‘Confessing their faith’:
an enquiry into the meaning which Anglicans
confirmed as adults give to their confirmation
and the place which confirmation has in their
faith journey

submitted by

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to discover what meaning adult candidates for Anglican confirmation gave to their confirmation, how they experienced the ritual and what place confirmation had in their continuing faith journey. The research report retells the stories of eight adults. The stories of four are presented as case studies. The baptism/confirmation stories of all research participants are presented as metaphors, a form of ‘systematic thematic analysis’ (Plummer 1983). For the study I adopted a life history, case study approach (Jones 1983; Plummer 1983; Minichiello et al. 1995) drawing on the insights of ritual theory (Turner 1969, 1972, 1976) and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott (1965, 1971).

Two sets of contextual factors formed the background to the study: the Church’s tradition and its debates about confirmation and the attitudes of lay people about their faith and about the Church. The research method involved a grounded theory approach. The principal data creation techniques were in-depth interview and the Faith Autobiography pro forma. Following the initial interviews, each research participant was sent a summary of the research findings (Summary of themes). The Summary gave the metaphors which emerged from the interviews, together with brief notes on the concepts used to interpret the data. Responses from the research participants were incorporated into the final form of the metaphors: Belonging to myself, Returning/Starting over, Growing up, Joining the family and Making a commitment.

Most research participants did not regard baptism/confirmation as joining the Church: rather they saw themselves as belonging to the Church already; neither were they concerned with becoming Anglicans. For the majority, the transition they made in baptism/confirmation paralleled another life transition which was taking place or was expected to take place. Taking part in the research helped form the participants’ ideas about baptism/confirmation. While the catechumenal process is able to provide a holding environment in which candidates for baptism/confirmation can explore the transitions in which they are involved, the initiation liturgy should reflect the ‘return’ motif which emphasises incorporation as well as the traditional Exodus motif which emphasises separation.
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Statement of Authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed ……………………………………………………………
Dated…………………………………………………………

Ethics Approval

The research procedures in this thesis have been approved by the Swinburne University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Register No:00/06).

De-identification

The names and identifying details of research participants have been changed.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Immediate purpose of research

The purpose of this research was to discover what meaning adult candidates for Anglican confirmation gave to their confirmation, how they experienced the ritual and what place confirmation had in their continuing faith journey.

Following an oft-made comment by Professor Susan Long, I have distinguished between the research project, that is, the process of studying and asking questions, and the research report, the document which analyses and reports the research findings and how they were arrived at. The aim of the research project was to listen to and retell the stories of those who had been confirmed in order to gain insight into the meanings which adult Anglican confirmation candidates give to their confirmation, how they experience the rite, and the significance which confirmation has in their faith journey. The meaning of confirmation for these men and women and for me emerged out of an interview and feedback process (‘listening to and retelling the stories’). We talked about what happened to them when they were baptised/confirmed and about the events leading up to the confirmation service and as we talked I remembered my own confirmation. I summarised the principal metaphors for baptism/confirmation which the research participants had used in the interviews. Responses by the research participants to the Summary of themes served to amplify and clarify the meanings which emerged from the interviews.

The aim of the report is to retell the stories of eight adults who had journeyed through a process of Christian initiation using the terms and the language of those who had shared their stories with me, to make sense of the research process and to make recommendations as to how the Anglican Church might help adult candidates for initiation become more aware of what confirmation means for them. To this end I adopted a life history, case study approach (Jones 1983; Plummer 1983; Minichiello et al. 1995) drawing on the insights of ritual theory (Turner 1969, 1972, 1976) and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott (1965, 1971). My research
method was influenced by the grounded theory approach used by Turner (1983) and Martin and Turner (1985). The research participants’ stories were retold in case study form. Ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena were used to illuminate the meanings of the principal metaphors for baptism/confirmation which emerged from the research process. The iterative nature of grounded theory with its cycle of data analysis and hypothesis generation enabled me to give a theoretical account which was grounded in the meanings which the research participants gave to their confirmation.

1.2 Why study the experience of adult confirmation?
During the last four decades of the twentieth century confirmation became the subject of study in the Anglican Church. There was an awareness in the Church of England and in Anglican Churches in the developed world of a decline in the number of confirmation candidates in relation to the number of those being baptised and a tendency among those confirmed to drop out of the worshipping community. These trends have continued to impact the Anglican Church in Australia. Powys (1999) noted that according to statistics in the Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne in the 27 years to 1998 the annual number of confirmations declined from 4521 to 620. The 1968 Lambeth Conference called for a re-examination of the relationship between baptism and confirmation (Holeton 1998). (The place of confirmation in the process of the reform of Anglican liturgies is discussed in section 2.3.9 Confirmation and Anglican liturgical reform.) Lambeth 1968 led to a number of conferences and official statements and reports, for example, the 1991 Toronto Consultation - at which the Australian Anglican Church was represented - (Holeton 1993), the 1995 Australian Bishops’ Statement (Sherlock 2001, p. 35), and Dunnill’s 1997 study for the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the Australian Anglican Church. However I am not aware of any research into the experience of adult confirmation candidates.

My research study was also informed by my own experience. I was confirmed as an adult on 22 September 1991 as part of my journey towards ordination. I was drawn to the Anglican Church by its history and tradition and by its links with my own family: my grandfather left the Baptist Church and was ordained an Anglican priest. History and tradition are valued in some aspects of Australian life (eg. AFL football and Anzac Day) nevertheless in some parts of the Australian Church relevance to contemporary
secular culture is valued more highly than the history and tradition of the Church. Confirmation for me involved letting go of a long held and deeply felt Baptist identity in order to embrace Anglicanism. I wanted to know what confirmation meant for other adults.

