will also examine how the community, Digital Saints (formerly St Benny's), has evolved and adapted to the changes in available technology, the lives of its leaders, community and the world around the 2020 lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are three elements at play in this research; the issue can briefly be delineated as secularisation and institutional ennui within the Church of England. A response is Pioneer Ministry developing Fresh Expressions of Church, specifically Digital Saints, the research subject, and myself as the participant and observer/researcher.

The following is an outline of the subsequent chapters delineating the background, progression, findings, conclusion and discussion of the research.

Chapter 1 discusses the problem and context that sparked the research. Traditional church numbers are declining, and the average participant's age is growing older. If this trend continues, most churches as we know them will no longer exist, and community activities will also be affected. The Church of England has always been a significant presence in aiding society, particularly those who do not have the financial means to pay for better schooling, medical care, food and housing. The government has relied heavily on religious institutions to support society in achieving those goals. The church has always been part of many elements of social care. Still, often the community is not aware of how much religious organisations do, all religious organisations, not just the church of England.

I discuss my role as a researcher, particularly in view of how my experience forms the lens through which the phenomenological data is viewed. Next, I explain my background in both Christianity and Digital Media. Finally, I explain how this study came about and develop the three main questions this study seeks to answer.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical foundations of the research, Media and Communications, focusing on 20th-century Broadcasting and its development in the United States and the United Kingdom. This research will examine the initial positions regarding mass media and how the concept of central control of communication and mass audiences has changed from the early theories. This study will also examine the fundamental concepts focusing on broadcasting which has enhanced Mass Society and,

in our networked world, has what is considered mass behaviour, both in consumer behaviour and mass politics, brought about by mass communication and shared understanding of beliefs and opinions (McQuail 2006). Finally, Christian Broadcasting, both radio and television, are viewed as setting the stage for Digital Saints 21st century broadcasting.

Chapter 3 examines how personal recording and the Video Cassette Recorder began a shift in society; and provided a framework for participatory culture. The advent of the internet, social media, and livestreaming all owe a debt to the recording's transformation of the media landscape and our access to it. All these things are necessary to study interactive social media broadcasting in the twenty-first century. This chapter also discusses social media and the notion of cultural capital, exploring the theory of spreadable media. If an idea, media text, or community is not spread, as Jenkins says, “it’s dead“ (Jenkins et al. 2018).

There is a relationship in media, particularly between “media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence” (Jenkins 2008: 2). This flow across media platforms could not happen without the new central repository of mass media, the Internet. This chapter examines the rise of the internet and its use for “the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want” (ibid). In my opinion, though, this is more than just entertainment. It has become increasingly important in the wake of the pandemic as a means by which people can enter places of worship.

Values for creativity have shifted in this new online arena which will be discussed, along with topics including cultural capital, the viral spread of content, and the dissemination of media artefacts.

Chapter 4 explores the 500-year cycle of Christianity, beginning with the Great Transformation and ending with the present-day age of Emergent Christianity. As a part of the evolving Christian church, "Emerging Christianity" benefits from computer-mediated technologies. Finally, Pioneering is explored in light of the Christian missional perspective of contextual theology. The Anglican Church has a division called ‘pioneering’, whose mission is to create new Christian contextual, worshipping communities. This undergoes a thorough examination and assessment. In 2006, priests became OPMs (Ordained Pioneer Ministers) and were dispatched to serve where their communities needed them most, ushering in the official establishment of Pioneer Ministry (Cray et al. 2010). We also examine New Monasticism, a branch of Fresh Expressions, and the concept of intentional communities.

Chapter 5 discusses the human need for communal connection and how this influences humankind's search for connection proximally and virtually. It explores the theory of Communities of Practice and how people work together in communities to accomplish and support each other. The apprenticeship model influenced the development of these communities; it was not the master who taught; instead, it was a slightly more accomplished apprentice who helped the newcomer. This informed the newcomer and assisted the more experienced apprentices to develop in their practice (Wenger 1998). Finally, the Christian community is examined as a representation of the Trinity. How God essentially is a relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and how this should be reflected in active Christian communities (Rohr 2016).

Chapter 6 discusses community in the digital space; the evolution of online communities, from online Christian communities to hybrid communities, is examined, focusing on Social Media platforms and convergence culture. In particular, how the publics consume mass media in new media forms will be discussed, such as social media streaming, and the consequences for religious communities and the hesitance of the church to utilise this digital space. Finally, I look at the rise and evolution of Digital Religion as a research paradigm and where Digital Saints sits within that construct.

Chapter 7 covers the evolution and development of the community of study. What initially started as a community service developed into a community of prayer supporting this work. Next, a Fresh Expression of church emerged from the community contacts. Finally, I explain how a community of interest grew into a Community of Practice. "Practice and identity are inseparable: it is through practice that community members shape both the community as a collective and themselves as individuals" (Zhang & Watts 2008:56).

Chapter 8 discusses the research design, which developed from action research. Not only determining what was emergent in the study but also allowing adjustments to the offering as a group leader to serve the community better. My philosophical stance is Husserl's notion that lived experience is valid as a scientific study. Also outlined are the methods used and the methodology on which this research is based. Finally, I explain the mixed methods of phenomenology (qualitative) and broadcast operation theory (quantitative) and how they will help give a balanced view and assessment of the hybrid Digital Christian Community.

Chapter 9 analyses the data collection of the mixed methods of this study, the quantitative audience and viewership research, and the qualitative phenomenological interviews. I examined how the change in platform, location and style affected viewership and engagement. I also explore how the media practice was adjusted during the study because of the review of audience participation and the effect of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns on engagement with Digital Saints. The Phenomenological interviews are thematically deconstructed and examined. The development of a spidergram is explained, and how it helped to clarify the themes and discoveries. These are then further explored and grouped to help shed light in order to form conclusions.

Chapter 10 contains the findings, conclusion and discussion in response to the research questions. The research questions are clarified, and the results, code and themes are determined. The theoretical framework drawn from the literature will be further defined, and the results developed from interviews with the community and audience statistics will be further explored. The pandemic amid this study highlighted how significant hybrid religious communities are and how they enable audiences and communities to connect. Finally, I will talk about how these findings can be applied practically and the further research needed in this area of study.

Chapter 1.

Problem and Context

The problem is that people today do not go to church as frequently as in the past, and as a result, religious groups are struggling due to a lack of volunteers and financial support (BRIN 2021). In recent years, society and its response to formal religion have changed, and the Christian mission is responding, although slowly, to that change (BRIN 2021). Many reports from the Christian mission's perspective have emerged in the past quarter century, all attempting to understand the fall in the numbers of churchgoers and the membership of churches, which were once the centre of social gathering and society in the United States and central to the parish care of souls in the United Kingdom. One such report that sought to understand and develop a formula for change is *Mission-Shaped Church,* published in 2004. "One of the central features of this report is the recognition that the changing nature of our missionary context requires a new inculturation of the gospel within our society. The theology and practice of inculturation or contextualisation are well established in the world Church but has received little attention for mission in the West" (The Archbishop's Council 2009: xi). The contextualisation that the report mentions is the basis of the concept of Pioneer Ministry, an incarnational method of mission focusing on reaching people where they are, rather than asking them to come to church. As the Pioneer Ministers develop relationships in that context, they are embedded in that society with those particular people, becoming part of the culture and creating a new form of "church" (Moynagh & Harrold 2012: 28). There is a reason for this need for a different approach.

Church attendance in the United Kingdom and other parts of the West has decreased steadily since the 1930s (Holden 2018). Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey,

in his speech at the Shropshire Churches Conference in November 2013, said that the Church of England could be just one generation away from extinction if they do not grow its membership, particularly among young people (Horan 2015:viii). The decline is generally observed across the adult population, particularly affecting Generations X and Y and Millennials (between ages 20 and 40) (BRIN 2021). During the 20th century, the Sunday school attendance of children dropped from 55% to 4% (The Archbishop's Council 2009: 11), determining who would continue to attend church as a teen. There had been a particularly steep decline in attendance in the last decade of the 20th Century (Dunlop 2018: 2).

Among those who continue to attend church, there is a lack of commitment to regular turnout at specific church meetings, most likely due to lifestyle changes and time constraints (Office of National Statistics 2021). A trend also indicates less commitment to volunteer organisations, community, and civic groups in general (ibid). However, the people who do have the time to commit represent a similar demographic to those who attend church (BRIN 2021). The average age of a Church of England parishioner is 61, according to a report by the Archbishops' Council (Church of England 2012).

This is partly due to the changes in society in the past 50 years influencing the lifestyles of the younger demographic. People are more mobile today, and most people have access to automobiles, meaning there are more vehicles on the road; in 1971, there were just under 12 million vehicles, whereas, in 2019 (pre-pandemic), the number reached 38.4 million (Department for Transport 2019). People are now driving longer distances and more work further away from home and thus have a longer commute. This influences two aspects: where people would go to church and, if they do, what else happens on the weekends. Some people find churches farther from home, investigating several churches

in their area, not just those closest to them, and finally travel to the chosen place of worship in their cars (The Archbishop's Council 2009: 2). According to the UK Government–published *Social Trends*, the number of people who own their own homes is up by 38%, and the homes bought take a more significant percentage of the family's wages. Maintenance of this residence has led to people doing more DIY projects on the weekends, particularly on Sundays (The Archbishop's Council 2009: 1).

Another societal change is due to employment, in particular, the increased number of female workers; 91.8% of men and 78.1% of women aged 35–49 are employed. In addition, many work for more hours, with most men working 40 hours a week, women working 38 hours, and some even reaching 50 hours a week (The Archbishop's Council 2009:2). This means that there is lesser free time for the average family. Another relevant factor affecting social change is that there are now more single-parent households; 23% of women are single parents and sole earners. Preparations for the coming week are thus made during weekends, and Sundays are considered family time (Office of National Statistics 2021: 30,42,177). In addition, the rise in divorce rates and more single-parent homes implies that weekends are also spent visiting the other parent (The Archbishop's Council 2009: 3).

All of these social trends contribute to the dramatic drop in churchgoing. There is not enough time or, for some, inclination to travel to and from the church during an already hectic weekend. Those missing from most congregations in the United Kingdom are from the age group 20–49 (BRIN 2021). This means that "the demographic of church congregations have changed significantly where those aged between 15 and 29 has shrunk by more than half, whilst those over 65 has doubled" (Dunlop 2018: 2).

If churches continue to decline at the current rate, they will become irrelevant to society as a whole, and the foundation to facilitate spiritual growth and engagement will disappear. In an ever more individualistic society, many Christians believe that faith communities remain an essential base for people to support each other and upon which community action can be facilitated.

This is not the first time that the failure of institutional religion has affected society in general. The dissolution of the monasteries during Henry VIII's reign meant that medical care and education for the poor were compromised, and the help available to the poor was radically diminished. "The suppression of the religious houses caused somewhat of a social crisis in England. The English elite were gravely worried about the apparent rise in the numbers of the vagrants and the number of the poor in general in society" (Pound 1986: 84). Although the state has addressed this in this present age, the government has asked more voluntary and religious organisations to help supply more provisions to deal with the recession and to be part of the Big Society. The following is mentioned in the Prime Minister's 2010 manifesto:

> We will use the state to help stimulate social action, helping social enterprises to deliver public services and training new community organisers to help achieve our ambition of every adult citizen being a member of an active neighbourhood group. We will direct funding to those groups that strengthen communities in deprived areas, and we will introduce National Citizen Service, initially for 16-year-olds, to help bring our country together (The Conservative Manifesto 2010: 37).

If Christian institutions fail or shut down there will be significant social impacts. Fergus Butler-Gallie explains some of the initiatives the church has launched to prevent this: "lunch and breakfast clubs; food bank collection and distribution; grants of cash to cover

heating and electricity bills; social spaces for pensioners, lonely people, refugee and asylum seekers; reading clubs and in-school volunteers sent to plug gaps in defunded literacy programmes“ (Butler-Gallie 2021). The Church of England runs about a third of the schools in the country with a million children attending. A quarter of all primary and more than 200 secondary schools are administered by the Church of England, with clergy devoting over a million hours working with the children and providing holiday and after-school camps. The Church is also the biggest sponsor of academies in England, with 250 academies and 650 converter academies (Church of England 2021). The voluntary work that the churches do, such as concerning Food Banks, help for the homeless (housing justice) and the Salvation Army, would no longer be able to support those who are suffering. In addition, the non-religious functions that often happen in church buildings would cease; this includes crèche facilities, youth groups, community meeting places, charity events, coffee mornings, and adult education classes, to name a few (BBC 2021).

A possible Christian response to this issue in the United Kingdom has been the emergence of Fresh Expressions of church and associated Pioneer Ministries. One of the remedies against this decline is encouraging and establishing new expressions of church that are contextually relevant to specific communities, subcultures and interests (The Archbishop’s Council 2009). As already mentioned, this work aims to provide a broader opportunity for people to engage with the church besides traditional Sunday morning attendance. These opportunities often involve specialist gatherings, and several Fresh Expressions have developed from there: for example for sports, such as surfing, there is the Tubestation in Cornwall; for craft-making groups involving children, there is Messy Church; Bread Church, where people gather to make and eat bread and discuss the gospel; and Café Church, a place for people to gather over a cup of coffee for discussion and fellowship (Lings 2016). Many examples of a Fresh Expression of church are

available; in fact, 10–20% of people who attend church now go to a Pioneer or Fresh Expression of church (Lings 2016).

The Church of England, recognising Pioneer Ministry as a specific calling, began ordaining priests in 2006 to lead these Fresh Expressions. Still, only 2% are led by an Ordained Pioneer Minister (OPM) rather than an ordained minister for this outreach of contextual communities. Interestingly, the majority of paid ordained leaders are men, but most of these groups are led by lay pioneers; the majority of lay, unpaid pioneers, are women (Lings 2016). However, despite the increase of these contextual churches and religious gatherings, church numbers are in decline. I believe this is largely due to the nature of the changes in society, particularly the time constraints and the inconvenience for those with small children or a longer commute.

Academics recognise New Monasticism as a subset of Fresh Expressions of church (Cray et al. 2010). Mobsby (2010) explains that this movement has introduced a new vocabulary to differentiate itself from traditional monasticism, despite being inspired by the ancient form of established places for prayer by monks and nuns; in particular, the idea of contemplative prayer and action in the community of the de-churched and unchurched. This mission, *missio Dei*, is most notably a new expression of church, "of seeking to catch up with what God is already doing to reconcile all things back into a restored relationship with the divine" (Mobsby 2010: 13).

This study stemmed from my work as a constructivist lecturer and Lay Pioneer Minister. As a member of a Fresh Expression of church aware of the decline in churchgoing, I felt called to investigate the notion of sustaining one's Christian faith through the formation of

a New Monastic community following a rhythm of daily prayer facilitated through online interaction, making it easier for those with small children to participate in the digital space.

The researcher as participant/observer: A biographical note

I am in a unique position to do this work as a researcher. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires constant revision of the interpretation, conducted using the researcher's understanding, and it is particularly crucial when studying religion to have a sense of a religious experience and point of view (Cox 1996). I was part of a New Monastic community Fresh Expression in Corby, digitally streaming Night Prayer for families with small children so that they could participate in the Benedictine prayer. As a member of the community and as a broadcast professional, I was interested in assisting with the development of new media streaming, and as a Lay Pioneer Minister, I was invested in developing the community further and enabling space for pastoral care. The hope was to encourage and support those members to such an extent that people become motivated to serve their local communities and deepen their relationship with God. Developing an online support platform as a New Monastic community would enable the backing of social justice initiatives to motivate members to be a "Christians out in the world" without the need to regularly attend a service in a physical building.

I am a practising Christian and have been since my conversion at age four in a church basement during Sunday School and have had a varied denominational experience since then. Most recently, I have been part of the Pioneer community as a Lay Minister working for a charity-based Free Church plant in Lytham, then with the Church of England as a volunteer Lay Pioneer Minister in a Fresh Expression of a church plant in Corby and now in North Yorkshire.

I have always been interested in spirituality; as a young child, I wanted to become a nun and a missionary. I led a Vacation Bible School out of our barn during summer in California when 12 and volunteered as a teen with Youth with a Mission in Santa Rosa, California. At the age of 19, I lived in an intentional Christian community – Ministry House – that was part of His Name Ministries, coming under the Jesus Movement in California. Although raised in a Pentecostal church, my leaning has always been towards Catholicism; I was baptised as Catholic when I was 18. I feel I have the perfect blend of the two traditions and consider myself a Charismatic Catholic Anglican.

Ministry has always been part of my lineage. My mother is now a Pentecostal minister, ordained in her 60's when women in her denomination were recognised as potential pastors and the denominational hierarchy accepted women for ordination. However, some Pentecostal denominations still do not recognise women as ministers, although women can be missionaries. My great-grandfather was also a Pentecostal minister; all eight of his children were part of the worship team, playing musical instruments and singing gospel songs. My grandmother sang and played the piano; my great-uncle, Culley Holt, sang and was a founding member of the gospel group The Jordanaires that were backing singers for Elvis Presley, among others.

As a broadcast professional, I have presented both live and recorded programmes for many years on the radio, as a presenter of magazine programmes, as a music presenter and as a broadcast journalist. I also have some broadcast experience working in television, functioning in the background on the production team. I have always been very interested in the visual aspects of broadcast. I was intent on seeing how this new media livestream could be developed into an authentic-feeling magazine style broadcast format

combined with participatory prayer. My varied experience as a Christian and broadcaster facilitates the lens used as part of the interpretation of the interviews.

Development of this study

This study emerged out of a need to connect with members of the community who were unable to attend, for whatever reason, the Benedictine offices of prayer at St Benedict's Fresh Expression of church in Corby. To resolve the problem, the ministry team began to make the prayers available on social media in livestream format.

As the livestream prayers were tested on Periscope, the ministry team discussed how community participation could be enhanced. I had the notion of doing a case study to identify the best methods to connect with the community and get a wider audience for the prayer. Attempts were made to measure the efficacy of the livestreams and how these connections are constructed, to develop a contextual religious community, "growing disciples with a sense of obligation to the wider church and to others in society" (Moynagh 2012: xviii) and not just to partake in "a form of spiritual consumerism" (ibid). The connection via social media livestream was a new experience for the community. Therefore, it was imperative to determine whether this could be used as a spiritual assist, to ascertain if the corresponding spiritual connection felt as "real" as face-to-face prayer and if the gathering community were a true community of practice. The most efficacious method to explore the participants' experience, their "life world" of the prayers, was to use phenomenology. That aspect and the evolution of the community will be covered further in the study.

Using new media broadcasting the rhythm of prayer was made available via social media on smartphones and other devices, freeing the burden of attending physically and

travelling amidst an already overwhelming modern pace of life. This research assesses audience interaction and attendance rates, determining the uptake of this offering. Using operational theory “to guide solutions to fundamental tasks“ (McQuail 2010: 15), we adjusted the media practice to encourage better participation, response, and experience. Phenomenological interviews were conducted to investigate this hybrid New Monastic community’s effect on the spiritual life of its members and to comprehend the participants' lived experiences and whether they benefited from the prayer and the resultant community.

The number of effective Fresh Expressions which have a presence in the digital realm has been limited. They have often been closed communities or those aimed at specific populations, such as the disabled community. Besides this, there has been an increased interest in New Monastic forms of Christianity that follow a simple rhythm of prayer to engage with God and build community.

This research seeks to determine if a hybrid New Monastic community and prayer space can address the current issue of an inability to attend church physically and fulfil the need for spiritual connection, with others and with God, by asking the following three questions:

1. How do digital participants of this New Monastic group, Digital Saints, experience and understand the Christian community and connect with God?
2. How does this experience and understanding inform or shape their spiritual/religious experience?
3. How can a responsive interaction with this community digitally enable media development and community growth?

Chapter 2.

Media and Communications

This study is interdisciplinary work through the lens of Media and Communication, focusing on one part of the mass media, broadcast, as both a medium and a method. As part of that interdisciplinary work, this study also views the research through another lens of a subset of Internet Studies, Digital Religion.

The notion of 'mass media' began with societal changes, notably industrial changes that transformed our culture. However, the notion of mass communication itself began with the advent of the newspaper press, it changed communication by "providing the 'social cement' and the 'nervous system' of society" (Hardt,1979: 45-46). This social cohesion fostering the idea of mass society and mass behaviour "…both in consumer behaviour and mass politics (was) brought about by mass communication and a shared understanding of beliefs and opinions" (McQuail 2006).

Mass communication was then supplemented by further entertainment, news and information media available to the masses, radio, television and cinema. However, the initial study into mass media was marginalised by 'serious' theorists due to the resistance to the notion of 'popular' culture (Holmes 2005) and the notion that serious research, particularly in sociology, focused on social problems rather than entertainment and information (ibid).

The first theories of mass communication referred to simultaneous transmission from a central point (sender) to the audience (receiver) of news, spectacle, and information (message) without interaction from the receiver. McQuail discusses this as enabling the "informational dominance of a whole society by those with the control of the means of

dissemination (2006: 5). Although this particular theory only works if there is centralisation of the origin and content, with the notion of control at this source.

Theories have arisen with the expansion of mass communication, particularly with the advancement of media technology. Harold Innis (1950, 1951) is credited with being the first person to create theories concerning the impact of technological advances in media. Innis retraced a significant portion of history, beginning with the first empires and evolving to the invention of the radio. Throughout this process, he uncovered a correlation between the predominant types of social organisation and major modes of communication. It is generally agreed that Innis's hypotheses were some of the first of their sort. More specifically, the focus of theory at that time was on the effects brought about by the invention of printing in Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century, arguably, the first form of mass communication. Many elements of the emergence of contemporary society and culture have been discovered to depend to some degree on the uses made of printing (Eisenstein 1979; McLuhan 1962).

From this and subsequent developments in the study of mass communication, as it is termed in the States, and media and communication, there is what Gitlin (1978) states is a dominant paradigm: the functionalist approach. The functionalist approach emphasises media's positive impact on society and favours quantitative empirical research.

20th-century broadcasting

Broadcasting in the 20th century is mass communication advancement using pre-existing technologies: print for the news, telephone and telegraph, films, photography, and sound recording. "Unlike all previous communications technologies, radio and television were systems primarily designed for transmission and reception, with little or no definition of

preceding content" (Williams 1975: 25). In this study, the original definition of broadcasting is employed: one person spreading many seeds while planting. This "one to many" method began in the United States with the full-time radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh with the first broadcast of the 1920 presidential election news.

The initial assumption was that the audience were passive receptors to what they heard in the broadcast. This theory is known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, also known as the Magic Bullet theory, where communication is injected into the audience and significantly causes the audience's behavioural change (Griffin 2000, McQuail 2010, Shramm 1955). This relies on the suppositions that all audience reacts similarly to any stimuli and that the message sent is immediate and powerful. What was particularly concerning to those in power at that time was that this perceived influence by broadcast could not be escaped; the public was helpless before it.

In the United Kingdom, in these early days of the wireless (radio), it was assumed that the broadcaster would hold much power over these passive recipients, influencing them in ways that could not at the time be determined. This caused concern as there were no definitive rules for broadcasting at the time, as the United States and the United Kingdom were only drafting them as they developed the platform. "Perhaps because of their closeness to power, radio and television have hardly anywhere acquired, as of right, the same freedom that press enjoys, to express views and act with political independence" (McQuail 2010: 34). As other Western countries began to develop radio, different approaches to the medium were advanced; public broadcasting services, state-run radio, state propaganda radio, commercial stations, and subscription services were all developed at this time. "The best-known development of commercial radio is, of course, in the USA and is often portrayed as opposed to Public Service Broadcasting. However,

many radio pioneers in the USA thought the medium should remain essentially a public utility" (Rudin 2011: 8). Soon after, a public broadcasting system was developed. National Public Radio (NPR) began in the States, using public funds and subscriptions to broadcast to the nation as a public service. It would suggest that in the 21st century, community radio in the UK is more in keeping with this idea of public service than any other, considering the reliance on publicly raised funds and volunteer working hours to keep these small stations on-air as a public service.

While the idea of public broadcasting was growing in the United States, there were clashes between the government and radio broadcasters in the United Kingdom. John Reith, the founder of the BBC, sided with the government during the first general strike in the United Kingdom, angering a large portion of the BBC audience and leading to distrust in the corporation. In some parts of the country, the strikers called for the public to act on this and sabotage radio transmitters. Misguidedly, Reith was attempting to keep the government support – the government tax financially supported the BBC. It seemed that he was also trying to prevent the BBC from turning into a state-run radio station that would essentially be a propaganda machine. However, this would not be the worst development for him; in fact, what Reith felt would be even worse was commercial broadcasting – "…the brute force of monopoly" (Rudin, 2011: 10). He felt that radio broadcasting should be a force for good, not just a source of entertainment, but something to help the audience grow intellectually, personally, and spiritually. To accomplish this, he moved many of the fluffier programs around on the schedule so that the audience would not only focus on the "lollipops" or "light programming". As a result of his influence, the BBC broadcast became central to family life. The gathering place for the family was no longer near the fireplace but in front of the wireless, and conversation involved what was happening in the programming.

Contrary to theorists at that time who felt that the audience was passive reception to broadcast and, ultimately, under the control of the broadcasters (McQuail 2010), Reith rejected the notion that the medium was a conduit of docile receptivity, "Reith's BBC also thought that the listening should not be passive – the public was expected to engage with the output" (Rudin, 2011: 13). This idea of interaction and engagement is very much in line with the development of social media and 21st-century broadcasting.

Radio during World War II showed the medium's real power: its immediacy. For example, journalist Richard Dimbleby was aboard a bomber over Germany and was with the Allied troops as they liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He was at the forefront of what was happening and an eyewitness to the process. He did a report on the camp's liberation that was considered so shocking and extraordinary that the BBC declined to broadcast it, saying they first needed confirmation. "Dimbleby threatened to resign unless his report was broadcast; never had the claim that 'journalism is the first draft of history' been made more forcibly" (Rudin 2011: 13). The impact of that broadcast was incalculable.

Also during WW II, the radio was leveraged to spread propaganda, hate, and disinformation as governments began to recognise the medium's power in influencing behaviour and action. The UK Government, at this point, began to focus keenly on radio and develop policies for having more control over this powerful medium.

After the war, technical advances in creating a visual broadcast medium that the war had stalled continued, television was developed further, and the average person, who could afford it, purchased one. Because of this adoption of new technology, during the 50s and

60s, a social phenomenon emerged where people discussed what they viewed at the office and around neighbourhood fences. As radio replaced the fire, television replaced radio as the focus of families and the community; "Now the tragedies of mankind were laid bare on the evening news. Consciences were stirred, protests organised, and, sometimes, political and military leaders were shamed into relieving suffering and gathered around the peace table" (Rudin 2011: 22).

Arguably, the shift in the conception of community began soon after in the 1960s with a more interconnected society due to the broadcast of the Vietnam war, rather than later with the rise of the Internet. This concern resulting in conversations across classes marked the nascent beginning of a "'globalisation' of social life, in which mass communication played some part" (McQuail 2010: 17). Society became less framed by the physical neighbourhoods, and interaction was no longer confined only to one's place in society (van Dijk 1999). Broadcasting footage of the war showed the real deaths and the actual price paid by the young men who fought in it. As a result, most of the United States public no longer wanted American soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. War footage led to the spread of protests across the country, mobilising the anti-war movement and transcending many previous social barriers, ultimately resulting in US troops' withdrawal from Vietnam. This is known as the collective reaction effect among crowds, where people gather physically and via mass media. This effect is manifested in widespread panic in response to alarming information, "The hypothesised effect of the media also exemplified it in stimulating civil disorder in some US cities in the late 1960s" (McQuail 2010: 487).

Enabled by the medium of broadcast, the power of connection also had a new purpose as a weapon of public relations and terror, such as in the case of the abduction and murder

of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. This action was planned and carried out for political objectives; the use of the mass media, in this case, was to draw attention to their cause to produce alarm. Terrorists realised the power of an audience and the potential for a collective reaction effect. In their article from 1982, Schmid and de Graaf maintained that violence is both a method of entry to media outlets and a message in itself (McQuail 2010: 486). Television news producers were caught between applying news values to these terrorist attacks and avoiding "being an instrument of harm and a hindrance to counter-terrorism" (ibid).

All of this was accomplished with congruent viewing, which at its peak had over 32.3 million viewers tuned into the 1966 World Cup in the UK, and over 50.5 million viewers in the USA watched M *A*S*H (the final episode). However, not long after the airing of M*A*S*H, the peak audience and the power it gave the television began to wane due to the development of the video recorder and its availability in the late 70s and early 80s. "It is a sobering and even profound thought … that in the thousands of years of human history, perhaps only two generations will have the cultural and psychological experience of listening and /or viewing the same material at the same time as half of the rest of their fellow citizens in that country: ranging from the royal family to the humblest of subjects" (Rudin 2011: 205). When it came to broadcast, particularly television, conjecture about its likely impacts by McLuhan (1962) and more reasoned analysis by Meyrowitz (2006) confirmed the basic assumption that this was an era significantly impacted by the shape of the 'dominant' medium of communication.

Christian Broadcasting in the 20th century

While broadcast was developing, Christian preachers and evangelists liked the idea of expanding their reach and began to establish inroads into the medium. Christian

broadcasting started with radio, seeking a "reawakening of fundamentalism" as a response to the Scopes Monkey Trial that affected the image and approval of Christianity (Wagner 2016), sometimes reducing it to ridicule. During this early development period, American evangelists noted the power and facility of the radio and began their own broadcasts; beginning in 1943, Charles Fuller's Old Fashioned Revival Hour had 20 million people tuning in across several stations. This was a significant milestone in the development of Christian broadcasting in the United States.

After the war, as television developed, these radio preachers began transitioning to the visual medium. The first TV worship broadcast was on 1 January 1948 – Walter Maier's Lutheran Hour simulcast on radio and KSD TV in St Louis. More people gathered in front of the TV, but the cost of production was prohibitive – and "only 2.3 per cent of US households owned a television set in 1949". However, the appeal of the visual broadcast was so great that more evangelists continued to buy airtime, despite the cost (Wagner 2016: 55).

This proved insightful as those who identified as American Christians began to watch the religious programmes. The study by Ableman (1987) on religious TV viewers in the 1980s showed that those who watched TV viewed religious programmes at least half the time. As part of this study, he posited that the self-identified Christians believed the watching of religious TV was to prevent a form of contamination from "worldly" television (ibid). There were six motivational factors for those viewers of religious television: for information, entertainment (similar to secular TV), faith, habit, escape, and a newly discovered dimension of religious TV “reactions", reacting to secular broadcasting and wishing something different. Nevertheless, the largest group of users were "ritual viewers" who "gratified their needs by watching televised worship services" and "felt the most affinity for

the medium and were the most likely to substitute TV viewing for church attendance" (Wagner 2016: 61).

The importance of broadcast radio and television and their influence on society set the stage for further developments in broadcasting which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3.

Broadcast changes and the Internet

Broadcast changed in the 20th century with the ability for the consumer to record output of the television stations and movies and the ability then to create and share their own media texts. It changed even further in the 21s-century due to the rise of digital methods and the internet and its effects on society. One must look at the other fields that have also changed by this new means of publication and connection, including the involvement and use of social media and cultural capital, setting the stage for Digital Saints and their livestreams.

Recording

The availability of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) for public use changed viewing by allowing for time slips and watching programmes later that congruent viewing did not enable. The VCR was the winner of the battle of the formats that included Sony's Betamax, developed in 1975, JV's VHS in 1976, and Philips V2000 in 1978. The VHS, now known as the VCR, won the "format war" in the 1980s even though Betamax was better quality, but VHS had better penetration, and was a less expensive machine (Castonguay 2006). Due to this, one no longer had to join in with the masses and view in real-time; programmes could be saved for viewing later, and one could postulate that this was the beginning of on-demand content (Rudin, 2011: 25, Zhu & Wang 2021). However, buying video content was not as simple as buying a record; radio helped fund the music industry as those who listened to the radio often bought records, cassettes and later CDs. Buying videos was a more difficult proposition as production companies kept the prices high; videos were costly to purchase, and most movies were not for sale to anyone other than the newly formed video rental stores to control consumption and the "cheapening" of the movie marketplace (Zhu & Wang 2021).

Consequently, a market for pirate videos grew with people buying two VCR units to record and share the rented movies, feeding the consumer's appetite for on-demand viewing. However, the intake of broadcast media continued to change, and audiences still accessed the output but no longer at once.

Mash ups begin

At this point, "vidding" began, the origin of what was to become remix culture. Vidding involved making music videos using footage captured by the new video recorders from TV shows and movies. According to Francesca Coppa (2008), this is a particularly female perspective on the world, which Ben Murray (2014) states is an essential engagement with the gender politics of pop culture, particularly as a reflection on the historical dominance of the male viewpoint in dramatic narrative. This creative use of the recorded video later helped to set in place the participation culture that is very much part of the internet today, in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in creating and circulating new content (Jenkins 2008: 331).

It is about the image – particularly the moving image. "Images are both fundamental and disposable in our understanding of the world behind the screen" (Laughey 2010: 105). But also about creativity using varying forms of the image, creating new forms of media texts by using already existing forms of media. In a way, this is accepting pop culture as relevant media culture and denoting postmodern media development.

Fredric Jameson (1991) stated that postmodern media culture differs from modernism in its use and revelling in 'intertextuality'. What he means is that many postmodern media texts lift material from previous works, whether it is music, characters, scenes, production

and style. Laughley explains that this is not about parody or spoof, that is not new, but using a technique of pastiche in which “intertextual references are not knowingly acknowledged or used for comic effect” (Laughley 2010: 108). Jameson spoke of the use of pastiche as the vanishing of individual style “We seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach” (Jameson 1991: 10).

Recording changed the nature of television viewing, allowing viewers to watch previously missed programmes due to the timing of the broadcast. This, in turn, also led to the ability to record interesting content that otherwise would not be accessible due to the inhospitable times they were originally broadcast. Technology has moved on, and most individuals now record and save programmes using more current methods and devices. Hard disk recordings took over from the DVD, just as the DVD took over from the video. Rentals of videos and DVDs declined after 2011 as both purchased and rented streaming took hold (Crisell 2012: 99, Zhu & Wang 2021). As in the new century, streaming services and on-demand viewing replaced video rentals, which replaced concurrent television watching for those born in the late 20th century, and the internet’s prominence and importance arose both as a repository of the entertainment noted, but also as a place to discuss the content as fans and as communities of interest (Means & Evans 2012).

The Internet rises

Research into the internet arguably began with what Dutton (2013) contends were the early theorists and founders of the discipline of Internet Studies, Levitt and Whisler (1958). While writing for the *Harvard Business Review*, they discussed information technology, and the changes computers would bring to business in the 1980s. This might have been a first look at the inevitable changes that would overtake all areas of modern

life. However, because of the widespread effect of the internet, there are differing views on the contributions of groups, individuals, and technological changes that identify the importance of the field. There is no single individual, place, or group that can take ownership of the internet's history; it is much more nuanced as "The internet emerged through that interaction of multiple advances across different sectors, made by a variety of individuals, groups, and organisations with different objectives" (Dutton 2013: 11).
I argue that the term, Omni-media (Lievrow & Livingston 2006), clarifies and encapsulates how this space has overtaken other mass media platforms (television, radio, newspapers) as the principal content repository in developed countries.

Over the years research has been carried out to understand the effect of the internet, looking at both the technological and the sociological effects of networking and synchronous and asynchronous connection. Researchers often speak solely of ARPANET's development, the "infrastructure that allowed the web to emerge" (Elton & Carey 2013: 27), as the baseline for the internet origins. However, what is often overlooked is the preparation of the audience/community for the social aspects of the web by the earlier developments. These included computer conferencing, online databases, bulletin boards and what Elton and Carey particularly note, Videotex - started in the early 1970s, accessed via the telephone network. "Collectively, these online applications contributed in a major way to the understanding of user interfaces, advertising, content, shopping, online games, graphics, communications, and the needs and wants of ordinary people – key elements in the array of web services that emerged in the late1990s and the late 2000s (Elton & Carey 2013: 28). This familiarity with these aspects of connection was preparation and understanding of the uses and community connections of the Internet.

Along with Dutton (2013), I argue that all studies on the internet must be examined as interdisciplinary, as the internet itself is now ubiquitous in most Western cultures and, in this context, normative in use and participation encompassing many media. There are many threads of the research, including the idea of freedom of expression and the notion of internet governance, along with politics and surveillance and sales of personal data, to the more community-focused social part of the internet, with interest groups and religious communities forming different areas of foci.

As the space of the internet itself is filled with political and sociological spaces, entertainment, news and social networking, science development, faith resources and misogyny, fear and hatred; studies cannot look at one discipline standing alone; it is necessary to investigate both the technological advances and sociological effects. Internet studies researchers are an interdisciplinary consortium of academics investigating the impact of the internet on society; media scholars, computer scientists and sociologists work alongside linguists, political scientists, and even philosophers. What unites them is their shared interest in investigating how the global network of computers touches almost every aspect of society (Campbell, 2004).

Although the Internet was considered a “dazzling light shining above everyday concerns” (Hogan & Wellman 2012: 43) in the 1990s, the space has become a routine, almost pedestrian part of living. “In reality, for almost all users, the immanent internet is networked, part of their everyday lives. [No one thinks] ‘I’m using the internet’ [any more than one] thinks ‘I’m using the telephone lines’. It is a tool that is there, often used unconsciously” (Hogan & Wellman 2012: 45). Due to the euphoria of the initial internet exploration, many individuals have lost their ability to see things from a broader perspective and have instead become presentist and provincial. Due to their presentism,

they “forgot that long-distance relationships had flourished for years, using automobiles, telephones, aeroplanes, and even postal letters” (ibid). I posit that social media is a further exploration of the telephone, the postal mail and even email. and the logical extension of those previous methods of connection.

The internet enabled the social media connection making it possible for Digital Saints to link with us and each other. However, most, if not all, participants did not think of the connection as being via the internet as connection was made via their mobile phone.

Social media

At the turn of the century social media became more prevalent as the internet became a fixture and was used as a platform for the technology that supports cellular/mobile phones. Social media was used across all available technology and platforms, not solely on mobile phones but laptops, desktops and tablet devices. In this space, the 21st-century media arises with podcasting and vodcasting, internet celebrities, remix culture, and the idea of freedom of expression and change in artefacts previously produced.

This study posits that this digital space, with the fluid concept of self, has changed us and our idea of humanity and, therefore, the sacred. This space is a brave new world and can be frightening to those in power in the church. Although it seems to use many digital formats for evangelism, for some, the church looks sceptically at the idea of identity change when it is not part of religious instruction. The new monastic community, Digital Saints, is located at the intersection of 21st-century broadcasting, the church, and new monasticism.

With Holmes (2005), I agree that Broadcast and Network need to be looked at as a pairing which works best to examine the outgrowth of social media and its streaming. Although this method of connection and broadcast can be viewed as a positive response to the emergent technology and use, Castells (2021), in his recent talk at the University of Catalan *The Network Society in the Age of Pandemics*, that the internet can not only network us but can create widespread marginality. Along with the beneficial qualities of instant communication and other ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies), there is a growth of a "global network of criminal society".

There is also the concern that this Network Society is formed primarily for capitalism, that capitalism has penetrated the logic of the medium - as the more individuals connect via the internet, the more data we provide for free and enable big data, such as Google, to sell our information and advertise to us directly. However, despite this concern, connectivity accessibility is often very beneficial. For example, Barry Schnitt, a director of Facebook, states that social media sites are changing relationships for the better. “By making the world more open and connected, we’re expanding understanding between people and making the world a more empathetic place (van Dijk 2013: 45); although Schnitt was promoting the company, he is not wrong about the social media platform making the world more open and connected, though not necessarily empathetic.

No one anticipated the extent to which computer-mediated community would grow in the 21st century on the many social media platforms or that we would be sharing content to show that we accept, empathise with, or acknowledge our belonging to that particular social media tribe. In the next section, we will address this and the notion of cultural capital.

Cultural Capital and participatory culture

We have always been sharing content since early media – such as scrolls or codices – to the 20th-century media, making mixtapes or recording movies that we often had rented to share with our friends. We were doing something that helped us connect and express a part of ourselves by sharing a slice of media and culture that we felt was valuable. It was a gift that subsequently enhanced your group/fellowship/friendship, which Bourdieu (2011) called 'cultural capital'.

Cultural capital continues to be crucial in the Digital Age – with a new asset added to the usual list of institutionalised, embodied, and objectified assets – spreadable. About broadcast, and in particular, 21st-century broadcasting, institutionalised assets refer to broadcast knowledge added to education or specialised knowledge; embodied assets pertain to a personality suited to broadcast or livestream, with knowledge used in speech and skills; and objectified assets concern clothes or belongings, and the opportunity to discuss, share, or show how to use them. This is particularly relevant in a community of practice, and the social capital of the community members is pertinent to their identity within the community and what they contribute, i.e., their value. Bourdieu based this theory of social capital on some views of Karl Marx (2006). "Like Marx, Bourdieu argued that capital formed the foundation of social life and dictated one's position within the social order. For Bourdieu and Marx both, the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. However, Bourdieu extended Marx's idea of capital beyond the economic and into the more symbolic realm of culture" (Longhofer & Winchester 2018: 22). He defines cultural capital as symbolic elements that we acquire by being part of a particular social class. When we are 'like' one another in our mannerisms, speech, educational qualification, or even our taste in music, we understand our place in our group and our identity in the community. Cultural capital has nothing to do with money

but having it can aid or hinder one's ability to attain wealth. Cultural Capital is not about the cost; instead, it is about the effort made in creating the media text and the creativity and thought behind the act of creation. The understanding that by copying a selection of music, a video, or a poster – as someone would create a song or story - someone is thinking about you. These pre-21st century "mashups" were the beginning of what is common now, created by using another's creation and adding a personal twist, insight, or theme to it. When you first started dating someone, you made them a mixtape of all the artists you liked. By this act, you were trying to send a message expressed in the lyrics or titles of the music you curated for your friend. It was about giving them a piece of you made by someone else, but because you liked it or it had meaning, it became part of you. We naturally want to let people know about something that resonates with us. We have several motivations for this; one is the pure joy of discovery and the need to share it; the other points to the item as proof that our standing is higher. These items could be shared to indicate tribes and to belong to/with one another as a symbol of that tribe; another is altruism, but sometimes it is the desire to share who we are and what we like for others to see what we see (Jenkins 2004: 82).

In this century, it is not enough to share these bits of ourselves; we must also be successful at promoting and marketing our 'interestingness'. We want a massive audience to like, share and spread our carefully crafted media artefacts (van Dijk 2013). We want to go viral. "We are all susceptible to the pull of viral ideas. Like mass hysteria. Or a tune that gets into your head that you keep humming all day until you spread it to someone else. Jokes. Urban legends. Crackpot religions. Marxism. No matter how smart we get, there is always this deep irrational part that makes us potential hosts for self-replicating information" (Stephenson 1993: 251).