1.3 The relevance of organisation dynamics to a study of confirmation

Distinguishing features of organisation dynamics are a concern for the non-rational aspects of human behaviour and for the interaction between an organisation and its environment. This project is part of a research tradition of applying the concepts of organisation dynamics to Christian ministry. In his pioneering study, The Dynamics of Religion, Reed (1978) adopted a systems approach to the study of the local church and drew on the psychoanalytic concept of regression to dependence. Carr (1997), likewise, regarded the church as a system and discussed transference and projection as tools for pastoral ministry. Systems theory and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approaches to ministry are represented in Nelson’s (1999) collection of essays on leadership and management in ministry. Willimon (2002) drew on Winnicott’s concept of transitional phenomena and discussed how the church’s liturgy can provide a holding environment in times of stress or need.

This is not the first study of initiation from a psychodynamic perspective. Carr (1994) used a psychodynamic approach to the Church’s ministry of baptisms, weddings and funerals. He investigated the following problem which the pastoral offices raise for parish clergy. Those who seek them are not for the most part members of the worshipping community. Parents seeking baptism for their baby have no role in the institution and/or do not understand the role of enquirer as defined by the Church. Vicar and enquirer inhabit different worlds. What the young couple seek in wanting to have their baby ‘done’ may be very different from what the Church regards as the sacrament of baptism.

Although this study deals with the initiation of adults rather than that of infants, it is similar to the work done by Carr in that it focuses on the meanings which lay people give to the rites of the Church. The majority of those who seek baptism for their
children come from outside the worshipping community. Most of those I interviewed
did not seek confirmation as long-standing members of the Anglican worshipping
community. Six of the eight participants in the study had not been baptised. One sought
confirmation to transition from the Baptist Church to the Anglican Church. Another was
a cradle Anglican. Baptised as an infant she had left the church as a young adolescent
and returned as a young adult.

Taking a systems approach to a study of confirmation helps to make sense of the
practice of episcopal confirmation. In the Anglican Church confirmation is the preserve
of the bishop. To date the Church has failed to act on the recommendation of the 1991
Toronto Consultation that confirmation may be delegated to a priest (Holeton 1993, p.
229). Exclusively episcopal confirmation may be hard to defend theologically
nevertheless it has an important function for the institution. It is a boundary function
that preserves something of the institution’s memory and identity. The office of bishop
is held to be derived from that of the apostles. It is enshrined in the Lambeth
Quadrilateral, four principles which form the basis of discussions on church unity
between the Anglican churches and other churches. (The Anglican understanding of the
role of bishops is discussed by Norris 1998. For the Lambeth Quadrilateral, see Sykes et
al. 1998, p. 502.) Adopting a systems approach to the church’s ministry highlights the
importance of episcopal confirmation as a boundary function.

Adopting a psychodynamic approach to confirmation falls within an established
tradition of fruitful research. Focusing on the meanings which the research participants
gave to their experience is part of this tradition (see section 4.2 Concepts and
philosophical basis). Interviewing the research participants revealed that most regarded
themselves as belonging to the Church already and viewed their initiation as a return, a
view radically different from that expressed in the Church’s liturgy. This study involves
the search for a liturgical model which reflects more adequately the experience of
candidates for initiation. I also discuss how a church community preparing candidates
for initiation can create a holding environment in which candidates can explore the
transitions in which they are involved (see section 8.3 What this means for the practice
of initiation in the Anglican Church).
During my research I was asked from time to time why I was not studying this topic in a Doctor of Ministry program at a theological college? The aim of the study was to see baptism and confirmation through the eyes of the ‘un-churched’ or ‘semi-churched’, that is, from the perspective of those with only a scanty knowledge of the Church’s ministry and sacraments. If in my own ministry I am to communicate the meaning of baptism and confirmation and its importance for adults, the best place for my research is in a secular university among those who have only a scanty knowledge of the Church’s ministry and sacraments.

1.4 Baptism and confirmation

I intended originally to study confirmation candidates who were baptised as infants. However this proved to be problematic: I was only able to find one candidate who was confirmed as an adult having been baptised as an infant. This was probably related to a decline in the baptism of infants. (For a survey of baptism and confirmation in the Anglican Church see Margaret Rodgers’ 1992 report to the Bishops’ Conference of the Australian Anglican Church.) Another candidate was confirmed as a rite of entry into the Anglican Communion. Six candidates received baptism and confirmation in the one service. This raised the question, is it legitimate to mix in the same study candidates who were confirmed with those who were baptised and confirmed? Could research participants baptised and confirmed in the same service distinguish their confirmation from their baptism or does baptism ‘contaminate’ their response to confirmation? Ian Gibson a fellow doctoral student and fellow Anglican remarked that asking those who had been baptised and confirmed in the one rite about their experience of confirmation was like asking those who had received holy communion in their marriage service about the experience of receiving holy communion!

Combining research participants who were confirmed with those who were baptised and confirmed raises theological questions as well as questions of research methodology. In the words of the Toronto Statement, ‘baptism is the complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist’. (The relationship between confirmation and baptism is discussed in section 2.3.9 Confirmation and Anglican liturgical reform.) Confirmation carries no meaning independent of baptism and adds nothing to baptism; rather confirmation is a lens we use to focus on certain aspects of baptism. For example,
the Australian Bishops’ Statement on confirmation focuses on three things which are implicit in baptism: the Spirit’s strengthening, our response to God’s grace in baptism (the baptismal promises), and our calling to Christian witness. This is reflected in APBA which presents a unified initiation rite as the ideal: ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion together with provision for Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows and Reception’. For this reason I use ‘baptism/confirmation’ or ‘initiation’ to refer to the unified rite in which the research participants took part.

Undoubtedly baptism overshadows confirmation theologically but it does not follow that baptism overshadows confirmation phenomenologically. Even though confirmation followed baptism and took place in the same rite, there is no reason to suppose that the research participants could not distinguish between the two: they were baptised by their priest and confirmed by the bishop. A number of research participants linked the ‘special-ness’ of their confirmation to the laying on of a hand by the bishop.

Dr Charles Sherlock (personal communication 16 December 2004) explained the difference between the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne in Australia as contexts in which baptism and confirmation are administered. In Melbourne when candidates are to be baptised and confirmed, they are said to be ‘prepared for confirmation’, not for baptism. Confirmation is administered by the bishop in episcopal regalia whereas baptism may be performed by a priest or a deacon. Sherlock observed that in Melbourne confirmation receives the principle emphasis. This is the case despite the note in A Prayer Book for Australia that where baptism and confirmation occur in the same service, the service should be arranged to highlight the centrality of baptism (APBA p. 70).

ECUSA recognises that baptism has pre-eminence. Sherlock observed that in ECUSA baptism is often administered by immersion whereas in Melbourne baptism by pouring is still the norm. In ECUSA baptism is administered at the great festivals of the church’s year, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints Day or the Sunday following, and the on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. ‘It is recommended that, as far as possible, Baptisms be reserved for these occasions or when a bishop is present’ (BCP ECUSA 1979, p. 312). APBA contains no note about the Sundays on which baptisms should occur. Sherlock also pointed out that there is more liturgical latitude in the practice of baptism in
Melbourne where three prayer books are in use, *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*, *An Australian Prayer Book (AABP)* and *A Prayer Book for Australia*, than in ECUSA where the authorised *BCP* supersedes all others.

### 1.5 Overview of thesis

The introductory chapter outlines the purpose of the research, why I embarked on it and why I undertook it in the context of a Doctorate in Organisation Dynamics program. Chapter 2 establishes the context for the research. The cultural context is the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) and discussion about how the Australian Church may undertake its mission in a changing society. NCLS findings about the increasing rejection of denominational loyalty by the faith community’s young adults and about the significance of a public faith commitment are of particular importance in the discussion about the Anglican Church’s mission. The ecclesiastical context for the research is the history and theology of confirmation. Section 2.3 traces the evolution of confirmation in the Anglican Church focussing on the different ways in which confirmation has been understood, the relationship between confirmation and catechesis and the impact on confirmation of Anglican liturgical reform.

Chapter 3 sets the theoretical framework for the project. Section 3.1 discusses the type of framework demanded by the nature of the project and considers whether the elements in the chosen framework: a life history, case study approach in the interactionist tradition drawing on the insights of ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott, are consistent with one another. The different theoretical elements and their distinctive contributions to the project are then considered in detail. Section 3.2 outlines the life history, case study approach and discusses the role of theory in a study which aims to tell the stories of the research participants in their own terms. Section 3.3 outlines some characteristics of ritual theory and introduces the concepts of liminality and communitas. The concept of confirmation as a transitional object is introduced in section 3.4. This approach allows the unconscious processes involved in the candidates’ preparation for confirmation, in the confirmation rite itself and in the research process to be considered.
Methodology (chapter 4) indicates how I conducted the research and why I used the methods that I did. The data creation methods (in-depth interview, the Faith Autobiography *pro forma* and the Summary of themes) are outlined. I give brief biographical details of the research participants and descriptions of the churches in which they were confirmed. I describe the process of data analysis from which the metaphors emerged and discuss the distinctive contributions of case study and thematic analysis.

Research findings are presented as different mixes of story and analysis. The case studies are pure story. They allow four initiation candidates: Ailsa (section 5.1), Chris (section 5.2), Danni (section 5.3) and Esther (section 5.4) chosen from the wider group of research participant to tell their stories in their own terms. From these stories five themes emerged which served as metaphors: Belonging to myself (section 6.1), Returning/Starting over (section 6.2), Growing up (section 6.3), Joining the family (section 6.4) and Making a commitment (section 6.5). The metaphors bring together the stories of all the candidates with my story and with theoretical elements from the conceptual framework in a systematic thematic analysis. The metaphors are followed by pure analysis. Chapter 7 focuses on the structure of the baptism/confirmation rite and discusses the value of the concepts of transitional phenomena and ritual theory in helping us to make sense of the candidates’ experiences of baptism/confirmation. The research revealed that for the research participants, baptism/confirmation was linked with other potential and hoped-for life transitions.

Chapter 8 summarises the findings of the study and argues that a pastorally effective approach to adult initiation will help candidates discern the transitions they are encountering in their lives. Section 8.3.2 advocates that the initiation liturgy should reflect the ‘return’ motif which stresses incorporation as well as the traditional Exodus motif which stresses separation and explores the practical implications of such an approach. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Introduction

There are two sets of contextual factors which form the background to our understanding of meanings which adult confirmation candidates ascribe to their confirmation. One is the ecclesiastical context. This is represented by the Church’s tradition and its debates about confirmation. The other is the cultural context. This is represented by lay attitudes about the Christian life and church affiliation – ‘views from the pews’ as Kaldor (1995b) and his associates put it. Of the two, the ecclesiastical context is the larger and the more complex. The history and tradition of confirmation touch on the Church’s identity. Dunnill (1997) dealt with history, tradition and the Church’s identity in his General Synod Doctrine Commission report, *Is Confirmation necessary in Anglican theology?* The Church’s history and tradition are important because they form the basis of the laws, liturgies and clerical and lay opinions of the present. The canons of the Australian Church governing baptism, confirmation and admission to communion are based on the canon law of the past. The liturgy of the Australian Church draws on the liturgies of the ancient Church and *The Book of Common Prayer*. The 1995 Australian Bishops’ Statement which represents the Church’s most recent pronouncement on confirmation expresses views which draw on traditions from different eras in Church history.