Henry Jenkins (2018) does not believe that ‘viral’ is the right word for denoting the spread of videos and memes that catch the collective imagination. One spreads media artefacts by deliberately sharing rather than accidentally attaching something to oneself. In the early days, when the phenomenon was not understood, the term ‘viral’ was commonly used, but as each person is now making a conscious decision to share and invite comments on different social platforms to the media text, ‘spreadable’ seems a better term (Jenkins et al. 2018: 22). Our participatory culture plays a prominent role in how things are spread. When referring to something that has captured the imagination, the zeitgeist, or has social capital, the term should be, as Henry Jenkins posits, *spreadable*. If an idea, media text, or community is not spread, as Jenkins says, “it’s dead“ (Jenkins et al. 2018).

Now the audience has more of a role to play through an appropriation and mashup of a theme (ibid); thus, what began as one item becomes, like a mixtape, a creation of many parts to be shared. Sometimes, the sharing is not initially legal but a form of piracy and copyright infringement.

Jenkins et al. (2013) points to the example of Susan Boyle; her initial foray on *Britain’s Got Talent* was incredible: her voice astounded the audience, and the news of it, and her, managed to make it to the United States. Many people wanted to hear her sing, but they had no access to the show. There was a demand for that content. Piracy, in this case, was motivated by market failures. Although the production company, Freemantle, was contacted, they could not quickly respond to the demand. Subsequently, a pirated clip of Susan Boyle singing was shared in the United States via a Chinese website, which in no time went ‘viral’. It was shared extensively because of her story itself and the different parts of her story that were so fascinating. She hit all the right buttons for the stateside

audience. Many blogs began to feature stories about Susan Boyle – a mommy blog, a prayer blog, and a fashion blog- assessing her makeover. Everyone was talking about Susan Boyle because she had social currency, and it mattered – not so much as Susan Boyle, the person, but as a vehicle to discuss things of interest.

Over 200 million people shared the clip of her singing. Unfortunately for Freemantle, they could not figure out how to make money out of her. They could not move fast enough (Brogan & Smith 2010). When Susan Boyle's album was released in the United States, it was number one on the Billboard 200 album chart for many weeks; it continued to hold on to the top spot into 2010. Piracy can happen because the platform to pay for the selected media artefact is sometimes unavailable. A brand usually owns distribution; circulation is something that is more grassroots and has an impact on the political debate. The cover of *The Pirate's Dilemma* has a quote from Chris Anderson of *Wired*, the magazine, "Piracy is a dirty word, but the same social forces behind it have created an online culture of sharing, collaboration, and wild creativity… today's pirate is tomorrow's pioneer" (Mason 2009). Social media platforms help establish connections with communities and audiences that can influence our online media consumption (Brogan & Smith 2010), which points us to items, experiences, or values with cultural capital.

Bethany Mota (2009) is an example of someone with digital cultural capital; as a teen, she started a YouTube channel, doing 'haul videos', so named because of her clothing shopping 'haul', showing her viewers what she bought. Her audience grew to over 10 million viewers and advertisers wanted to be part of her channel. By the time she was 19 she had a clothing line and was a millionaire. This demonstrates how cultural capital in the digital space can develop into a digital community or fan space, in this case, a digital

fashion-based community, and can sometimes be monetised. Her channel is a perfect example of 21st-century broadcasting.

These communities have a commonality: the need for connection with people similar to themselves. Whether online or offline, faith-based or secular, every community comes together because those part of it have an affinity with each other and gain meaning from their connection. This need to connect represents an integral notion for this study.

The ability to record changed media and our access to it: the internet arising, social media and livestreaming and the notion of cultural capital. These all lay the foundation for studying 21st-century interactive social media broadcasting. First, however, these theories' key concepts need to be integrated into the 20th and 21st centuries and woven into the changing face of the Christian church, Emergence Christianity.

Chapter 4.

Emerging Christianity and the changing face of the Christian Church

This chapter discusses Contextual Theology and Emergence Christianity in our postmodern society and its effect on our mediated culture. We also investigate New Monasticism as mission and the Pioneering Fresh Expressions of church as a possible remedy to the problem of lack of engagement with the Church using tools from our mediated society.

Emergence Christianity

Professor Randal Reed (2014) defines the Emerging Church, or Emergence Christianity, as a post-Evangelical response to Christianity's political placement, particularly in the United States. He noted the movement came out of Evangelicalism in crisis, with younger people leaving because of "…the general popular impression of being intolerant, judgemental, and right-wing" (Reed 2014: 67). Reed went on to clarify that the movement was not one group of theological dissidents; there were several views of how Christianity needed adjustment in the modern age. He notes that the differences in approaches can be delineated in the "battle over the identity of Emerging Church participants" …in that "each thinker postulates a different conception of Christian identity for his readers. As different as the political standpoint of each of these thinkers is, each of their perspectives follows from their construction of identity" (Reed 2014: 69).

Bevans & Tahaafe-Williams (2011: 3), speaking of contextual theology, recognised the importance of taking into account two realities: one of which is the experience of the past, reported by holy scripture and church tradition, and "the second is the experience of the present or a particular context, which consists of one or more of at least four elements: personal or communal experience, 'secular' or 'religious' culture, social location, and

social change." This examined the role of society and culture and their effect on how this changes religion.

Out of the Emergence Christianity Movement arose theologians examining the changes, differences, and what Snyder (2016: 120) spoke of as "the most interesting reality of the movement is its otherness; its insistence on a way of being church beyond convention. Or, ecclesiologically put, the church is always more than you think it is". These theologians became the movement's voice, becoming both Emergence Christianity researchers and theologians as well as popular writers, as what they discovered resonated with the very people leaving the traditional church.

Packard (2016: xii) speaks of them becoming household names. "Once obscure people associated with the Emerging Church Movement (ESM) are now famous. For example, Rob Bell, Rachel Held-Evans, Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, David Crowder, and Nadia Bolz-Weber regularly find themselves at the top of bestseller lists (or hosting their own show on Oprah's network). The late Phillis Tickle emerged as one of the most important theologians of her generation because of her work about the Emerging Church".

500 Year Epochs

Professor Tickle wrote extensively about a 500-year cycle that affected Christianity and defined the cultural shifts that helped to bring that about. She argued that there are "semi-millennial tsunamis of change [that] shape religion and culture in the West" (Tickle 2012: 17).

A simple timeline of the church changes leading up to the current Emergence Christianity epoch could be clarified alongside technological and societal changes and would be delineated thus:

The Time of Christ 33 AD (The Great Transformation)

Jesus's initial ministry reached the Jews and called them to repentance and renewal of their relationship with God. His ministry involved, in part, changing the previously distant words used for God and calling for people to speak to Him as a father rather than Lord. His death ended the division between God and man and removed the separation that kept the ordinary person from worshipping God directly. That this barrier was removed was made clear by tearing the curtain separating the Holy of Holies, the most sacred area in the temple, from the rest of the tabernacle. This place was where God would "…appear in the cloud over the mercy seat" (Leviticus 15:2), and if anyone were within the room divided by the curtain when this happened, they would die. The heavy curtain kept this exceptional part of the temple from the rest. The tearing of this curtain symbolised no separation between people and God after Jesus' death on the cross (Matt 27:51). A priest did not need to speak on behalf of the people; instead, everyone could speak for himself. After this, during Pentecost, God sent his Holy Spirit to inhabit each person (each person as a temple rather than the former building), symbolising his living within our humanity.

Following the Pentecost, the notion of the priesthood of all believers and the widening of the church to gentiles shortly after Jesus' death was established. The major transformation was direct access to God without necessitating priestly intercession and sacrifice.

This new faith, and new epoch, was developed out of Judaism. However, due to the political background of that time, it was broken into pieces and "ground down into such small parts that its adherents would be forced to leave their natal land, regroup, and ultimately broadcast the seeds of their faith, be it Christian or Jewish, all over the known world" (Tickle 2012: 26).

Council of Chalcedon 451 AD and the age of Gregory the Great

This upheaval was the most chaotic of all; however, it was unclear how to point toward a particular person as the leader or a single date as the pivot. Nevertheless, in 451, Emperor Marcian established the Church's Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, located in Asia Minor. "…of all the great church councils, the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) in particular stands out, in that it not only documents a pivotal moment in the history of Christian theology and imperial policy but is also documented in great detail in its proceedings, also known as the Acts" (Amirav 2015: 19).

This Council of Chalcedon was meant to determine the correct doctrine in the Church and to address the many issues were discussed in the council, with the most prominent being whether to call Mary 'Mother of God' and whether Jesus was one 'person' of two natures or two 'persons' under one skin (Threlfall-Holmes 2012). This council was divided, and the arguments were strident. Eventually, Oriental Christianity was exiled and withdrew from Western and Eastern Christianity. This withdrawal was the beginning of the three grand divisions of the faith: Western Christianity, now known as Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; Eastern Orthodoxy, also known as Greek Orthodox in Greece and Russian Orthodox in Eastern Europe; and Oriental Orthodoxy (or Oriental Orthodox Church), which is Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian or Syrian Christianity (Bevans & Schroeder 2008, Threlfall-Holmes 2012, Tickle:2012).

All writings of the Christian canon, combined at the time of Constantine, required at least some literacy and a form of societal stability. At that time, growing illiteracy in worship and lawlessness in society was highly observed.

> What politically and culturally would very swiftly spiral down into the Dark Ages was already at work, peeling the Christianity of the Early Church away from the laity and inserting into the resulting vacuum a kind of animistic, half-magical form of a bastardised Christianity that would characterise the laity and much of the minor clergy over the next few centuries (Tickle 2012: 25).

Pope Gregory I, canonised directly following his death as St Gregory I, preserved the doctrines and writings of the Church through the monasteries and convents. Christian clergy, monks and nuns were educated in these communities of intention as a place of learning and faith. The power developed by the repository of learning became the power of the abbots and abbesses, as well as priors and prioresses (Tickle 2012).

The Great Schism of 1051 AD

According to Hill (2007), the Great Schism was the break between the Eastern and Western churches, or the Orthodox and the Catholic churches, that came to a head when two men occupied two thrones in Rome and Constantinople: Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius. They divided over arguments regarding practices in the church, such as using unleavened bread and Byzantine methods. Patriarch Cerularius also wished to possess the same rank as the pope. He removed the Latin churches from Constantinople and separated them from the Roman Church to take control. He and the entire Eastern church were excommunicated by Papal Bull in 1054, following Pope Leo's death from

malaria, giving him credit for excommunicating “the entire Orthodox Church“ (Hill 2007: 205).

The Reformation 1517 AD

It began when Martin Luther, a monk, depicted his displeasure and disagreement with the church by posting 95 theses arguing his concerns on a church door in Wittenberg. ‘Certificates of indulgences’ were purchased to shorten the time spent in purgatory, a fiery place for those who needed to answer for their sins after death before moving to heaven. The Catholic Church supported this notion for several reasons, one of which was the amount of money that could be made by purchasing them and the money Pope Leo X needed to raise to build St Peter’s Basilica in Rome (Atherstone 2011). Although indulgences had constantly been abused by pedlars selling forgeries, the reality of the sales technique by the monk Johann Tetzel notably raised Luther’s concern. It is mentioned in his 27th thesis, Tetzel’s pitch was “as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs“ (Threlfall-Holmes 2012: 76). However, the Church, rather than engaging in discussion of Luther’s concerns in his theses “demanded he accept the authority of the Church” (ibid). Luther was excommunicated in 1520, by which time he had become a local hero in Wittenberg and was protected by the local ruler, the Elector Friedrich“ (Threlfall-Holmes 2012: 17).

The 95 theses posted on the church door, a method of standard academic practice in the 16th century, most likely would have passed without much comment if it was not for the development of the printing press. Usually, the articles posted on the church door were debated publicly and locally. Publishers who owned the new printing presses gauged the document's importance and, most importantly, the potential for sales of the theses. These publishers printed these theses and sold their copies. This method became so popular

that it was reprinted farther and farther afield, with no worry of the copyright at that time. Tom Rassieur, the curator of the Minneapolis Institute of Art's 500th-anniversary exhibition of Luther's life and work, said, "When they saw how rapidly they were selling, they made copies and copies and copies. It went viral" (Gjelten 2016). The Reformation began due to the available technology and information access to the ordinary person. "Luther expected only to prompt a debate within Christian circles, but with that act, he sparked a revolution. The Protestant Reformation that followed his protest upended the political and ecclesiastical order across Europe" (Gjelten 2016).

All these epochs in Western Christianity depicted a time before the crunch point that led in the direction of change. Several changes were instigated by those who belonged to the church, wishing to resolve what they believed to be concerns in the trajectory of the faith. They often denoted a desire to return to a more uncomplicated focus on devotion to God. The first changes in eras following the Great Transformation were caused due to debates in doctrine among theologians and scholars. The Reformation and Emergence Christianity epochs are also this, but also about access to God and information about God that is taken from the hands of the Gatekeepers.

The Great Emergence – Present-Day Epoch

The term 'emergent' itself is derived from Lewes' 'Emergence Theory' regarding "dramatic unforeseeable changes that cannot be entirely described or defined quantitatively, changes the results of which Lewes called 'emergents'" (Tickle 2012: 32) GH Lewes was a contemporary of Charles Darwin, who argued for this "qualitative novelty" (ibid). This term can be applied to this epoch; just as the Reformation culture change began with literacy, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) literacy began this change. Speaking at Oxford, McLuhan explained that the media has changed the way we behave in this

age. “It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media” (McLuhan 1978). He predicted an interconnected global community where information itself could wage war on many levels. He believed that this interconnectivity could change us in the same manner the telephone changed society: “the complete transformation of the user (of the telephone) is never mentioned. Because it is hidden“ (ibid). The telephone changed society because the connection between people became instantaneous. It was no longer necessary to wait for a response for letters, telegrams and other forms of communication, as one could ring someone on the phone and speak as if they were face-to-face. Once most people acquired a telephone every part of society was affected (Katz 1999).

Emerging Christianity scholars acknowledged and embraced the changes in society and culture and recognised that what we often term historical Christianity is, in fact, a culture-based understanding rather than a church doctrine. Gay (2011: 50), while speaking of Emerging Church, talks about ‘unbundling’, a term used in the dispute between Microsoft and the European Union over the practice of proprietary software ‘bundled’ within Microsoft’s operating system. “The crucial theological questions being asked of inherited bundles in each case have to do with how far linkages between belief, order and practice were theologically necessary and how far they reflect a range of historical, cultural and political contingencies that leave them open to reformulation (or even ‘reformation’)” (Gay 2011: 50).

What is clear in Emerging Christianity is that there is a call to the foundations of faith, but, as mentioned by the theologians, without the cultural constructs, the padding, if you will, of what makes it understandable, or even comfortable, to ourselves. A theology that is

contextual to the people and their placement is why Pioneering as a Fresh Expression of church was developed.

Smith (2006: 17) clarifies this idea further: “While we might not name it as such, our experience of cultural shifts and changes can be traced to the advent of postmodernity and the trickle-down effect of postmodernism on our popular culture”. It is important to consider the effects of postmodernism in secular society and the church.

Postmodernism and Emerging Christianity

Adherents of postmodernism, a school of thought that emerged in the mid-1980s, argue that traditional social philosophers were motivated by the conviction that history has a trajectory and advances toward a better future. However, there are no longer any reasoned metanarratives, which are overarching explanations of the past and present. Lyotard argued that the objects and the thoughts that originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy carry with them one of the rules that supports their possibility. This rule states that there is no reality unless it is testified by a consensus between partners over a certain body of knowledge and certain commitments (Lyotard 1984: 77).

Giddens and Sutton (2021), referring to Zygmunt Bauman (1992), discusses a distinction between some ways of considering postmodernism. First, there is a need for a sociology of postmodernity, or indeed, postmodern sociology. In one approach, there is the acceptance that society has moved rapidly in a “postmodern direction” due to the rapid growth and spread of the mass media, new information technologies, the more fluid movement of people across the world and the development of multicultural societies – all of these mean that “we no longer live in a modern world but in a postmodern one”. With the understanding that sociology research illuminates this emerging postmodern world. The alternate approach proposes that the “type of sociology which successfully analysed

the modern world of capitalism, industrialisation and nation-states is no longer capable of dealing with the de-centred, pluralistic, media-saturated, globalising postmodern world. New theories and concepts will have to be devised. In short, we need a postmodern sociology for a postmodern world" (Giddens & Sutton 2021: 33).

However, not all sociologists agree that we are approaching a new, postmodern era. Jürgen Habermas (1993) is a vocal opponent who views modernity as "an imperfect enterprise." Instead of throwing modernism away, we should work to expand it by advocating for greater democracy, more freedom, and sanity. According to Habermas, postmodernists are all fundamentally defeatists (Giddens & Sutton 2021). Why is it important to understand the postmodern view? Postmodernism has directly affected the Christian Church.

Postmodernism and the Church

Corcoran (2011: 11) takes this notion when discussing the changes in Christianity. He posits a rejection of [1]realism, hesitance regarding creeds and credal beliefs, and 'epistemic humility'. He cited Robert Weber in Divine Embrace, stating: "In the postmodern world, the way of knowing has changed. We now live in a world in which people have lost interest in argument and have taken to the story, imagination, mystery, ambiguity and vision". Modernism (or the age of reason) focused on scientific enquiry, rejecting forms of superstition (and often religion); as Voltaire stated, "Superstition sees the whole world in flames, philosophy quenches them" (Parrinder 2005: 24). In addition, there was a focus in the age of reason on the scientific method and rejection of non-

[1] Realism, in this instance, is speaking of the notion that things exist outside of the mind and our observance and interaction with it.

science; in the scientific method, the notion of a specific stand-alone truth was often considered.

The idea that science was the ultimate way to arrive at the truth, leading to more tolerant people, was also presented (Grijsbers 2018). Postmodernism rejects the idea of only one truth, stating that several different perspectives in the world that are, in a sense, true. “It opposes the idea that the world is a well-ordered system” (ibid).

The effects of postmodernism on the church include a confrontation with religious foundations and questioning the idea of there being only one type of Christianity, with the notion that there is only one truth. Postmodernism resists the concept of ‘neutral history’ to stress (or even celebrate) the differences in the world, and in our case, expressions of Christianity. Rather than emphasising that there is only one correct way – or denomination, the Emerging Church recognizes that there are several ways, depending on culture, to find one’s way to God. “The identity of the believer is a key aspect in this regard, and part of this notion is that identity must not only be possessed, but also constructed to develop our place in society (Grijsbers 2018). “If the cultural icons of modernity were the factory, industry, manufacturing, and the production of goods, then the cultural markers of postmodernism are information, new technologies (e.g., cell phones and the internet, with their ubiquitous social networking capabilities), connectivity, interdependence, decentralization, and globalization” (Corcoran 2011: 11).

Metanarratives, such as Marxism, Capitalism, and even Christianity, are questioned and sometimes rejected. However, it is essential to disentangle our cultural understanding of Christianity from the basics of the faith to “float free of the grand narratives we find ourselves in and to view things from a ‘God’s-eye view’; to understand that our grasp of

reality is ‘partial, incomplete and fragmentary’ and in this way, we can understand better other views of the faith, letting go of the idea that “I’m right, you’re wrong and going to hell. End of story” (Corcoran 2011: 11). Instead, in the Emerging sense, one must look past denominational differences and focus directly on Christ and Him crucified.

Emerging Christianity has a different outlook towards faith, turning away from fixing on the notion of believing (orthodoxy) and instead focusing on doing (orthopraxy) (McLaren, 2004). It is “a turn away from faith as a kind of *Scientia* (knowledge) and a turn toward faith as a kind of *sapient* (wisdom)” (Corcoran 2011: 13). Change in the way one views God is considered by Corcoran (2011: 11) when he posits God as an event, believing that the changes wrought by connection with or attempted relationship with God through Christ are more than a thought process. “Christianity is a *subjective*, transformative *event* that upends, ruptures, and transforms human life”. The notion of God as an event helps to explain how modernity had forgotten and perhaps even suppressed traditions that were not seen as scientific and fitting. It acted as permission and incentive to go back and explore what had been lost or abandoned along the way (Gay 2011: 20). This view seemingly contradicts the idea that Luther rejected in the works as opposed to grace. Perhaps, this Post Protestantism, as the Emerging Church, is attempting to return to the elements of the faith that were discarded; the practices of embodied intentional communities that were “central to spiritual formation and toward the atomistic, disembodied and cerebral centred” (Corcoran 2011: 15). McLaren (2004) believed that the emphasis on learning (in a pedagogical sense) rather than living creates a longing in the human heart to live in God’s embrace and have life more abundantly. For many in the Free Church, with its emphasis on the freedom of the spirit and expression, that includes returning to the creeds, liturgy and confession.

Fresh Expression and Pioneering in the Anglican church are part of the Emerging Church communities that look at new and contextual ways to connect with people and attempt to walk alongside them on their path of faith (Cray et al. 2010). Bevan argues that the role of a trained theologian, or one who would assist the contextual mission of the new faith gathering, would provide a biblical and traditional background but ultimately would enable the people to develop their own theology (Bevans 2011: 58). This is the very foundation of the notion of Pioneering, developing a contextual worshipping community, relevant to those who are resident, both proximal and digital.

Fresh Expressions and Anglican Pioneering

The Fresh Expression initiative originates from a 2004 report by the General Synod of the Church of England. This report, published as *Mission Shaped Church* (Archbishop's Council 2004), addresses the changes in society and calls for an initiative that is an ecumenical breakout in response to the traditional forms of church and worship. The idea behind Fresh Expressions elucidates that each group or community is consulted regarding their spiritual needs to ensure that the expression is uniquely suited to them (Sine 2011). For example, if the community/group include families with children playing sports on Sunday, the Fresh Expression of church, in this instance, would be formed keeping that in mind. The meeting time would then reflect the times that the children would be playing the sport; if the teams met on Sunday mornings, then the Fresh Expression of church would be in the afternoon. If the community had small children, the liturgy, service and means of delivery of the service would be targeted at young families with small children, in short, to be contextual to that community to reach and serve it.

Contextual Theology is Pioneering in a nutshell. Because God is unchanging even amid ever-changing circumstances, the church must remember that it is impossible to devise a

strategy that will always be effective and that it must be open to constantly develop its theology for its specific context in tandem with its missiology. Due to the rich diversity of the Christian canon, adherence to the tradition must take a creative form. To show our devotion to a tradition, we must sometimes "abandon" it in favour of a novel interpretation (Bevans 2009: 160).

We may foster the development of manifestations of the church rooted not only in the faith but also in the environment in which they were born by placing a weight on contextual considerations. To be effective in the twenty-first century, a theology must be free from the constraints of Western traditions, topics, and methodologies, which is why contextual theology is so important (Bevans 2011).

What emerges may look quite different from what we are accustomed to if we can appreciate the culture into which we are attempting to mission. Since we are strangers in a strange land, we must abandon the cultural practices and beliefs that have helped us, for those people grow into fully mature Christians beginning to develop their own (Bevans & Schroeder 2011: 92). They go on to argue that if possible, we should offer the Gospel without any additional context or assumptions (ibid). The Pioneers must have trust that the people they are ministering to are also guided by God's spirit and will develop a unique and authentic manifestation of their religion.

However, the Bible does not provide us with this supra-cultural core, making it difficult to convey a ‘naked gospel.’ The Bible's meaning changes depending on the setting in which it is read. The hope is that this cultural manifestation of God's revelation may be parsed out to reveal the universal heart of the gospel (Cook et al. 2010: 93)

In Fresh Expressions and Pioneering, this information used to assist in the development of the contextual community is gathered overtly by asking questions when the individual members of the group first meet. Then it adjusts over time when a relationship with each member is formed (Mobsby & Berry 2014; Moynagh 2014; Myers 2007). The rationale behind Fresh Expressions is that a relationship with the community/group is formed so that adjustments can be made for the needs of that group. This is not to say that sports churches, for example, are to be formed separately from other churches. Instead, it implies working with the traditional church communities to reimagine the groups' understanding of God and religion. "The Fresh Expressions Movement has responded to the apparent decline in popularity of Christianity by encouraging the development of new forms of ministry at the grassroots level, intended to appeal to people who are not currently being reached by traditional ministries" (Smith 2015: 12).

Since this method takes time, measuring success can be difficult. Some of these communities are assessed using measures, such as milestones, to produce a specific output. In most cases, this is depicted by the number of worshippers. An argument states that the old form of measuring success is not the most relevant. Rather than the number of worshippers, the connection with the members and friendships formed are a clearer idea of success and eventual sustainability (Moynagh 2014).

Other communities are based on a more organic model using the pioneering service approach, which fits closely to the fellowship and friendships of a social community. Initially, in this organic form, the Pioneer meets the community first, and fellowship/relationships are established generally where the community already finds itself, i.e., sports clubs, allotments, preschool and after-school groups (Moynagh 2014).

Next, the community members are asked about their needs, for example, snacks for teenagers after school on the playing field. Then, the group wanting to establish a faith community begins to fulfil those needs without seeking numbers or milestones, to serve the people.

The Pioneer seeks to construct a contextual articulation of the Gospel. The new theology that develops will appear quite different to outsiders than what may be expected from Western orthodoxy. Nevertheless, these challenges should not discourage the missionary, as the insecure leaders of Judaism misread Jesus' call to reinvent as a rejection of Jewish custom and a threat to Rome's colonial rule (Bevans and Schroeder 2011: 117).

As Pioneer leaders, it was essential to protect the new worshipping community's spirituality and theology as part of the duties as curators and facilitators of Fresh Expressions. St Benny's, later Digital Saints, is one such community that formed organically around the tenets of New Monasticism and service to the community.

New Monasticism

New Monasticism is a term used by theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1939 while he described the community he began in Finkenwald (Wilson 2005). He believed that people were to overthrow 'religion'[2] and return to a purer relationship with Jesus by living according to the directives from the Sermon on the Mount. Unfortunately, the Nazis martyred Bonhoeffer at the end of WWII, a week before the allies liberated the camp where he was held (ibid). Nevertheless, his works and life, including his response to intentional communities, inspired many across the Christian theological divide between Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox churches. This New Monasticism is non-

[2] Religion here is used as a term for following the forms of spirituality without inner change.

denominational and, in some cases, even multi-faith. As part of its ethos, the New Monastic movement has an agenda of social justice and care of the community to understand God in a less 'religious' and more 'authentic' way. New monastics seek to return to the more straightforward concepts of God and serve Him (Claiborne 2005).

According to the New Monastic community Rutba House (Wilson 2005), there are twelve marks of New Monasticism:

1. Relocation to abandoned places of the Empire
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy
3. Hospitality to the stranger
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities, combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the church
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the Old Novitiate
7. Nurturing common life among members of intentional community
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us, along with the support of our local economies
11. Peace-making in the midst of violence and conflict resolution
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life (Wilson 2005: xii-xiii).

New Monasticism calls for a return to simple, devout living, often observing ancient monastic values. As stated earlier, in 1939, Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught a group of potential pastors in an underground seminary. It was hidden as the government had forbidden him to teach due to his radical idea of Jesus first, rather than nationalism or country (Wilson 2005). In the seminary and his book*, The Cost of Discipleship,* he states his premise that ancient monasticism was an excuse for the Christian church to become more secular, inferring that only a selected few would be able to live a more holy life and move to the cloister as monks or nuns (Bonhoeffer 1964). He further claimed that when the secular world specified that the church members were not living a godly life, they could point to those who had removed themselves from the world to pursue a more holy life. This supported the belief that the average person could not emulate that secluded and obedient lifestyle of separation from the world for God. He explained that Martin Luther realized this double standard, believing that grace was not about indulgences but rather about radical obedience to God, regardless of a person's location. This implied that Luther left his life as a monk to return to living among the people "…not because the world in itself was good and holy, but because even the cloister was only a part of the world" (Bonhoeffer 1964: 40).

Bonhoeffer believed that Luther, after leaving the ancient method of monastic life, could live the words of Jesus due to God's costly grace. "By laying hold of forgiveness, he made the final, radical renunciation of a self-willed life, and this breach was such that it led inevitably to a serious following of Christ" (Bonhoeffer, 1964: 42). He suggested that this was another such time for the church to relook at the commitment to holiness, as he wrote to his brother Karl-Frederick: "The restoration of the church will surely come only from a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old, but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount

in the discipleship of Christ. I think it is time to gather people to do this" (Pangritz, 1935: 53). This first reference to the idea of New Monasticism has at its base the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 and 7).

Although each New Monastic group uses some form of rule or marker, such as the twelve marks of New Monasticism from Rutba House, each of them shows a preference toward a need to advocate for those who need social justice in every society. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a founder member of that intentional community, states that any claim to be a New Monastic must also have this as part of their life and community agenda. He clarifies that this is just one of the twelve marks of New Monasticism; additional to this is the clear spiritual direction from the Sermon on the Mount (Wilson, 2005).

There are several forms of New Monastic faith communities in the United Kingdom. Along with the communities in abandoned places and missions in estates, there are communities in areas of high materialism and spiritual impoverishment, such as Moot in London (Adams & Mobsby 2009). There is mayBe, a dispersed community in Oxford, and the community of Saints John and Mary, located on the edges of St. Bernard Monastery. That small group hosts New Monastic conferences and teaches about the New Monastic way under the Monos Foundation's auspices. New Monastic communities can be formed for another purpose: the Neighbours' Community started in Northampton in a series of terraced houses to support those leaving mental institutions, some of whom were resident, and was active for over 20 years (Sawtell 2015). Communities also formed in places of pilgrimage, as well as new monasteries, such as the Northumbria community. Communities are also formed where needed most, such as in conflict zones. Finally, youth communities also exist, such as 24/7 Prayer communities. They have a 'Punk Monk' in their 'Boiler Rooms' – prayer spaces where these committed individuals

work, usually voluntary, to assist the members of the community who are not used to praying (Greig & Roberts 2004).

The Rutba House in North Carolina and the Simple Way in Philadelphia are such communities in the United States. In Europe, Jean Vanier began a New Monastic community named L'Arche in Switzerland to support those with learning disabilities. The Community of the New Monastic Way also exists, a dispersed community in the United States who gather a few times a year. A few New Monastic communities are also inter-faith; however, they all teach some form of contemplation, living 'the hours' in a modern world. This movement calls for a reformation of the contemporary way of living, not a return to pre-digital existence, but as the Christian Church has done throughout its existence, a return to a deeper connection to God.

New Monasticism has continued to develop across Western Christianity in many forms. This study will be looking at two places of development of New Monasticism in the 20th and 21st centuries, the United Kingdom, with its influence on and of Fresh Expressions; and the United States, led by those who sought healing on the margins of society, sometimes even led by societal misfits.

Communities of Intention

It began with a re-evaluation of faith in the Christian church and a call to renewal of the roots of the faith, particularly to the actual words of Jesus. This re-evaluation of the Christian faith and renewal to the origins of the faith can also indicate a rejection of the Magisterium or teaching authority of the church, instead fixating on the words of Jesus and living out life as his disciple. The longing for spiritual renewal and connection with the divine can emerge in society as a type of spiritual zeitgeist, with various people

responding. In the early centuries, many felt this call and left to become a solitary hermit to find a closer bond with God, often going to the desert to seek him.

In many cases, others followed these solitary men and women, sometimes known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and formed a community around them (Knowles 1969: 9–53). Tickle (2012: 123–144) states that a quarter of the newly emerging churches and groups in this present epoch are engaging in some form of monasticism. She posits that it is a post-denominational, post-protestant phenomenon and is geographically situated but primarily based in a virtual space.

Social reformers, such as Shane Claiborne, believe that a pivotal point of the New Monastic movement is the agenda of social justice and care for the local community. This notion seems particularly emphasized to encourage and develop those seeking God in a less 'religious' and more authentic way (Claiborne 2005: 27).

Shane Claiborne explains:

> I am convinced that most of the terribly disturbing things which are happening in our world in the name of Christ and Christianity are primarily the result not of malicious people, but of bad theology (at least I want to believe that). So, rather than distancing ourselves from religious language and biblical study, we dive into the Scriptures together, meeting bad theology with good theology, meeting distorted understandings of the warrior God by embodying our allegiance to the slaughtered lamb, meeting the health and wealth gospel by following the Homeless Rabbi (Claiborne: 2005: 31).

The idea of 'bad theology' can be exemplified by a few televangelists' push for more money, private jets, and the appearance of an acceptance of the ends that justify the means. This includes the rejection of asylum seekers and the focus on money-making, their kingdom-building, rather than God's. In this case, it would imply enriching oneself at the expense of the hungry, hurting, and broken.

Claiborne (2005) focused on New Monastics, seeking to return to the simpler concepts of God and service to him, following Jesus as a radical social reformer and anarchist against the suppressive system of governments and religions. Claiborne, in his book *Ordinary Radical*, states that to become a true New Monastic, one must not only want to follow God spiritually but live the devotion by serving those who Jesus had mentioned by name in Matthew 25, explaining that what one does to anyone, they do to him (Claiborne 2005).

> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Matt 25:34-40).

Red Letter Christians are another New Monastic community targeting the dispersed community on the web that particularly follows the 'radical' Jesus's words (Campolo &

Claiborne 2012), such as the passage above. In many Bibles, Jesus' words are printed in red to stand out from the rest of the text in black. Claiborne postulates that to be a true New Monastic, one must move to abandoned parts of the empire, as his group, The Simple Way, did in North Philadelphia and use their time to serve the community (Claiborne 2005). The story of the beginning of his community is inspiring.

> In 1995, dozens of homeless families moved into an abandoned Catholic church in North Philadelphia. The Archdiocese told them that they had 48 hours to move out, or they could be arrested. With nowhere to go, these courageous mothers and children hung a banner on the front of the building that said, "How can we worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?" The families held their own press conference and announced that they had talked with the real 'owner' of the building (the Lord Almighty!) – and God said they could stay until they found somewhere else to go (the Simple Way n.d.).

In January 1998, after the church occupation, students who had been part of that movement, including Claiborne, pooled their money in common and bought an old shoe repair shop on Potter Street to move into the community. Their inspiration was the book of Acts, where the new church shared all their possessions in common. They "…gave freely to those in need and met in each other's homes for worship. The Gospel was lived out of dinner tables and living rooms" (ibid).

Part of Claiborne's New Monastic formation involved working with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, who saw the needs of the community and assisted those who were dying impoverished and alone. Claiborne's group is part of a counter-cultural movement in the United States that declares the 'American Dream' is, in fact, sin. He names this the

‘Theology of Enough’, stating: “Essentially, this theology is anchored in the idea that God did not create too many people or not enough stuff. Poverty was not created by God but by you and me because we have not learned to love our neighbour as ourselves. Gandhi put it well: ‘There is enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed’” (Claiborne 2005: 31). He clarifies by examining the time the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and were fed daily by manna. God commanded that each person only gather as much as needed for that day; there is no need to hoard. “When they did collect extra, God sent maggots to destroy that stockpile. They were ordered to carry with them one ‘Omer’ (a measurement), which was symbolic of their daily providence of bread“ (ibid). Claiborne states that there should be no poor, but because of our human nature, “even if there is enough, human greed and systemic injustice will always create poor people in the land, so God teaches us a personal responsibility to our poor neighbour“ (Claiborne 2005: 32).

Alternatively, Moot community founder Ian Mobsby, in his talk to the Fresh Expression ministers at Southwark Cathedral in November 2015, stated features of the New Monastic communities within this group (such as Moot) were focused more on individual spiritual growth. Each community possessed a rhythm or rule of life with seasonal aspirations and spiritual practise and postures, and each community would commit to being missional, contextual, and relevant to their geographical place. The communities would not have to live in the same space (such as the Rutba Community); they could be dispersed and distributed household networks and still be considered an intentional community. The dispersed community would have participative governance, and in some way, each community would be contemplative and sacramental. The communities would be committed to non-dualism and non-tribalism, and there would be a pledge to Post Secular and Servant Discipleship. Mobsby believes that each community must be “deeply Trinitarian in belief and practice, but finally for it to be truly new monastic (and in his

thinking a Fresh Expression), it must be experimental and creative in spirit and practice" (Mobsby and Berry 2014: 38). Jurgen Habermas used the phrase "post-secularism" to describe the contemporary moment in which modernity is seen as failing and morally corrupt, requiring a new peaceful dialogue and tolerant cohabitation between faith and reason to learn from each other (Habermas, 2008).

Several communities have styled themselves as New Monastic, both Christian and secular. For Sawtell (2015), the Neighbours Community in Northampton is an excellent example of New Monasticism without undue focus on its term. Several families gathered in connected terraced houses to learn and grow as a community, supporting people with mental illness. The three terraced houses had interconnecting doors and flexible spaces in each house so they could grow and move as the community expanded (Sawtell 2015).

In Summary, the gathering of like-minded people in both proximal and digital spaces to live out the words of Jesus are New Monastics. They can gather quarterly, such as the dispersed Northumbria Community, pray together daily, like the Neighbours Community, or meet sporadically. However, prayer and action are the main components of each community. The key theme of all these communities is to act out the calling to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those in prison. In short, this implies living out the words spoken by Jesus. This is radical action by a group of believers. This is a simple thing but not necessarily easy. New Monastic communities can be led by an abbot or abbess, a leader or a priest, or a voting group. They can follow a rule, such as rules by St Benedict or St Francis, or form a practice of their own (Cray et al. 2010) However, they have in common the implied removal from a church full of form and ritual but do not use their hands in service, such as those in the 12 signs of New Monasticism that Rutba House delineated (Wilson 2005). In particular, it includes fighting for the

downtrodden, the sick, and the strangers; as is one group working for those imprisoned at the United States border seeking asylum, protesting and sometimes getting arrested for bringing the plight of those families to the attention of the public (Claiborne 2005). New Monastic communities seek to be the hands of Jesus, which can only be accomplished if they work together as a community.

In this chapter, we examined the epoch of Emerging Christianity as part of a 500-year cycle and noted the other periods leading up to it. We surveyed Fresh Expressions of church and Pioneering, often called the research and development department of the Church of England (Moynagh 2012), and part of those Fresh Expressions, Pioneering New Monasticism. In this next chapter, we will look at the rationale behind the gathering; being a community.

Chapter 5.

Community

This chapter examines the fundamental human desire to be part of a community. It also discusses the relationship of the three persons of the Holy Trinity being in a relationship as a basis for Christian community. Next, it explores the idea of a Community of Practice and its ability to further spiritual exploration. Finally, it shows how these three approaches are exhibited in the Digital Saints hybrid community.

What is Community?

The idea of tribes, families and community has always been important to humans from when they first worked together to ensure survival. Ancient campfires led to the rise of storytelling and connecting about 400,000 years ago when humans first learned how to control fire fully (Smith et al. 2017; Weissner 2014). These conversations were not merely regarding survival but a chance to use the imagination. In order to tell stories and develop deeper and more intimate social and spiritual connections, they created a space to provide pieces of oneself and the fragments of nutrients that keep humans alive. Polly Weissner (2014) speaks of her study of the social networks of the Ju/'hoan Bushmen, wherein she noted that the daytime and night-time conversations around the fire had two distinct flavours. The daytime conversations involved economic issues and complaints about other people, and once the group developed from hunter-gatherer to farming, it morphed into discussions about land rights. However, during the "firelight conversations" in the evening, the subjects changed to telling stories, including tales from other communities (Weissner 2014).

It appears that humans have always gathered for stories, information, and humour to share their ideas and interests in places of safety after the day has ended (Smith et al.

2017). These communities could be in the form of family groups, tribes, workers and peoples. The size and shape of the group did not matter as much as the interest and communal focus and the sharing of their indigenous culture. When the fire was conveniently taken indoors to cook and warm the dwelling, groups of these dwellings became neighbourhoods that defined communities. Being human is about telling personal stories and sharing others' stories. Only recently have we not gathered into proximal communities of extended families, working/farming groups or neighbourhoods (Smith et al., 2017). These gatherings all depict a form of society or culture.

There are several ways of defining 'culture'. One includes the singular artistic and intellectual endeavours, sometimes called "high culture" (Arnold 1867; McQuail 2010), while another is presented with respect to anthropology, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1870: 1). Finally, there is a third notion of culture, which states that it is a mix of how society functions, our places, and the things we create that help us exist (Schein 1990).

Deuze (2006) states that we include the word 'culture' erroneously in several modern descriptions, as our culture is in the midst of change from embodied artefacts to digital. Manovich (2001: 52) clarifies that "today, we are in the middle of a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication." Calcutt, cited in Deuze (2006), explains that many of the terms used to describe this were often technological terms.

> The main problem with most of this work has been the often-implicit conflation of "culture"—as in the shared norms, values, practices, and expectations of a group of people—with communication technologies. Although I do not want to argue that

> technology has no consequences for either humans or machines, I find this argument problematic because it, at times, mistakes the new spaces opened up by communications technology for new forms of culture (Calcutt 1998; Deuze 2006: 64).

Despite the different takes and critiques regarding CMCs, Calcutt believed that there is one question we are left with: In what ways do the norms and ideals of this "digital culture" manifest themselves (ibid)?" One such type of community that functions online and offline as a part of our human experience and nature is known as a Community of Practice, as stated by Wenger (1998).

Communities of Practice

"Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger 2011: 1), and is another way of finding meaning in the world. Community of Practice (CoP) is a social theory that explains how people work together in communities to accomplish and support each other. Although this was developed as a learning theory, it is more about the notion of learning as a human element that we are growing in many ways, i.e., spiritually, intellectually, and artistically, throughout our lives. The notion is that in a community, this is negotiated with each member sharing part of the enterprise of the community and part of their competence, and in this system, becoming more of who they are, developing meaning and identity. "So, what if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world? What if we assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating or sleeping, that it is both life-sustaining and inevitable and that – given a chance – we are quite good at it?" (Wenger 1998: 3). Developing together in this way is a social phenomenon.

The theory starts with the premise that "…we are social beings. Far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning" (Wenger 1998: 4). This is in line with the basis of CoPs, a view of apprenticeship, recognising the learning that was more inclined towards relationship than pedagogy. A master would have many apprentices, and generally, that group would develop a relationship based on their competence and experience. Broadly, it was not the master who explained how to do something; rather, it was a slightly more accomplished apprentice who helped the newcomer. This both informed the newcomer and assisted the more experienced apprentice to develop in their practice (Wenger 1998). This is replicated in the idea of pioneering and discipleship, working with someone new and 'walking alongside' them as a method of development (Moynagh 2012). Learning, in this context, is not the notion of school or pedagogy but the daily adjustments to our knowledge and negotiation in our world.

Not all communities are Communities of Practice. Wenger explains that three characteristics must be present for a community to be a Community of Practice. It cannot be only a club or group of friends but must have a separate identity and a "shared domain of interest" (Wenger 2011: 1). Moreover, there must be shared commitment and competence that differentiates the community members from other people. The form of competence is not necessarily valued outside of the community, as it is a skill that is not required outside of these people, such as the ability to sing or dance.

Another characteristic is the nature of the community itself: "In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" (Wenger 2011: 2). The basis of this is the relationships that grow amid their learning from each other. This does not mean that having the same job or title

makes a Community of Practice, or a website or digital space on its own is not one, unless there is an interaction and subsequent learning from each other. This interaction does not need to occur daily. An example used by Wenger is the Impressionist painters in France, who would meet in cafés and studios to discuss the form of painting they were developing together. “These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they painted alone” (ibid).

A Community of Practice is not solely a “community of interest”; for example, people interested in particular genres of books gather together to discuss and share that interest. The key is in the name: members are practitioners and develop a shared experience. They have shared resources that are developed and shared “experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems“ (Wenger 2011: 2). A Community of Practice needs an effort to collect information and experiences into shared knowledge and repertoire that can be used for their practice.

Two foundations provide meaning in a Community of Practice: participation and reification. Both elements must be of equal strength for the community to function. Participation is about joining in the practice of the community; it “connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice” (Wenger 1998: 47). The practice is how one can experience the world and what provides meaning to our engagement “to the motions of our bodies and the workings of brains” (Wenger 1998: 51). Participation is not solely about participating in an activity but about sharing experiences, effort and relationships with other participants that result in the shared practice. It is about recognising that the others participating contribute to the community. This contribution does not mean that there is equality. “It can involve all kinds of relations,

conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative" (Wenger 1998: 56). This shapes the experiences of the members and the community. This participation and practice form part of our identity: "It is a part of who they are that they always carry with them…" (Wenger 1998: 57). Membership in a Community of Practice is not something that can be turned on and off since it becomes a part of one's identity.

Reification as part of a Community of Practice is about producing objects as part of the experience, such as "tools, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form" (Wenger 1998: 59). Creating a tool to work with changes the nature of the activity; therefore, reification can further shape members' experience and the CoP. Tool and form-making, writing laws and procedures are all reifications of concepts that are used for practice. Reification can be powerful since "a politician can reify voters' inarticulate longings in one phrase that galvanises support…But the power of reification – its succinctness, its portability, its potential physical persistence, its focusing effect – is also a danger. The politician's slogan can become a substitute for a deep understanding of and commitment to what it stands for" (Wenger 1998: 61).

He explains that the nature of these two elements, participation and reification, are complementary and necessary to each other. "The reification of a constitution is only a form; it is not equivalent to a citizenry. Yet, it is empty without the participation of the citizens involved" (Wenger 1998: 62). This is the practice behind St Benny's and later Digital Saints. By exploring each participant's self-reflective response and contribution to the new monastic community, we understand their experience of a digital connection to community and spirit. This connection further builds the community. This is "…learning as social participation. Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in

certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities" (Wenger 1998: 4). This is key to the Community of Practice: meaning, practice, community and identity. Meaning is a way of having a discourse regarding our ability and its changes, both collectively and individually, and to make our life experience meaningful. Practice is "a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action" (ibid). Community, as mentioned before, is where we inhabit socially and are recognisable as competence. From this we gain identity, wherein our learning changes us and shapes us as a person.

This study posits that the need to connect and share our culture is part of human nature, which can be defined as 'the authentic parts of ourselves'. In the social learning construct of the CoP, whether this is explored spiritually, creatively, via storytelling, or shared life experiences, it is endemic to an all-encompassing society to share a piece of what is oneself. As mentioned earlier, a few reifications of the CoP are stories that are developed and shared in the community. These narratives are not only personal as they are often expressed in verbal histories and tales that feature archetypes of these narratives, including Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches, The Quest, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy and Rebirth (Booker 2005). Each archetype can be combined with others, but there is a principal thrust in the narrative shared. Booker believes that all stories carry one of these seven basing his theory on the Jungian human archetypes.

Jung's theory stated that the human psyche involved three elements that worked in harmony: the conscious mind, the unconscious and the ego. However, Jung believed that there was also a collective unconscious – wherein each human being received something

in our DNA from previous knowledge shared by all of humanity. These archetypes were all part of a universal pattern that resonated with each member of the human race. Jung hypothesised that humanity inherits these prototypes in a similar way that we would inherit instincts (Anthony 2006). The connection that is created through these narratives reaches deep into each of us through our cells. This connection, therefore, becomes more than blood. Possibly, the community then created is more than only fellowship; it is a yearning and recognition of the stories we share.

I suggest that this collective unconscious that Jung speaks of can perhaps be a foundation desire for a deeper connection to God. During this study, I noted this longing for the link to the divine. This previous knowledge that Jung says we share is the recognition of a supreme being that, whether ignored or acted upon, resonates in the types of stories that live within us. Even the designations of the stories can evoke the notion of the divine walking or fighting alongside us – in Overcoming the Monster, the Quest or Voyage and Return.

Communities are a part of humanity, and we are social creatures who desire connection. Therefore, whether in constructed environments or social gatherings, humans gather and create a culture where they belong. The Christian community is one such culture of gathering based, at its heart, on the gathering of the three persons of the Godhead: the Social Doctrine of the Trinity.

Christian Community as a representation of the Trinity

A community of faith has, at its base, a shared experience and belief. Christian community bases its development and understanding in the community of the Trinity, known as the Social Doctrine of the Trinity. In *Participating in God*, Paul Fiddes (2000)

considers the importance of understanding this basis when he discusses the pastoral ideal amid this community. He explains that it was difficult when the early church fathers developed the doctrine of the Trinity since they tried to find words and concepts to express an experience.

> They encountered God in the actions and words of a human Son, Jesus Christ; they found God revealed and active in this Son who welcomed outcasts into the Kingdom of God the Father and spoke the word of forgiveness on God's behalf. They found God in a new energy and guidance they experienced within their community, opening up relationships beyond the accepted social boundaries and opening up a hope for a future new creation; they could only speak of this in terms of the 'Holy Spirit' of God, and they associated this Spirit in some way with the ongoing presence of Jesus Christ who had been crucified (2 Cor 3:17-18; Fiddes 2000: 5-6).

Rohr (2016) clarifies the notion of this Godly community by beginning with the story in Genesis 18:1-8, where God (here as the Lord or Yahweh) appears to Abraham, but as three men. Abraham and Sarah recognise that God is amid these three people, so they reverence them by bowing and calling them "my Lord". Then, as typical during that time, they offered them hospitality "to create a space of food and drink for their guests. Here we have humanity feeding God; it will take a long time to turn that around in the human imagination. 'Surely, we ourselves are not invited to this divine table,' the hosts presume" (ibid).

It was essential for Abraham and Sarah to offer hospitality and honour the guest, welcoming them to eat, drink and rest. It was believed that all guests were a gift from God and must be cared for. In fact, eating alone was considered woeful – and only the

fatherless and orphans would eat alone (Arnold & Hess 2014). This generosity and hospitality inspired an icon by Andrei Rublev in the fifteenth century known as *The Hospitality of Abraham,* which eventually became known as *The Trinity*.
This painting was not just a form of embellishment, as icons were considered 'written' rather than painted. They were written as a way to teach theology, as each bit of the icon held and clarified a more profound truth. Rohr (2016) states: "As Icons do, this painting attempts to point beyond itself, inviting a sense of both the beyond and the communion that exists in our midst."

The three that Abraham and Sarah served belonged to the community of the Trinity of God. Each of the Trinity's natures is further clarified in the three primary colours used in this icon – each colour denoting a facet of the Holy One. Gold for the Father, blue for the incarnate Christ, and green for the Holy Spirit. The gold represented perfection and wholeness, the centre and source of all. Blue represented Christ in the flesh; the sky and sea reflecting each other, and green symbolised "divine photosynthesis", transforming light into itself.

However, the striking part of this icon was not the colours or Christ holding up two fingers together to show he is both spirit and matter; it was the form of God as a community himself, in the form of the Three. Not only were they together in enjoyment and fellowship as separate personalities, but they also enjoyed a tangible form of hospitality. Rohr (2016) says, "If we take the depiction of God in The Trinity seriously, we have to say, 'In the beginning was the Relationship.' The gaze between the Three shows the deep respect between them as they all share from a common bowl" (ibid).

The Christian community, at its best, is described using this same symbol. Instead of separate individuals, the community is of brothers and sisters in Christ, not seen purely as separate but together in a relationship as a family. The true sense of Christian community, both online and in-person, should first be seen as a relationship of brothers and sisters.

Further, in the icon, the Spirit's hand is pointing to a fourth setting at the table, inviting someone to sit at a place. "It is stunning when you think about it – there was room at this table for a fourth" (Rohr 2016). There is a small hole at the front of the table with remains of glue that historians believe once held a mirror in the original icon. The mirror reflected the person observing the icon, i.e., us, to show our place at this table. Not only are we asked to participate in this connection, but I contend that we are also expected to reflect God in our relationships via how we live out our faith here on earth.

One of the great lessons the Trinity can teach us is community, teamwork, and hospitality, which should be something we choose to emulate. It is easy to have an individualistic and consumeristic faith in a culture that encourages a solo identity. When the community comes together, it may be felt that 'yes, we may come together with other Christians for fellowship, but it is the relationship with God and us that matters'. The Trinity is also a community, each respecting, honouring and enjoying the company of each other. Moreover, the 'alone with God' scenario is very much a modern concept, which is not workable, and was discouraged by Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, God talked about having a relationship with a people as a group, a tribe or community, or even a people, not purely as individuals. Our insistence on individuality and separateness is a very modern idea. In thinking of the concept of a

Christian community, one must remember the two main commandments of Jesus: love God and love people. It is not certain that one can honestly do one without doing the other. We are called to be Christ-followers, not as individuals aiming for the pinnacle of piety, but as a community building each other up and encouraging one another in our relationship with God.

In summary, using the icon as an interpretation of the Trinity, we are supposed to be in a relationship of service and love with one another, fostering hospitality. We are not intended to worship in a closed group but rather as an open congregation. So who do you invite to your table to show your love for God? This encouraging, supporting form of community is viable in the 21st Century as a hybrid community for those who gather in the digital space.

To understand Digital Saints as a hybrid community, we must first look at the development of digital communities and the inherent risks they pose, the nature of authentic relationships, and creating/rejecting spectacle. The next chapter will cover the rise of digital religion, the call for digital connection, the rejection of that call, and how technology and information change society.

Chapter 6.

Digital Communities

In this chapter we discuss the environmental factors that allow Digital Saints to operate successfully as a hybrid social network. Online communities and belonging in the modern world are also explored. We will also discuss the role of Digital Saints in the emerging field of study known as Digital Religion, which investigates the merging, mixing, and blurring of online and offline religious spaces brought about by the efforts of religious communities and individuals to integrate their spiritual lives with digital media. (Campbell 2013). Further, the benefits of a hybrid community were discovered in this research. Hybrid "Networks amplify the scale of progression in geographical communities, allowing them to grow much larger much faster than their offline counterparts (Pearce & Artemesia 2009: 5).

Studies into how religion inhabits the internet space had developed out of Internet Studies beginning in the 1980s when religious groups naturally moved from occupying other media, such as television and radio, to online spaces. This took many forms as the religious institutions and communities made their way forward, including pilgrimages and churches, both online and as a part of an online game with avatars and places for prayer and adoration. The developing Digital Religion studies examine all the expressions of religion that inhabit the digital space.

Digital Religion as a research paradigm

To situate this study within Digital Religion, we look at Hojsgaard and Warburg's (2005) identification of four waves of digital religion research. The first wave mainly describes the "emergent phenomenon of digital religion" (Campbell & Evolvi 2019:2) in the mid-

1990s, as above, when online religious communities and chat rooms began to develop on the web. Scholars in the first wave investigated questions about who uses the internet and why, focusing on the earliest religious online groups and religious-themed online exchanges. There was, and is, fear over the digitalisation of spiritual values and practices and the ways that would affect families. “Just as “dime novels, then cinema, then radio, then television, then home video, were each seen as potentially undoing childhood, family, and – importantly – parental authority, digital media are seen to threaten the same values, in more seductive and dangerous ways” (Hoover 2012: vii). Here he speaks of the generational divide that is apparent to those who grew up with the stated media and those who did not. The first wave looks at doing what we have always done but merely moved to another platform.

The second wave of digital religion research examines the validity and effects of digital behaviours and analyses the internet in more realistic terms. Campbell and Evolvi (2019) point to Hojsgaard and Warburg’s (2005) book *Religion and Cyberspace* as situated in the second wave, steering to a third emerging wave. Scholars came together to discuss the emerging second wave at the international conference ‘Religion and Computer Mediated Communication’ at the University of Copenhagen in 2001. The resultant contributions formed the book above that addressed the second wave.

In the third wave researchers paid more analytical attention to how virtual and real-world environments interact. While the previous two waves tended to view online religious communities as existing only online, the third wave acknowledged the internet's pervasive presence in modern life and its effect on traditional religious spaces (Campbell & Evolvi 2019).

The fourth wave examines how people use media in their daily lives. It continues to concentrate its attention on the ties that connect the online and offline worlds of religious practice, and it accomplishes this while also assessing the "existential, ethical, and political aspects of digital religion" and the intersections of such factors as "gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality" (Campbell & Evolvi: 2019: 3). This wave situates itself in Web 2.0, which connects us internationally and cross-culturally with a constant presence. As part of this, the applications and the ability of regular users to respond to and develop new media expressions on their own are often cited as leading us toward more freedom of speech, equality, and democracy. In particular, these affordances threaten top-down, hierarchical authority, creating difficulties (Cheong & Ess, 2012). The authority of Digital Religious Creatives will be examined further in the discussion. This study is situated in the fourth wave, specifically in the hybridity, participatory culture and interactivity using digital affordances of social media.

It has been more apparent over the last 20 years, as the internet has expanded, that it is difficult to separate evaluation between interaction online and physical environments. The most convincing theory about the internet is that real-world and virtual places are inextricably intertwined and mutually formative (Siuda 2021). In this space connection is now constant as our technology enables us, and media is now the "connective tissue of society" (Shirky 2010:44). It keeps us informed, connected, entertained, offers us ritual and understanding, and allows us to participate in creating texts for others and our edification and enjoyment. The internet "mixes broadest and conversational patterns so thoroughly that there is no obvious gulf between them" (Shirky 2010: 54).

This is the space that people occupy, and here is where Digital Saints needed to reside. Hauerwas (2001) contends that "the Church is Mission", and to be mission, it needs to be

where people are. Very much the rationale for contextual theology and Pioneer mission, this is about going where people already are. Mission was the rationale behind the first church's placement on the internet.

Online chat groups

In chapter 4, we noted Videotex set the groundwork for understanding user interfaces and web services that arose in the 1990s. In the United States, there were three major videotex operators; CompuServe, AOL and Prodigy (Elton & Carey 2013: 35). "In combination, these videotex services placed several million people on the Web. This was a crucial step that enabled the Web to reach critical mass so quickly" (Elton & Carey 2013: 36). Users were now supplied with services that included news, banking, travel games, email, forums and, most notably, chat. This new infrastructure enabled a more accessible community.

"Both the number of users of the internet and the number of sites on the Web grew in stunning rates from 1995 when the Internet was opened to commercial use, and the videotex community of consumers and business began to merge with the internet pre-existing community comprising, for the most part, academics, students, and other from outside the corporate world" (Elton & Carey 2013: 38). Part of the offering from these groups, along with email, were chat rooms that were taken up with enthusiasm. As a result, in the 1990s, CompuServe moved from being a videotex provider to a web provider with an online community in which I was a member. There is a benefit of meeting online; it is liberating – the site becomes the common factor. It rejects authority – even when it then re-organises and structures it again (ibid).

Personal Experience with an online community

My own first experience of an online community was CompuServe's CB Simulator in 1996. At 'Basecamp', I met on that channel online through a dial-up connection while living in Belgium. The CB Simulator depicted many channels with several interests. Basecamp was for ordinary people, English speakers, the majority in England, who discussed random things in groups. Generally, it was a 'multi-age' sort of chat. Some used this channel as a dating service, and their first question was a/s? (Age, Sex) If you were not what they were looking for, off they went.

There were other channels for young people with particular interests, such as motorsport, Christianity, and those who wanted a 'family friendly' chat. Everyone who logged on could chat via text in real-time with anyone else who paid the fee for CompuServe membership and, in Belgium, the price for connecting using expensive dial-up. All used a 'handle' rather than one's real name. It was possible to message any other person directly or join a channel and speak to everyone at once. This anonymity helped with challenging conversations and led to deep connections with other group members (Campbell, 2012b).

People could use emoticons instead of what would have been facial expressions, and often would use them more frequently to allay the coldness of the space (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). This and 'handles' or nicknames were another way to transfer identities online, replicating, in some small way, how people and groups represented themselves (Campbell & Evolvi 2019: 4).

For me, this was my first foray into online contact and the first to use a form of communication that was both synchronous and asynchronous. One could catch up later and add their response if one was unavailable when the conversations originated. The

deep connection enabled by this digital space surprised many. This was a revelatory time for many in the community: I knew of relationships that began and ended, both online and offline, and people who had moved across the planet to be with someone they connected with online. It was the first time I had linked with other English speakers globally in one chat room and my first experience gathering with other members of a specific community, sometimes faith groups, online.

The First Church of Cyberspace

The first solely online Christian church was the First Church of Cyberspace, created by Charles Henderson, a Presbyterian Priest in the United States, in 1994 at GodWeb.org (Paulas 2014). There were different 'rooms' for people to chat in, as well as worship services once a day by employing a digital Bible. Second Life, a multi-player, online virtual world developed in 2003, has many Christian churches as part of the 'play', including denominational churches, such as Grace Baptist Church. Worshippers were able to join the service as an *avatar,* a graphic representation of themselves in virtual buildings (ibid).

The first priest assigned to minister to an online church in the United Kingdom pastorally was Reverend Pam Smith. She had initially joined the team of the Church of Fools, created by the Ship of Fools management, while training for ordained ministry. Following her curacy, she was assigned as a priest to i-church in June 2008. She felt that "just as missionaries had always travelled to proclaim the gospel in new lands" (Smith 2015: 3), Christians also needed a presence in the new digital land of the internet. This was especially relevant to her as a new priest, as she believed that the Anglican church was suspicious of the new digital technology and wished to resort to the old ways of pastorship. Uncomfortable with online communication, "Such communities may be

resistant to the notion that they have to go online and make disciples" (Smith 2015: 4). Despite the reluctance, churches began to see the benefit of going online and having a place on Facebook, WordPress blogs and a webpage to connect with their congregants.

In the United States, televangelists, who were used to broadcasting, used the same format to reach their members via YouTube livestream, such as Daystar and TBN. The Catholic church was exceptionally proficient, including livestreams of perpetual adoration of the Eucharist (EWTN n.d.) and intentional communities, as well as others, gathered to pray the rosary online.

These digital spaces

These internet interactions are also known as third spaces and hypermedia. The third spaces of digital religion (Echchaibi *et al.* 2013) postulates that numerous online spaces assist individuals to choose what religion means to them, hence affecting religious cultures, and so extends the mediation of meaning theory. Mediation of meaning (Hoover 2012) posits that the media have a role in helping individuals understand and adopt religious views. People utilise their personal experiences and the information provided by the media in their active pursuit of making meaning of what is religious. The internet also plays a significant part in the negotiation and expression of opinions (Campbell 2016, Siuda 2021), and often is a place to demonstrate care, both in an online manner and assisting this care to take place offline. The Digital Saints community occupies one of these hybrid third spaces.

New monastic communities have an ethos of support and care for participants and, in some cases, society, even in the digital space. They have the same philosophy as the ancient intentional communities built as a place for trust and freedom to develop meaning.

“Community is the place where we ideally learn to be ourselves without fear or constraint. Community life deepens through mutual trust among all its members” (Vanier 2015). This demonstrates the concept of ‘Communities of Interest’ and whether they are ‘intentional’ in the monastic sense. This “is a form of cultural theory of social phenomena, based on the idea that humans share ways of making sense, or ascribing meaning to the world as the means for ‘doing life together’” (Lankshear & Knobel 2011). These communities of connection do not require proximity; these are groups of interest using ‘Affinity Spaces’ (Lindgren 2012), such as YouTube with Bethany Mota (2019).

These communities of interest exist online in virtual space and sometimes can develop from the virtual to a physical space and sometimes from the physical to the virtual space. For example, “It seems members of online religious communities import traditional religious rituals into online concepts, even if these practices must be modified in some form in order for them to be ‘online’” (Campbell, 2013). These are “designed spaces that have been built to resource people who show a particular interest or endeavour (an affinity). They are social spaces where members of an affinity can ‘affiliate’ to share and gain knowledge, interact, locate resources, and so on” (Lankshear & Knobel 2011).

The call for Digital connection

However, the Christian church has varied reactions to the idea of a digital presence and identity. A Church of England report from the Archbishops’ Council in 2015 called *Resourcing Digital Evangelism, Discipleship and Training* (The Archbishop’s Council 2015) outlined the need for modern dioceses to understand and utilise the skills and connections brought about by a digital presence. This paper’s call was for the dioceses to have a presence in the digital space based on the idea that all people are now connected via mobile phone technology. The Archbishops’ Council actively encouraged each

diocese to promote connection with the digital natives. This suspicion of technology has long been a response from some in the Christian Church and society's hierarchy. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* Neil Postman posits that our decline as a culture was due to the decline of the 'Age of Typography' and the rise of the 'Age of Television' (Postman 2005). "This change-over has dramatically and irreversibly shifted the content and meaning of public discourse since two media so vastly different cannot accommodate the same ideas" (Postman 2005:8). Similar to television and print, digital communication has changed this discourse even further. Everything is modified to fit the web, the style of writing, the way it is laid out on the webpage, and even how our brains interpret the information – we are altered as much as the message.

Resistance to the call

Even with the call to use more of the digital space, some of the bishops that oversee the dioceses in the Anglican church feel that this virtual space is not safe or neutral and, as a matter of principle, does not create a place there for the believer. This is not uncommon; theorists have struggled with this idea for quite some time. For example, Heidegger stated that technology was not neutral, as it was a lens through which we see the world, creating the world we see. "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral" (Heidegger 1977: 4). This point of view is known as technical determinism, that technology is not completely under human control: it exhibits some level of independence and pursues its own purposes regardless of what humans want.

An alternate view is technological instrumentalism, stating that technology is a neutral tool, neither good nor bad. It appears that most of the hierarchical religious institutions

seemed to agree with technological determinism, that the method was as important as the communication itself. Carr posits that technology is both determinism and instrumentalism. “Sometimes the tools do what we tell them to, other times we adapt ourselves to our tool’s requirements” (Carr 2010: 22). Brooks and Nicholas (2015: 43) state that the problem with a “binary approach to technology (is that it) considers it to be completely positive or negative.” In addition, there is the thought that all technology is an ‘upgrade’, and, therefore, an improvement; a theory that upgrading can “deliver human flourishing all by itself” (ibid). It appears that according to this binary approach, technology is either all good or all bad and can limit our use of digital tools and disenfranchise those very people that the church stated must be reached (Brooks & Nicholas 2015: 44). For example, at one recent diocesan clergy conference, the diocesan organisers asked the hotel to turn off the Wi-Fi so that the clergy could not tweet or post their thoughts and reactions to the conference online.

Although the conference centre refused to do this as other groups were staying in the same hotel, the younger clergy heard of this request. At the conference itself, with each speaker's introduction, there was a prelude that no one should use their smartphones to tweet or engage digitally during the meeting. During the talk, they were told that all should be reflective (and therefore spiritual) and that reflection could not occur if they were tweeting. The younger clergy felt disenfranchised and their contribution to the dialogue unappreciated. My partner priest in this study, Reverend Nik Stevenson, was at this conference. This Generation X priest uses digital space for reflection and connection and believes it to be essential in the 21st century. “I felt that they were trying to keep things secret and that they felt that the only valid form of reflection was sitting alone in a room rather than discussion. I was frustrated by the lack of insight into how my generation worked – and we are not the digital natives. Generation X had technology grow up around

us; we were happy to grab onto the things that worked for us and use them for everything. This idea that sharing deep thoughts would cheapen them or make them somehow suspect led me to believe that this diocese would not flourish in the future" (Stevenson 2017). Hoover and Lundy (1997) state that a crucial starting point is to approach media and religion as types that are more symbiotic relationships than oppositions. Early in developing a digital platform or social media application, there is optimistic anticipation towards the new method; however, there appears to be suspicion and expressed need for control from the hierarchy. There has always been resistance to change, as mentioned earlier. This can impact the church's relevance today.

This division was further clarified to me while attending the Premier Digital Conference in London in 2017. A few conference attendees outside the sessions discussed the lack of control and regretted the absence of gatekeepers to filter information into the public. One such participant stated that technology, particularly digital means of communication, is to be avoided, stating that the digital space can be a conduit of evil thoughts, not to mention the web's darker elements (Smith 2017). In addition, there is an undercurrent in a few denominations: "Modern technology cannot deliver life because it is not God" (Brooks & Nicholas 2015: 39).

However, other attendees at the Premier conference were there to connect to digital natives, as well as those looking to close the gates more firmly. This would suggest that although there is a directive to embrace the new connection with the information age from some in the religious hierarchy, it is not universal, highlighting that there were always those who declined to change in each epoch. This is why there are so many different denominations in Christianity.

Changes in access to information

An example of a technological shift was the Johannes Gutenberg's system of movable type (Tickle 2012). Prior to the establishment of the Gutenberg Press in 1440, copies were handwritten by monks and scribes, and each volume was precious and rare. Therefore, it is not surprising that in 1517, the Protestant Reformation began as society gained access to the Bible and could make their interpretation rather than the official explications of the church.

Another factor in the changes that led to the Reformation was that all scholarly works, such as the Bible, were in Latin, the language of scholars and priests. John Wycliffe, a theologian that helped to spur the Reformation, believed that it was essential for the Scriptures to be in one's language in order for one to learn the Christian faith for oneself. He translated the Bible into English in 1382. For this, and the subsequent influence on leaders of the English Reformation, he was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake. He died in 1384; however, the Council of Constance declared him a heretic in 1428, dug up his body and burned it at the stake after death. His ashes were then scattered in the River Swift (Cavendish, 2015). The changes to Christianity and England were unstoppable. There was access to information unfiltered by authority that helped fuel the Reformation (Atherstone, 2011).

I believe something similar is happening now with the world's access to virtually unlimited information, connection and community. I suggest that although tribes and countries once separated us, our international access, as well as the invention of translation apps, has

led to long-distance communication that is not dependent on knowledge of tongues; and interconnectivity affecting our spiritual formation as social connection.

Communities online are still human

No community is idyllic; the proximal pre-digital communities were also fraught with distrust, homophobia, greed and toxic relationships, and shared working people and families; they all had a connection. These digital communities have all of this, with the addition of anonymity and trolls.

According to Jones (1997), what people wish from this new community space is connection and a longing for what we have once known, albeit looking through rose-coloured glasses, as the “great, good place” (Oldenburg 1991) clarifying that we had that connection at one time but left it in modernity for individualism. This new Computer-Mediated Communication space would connect us “without our having to expend much effort since it would overcome space and time for us, and it would also enable us to communicate with one another” (Jones 1997:11).

J Macgregor Wise (1997) felt that the failure of society is that we do not understand each other. If we can only find better ways to have those conversations, political, moral and otherwise, we can end the suffering that is contemporary life. As a result, the internet would enhance social life. It would be a place to gather where neither distance nor time could prevent us from talking to other people, and it would build that community on the strength of conversation rather than on the foundation of shared dwelling or existence.

Looking for the digital natives

This idealistic notion of connecting via the Internet is part of the search for establishing a more authentic connection with millennials and digital natives. “In the United States, 59 per cent of young people aged eighteen to twenty-nine with a Christian background have dropped out of the church. Among those who came of age around the year 2000, a solid quarter claim no religious affiliation at all, making us significantly more disconnected from faith than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their lives and twice as disconnected as baby boomers were as young adults. It is estimated that eight million young adults will leave the church before their thirtieth birthday“ (Kinnaman & Hawkins 2011: 19). Pew research supports this point: “For example, adults younger than 40 are less likely than older adults to say religion is ‘very important’ in their lives not only in wealthy and relatively secular countries such as Canada, Japan and Switzerland but also in countries that are less affluent and more religious, such as Iran, Poland and Nigeria.“ (Pew Research Centre 2020).

The research uses affiliation to measure that group’s attachment to religion. Asking how important religion is in their life is the most direct way to measure the “intensity of that connection“ (ibid). The question that might have skewed the research was “How important is religion important to you?“, when the word itself – religion – is considered pejorative among some Christian denominations where often the response to the question “Are you religious?“ is “I am not religious – I am a believer.“ Therefore, asking the survey respondents how important religion is to them might have unconsciously biased their responses.

Based on weekly religious service attendance (one of the measurements), young adults do not attend as often in both Christian and Muslim populations. “Young adults are, on the whole, less likely than their elders to say they attend religious services every week“ (Pew Research Centre 2020). Although this trend was widespread, it was not universal. In many countries, no difference was observed, but when there was, it was “almost always in the direction of younger adults being less religious than their elders“ (ibid). There are exceptions to this: in Georgia and Ghana, “the age gap goes against the global pattern; in these places, young adults are more religious than their elders by this measure. For example, in Ghana – where young adults are also more likely to be affiliated – 91% of younger adults say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 85% of older adults“ (Pew Research Centre 2020).

This report does not address the hidden Christians mentioned in *The Invisible Church* (Aisthorpe 2016) who have no affiliation to churches and pray alone or online and are “spiritual but not religious”. This is possibly not about the number of those who attend but the style, or those not belonging to the Abrahamic religions. “In particular, rates of prayer and attendance at worship services are generally seen as reliable indicators of religious observance within Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), but they may not be as applicable for Buddhism, Hinduism and other Eastern religions” (Pew Research Centre 2020).

Age is not the only factor noted in this study. “This has led many researchers to observe that people in poorer parts of the world are, on average, more religious than those in societies with advanced economies. Other indicators of economic development – such as education, life expectancy and income equality – also tend to align with measures of religious commitment” (ibid). The late Rachel Held-Evans (one of the Emerging Church’s

preeminent speakers) opined that the younger generation – she identified as a millennial – is “looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity. Like every generation before ours and every generation after, we’re looking for Jesus – the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places he’s always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these” (Held-Evans 2015: 25). Raised in a religious evangelical household, she believed that the spin put on that particular branch of Christianity alienates so many. The judgement and the need to be perfect – or at least to appear so – put so much pressure on the believer.

Spectacle of Worship

Held-Evans (2015) felt that what many of her generation want is not so much the supposed certainty that religion gives but rather the kindness and connection it entails and the community support and care it offers. The modern performance spectacle of the charismatic evangelical church often includes fog machines and ‘production values’, bands and audio-visual enhancement of most modern mega-churches that have started disenfranchising the next generation. This style of worship was a new and exciting concept in the 70s and 80s, using rock music to help those who loved music and holding concerts to impart excitement and a concert vibe amidst worship. Beginning in the 1970s in California and spreading across the globe, the Vineyard Movement, founded by musician John Wimber, called out to those disenfranchised by the staid, hymn-singing churches of the 50s. Their focus was on the “signs and wonders“ of the charismatic rock concert style of worship and home groups and was part of the Jesus Movement, which started in the late 60s and 1970s in California. Carol Wimber, John Wimber’s widow, said that they initially rejected the idea of signs and wonders and, in fact, had thrown out those in their Quaker Meeting House congregation who expressed belief in this. However, after

a time, the emergence of some signs and wonders that they could not deny, they believed, and the Vineyard Movement was born (Wimber 2012).

The Vineyard and the other groups arising from the Jesus Movement of the 1960s were part of what Tickle calls peri-emergence, the build-up to the Great Emergence, this epoch of the Christian church. As stated previously, the search for an authentic relationship with God happens approximately every 500 years (Tickle, 2012). This and other Jesus-focused new denominations sprung up in search of the “Real Jesus“ (Kimball 2007), seeking authenticity in fellowship with God. As some of the counter-cultural expressions grew, the religious management grew, and the idea of freedom of the spirit slowly began to be governed by a “style“ that, in the end, it was as rigid as the churches they were leaving. What was at first a freedom-based expression developed into the church, becoming a place of serious and sometimes academic learning. It became a place that defined how “spiritual“ one was by their biblical knowledge, and, although inadvertently, defined who would be considered “leaders“.

In the early Jesus Movement churches, the congregation taking notes during the sermon was typical, as if revising for a later exam. Afterwards, debriefing meetings were often conducted; in the church I grew up in, it was called “Afterglow“. Nevertheless, according to Barbara Brown Taylor (2015), the form of expression has changed now – what people want is something different. “In an age of information overload…the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned them dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, and who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more about God. More God“ (Taylor cited in Held-Evans 2015: 1): an authentic and intimate connection with the Deity.

So, what is real, man?

Genuine authenticity has long been debated, and the notion of an intimate, authentic connection is even more problematic as authenticity relies on a clear view of oneself. Nietzsche used the fictional figure of Zarathustra's hero (the *Ubermensch*) to explain the struggle to grasp the idea of whom one was created to be: “Human existence is uncanny and still without meaning. I will teach men the meaning of their existence – the overman. . Like the sun, Zarathustra too wants to go under; now he sits and waits, surrounded by broken old tablets and new tablets half-covered with writing. Behold, here is a new tablet. . . Man is something that must be overcome. . . God died: now we want the overman to live“ (cited in Golomb 1995: 2).

However, genuine authenticity goes further than that; it is neither honest nor sincere; it just is. “Authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate“ (Sartre cited in Golomb, 1995: 12). That notion of authenticity can be applied to spirit. Instead of focusing on the authentic self – or human – the focus is on the authenticity of the understanding of God. This new understanding is the acceptance of the lack of understanding that the concept of the authenticity of God is that we, as human beings, do not and cannot understand Him; we can only accept and worship.

Peck argues that, contrary to authenticity, a “best-foot-forward“ stance could create, at best, a pseudo-community that:

> …attempts to purchase community by pretence. It is not an evil conscious pretence of deliberate black lies. Rather, it is an unconscious, gentle process

> whereby people who want to be loving, attempt to be so by telling little white lies, by withholding some of the truth about themselves and their feelings in order to avoid conflict. But it is still a pretence. It is an inviting but illegitimate shortcut to nowhere. (Peck 1998)

There are drawbacks to online “belonging“. It is easy to misrepresent oneself, and it may not be possible to have an authentic conversation. Turkle (2011) feels it is only via face-to-face communication that we can fully listen to one another and provide our full support without sugarcoating the problematic parts or simply showing our best selves. Nevertheless, even face to face, we still curate what we give another. Our very human tendency is to project our very best side. Doing this restricts our growth, both within the online community and in our local community.

Let me give you an example of this: the case of Anita Wing Lee and her Instagram posts and Periscope broadcast focusing on faith and meditation. She started several Periscope groups and led meditation sessions via Periscope, which were attended by as many as 5–600 people at a time; I, too, was part of that community. Although helpful to her group, it appeared unhelpful to herself – the fragmented connection was detrimental to her well-being – and at the end of her two-year journey, she stopped her daily Periscope broadcasts and observed a “Periscope fast“ for three months.

After her “digital fast“, she returned with a different perspective on being a digital citizen. She is reintegrating her Periscope and Instagram videos with her writings on the idea of a religious community. Initially, this was based on her experience of Eastern religions, the book *A Course in Miracles* (Thetford & Schueman 2006), and her extensive meditation practice. As the years went on, she refined her practice and developed many links in the

digital space. On her return on 17 November 2018, she shaped her meditation practice by the charismatic Christian tradition called “soaking“. She led this meditation on the first of her 21-day programme signifying her return to a smaller but receptive audience – with the added attention of the usual trolls. Her idea of community, completely virtual with occasional in-person meetups, seems to be the virtual millennial community’s standard. The groups of “friends“ that often met during her previous daily Periscope and Instagram broadcasts have not gone away but lie dormant in expectance of her return (Lee, 2018).

In summary, the connections gained via early Web 1.0 sites such as CompuServe and later through social networking sites such as Facebook and Periscope were eye-opening. Initially, there was freedom in connecting via CompuServe, offering safety from sometimes dangerously embodied conversations. As a woman, safety is a concern in a crowd. As a fast typist, I was able to be “the funny one in the room“ as I got my message out more quickly. As a Christian, I met many other people of faith, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, and pagans, and engaged in deep spiritual exchanges because there was freedom as we could not see each other’s faces.

Chapter 7.

The development and evolution of the community of study

The New Monastic Community Digital Saints began as St Benny's in Corby, named after the monastic Saint Benedict. In 2011, Reverend Nik was hired as a Lay Pioneer Minister to plant a new worshipping community, targeting the new housing estate of Oakley Vale in Corby by the Diocese of Peterborough. The new community project was overseen by a guiding team of experienced church leaders, including the rural dean. The project was also supported by some of the other local Anglican churches, along with ecumenical support from other denominations. The vision was that the new worshipping community would be contextually appropriate for this new area of recently built homes, considering the lifestyle and existing time commitments of a community primarily made up of young families or a Pioneering Fresh Expression (Moynagh 2012). The original plan was for this community to meet up physically, and there were no plans to include any online ministry.

For building a foundation for a Fresh Expression of church, the first six months were spent listening to the local community, establishing links with local organisations, and examining what already existed in the way of faith engagement on the estate. "Listening, service and incarnational mission are seen as central to the development of fresh expressions to ensure they are suitably contextual" (Dunlop 2018:11). An Elim Pentecostal church and a Methodist deacon were already working in the community, and both were very supportive of building a new worshipping community. The local community association was amid plans to build a new community centre and was interested in what was being done, offering local information and potential logistics. They supported community service and asked Reverend Nik to be part of their steering committee as a volunteer.

At this point, there were conversations with diverse community members to understand what they needed so that the fresh expression could serve them by meeting that need. As mentioned previously, in Fresh Expressions, listening is the first step in developing an expression (or religious gathering) that serves the community (Moynagh & Beck, 2020). Identifying and creating a new worshipping community was about more than gaining numbers but fulfilling an unmet need. The name for the community, St Benedict's or St Benny's, was selected at this time.

The first pivotal connection was with the Stewart and Lloyds Rugby Club, created when the principal employer in Corby was the steelworks. After joining the club and playing for a season, Reverend Nik was invited to train as a coach and to take responsibility for the under-15 teams. This role fit his skills: Reverend Nik had played rugby since he was 11, was a qualified youth worker, and had helped manage a Christian sports camp. Sports, working with young people, and coaching became part of the scheme in preparation for the 2015 Rugby World Cup, where more school children were encouraged to try rugby. Nik began discussions about rugby coaching in local secondary schools. This is in keeping with the studies in *Social Trends* that indicated sporting activities were important to young families and a popular way of spending leisure time (Office of National Statistics, 2021).

Part of the ethos of Fresh Expressions is using your skills, talents, and circumstances to connect with and serve the community. This approach can be challenging for the religious hierarchy to understand, sometimes thinking that using skills – such as rugby or art, for example – is enjoying oneself rather than serving God. There is an old notion that if there

is no suffering, there is no service. This mindset is illustrated in the writings of Pastor John Piper, speaking of Adoniram Judson, a Baptist missionary to Burma:

> More and more I am persuaded from Scripture and from the history of missions that God's design for the evangelisation of the world and the consummation of his purposes includes the suffering of his ministers and missionaries. To put it more plainly and specifically, God designs that the suffering of his ministers and missionaries is one essential means in the joyful triumphant spread of the gospel among all the peoples of the world (Cole 2006).

The missionary lost wives (two died; he left his third behind when he died) and children, was tortured, and suffered greatly to bring the Gospel to Burma. This is not to say that suffering for the Gospel is not biblical, and Jesus suffered. Throughout the Bible, many passages warn of suffering and persecution for the followers of Jesus; but not every instance of service to God involves suffering.

If as a Christian and follower of Christ you believe that God made you for a purpose, you also believe that he equipped you with particular talents, gifts and abilities (see Psalm 139:13; Psalm 139:15-16). Christians are also called to do what they are good at, and, by its nature, if you are good at something, you very often enjoy doing it.

In the first letter of Peter the following is explained:

> Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. **11** Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:10-117)

Romans 12:6-8 states:

> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Note that the Romans passage speaks of doing acts of mercy with cheerfulness. The word “cheerfulness“ in the original Greek is *hilarotes* from the root *hilaros*; joyous, cheerful and not grudging are other interpretations (Strong 2010). The point is that when serving, one can serve joyfully and, in some instances, is called to. This in no way downplays what Jesus himself said about there being suffering; he also said we would have joy and live life abundantly (John 10:10). The scepticism towards this style of “cheerful“ readiness to serve (Moynagh and Beck 2020: 66) led to further problems down the line and eventually resulted in a lack of support for the nascent community from the traditional church.

That summer St Benny’s was asked by a friend to be the first to launch “Make Lunch “as a pilot project (TLG.org, 2015). Rachel Warwick watched a documentary about young people in the UK who get enough to eat during school because they receive free lunch but face difficulty during school holidays. She asked St Benny’s to feed these children in a way that could be replicated to roll out across the country. Inspired by this, Reverend Nik coordinated with the schools to provide lunch to those children, and the schools let the parents know when and where the food would be available. St Benny’s did not have a building in Oakley Vale then, but there was an empty plot where the community centre was to be built. St Benny’s got permission to do it there and erected a gazebo for shelter to feed the children during school holidays (Miles 2015). At first, there were cooked meals, but it was discovered that the children did not want that; they wanted sandwiches

and someone to organise games. It also turned out it was not just the children who officially needed school meals but also children wandering about looking for play and joining in the fun.

The new community gathered other helpers and continued to serve meals during the school holidays and ended up on ITV, BBC Local Radio, and *The Teaching and Learning* section of *The Guardian*, discussing the need to feed the children and provide lunches under the gazebo. St Benny's continued to do Make Lunch the following year in the park, under the gazebo, making sandwiches and organising games for the children, with several community members joining the effort. This was rolled out as had hoped, and many communities united in the action. The Cinnamon Network helped fund materials to ensure the feeding of children. Make Lunch continues to feed children as part of the Transforming Lives for Good charity.

In hindsight, I can see that it was clear at this time that what was developing was a community of practice. "Practice involves the interaction of two processes: participation and reification" (Zhang and Watts 2008: 58). Participation meant being part of the community, and all relationships that developed there gave the community its essence; reification concerns the life experience of the members as they create things that bring this "experience into thingness" (ibid). For example, a part of the community that took part in Make Lunch worked on other projects with St Benny's, initiated different types of service targeting Oakley Vale, and joined St Benny's in prayer. "Practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (Wenger 1998: 52). During talks given in the community, St Benny's spoke of what the Fresh Expression doing was "apprenticeship in community". This developed into St Benny's strapline printed on materials given to the public. "The term community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as

a living curriculum for the apprentice" (Wenger 2006: 1). Apprenticeship and discipleship go hand in hand for this community. "Discipleship is about learning and living out the way of Jesus in the world" (Moynagh & Beck 2020: 16).

During Easter, we set up a prayer labyrinth in our house (as St Benny's did not have a building, we missioned out of our home) similar to 24/7 prayer rooms (Greig & Roberts: 2004), with five rooms in the following order: The Last Supper, Garden of Gethsemane, the Cross, the Tomb, and finally the Resurrection. Each space was designed to be interactive yet prayerful, offering an opportunity to engage with the Easter story. We opened our home for the week running up to Easter Sunday, and many members of the local community came to engage with the experience and join us for a coffee and chat at the end as part of an alternative *emerging worship*[3] gathering (Kimball 2004). This was another part of how the community of practice was shaped and how it began to develop. At first, there was mutual engagement, such as when working on Make Lunch or taking part in these prayer rooms, with the different members interacting with us and each other. Other enterprises followed, involving members working together for the good of the community. Several new projects emerged after this, encompassing neighbours and community centre members working together, such as Christmas lunch for those with nowhere else to go. Finally, a shared repertoire developed, which according to Wenger (1998), consists of "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (Wenger 1998: 83).