Clergy attitudes help form the attitudes of those adults whom they present for confirmation. Contemporary attitudes of lay people about their faith and about the Church constitute the cultural context for confirmation. In recent years these attitudes have been the subject of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). In this chapter I begin with the cultural context. The first section (2.2 The cultural context: the National Church Life Surveys) looks at the results of the NCLS in relation to the increasing rejection of denominational loyalty and the importance of making a public faith commitment. In the second section (2.3 The ecclesiastical context: The origin and history of Christian initiation), I turn to the ecclesiastical context and trace the meaning
of confirmation from its disputed origins in the New Testament to contemporary
guidelines for its practise in the Anglican diocese of Melbourne.

2.2 The cultural context: the National Church Life Surveys

Patterns of church attendance and patterns of religious belief have changed radically
were carried out to identify patterns of church attendance, belief and activity in order to
assist churches engage in mission in their current social context.

The 1991 survey revealed a decline in denominational loyalty, what Kaldor (1994)
described as the Protestant Supermarket. Twenty eight percent (28%) of those surveyed
had changed congregations in the past five years. Twelve percent (12%) now
worshipped in a church of a different Christian tradition or denomination (Switchers);
Sixteen percent (16%) had transferred to another church in the same Christian tradition
(Transfers). Sixty two percent (62%) of those surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed
that worshippers should retain a lifetime loyalty to one denomination; 13% were
undecided. Those in the 25-35 age group gave the least support to the notion that
Christians should remain loyal to one denomination throughout their adult lives. The
largest number of Switchers and Transfers were around 35 years of age.

The 1991 study also revealed the importance of a ‘public faith commitment’. Kaldor
(1995a) found that church attendees who owned their faith publicly were more likely to
report that they were growing in their faith and were at ease in telling others about their
faith. Making a ‘public faith commitment’ was significant for the overwhelming
majority of those who had taken such a step: forty seven percent (47%) said that it
changed the direction of their life; for thirty five percent (35%) it constituted a
significant public statement. According to Kaldor (1995a, p. 140), ‘making a
commitment appears to be an important step in a person’s faith journey.’
2.2.1 Confirmation as Anglican identity and public faith commitment
Confirmation in the Anglican Church of Australia is a rite in transition. Rodgers’ 1992 report to the Bishops’ Conference indicated that the number of confirmations had declined dramatically since the 1960s. A survey of three dioceses showed that confirmations had declined by more than forty percent (40%) in the period 1963-1973. A survey of thirteen dioceses showed a decline of more than fifty percent (50%) in the period 1980-1990. Confirmation is no longer a pre-requisite for receiving holy communion neither is it a form of Christian puberty rite (Carr 1994, p. 27). Nevertheless confirmation involves making a public faith commitment – something which NCLS showed was a significant event for those who make it. The NCLS results raised two questions about confirmation: i) What is the significance of making a public faith commitment for those who are confirmed?; ii) How do those confirmed view the Anglican Church – the Mother in whose bosom they confess their faith – in the light of Kaldor’s (1994) findings that young adults do not value denominational loyalty?

2.3 The ecclesiastical context: The origin and history of Christian initiation

2.3.1 Introduction
Confirmation according to *A Prayer Book for Australia* (1995) may be practised in connection with baptism and holy communion or as a rite on its own. It involves the candidates kneeling and receiving the laying on of the bishop’s hand with prayer. Scholars have disputed the relationship between baptism and confirmation and whether or not confirmation can be found in the New Testament. The purpose of section 2.3 is to trace the origins of confirmation and the way it has changed in meaning and function at different times in Church history. Following an examination of the New Testament data, the discussion shows how a post-baptismal anointing/ laying on of hands evolved in the Western Church into a sacrament of strengthening by the Holy Spirit. The relationship between confirmation and catechesis (instruction in the content of the Christian faith) receives special attention. Arguments for the apostolic origin of confirmation prevailed in the Church of England from the late nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century. Mason and Dix were influential advocates of this view which was
opposed by Lampe (see Buchanan 1993 for a survey of the debate). Following the movement for liturgical reform, Anglican liturgies came to treat confirmation as catechesis for those receiving communion for the first time rather than as the objective imparting of the Spirit. The 1968 Lambeth Conference and the 1991 Toronto Consultation were influential in clarifying an Anglican view of the nature and role of confirmation. The focus of this discussion is confirmation in the Anglican Church of Australia and its practice in the Diocese of Melbourne.

2.3.2 Christian initiation in the New Testament: did it include a post-baptismal rite of anointing/laying on of hands?

Baptism is the rite of initiation into the Christian community (John 3:5; Acts 8:35-38; Romans 6:3-8; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Hebrews 10:22-23; I Peter 3:21). The author of Acts probably intended the words of Peter in Acts 2:38 to establish the pattern for entry into the church (Noakes 1992). Those who heard Peter’s Pentecost sermon responded to him and the other apostles, “‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”” Thus entry into the church involved three related elements, repentance, baptism in water and reception of the Spirit. Baptism is in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or in the name of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19). Through baptism the initiate is incorporated into Christ and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The rite of initiation consisted of preparation and dipping in water. It is possible that this was followed by anointing and/or laying on of hands. Candidates were given some instruction and received baptism, possibly after expressing assent to a question about their faith in Jesus (Acts 8:37: this verse may be secondary but as such it reflects the practice of the early church, Metzger 1971).

2.3.2.1 Was anointing/laying on of hands a necessary part of initiation in the New Testament churches?

In some congregations at least it seems that the laying on of hands was the means by which the Holy Spirit was conferred. In Acts 8:12-17 the apostles Peter and John laid
hands on a group of Samaritan converts who had earlier been baptised by Philip and prayed that they might receive the Spirit. A similar incident is recorded in Acts 19:5-6: baptism ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ was followed by laying on of hands by Paul and the reception of the Spirit. Some commentators take these passages to mean that laying on of hands is a superior rite associated with apostolic authority and that laying on of hands is necessary to complete baptism (Dunnill 1997). Hebrews 6:1-2 refers to ‘the basic teaching about Christ’ which includes ‘instruction about baptisms and the laying on of hands’. According to Dunnill (1997) this text links baptism and laying on of hands in a way that suggests they were part of one rite.

The passages from Acts that refer to baptism followed by an apostolic laying on of hands and the reception of the Spirit should be treated with care. The book of Acts shows how the gospel spread from Jerusalem through the Empire to Rome. It was not intended as a handbook for liturgy or church order (Fee & Stuart 1993). Nevertheless the conversion of the first Samaritan converts narrated in Acts 8 is a major turning point in the story. Jews and Samaritans were divided by long standing enmity based on rival religious claims (John 4:9, 20). The reception of the Spirit at the hands of the apostles demonstrated that the Samaritans were incorporated into the Jerusalem-based Christian community (Lampe 1951; Marshall 1980). The conversion of the first Gentiles was likewise an extraordinary event that required ratification by the apostles. The household of Cornelius received the Spirit when they heard the gospel from Peter but before they had been baptised in water (Acts 10:44-48). The unusual nature of this is emphasised in the narrative. ‘The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles’ (Acts 10:45). An extraordinary event was required to provoke Peter into baptising Gentiles. Even so the church in Jerusalem required an explanation from Peter for his behaviour (Acts 11).

The laying on of hands recorded in Acts 19:5-6 also took place in unusual circumstances. Paul met with some Ephesian disciples who had received John’s baptism. The text indicates that they were not Christians. They needed to hear the Good News about Jesus and the promise of the Spirit before being baptised in the name of Jesus. Marshall (1980) suggested that the laying on of hands was necessary to demonstrate to members of this semi-Christian group that they belonged to the
Universal Church. Whether or not Marshall is correct, this incident cannot be taken as evidence that a post-baptismal laying on of hands was normative (cf. Lampe 1951).

2.3.2.2 Laying on of hands

In the New Testament laying on of hands is associated with healing, blessings, baptism and the reception of the Spirit and commissioning for a set task. Prayer is frequently mentioned in this context. Dunnill (1997) concluded that as a symbolic act, laying on of hands involves two elements: the transmission of divine power (Mark 6:5; Acts 8:19) and identifying an individual as a representative of the divine community (Acts 6:6; 13:3; I Timothy 4:14). He argued that blessing-with-power and commissioning presuppose membership of the community. Laying on of hands in the context of baptism therefore, is not an initiation rite, nor does it add a new element to baptism rather it emphasises baptism’s Spirit-empowering significance (Dunnill 1997).

2.3.2.3 Anointing with oil

It is possible that baptism was accompanied by anointing with oil symbolising the Holy Spirit. In II Corinthians 1:21-22 Paul wrote that Christians have been anointed by God, sealed and given the pledge of the Spirit. Elsewhere in the New Testament there are references to the ‘seal of the Holy Spirit’ (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) and to the seal of God on the foreheads of the righteous (Revelation 7:2-4; 9:4) and to anointing (I John 2:20; 2:27). In the Old Testament the consecration of priests involved washing with water and anointing with oil (Exodus 29:1-9). Anointing was also associated with healing (James 5:14). It was also the normal accompaniment of celebratory washing (Ruth 3:3).

Kavanagh (1978) argued strongly that anointing was an integral part of baptism on the grounds that it ritualised the reality that Christian baptism was baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Jesus, the Anointed One. Lampe (1951) argued that anointing refers to the Spirit as a pledge of salvation to come rather than to a rite of anointing. It is more likely that Lampe is correct. The fullest account of the seal of the Spirit occurs in II Corinthians 1:21-22. ‘God …has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.’ The language here is legal and commercial rather than cultic. The word ‘establish’ is a legal term referring to binding
commitments. The verb ‘to put a seal upon’ refers to the sealing of documents and sacks so that they cannot be tampered with. The ‘first instalment’ is the deposit paid by the purchaser as a guarantee that the full amount will be paid on time (Kruse 1987).

In conclusion, anointing/laying on of hands was not a necessary part of baptism in the New Testament. Christian baptism is rich in meaning. The multiplication of rites such as layings on of hands and anointings occurred in order to convey the many meanings of baptism (Dunnill 1997).

### 2.3.3 Anointing/laying on of hands in the post-New Testament Church

If the post-baptismal rite of anointing and laying on of hands did not originate in New Testament practice, where did it come from? It is possible that the practice of anointing developed from the custom in the ancient world of anointing when taking a bath. Another possibility is that both anointing and the laying on of hands were introduced from the initiation rites of the semi-Christian Gnostic sects (Whitaker 1981).

The *Didache* whose origins and date are disputed (possibly Syria or Egypt between AD 60 and late second century) makes no mention of anointing or the imposition of hands (Hawkins 1992). Justin Martyr who wrote in mid-second century Rome, mentioned neither anointing, nor the imposition of hands nor the gift of the Spirit! In Justin’s account candidates were baptised and brought into the assembly where they were greeted with the kiss of peace and shared in the eucharist. It has been argued that this is not conclusive evidence that he did not know of these things. Justin’s purpose was to stress the harmlessness of Christian rites rather than to give a detailed account of the liturgy (Buchanan 1986; Noakes 1992).

The earliest evidence for an integrated rite of initiation can be found in the Tertullian’s treatise *Concerning Baptism* and in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome, both early third century. According to the *Apostolic Tradition* after baptism when the candidates had put on their clothes, the bishop prayed that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit. He then anointed them and signed them with the cross. This practice is reflected in Tertullian, with minor differences. Tertullian made clear that the ‘laying on of the hand’ referred to in the *Apostolic Tradition* meant that the bishop stretched out
his hand over the candidate during the prayer (Noakes 1992). (For the text of Concerning Baptism and the Apostolic Tradition, see Whitaker 1970.) Kavanagh (1984) argued that in Hippolytus the prayer, consignation and anointing formed a distinct liturgical unit which later became the Roman rite of confirmation.