The regular monastic rhythm of prayer, known as the daily offices, was refined during this time, becoming one of the most central rituals practised by the community. When the

[3] A term for alternate forms of worship in this particular epoch.

project was over, we took down all prayer stations except one with a sizeable homemade cross. We found it helpful to have a designated place of prayer. We began to pray in the morning and evening, using the standard Anglican liturgy from Common Worship, inviting others to join us in that prayer room. We found the set services overly long and often a bit complicated. We then discovered, after some research, the Benedictine Handbook that included morning and evening prayers which was used for several months.

This was when the contemplative prayer and following a rhythm of life began to clarify the type of Fresh Expression that was developing – a New Monastic worshipping community (Claiborne, 2010). At this point, the prayers were the daily Benedictine offices, which began with lauds (morning prayer) at 6.30 am, then the Lord's prayer at noon, Vespers (Evening Prayer) at 7 pm and Compline (Night Prayer) at 9.30 pm. In addition, St Benny's took part in developing an individual rule of life for the community, and those who took part in prayer read a portion of the Benedictine Rule every morning, expanding the community's spiritual practice.

As the community developed further into prayer and contemplation, as well as developing further social action, St Benny's began making links with other intentional communities of practice (New Monastic communities), particularly the Northumbria Community (a dispersed New Monastic community) and the Community of Saints Mary and John. As prayer and interaction with Oakley Vale developed, St Benny's outreach extended further. To lead a distinctive Christian life, it helps to have Christian projects, supported by Christian friends, in the contexts where we live. These projects give discipleship a Spirit-shaped focus, "through which the kindness of Christ can touch people nearby" (Moynagh & Beck 2020: 28). At this point, to promote community involvement, shirts were printed with the St Benny's logo and the strapline "apprenticeship in the community" to wear

when working on a project in Oakley Vale in hopes of starting a conversation. “Anyone interested is introduced to Jesus as a part of a richer life“ (Moynagh & Beck 2020: 23). Conversations revealed the difficulty faced by young families to take part in the daily prayers, particularly Compline, as it happened in the evening after the children’s bedtime.

In September 2012, an intern Christian youth worker and sports coach came to work with the community, developing sports outreach, to learn more about New Monasticism and gain experience working on a Fresh Expression of church. He roomed nearby and took part in the daily prayers. Reverend Nik and his intern Rob were given the opportunity to coach rugby in local secondary schools and were encouraged to get the most promising player to join their local club and take their rugby to the next level. The coaching helped establish good community links and generated income for the church as the Rugby Football Union (RFU) paid St Benny’s for the coaching and funded the coach’s training.

At this time, the community’s core members had a group meeting as a weekend away to discuss the focus of St Benny’s and the way forward. As a CoP, each of the members offered inputs for the future to share “perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action“ (Wenger 2009: 211) in the enterprise of St Benny’s that is “worth pursuing and (their) participation is recognisable as competence“ (ibid). After this, the focus of the community was clarified, a plan was put into place, and a shared focus was outlined.
St Benny’s would concentrate on the following four things:

1. Service to the community
2. Living out our faith in the community
3. Prayer
4. Working on elements from the Sermon on the Mount (such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc.)

In speaking of Wenger, Zhang and Watts stated that he "… characterised Communities of Practice in terms of practice and identity; practice defined what the members do, and identity defines who the members are in regard to the practice. Practice and identity are inseparable: it is through practice that community members shape both the community as a collective and themselves as individuals" (Zhang and Watts 2008: 56). The community grew in number and community interaction, and rugby training work with the school-age children continued to grow. Some of the same young people would come and chat during the summer at the Make Lunch project, where relationships were formed, and some spiritual conversations took place. "The aim of all this mission is that the entire creation should flourish through God's infectious generosity" (Wright cited in Moynagh & Beck 2020: 41).

Following a meeting with his guiding team in the summer of 2013, Nik was encouraged to devote the time spent rugby coaching to focus more fully on work at the newly built community centre. As mentioned, there was suspicion regarding Nik's ability and his interest in sports. Somehow this interest was considered a sign that his work was not serious but distracted him in his mission to build a worshipping community. Another issue was his new leadership team members who did not have the same ethos of service in the community and wanted a traditional worship community rather than a fresh expression/sports community. The supervisory team's understanding of how the coaching could lead to a worshipping community was limited; they feared this was a waste of time. However, they did know of successful Fresh Expressions that started as cafés and suggested that serving breakfast and coffee at the community centre would work better than coaching sports activities. Their concern was combined with the problem of working across parish boundaries; the young people lived in St Benny's patch, but the schools

were outside it. Although St Benny's interacted with the young men outside of the sports clubs, there was again a lack of understanding of this method of creating relationships as a future base for discipleship. This scepticism was not uncommon in emerging worship communities from those in traditional ministry. Kimball (2004) mentions a new worshipping community that was effective with initial support from the senior pastor, gathering more than a hundred people to the Fresh Expression. "But then, with no warning, the senior pastor decided to shut it down. He wanted to send the people attending the alternative (emerging) service to the main service where he preached because he thought that they needed to move into a *real* church service" (Kimball 2004: 16).

In September 2013, St Benny's community members served breakfast to the children of football teams playing on the nearby fields and their parents at the new community centre, an initiative they called St Benny's café. The community café was open to the public, and a new intern assisted St Benny's. This took place on Sundays from 9 am to 2 pm; later in the afternoon they gathered for a Messy Church style service, focusing on craft, games, and fun exercises and using a Bible storybook for the scripture portion of the service to engage young children and their families. Two families who were part of the new monastic community came to support this, and St Benny's was officially meeting as a church. The Sunday afternoon service was already in place to be held as soon as the community centre opened and would have started even without the café.

Once a month, a bring-and-share meal was conducted at the community centre, hosted by St Benny's, which was well attended by other non-religious members of the community. We gradually began to grow, building friendships with the de-churched and un-churched who started to come to the meal initiative and the services. An unexpected

outcome was that the service appealed to some young men who were developmentally disabled, and that side of this community began to grow. However, there was still a need for those with small children to join in the daily Benedictine offices (prayers), and St Benny's began to look into finding a way to make the prayers available online.

Nik discovered that running a café in the morning and leading a service in the afternoon was problematic, especially alongside his preparations to become ordained. He felt he could not put the energy into developing and leading the service in the afternoons, which was essential, as he was often fatigued. Unfortunately, it turned out that reducing engagement with the rugby club and trying to work with other sports teams had not worked. Dropping rugby coaching had several consequences: the income for the church that Nik earned as a coach was gone, and there were not enough earnings in the café to make up that deficit. The money supporting the Fresh Expression was then less. The young men Nik had been working with no longer had a coach, and the young teams disbanded.

I argue that the move from coaching to a more recognisable Fresh Expression of a café church was a considerable mistake made by the supervisory team in the Anglican Church. They could not see that the relationships built from supporting the rugby club gradually began to bear fruit. They would have significantly impacted a missing demographic of the Church of England, young men. I believe that their vision of what a church community should look like was based on an older model of Fresh Expressions. The emerging sports church expression was not understood, so it had to stop. Unfortunately, this is often the case with pioneering; the local church management is unwilling to let the ministry develop in organic ways and prefers using specific models. "These new communities are not better than the existing congregations to which they are

connected. They are just different, with different ministries and missions“ (Moynagh & Beck 2020: 26).

However, St Benny’s existing community was even more focused on meeting together and was looking for ways to enable members to gather for prayer. At about this time, the management team of volunteers and community members of St Benny’s discussed the need to livestream Compline and gather online. Using Periscope, St Benny’s began streaming prayers through the app, and community members gathered for evening prayer. This created more connections during face-to-face interactions as the community prayed with us, sometimes five days a week. “Discipleship takes place through socialisation“ (Moynagh & Beck 2020:12).

In summary, the Digital Saints online community was initially created by St Benny’s in Corby to respond to the need of community members who were unable to meet in the evening for night prayer as they had small children. This was an addition to the embodied practice of St Benny’s community. Although digital, the livestream was meant to be a “live” prayer space from the beginning to enable those who could not physically meet. Although I was part of the original community and assisted in its formation, the community was originally an offshoot of the Fresh Expression; I did not create the community. It was meant to be a discipleship aid, assisting the members of an already developed embodied New Monastic community. My role was to help in its media output and examine the experiences of a sample of the members while improving the streaming for a better audience experience and, therefore, religious experience. The lay minister (later priest) was the community’s leader and developed the New Monastic model replicating an embodied model of gathering for prayer (Cray et al. 2010). The model was based on Michael Moynagh’s notion of contemporary contextual communities, organically growing

from initial friendships, contact, and service (Moynagh 2012). These focused on prayer and a rule of life, as most New Monastic communities do (Cray et al. 2010, Mobsby & Berry 2014, Moynagh 2014, Reed 2014). There were several offices or daily prayers in which St Benny's took part, but the one to be streamed was the last one of the evening, Compline, or night prayer. This is in line with the evolution of St Benny's, later Digital Saints as a community of practice and developing into an online/offline hybrid community.

Chapter 8.

Methodology and Method

This research aimed to discover how members of a New Monastic community experience and understand the spiritual connection and renewal online. The community members' voice and experience of "God" is the centre of this study, seeking to determine if a spiritual connection can be established in the digital space as a supplement to the proximal space and facilitated by 21st-century broadcasting primarily on mobile devices.

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the participants' lived experiences, to look at their definition of reality and to measure viewers and participants as audience research. According to Campbell (2019), this fourth wave of Digital Religion research also needs to consider quantitative measures, such as these viewing figures. Therefore, having an audience research perspective and gathering empirical data as well as examining how the community member perceives the practices is the next evolutionary step in developing that area of study (Campbell & Vitullo 2016).

Epistemology

As mentioned previously, this research was motivated by my affiliation with online communities and my involvement with New Monasticism and prayer, combined with my religious background; I am the daughter of a Christian minister, the granddaughter of another Christian minister, and the wife of an Anglican priest. This study's foundation stemmed from my experience as a constructivist lecturer and researcher. I posit that in this type of research that focuses on the participants' experience, constructivist epistemology affirms that any knowledge is a product "of the social context where meaning evolves from interactions with others" (Crotty 1998: 53), particularly if the aim is to explore the participants' experiences as they create and understand meaning as well

as a self-reported spiritual connection through their own social construction and interpretation. According to Creswell (2003: 9), socially constructed knowledge is developed by human beings while they inhabit and engage in the world they make sense of. This interpretation flows “from their own personal and historical experiences“ using a lens of their own culture. This meaning is social, coming from the interaction in and with a human community.

As a constructivist researcher and broadcaster, my background helps with this interpretation, and my relationship with the study participants is subjective, interactive, and interdependent. According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), the reality of the world that both I, as a researcher and the participants, partake in together is multiple, complex, and not easily qualifiable. A study that is founded on constructivism asserts, “The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory undergird all aspects of the research“ – the research product is context-specific (Lincoln & Guba 1989: 83), and the approach is aimed at both discerning and describing the unique nature of those being investigated (Briodo & Manning 2002). This epistemological method was ideal for this project as human interaction and worldview were pivotal.

The participant’s experience and understanding of the New Monastic online prayer formed their belief and interpretation of the community. Their reflection and, subsequently, my reflection on their understanding developed into a hermeneutic circle where the understanding underwent constant revisions as meaning emerged. As I have experience being a prayer facilitator, broadcaster, and researcher, these revisions led to changes in the broadcasting and online connection method to enhance the participants’ experience.

Strategy

Part of this study's strategy is to use a form of participatory research, broadcast operational theory, which involves watching the interaction of the participants and talking to them (Robson 2002), as well as adjusting the broadcast livestreaming to serve them better. In particular, this study uses a flexible research design in the practical applications of the digital prayer 'platform'. "They are flexible in the sense that much less pre-specification takes place, and the design develops and 'unfolds' as the research proceeds" (Robson 2002: 5).

There were both intended and unintended effects with the changes in the streams covered in each of the observation sections. The hypothesis was if livestreaming is used as the basis of interaction, it will foster a feeling of personal connection for the audience/community, both with other community members and with God. The intention was also to develop a format similar to live television. As with television, the new media livestreaming aims to create "the sense of intimacy and personal involvement that it seems to be able to cultivate between the spectator and presenter or the actors and participants on screen" (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006: 9).

Audience

This study offers an analysis of the development of an interactive digital New Monastic community where the community would also be an audience. There were concerns in the ministry team about targeting a particular audience via social media. This could seemingly disenfranchise other groups of audience, and there was a risk that the community could become 'exclusive'. Denis McQuail (2015) stated in his lecture at Oxford discussing the Uses and Gratification theory that one cannot predict the audience's action. Contrary to

earlier views, all messages are filtered through the individual receiver's life experiences and perceptions; "even the most potent communication can't influence an individual who has no use for it" (McQuail 2015).

Further, the communication influence was about the "impact on daily life". Looking at a way to measure the community's response, he posited that any attempt to characterise and evaluate the question of interactivity would be difficult as the audience's response could be considered a real social interaction with all of the variables inherent within. With this in mind, we developed a live format to foster interaction, which was authentic, vulnerable, and as honest as we could be in a similar embodied interaction. People could join us in the livestream, and we would respond in real-time. A recording that would be watched later would not facilitate that connection or feeling of immediacy (Dwyer 2019). In addition, making a recording for the prayers is a much more considered process.

We had discussed pre-recording and decided if we were going to do recorded prayers, we would need to spend a lot of time producing them and making them much more available. Pre-recording might include having all of the seven monastic daily offices (prayers) every day, possibly making seasonal variations but as an archive of recordings. For prayer, in particular, it was crucial to respond to people at the moment. The way you produce something changes when you broadcast something live; there is a different energy around it. The acceptance of it by the audience/community is different when you have something that's very carefully planned, detailed, and produced (Crisell 2012). "And actually, this is one of the problems with the church; I think generally is that because we have in many a very tightly structured liturgical formation of a service. Mistakes are not permissible, or they're acceptable, but they're not ideal. Rather than having a general structure and taking it wherever it goes with an experienced leader" (Stevenson 2019).

Our experience as live radio broadcasters and media practitioners enabled this responsive format: “Those should be the same skills that you’re looking at in any curator of spiritual experiences, whether it be prayer or a service. But when you stick too tightly to a structure, what can happen is that it loses any spontaneity. It can lose its soulfulness, sometimes“ (ibid).

Live Broadcasting

The Digital Saints online community’s broadcast platforms included a Facebook page, a Twitter handle, an Instagram channel, a YouTube channel, and a website. The prayers were broadcast online in real-time via Periscope, Facebook Live, and YouTube Live allowing the community to participate in the daily corporate prayer. The liturgy is available on the website or posted in the comments on Facebook and broadcast. There is also access to other applications used by the community. It was determined that we broadcast live using the livestreaming function.

A live format includes preparation and curation of the elements in the broadcast. This preparation and scrutiny of the broadcast elements can mean that there is a feeling of “liveness“ for the viewer. Crisell (2012) discusses the idea of “liveness“ in broadcasting, stating that all broadcasting, in this case, new media streaming, is mediated as the communication is not embodied, i.e. the sender and receiver of the transmission do not inhabit the same physical space. There are no physical cues and no opportunity to use touch. He argues that even interpersonal communication is mediated by the use of parts of the body in communication. “We might now suggest that *live* communication takes place when the author of a message is also her own medium” (Crisell, 2012: 3). He further asserts that radio and television, and thus by extension new media broadcasting,

“can *never* be live because however self-effacing they may be, they are media and thus offer mediated communication: they may provide co-presence in time, but they cannot provide co-presence in space“ (Crisell 2012: 6). Although I agree that mediated conversations are not the same as face-to-face interpersonal communication, they both serve the same function. The feeling of “liveness“ is centred around the notion of a live broadcast, watched together simultaneously- with the added benefit of being available to view later. This feeling of “liveness“ could respond immediately to queries, comments, and other interactions. The liveness, then, is *more* live than formats previously used in television, closer to that of radio.

With this in mind, our initial format was conceived as a simple new media style vlog, with no pre-produced items, B roll, or vision mixing. There was one fixed smartphone camera pointing at our faces. The lighting was achieved by a single point light rather than a three-point set-up at this point (Dwyer, 2019). To foster connection, we used media techniques to bond with the audience/community, such as looking into the camera to appear to be looking into the audience‘s eyes, and just as in radio, speaking as if to one person rather than a group, by saying “you“, never “out there“ or “listeners“ (Geller 2007).

This technique is not inauthentic; though structured and using broadcast techniques, it was used to assist the feeling of an in-person conversation. Charles states that as opposed to the material world, there “is the meaningless void of the virtual realm, the world that most of us in the western world spend so much of our time inhabiting. Yet, although there is no authenticity, we are still tormented by a nostalgic yearning for it“ (Charles 2012: 13). I’m not convinced that there is no authenticity in the Web; instead, it is another way of presenting connection (Note: The convention of whether to look into a person’s eyes or not during a conversation varies across different cultures.) Although

some subject others to ‘fakery’, this is the same in the material world. This is analogous to telephone and confidence tricksters phoning and requesting your money in nefarious ways, although most conversations over that device are honestly held.

Another consideration was the audience or community’s perception of us as presenters/layperson and priest, and our social presence formed by the livestream. Particularly in social media, a different platform can influence how one appears.

> Social presence is influenced by the intimacy (interpersonal vs mediated) and immediacy (asynchronous vs synchronous) of the medium and can be expected to be lower for mediated (e.g., telephone conversation) than interpersonal (e.g., face-to-face discussion) and for asynchronous (e.g., email) than synchronous (e.g., live chat) communications. The higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that the communication partners have on each other’s behaviour. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 62).

Mixed methods

This study primarily uses phenomenology as a qualitative tool. In addition, it employs a form of broadcast operational theory, a quantitative approach to determine the connection statistics with 21st-century streaming and adjust the broadcast methods in response to the statistics to engage the audience. The mixed methods used, thus, are both quantitative, using connection statistics, and qualitative, depending on phenomenology, to understand the participants’ value attributed to the online community, their experience, and whether they have felt connected both to each other and to a higher power using the digital platform.

Operational theory is often used in industry to fine-tune the development of systems and artefacts and the creation of objects to ensure they are fit for purpose. This study involves "supporting and engineering change as an integral part of the research process" (Robson 2002: 7). As mentioned before, this includes adjusting the method of broadcasting, both the mechanical means and the format development, in response to the participants' conversations and surveys, as well as the connection statistic. Reviewing the broadcasts and discussing the "successes" of the livestreams periodically in the team, as well as changing (adapting) the mechanics, technology, and method, led to an improved media artefact, in this case, the livestream, by using "practical ideas assembled and applied by media practitioners in the conduct of their media work – offering solutions to tasks" (McQuail 2010: 14).

This enquiry is designed for the researcher to take part in the digital platform streaming and adjust the focus of the "broadcasting" as it developed, using formative and summative evaluation (Robson 2002: 28). This is controversial as some feel that "pure" research is only observation, but using the researcher's own experience and understanding can enhance the process; "…it is part of the researcher's job to use this understanding to suggest ways in which desirable change might take place, and perhaps to monitor the effectiveness of those attempts" (Robson 2002: 8). This method is "primarily distinguishable in terms of its purpose, which is to influence or change some aspect of whatever is the research" (Robson 2002: 215).

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach is ideally suited to study the participants' experience of Digital Saints, the hybrid community of this study. Phenomenology is "a philosophical movement originating in the 20th century; the primary objective of which is the direct

investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined conceptions and presuppositions“ (Beimel 2014: 26).

This study uses phenomenological ethnographic methods of observation and interviews from the baseline of initial contact with the digital community members and following their further integration into the community in a New Monastic sense. Creswell asserts that “a phenomenological approach is best suited to understanding several individuals’ common or shared experiences to a phenomenon. The term lived experience is applied since lived experiences are those that reveal the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness regarding the events in which one has participated“ (cited in Gray 2014: 165). It is the idea of lived experience, things and their appearances, and recognising and reflecting this complexity.

This lived experience is the lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*, comprising all that one experiences while living – all of the experiences, activities, and connections, in short, everything, that makes up the daily norm of an individual’s life. Tomislav Zelic states that when Husserl uses the term “lifeworld“, he is referring to what he believes is “the only real world, the one that is actually given through perception“, declaring it is the basis of all “theoretical and practical life“ (Zelic 2008: 414).

Each participant has had experiences that influenced and gave precedence to their interpretation of the religious online community’s value effect. To interpret their interviews regarding these phenomena, one must first understand the idea of religion and community. In this particular case, the practices of a community of intention offer many definitions of spirituality appropriate for this context. It is “a varied, symbolic expression of, and appropriate response to that which people deliberately affirm as being of unrestricted

value for them“ (Cox 1996: 11). By taking part in a spiritual/religious group, each individual is searching for meaning in their world within the context of a community. It is about what is done not only as an individual but also as part of the intentional community. It comes with the implied understanding that although we are alone before God, we are also a community before God. Phenomenologists attempt to understand rather than merely describe a phenomenon itself by reflecting on it whilst amid the activity (Cox 1996: 25). Heidegger in *Being and Time* states that the question here is to understand, in order to do that phenomenology examines “What does it mean to exist in the world?“ (1968: 35). Previously, although there was a need for clarity, there was no vehicle for studying it for an understanding of meaning.

Before the Enlightenment, science and religion were considered part of the same method. St Thomas Aquinas was both a theologian and a scientist. In his extensive corpus, he discusses not only scientific principles of natural science but also mathematics and physics as well as theology, philosophy, and music (which, in his opinion, was also scientific), because “those who practice such disciplines can talk about the subjects studied in those disciplines in a way that is systematic, orderly, capacious, and controlled by common human experience (and, in some cases, in the light of the findings of other sciences)“ (Morris n.d.). He argued that creation came first from the idea of God and spirit in all force and being and that science was combined with theology and not separate from it. It was during the Enlightenment period that science began to separate itself from the idea of spirit and the notion that man was spiritually formed. Husserl’s contemporary Freud felt that all religions were, in fact, a dangerous illusion. Marx called it the “opium of the people“; religion, and by extension, feelings and “heart thought“ or impressions, were considered weak and non-scientific (Aquinas 2006, Cox 1996, Marx 2006, Wulff 2016).

Husserl felt that this positivist study of “mere facts“ and the dominance of “naturalism“ led to the exclusion of a range of study that dealt with feeling, meaning, and intuition (Snyman 1997). The focus on that “which explained the world exclusively in terms of apparent natural occurrences, thereby leaving no room for seeing ‘meanings’ beneath the phenomena of nature“ (Cox 1996:17) was flawed. He posited that there was more than what we could merely observe. Husserl’s mathematics background helped him develop this method's concept and phenomenology's philosophy.

This particular methodology is crucial to the current study. It is often assumed that a cyber-religious experience is somehow an illegitimate spiritual experience, thinking that by connecting to people virtually online and not meeting face to face, the spirituality is of a lesser degree and can even be considered selfish. The Pope, in his encyclical, warned about this, stating that a face-to-face connection must supplement the digital connection for the formation of a true religious community (Francis 2013).

Phenomenology is used to understand how members of the online/offline community experience and understand a digital connection with a human/God and how this experience and understanding of this digital Christian community inform or shape their spiritual experience (O’Leary 1996). Using this method, it can be determined whether the individual participating in this study will have experienced a sense of spiritual renewal, a more profound dedication to God as they perceive it, and a “belongingness“ to the hybrid religious community. This knowledge is not concerning the things themselves but in the “consciousness of the knowing“ (Cox 1996: 66); then, “…the subject intentionally interacts with the object of perception and integrates them into his mind. This ‘meaning’ is then discerned ‘beneath’ the acts of observation“ (ibid).

Husserl's phenomenology requires that a researcher be aware of subjectivity and work towards "epoché" before each interview and observation. Epoché involves suspending all "thoughts about material things, science, other humans, the sequence and order of events, or any other presuppositions" (Cox 1996: 48) and placing them into brackets. Husserl said that by "bracketing out" every previously held belief or assumption, the observer allows the pure phenomena to "speak for themselves" (ibid). Only then can "The observer performs the eidetic intuition whereby only the essential structures of the phenomena are seen… the eidetic intuitions the observer to see into the very structure or meaning of the phenomena" (ibid).

However, I believe that method is not achievable in this study and, in fact, would even hinder the discussions. In accordance with Heidegger, I believe it is impossible to remove bias and achieve epoché completely. He stated that there is no possibility of bracketing (epoché) as we are always with others in the circumstances of existence in the world. We come with our own innate biases (Heidegger 1968). Therefore, a better approach for this study is hermeneutic phenomenology requiring a different evolving lens to interpret the data, which "seeks to bring to the essence of a lived experience an interpretive descriptive text that continues to acknowledge the complexity of that experience" (Manen 1990: 117).

Researcher's lens of interpretation

Hermeneutic phenomenology requires constant revision of the interpretation conducted through the researcher's understanding. This is a constructivist approach, processing what is discovered and building mental structures interacting in this environment, developing design during the discovery, and interpreting their narrative of experience through the researcher's understanding, as mentioned before. My bias, covered

previously, concerns the lens used to interpret the results and narratives, and the participants' spirituality and religious experience influences their perspectives and leads to a different interpretation. "A central problem for the study of religion is how the subjective observer gains knowledge of an objective entity when the objective entity is embodied in subjective experience" (Cox 1996: 27), which in this case is the religious life and practice in a hybrid religious community. Hermeneutic phenomenology will address that problem.

The idea is that one can see the world from the perspective of another who considers themselves religious; "there is no religious reality other than the faith of the believers" (Kristensen 1960). God as a being, as well as a concept, must be addressed in light of the study of his effect on those who believe in him, as Hegel believed that one could not contemplate God (in the phenomenological philosophical context) without considering the person who believes in God – his "human religious experience". Merklinger (1993) said that this separated the idea of God as an "object of thought found in natural theology to God as an objective correlate of the religious experience of the human subject. Thus, for the first time in the history of the development of the philosophical inquiry of religion as a complete modality of human experience in itself, the inner horizon of which is a concatenation of both 'non-rational' human feeling and reason" (Murphy 2010: 70). This measurement is ideal for this study as there is no concrete measurement for the concept of religious experience or spirituality, only the participants' experience and view of spirit connection.

Night Prayer

Night Prayer or Compline (the last of the monastic offices before bedtime) was chosen by the Digital Saints community because, of all of the traditional divine offices and New

Monastic prayers, Night Prayer, said at the end of the day, is about finding peace before sleeping. In its own way, the Night Prayer is the antithesis to modern life – slowing down, reflecting, and being still. It could be said that in this use, this prayer is an antidote to modern insomnia. According to the *Common Worship: Daily Prayer*, Compline "derives its name from a Latin word meaning 'completion' (*completorium*). It is above all a service of quietness and reflection before rest at the end of the day" (The Archbishops' Council 2005: 334). Part of this prayer comes from the Nunc Dimittis. When Jesus was presented in the temple when eight days old to observe the Jewish tradition of designating every male firstborn as holy to the Lord, two prophets were there. One of them was Simeon, a devout, pious man who had been waiting long to see the Messiah. According to Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit revealed that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. When Mary and Joseph came to the temple to present the infant Jesus, in the story, Simeon was guided by the Holy Spirit to see them. He said a prayer over Jesus that is part of the Night Prayer, the letting go, called the Nunc dimittis. "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for the revelation to the Gentile and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32). This sense of accomplishment and finality is part of what the Night Prayer imparts. The day is finished; all that is left is to rest.

A bedtime prayer taught to American children gives another version of this: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord, my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take" (Watts, n.d.). This prayer is from *the New England Primer*, first published between 1687 and 1690, and so widely known among American children until the 1960s that just by hearing the first line, almost everyone would understand it is about bedtime prayers and sleep. The theology of giving God one's entire life by trusting Him

with the future, whether or not one is awake, is part of the notion of letting go, which is necessary for peace and sleep.

The post-industrial modern life is filled with noise and hyper-connectivity and is very different from the bucolic agricultural life with its rhythm of the seasons and spaces of quiet. The addition of the digital space to this world has caused even more interruptions and distractions. Often, we embrace this frantic pace as inevitable and choose to believe it makes us better, more accomplished people. Brene Brown says we feel worthier if we are too busy. It is a sense of accomplishment if there is no time for play or rest because we are “successful“ if we do not pause (Brown 2012: 30-75). However, it is unhealthy for human beings mentally or physically to not rest. Modern life is filled with stress and busyness, as well as information and connectivity because of the Digital Revolution. “Technology is no longer just a part of life in which we can choose to participate or not, but rather it shapes the context in which we all live“ (Brooks & Nicholas 2015: 3). This is not in any way to say it is not a tool to be exploited. The digital space can also provide a means to slow the frenetic speed in which we live. We use this space to connect during Night Prayer.

The schedule of five nights a week was reduced to three nights at the beginning of the second year of broadcasting and subsequently returned to five nights (see appendix d). The changes in the Facebook algorithm and the effect of the Cambridge Analytica scandal affected numbers, in addition to Facebook reducing their free notification of the “friends“ of Digital Saints as they rolled out Facebook advertising. The broadcasts became simulcast from YouTube and embedded into Facebook after that.

Accountability and safeguarding

The study is subject to several safeguarding parameters in the ethics approval statement. There was minimal chance of harm for the study participants, but appropriate counselling and referring to statutory authorities were considered part of the plan should any significant issues or subjects emerge during the interview. None from the sample community was under 18 or a vulnerable adult. All participants were also covered by the Diocese of Peterborough's safeguarding policies and procedures and were cared for pastorally by Digital Saints' leaders. Since July 2019, the community has been under the Diocese of York's supervision due to the minister moving roles and locations.

When interviewing the participants, their safety and the need for discretion when discussing sensitive issues were considered. Many interviews were primarily conducted via the video call function on Facebook Messenger. The audio was recorded for recordkeeping. Only one member was interviewed in person, conducted in a public area out of the other group members' earshot.

One of the ethical challenges of this study is keeping confidential interactions private on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, where the prayer broadcasts are streamed. If anyone does post any exchange, such as a request for prayer, a comment, or just a hello to the leaders, it identifies them with their handle and shows what they are discussing with the rest of the group, both in real-time and later in the archived video. To address this, during the livestream, we inform the viewers that they can contact us privately via direct messages on both Twitter and Facebook, and personal email addresses are posted on the website for confidential conversations. This was not such a huge problem for Periscope participants as they often had a handle that may not be their given name and

are therefore anonymised if they wish to be, but Facebook does not offer that option for personal accounts.

Steps for phenomenological data collection

Drawing on the existing interview methods research, I compiled and used an interview guide to ascertain the participant's perception of the digital/hybrid community of faith and their engagement and employed a semi-structured interview design with base and follow-up questions (Smith et al. 2009). I observed the audience's reaction to the digital platform and coded audience participation and response. The interviews revealed that quite a large portion of the participants participated in the broadcast sessions but did not interact, although they took part in the prayers with the liturgy. Nonetheless, the participants still felt a sense of belongingness to the community and had a religious experience or a spiritual connection. Those who did not participate via text, comment, or other forms of interaction had their interaction data gathered during the interviews.

Step one: I contacted those who had liked and subscribed to the various platforms. I also talked in Northampton in 2017 to Peterborough Diocese interns and the Peterborough Anglican Cursillo meeting about the study.

Step two: Twelve people who liked and subscribed contacted me regarding their participation in the study. One was from the Cursillo meeting, who subsequently became a member of the community.

Step 3: All interviews, bar one, were conducted via Facebook messenger, either on a video call or not, depending on the speed of the internet connection. Participants expressed that they felt this was the most appropriate way as that was how they

interacted with Digital Saints generally. The duration of the interviews varied significantly based on how in-depth each participant wanted to go. All gave a rich interview, but some also discussed other things unrelated to the interview; in fact, an interview with a participant who needed to talk turned into a pastoral discussion.

Step 4: I recorded the interview from the beginning and took extensive notes, typing as I listened, integrating my thoughts and impressions. In the semi-structured interview, the research jumped from one formulated question to another to allow for an in-depth conversation and "enable the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue, modify questions and following interesting aspects that come up during the interview" (Shinebourne 2011: 50). Each received the Participant Information Sheet and obtained informed consent. We discussed the confidentiality of the study and that the outcomes would be anonymised.

Step 5: I transcribed the interviews from the recording, taking note of themes, subthemes, and interesting side directions in the conversations, using colours and tabs to make note of any potential new coding. I then read the transcripts once they were finished, and the recordings were played to ensure accuracy.

Step 6: Using the same protocol for all participant interviews for notes and observation (Creswell 2003: 189), I integrated all my original notes to obtain a general sense of the data and to reflect on their meaning. I found essential quotes from the participants describing relevant topics and used them to show the themes.

Step 7: I met with the partner priest of the study after he read the transcriptions and discussed the themes discovered. As each transcription was filled with a detailed, deep

description by the participants, it took several meetings to complete them. Notes on these discoveries were made, and I reflected on them and created a spidergram to compare the themes and codes that developed visually.

Step 8: I searched for connections among all the participants in their themes. Then, I reread the transcriptions, looked at the notes, and, using my “lens“ of interpretation, identified the final coded themes and subthemes, adding these to the spidergram.

Selection of interview participants

To study the viewer's life experience and the effect of the livestreamed prayer services, it was essential to use participants who took part in the prayers and had experience with the phenomenon (Smith 2009). To achieve this, the sample group was gathered from those who either liked or subscribed to one or another of the various platforms used during the broadcast beginning in August 2018. From the 25 people contacted directly, 12 initially chose to be part of the study, with 11 completing the interviews. This smaller group was still effective and was in agreement with Smith et al., who stated better research could be formed with “A more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant“ (2009: 56). The sample size was in line with that suitable for a qualitative research design. “In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data“ (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2007: 242).

I did not know some of the participants, and I could not see some of them during the interviews. Therefore, I couldn’t ascertain their gender, age, or ethnicity. Others were interviewed using video chat, but I could not necessarily identify their gender or age. Unless this was disclosed during the interview, this data was not gathered. Each

participant is anonymous and identified by a letter pseudonym in the study, but their name was used when contacting and interviewing them.

Criteria for the participants:

Although the participants' age wasn't asked, I did ask if they were over 18 to qualify as a participant in the study. The criteria for participation were as follows: a) the candidate was 18 years of age or older, b) they liked or subscribed to one or more of the livestream broadcasts and took part in the Night Prayer, c) they signed the informed consent form, and d) they were willing to be recorded as part of their interview.

Risk assessment

Examining one's religious life during their participation in a study poses risks and could potentially hurt their faith. Consequently, I ensured that in the semi-structured interviews their faith was not questioned at any time, only their experience of it during the livestream. My husband is the priest of this study, and we have worked together for many years in various capacities. I trust him and know his concern for this digital parish is sincere. However, I am aware that it would be difficult for anyone to share complaints or concerns with me about anything they were unhappy with, either Nik or me. A fellow priest and pioneer minister, Rev Ali Middleton, was an advisor to the project and a "listening ear" if there was a problem. All participants received documentation stating that Reverend Middleton was available to contact with any complaints or concerns (Appendix g).

Data collection of viewing figures

Quantitative data were gathered from the number of views on each platform, namely the Periscope account, Facebook pages, and YouTube channel, as the media practice evolved over the study's four and a half years. This data was tabulated to analyse trends

and calculate the total views, as well as noting differences in the popularity of the various channels. The information was used to respond by adjusting the media production techniques to amplify audience and interaction. This will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 10: Findings

This research aimed to examine how new media technologies enable the spiritual experience of New Monastic communities of faith. This study's findings emerge from two parts: 1. the observation of the new media platforms concerning the community's growth, connection, and in terms of technological advances and the statistics relating to the relationship established on each platform, and 2. the phenomenological interviews of the participants of the community. The new media platforms (Periscope, Facebook, and YouTube) are "linking Information Communication Technologies (ICT) with their associated social contexts, bringing together three elements: technological artefacts and devices; activities, practices and uses; and social arrangements and organisations that form around the design and practices" (McQuail 2010: 37). This study also investigates the Digital Saints community's religious experience through the lens of the integration approach to media, which differs from interaction methods that are limited to intersubjectivity. Integration happens not via interaction with people but by interaction at the level of an indirect social connection extended by another agent, whether a person or a communication device (Holmes 2005: 176).

Observation of the effect on livestream audience

As mentioned in the strategy, this study used a form of participatory research, a type of broadcast operational theory, to adapt the livestream new media broadcasts in response to the interaction and feedback of the participants. Operational theory is most often used in the manufacturing industry and broadcast to design and implement practical changes in the method and format of live media production. This flexible research design allows for the evolution of the platforms and the means to connect with the participants and community members. The first broadcasts were on Periscope.tv as a test of broadcast

effects and to ascertain audience interaction. Interaction on Periscope was via the use of the heart symbol by tapping the mobile phone screen or the text section, which allows to text the viewing audience which would overlay the video so that other viewers can respond to those comments.

The digital platform test was conducted on 1 February 2016 using the Periscope account St Benny's (St Benedict's Corby), which a week later was changed to @DigiSaints as we were leaving the support of St Benedict's and their community. This was the first platform tested for broadcasting using our mobile phones. It was in the early days of Periscope; the immediacy and interactivity of the medium were very attractive to its audience, with some watching just because it was possible to view people in real-time, whether it be watching someone drive to work, make dinner, or paint. Initially, recording and archiving live broadcasts for later viewing was challenging, so revisiting a broadcast wasn't possible at this point. The viewing figures were roughly 5–10 per livestream during this time. There were a few occasions when we had 20–30 viewers, but these were outliers and not an accurate representation of our regular viewership. We had regular viewers, including some who knew us and found us through the Periscope platform. Most merely watched, but a few interacted, making simple prayer requests or, on occasion, asking questions about faith following the broadcast. An independent programme developed later called Katch.me could be used to capture and save these Periscope offerings. However, when Periscope enabled archiving past broadcasts later on, their platform, Katch.me folded.

Media practice adjustment

Adjustments to the format began after the first week of Compline (Night Prayer) livestream five nights a week at 9:30 pm. The initial observations were that by starting with prayer, people would miss the beginning of the prayers because of the time it took for

people to join in the social media stream after the notification. Consequently, we adjusted our format to have a chat and then prayer. The original prayers were obtained from another New Monastic society, the Northumbria Community. Before we began praying, we shared the link to the prayers on Periscope on the Northumbria Community's website. We observed several problems with this initial format; as the liturgy was not available immediately, we lost some people who would connect. Those who did would often pray but did not have the function on their phones to have two screens open at once, thus unable to pray the liturgy with the community. The lack of liturgy affected their experience of the prayer and our experience leading the Night Prayer.

With this in mind, still using our mobile phones, we made a PowerPoint presentation of the liturgy and placed ourselves in front of the front-facing camera. The computer monitor showing the display was positioned behind the phone in view of the rear-facing camera during prayer. With a bit of juggling, this worked. Although not more than a phone was required to broadcast a person speaking, switching between shots and showing printed words or photos was challenging. During the livestream, if we wished to display an item or highlight something, we did what other Periscope content creators did: hold up pictures and objects in front of the camera. This lack of technology or the provision to vision mix was very frustrating, and I felt it distracted the audience/community. Just as in a well-written book you overlook the writing and focus solely on the story, in a well-streamed new media broadcast, you focus exclusively on the story and the people you are connecting with and not on the medium (King 2000, Randall 2007). It was essential that we continually reviewed the practice at this time, and we made adjustments almost daily.

Some excellent conversations came out of Periscope broadcasts; one, in particular, comes to mind. It was a discussion on the difference between Christian and Muslim

prayer instigated by a young Muslim man – this went on for more than one livestream. Periscope did well as a platform, but the adjustment we needed to make for the liturgy was cumbersome. At that point, a Kickstarter item was developed called Mevo that would enable livestream vision mixing with the effect of multiple cameras and microphones. Digital Saints invested in the Kickstarter project and were looking forward to their production of the new media TV studio device – which took longer than initially anticipated.

Despite the best benefits of real-time livestreaming such as immediacy and interaction, I felt uncomfortable on Periscope. With this instant connectivity came the trolls, who were incredibly disruptive and cruel and would often target women in the digital space with their ridicule. A troll is someone on the Internet who misuses anonymity to say hurtful or caustic things. “It was epitomised by anonymous users in the comments section of blogs, where such users would leave deliberately cruel and callous comments that served no purpose other than to hurt, shock, offend and sow discord“ (Hannan 2018: 7). As they were anonymous, they could not be held accountable. Fake accounts were sometimes created when a profile and username were needed on social media platforms. Unfortunately, when interacting on social media platforms, there is no avoiding these monsters.

> Trolling is now an open practice, in which many trolls no longer bother hiding behind fake names and fake pictures, feeling evermore confident to make abusive comments against people they know and do not know alike. The atmosphere of social media has become so poisoned by incivility that trolling can rightly be said to be the new normal, as regular to our political atmosphere as the air we breathe. It is a tense environment in which disagreements, even between friends, quickly

> descend into vicious battles, very often destroying those friendships in the process (Hannan 2018: 8).

Their harsh comments on physical appearance, faith, and anything they felt would cause a reaction detracted from the openness and vulnerability developed in the livestream community. Sometimes the trolling was more straightforward and less abrasive; some would merely fling obscenities in the text that rose in Periscope to disrupt the conversation. Such acts were akin to one running into a room, shouting obscenities, and leaving shocked people behind. Fortunately, we found that we could block them individually. In addition, we observed another content creator on Periscope, @MrASingh, who chose a different method to deal with trolls; he engaged them in conversation and, somehow, stopped the trolling. We were torn about excluding the trolls, but their interruption and comments were distracting and painful – although blocking them made it feel as if we were excluding those who disagreed with us. As we were a faith-based prayer space, that felt particularly wrong.

We decided to continue blocking some of the most disruptive trolls to ensure the participants' health, safety, mental well-being, and the prayer space's sacredness. However, we did try and adjust our response to the trolls to emulate @MrASingh as much as possible. We continued the test with Periscope and looked at the then newly launched (as of April 2016) Facebook livestream. After much consideration and discussion, we felt that perhaps Periscope did not work as well for community building as Facebook, but the interaction element 'hearts' used to signify agreement and support by tapping on the screen and text interaction were Periscope's advantage. Therefore, we decided to continue to broadcast on Periscope and add Facebook Live when we launched the

livestream officially to utilise the best of both. We completed the test broadcasts in July 2016.