2.3.4 The development of a post-baptismal anointing in the Eastern Church

The church grew up in two main cultural backgrounds. The Western Church had its home in the Hellenistic culture of the Graeco-Roman world where Greek and later Latin were spoken. Geographically this covered the greater part of the Mediterranean basin and included Alexandria and Egypt. The Syrian rite was associated with Antioch and inland Edessa. Although the culture of Antioch was Greek, the indigenous population spoke Aramaic (Syriaic) and their culture was Semitic. The Syrian rite spread to Byzantium (Constantinople) and to all the churches of the eastern world.

It is possible from the early third century to identify two basic forms of initiation, one associated with the Eastern Church and the other with the Western Church (Whitaker 1981). Nevertheless in both east and west the rite associated with the gift of the Spirit could only be performed by the bishop. In the west the gift of the Spirit was associated with a post-baptismal ceremony. The eastern form of initiation had no post-baptismal ceremony. A post-baptismal anointing was introduced to the Eastern Church in the fourth century, possibly by St Cyril who is known to have been a liturgical innovator (Whitaker 1981). In the Eastern Church today the candidate is anointed by the priest after baptism with oil blessed by the bishop – thus maintaining the link with the bishop. This anointing is known as the seal of the Holy Spirit and is bestowed on adults and infants alike.

2.3.5 The evolution of confirmation in the Western Church

Whereas by the fourth century the practice of Easter and Pentecost baptisms was widespread, by the eighth century the influence of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin and a high infant mortality rate had led to the practice of emergency baptisms by a priest, midwife or family member. For those who survived, the laying on of hands and
anointing had to be postponed to a later date when a bishop was available. Parents were not willing to wait until Easter for their children to be baptised so the post-baptismal rites were deferred. The Roman Church insisted that the post-baptismal ceremonies were the sole prerogative of the bishop; however large dioceses and infrequent visitations meant that opportunities for confirmations were infrequent. Furthermore many parents were lax in presenting their children for confirmation. This led Archbishop Peckham at the Council of Lambeth in 1281 to order that none should receive holy communion unless they had been confirmed or prevented from receiving confirmation or were in danger of death.

2.3.6 The meaning of confirmation

The Fathers were not unanimous about the nature of the gift of the Spirit. There was little need to define the nature of the new grace until confirmation developed as a rite on its own (Yarnold, 1992). ‘Confirmatio’ was first used as a liturgical term by Faustus of Rietz in a Whitsunday sermon preached about 460. He said that in baptism we receive new birth; in confirmation we receive an increase of grace (augmentum gratiae) in which we are strengthened to face the struggles of life (robur ad pugnam). This understanding of confirmation developed the views of Cyril, Ambrose and Theodore of Mopsuestia who regarded the gift of the Spirit variously as strength for the fight against the devil and the completion of baptism. Faustus’ view of confirmation became widely influential because it was quoted by the author of the False Decretals which became popular in the ninth century (Yarnold, 1992).

2.3.7 Confirmation and catechesis

Catechesis is instruction in the Christian faith. From the second century the catechesis of adults preparing for baptism was undertaken through the catechumenate. The Didache and the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian refer to the catechumens’ instruction in doctrine and morals, as well as the praying, fasting and all night vigils that were part of baptismal preparation. According to Hippolytus the catechumenate usually lasted three years and involved a two-stage process. The initial stage focused on Christian doctrine and morals – ‘hearing the word’ and putting it into practice. Candidates were then assessed according to their sorrow for sins, faith in the church as
the teacher of truth and their transformation of life; a Christian witness acted as a reference. Candidates judged worthy to be chosen engaged for a short period in daily exorcism, fasting and prayer. Two days before Easter the candidates kept an all night vigil of Scripture reading and instruction. Their catechumenal preparation concluded with baptism at dawn on Easter morning.

It seems likely that creeds were developed in association with baptismal preparation and the baptismal liturgy (Stead 1987). The Creed represented the essentials of the faith agreed upon by all believers no matter how simple. The catechumens were not allowed to have the Creed in writing. It was ‘handed over’ to them at the climax of the baptismal preparation as they repeated it phrase by phrase after the bishop who then gave an explanation. (For a discussion of the practices found in the ancient sources see Yarnold 1992.) The first occurrence of a formula recognisably akin to our Apostles’ Creed is found in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus. According to Westerhoff, the Creed acted as a witness to the catechumens’ Christian faith and lifestyle. ‘Baptism represented a distinctive change in a person’s faith and a dramatic change in her or his character: the Creed encompassed the essential characteristics of this new way of faith and life’ (Westerhoff 1990, p. 171-172). In later centuries the Church continued to use creeds as affirmations of faith but with the decline in adult baptisms the early emphasis on change and witness was lost.

The Edict of Milan (313) changed the character of the catechumenate. The Christian faith was no longer an illegal religion. Some joined the church for marriage or civil advancement. Many postponed baptism because enrolment as a catechumen was all that was necessary to be recognised as a Christian and admission to the catechumenate came to be regarded as a second-class Church membership. Baptismal formation was focussed on Lent during which the catechumens learnt the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Following their baptism at the Easter Vigil the neophytes (newly baptised) returned each day of the following week for instruction on the sacrament they had received (Walters 1990).

A decline in adult baptisms led to the decay of the catechumenate. From the middle of the fifth century infant baptism became the norm. The task of instruction fell to the clergy because neither parents nor godparents were adequately instructed, however,
most of the clergy were poorly educated themselves. The usual means of instruction during the middle ages was preaching. Repeated admonitions by church and civil authorities about the importance of preaching suggest that it was widely neglected. The Medieval Church did not develop formal structures for Christian education of the laity nevertheless its emphasis on the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments shows continuity between the ancient catechumenate and the catechisms of the Reformation (Marthaler 1990).