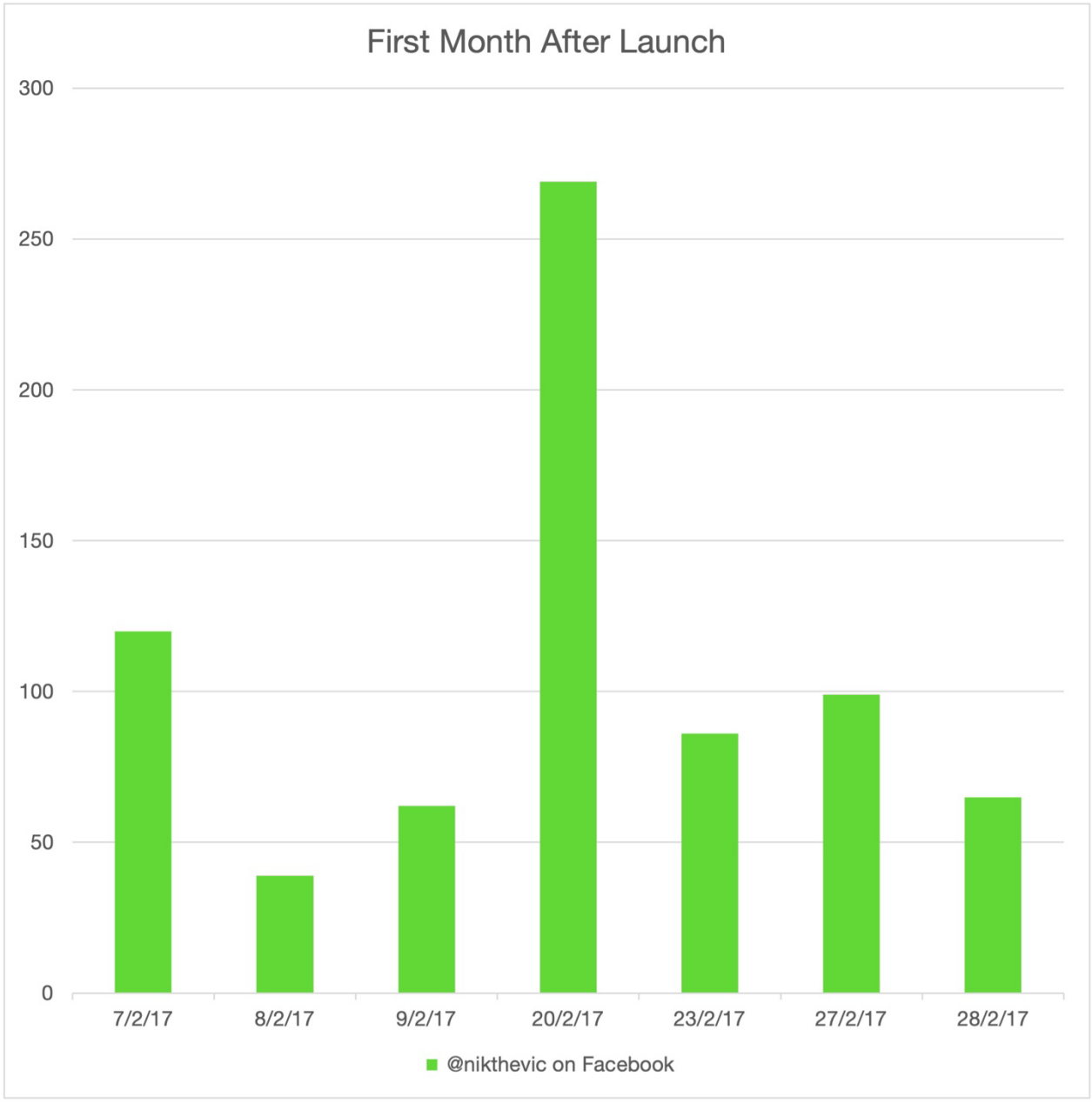

Figure 1: Viewing Figures for Launch Month – February 2017

We officially launched the livestreams on 7 February 2017 on Facebook Live with a link to St Bennys.org. The Kickstarter Livestream Mevo Vision-Mixer was built and shipped to us later in 2016. Unfortunately, we could not use this for Periscope as it was not one of the options available to livestream since it did not have the necessary API (Application

Programming Interface). Even after careful deliberation, we moved from Periscope after all. We started our livestream broadcast using the Mevo in February via Facebook Live, planning to continue with Periscope when the API was available. We took snapshots of the number of viewers in the first month to assess the viewing and adjust the livestream (Figure 1). We observed that previously on Periscope, the interaction was very fast, almost frantic. The comments scrolled up on the stream for everyone to see during the conversation. Keeping up with the comments was crucial, so one person was designated to watch them while the other maintained “eye contact“ while speaking. Getting “hearts” symbols (signifying agreement) on Periscope was also a real-time indicator of whether or not you were engaging the viewers. This interaction helped guide the direction of the live conversations. The initial Facebook livestream did not have the same option of giving “hearts” immediately, and viewer interaction was only in the comments below the Facebook stream rather than over the video as in Periscope, which meant that they were sometimes missed (See Appendix B for the link to Digital Saints History Showreel).

As initially, there was no immediate feedback to react to as presenters; it felt less like a livestream and more like a traditional broadcast. Because of the nature of the radio and television, most audience reactions are accessed after the broadcast. However, the Mevo made a considerable difference in the way we broadcast emulating a multi-camera studio, enabling real-time vision mixing with different angles and close-ups, which immediately improved our style and helped create the friendly interest of a local television magazine programme with real-time audience interaction (Dawkins and Wynd, 2010). The magazine-style format did not take away from the sense of a virtual sacred space but enhanced the chat and discussion part of the livestream that took place before the prayer.

In late 2018, another technological breakthrough that helped with the livestream was the ability to have cutaway screens that could be used for the liturgy and photos. We had

previously used a computer monitor showing a PowerPoint of the liturgy (See appendix B), but with the Mevo, there was no back camera. In the Mevo livestream change, we initially shared the liturgy in the comments section below the livestream on Facebook, which affected the interaction within the community, with one person saying that it reduced their sense of belonging to the community. When reading the liturgy, they could not make comments themselves, and no one would see them during this time. As liturgy is an essential factor in the Night Prayer, we began searching for another way to include it and even contacted Mevo.

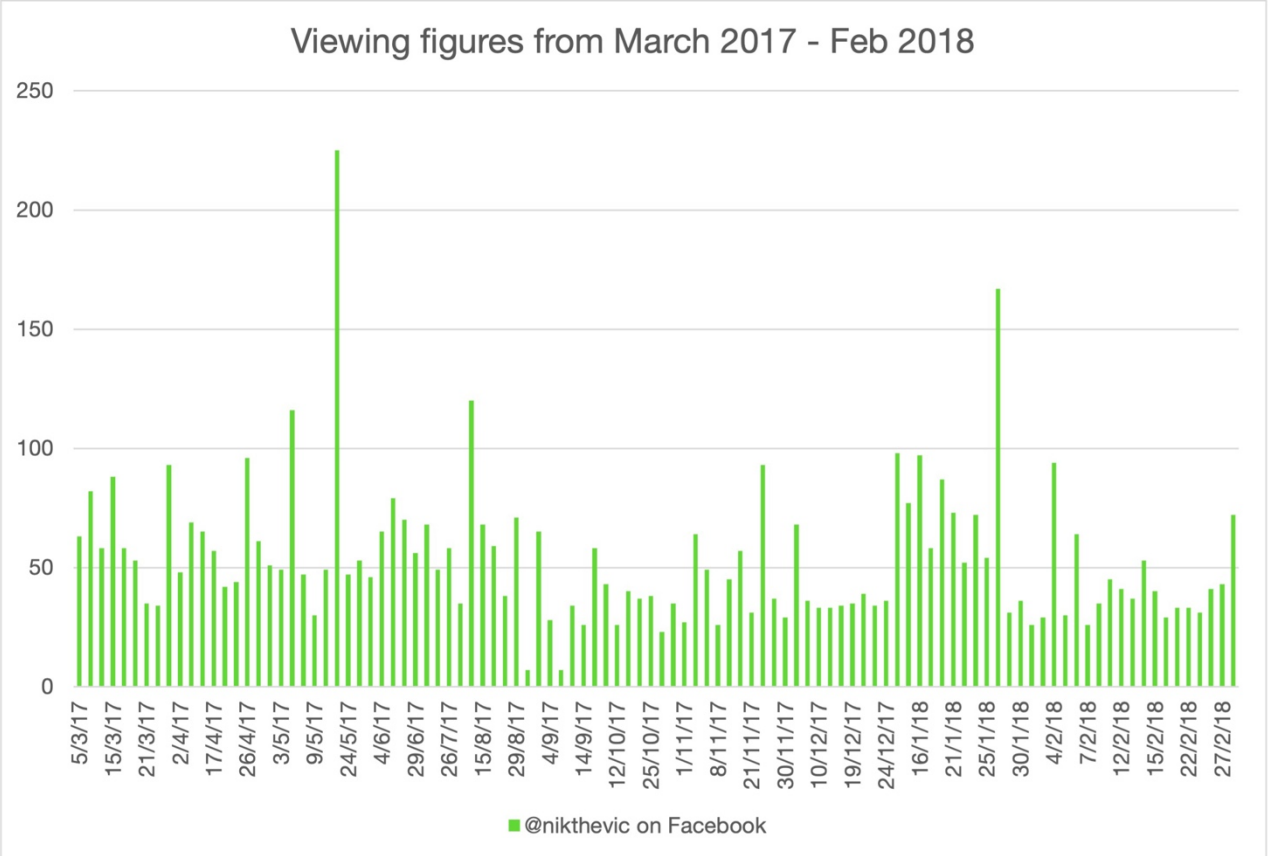

Figure 2: Viewing Figures for March 2017 – February 2018

From March 2017 to February 2018, we broadcast five times weekly at 9.30 pm for a short chat and Night Prayer. Figure 2 shows that the average number of synchronous and asynchronous viewers was about 50 per evening. However, there were some unexpected highs, which were due to outside broadcasts and special events. The highest viewership

amounted to 225 in May when we broadcast from Pioneer home, with other pioneer ministers sharing the broadcast on their social media accounts (see Appendix B; timestamp 5:34).

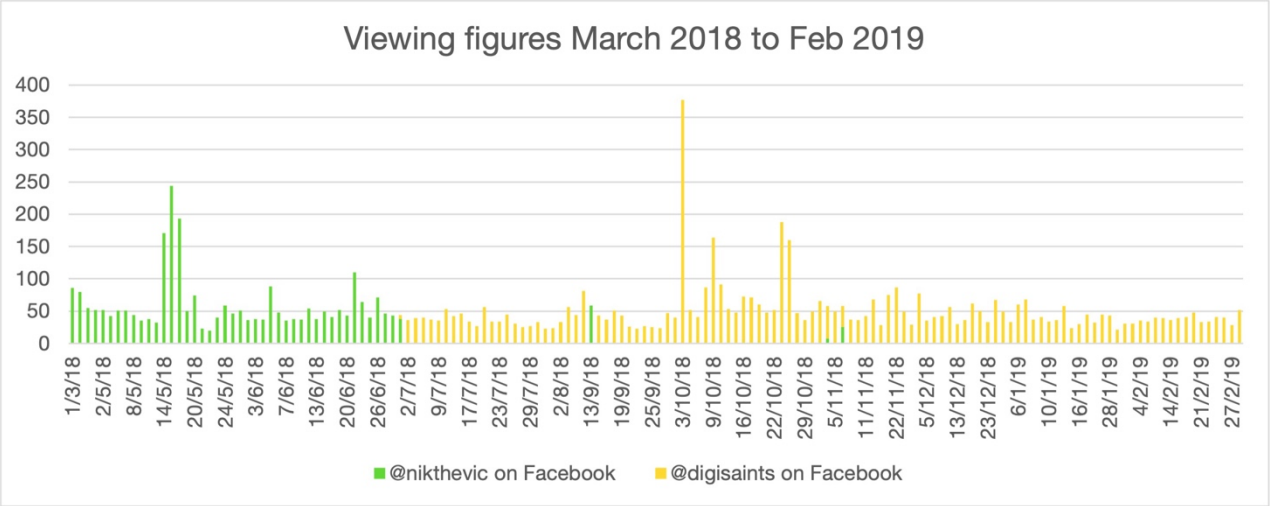

Figure 3: Viewing Figures for March 2018 – February 2019

From March 2018 to February 2019, the average was between 45 and 55, with some high points. We switched from the “NiktheVic“ Facebook page platform in July 2019 to our final official place as Digital Saints both for the website and the Facebook page (see appendix B for the link to the video). Some accidental cross-postings led to higher numbers. The improvement in interaction this year was noticeable, and those who participated self-identified as part of the Digital Saints community at this point, often sharing and inviting others to join in the streams to be a part of their experience. On 3 October (see Figure 3), we boosted the livestream by using Facebook Ads, targeting viewers of ages 20–40. The target was further granulated to those interested in religion and contemplation, focusing on a particular internet religious culture: “Culture refers to ideas, beliefs, identity, symbolic expression of all kinds, including language, art, information and entertainment, plus customs and rituals“ (McQuail 2010: 6); the ritual, in this instance, was prayer.

Note that on 3 October, the viewership went from an average of 50 to 377. Using advertisement was an experiment; we would not continue advertising due to the costs. However, the change in the number of viewers from just one promotion was significant. Digital Saints was not interested in gathering new participants but aimed to support those it already had, so the prospect of advertising was shelved.

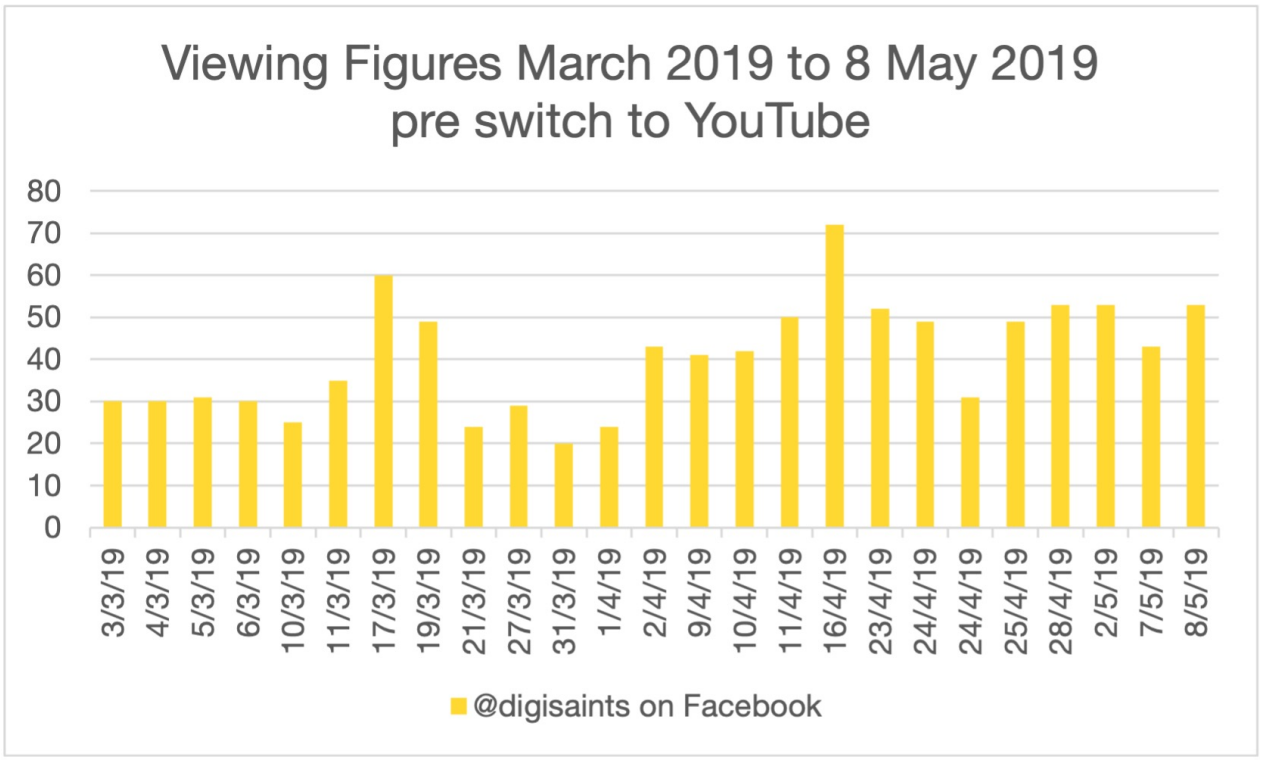

Figure 4: Viewing Figures March 2019 to 8 May 2019

These livestreams in figure 4 were broadcast on Facebook before determining to switch the livestreams to the Digital Saints YouTube channel. This was in an attempt to assist the livestreams to become “spreadable”. “Spreadability“ is about making content more easily shared within certain platforms, making the community more likely to share the content due to ease. “Spreadability recognised the importance of the social connections among individuals, connections increasingly made visible (and amplified) by social media platforms“ (Jenkins 2009: 21). Previously the term applied to this idea was “viral“, but Jenkin explains that when using the term “viral” it is implied that there is no conscious

intention behind the spread of a text. Conversely, according to Jenkins, spam email is viral, but internet memes and shared videos are “spreadable“ (ibid).

However, although it allowed us to spread across platforms through sharing, we could not gauge the level of viewership or have the same level of interaction we were accustomed to on Facebook. We eventually discovered we were losing viewers because it became harder to interact. As seen in Figure 5, an inadvertent return to Facebook Live showed a viewership of over 160; it was our first broadcast since the move to North Yorkshire, with an uptick in numbers due to local interest. However, viewership of the Facebook live broadcast later diminished as the momentum of audience interaction lessened.

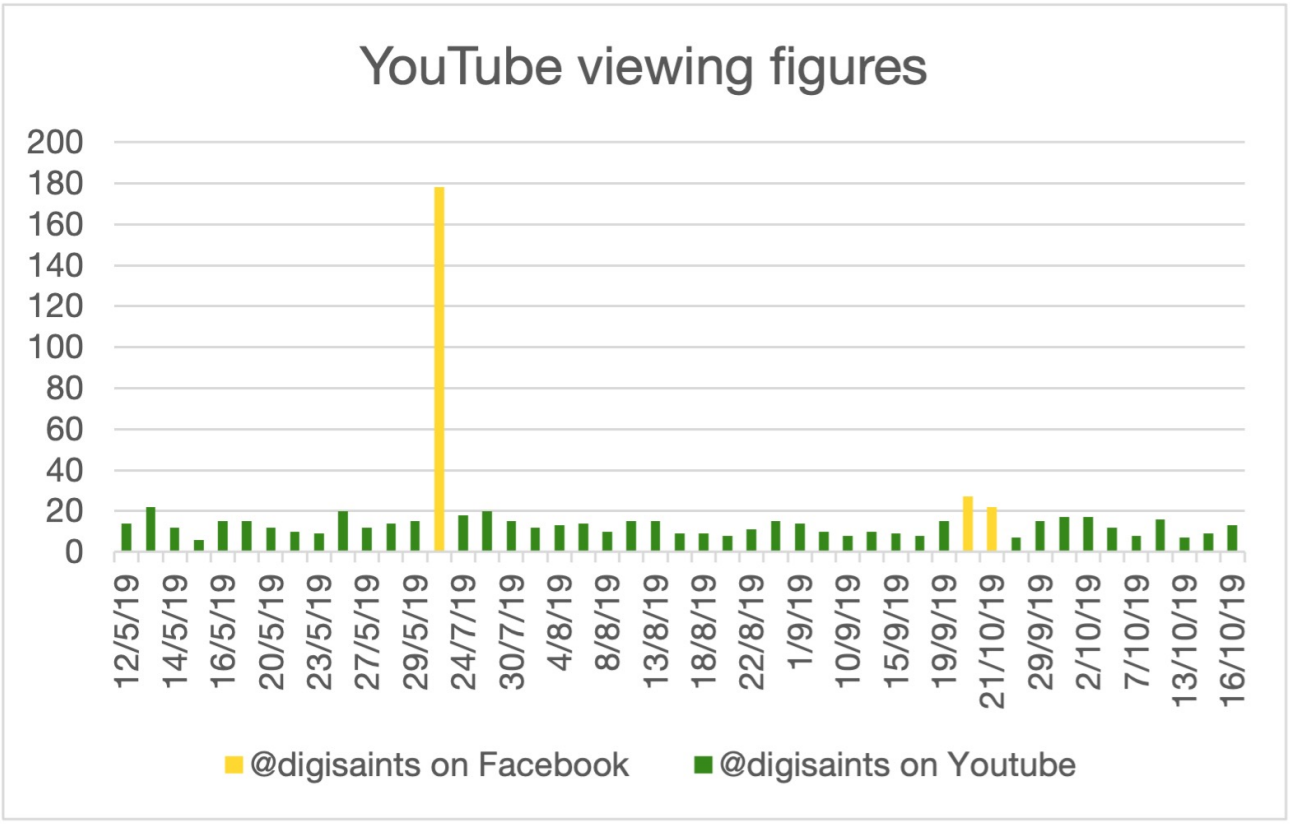

Figure 5: YouTube Viewing Figures 12 May 2019 to 16 October 2019

From September, limiting our broadcasts to three nights a week was necessary due to the North Yorkshire move for Reverend Nik’s new position as an Ordained Pioneer Minister in the York Diocese. You can see the corresponding drop in the figures above. Although we

had quite a few viewers from the shared content via Facebook, we could not gather those figures as viewers could watch the livestream without being counted in the YouTube figures. The anomaly in Figure 5 above corresponded to the Facebook broadcast, our first broadcast from our new location, which gathered 178 views on 23 July, achieved by word-of-mouth advertisement in St Francis. We realised YouTube was not working on its own, but it allowed us to share across different platforms. The Mevo went through an upgrade to enable multi-platform streaming at this time (See Appendix B; timestamp 5:45). We chose to continue with YouTube but added @digisaints, @Nikthevic which was Reverend Nik's page on Facebook and DigiSaints on YouTube to enhance the spread and enable viewer tracking in October 2019.

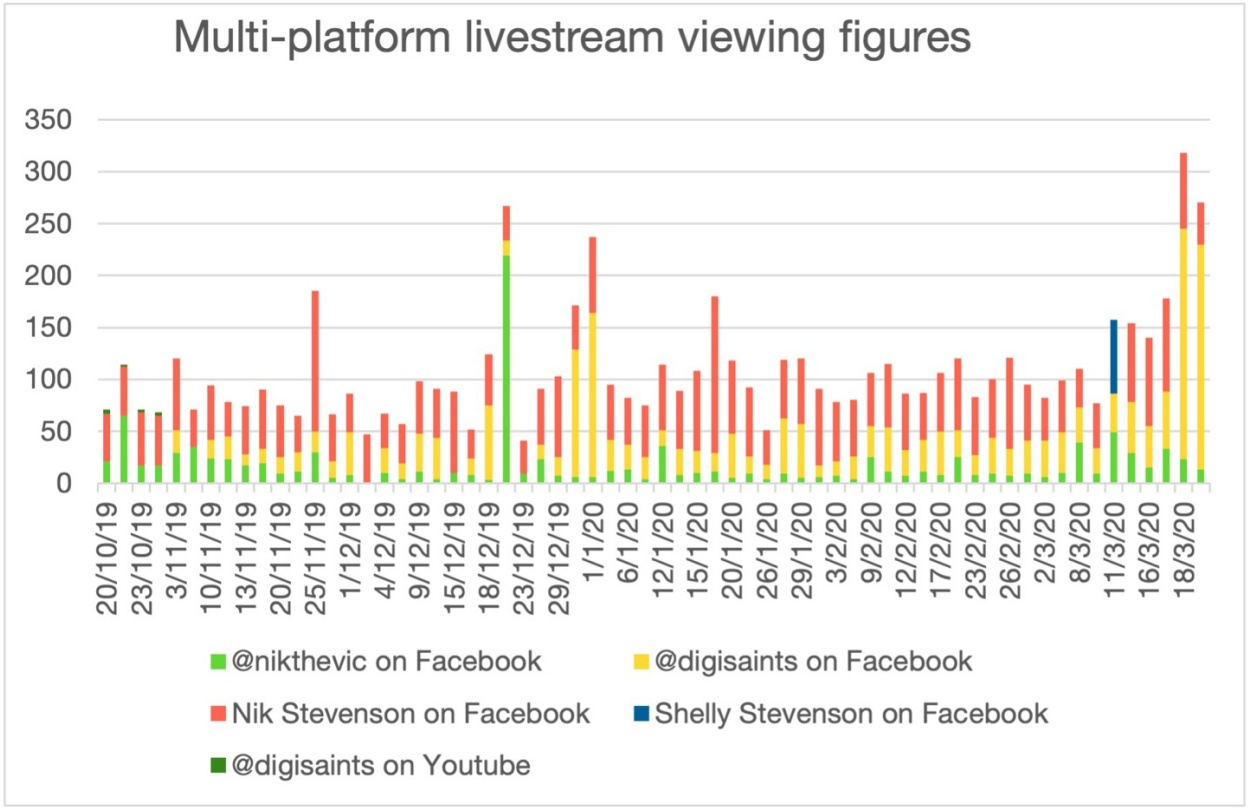

Figure 6: Multi-platform Viewing Figures 20 October 2019 to 18 March 2020

The sharing and multi-platform livestreaming greatly impacted our reach and community response. There was an impact from the local community in North Yorkshire as they heard of the broadcasts and joined. The most significant difference at this point was the

level of interaction. We missed some of the audience's interactions during the livestream because we could not monitor all platforms and streams simultaneously. We had to review Facebook after the streams to interact with the audience, missing the vital point of livestreaming (McQuail, 2010). More interactions came from the viewers outside of the prayer time, and meetings happened both online and offline as part of "reflection on practice" and discipleship, all part of being a community of practice. "Practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (Wenger 1998: 52).

In February 2020, Digital Saints was to have its first digital Eucharist service. Through conversations via Facebook Messenger, we discovered that the community was showing a desire to go deeper into Christian fellowship and discipleship in some way. We hoped that offering a sacramental element such as the Eucharist would facilitate this in our community.

Fundamentally, the Eucharist is about people gathering to share in all that God provides, remembering all that Jesus did for us and renewing our souls and bodies by participating in this holy meal. The sacraments are a crucial marker of any emerging Christian community. Especially since there had been a desire among some of our new members to share bread and wine in communion, it was felt that we should facilitate this.

Reverend Nik had researched the changing theology of the Eucharist and, in his thesis, argued the idea of a digital Eucharist was sound.

> Although it may be uncomfortable for some to consider a theology of a Digital Eucharist, it is essential to remember that God works through many different types of services from a variety of traditions. In the sacraments, we rely on a promise from God; it is nothing that we humans can make happen (Stevenson 2018 10).

Richardson agreed: “At these meetings, you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively, and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ (Richardson, 2018) “. Reverend Nik continued:

> I believe we can include a Digital communion in this promise, especially when people are having genuine spiritual experiences from participating. After all, no matter what form of Eucharistic devotion we are participating in, we are all striving to meet Jesus and be granted life to its fullest (Stevenson 2018: 10).

We had notified the leader of Multiply (the group overseeing the mission) of the intention of Reverend Nik to preside over a digital Eucharist, and all was going forward. However, a local priest had heard of this, found it heretical, and spoke to a bishop in York who determined that this was not the right time to proceed. Therefore, out of deference to the bishop, we refrained from the idea of a digital Eucharist.

Digital Saints’ response to COVID-19

On 23 March 2020, the world changed because of the lockdown measures implemented to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Churches were shut down, and people reached out to the Digital Saints community for more content and opportunity for connection. In response to the government’s lockdown, we determined that increased participation and content from Digital Saints should be available to support the digital community and the local Yorkshire community. As a result, night Prayer returned five nights a week, and new 15-minute reflections and meditations were livestreamed at noon, Monday through Thursday.

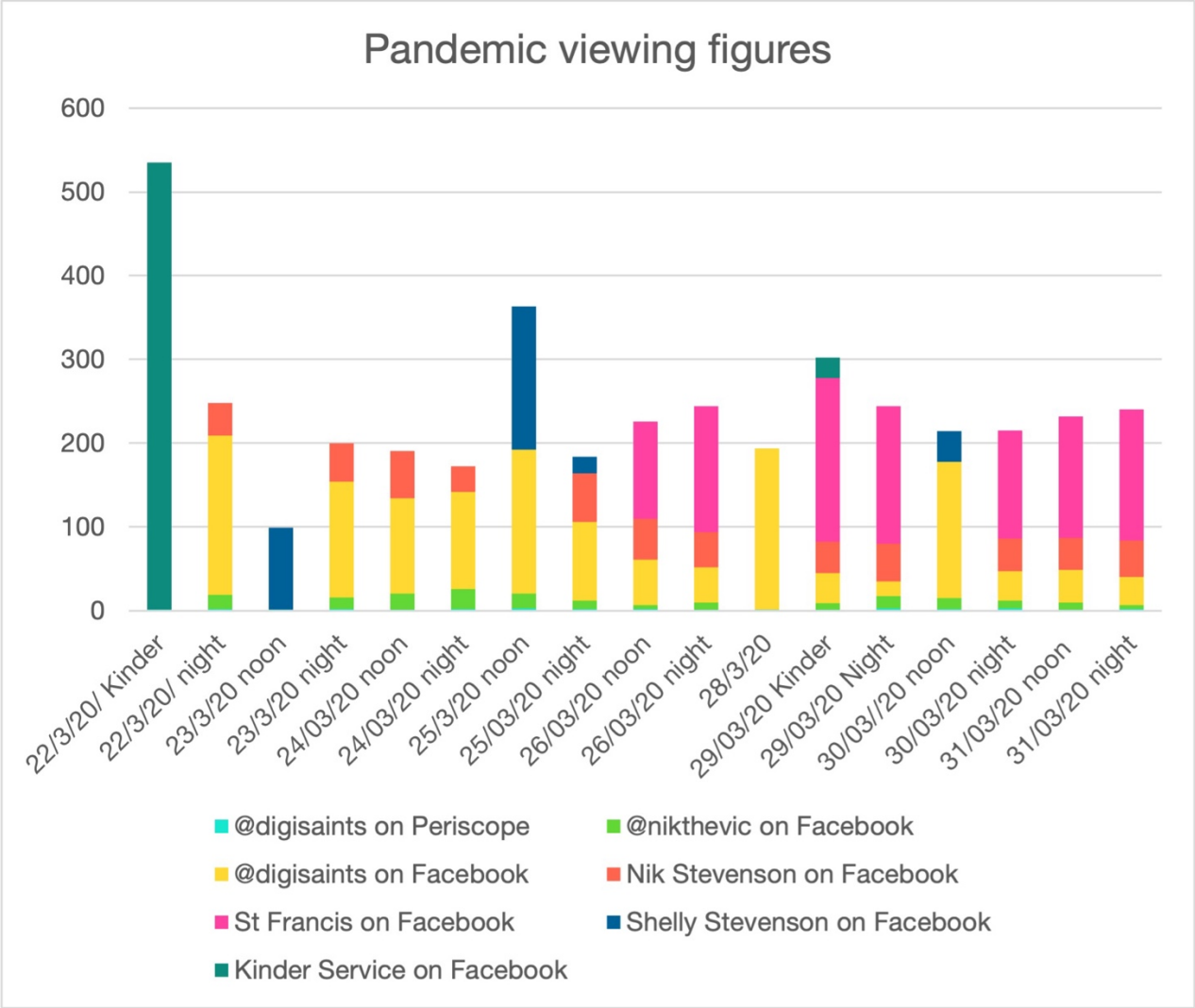

Figure 7: Pandemic viewing figures (test week) 22 March 20 – 31 March 20

The number of individual viewers increased during the pandemic in the first month of broadcasting (see Figure 7). We thus determined that it was essential to continue broadcasts.

Our first broadcast during the lockdown was the Kinder Service on 22 March 2020, which we usually did in person at St Francis Church on Sunday afternoons. We added the St Francis Facebook page to our streaming livestreaming platforms. On Sunday, this all-age service went online for the first time. We had just begun meeting at St Francis Hall weekly at 4 pm for about eight weeks when the pandemic hit, and gatherings were discouraged

and then forbidden. We formatted the service aimed at children, leaving out some elements and adapting others to make it a better fit for an online livestream interaction. Moving a service from a face-to-face format to one entirely online was very informative; one could discard so much of the standard children's service. When we moved the Kinder Service online, the hour service became about 15–20 minutes, leaving out the songs and simplifying the craft activity to include objects that most people had at home. The prayers and confession were the same as before, except for the "prayer board" the children created at the church used to place their prayers.

The children were still encouraged to write their prayers down – or draw a picture – but then, instead of the board, to put them on their fridge so they would remember to pray them during the week.

We noted from this experience that taking a service that is entirely face-to-face and to replicate its exact form online is not the best practice. Therefore, we adjusted the format, considering the children's limited attention spans. There was good response and interaction from children and families who made crafts and interacted by posting their creations online on the Kinder Service page (See Appendix B; timestamp 7:30).

Many people were anxious about their families during the pandemic, so prayer requests increased even further. Previous to the pandemic House Group, a meeting of people to support the ministry in building a new worshipping community, met on Tuesdays and then went to the pub for a Pub Quiz. This group that met in person morphed into a digital House Group that continued to organise the Pub Quiz. Before this, what was interesting was that many of the House Group began to join Digital Saints online prayers without us knowing that they had joined. The oddity of meeting with these people physically once a

week was a little unsettling. Because of the radio's connection techniques we employed, they felt they knew us already, although we did not know them. That made for an occasional awkward in-person conversation as they already knew what was happening in our lives.

We discovered we were missing some of the community's live responses on the Facebook pages during the broadcasts. We thus began to monitor the streams visually to interact with the audience, which did inflict a heavy load on the computer and hence an occasional blackout. We decreased our number of platforms as the computer struggled to monitor them all, which was crucial as the point of the livestream was the interaction. So instead of broadcasting directly, we shared the link to access the main Digital Saints page on @NiktheVic and St Francis Facebook from 20 September instead.

The number of participants in Digital Saints multiplied with much interaction (see Figure 8). This increase was due to the congregants from the local church who were no longer allowed in the church buildings for private prayer or services. They joined the gathering with Digital Saints through their Facebook page link. The local running club, Orchard Eagles, also began to attend the evening prayers as they knew Reverend Nik and asked him to offer some reflections during the pandemic for their webpage, similar to those we had started at midday for Digital Saints. These were to be recorded and provided twice a week. They also began participating in the Tuesday evening Zoom Pub Quiz and asked for a runner-specific quiz, which we did. Soon, we were streaming three times on some days. The pandemic catalysed this connection with the running club. This resulted from the closeness the runners already felt to Reverend Nik, from running together a few times a week, which was curtailed. The running club themselves were already a supportive sports community. Hammet, cited by Moynagh, describes this phenomenon: "It would be

hard to overstate the emphasis on the nature of church as community and the importance of experiencing community in the church for those in the emerging church (2009: 225). The same could be said of all-new contextual churches. Despite their differences, they virtually all put community at the centre of their lives“ (Moynagh 2012: 379).

During this time, what was especially interesting was the increased interaction from the audience/community using Facebook Messenger and the comments. This was the natural next step in the community's evolution, particularly considering communities of practice. “They are about knowing, but also about being together, living meaningfully, developing a satisfying identity and being human“ (Crossland 2006, Wenger 1998:134). Over the life of Digital Saints interaction slowly grew through the occasional comments on Facebook and liking and subscribing to the streams. During the pandemic, more people participated in the chat and contributed to the prayer list, as well as chatting via WhatsApp. The pandemic accelerated the community's evolution and increased the number of views.

However, this increased activity in response to the pandemic was exhausting. The number of livestreams, the preparation for the streams, the community's social interaction in the pub quizzes, and the number of reflections more than trebled the workload for us. After the lockdowns were eased, we dropped the Pub Quizzes but continued with the reflections, Night Prayer, and the Kinder Service.

Our community had just begun to meet face-to-face more often when the pandemic hit, so we will further explore having physical gatherings of the community after the pandemic is over. We continued this level of livestreaming until the end of the study. After the initial

month's surge, our views were increasing by an average of 150 views a broadcast with all of the platforms combined.

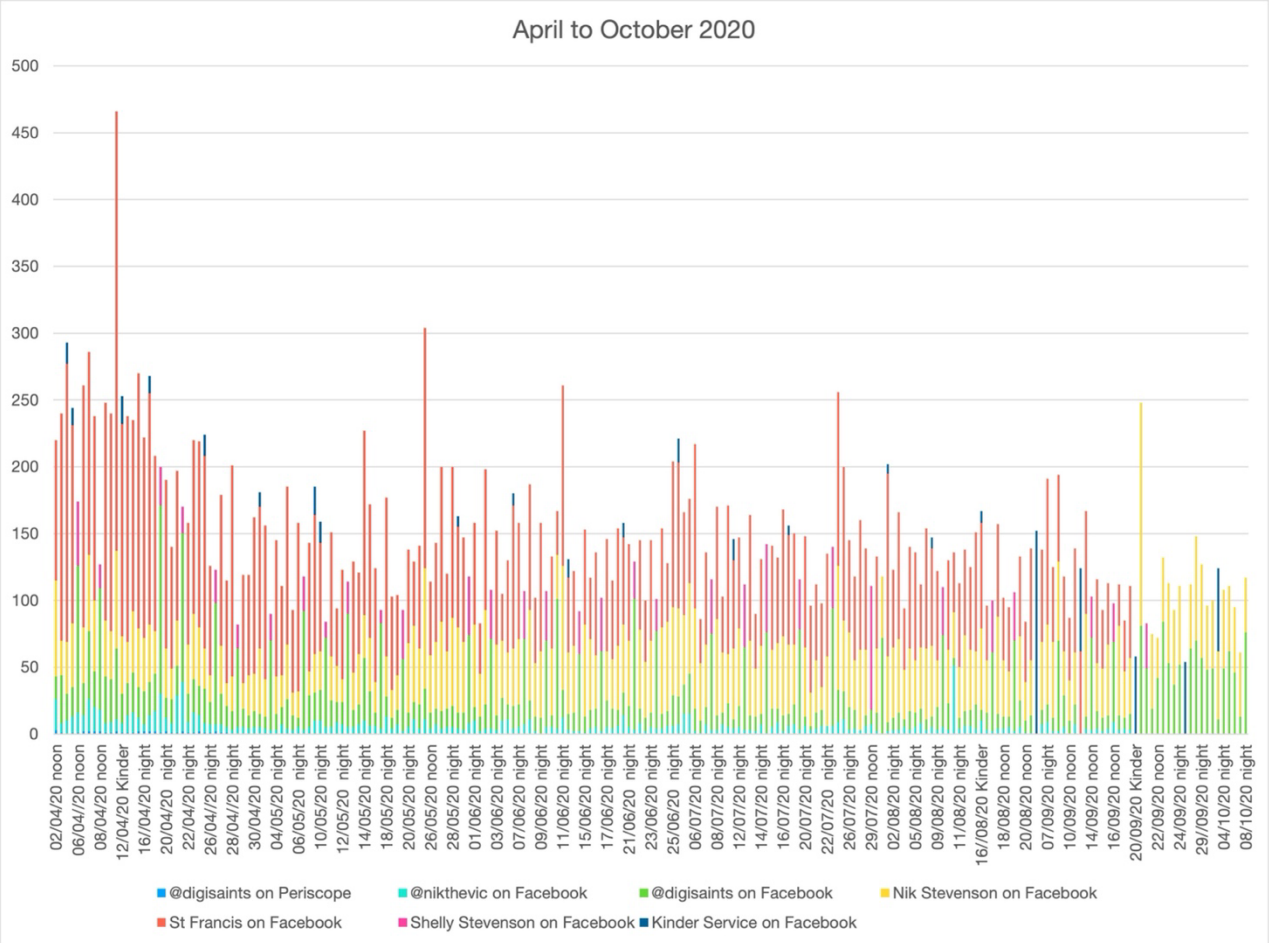

Figure 8: Viewing Figures April 2020 to October 2020

Throughout this study, we observed that with each improvement in broadcasting and technology, there was an improvement in the connection and interaction with the community and the community's experience and relationship with us. This meant more interactions both in the livestream and out of it. We began conversing via Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, and some requested to speak to us one-on-one via the apps or on the telephone. We invested in better routers to aid our digital stream upload as we had noted occasional buffering, which affected the community's livestream experience. We responded to the viewers' comments and concerns about the interaction ability,

lighting, sound, and technical issues that affected their experience and made appropriate adjustments to ensure that a lousy broadcast did not impair their experience. From the links via the livestream, we developed closer friendships and relationships offline and online.

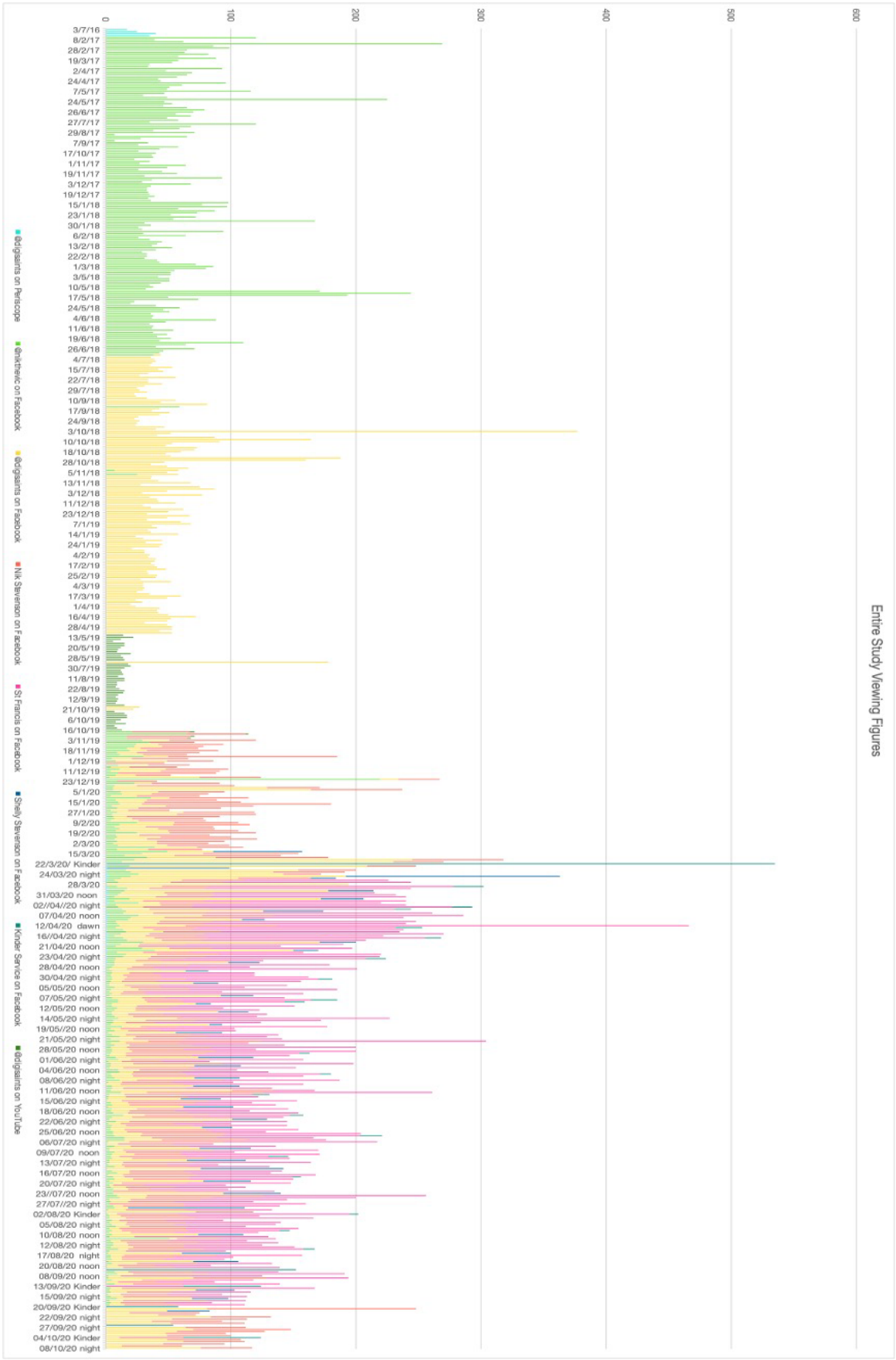

Figure 9, shows the total number of views and platforms during the study

Interviews with participants: Themes and discoveries

As mentioned before, I contacted all who 'liked' or subscribed to the livestream inviting them to take part in the study. Twelve people initially agreed, and eventually, eleven people participated in the interviews conducted mainly through Facebook Messenger video calls, similar to Skype. The participants were from all over the world, but most were from the UK, and some were English living in other countries. This was anecdotally discovered as part of the conversations, not elicited through interview questions. I found one person was in Texas, one in France, one in Abu Dhabi, and the rest scattered across England.

I was surprised by the age of those who took part in the interviews, although no questions pertaining to this were asked; a few of the participants offered this information during the interview. When this study was formulated, the idea was that most of those who participated would be digital natives. Instead, the ages were spread from the mid-30s to one participant in their 80s, with the majority in their 40s. Facebook's demographic has changed from the university students who were initially targeted. According to the digital marketing agency Omnicore, "62% of online Seniors aged 65+ are on Facebook, and 72% are between age 50-64" (Aslam 2019).

This study used the phenomenological ethnographic methods of observation and interviews, using two sets of questions. These were open-ended questions, allowing deep reflection and rich description; the first set included the baseline questions to establish their interest and understanding of the nature of digital communities and their experience of the digital community concerning their faith. The second set explored their experience in the hybrid community further.

The first question was about their experience in the digital space: “How can digital technologies enable the experience of New Monastic communities of faith? This was broken down into two sub-questions: “How do participants of the digital community experience and understand the Christian community?“ and “How does this experience and understanding inform or shape their spiritual or religious experience?“ As noted before, for some the word ‘spiritual’ was used as the word ‘religious’ can be considered pejorative in some Evangelical Christian communities. I was particularly interested in how their experience played out in their religious life, both on and offline.

As each participant answered the questions and discussed their experience, relevant codes were identified. As mentioned in chapter 9, part of this process was to identity the codes that were transferred to a spider gram or mindmap to help identify the themes. It was crucial to examine the context in which their dialogue rested to delineate the codes and themes. To do this each circumstance in which a particular statement made by the participant is received and noted, along with their tone of voice, and if there is access to video, their facial expression and movement of their body. I took note of the use of language and other indicating systems. Grossberg (1996) stated that cultural studies are ‘radically contextual’. This is because cultural studies focus largely on identity creation, social interactions, and differences, all of which can only be measured in context and not by reference to universal features.

Once the initial codes and links were formed, themes were discovered and investigated more thoroughly. First, I used the actual quotes from the participants to illustrate their experience and the themes and subthemes. Next, I searched for connections across all themes, sub-themes, and codes, using links in the mind map to connect the different experiences using my “lens“ of interpretation (see Appendix e). Phenomenology was

used to understand the participants' experience and, employing my lens, to interpret using hermeneutic phenomenology, revising as necessary, for extracting codes and links to other codes and themes using colours, links, and nodes.

Using the MindMup application, I created a spidergram – or mind map of what had been discovered. Paul Ballard and John Pritchard describe this approach as ideal for facilitating communities' theological ethnographic research. "It draws on the ability of the mind to make connections of a lateral as well as a linear nature, opening the possibility of people seeing links they had not initially imagined or realized could be there. It is a good method of opening a debate or blowing fresh material into the reflection" (Ballard & Pritchard 2006: 132).

The process began with a vast supply of raw material from the interviews, including background, interpretations of the livestreams, and experiences obtained after discussion with impressions from Reverend Nik. The initial step was to start the reflective process and begin to see connections by building a mind map using coloured pens on paper before transferring it to the computer. "The objectivity and visual impact of a piece of paper allow the reflection to take on a clarity and shape which is not always present in 'the slimy mud of words, the sleet and hail of verbal imprecisions'." It takes the richness of a situation seriously and is open to the contribution of any information or insight from another relevant discipline" (Ballard & Pritchard 2006: 133).

They did discuss the limits to this approach; the problem with any correlational method to theological contemplation is that it may lack criteria for assigning appropriate relative weights to various sources of information in the discussion. That is where the lens of interpretation from my experience comes in, after separating the questions according to

their questions, codes, themes and nodes, a spider gram/mind map was planned and uploaded to the application.

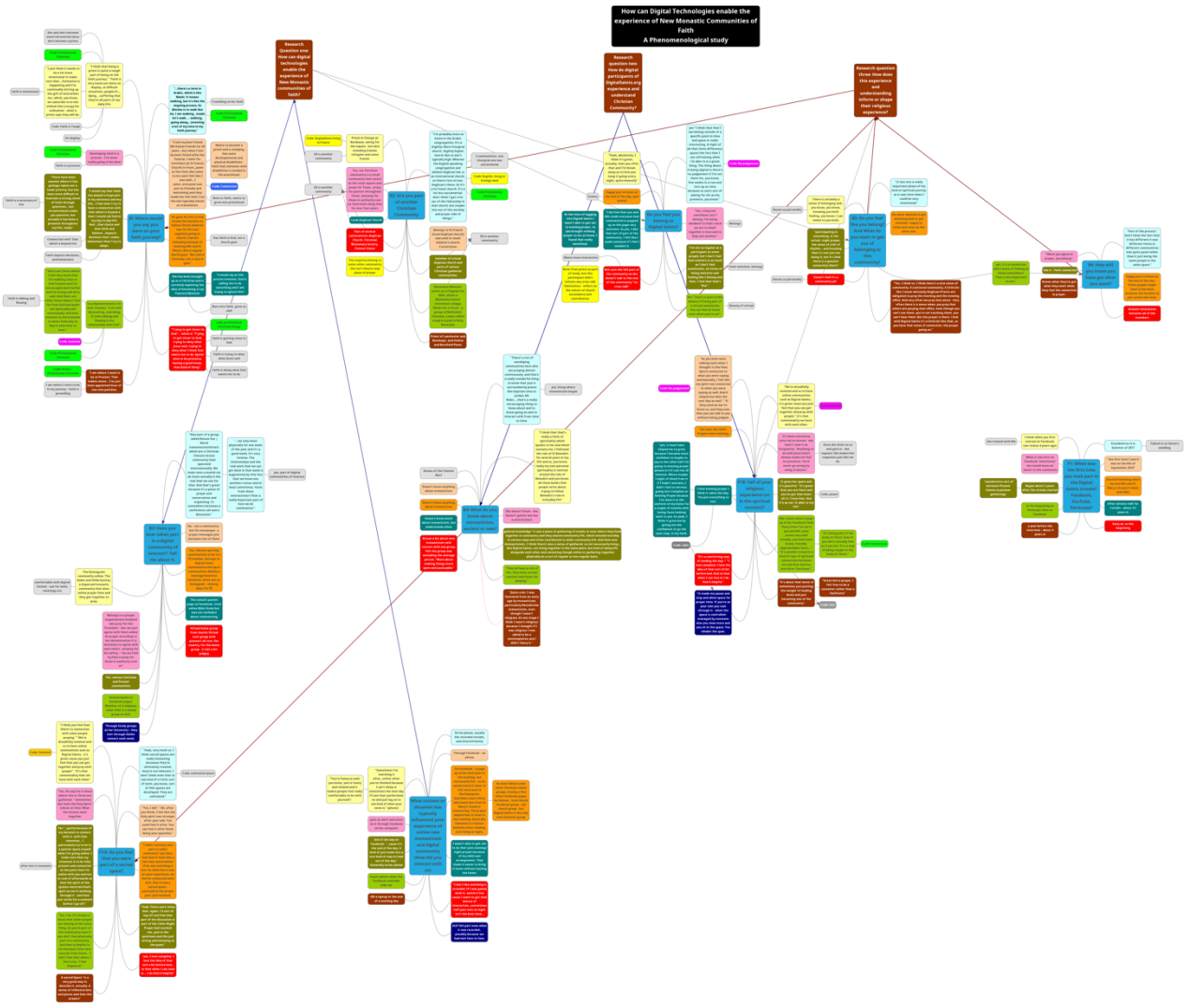

Figure 10

Themes and subthemes, connections, and links from the interviews. To zoom in, see Appendix E, which is a vectored PDF.

Participant legend; **A** (peach) **B** (navy blue) **C** (Olive Green) **D (**teal) **E** (Lime Green) **F** (Red) **G** (Brown) **H**(Pale Blue) **I** (Yellow) **J** (Gold) **G** (Pink)

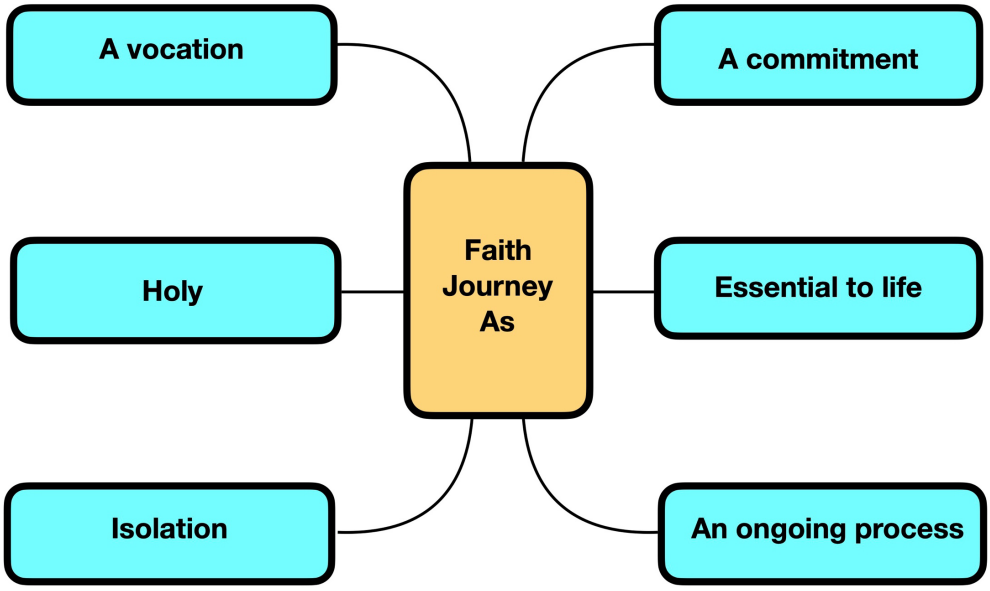

Figure 11: Faith journey – Common themes

Giorgi (1997) described a systematic procedure for using an analytic method representing constituents (codes) of the research and resultant themes. In this research, a code is the first look at a reoccurring item in the interviews. Codes can be developed across interviews, drawn out, and shaped differently from what was imaged at first glance. Themes are similar codes and are gathered together in a set for further sifting and analysis.

Once the initial mind map was complete, the dominant codes from the impressions gained from the first question of the interview concerning the faith journey were linked, and common themes were discovered. The codes from each interview were varied, but the following themes emerged: a **Vocation**; a **Commitment**; **Essential to life**; an **Ongoing process**; **Isolation**; and **Holy**.

Looking at the vectored pdf in appendix E, you can see the codes and impressions surrounding the initial question and the links described as they developed across the questions. There are also different meaning units that are neither codes nor themes surrounding the participant bubbles, often these are in a neutral colour.

As each interview progressed, further meaning was discovered by observation of the participants during the process. For example, some things that were gathered were explicit; each participant used terms that were separated and placed in the mind map as a single term, such as **Isolation** and **Commitment**. Other discoveries were implicit, found in parts of the interview that did not relate to the original question, the narrative amplifying their experience and reflexive response to the community. In these cases, a summary of the participant's perceived intention was put into the map rather than highlighting a single, pivotal quote from the interview. The **Holy** code developed out of several instances of the participants discussing how they wanted to do what God wanted, what Jesus wanted, or even what they believed was their ultimate attainment, going forward in the priesthood. As my hermeneutic phenomenological lens used each further interview to re-assess previous codes and redesign the map due to discovery, links between different questions were formed and noted.

An unexpected theme was that most of those who participated in the research were either clergy or leaders in other Christian communities, identified as **Vocation**. Initially, this was noted as **Professional Christian.** This delineation does not represent the majority of those who join the stream daily but only those willing to participate in the research. As the participants were self-selected based on their liking or subscribing, it appears they were in some way invested in the community and had used the evening prayer as a means of support for their ministries.

All of the participants described their journey as a form of life quest essential to their well-being, noted as **Essential to Life**. Participant H talked about it being a long-term journey that was best explained in another language: "… there's a term in Arabic, which is like *mashi*. It means walking, but it's like an ongoing process. So *Bimshe* is to walk like 'to be'; I am walking; *mashi* is let's walk…walking (together), going along…investing a lot of my time in my faith journey."

A few spoke of the difficulty they faced along their faith journey and the determination it took to continue, noted as an **Ongoing process**. For example, participant C explains, "There have been seasons where it has perhaps taken not a lower priority but been more difficult to maintain a strong sense of faith through questions, and you know, circumstances make you question." But, they add, "I would say that faith has played a huge part in my existence and my life… I feel that… I try to have a connection with that which is beyond me that I would call God in my day-to-day life. And it has that choice, and that faith and belief has a way – it impacts decisions that I make, behaviours that I try to adopt."

Participant E discusses the outcome of this God connection: "There are times where I feel very much that I'm walking close to God, to Jesus, and I'm encouraged and fruitful and I'm loving, and all is well. And there are other times where I feel far from God and quite low spiritually and emotionally. At that moment, as the moment varies from day to day or even hour to hour." Having been in ordained ministry for over ten years, she continued, "I am still discovering, searching. It's like ebbing and flowing in my relationship with God," noted here as **Commitment**.

As I mentioned, almost all the participants in the sample group were working in the church; a few were lay leaders, and most were ministers and priests. Participant I spoke about her journey being something that was consciously determined, “I just think it needs to be a lot more international to make sure that…formation is happening and I’m continually stirring up the gift of God within me, which, you know, we subscribe to in the ordinal[4].“ She added, “I think that being a priest is quite a tough part of being on the faith journey.“ She explained that when you are clergy, what you do is more noticeable; there isn’t the privilege of working out your faith privately. Then there is the calling to walk alongside those whom priests are called to serve. She expressed, “Faith is very much out there on display…in difficult situations, people ill, dying, suffering, all the parts of our daily life.“

One participant was a Christian for as long as she could remember. Her culture was based on her connection with her family’s church. She said, “I’ve been a Christian all my life. I’ve been at church most Sundays since I was three months old….“ She confessed that she drifted away as a teen but came back as an adult when she married. Her family was also very active in the church, and she ran the Sunday schools. “We have a church family. Our church… there’s some people in our congregation that have known me since I was able to walk… they are what I call a different family that I can call on in times of need.”

Another participant, who came to faith when they were 16, said, “I’m a Christian; I just don’t go to church.“ Church, for this person, was about gathering in a physical building, not gathering together as the body of Christ; they did that in another place. They explained that they belong to several faith communities on the web, including Digital Saints, and connected with other believers online rather than in a physical space. Steve

[4] The Ordinal is the liturgy for ordination – what a priest promises they will do.

Aisthorpe talked about this in his book, *The Invisible Church: Learning from the Experience of Churchless Christians*: “Churchless faith is a feature of the dramatic and momentous change going on in Western society” (2016: 1). He understood that his research into this “provides a window into the world behind the statistics of so-called decline and enables us to understand what is really going on – why this is an exciting time and why declining church attendance may not be all that it seems“ (Aisthorpe 2016: 1). He posits the question, what if this decline in attendance in the traditional physical church is not as is thought? Like Participant J, what if Christians do not feel that their local church times are right for them or that the service is relevant to how they live their lives and meet their need in another way? In Participant J’s case, he meets that need by gathering with other members of Christ’s Body (the church) online. Although not part of the sample group, we observed throughout the study that some participants/members of the Digital Saints community were also not members of a physical church.

I discovered that most of the sample group included members of other Christian communities, and the Digital Saints stream was a supplement to their churchgoing. Each felt their experience of God and faith was enhanced by meeting with other believers in any setting, be it face-to-face, digitally, or even via telephone. One participant stated that it was what the Bible said to do: “Where two or three gathers in my name, there I am with them“ (Matt 18:20). Regardless of where they were on their faith journey, all of the participants spoke of the importance of continuing to nurture their faith.

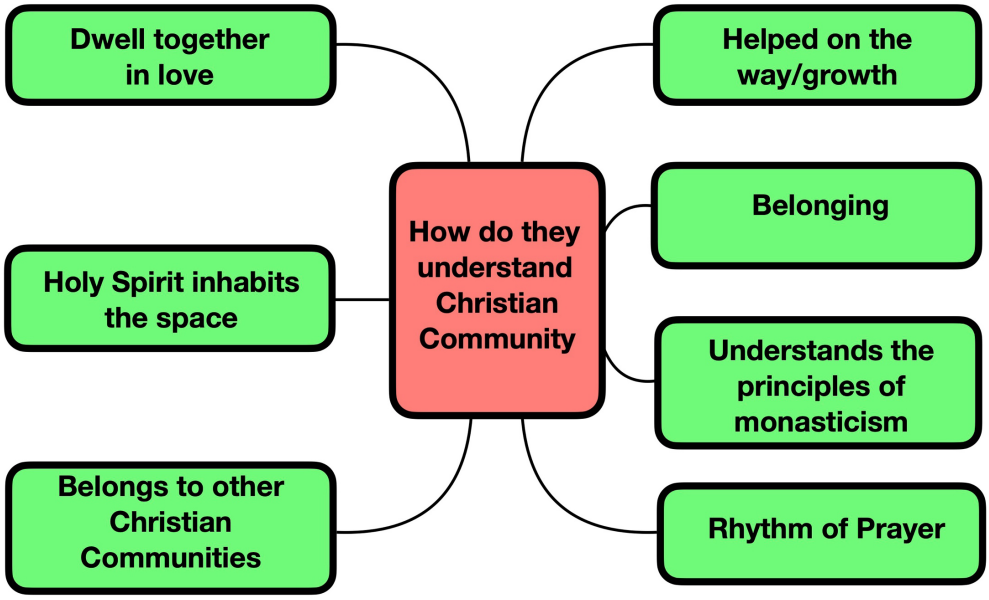

Figure 12: Christian Community – Common Themes

The next question was: How do digital participants of Digital Saints experience and understand Christian Community? The themes that emerged were **Dwell together in love; the Holy Spirit inhabits the space**; **Belonging**, the **Rhythm of prayer**; **Helped on the way/growth**; and **Understands the principles of monasticism**. In addition, we discovered all belonged to other Christian Communities, some online and some offline.

Most participants understood ancient monasticism and the call of those in ancient monastic communities to live an intentional life, an excellent example of what it was to live together in love. Code: **understands the principles of monasticism.** For example, participant C explained, "…they lived together in community, and they shared community life, which included worship in various ways and often contributed to broader community life. And then new (monasticism)… I think there's also a sense of gathered, so not necessarily living, like Digital Saints, not living together in the same place, but kind of

doing life alongside each other and connecting through online or gathering together physically on a sort of regular or less regular basis.“

It appears that this group believes that a Christian community is not necessarily “church“ as in a physical building, although most of them also belonged in some way to a church group. Almost all participants spoke of digital communities of interest they belong to, some faith-based and some not. All were comfortable with gathering in the digital space and expressed their understanding of community as a gathering of the Body of Christ or believers. This was articulated as **Dwells together in love** and formed another theme as the other participants spoke of feeling at home (dwelling) together.

I note that there seems to be some transitional movement from established physical, religious spaces to more hybrid and online communities of interest with this group. This trend has been observed by Michael Moynagh, who states, “Over the past half-century, a cultural blizzard has transformed the landscape, and the church must engage with the world as it now exists. This does not mean that inherited forms of church have had their day. On the contrary, many churches continue to serve significant segments of society. Yet the question presses: who are these churches *not* serving“ (Moynagh 2012: 151)?

Participant K meets with other Christians, but not in a building. She says, “Our Christian community is a small community that meets at the town squire and prays for Texas – prays for pastors throughout Texas and prays for those in authority over us. We’ve been doing that for over four years.“ She explained that all the people who meet in the town square were from different churches or none. They were all from the area, found each other, and believed in prayer. Participant K went on, “Community is about gathering together and agreeing with one another in prayer.“ The **Rhythm of Prayer** was another

theme that developed, noting this and other conversations that spoke of the necessity of specific times of prayer.

Participant E said, “It’s being part of the body of Christ, even if you don’t feel you are. It’s being taught in the body of Christ.“ Although we have many who join our livestreams, they do not interact or do not log in; as stated before, the only way we discover that they have been taking part is when they tell us later. However, most of these participants say they felt part of the body of Christ during the livestream. This theme, **Belonging,** came up in all of the interviews, both here and in the further questions, as essential to the walk of faith.

With this established, I asked the question, “Do you feel you belong to Digital Saints?“ An essential part of this was understanding that the term “belonging“ differed with each participant, their life experience, and their perspective. They each clarified their viewpoint when asked, “What do you want to get out of belonging?“ The themes **No judgement** and **Friendly and accepting** were added to this section’s existing themes. It appears that many participants felt isolated from their communities and unsupported in their faith; some felt this way because being the religious leader meant they did not experience their community the same way.

Participant K reported, “I do sometimes feel isolated because the people who I minister to all see me as their minister and as their chaplain. So, I am part of the community, but I am also separate from the community. And that’s the thing that is isolating because there’s no one here who’s known me longer than two years.“

As for belonging to the Digital Saints as a faith community, all, bar one, experienced a faith-based community and felt they belonged. Participant G reported, “I think there’s a nice sense of community. A scattered community. A little bit like – I mean, obviously, Anglican priests are obligated to pray the morning and evening office. And very often we pray that alone – very often there is a sense when you pray that others are praying that office, even though you can’t see them, you’re not touching them, you can’t hear them. I think with Digital Saints; it’s a little bit like that, so you have that sense of connection, the prayer going on.“ Participant H explained, “I think that, that I can belong outside of a specific point in time and space is really interesting. In light of all that (time difference, space), the fact that I can still belong when I’m able to is a great thing. The thing about it being digital is there’s no judgement if I’m not there for, you know, five weeks in a row and turn up on time because no one’s sort of asking for me as my presence, you know.“

Participant F did not feel that it was a community as there was not enough “across banter“ from those who joined the livestream. She said, “I don’t think it’s quite there yet… so if it was a community that there would be more sort of interactions between everybody who watches whether that’s live or later on… so you can’t, ‘cause you’ve got the chat window that has the liturgy in.“ Not long after this, we were able to put the liturgy in as a cutaway graphic during the livestream as the technology advanced to enable that. She has continued attending, uses the chat function, and gives the new heart and thumbs-up reactions to interact with the livestream.

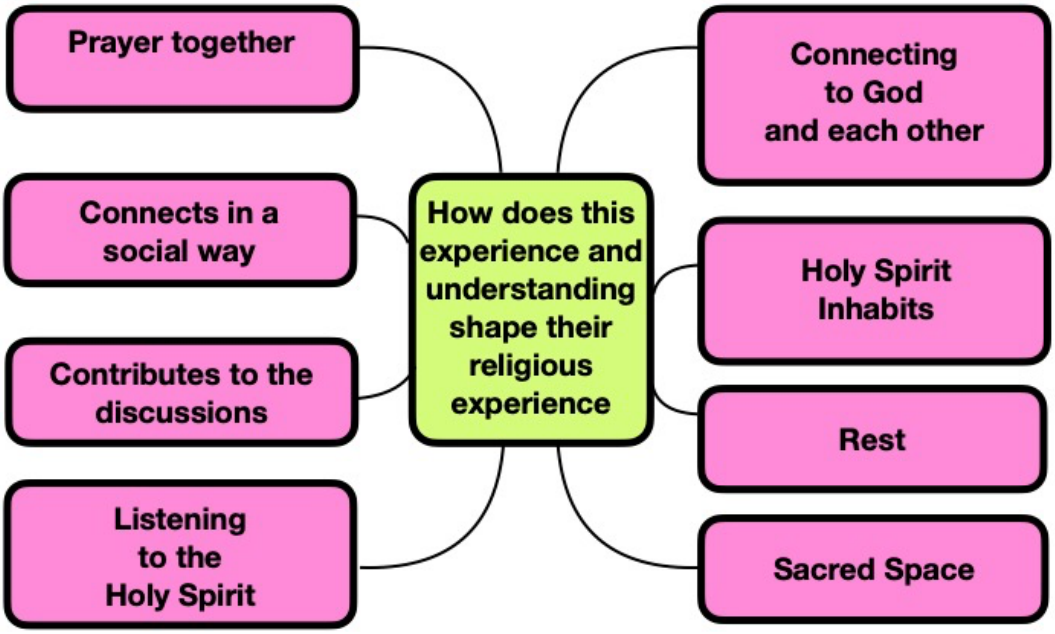

Figure 13: **Religious Experience – Common Themes**

New themes arising from the intersections were **Prayer together, Connects socially**, **Contributes**, **The Holy Spirit inhabits the space**, **Sacred space**, and **Rest**.

Shaping and informing religious experience and practice is an extensive category. The themes reflected this, coalescing with central themes of **Experiencing a sacred space**, **Listening to the Holy Spirit**, and, in prayer, **Connecting to God and each other**. This connection with both God and each other is the embodiment of learning to follow Christ. Speaking of Christian new monasticism, Grimley and Woodley posit, “In its rawest form, it is primarily concerned with aiding the human return journey to God. It is a journey back from our broken and fallen state toward wholeness, returning to the Creator’s arms“ (Grimley & Wooding 2010: 61). I agree with their supposition, but I would add another element; part of the Christian journey is also our connection with each other. Jesus put it succinctly in the Gospel of Matthew: “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God

with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). This connection with others who are praying with you help people "become more fully present to themselves and God's love, which should bring increase peace, tolerance and love in how adherents to this way of life (New Monasticism) relate to others" (Mobsby & Berry, 2014: 58).

All participants mentioned how the experience of praying together in this digital space touched them; Participant C said she experienced peace. It gave her a space for that: "participating in something, in the actual night prayer, the sense of a bit of rhythm… and knowing that it's not just me doing it, but that there is a genuine connection there… It's great that you are there, and you've (Digital Saints) got that heart for it. I love that. And it's an ear. It adds to my life." Participant K added, "When you agree in prayer, you belong." Speaking of the connection that was possible, despite being geographically apart, Participant I said, "We're dreadfully isolated, and so to have online communities such as Digital Saints… it's great because you just feel that you can get together and pray with people. It's that commonality we have with each other."

Participant E added, "It's another strand in a kind of rope of spiritual connections between me and God and me and other Christians." Participant G mentioned that it was difficult to feel part of a community when leading, that you are part of but removed when you are the clergy. She described her religious experience, "It's a great aid to prayer; I felt free to be a consumer rather than a facilitator." These led to the theme **Connecting to God and each other**.

Participant D reported that her online experience of the Night Prayer shaped her religious experience. It helped her grow, as, after six months of joining, she was able to join a weekly evening prayer service in her local church. She said, “I became more confident to maybe say to the other half; I’m going to evening prayer please, it’ll cost me 20 minutes. Where maybe I might have shied from it if I hadn’t (joined us online) … I didn’t feel so nervous going into Compline or Evening Prayer because I’ve done it in the comfort of my home for a couple of months with loving faces looking back to you. So yeah, I think it grew me by giving me the confidence to go the next step in my faith. I love evening prayer; I think it calms the day. You put everything to rest.“ This is very much “learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world“ (Wenger 1998:3). Her “apprenticeship“ with Digital Saints contributed to her competence in understanding the liturgy, the use of terms, and ritual.

Rest was a central theme described by many who used Night Prayer as an ending to the day. Participant F said that it was part of the *examen*, a method of prayer Ignatius of Loyola started in the 16th Century, looking over the day and considering what had gone before, to look for what God does, what could be different. “It’s a comforting way of landing the day. I love Compline (Night Prayer). I love the idea of that sort of bit before bed… I do find it helpful.“ Participant J mentioned it was not only peaceful but also relaxing at the end of the day.

Participant A said it was not just during the prayers that they experienced God’s presence: “As you both were talking to each other, I thought it (the Holy Spirit) connected to what you were saying, and basically, I felt my spirit connecting to what you were saying as well. And it helped me then the next day, as well.“ Here, Participant A is speaking of the Pentecostal terminology describing the physical feeling of “connection“ that Albrecht

(1999) posits is a “mode of Pentecostal ritual sensibility“, in particular the “mode of contemplation“. “A deep receptivity and sense of openness to the Holy Spirit characterises this ritual mode… Pentecostal people seek to ‘be open to the work of the Holy Spirit’“ (Albrecht 1999: 183). In this particular instance, I believe that Participant A refers to the notion of discernment that the Holy Spirit gives to understand and negotiate circumstances in one’s life. As a community of practice, this is an example of a shared practice, particularly the practice of L**istening to the Holy Spirit** as part of discipleship.

Participant A added, regarding connecting and sharing in the comments, “If they (participants) need an ear to listen… they know that they can talk to you without being judged.“ In many interviews, the theme of **No judgement** came up in different sections; they felt there was no judgement about the times they joined or their prayers or conversation. Instead, they were accepted and welcomed where they were. This again relates to the community of practice that is Digital Saints, concerning the idea that as a group, they have a shared practice and support, which Wenger describes, “…in the course of all these conversations, they have developed a set of stories and cases that have become a shared repertoire for their practice“ (2011: 2).

Participant B said that the notification for Facebook Live popping up helped them. “It made me pause and stop and allow space for prayer time. If you’re on your own, you rush through it – when the space is controlled (Participant B is speaking of prayer space either online or offline) – managed by someone else, you relax more, and you sit in the space, you inhabit the space.“ Participant K said noting her religious experience, “Anything to do with Jesus always made me feel his presence.“

What was the participant's experience of the livestream as a sacred space?

Sacred space, in this instance, can mean many things. Lings (2020) discusses different types of sacred spaces, but all are a “portal to deeper community life in Christ“ (Lings 2020:12). He speaks of the various sacred spaces in the monastic tradition: the cell, the chapel, the chapter, the cloister, the garden, the refectory, and the scriptorium, each respectively referring to the different types of gathering for worship: alone, in public, a place to make decisions, for meetings, a place of work, the place for hospitality, and a place for study and passing on knowledge. Each location can be sacred as each allows a moment to stop and reflect or work and worship. However, the idea of a sacred space is a mindful space or moment to remember who we are in Christ and listen to what He says to us in that space. In preparation for inhabiting a sacred space (and therefore meeting God), Lings offers a prayer taken from the Anglican collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity:

> O God, the protector of all that trust in thee,
> without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
> Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy;
> that, thou being our ruler and guide,
> we may so pass through things temporal,
> that we finally lose not the things eternal:
> Grant this, O heavenly Father,
> for Jesus Christ’s sake our Lord (Lings 2020: 44).

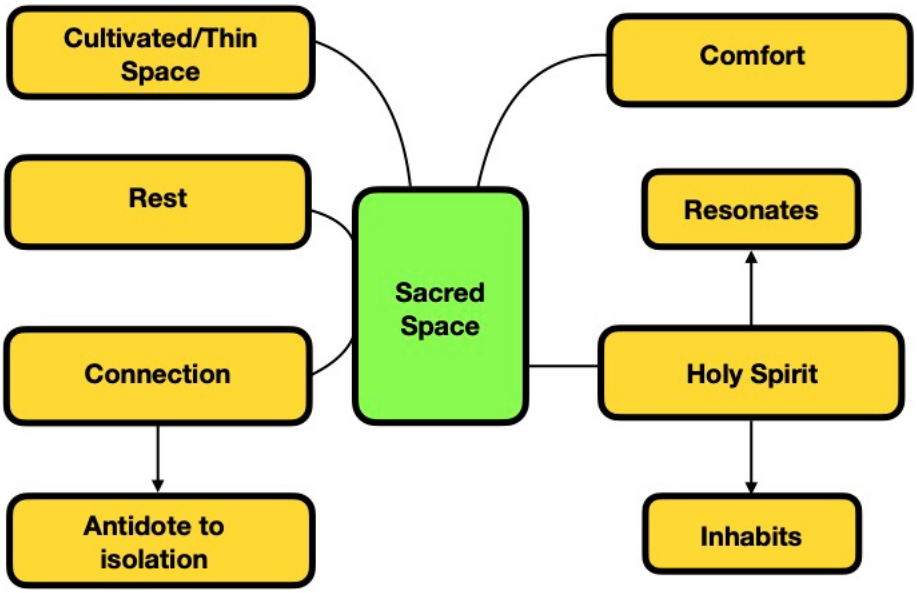

Figure 14: Sacred Space – Common Themes

Was it a sacred space?

Participant H explained the idea of a sacred space very well: "I think sacred spaces are really fascinating because they're ultimately created; they're not inherent. I don't think even that to use kind of a Celtic sort of term, you know, sort of thin spaces are developed; they are cultivated." The decision to be part of this curated space was paramount. Participant C said they believed they were part of a sacred space, "… partly because of my decision to connect with it, with that intention… I particularly try to be in a quieter space myself when I'm going online. I make sure that my intention is to be fully present and connected at the point that I'm online with you and not to rush off afterwards so that the spirit of the spoken word and God's spirit as we're working through it. And then just settle for a moment before I go off."

"I didn't actively take part or make comments," Participant J said, but he did feel that it was a two-way conversation. If he was taking part in the livestream while it was

broadcast, he thought it was an open experience; he felt a connection with God; it was a sacred space, particularly the prayer part. Because this is part of a joint enterprise of a Community of Practice, Participant J was participating in Digital Saint's shared purpose and identifying with the practice of the community, in this instance, prayer. Even though Participant J did not post comments, he was still taking part in the purpose of the community in its joint enterprise, held together by mutual accountability, in this case, the responses of and intentions in the prayer (Koliba & Gajda 2009).

Participant E experienced the livestream as a sacred space that helped her by giving her the comfort she needed: "It's lovely to know that other people are sharing in the same thing. So, you're part of the community even if you don't feel physically part of a community. And that's helpful to me because I live very, very far from home. So, I don't feel that where I live in my home, I feel displaced."

Participant G opined that a sacred space "is a very good way to describe it, actually. A series of reflective bits and pieces and then prayers." Participant A said, "Oh after you finished, I felt like the Holy Spirit was stronger after your talk. You could feel it after." Many participants discussed not rushing off after the prayers and reported listening to them while winding down at the end of the day to aid their understanding and shape their religious experience. "There were times that, again, I'd sort of log off and feel that part of the discussion or part of the Celtic Night Prayer had touched me… just in the quietness and the just sitting and listening to the quiet," C explained.

In conclusion, many links and codes were not replicated, and the themes repeated in the theme sets and the connections were made evident by the colours and linkages. (See appendix E) Those themes linked across theme sets and sections came about due to the

nature of the open-ended questions and the participants' ability to give detailed, full descriptions of their experiences. I will explore what I feel to be the significant areas here.

Deconstructing the theme of vocation

Every theme cluster has one dominant idea. In this one, the notion is that spiritual life is an ongoing process essential to life. However, a subordinate theme, **Vocation,** highlights the digital divide in that those with access to the stream on smartphones, tablets, or computers had to be in the position to use our livestreaming for their spiritual enhancement. “Changes in society demand new skills, especially those related to the Internet as one of the most important means of communication in contemporary society“ (Van Deursen & van Dijk 2010: 893). No one without any of those devices could access us. Researchers are primarily looking at how this affects society, specifically the disenfranchisement of those who cannot easily pick up digital skills, such as the elderly or those who do not have the means to partake. This divide is increasingly affecting those who are marginalised (van Dijk 2013). Rice and Haythornthwaite, citing McNutt, state, “While on the one hand the Internet and other communication and information technologies can increase human capital by providing better access to education and training, on the other hand, those who do not have sufficient resources or experience will be further excluded from human and social capital“ (Rice & Haythornthwaite 2006: 93). Studies have shown that even when given access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT), those who were “traditionally disadvantaged“ did not overcome their lack of experience very quickly. Traditionally disadvantaged are the elderly, those with a lower income, and those without a university education (ibid).

The discovery that many research participants in the study were ‘vocational Christians’ highlighted this digital divide. This also pointed to an interesting phenomenon; leaders

also felt the need to be community members supported by another leader. They said they were happy to “relax“ and “be a consumer“ rather than overseeing the interaction. At its heart, belonging to a Community of Practice is a social approach with a shared

> language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all of the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle clues, untold rules of the recognisable stable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodies understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views (Wenger 1998: 47).

All of them were grateful for a way to connect and share practice outside of the streamed prayer. Many associated with Reverend Nik via various means, including the telephone, to discuss, share practice, and in one instance, ask for prayer for a parish. They also offered their expertise and helped “work out common sense through mutual engagement“ (ibid).

How does “belonging“ fit?

The dominant theme in the study was supported by the sometimes stated and sometimes implied **Belonging**. This was about the Christian community and, even when online, living together with love. The interviews revealed that all belonged to other Christian communities, some online and some offline. Still, as a community, they self-identified as a member of Digital Saints and were invested in this as part of their identity (Cox 1996).

> To look for specific processes of identification and interaction is more concrete than trying to capture a community in its entirety. This is even more so with the networked forms of the Internet... the combined processes of identification and interaction create and sustain belonging, and patterns of belonging extend across

> online/offline interfaces. This is relevant to individual religiosity as well as group religion (Lundby 2011: 1221).

This notion of belonging denotes a correlation to their identity as participating in this Community of Practice "transforms who we are and what we can do; it is an experience of identity" (Wenger 1998: 214). This connection included participants as a community "incorporating its members' pasts into its history – that is, by letting what they have been, what they have done, and what they know contribute to the constitution of its practice" (Wenger 1998:215). All spoke of experiencing a connection with God. According to Lundby, "Religion is understood through processes of mediation and patterns of belonging rather than as defined 'communities'" (2011: 1219). However, using the word *community*, "functional and healthy spiritual community has been repeatedly identified as a crucial element of new monasticism regarding the formation of individuals and participative action in life" (Mobsby & Berry 2014: 181). It is functional in that the community worked as a family built of disparate people coming together to support and serve the community they inhabit. The aspect of healthy relationships signifies open and honest communication between the members, making closer connections to support and build in love the community they inhabit. This vision of community is Digital Saints' vision. "Engagement, imagination, and alignment are all important ingredients of learning – they anchor it in practice yet make it broad, creative, and effective in the wider world." (Wenger 1998: 217). They were learning, as mentioned before, as apprenticeships in the community.

Connection

A subordinate theme in this study was the need for **Connection**, particularly among those working in the church who did not feel the benefit of belonging to a community of faith as

they were the leader. Not only did they discuss it was beneficial not to be the one to lead, but they also mentioned, sometimes only implied, a notion of **Loneliness** (another theme) in more than one section of the interviews. This was a resounding theme. They spoke of isolation in their placement (as a priest or lay person) because they were leading and could not lower their guard to care for their church pastorally.

As a researcher, I had expected some form of loneliness among the digital natives who accessed our livestream. In the BBC's Loneliness Experiment, in collaboration with the Wellcome Collection, it was shown that youth, digital natives with the most connections, felt the loneliest. This survey, the largest of its kind in the world, received responses from over 55,000 people (Hammond, 2018). People are living busier and more complicated lives; they often remain separated from their local community. They find it difficult to access their local religious community, giving curated snippets via social media that cannot replace the messy human connection. Turkle (2011) calls this the "I share; therefore I am" phenomenon. Turkle notes that this has its own problems: "And now we look to the network to defend us against loneliness even as we use it to control the intensity of our connections. Technology makes it easy to communicate when we wish and to disengage at will" (Turkle 2011: 13). What I did not expect from both the demographic of the participants and their vocation was their need for an "outside connection" where they would be accepted without judgement.

Whether the loneliness came from leading or from belonging to the young generation or was caused by distraction, a subtheme discovered was that belonging to the community was an antidote to a symptom of modern life, the frenetic busyness, and the overwhelming sense of missing out, combined with an equal longing to live a life more devoted to God. Creating a hybrid digital community to counter the distractions of modern

life, aiding prayer with the assistance of a supportive community in the digital space, would assist those spiritually and help the church become more relevant (Moynagh & Beck 2020). An emerging expression of the church that meets that call are cell churches, smaller groups of people meeting in homes, with all the cells coming together in a large gathering once or twice a year (Beckham 1997). This can be a break from spectator worship and perhaps a return to the essence of spiritual life from a simple time but aided by technology. This would give those who lead a change by giving them a break from their leading role to participate in a supportive environment.

There were links across clusters: connecting the themes of **Sacred Space** and the idea of **God with us,** with a strong theme, **No Judgement**. Throughout the interviews, all said, at various points, that one of the most valuable and appealing benefits of the livestream was that no one would know how often one came or how long one would be part of the prayers. There was just an acceptance and a perceived joy that they had joined.
According to a Barna Group study, young Christians leave the church due to feeling judged or misunderstood (Barna Group 2014). And this is not exclusive to young Christians. According to the Pew Research Centre, people leave the church because they feel judged or not accepted by the rest of the congregation (Pew 2020). Another aspect of being a community of practice is that there is an acknowledgement of each member's competence and inclusion and the negotiation of the lifeworld and belonging.
The participation style met the need to be part of a broadcast event; the livestreaming and taking part as those who belonged satisfied a need for a sacred space and safe belonging. Holmes observed, "Broadcast media enable a form of reciprocity without interaction in which individuals are 'metaphorically' interacting with each other, 'such that the "broadcast media becomes an agent through which each audience member can 'reflexively monitor' what it is that other audience members are consuming"' and then

‘facilitate a sense of belonging security and community, even if individuals are not directly interacting’“ (Holmes cited in Wagner 2016: 64).

This style of broadcast was not new; new media and its focus on the changes in the environment due to new technology reminds us that the previous media has been incorporated into the new media space; this absorption is called “recombination“, i.e., the “continued hybridisation of both existing technologies and innovation in interconnected technical and institutional networks“ (Lievrouw &Livingstone 2006: 23). This new media community initially appeared to be a logical extension of televangelism– noted in Wagner (2016). However, this was a different flavour of that style of Christian TV. There was a different emphasis that was placed on connection and serving. Christian TV focuses greatly on information dissemination, particularly Bible reading (Wagner 2016), but Digital Saints was a New Monastic model keeping in line with the twelve marks of New Monasticism. “Yet an observation made some 30 years ago remains true today: the evangelical media consumer ‘tunes in not just because it typifies that which he [sic] likes, but that which he [sic] is’“ (Crossland 2006).

Observations from the team

As the community leader, Reverend Nik had hoped that Digital Saints would provide a safe space for people to discover and nurture their faith in God, the essence of a faith community. The practice of saying Night Prayer was a peaceful counteraction to our modern world based on the ancient practice of stilling oneself before sleep. This was an opportunity to contemplate the day, say a prayer for concerns and others’ needs, and leave things in God’s hands before bedtime. The vision was that people would gather to this rhythm of life and desire a deeper relationship with God and each other. Initially, it was discovered that developing a community online in this way is challenging. Many

people built a relationship with us, but there was less interaction between participants. “Religion that is constituted in new ways through digital media and cultures… recognises promulgation of existing religious practices has both online and offline implications. It also means digital culture negotiates our understandings of religious practice in ways that can lead to new experiences, authenticity and spiritual reflexivity“ (Campbell 2013: 3). We eventually understood Digital Saints could be the catalyst and create smaller groups that would interact or note groups that were already interacting and joining, bringing Digital Saints and its vision. Soon, we connected locally (in person pre-pandemic), with added interaction every evening at Night Prayer.

Working as an Anglican pioneer, lay minister, and researcher online led to some issues, mainly due to the misunderstandings that came from those in leadership while attempting a fresh way of developing a worshipping community; these were not because of any bad intentions on the part of the leaders, but because of the misunderstanding of and suspicion associated with new media. Campbell (2021) discusses the difficulties that Digital Religious Creatives (RDCs) have in the new field that has been created as an “influencer“ and, therefore, an “expert“ in religion. By the nature of broadcasting on social media, RDCs are in the eye of the net and can resemble someone with power. This can cause problems with the traditional church hierarchy, which generally does not occupy the same space. Furthermore, perhaps the creative nature of pioneering can lead to some suspicion. In that case, pioneers who have access to mass media are even more suspected and can be perceived as outsiders who are “instigating an independent or parachurch ministry that can be seen as in conflict with traditional gatekeeping, vetting or promotional structures“ (Campbell:2021: 77).

As the study on the New Monastic community progressed, an interesting phenomenon was noted: most who participated in the livestream watched and prayed without logging in and only letting us know later. The demographic we expected, the digital natives, most often lurked and only contacted Digital Saints directly via alternate means. This is anecdotal, as we could not determine the ages of all those who viewed the livestream. Facebook only lets you know the number of views and whether there is a connection or share; however, who it is by cannot be determined.

Is Digital Saints a successful worshipping community?

One question raised in this study is whether Digital Saints was a successful worshipping community. The traditional way of measuring an Anglican church's success or failure is to consider the average Sunday attendance. The details captured in the church's service records regarding the congregation note whether the congregation participants are over or under 16 and participate in communion. A regular churchgoer of the Church of England is defined as someone who attends monthly (Archbishop's Council 2004). Initially, the average daily viewing figures were 50 views five times a week. Digital Saints would be considered a reasonably sized church/intentional community based on these figures alone. Five of those 50 interacted directly with us consistently during prayers; from the other 45, we had occasional requests for prayers. An accurate indicator of this community's success is the request to renew marriage vows for a couple participating in Night Prayer. The renewal of vows is another indicator of the community's success – as they feel enough belongingness to the community to ask the priest to perform this ceremony – although it was held in person at a borrowed church in Yorkshire.

As the community evolved, we had conversations via Facebook Messenger, met with some local people face-to-face, and developed conversations outside the livestream.

Michael Moynagh (2014) said prayer was the first step in getting a new community started, notably praying for a mission heart. Enthusiasm, he went on, can trip up efforts to connect when the space to be developed needs to be grounded in serving the community, loving, remembering that we also are loved, and dying (i.e. to self) to what we want, and focusing on what the community needs.

> Jesus spent thirty years in the society that would be the focus of his mission, but only three years on the mission itself. If his behaviour as a twelve-year-old is any guide, he spent those thirty years listening to, and learning about, the people he was going to serve. Aged twelve, Jesus listened carefully to the temple authorities and asked them questions (Luke 2:46). He wanted to understand the culture that would be part of his adult life (Moynagh 2014: 164).

I agree with Moynagh on this; to be contextual to the lives of those you serve, listen to them and understand what they need: “Listening prayerfully to the people you feel called to serve should shape every aspect of your witnessing community’s life. Usually, this listening happens in a simple way – in informal settings as you chat with people and get to know them. Sometimes it can be more elaborate“ (ibid).

Surprises

Community size

Before the community was created, it was envisioned that a group of people would be part of the initial Periscope community and other platforms would later be included in the baseline questions. However, the nature of the community changed so much over time; some of those individuals changed. It was discovered that many of the participants could join the livestream but not be seen by the broadcasters. Viewing the data, we found the numbers of those who watched and prayed in the livestream were often surprisingly different from those who logged in or interacted in some way; this is the phenomenon

known as lurking. Due to this, rather than one fixed group of people, we interviewed participants who gathered at different points in the life of the stream.

Lurking

Unfortunately, because Periscope did not offer the ability to replay livestreams until mid-2016, we don't have any viewing data for the test streams. Nevertheless, we observed that five to twenty-five people attended each livestream. However, we learned that the number of those who logged in and those who watched without being counted as a view was significant. The term for this is lurking. We could gauge views on Facebook, but this in no way reflected the number of interactions we saw. We spoke to some people later who admitted to lurking a few times a week but never actually joining the stream so that we could see who was with us or commenting via Facebook Messenger or Twitter. While on YouTube, we did not see who viewed the livestream when it was shared or embedded elsewhere. However, lurking can give an idea of the number of participants. The 'silent groups' in online communities, sometimes referred to as lurkers comprise the bulk of community members. In collaborative websites, such as an online community, 90% of people just read the material, 9% modify content, and 1% actively generate new content, according to the well-known '90-9-1' principle (Sun et al.2014: 111), in our case, comment and interact in the livestream. As a radio practitioner, I recall a similar formula described to me when I was first a presenter in the 80s; for everyone who rang or contacted the radio station, the station manager would count one such interaction as "worth" at least 200 listeners.

I am aware of priests, some Methodist ministers, curates, and those with no religious affiliation who came to partake and interact in the prayers without commenting or making us aware of their presence. However, they by no means account for the total number that

appears to be coming to the Facebook Live prayers. It seems that people have come to understand what a peaceful community is, treating this as an alternative to church. "…there is a difference between finding out the facts about Christianity and learning to live as a Christian" (Smith 2015:19). The nature of our world is that information is now readily available, but someone who could be an example or mentor for helping begin the Christian journey is sadly lacking.

Throughout the interviews, it was apparent that the participants experienced belonging and felt that they belonged to Digital Saints. The livestream was a supplement to their churchgoing, church leading, or their experience of the sacred. All wanted to have some form of daily prayer in their lives. There was a sense of loneliness in those who led or worked in churches, needing a place to belong without judgement, which in itself was a powerful theme. This will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 10: Conclusion and discussion

This research observed the development of an online New Monastic community using 21st-century broadcasting via social media. The lived experience of the digital participants was documented by developing a phenomenological understanding of their religious experience and the effect on their spiritual development. In addition, the digital presence was evaluated, adjusted and improved by looking at the Digital Saints' social media output, its development through audience measuring, interaction with the participants, and media production.

This investigation sought answers to three questions: How do the digital participants of the New Monastic group, Digital Saints, experience and understand the Christian community and connect with God? How does this experience and understanding inform and shape their religious/spiritual experience? Finally, how can a digitally responsive interaction with this community enable media development and community growth?

How do the digital participants of the New Monastic group, Digital Saints, experience and understand Christian community and connect with God?

All of the study participants felt part of the Digital Saints community and indicated that they felt connected to God and joined together as the body of Christ. The theme **Belonging** was clear, although not always explicit. As mentioned, a subtheme concerning a **Need for connection** became apparent, particularly among those who served the church as a leader, both lay and ordained. The idea of a sacred space was explored, and all felt a connection with God in the prayer, chat, and later offline conversations about God. One significant observation was that there was no difference between the online connections made in the Night Prayer and the offline connections. In prayer or fellowship,

each interaction supported one another, digitally and physically. The connection made in the community was supported by the opportunity to meet digitally several times a week. Often, people would bring up ideas that had been part of a digital service in conversations. This hybrid space, where digital and physical connections combined, created a more profound sense of community and belonging. Neither space was deemed more important, and digital and physical connections were mutually beneficial to the lives of its members. Even when the proximal community the participants belonged to were not Digital Saints, this connection was enhanced by various experiences, views, and opinions.

Arni Svanur Danielsson (2020: 11) speaks of this, describing a response to the pandemic by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iceland in *Connection Trumps Technology.* A key question is not about technology but how the church "can nurture and strengthen the connection with and between the members of a faith community or parish". This change brought about by the pandemic accelerated the use of the omni-medium to empower faith communities "to witness rather than merely watch a worship service" (Danielsson 2020: 11). What is important here is the active participation of the community members. "A decade from now, we will hopefully remember this exceptional time as a time of learning, not just about online worship, but also about worship face to face, in the same space" (ibid).

The combination of digital and proximal groups

Digital Saints worked directly with other local groups in each area we inhabited during the study. We discovered that local groups, those in proximity, were surprisingly more relevant than initially thought. We connected with them, interacting face-to-face or talking about our livestreaming; as a result, most of our growth came from local people gathering

with us online and then sharing the livestreams with their friends digitally. Moynagh and Beck (2020) discuss the organic way that worshipping communities develop; one such is “Paws for Praise. Dog lovers gather in the local dog park for prayer, worship, Scripture and play “(22). This is echoed in the connections of some groups with Digital Saints: Orchard Eagles Running Club, St Francis, St Mary’s, and St Benny’s.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of locality, the connection via the web was seen as relevant and even religious. A Barna Group survey in the United States clarifies that although Jesus is seen as a good influence, the average person considers the Christian Church as filled with people who do not *live* the faith (Barna Group, 2008). The members of Digital Saints sought to find connections online to better enable them to live out their faith in their digital and physical communities. Another response would be to strive to make that connection in another space, seeing people living out their faith in the community (Lundby, 2011).

The pandemic accelerated the change from offline to online gatherings with these groups. This was due to two things, cutting people off from their “normal“ interaction and allowing for more broadcasts for interactivity. An urgency during the initial lockdown affected the Digital Saints livestreams, with the community asking for more spaces of connection. Digital Saints was one example of what was happening globally. Aneya Elbert, the ministries coordinator with St Thomas Episcopal Church in Texas, spoke with other ministers about how much busier churches were online after the onset of the pandemic:

> In addition to regular worship and formation, we were now offering Morning Prayer and Compline Monday through Friday; social media posts increased; our website and mobile app were updated daily; we created and curated digital content and

> recorded/edited items that include messages from the rector, music and children's chapel (Elbert 2020:13).

The pandemic changed the world in the way trends were accelerated, from working at home to consuming religious services online. This was apparent in Digital Saints' viewership, participation, and direct communication. "Some Americans say their religious faith has strengthened due to the outbreak, even as the vast majority of U.S. churchgoers report that their congregations have closed regular worship services to the public" (Pew Research 2020). I believe this trend will continue as we will never return to pre-pandemic working or religious service offerings. Ralf Reimann (2020) states that in Germany, pre-pandemic, there was "…a general feeling that social media activities only lead to virtual encounters, whereas real encounters are face-to-face meetings" (2020: 32), but because of the pandemic, the church had to become "agile and adaptive, God may well be able to work it for our good (Rom 8:28)" (Reimann 2020: 32). As with many of the worshipping communities we found not only an increase in community numbers but also a greater desire to connect through social media (Campbell 2020). Reverend Nik was even asked to offer specific reflections weekly for the running club's Facebook group. There seemed to be a longing for connection and to inhabit a space that discussed the difficulties of the current situation and possible coping remedies for surviving the informed social isolation.

How does this experience and understanding inform and shape their religious experience?

The informing or shaping of a religious experience often happens when you are part of a Christian community. As previously mentioned regarding the Social Doctrine of the Trinity, God is Himself a community, and the formation of spiritual experiences often needs others. The participants often spoke of "prayer together" as a marker of "spirituality", in

particular, praying as Jesus said, “where two are three are gathered (to pray) I am with you“ (Matt 18:20). Participant K said it clearly, “When you agree in prayer, you belong.“

One participant particularly stood out to me, Participant E, when they said, “it’s another strand in the rope of spiritual connections between me and God, and me and other Christians“. This connection to the community and God informs spiritual practice, following the ten commandments summed up by Jesus, “Love God with all your heart, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself“ (Mark 12:30-31). Digital Saints designed graphics (used for shirts in one craft Sunday) summarising further with two arrows, one horizontal and one vertical, with ***Love*** in the middle. Love God, Love People.

A clear indicator that this question was answered came from Participant D, who said she could now join a weekly evening prayer service at her church that she was not comfortable joining earlier because of her time spent with Digital Saints in Night Prayer. “Maybe I would have shied from it if I hadn’t (joined Digital Saints online)“. Being part of a community of practice helped shape the experience as each member was cared for and valued. As mentioned before, this is an apprenticeship, not having only one leader and all contributing to the development of each (Wenger, 2009).

Shaping and informing religious experience involves growing, changing, and developing fellowship with like-minded members, often sharing experiences. For example, Alessandra Vitullo observes that Cambell’s (2005) notion of an internet “sacramental space“ can support growth by encouraging the members of the group through their discussion together online. These spaces are affinity spaces and community places where the members can meet with others like them and be accepted and cared for in

ways they cannot be offline. “These communities use the Internet as a support structure, facilitating their personal and spiritual growth“ (Vitullo 2019: 44).

There was a desire amongst several members of the community to experience the sacraments as a digital community, specifically by being able to share communion in a livestreamed service as part of their spiritual development. Turning down the opportunity to become a sacramental community, I believe, was a mistake and detrimental to the experience of the folk.

The exclusion of the digital Eucharist

Although the digital Eucharist was not the focus of this study, it is crucial to contemplate the implications of its exclusion. By excluding the Eucharist from the digital space for participants, where, due to the pandemic, most services were now offered, it appeared as if the Church of England was unwilling to look again at the canon regarding the Lord’s Supper. Instead, priests streamed the Eucharist service and took the elements themselves on behalf of the congregation. We disagreed with the idea that someone taking the Eucharist on behalf of the communicant was enough. Showing someone the Eucharist while not allowing them to partake of it online was akin to showing someone hungry a sandwich and then eating it in front of them. Other Christian denominations, such as the Baptists in the UK and the United Reformed Church, did not appear to have the same resistance to those based at home using their elements in front of the screen blessed by the priest or pastor, communion and the Eucharist went ahead (Baptist Union of Great Britain 2020).

The problem with refusing the opportunity for a community to celebrate the sacraments in a relevant way is that they are denied their validity as a true Christian community. Sharing

bread and wine in the context of a “Holy Meal“ is an essential marker of any Christian community. Although there may be various ways to partake in what is happening during the meal, most Christians will agree that it is an important ritual to engage in regularly. The Eucharist is a continuation of the meal Jesus shared with his disciples shortly before his crucifixion and after his resurrection (World Council of Churches 1982). This denial is also significant for a Community of Practice. Shared rituals make meaning in the mutuality of engagement; “the ability to engage with other members and respond in kind to their actions (in this case, participating in the Eucharist) and thus the ability to establish relationships in which this mutuality is the basis for an identity of participation“ (Wenger 1998: 137).

The shared meal represents the gift of Christ, and one receives his sacrifice afresh in the elements that are partaken during the meal. “The Eucharist is the sacrament of the gift that God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit“ (World Council of Churches 1982). The Eucharist is interpreted in various ways across church traditions and denominations; within the Anglican church, it is viewed as a Trinitarian Feast where Christ renews his relationship that was first recognised in Baptism. It is a participatory event wherein one joins with God through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit in a Holy communion of both God, people, and the bread and wine (House of Bishops of the General Synod 1997: 37). As it is a participatory event, the notes included in the Anglican liturgy point to the need for a priest to lead specific parts of the service. Still, others should be done by the people present, such as the reading of Scripture, prayers of intercession, and distribution of the elements (The Archbishops’ Council 2000: 159).

As we can see, a valid Anglican worshipping community should include the sacraments, and communion is critical for both God’s participation in the lives of the people

worshipping and for holding the community together in the power of the Holy Spirit. By refusing a community the ability to be fully sacramental and to encounter the Grace of God through sharing bread and wine, we remove an essential part of what it means to be a Christian community. Unfortunately, this eliminates the opportunity for a deeper connection through digital means and can alienate a community from the wider church.

Genuine digital connection is possible, and when all intend to participate, the results can be profoundly spiritual. An excellent example of this can be seen in an online community that held funerals in the digital space for members who had died. This account comes from a blog, which has since expired by user Kirkepiscatoid, who recorded their experience:

> There I was, in the dark, by my fire, standing and reciting the Apostle's Creed with tears leaking out of the corners of my eyes and my voice cracking b/c the sheer beauty of what was happening was just grabbing me. I was NOT alone in the dark. I was standing in God's firmament with several other people slung all over the country at that moment who were all in their "sacred spaces for the evening", reciting the Creed. The next moment of utter "Oh, wow-ness" was at the exchanging of the peace. I had my Facebook Chat activated, and my Facebook friends were all exchanging the peace, LIVE, with me, just as if we were right there in church together!
>
> We used Eucharistic Prayer A, and I realised that even without the Book of Common Prayer with me, these words are burned in my heart, as are my responses. Before I knew it, I was kneeling in the yard, feeling the knees of my jeans getting damp, the chilly night breeze, the warmth of my chiminea fire and the TOTAL sacredness of my sacred space in the yard. Larry typed in that our elements had been consecrated by Fr. Mark, and then he typed in "The Body of

> Christ, the bread of heaven“ and “The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation,“ and I tell you what...that Triscuit and the little slug of wine I had brought out in the yard—was electric. Absolutely electric. It was one of the most real Sacraments I have ever felt (White 2009).

Unfortunately, despite the authentic experiences of people on the ground who have encountered God in powerful ways through digital Eucharists, the Anglican church is not prepared to consider experimenting with such an idea. By refusing people the opportunity to encounter God through the sacraments using digital technology, we deny the validity of online communities. This is especially hard for those who can only connect digitally, particularly those with disabilities who find it hard to physically access a church building.

It is difficult to comprehend that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when churches were shut and digital communication was the only means for offering services, the church did not even give temporary permission for people to experiment with digital communion. Instead, the church relied on an old, obscure piece of liturgy from the Book of Common prayer called Spiritual Communion. This piece of Anglican liturgy was designed for when a minister went to give a sick person communion when they were too ill to receive it by mouth. The prayer was then made such that they could receive in their hearts and that their physical infirmity should not be a barrier to them receiving the Grace of God that would be ordinarily present in the elements of the communion service.

> But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or for lack of company to receive with him, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood; the Curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and

> giving him hearty thanks therefor; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacraments with his mouth (The Archbishops' Council 2005: 464).

During the lockdown, we witnessed many priests perform communion services on camera. Rather than allowing people to have their elements at home and be blessed through digital means, they were to pray and receive the "benefits" of communion in their hearts. Again, one is not denying the power of God to act by grace in a situation where there is a clear pastoral need but merely pointing out the strangeness of trying to jump through theological hoops to disallow a digital communion.

Unfortunately, due to the hierarchy of the Church of England, its synodical structures and its place in English Law, it can take a long time for any innovation to be granted permission when those in charge feel a particular act falls outside the currently permitted practice. Although many people are ready to receive the Eucharist digitally and priests are willing to preside over online communion services, the lack of permission and threat of church disciplinary measures sadly cannot happen for those inside the Church of England's structures.

This study's third question was: **How can a responsive interaction with this community digitally enable media development and community growth?**
Using operation theory, we adjusted the media practice and increased the audience significantly by responding to the community. However, as we discovered with the development of the community, they were not an audience, per se.

The audience and community

The audience, in this circumstance, is an outdated notion. "Audiences are not passive

receptors of mass communications but are active agents who strategically seek out and select specific media to satisfy their felt needs" (McQuail 2010: 58). Although, if there is a need to use the view of "audience", perhaps the best theory would be the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) to explain this population studied. This audience/community desired something of use to them spiritually and socially, and in that, each person in the community felt the need for gratification or fulfilment (Ward 2017). "What gratifications do they get from that medium to keep them coming back for more" (Ward 2017: 59)? In this case, these people kept coming back because it was of use to connect this way, seeking a digital sacred space from their home.

This particular theory was developed in the 1960s from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory – "which holds that people strive to satisfy their needs for sustenance, safety, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation" (Maslow 1943). UGT has five tenets: audiences are active and goal-oriented in their media choices; they actively link specific media choices to need gratification; media compete to gratify audience needs; "they are self-aware of their motivations in choosing media, and audiences make their value judgements of the media content" (McQuail 2010: 59), and for this audience via shared livestreaming: "All platforms – radio and television, just as much as the Internet – are each, in their ways, ecologies where users interact (whether directly or indirectly), engage in shared rituals, and form communities" (Ward 2017: xxi).

Whatever audience theory is used, despite removing its antiquated idea of a solely passive audience, that is still not the right fit for denoting the group gathered during this study, nor is the term "media users". Perhaps the best term comes from Lievrouw and Livingston (2006), "people". The changing landscape of digital connection makes the idea of separate digital communities as a different type of connection compared with offline

communities laughable. The Internet is now part of everyday life, “seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of institutional and everyday life“ (Lundby, 2012: 4). Bayam (2006) argued that digital media tools are just that, tools and that there would come a day when there is no distinction between life offline and online (Lundby, 2011: 1224). As mentioned before, this was similar to how the telephone changed how we communicated; the telephone itself was ignored amid instant verbal communication (Lievrouw & Livingstone 2006).

The terms in new media for those who gather online are changeable, but it is essential to realise that the instrument of connection is not the connection itself. The changes in technology changed the shape of the community. “Researchers are rethinking the once-dominant ‘one-to-many’ frame of mass communication and its role relative to one-to-one and many-to-many (or n-way) modes of communication“ (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006: 5). This change affects the notion of public management, power, and how we “belong“. This is changing and combining our modes of communication, using whatever media forms and communication mechanics best suit us. The audience is more than an audience; the mechanical items, more than a tool, have become fundamental to our understanding of ourselves. Marshall McLuhan famously said that “the medium is the message“ (McLuhan, 1978); these media have changed us as a community and returned us to a previous model, that of neighbours, digital neighbours.

To conclude, this study observed the development of Digital Saints, a hybrid Pioneering Fresh Expression of church that became a New Monastic Community of Practice. This community used 21st-century new media broadcasting to connect for daily offices of prayer. During the COVID-19 pandemic Digital Saints responded to the community by creating further instances of digital connection to support people in a frightening time. In addition, this research explored the lived experiences of the members and their conscious

process and holistic progression, using a phenomenological understanding of their religious experience and examined the effect of the livestreams on their spiritual development concerning their digital presence.

This has determined that digital technologies could enable the experience of New Monastic communities of faith and that 21st-century new media broadcasting via social media did assist and inform the spiritual and religious experiences of the participants, enabling a “sacred space“ and a connection with God. This online and offline hybrid connection was accelerated significantly, proving that there is no longer a division between online and offline gathering. This constitutes a “digital discourse“, named by Bolander and Locher (2020), encompassing all of the ways that media is used to communicate through the now all-present, ubiquitous Internet. As Lievrouw (2006) said, this use of technology forms us – called “social shaping“, and technology is further shaped by the people who use it. Overall, this study provides support for the validity of a media sociological perspective for mission, in that the focus is on the “context of communication and not the conduits of church and mission” (Lundby 2012: 25). An online platform is another place to gather; the place is not the pivotal point; the purpose of the gathering is.

The changes during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the need for agility in faith communities to respond to the needs of their varied groups. Campbell (2020) speaks of “the distanced church“, a term denoting the need for “social distancing“ during the pandemic and the necessity to still connect as believers even though we are “physically separated from one another but still spiritually interconnected and in need of some modified forms of technologically facilitated social interaction“ (4).

This research is beneficial because it informs educators of the new religious leaders and assists in advancing digital religious study. In particular, this study can show the intersection of online and offline aspects of a faith community and how that intersection can help develop community and discipleship of the members as a community of practice. Another contribution of this study is that it could aid young families who wish to participate in New Monastic prayer by making one or all of the daily offices available to those via livestreaming. It can be used as evidence that a hybridised community, where both physical and digital connection are valued equally, can be most effective in encouraging the spiritual development of faith communities. Moreover, the recent pandemic has shown that the insistence on physical connection as necessary for a member to be truly part of a community is no longer the case. We have also seen that connecting online is often more convenient in some cases and can lead to a greater sense of well-being for members and leads to an acceleration of the development of the community. I agree with Lundby that any "distinction between "virtual" and real are, at best quaint, and worst, simply not relevant to how people use the Internet these days, i.e. as interwoven into the fabric of life" (Lundby 2012: 27).

Overall, this study provides support for the validity of digital forms of religion and spirituality, such as online/offline New Monasticism, and can aid in a connection with the "missing generation" in church, those aged between 20 and 40 years. In the traditional religious culture in the UK, the average age of a Church of England parishioner is 61 (Pew, 2020). Each digital native and digital immigrant participating in the Digital Saints Livestream were part of smartphone culture, and most accessed the livestreams by mobile phone. I argue that society and belief are not separated, no matter how much the church might want to remove itself. As mentioned before, Luther left his life as a monk to return to living among the people "…not because the world in itself was good and holy,

but because even the cloister was only a part of the world“ (Bonhoeffer 1964: 40). Both the digital natives and digital immigrants connected with the church want a place that can provide answers to their deep questions, but also unite with people who can do more than just answer questions (Wang et. al. 2013). “Each day, religious programmers are creating content designed to meet this informational need. Whether that content can be accessed – when seekers want it, and by the platform most convenient to them at the time – is the question“ (Wagner 2016: 63). This study finds that religious instruction and information can be gathered anywhere; what needs to be addressed is the longing that has been discovered by religious communities for unconditional acceptance and belonging.

Further research suggestions

As hybrid faith communities begin to emerge from the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, more research is needed into how a community’s digital presence is maintained. This will include parity of the importance of both digital and physical attendance.

More research is needed into the digital Eucharist and what effect this might have on the purpose of physical gatherings.

Future studies will have to explore if digital communities of faith effectively sustain a person spiritually, does this make them more effective in living out their faith in their community? Conversely, will a community's lack of physical presence lead to a lack of faith or merely a lack of buildings and leaders?

Perhaps a study to further our understanding of the role of digital connection. Does the opportunity to connect digitally reduce the burden on faith communities to attend multiple

gatherings per week/month? Does this, in turn, reduce the administrative, financial and organisational burden on that community? How will the hierarchy deal with the lack of perceived control?

Does a digital presence allow greater access for people with disabilities, health issues, and shift workers and carers? Does a greater parity of physical and digital attendance mean that these people can feel more valued by the community and have a greater sense of belonging to it? Or can this also alienate those who are not comfortable with digital connection?

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Appendix B:

Film at: https://youtu.be/PpwX-durgM8

Digital Saints a History Film Timeline

0:03 Welcome
0:08 How it began
0:46 What is Digital Saints?
1:14 What you are going to see
1:52 First broadcast
2:15 Trying mornings
2:20 Words on a laptop screen
2:44 Freeform prayer, responding to prayer requests
4:14 First time with the Mevo
4:21 Trying out Auto Director
4:55 Back after Nik's Dad died
5:34 At Pioneer Home
5:45 Adding graphics and migrating to facebook.com/digisaints
6:29 Prayers as graphical overlays
7:05 Blue Christmas
7:30 First online Kinder Service
7:40 Praying in the woods
7:55 First Night Prayer during lockdown
8:15 Midday reflection
8:24 Christian mediation
8:35 Guest appearances
8:51 End of first Night Prayer
9:42 Digital Saints is still going
10:07 END

Appendix C:

Glossary of Terms

Church: The body of Christ, not a building, but the people.

20th century broadcasting: in this study refers to Radio and Television

VOD casting: Vision on demand, such as YouTube, Vimeo, etc.

Podcasting: Audio programmes on demand, usually in speech format and targeted at niche audiences

Postmodernity a school of thought that emerged in the 1980s. it is a theoretical perspective or method of analysis that rejects modernist "grand narratives," rejects the notion that knowledge can be known with absolute certainty or that meaning can be held steady across time. It places an emphasis on the role ideology plays in maintaining social and political hierarchies (Bryant, Johnston & Usher 2004).

Post secular: Jurgen Habermas used the phrase "post-secularism" to describe the contemporary moment in which modernity is seen as failing and morally corrupt, requiring a new peaceful dialogue and tolerant cohabitation between faith and reason to learn from each other (Habermas, 2008). In literary studies, the word refers to a postmodern religious or spiritual sense in contemporary literature (McClure, 2007).

Congruent viewing: Everyone watching (usually television) at the same time.

Corporate prayer: A group of people all praying together

Spectator worship: Going to a place of worship, enjoying the service as a show and then leaving again without engagement or personal cost.

Old novitiate: The time of preparation and training that a prospective monk, nun, or lay member of a religious order has before taking vows to join that order. This is to discern if they feel called for the separation of religious life.

Appendix D: Viewing Figures

	@stbennys on Pericope	@digisaints on Periscope	@nikthevic on FB	@digisaints on FB	Nik Stevenson on FB	St Francis on FB	Shelly Stevenson on FB	Kinder Service on FB	@digisaints on YouTube	Total views
1/2/16	No data									
2/2/16	No data									
4/4/16	No data									
5/2/16	No data									
6/7/17	No data									
7/2/16	No data									
8/2/16	No data									
9/2/16		No data								
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5/7/16		40								40
6/7/16		35								35
7/2/17			120							120
8/2/17			39							39
9/2/17			62							62
20/2/17			269							269
23/2/17			86							86
27/2/17			99							99
28/2/17			65							65
5/3/17			63							63
6/3/17			82							82
8/3/17			58							58
15/3/17			88							88

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20/3/17			53							53
21/3/17			35							35
22/3/17			34							34
29/3/17			93							93
2/4/17			48							48
5/4/17			69							69
12/4/17			65							65
17/4/17			57							57
20/4/17			42							42
24/4/17			44							44
26/4/17			96							96
30/4/17			61							61
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3/5/17			49							49
7/5/17			116							116
8/5/17			47							47
9/5/17			30							30
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21/5/17			225							225
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25/5/17			53							53
31/5/17			46							46
4/6/17			65							65
25/6/17			79							79
26/6/17			70							70
29/6/17			56							56
11/7/17			68							68
19/7/17			49							49
26/7/17			58							58
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23/8/17			59							59
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6/11/17			64							64
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9/11/17			45							45
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3/12/17			68							68
6/12/17			36							36

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21/12/17			34							34
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16/1/18			97							97
17/1/18			58							58
18/1/18			87							87
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6/2/18			64							64
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14/10/18				53						53
15/10/18				48						48
16/10/18				73						73
17/10/18				71						71
18/10/18				60						60
21/10/18				48						48

22/10/18				52						52
24/10/18				188						188
25/10/18				160						160
28/10/18				47						47
29/10/18				36						36
30/10/18				49						49
1/11/18				66						66
4/11/18			7	51						58
5/11/18				49						49
6/11/18			25	33						58
7/11/18				37						37
8/11/18				36						36
11/11/18				42						42
13/11/18				68						68
14/11/18				28						28
15/11/18				75						75
22/11/18				87						87
1/12/18				49						49
3/12/18				29						29
4/12/18				77						77
5/12/18				35						35
6/12/18				41						41
9/12/18				42						42
11/12/18				56						56
13/12/18				30						30
17/12/18				36						36

18/12/18				62						62
20/12/18				50						50
23/12/18				33						33
24/12/18				67						67
30/12/18				49						49
31/12/18				33						33
6/1/19				60						60
7/1/19				68						68
8/1/19				37						37
9/1/19				41						41
10/1/19				34						34
13/1/19				36						36
14/1/19				58						58
15/1/19				24						24
16/1/19				30						30
20/1/19				45						45
22/1/19				32						32
24/1/19				45						45
28/1/19				43						43
30/1/19				21						21
31/1/19				31						31
3/2/19				31						31
4/2/19				35						35
7/2/19				34						34
10/2/19				40						40
13/2/19				39						39
14/2/19				36						36
17/2/19				39						39
18/2/19				41						41
19/2/19				48						48

21/2/19				33						33
24/2/19				34						34
25/2/19				41						41
26/2/19				40						40
27/2/19				28						28
28/2/19				52						52
3/3/19				30						30
4/3/19				30						30
5/3/19				31						31
6/3/19				30						30
10/3/19				25						25
11/3/19				35						35
17/3/19				60						60
19/3/19				49						49
21/3/19				24						24
27/3/19				29						29
31/3/19				20						20
1/4/19				24						24
2/4/19				43						43
9/4/19				41						41
10/4/19				42						42
11/4/19				50						50
16/4/19				72						72
23/4/19				52						52
24/4/19				49						49
24/4/19				31						31
25/4/19				49						49
28/4/19				53						53
2/5/19				53						53
7/5/19				43						43
8/5/19				53						53
12/5/19									14	14
13/5/19									22	22
14/5/19									12	12
15/5/19									6	6

16/5/19									15	15
19/5/19									15	15
20/5/19									12	12
21/5/19									10	10
23/5/19									9	9
26/5/19									20	20
27/5/19									12	12
28/5/19									14	14
29/5/19									15	15
23/7/19				178						178
24/7/19									18	18
28/7/19									20	20
30/7/19									15	15
1/8/19									12	12
4/8/19									13	13
6/8/19									14	14
8/8/19									10	10
11/8/19									15	15
13/8/19									15	15
15/8/19									9	9
18/8/19									9	9
20/8/19									8	8
22/8/19									11	11
25/8/19									15	15
1/9/19									14	14
5/9/19									10	10
10/9/19									8	8
12/9/19									10	10
15/9/19									9	9
17/9/19									8	8
19/9/19									15	15
20/10/19				27						27
21/10/19				22						22

22/9/19									7	7
29/9/19									15	15
30/9/19									17	17
2/10/19									17	17
6/10/19									12	12
7/10/19									8	8
9/10/19									16	16
13/10/19									7	7
14/10/19									9	9
16/10/19									13	13
20/10/19			21		46				4	71
21/10/19			65		47				2	114
23/10/19			17		51				3	71
28/10/19			17		48				3	68
3/11/19			29	22	69					120
6/11/19			35		36					71
10/11/19			24	18	52					94
11/11/19			23	22	33					78
13/11/19			17	11	46					74
18/11/19			19	14	57					90
20/11/19			9	16	50					75
24/11/19			11	19	35					65
25/11/19			30	20	135					185
27/11/19			5	16	45					66
1/12/19			8	41	37					86

2/12/19					47					47
4/12/19			10	24	33					67
8/12/19			4	15	38					57
9/12/19			11	37	50					98
11/12/19			4	40	47					91
15/12/19			10		78					88
16/12/19			8	16	28					52
18/12/19			3	72	49					124
22/12/19			219	15	33					267
23/12/19			9		32					41
24/12/19			23	14	54					91
29/12/19			7	18	78					103
30/12/19			6	123	42					171
1/1/20			6	158	73					237
5/1/20			12	30	53					95
6/1/20			13	24	45					82
8/1/20			4	21	50					75
12/1/20			36	15	63					114
13/1/20			8	25	56					89
15/1/20			10	21	77					108
19/1/20			11	18	151					180
20/1/20			5	43	70					118
22/1/20			9	17	66					92
26/1/20			4	14	33					51
27/1/20			9	53	57					119
29/1/20			5	52	63					120
2/2/20			6	11	74					91
3/2/20			7	14	57					78
5/2/20			4	22	54					80

9/2/20			25	30	51					106
10/2/20			11	43	61					115
12/2/20			7	25	54					86
16/2/20			11	31	45					87
17/2/20			8	42	56					106
19/2/20			25	26	69					120
23/2/20			8	19	56					83
24/2/20			9	35	56					100
26/2/20			7	26	88					121
1/3/20			9	32	54					95
2/3/20			6	35	41					82
4/3/20			10	39	50					99
8/3/20			39	34	37					110
9/3/20			9	25	43					77
11/3/20			49	37			71			157
15/3/20			29	49	76					154
16/3/20			15	40	85					140
17/3/20			33	55	90					178
18/3/20			23	222	73					318
19/3/20			13	217	40					270
22/3/20/ Kinder								534		534
22/3/20/ night			17	190	39					246
23/3/20 noon							98			98
23/3/20 night			14	138	46					198
24/03/20 noon			19	114	57					190
24/03/20 night			24	116	30					170
25/3/20 noon			17	172			171			360
25/03/20 night			10	94	58		20			182
26/03/20 noon			5	54	49	116				224

26/03/20 night			9	42	42	150				243
28/3/20				193						193
29/03/20 Kinder			8	36	37	196		24		301
29/03/20 Night			14	18	45	164				241
30/03//20 noon			13	163			36			212
30/03/20 night			9	35	39	129				212
31/03/20 noon			9	39	38	145				231
31/03/20 night			5	33	44	156				238
01/04/20 noon			17	153			34			204
01/04/20 night			5	23	48	162				238
02/04/20 noon			23	17	72	105				217
02//04//20 night			7	36	26	170				239
05/04/20 Kinder			10	20	39	208		16		293
05/04/20 night			12	22	48	148		13		243
06/04//20 noon			15	110			48			173
06/04/20 night			12	24	42	181				259
07/04/20 noon			24	51	57	152				284
07/04/20 night			18	27	53	138				236
08/04/20 noon			16	91			18			125
08//04/20 night			7	35	42	163				247
10/04/20 night			8	32	36	163				239

12/04/20 dawn			9	53	73	329				464
12/04/20 Kinder			7	22	43	159		21		252
12/04/20 night			13	24	31	169				237
14/04/20 night			15	30	46	143				234
15/04/20 night			10	23	44	191				268
16//04/20 night			5	25	40	150				220
19/04/20 Kinder			12	25	43	173		13		266
19/04/20 night			15	28	32	131				206
20/04/20 noon			29	141			29			199
20/04/20 night			10	15	37	126				188
21/04/20 noon			7	18	23	91				139
21/04/20 night			28	22	34	112				196
22/04/20 noon			37	111			20			168
22/04/20 night			8	21	37	91				157
23/04/20 noon			15	25	49	130				219
23/04/20 night			12	22	44	139				217
26/04/20 Kinder			7	26	30	144		16		223
26/04//20 night			6	17	20	82				125
27/04/20 noon			5	91			25			121
27/04/20 night			6	23	36	113				178

28/04/20 noon			4	16	17	77				114
28/04//20 night			3	14	26	158				201
29/04/20 noon			5	59			18			82
29/04//20 night			5	14	19	81				119
30/04/20 noon			4	10	30	75				119
30/04/20 night			5	12	28	117				162
03/05//20 Kinder			5	10	49	106		11		181
03/05/20 night			4	9	28	115				156
04/05/20 noon			3	67			20			90
04/05/20 night			3	12	28	102				145
05/05/20 noon			7	13	24	67				111
05/05/20 night			4	22	41	118				185
06/05/20 noon			3	11	17	62				93
06/05/20 night			5	7	20	126				158
07/05/20 noon			3	89			26			118
07/05/20 night			5	24	18	96				143
10/05/20 Kinder			10	21	29	104		21		185
10/05/20 night			10	23	29	81		16		159
11/05/20 noon			5	67			12			84
11/05/20 night			5	20	33	93				151
12/05/20 noon			9	15	27	43				94

12/05/20 night			7	17	17	82				123
13/05/20 noon			5	85			24			114
13/05/20 night			5	13	28	83				129
14/05/20 noon			7	15	38	61				121
14/05/20 night			10	47	32	138				227
17/05/20 Kinder			6	26	40	100				172
17/05/20 night			6	10	23	85				124
18//05/20 noon			4	79			10			93
18/05/20 night			13	15	30	119				177
19/05//20 noon			4	8	21	70				103
19/05/20 night			7	11	26	60				104
20/05/20 noon			2	54			37			93
20/04/20 night			5	11	52	70				138
21/05/20 noon			11	13	57	48				129
21/05/20 night			4	18	42	77				141
24/05/20 night			11	23	90	180				304
26/05/20 noon			4	12	43	55				114
26/05/20 night			7	12	50	74				143
27/05/20 night			4	13	67	116				200
28/05/20 noon			5	14	43	58				120
28/05/20 night			5	16	66	113				200

31/05/20 Kinder			4	12	64	75		8		163
31/05/20 night			3	13	53	78				147
01/06/20 noon			8	66			44			118
01/06/20 night			10	10	62	76				158
02/06/20 noon			2	11	32	38				83
02/06/20 night			4	18	71	105				198
03/06/20 noon			4	67			37			108
03/06/20 night			3	11	53	85				152
04/06/20 noon			10	17	43	35				105
04/06/20 night			11	11	39	69				130
07/06/20 Kinder			4	17	43	107		9		180
07/06/20 night			5	17	49	87				158
08/06/20 noon			7	64			36			107
08/06/20 night			11	14	68	94				187
09/06/20 noon			2	11	40	49				102
09/06/20 night				12	50	96				158
10/06/20 noon			5	65			37			107
10/06/20 night			5	9	50	69				133
11/06/20 noon			4	97	33	33				167
11/06/20 night			12	21	93	135				261

14/06/20 Kinder			3	12	46	56		14		131
14/06/20 night			2	14	50	56				122
15/06/20 noon			2	58			32			92
15/06/20 night			1	12	69	71				153
16/06/20 noon			4	14	53	46				117
16/06/20 night			5	14	40	77				136
17/06/20 noon			2	60			40			102
17/06/20 night			5	20	37	84				146
18/06/20 noon			4	15	37	59				115
18/06/20 night			6	12	48	88				154
21/06/20 Kinder			14	17	51	65		11		158
21/06/20 night			5	16	49	72				142
22/06/20 noon			3	98			28			129
22/06/20 night			8	11	59	67				145
23/06/20 noon			2	10	42	46				100
23/06/20 night			5	11	54	75				145
24/06/20 noon			4	73			24			101
24/06/20 night			4	11	65	74				154
25/06/20 noon			6	11	67	44				128
25/06/20 night			6	23	66	109				204

28/06/20 Kinder			7	21	66	109		18		221
28/06/20 night			15	22	52	77				166
06/07/20 noon			15	30	68	63				176
06/07/20 night			2	17	75	123				217
07/07/20 noon			1	9	43	33				86
07/07/20 night			7	13	47	69				136
08/07/20 noon			3	72			41			116
08/07/20 night			3	11	72	84				170
09/07/20 noon			7	9	45	42				103
09/07/20 night			5	18	37	111				171
12/07/20 Kinder			4	7	53	66		16		146
12/07/20 night			5	16	58	68				147
13/07/20 noon			3	62			47			112
13/07/20 night			3	11	56	94				164
14/07/20 noon			2	11	36	41				90
14/07/20 night			7	8	51	65				131
15/07/20 noon			1	75			66			142
15//07/20 night			5	14	44	78				141
16/07/20 noon			9	10	49	64				132
16/07/20 night			2	12	59	95				168

19/07/20 Kinder			6	9	52	82		7		156
19/07/20 night			7	15	45	83				150
20/07/20 noon			3	75			38			116
20/07/20 night			6	7	52	83				148
21/07/20 noon			3	3	25	65				96
21/07/20 night			4	12	39	57				112
22/07/20 noon			6	12	17	63				98
22/07/20 night			6		52	77				135
23//07/20 noon			6	88			46			140
23/07/20 night			9	24	93	130				256
26/07/20 Kinder			11	21	53	115				200
26/07/20 night			3	17	56	69				145
27//07/20 noon			4	14	37	63				118
27/07//20 night			3		60	97				160
28/07/20 night			6	8	49	76				139
29/07/20 noon			7	11			93			111
29/07/20 night			2	14	48	69				133
30/07/20 night				72	46					118
02/08/20 Kinder			2	7	49	137		7		202
02/08/20 night			3	9	53	58				123

03/08/20 night			3	13	55	95				166
04/08/20 noon			5	6	37	46				94
04/08/20 night			3	14	47	76				140
05/08/20 night			5	11	39	81				136
06/08/20 noon			8	11	46	47				112
06/08/20 night			3	8	53	90				154
09/08/20 Kinder			5	8	53	73		8		147
09/08/20 night			3	17	35	67				122
10/08/20 noon			5	69			36			110
10/08/20 night			3	20	40	67				130
11/08/20 noon			51	6	34	45				136
11/08/20 night			4	8	38	63				113
12/08/20 noon			6	11	57	64				138
12/08/20 night			6	12	45	62				125
13/08/20 night			4	18	40	89				151
16//08/20 Kinder			10	8	61	79		9		167
16//08/20 night			3	13	39	41				96
17/08/20 noon			2	59			39			100
17/08/20 night			4	11	73	69				157
18/08/20 noon			4	9	42	47				102
18/08/20 night			5	8	34	48				95

19/08/20 noon			2	68			36			106
19/08/20 night			5	20	48	60				133
20/08/20 noon			1	9	29	45				84
20/08/20 night			1	13	41	84				139
23/08/20 Kinder								152		152
23/08/20 night			7	11	51	69				138
07/09/20 night			9	13	60	109				191
08/09/20 noon			2	10	57	56				125
08/09/20 night			2	68	59	65				194
09/09/20 night			5	24	33	56				118
10/09/20 noon				10	30	47				87
10/09/20 night			7	15	39	78				139
13/09/20 Kinder						62		62		124
13/09/20 night			4	9	77	77				167
14/09/20 noon			3	69			31			103
14/09/20 night			4	13	36	63				116
15/09/20 noon			2	10	37	44				93
15/09/20 night			4	10	53	46				113
16/09/20 noon			9	60			29			98
16/09/20 night			3	11	67	31				112
17/09/20 noon			4	8	35	38				85

17/09/20 night			3	12	42	54				111
20/09/20 Kinder								58		58
20/09/20 night				81	167					248
21/09/20 noon				49			34			83
21/09/20 night				19	56					75
22/09/20 noon				42	30					72
22/09/20 night				84	48					132
23/09/20 night				53	60					113
24/09//20 noon				37	56					93
24/09/20 night				52	59					111
27/09/20 Kinder								54		54
27/09/20 night				64	48					112
28/09/20 night				70	78					148
29//09/20 night				57	70					127
30/09/20 night				48	48					96
01/10/20 night				49	51					100
04/10/20 Kinder				11	51			62		124
04/10/20 night				49	59					108
05/10/20 night				62	49					111
06/10/20 night				46	49					95

07/10/20 night				13	48					61
08/10/20 night				76	41					117
										0
										0

How can Digital Technologies enable the experience of New Monastic Communities of Faith
A Phenomenological study

Research Question one: How can digital technologies enable the experience of New Monastic communities of faith?

Research question two: How do digital participants of DigitalSaints.org experience and understand Christian Community?

Research question three: How does this experience and understanding inform or shape their religious experience?

B1: Where would you say you were on your faith journey?

- "I think that being a priest is quite a tough part of being on the faith journey." "Faith is very much out there on display...in difficult situations, people ill...., dying, ...suffering that they're all parts of our daily life.
  - Faith is intentional
  - "I just think it needs to be a lot more intentional to make sure that ...formation is happening and I'm continually stirring up the gift of God within me, which, you know, we subscribe to in the ordinal (the Liturgy for ordination - what a priest says they will do.
  - Code: Faith is Tough
  - On display
- She said she's become more introverted since she's become a priest
  - Code: Professional Christian
- Developing faith is a process - I'm never really going to be done
  - Code: Professional Christian
  - Faith is a process
- "I would say that faith has played a huge part in my existence and my life... I feel that I try to have a connection with that which is beyond e that I would call God in my day to day life. And ...that choice and that faith and believe ...impacts decisions that I make, behaviours that I try to adopt.
  - Faith is a necessary of life
  - "There have been seasons where it has perhaps taken not a lower priority, but has been more difficult to maintain a strong sense of faith through questions... but circumstances make you question, but actually it has been a presence throughout my life, really".
  - Connection with "that which is beyond me
  - Faith impacts decisions, and behaviours
- In ordained ministry for over 10 years. "I am still discovering, searching.. It's like ebbing and flowing in my relationship with God".
  - Faith is ebbing and flowing
  - "there are times where I feel very much that I'm walking close to God to Jesus and I'm encouraged and fruitful and I'm loving and all is well. And there are other times where I feel far from God and quite low spiritually and emotionally. And that moment as the moments is varies from day to day or even hour to hour."
  - Code: Isolated
  - Code: Professional Christian
  - Code: Priest - Professional Christian
- "I am where I need to be at Present. That makes sense... I've just been appointed Vicar of two new parishes.
  - I am where I need to be in my journey - Faith is grounding

B2: Are you part of another Christian Community

- Priest in Charge at Bordeaux, caring for the expats - but also including Iranian refugees and some French.
  - Code: Anglophone living in France
  - DS is another community
- Yes, our Christian community is a small community that meets at the town square and prays for Texas - prays for pastors throughout Texas, and pray for those in authority over us. Have been doing that for over four years.
  - DS is another community
  - Local Anglican Church
- "I'm probably more at home in the Arabic congregation. It's a slightly. More liturgical church, slightly higher church. But so don't typically high. Wherave the English speaking congregation and whilest Anglican led, is an international church, so there's lots of non-Anglican's there. So it's a lot lower church. It's a lot less sacramental. And I think I get a lot our of the fellowship in that church, but maybe less out of the worship and prayer side of things."
  - 2 communities, one liturgical one non sacremental
  - Code: English, living in foreign land
  - Code: Professional Christian
- Belongs to St Francis (local Anglican church) and used to teach children's church, Cornerstone.
  - DS is another community
- member of a local Anglican church and parts of various Christian gathered communities.
- Methodist Minister, works as a Chaplain for NHA, which is Methodist homes retirement village. Works for a Circuit - a group of Methodist Churches. Leads a Bible study in a pub in Kirby Moreside.
- Priest of Lanchester and Burnhope, and Hollow and Burnfield Plane.

B3: Have you ever taken part in a digital 'community of interest?' Tell me about it.

- "...there's a term in Arabic, which is like Mashi. It means walking, but it's like the ongoing process. So Bimshe is to walk like be, I am walking , mashi let's walk, ... walking, going along....investing a lot of my time in my faith journey."
  - Travelling on his faith
  - Code: Professional Christian
- "I lost my best friend. We'd been friends for 20 years ...but when I lost my best friend after her funeral, I went for stretches (at St Francis Church) in front...Janet at the time who came to me and I felt like I was well.... I came...everyone was just so friendly and welcoming and they made me feel that I cut the law typically (check on translation).
  - Wants to become a priest and is studying. Has some developmental and physical disabilities - feels that someone with disabilities is needed in the priesthood.
  - Code: Connection
  - New to faith, wants to grow into priesthood
- He gave his life to God (made the decision to follow Christ) when he was 16. He's not regularly going to church, started following because of meeting Nik and St Mary's. Not a regular church goer. "But still a Christian, not a church goer"
  - Has faith in God, not a church goer
- She has been brought up as a Christian and is currently exploring the Idea of becoming a Lay Pastoral Minister
  - "I would say at this precise moment, God is calling me to do something and I am trying to ignore Him".
  - Born into faith, grew as well
- "Trying to get closer to God" - which is "Trying to get closer to God, trying to obey what Jesus said, trying to obey what I think God wants me to do. Spend time in his presence, having a good moan, that kind of thing".
  - Code: professional #holywanderings
  - Faith is getting close to God
  - Faith is trying to obey what Jesus said
  - Faith is doing what God wants me to do

B4: What do you know about monasticism, ancient or new?

- "There's a lot of worshiping communities here who are praying almost continuously, and that's a really wonderful thing to know that your'e surrounded by places like baptism sites in Jordan, Mt Nebo.....that's a really encouraging thing to know about and to know going on and to interact with from time to time.
  - yes, living where monasticism began
- "I think that that's really a form of spirituality which speaks to me and which sustains me. I followed the rule of St Benedict for several years in my life and so, you know, really my own personal spirituality is centred around the rule of Benedict and you know, all those books that people write about trying to follow Benedict's rule in everyday life"
- Knows of the Chemin Nerf
- Doesn't know anything about monasticism
- Doesn't know anything about monasticism
- Doesn't know much about monasticism, but understands ethos
- Knows a bit about new monasticism with contact with one group. Felt the group was excluding the average person. "More about making things more open and assessable."
- She doesn't know - she doesn't gather but has a central place
- general knowledge "it was a place of gathering of monks or nuns where they lived together in community and they shared community life, which included worship in various ways and often contributed to wider community life. And then new (monasticism)....I think there's also a sense of gathered, so not necessarily living... like Digital Saints, not living together in the same place, but kind of doing life alongside each other and conneting though online or gathering together physically on a sort of regular or less regular basis.
- "They all have a rule of life, they have certain routines and times for praying."
- "Quite a bit. I was facinated from an early age by monasticism, particularly Benedictine monasticism, even though I wasn't religious. At one stage I think I wasn't religious because I thought if I was religious I was called to be a contemplative and I didn't fancy it."

B5: Do you feel like you belong? And What do you want to get out of belonging to this community?

- "When you agree in prayer, you belong".
  - Has it - feels connected
  - Knows what they've got what they want when they feel the connection in prayer.
  - yes, it is a connection and a sense of feeling at home somewhere. That's very important to me".
  - "Yes, I think so. I think there's a nice sense of community. A scattered community. A little bit like I mean obviously Anglican Priests are obligated to pray the morning and the evening office. And very often we pray that alone - very often there is a sense when. you pray that others are paying that office, even though you can't see them, you're not touching them, you can't hear them. But the prayer is there. I hink with Digital Saints it's a little bit like that, so you have that sense of connection, the prayer going on."
    - "it ties into a really important phase of my kind of spiritual journey as it was time when I could be very intentional"
    - He never wanted to get anything back or get involved - happy to listen and relax on the other end.
- Do you feel you belong to Digital Saints?
  - "Yeah, absolutely. I think it's great, actually, that you offer that and I'm blown away as to how you keep it going every night, quite honestly"
    - Code: No Judgement
    - yes "I think that that I can belong outside of a specific point in time and space in really interesting. In light of all that (time difference, space) the fact that I can still belong when I'm able to is a great thing. The thing about it being digital is there's no judgement if I'm not there for, you know, five weeks in a row and turn up on time because no one's sort of asking for me as my presence, you know."
  - Happy just to listen at the end of the day. (get quote)
    - listens
  - "I'm not as regular as a participant as some people, but I don't feel that matters in as much as I don't feel unwelcome...In terms of being welcome and feeling like I belong and that, I feel that that's fine."
    - feels welcome, belongs
  - Yes "That's is part of the beauty of being part of a virtual community. You can feel at home even when you're not".
    - Beauty of virtual
  - "Yes, I may not contribute, but I belong. I'm being obedient to God's word we are to dwell together in love and to help one another".
    - Belongs
  - "I did feel that you and Nik made everyone that commented or popped up on the page very welcome. So yes, I did feel sort of part of the community, I felt like I could comment if I felt I needed to.
  - Not sure she felt part of the community as she doesn't talk to the rest of the community "no cross talk"
  - At the time of logging into Digital Saints I wasn't able to get out to evening prayer, so you brought evening prayer to me at home, I found that really beneficial.
  - Wants more interaction
  - Note from priest as part of study, but this participant didn't initiate any cross talk themselves - reflect on the nature of church attendance and contribution.
- Knows us personally
  - There is certainly a sense of belonging and , you know, you know, knowing you both feeling, you know, I can relate to you both.
  - "participating in something, in the actual...night prayer, the sense of a bit of rhythm... and knowing that it's not just me doing it, but it's that there is a genuine connection there."
  - Doesn't feel it's a community yet
- "We're deadfully isolated and so to have online communities such as Digital Saints.... it's great cause you just feel that you can get together and pray with people." It's that commonality we have with each other.
  - Code: Isolated
- It's been sometime since we've moved - she hasn't seen it as frequently. "Anything to do with Jesus that's always made me feel his presence. You'll never go wrong by using scripture."
  - Once she clicks on us and gets in - she repeats. She makes her responses just like we do
- It gives her space and it's peaceful. "It's great that you are there and you've got that heart of it. I love that. And it's an ear. It adds to my life"
  - Code: peace
- She comes when it pops up in her Facebook feed "Every time I've see it it you and Nik come across very well visually, you both have lovely, friendly, approachable faces...." "It's another strand in a kind of rope of spiritual connections betweem me and God. And me and other Christians".
  - "It's being part of the body of Christ. Even if you don't actually feel as if you are. It is a way of being taught in the body of Christ."
    - Code: Connection
  - "It's about that sense of sometimes just putting the weight of leading down and just becoming one of the community".
    - "Great Aid to prayer, I felt free to be a consumer rather than a facilitator"
    - Code: rest
- Felt that the Celtic Prayers were relaxing.
- I love evening prayer I think it calms the day. You put everything to rest.
  - Code: calm
  - "It's a comforting way of landing the day -" "I love compline. I love the idea of that sort of bit before bed. And so that when I can tune in I do find it helpful."
  - "It made me pause and stop and allow space for prayer time. If you're on your own you rush through it - when the space is controlled - managed by someone else you relax more and you sit in the space. You inhabit the spae.
- "As you both were talking each other I thought it (the Holy Spirit) connected to what you were saying and basically, I felt like my spirit was connected to what you were saying as well. And it helped me then the next day as well." "If they need an ear to listen to, and they now that you can talk to you without being judged.
  - Code: No Judgement

F1A: Do you feel that you were part of a sacred space?

- Code: cultivated space
- " Yeah, very much so. I think sacred spaces are really facinating becuase they're ultimately created, they're not inherent, I don't think even that to use kind of a Celtic sort of term, you know, sort of thin spaces are developed. They are cultivated."
- "Yes, I did". "Oh, after you finish, I felt like the Holy spirit was stronger after your talk. You could feel it after. You can feel it after finish doing your speeches."
- "I didn't actively take part or make comments" but does feel that it feels like a two way conversation. If he was watching it live, he feels like it was an open experience. He felt he connected with God, that it was a sacred space - particularly the prayer part. Just listened.
- "Yeah. There were times that, again, I'd sort of log off and feel that part of the discussion or part of the Celtic Night Prayer had touched me...just in the quietness and the just sitting and listening to the quiet."
- "yes. I love compline, I love the idea of that sort o bit before bed... so that when I can tune in ... I do find it helpful".
- Yes "...partly because of my decision to connect with it, with that intention... I particularly try to be in a quieter space myself when I'm going online. I make sure that my intention is to be fully present and connected at the point that I'm online with you and not to rush of afterwards so that the spirit of the spoken word and God's spirit as we're working through it - and then just settle for a moment before I go off."
  - after lets it resonate
- Yes, I do. It's lovely to know that other people are sharing in the same thing. So you're part of the community even if you don't feel physically part of a community. And that is helpful to me because I love very very far from home. - I don't feel that where I live is my . I feel displaced."
- A sacred Space "is a very good way to describe it, actually. A series of reflective bits and pieces and then the prayers"
- "Also part of a group called Renew Our | World (renewourworld.net) which are a Christian Climate Action community that operated internationally. We meet once a month via uh Zoom actually is the tool that we use for that. And that's great because it's a place of prayer and conversation and organising. I's somewhere between a conference call and a discussion."
- "...we only meet physically for one week of the year and it's a good week. It's very intense. The relationships and the real work that we can get done in that week is augmented by rthe fact that we know one anothers voices and at least sometimes, faces from these interactions///that a really important part of how we do community>"
  - yes, part of digital communities of interest
- Code: Anglophone living in France
- DS is another community
- DS is another community
- Local Anglican Church
- Part of several communities, Anglican Church, Christian Missionary Society, Pioneer Home
- The majority belong to some other community this isn't they're only place of prayer
- Wants more interaction
- Note from priest as part of study, but this participant didn't initiate any cross talk themselves - reflect on the nature of church attendance and contribution.
- Not sure she felt part of the community as she doesn't talk to the rest of the community "no cross talk"
- Yes "That's is part of the beauty of being part of a virtual community. You can feel at home even when you're not".
- Belongs to St Francis (local Anglican church) and used to teach children's church, Cornerstone.
- member of a local Anglican church and parts of various Christian gathered communities.
- Methodist Minister, works as a Chaplain for NHA, which is Methodist homes retirement village. Works for a Circuit - a group of Methodist Churches. Leads a Bible study in a pub in Kirby Moreside.
- Priest of Lanchester and Burnhope, and Hollow and Burnfield Plane.
- Belongs to a prayer organisations hundred who pray for the President - she can just agree with them online (in prayer according to her denomination it is necessary to agree with each other) - praying for his safety - "we are told by Paul to pray for those in authority over us"
- Yes, various Christian and Pioneer communities
- Several based on Facebook pages. Member of a religious order that is a closed group as well.
- Through Study groups at her University - they met through Adobe connect each week.
- The Enneagram community online. The Aiden and Hilda Society, a dispersed monastic community that does online prayer time and they get together to pray.
  - comfortable with digital format - use for work, meetings etc
- Yes, follows sporting communities as he is a PE teacher, belongs to digital music communities and sport communities. Mainly a message board on Facebook. Some are on Instagram - sharing ideas for PE
- The school's parent page on Facebook, tried online Bible Study but was not confident about commenting
- Virtual home group from church: Virtual Lent group with pioneers all over the country, For the home group - it felt a bit judgey
- No - not a community - but On messenger, a prayer messages just between two of them
- Code: Isolated
- "I think you feel that there's a connection with other people praying." "We're dreadfully isolated and so to have online communities such as Digital Saints... it's great cause you just feel that you can get together and pray with people". "It's that commonality that we have with each other"
- "Yes, He says he is there where two or three are gathered. " Sometimes she feels the Holy Spirit, (check on this). What the lessons were together
- "You're funny as well, you know, you're funny and relaxed and it makes people feel really comfortable to be with you both".
- "Sometimes I'm watching it after...either after you've finished because I can't sleep or sometimes the next day I'll see that you'be been on and just log on to see kind of what your news is." (phone)
- gets an alert and clicks on it through facebook on her computer
- End of the day on Facebook. "...cause it's the end of the day, it kind of just leads into a nice kind of way to lead out of the day." Generally on her phone
- Smart phone when the Facebook reminder pops up
- ON a laptop at the end of a working day
- On his phone, usually the recorded stream, and intermittently
- Through Facebook - on phone
- On Facebook - it pops up on his feed later in the evening, not necessarily live - so he would watch it then. It felt very local to Northampton. Suscribers were those who knew him from St Mary's. Found it interesting. The prayer helped him to relax in the evening. Generally listened to it before bedtime after reading. Last thing at night.
- I wasn't able to get out to do that (join evening/ night prayer) because of my child care arrangement. That made it eaiser to bring it home without leaving the home.
- "I don't like watching it recorded. If I was gonna wtch it, watch it live cause I want to get that duense of interaction...sometimes half past nine at night isn't the best time...
- Still felt part even when it was recorded , possibly because we had met face to face.
- What context or situation has typically influenced your experience of online new monasticism and digital community (how did you interact with us)
  - he does follow some other Christian online groups, mostly a few other Facebook pages he follows - local church Facebook group - old church group - but Digital Saints is the only new monastic group

F1: When was the first itme you took part in the Digital Saints stream? Facebook, YouTube, Periscope?

- she trained with Nik
  - I think when you first started on Facebook. (we reckon 4 years ago)
  - When it was first on Facebook. Sometimes she would leave an 'amen' in the comments
  - "wandered in sort of between Pioneer Homes (a pioneer gathering).
  - Began about 2 years after the stream started
  - In the beginning on Periscope then on Facebook
  - a year before the interview - about 4 years in
- Stumbled on it in Summer of 2017
  - Talked to at Simon's wedding
- "the first time I saw it was on the 8th of September 2019"
- Started following when he met Nik and St Mary's (3 years? check with Nik)
- After witness talk for Cursillo - about 3.5 years in
- Early on, in the beginning

Appendix F

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval

Project Title

An exploration of the use of digital technologies in new monastic communities: A case study

Principal Investigator

Record of Approval

I **request an ethics peer review** and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	X
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	X

Name: Michele Hensley-Stevenson.....

Date: 21/01/2015 .....

Student's Supervisor (if applicable)

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Name: Fredrick Mudhai .....

Date: 23/01/2019 .....

Reviewer (if applicable)

Date of approval by anonymous reviewer: 31/01/2019

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

Project Information

Project Ref	P31390
Full name	Michele Hensley-Stevenson
Faculty	Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Department	School of Media and Performing Arts
Supervisor	Fredrick Mudhai
Module Code	FAH-PHD
EFAAF Number	
Project title	An exploration of the use of digital technologies in new monastic communities: A case study
Date(s)	21/01/2015 - 31/12/2020
Created	21/01/2015 10:29

Project Summary

* To explore the emergence of the contemporary movement known as 'New Monasticism' the new monastic communities, and their digital community presence in Post –Christendom, Post-Secular, society

* To develop a phenomenological understanding of community and their effect on physical placement and cult culture in relation to their digital presence

There have been many 'New Monastic' style communities through out history, both Christian and Secular. There is not a clear definition of 'New Monastic' community as each lay/secular community that calls itself 'New Monastic' have set out different criteria as to what this means.

This study will look at what a self identified spiritual digital community is. The phenomenon of 'spiritual' connection involves a joining to a group in a metaphysical way which does not always include proximity. By investigating the self-reflective response of each participant in the new monastic community we will understand the digital connection to community and to spirit.

I believe that this is the next evolutionary step in online presence – a spiritual step It is time for a transformation back to the small, back to the intimate.

Names of Co-Investigators and their organisational affiliation (place of study/employer)	

Is the project self-funded?	NO
Who is funding the project?	
Has the funding been confirmed?	NO
Are you required to use a Professional Code of Ethical Practice appropriate to your discipline?	NO
Have you read the Code?	NO

Project Details

What is the purpose of the project?	* To explore the emergence of the contemporary movement known as 'New Monasticism' the new monastic communities, and their digital community presence in Post –Christendom, Post-Secular, society * To develop a phenomenological understanding of community and their effect on physical placement and cult culture in relation to their digital presence Research Question: How can digital technologies enable New Monastic communities of faith? One question that will be addressed in this study is, can we only be human when we are face to face? In that context, does that mean that if one cannot see to whom they are speaking, is their interaction in any way not a true representation of human connection? Can we, as spiritual beings, only then connect in a spiritual way with others in community face to face? (O'Leary, 1996)

What are the planned or desired outcomes?	This research draws together theories of religion, community and digital media for its analysis of a specific phenomenon, that of a digital new monastic community. The study will investigate the creation of a pilot virtual community of faith within the New Monastic context and strive to determine the viability of digital iterations of such communities of faith. In practical terms, the research study will also yield: 1. An online digital community will be created for the purposes of this research and for use by the monastic community identified www.nikthevic.com facebook.com/nikthevic @nikthevic on twitter

	2. An archive of online radio programs and live blogging sessions will be created for analysis 3. An understanding of how, if and why digital monastic communities will be obtained through an analysis of the functioning of the specific case study 4. The challenges and shortcomings of digital monastic communities will be explored. 5. Journal article for Monastic Studies, Anvil Journal and for Fresh Expressions

Explain your research design	This study will use phenomenological ethnographic methods of observation and interviews from the base line of initial contact with the digital community and following their further integration 'into the community' in a monastic sense. Using this methodology, it can be determined whether the individuals participating in this study will have had a sense of spiritual renewal, a deeper dedication to God as they perceive them, and the 'belongingness' to the online spiritual community. The ethnographic methods of observation and interviews from the base line of initial contact with the digital community and following their further integration 'into the community'. There is a six-monthly cycle of review for Fresh Expressions of church starting May 2018. Six weeks prior to into these reviews taking place would seem to be a sensible opportunity to consult and to investigate the state of the community. It would seem reasonable to use this same time to interview the participants for this research in order to avoid intruding too much on their new monastic community. What is new, we have moved from Oakley Vale, and will not be using participants
	from that community.

Outline the principal methods you will use	As indicated in the previous section the principal methods used will be observations and interviews with the participants in digital community. A series of interviews at key points in the experiment will be used to assess self-reported viability of the virtual community of faith. Participation interviews will be voluntary, and participants will have the right to withdraw at any stage of the process. Participants will be provided with details on the interview process and how the data will be used. Participants will not be identified in the final research document. Data collected will be held by the researcher for 5 years and will not be available for use by other researchers. However: The total population size of the digital community is not determined at this point as this is a new venture - so there may be the outcome that every member of the community that is willing will take part of this study. However, each person will be approached individually, no one will know who is or is not part of the study. Each of the interviews will be undertaken privately (though most likely digitally) and the results will be password protected. The observation method is detailed below.
Are you proposing to use an external research instrument, validated scale or follow a published research method?	YES
If yes, please give details of what you are using	Drawing on the existing research on interview methods, I will be designing my own interview guide to ascertain participants perception of the digital community of faith and their engagement

	with it. The participant's interaction with the digital platform will also be observed and coded. Over the three years, (beginning 2018) using observation and interviews with the individual participants, it will be determined whether or not they consider themselves as part of the community and whether according to their perception, they feel that the digital community meets their spiritual needs. Contact will be made with each participant a minimum of every three months so that there will be 12 reference points over the three years. This contact will be outside of the typical community contact. Timeline: Platform Testing 2015. Gathering the Community 01/06/2018, Baseline Interviews 01/06/2018, First Trials (Streaming and forums) 01/01/2019, 6-month interviews 01/07/2018, Going Deeper 01/07/2019, 12-month reviews 01/01/2019, Interim analysis 01/02/2019, 18-month reviews -01/07/2019, 2-year reviews 01/01/2019, Exploring participation chapter 01/04/2020 Final Writeup 01/10/2021 31/12/2021
Will your research involve consulting individuals who support, or literature, websites or similar material which advocates, any of the following: terrorism, armed struggles, or political, religious or other forms of activism considered illegal under UK law?	NO
Are you dealing with Secondary Data? (e.g., sourcing info from websites, historical documents)	YES
Are you dealing with Primary Data involving people? (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, observations)	YES
Are you dealing with personal or sensitive data?	YES
Will the Personal or Sensitive data be shared with a third party?	N

	O
Will the Personal or Sensitive data be shared outside of the European Economic Area ("EEA")?	NO
Is the project solely desk based? (e.g., involving no laboratory, workshop or off-campus work or other activities which pose significant risks to researchers or participants)	NO
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by the study that have not	YES

been covered by previous questions?	
If yes, please give further details	My husband is the priest that is part of this study. We have worked together for many years in various capacities. I trust him and know that his concern for his digital parish will be sincere. However, I am aware that it would be difficult for anyone to be able to complain or express concern to me about anything they were unhappy about with either Nik or me. Rev Ali Middleton will be an advisor to the project and a 'listening ear' if there is a problem. She is also a pioneer minister and ideally suited to this.

DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) formerly CRB (Criminal Records Bureau)

	Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Does the study require DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) checks?			X
	If YES, please give details of the serial number, date obtained and expiry date			
2	If NO, does the study involve direct contact by any member of the research team:			
	a)	with children or young people under 18 years of age?		X
	b)	with adults who have learning difficulties, brain injury, dementia, degenerative neurological disorders?		X
	c)	with adults who are frail or physically disabled?		X
	d)	with adults who are living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres, hospitals or hospices?		X

	e with adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?)		X
	If you have answered YES to any of the questions above please explain the nature of that contact and what you will be doing		

External Ethical Review

	Question	Yes	No
1	Will this study be submitted for ethical review to an external organisation? (e.g. Another University, Social Care, National Health Service, Ministry of Defence, Police Service and Probation Office)		X
	If YES, name of external organisation		
2	Will this study be reviewed using the IRAS system?		X
3	Has this study previously been reviewed by an external organisation?		X

Confidentiality, security and retention of research data

	Question	Yes	No
1	Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the study?		X
	If YES, please give an explanation		
2	Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, and associated persons, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs or findings from this study?		X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case		
3	Is there a significant possibility that a specific organisation or agency or participants could have confidential information identified, as a result of the way you write up the results of the study?		X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case		

4	Will any members of the research team retain any personal of confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
5	Will you or any member of the team intend to make use of any confidential information, knowledge, trade secrets obtained for any other purpose than the research project?			X
	If YES, please explain further why this is the case			
6	Will you be responsible for destroying the data after study completion?			X
	If NO, please explain how data will be destroyed, when it will be destroyed and by whom	It will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research 2025 It will be shredded and disposed of in a ecologically sound method.		

Participant Information and Informed Consent

Question			**Yes**	**No**
1	Will all the participants be fully informed BEFORE the project begins why the study is being conducted and what their participation will involve?		X	
	If NO, please explain why			
2	Will every participant be asked to give written consent to participating in the study, before it begins?		X	
	If NO, please explain how you will get consent from your participants. If not written consent, explain how you will record consent			
3	Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with this data during and after the study?		X	
	If NO, please specify			
4	Will there be audio, video or photographic recording of participants?		X	
	Will explicit consent be sought for recording of participants?		X	

	If NO to explicit consent, please explain how you will gain consent for recording participants			
5	Will every participant understand that they have the right not to take part at any time, and/or withdraw themselves and their data from the study if they wish?		X	
	If NO, please explain why			
6	Will every participant understand that there will be no reasons required or repercussions if they withdraw or remove their data from the study?		X	
	If NO, please explain why			
7	Does the study involve deceiving, or covert observation of, participants?			X
	Will you debrief them at the earliest possible opportunity?			
	If NO to debrief them, please explain why this is necessary			

Risk of harm, potential harm and disclosure of harm

Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
2	Is there any significant risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants?	X	

	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks	Given that this study will involve an exploration of the experience of faith, there is a small risk that participants may experience a crisis of faith. Although the study itself is unlikely to result in such a crisis, the participants own refection on their faith journey could challenge their existing beliefs. The nature and structure of questions will be carefully considered and vetted by the supervisor and director of study before they are used. If necessary, faith counselling could be provided within the organisation which the study is being conducted.		
3	Is there any risk that the study may lead to psychological or emotional distress to researchers?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
4	Is there any risk that your study may lead or result in harm to the reputation of participants, researchers, or their employees, or any associated persons or organisations?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
5	Is there a risk that the study will lead to participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			
6	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or at risk or harm?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks			

7	Is there a risk that the study will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		X
	If YES, please explain how you will take steps to reduce or address those risks		
8	Are you aware of the CU Disclosure protocol?	X	

Payments to participants

Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any kind of inducements, or reward for taking part in your study?		X
	If YES, please explain what kind of payment you will be offering (e.g. prize draw or store vouchers)		
2	Is there any possibility that such payments or inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		
3	Is there any possibility that the prospect of payment or inducements will influence the data provided by participants in any way?		
4	Will you inform participants that accepting payments or inducements does not affect their right to withdraw from the study at any time?		

Capacity to give valid consent

Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Do you propose to recruit any participants who are:		
	a) children or young people under 18 years of age?		X
	b) adults who have learning difficulties, mental health condition, brain injury, advanced dementia, degenerative neurological disorders?		X
	c) adults who are physically disabled?		X
	d) adults who are living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres, hospitals or hospices?		X

	e)	adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?		X
		If you answer YES to any of the questions please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent		
2	Do you propose to recruit any participants with possible communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited use of knowledge of the English language?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent			
3	Do you propose to recruit any participants who may not be able to understand fully the nature of the study, research and the implications for them of participating in it or cannot provide consent themselves?			X
	If YES, please explain how you will overcome any challenges to gaining valid consent			

Recruiting Participants

Question			**Yes**	**No**
1	Do you propose to recruit any participants who are:			
	a)	students or employees of Coventry University or partnering organisation(s)?		X
		If YES, please explain if there is any conflict of interest and how this will be addressed		
	b)	employees/staff recruited through other businesses, voluntary or public sector organisations?		X
		If YES, please explain how permission will be gained		
	c)	pupils or students recruited through educational institutions (e.g. primary schools, secondary schools, colleges)?		X

	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
d)	clients/volunteers/service users recruited through voluntary public services?			X
	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
e)	participants living in residential care, social care, nursing homes, re-ablement centres hospitals or hospices?			X
	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
f)	recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed forces?			X
	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
g)	adults who are in prison, remanded on bail or in custody?			X
	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			
h)	who may not be able to refuse to participate in the research?			X
	If YES, please explain how permission will be gained			

Online and Internet Research

	Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Will any part of your study involve collecting data by means of electronic media (e.g. the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, online forums, etc)?		X	
	If YES, please explain how you will obtain permission to collect data by this means	I will already have permission from the organisation whose activities will be monitored.		
2	Is there a possibility that the study will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?			X
	If YES, please explain further			
3	Will the study incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?			X
	If YES, please explain further			

4	Will you be using survey collection software (e.g. BoS, Filemaker)?			X
	If YES, please explain which software			
5	Have you taken necessary precautions for secure data management, in accordance with data protection and CU Policy?		X	
	If NO	please explain why not		
	If YES	Specify location where data will be stored	the Data will be stored in a separate hard drive that will not be able to be accessed by any participants.	
		Planned disposal date	01/06/2025	
		If the research is funded by an external organisation, are there any requirements for storage and disposal?		X
		If YES, please specify details		

Languages

	Question	**Yes**	**No**
1	Are all or some of the consent forms, information leaflets and research instruments associated with this project likely to be used in languages other than English?		X
	If YES, please specify the language[s] to be used		
2	Have some or all of the translations been undertaken by you or a member of the research team?		
	Are these translations in lay language and likely to be clearly understood by the research participants?		
	Please describe the procedures used when undertaking research instrument translation (e.g. forward and back translation), clarifying strategies for ensuring the validity and reliability or trustworthiness of the translation		
3	Have some or all of the translations been undertaken by a third party?		
	If YES, please specify the name[s] of the persons or agencies performing the translations		

	Please describe the procedures used when undertaking research instrument translation (e.g. forward and back translation), clarifying strategies for ensuring the validity and reliability of the translation	

Laboratory/Workshops

	Question		Yes	No
1	Does any part of the project involve work in a laboratory or workshop which could pose risks to you, researchers or others?			X
	If YES: If you have risk assessments for laboratory or workshop activities you can refer to them here & upload them at the end, or explain in the text box how you will manage those risks			

Research with non-human vertebrates

	Question		Yes	No
1	Will any part of the project involve animal habitats or tissues or non- human vertebrates?			X
	If YES, please give details			
2	Does the project involve any procedure to the protected animal whilst it is still alive?			
3	Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?			
	If YES, please give details			
4	Will the project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non- natural setting that is outside the control of the researcher?			
	If YES, please give details			
5	Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?			
	If YES, please give details			

6	Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		
	If YES, please give details		
7	Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species of those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		
	If YES, please give details		
8	Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?		
	If YES, please give details		
9	Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than Octopus vulgaris?		
	If YES, please give details		

Blood Sampling / Human Tissue Analysis

Question		**Yes**	**No**
1	Does your study involve collecting or use of human tissues or fluids? (e.g. collecting urine, saliva, blood or use of cell lines, 'dead' blood)		X
	If YES, please give details		
2	If your study involves blood samples or body fluids (e.g. urine, saliva) have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The British Association of Sport and Exercise Science Physiological Testing Guidelines (2007) or equivalent) and that they are in line with the level of risk?		
	If NO, please explain why not		
3	If your study involves human tissue other than blood and saliva, have you clearly stated in your application that appropriate guidelines are to be followed (e.g. The Human Tissues Act, or equivalent) and that they are in line with level of risk?		
	If NO, please explain why not		

Travel

	Question		Yes	No
1	Does any part of the project require data collection off campus? (e.g. work in the field or community)		X	
	If YES: You must consider the potential hazards from off campus activities (e.g. working alone, time of data collection, unfamiliar or hazardous locations, using equipment, the terrain, violence or aggression from others). Outline the precautions that will be taken to manage these risks, AS A MINIMUM this must detail how researchers would summon assistance in an emergency when working off campus. For complex or high risk projects you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment	I am familiar with the environment as I am a member of that church community. The building where we meet is monitored by staff and access to emergency assistance is always available. I am never alone in the building. The time of collection is during the day, and some data collection will be digital. To summon assistance in an emergency there is an alarm 'panic button' on the wall of the building that can be pressed in an emergency. But as most of the interaction, other than meetings with the church leaders, all interviews and observation will be virtual.		
2	Does any part of the project involve the researcher travelling outside the UK (or to very remote UK locations)?			X
	If YES: Please give details of where, when and how you will be travelling. For travel to high risk places you may wish to complete and upload a separate risk assessment			
3	Are all travellers aware of contact numbers for emergency assitance when away (e.g. local emergency assistance, ambulance/local hospital/police, insurance helpline [+44 (0) 2071 737797] and CU's 24/7 emergency line [+44 (0) 2476 888555])?			
4	Are there any travel warnings in place advising against all, or essential only travel to the destination? NOTE: Before travel to countries with 'against all travel', or 'essential only' travel warnings, staff must check with Finance to ensure insurance coverage is not affected. Undergraduate projects in high risk destinations will not be approved			

5	Are there increased risks to health and safety related to the destination? e.g. cultural differences, civil unrest, climate, crime, health outbreaks/concerns, and travel arrangements?		
	If YES, please specify		
6	Do all travelling members of the research team have adequate travel insurance?		

7	Please confirm all travelling researchers have been advised to seek medical advice regarding vaccinations, medical conditions etc, from their GP		

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form

Digital New Monastic Communities (*see Participant Information Sheet*)

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at anytime without giving a reason.

3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence

4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded (*October 2020*).

5. I agree to be filmed/recorded as part of the research project

6. I agree to take part in the research project

Name of participant: .....

Signature of participant: .....

Date: .....

Witnessed by (if appropriate): .....

Name of witness: .....

Signature of witness:.....

Name of Researcher:.....

Signature of researcher: .....

Date:.....

Appendix H

Participant Information Sheet

1. This project and study: DigitalSaints.org is researching*:*

How can digital technologies enable New Monastic communities of faith?
We will explore the emergence of the contemporary movement known as 'New Monasticism' the new monastic communities, and their digital community presence in Post –Christendom, Post-Secular, society by interviewing participants who take part in the digital community periodically and studying the results.

This would be in order to develop a phenomenological understanding of community and their effect on physical placement and cult culture in relation to their digital presence

2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because of your interest in new monasticism and interesting in forming and/or participating in a digital community of faith.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to participate. You may initially participate and then change your mind as well. We would hope that if you have any questions or problems you would contact Shelly Stevenson so that we can resolve any problems.

4. What do I have to do?

You would need to take part in at least one daily office with the digital community. All of the times and the streaming outlets will be on the website. You would need to participate in an occasional forum, and take part in corporate prayer. Digital Saints would supply the link for the Breviary and any materials needed to take part.

There will be occasional interviews. We ask that you take part in these interviews and reflect on your spiritual journey in those interviews,

5. What are the risks associated with this project?

There is a risk that some other participants may misrepresent themselves in the community. There is a risk of cyber bullying, and a risk that this experience may influence your faith.

Mitigations: No one will have access to your details outside of the researchers, and no one will be able to post un monitored texts. All group live interactions are monitored, and any theological information disseminated will be monitored by Clergy of the Church of England.

6. What are the benefits of taking part?

You will be part of the first online New Monastic communities – a Fresh Expression of the CofE. You will be able to have communal prayer, take part in digital offices, study with other participants and take part in community 'house groups' and worship.

7. Withdrawal options.

You can withdraw at any time from this study. We just ask that you give an exit interview so that we can 'close off' your part of the study.

8. Data protection and confidentiality.

All participant information will be held securely (not on the website) and will not be available to anyone other than the researcher. You have the right to confidentiality. Each participant will be anonymous.

9. What if things go wrong? Who to complain to?
If anything goes wrong you can complain to Dr Fred Mudhai at Coventry University arx231@Coventry.ac.uk. If you have a religious or spiritual question or complaint, please contact Rev Ali Middleton at rev.ali.j.middleton@gmail.com.

10. What will happen with the results of the study?

This will be used in the first instance as a Doctoral Thesis. If there were to be a book, you would be contacted and any information and or research would be used anonymously

11. Who has reviewed this study?
Dr Fred Mudhai is the Director of Studies for this study and Coventry University.

For further information and Key Contact:

Shelly Stevenson Steven47@uni.coventry.ac.uk or ring XXXXXXXXXX

Appendix I

Baseline questions:

1. **Where would you say you are on your 'faith journey'?**
2. **Are you part of another Christian community?**
3. **Have you ever taken part in a digital 'community of interest'?**
    a. **Tell me about that.**
4. **What do you know about Monasticism, ancient or new?**
5. **What do you want to get out of belonging to this community?**
6. **How will you know you have got what you want?**

Questions for subsequent Interviews
(it would be dependant on their answers to the baseline questions, but some typical questions are below)

1. **What is your experience of the digital new monastic community?**
    a. **(Probing questions) Did you feel that you were part of a virtual 'Sacred Space'? Please tell me about your experience?**
    b. **Tell me of your experience in the spiritual context?**
    c. **(further Who What Where When Why and How type probing questions depending on their narrative.**
2. **What context or situation has typically influenced your experience of online new monasticism and digital community?**
    a. **(further questions depending on the response)**
3. **Where would you say you are on your faith journey now?**
4. **Do you feel a part of this community? How?**

'Participation in the study is entirely voluntary; you can withdraw from the survey at any point of time, without giving a reason for doing so. Please be assured that the **information you provide will remain strictly confidential and anonymous**. Answers will be reported so that no individual or organization will be identifiable from any publication presenting the results of the survey. By responding to the questionnaire, your consent to take part in the study is assumed and that you agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. If you would like to have further information about the project, please contact me via email at Steven47@uni.coventry.ac.uk