2.3.8 Confirmation and The Book of Common Prayer

Luther rejected the medieval rite of confirmation as having no basis in Scripture. Specifically he rejected the notion that it conferred the Holy Spirit on the grounds that this detracted from baptism. Nevertheless Luther allowed confirmation but linked it to the instruction of children. He stressed the importance of catechising young people prior to receiving first communion and issued a longer and a shorter catechism for the purpose. Erasmus recommended that at puberty boys should be instructed on the meaning of their baptism promises and renew them in ‘solemn ceremonies’ preferably with the bishop. The renewal of baptismal promises and the importance of catechesis influenced the confirmation rite in The Book of Common Prayer.

Following the example of Luther and Erasmus, Cranmer shifted the emphasis from the confirmation rite to the catechising which preceded it. In the Prayer Book of 1549 confirmation is to be administered only to those who can say the Creed, Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments and can answer such questions out of the Catechism as the bishop may ask them. (See The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI 1910.) None are to be admitted to holy communion until they have been confirmed. Significantly Cranmer omitted from the confirmation rite the anointing which according to medieval theologians was central to its sacramental nature but included it in the baptism service (Holeton 1998, p. 305). Confirmation thus became a necessary prelude to communion rather than an adjunct to baptism. The meaning of the confirmation order was left ambiguous because in other respects the 1549 confirmation service was in continuity with the medieval rite. According to the preamble to the Catechism, the imposition of hands and prayer imparts strength and protection against temptation to sin. Confirmation, therefore, should be administered at an age when children begin to be
in danger of falling into sin. Furthermore, the bishop is the only minister for confirmation.

The 1552 Prayer Book downplayed the notion that there is an objective giving of the Holy Spirit in confirmation and strengthened the emphasis on catechesis (Fisher 1992, p. 164). In the 1549 Prayer Book the bishop said the prayer for the sevenfold Spirit, the traditional confirmation prayer of the west: ‘Send down from heaven … upon them thy Holy Ghost the Comforter with the manifold gifts of grace …’. This prayer was amended in the 1552 Book to read: ‘Strengthen them … with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace …’. The signing of the head and the pax which appeared in the 1549 Prayer Book disappeared from the 1552 Book. At the laying on of his hand the bishop prayed: ‘Defend, O Lord, this child with thy heavenly grace that he may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto thine everlasting kingdom.’ Thus bestowal of the Spirit in the 1549 Book is replaced in the 1552 Prayer Book by a petition for the Spirit's grace and strength.

In the 1662 Prayer Book it is assumed that the confirmation candidates have been catechised by the priest. Instead of questioning candidates on the catechism, the bishop asks them to, ‘renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in your own person …’ Those admitted to communion no longer had to be confirmed, rather they had to ‘be confirmed, or ready and desirous to be confirmed.’ According to Behrens (1985) this was a concession to the Puritan divines at the Savoy Conference of 1661 who had stated that ‘confirmation may not be made so necessary to the Holy Communion, as that none should be admitted to it unless they be confirmed’. Nevertheless it is in the spirit of Archbishop Peckham’s concession that those who have been prevented from being confirmed may be admitted to communion.

*The Book of Common Prayer* Catechism asks, ‘How many Sacraments hath Christ ordained in his Church?’ To which the answer is given, ‘Two only, as generally necessary to salvation, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.’ The number of sacraments had been fixed at seven (including baptism and confirmation) since before the Second Council of Lyons (1274). (The twelfth century process which settled
the number of sacraments was based on an enquiry as to which of the Church’s ritual acts were most necessary to salvation, De Clerck 1996, p. 196). For the Reformers a sacrament was ordained by Christ, hence the form of the question and answer given in the Catechism. The view expressed in the Catechism was reiterated in Article XXV which states that confirmation and the other ‘commonly called Sacraments’ are not Sacraments of the Gospel but are the result of the ‘corrupt following of the Apostles’. Buchanan (1986, p. 21) pointed out that for the Reformers, ‘commonly’ usually meant ‘wrongly’. Dunnill (1997, p. 2), however, cited evidence that may indicate that Cranmer regarded confirmation in some sense as a sacrament.

2.3.9 Confirmation and Anglican liturgical reform

Until the early nineteenth century Anglican bishops neglected confirmation just as their predecessors had in pre-Reformation times. Confirmation was unobtainable in the colonies as there was no Anglican bishop outside the British Isles until 1785. Broughton’s first confirmation was in Parramatta in 1836. Prior to this as Archdeacon he had admitted to communion young people no younger than fourteen years of age on reaffirmation of their baptism promises. The reaffirmation followed the Prayer Book ‘Order of Confirmation’ but omitted the laying on of hands (Dunnill 1997). Church reform and the spread of railways meant that from the early nineteenth century confirmation became more widely available in the British Isles (Buchanan 1993, p. 106). Towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century confirmation grew to have unprecedented importance under the influence of Mason and Dix who held the view that baptism and confirmation were two stages of the same rite. Baptism effected a re-birth; confirmation effected the gift of the Holy Spirit (Buchanan 1993). This is similar to the view taken by some of the early Fathers but, as we have noted, is unsupported by the New Testament. (For the way in which the meaning of confirmation developed from the early Fathers to the middle ages, see 2.3.6 The meaning of confirmation. For a discussion of the New Testament data on the relationship between anointing/ laying on of hands and baptism, see 2.3.2.1 Was anointing/laying on of hands a necessary part of initiation in the New Testament churches?)
The 1968 Lambeth Conference raised the question of the relationship between baptism and confirmation in the context of a concern to provide some form of commissioning for lay people for their mission in the world (Holeton 1998). One outcome of the Lambeth Report, ‘The Renewal of Church in Faith’ and Conference Resolution 25 was that two years later, the Anglican Church in New Zealand began to admit baptised children to communion before confirmation.

The Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (Toronto 1991) took up the concerns of the 1968 Lambeth Report. The Toronto Statement affirmed that ‘baptism is the complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist’ (Holeton 1993, p. 229). Confirmation is a pastoral office which the bishop may delegate to a priest. It is not part of the initiatory process and is not necessary for admission to communion. Confirmation should not follow baptism in an adult initiation rite. Nevertheless the laying on of hands with prayer for the strengthening of the Spirit may be practised for those renewing their faith. An episcopal rite of reception should be available for baptised Christians who wish to be received into the Anglican Church from another Christian church. (For the full text of the Toronto Statement see Holeton 1993, pp. 227-254).

2.3.10 Confirmation and the Australian Prayer Books

The movement for liturgical reform led to An Australian Prayer Book (AAPB) 1978. AAPB followed The Book of Common Prayer in its understanding of baptism and confirmation. The book had two liturgies for each rite offering a more conservative and a less conservative revision of the rites.

‘The Baptism of Infants – First Order’ (the more conservative revision) included a note that godparents should be reminded of their duty to see that the infant is taught the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments, is instructed in the Catechism and in due course presented to the bishop for confirmation. ‘The Baptism of Infants – Second Order’ recognised that godparents no longer have a direct teaching responsibility. An explanation of the duties of parents and godparents was included in the introduction. Children are to be brought up as ‘faithful members of the Church’ and when they are old enough to affirm the baptism promises for themselves, be brought to
the bishop to be confirmed. Children need ‘encouragement, teaching and the help of a
good example’ in their Christian formation. The responsibilities to which the parents
and godparents give assent were restricted to giving help and encouragement. ‘Are you
willing to give [the child] this help and encouragement by every means in your power?’
(AAPB p. 518). The responsibility to teach was omitted.

Both confirmation liturgies retained the bishop’s prayer for strengthening and for the
seven-fold gifts of the Spirit. ‘A Service of Confirmation Second Form’ recognised that
confirmation offers an opportunity for the whole community to reaffirm its baptism
vows. There was an option for the congregation to join with the bishop in the prayer,
‘Defend, O Lord…’ The Second Form also included an address by the bishop outlining
the responsibilities of church membership and inviting members of the congregation to
recommit themselves to this calling.

A Prayer Book for Australia (APBA) 1995 showed the influence of the third century
initiation rite and to a lesser extent the influence of Toronto 1991. (For the third century
rite see 2.3.3 Anointing/laying on of hands in the post-New Testament Church.)
Separate services for the baptism of infants and adults were replaced by a unified
initiation rite: ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion together with
provision for Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows and Reception’. When children were to
be baptised a revised address clarified the role of parents and godparents. Before the
congregation they should confess their own faith and their intention to bring up the
children ‘in the faith and practice of the Church.’ Notes to ‘Holy Baptism,
Confirmation’ emphasised the importance of a unified initiation rite. For adults,
baptism, confirmation and first communion should take place at the same service –
contrary to the Toronto Statement which had rejected the notion that adult initiation
should include confirmation.

Even though the unified rite was presented as the ideal, separate rites for baptism and
confirmation were included: ‘Holy Baptism in Morning and Evening Prayer’ and
‘Confirmation together with provision for Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows and
Reception’. Furthermore the APBA notes indicated that when baptism and confirmation
occur together, the ordering of the service should recognise the centrality of baptism.
There was also a distinction between baptism and the post-baptism ceremonies. When
there are a number of baptisms, the post baptismal ceremonies including the signing with the cross should be performed after all baptisms are completed.

In some ways *APBA* represented a movement towards the recommendations of Toronto 1991. The bishop’s prayer after the laying on of hands omitted the reference to ‘the example of the apostles’ which had appeared in *BCP* and *AAPB*. This revision recognised that Acts 8 and Acts 19 do not form a precedent for confirmation. *APBA* included a rite of ‘Reception into Communicant Membership’ which allowed baptised, communicant members of other Christian churches to be received into full membership of the Anglican Church. A rite of ‘Reaffirmation of Baptism Vows’ with episcopal laying on of hands was also provided. (In a commentary on *APBA*, Dowling 1997 noted that unlike confirmation which would only take place once in a person’s life, the rite of reaffirmation could be repeated but this would only happen rarely.)

In other areas there was no movement away from the Church’s traditional stance. The Australian Church did not take up the recommendation from Toronto that the bishop may delegate confirmation to a priest. (See the discussion at 2.3.9 Confirmation and Anglican liturgical reform.) The rubric to ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’ (*APBA* p. 50) stated, ‘When this service includes confirmation the presiding minister is the bishop’. One minor change was interpreted as a step away from Toronto. The Catechism was moved from a place with the baptism and confirmation rites to an appendix with the Thirty Nine Articles. This was done no doubt for the sake of convenience but one reviewer observed that it allowed ‘confirmation to be a rite of Christian initiation rather than a graduation from catechism class’ (Elich 1995 p. 89) – contrary to Toronto 1991 which stated that confirmation was not part of the initiatory process.

The Australian bishops issued their Statement on Confirmation in 1995, the same year in which *APBA* was published. The Statement ‘commends to all Anglicans the following statements concerning confirmation:

- confirmation is a ‘sacramental’ strengthening by the Holy Spirit for the ongoing Christian life;
• confirmation is administered on the profession or reaffirmation of the baptismal promises;
• confirmation is an opportunity for commissioning for the work of Christian witness in the world’ (Sherlock 2001, p. 35).

The Bishops’ Statement drew on a number of traditions. Confirmation as ‘sacramental’ strengthening by the Holy Spirit echoes the medieval view of confirmation as a sacrament and the claim that in confirmation we receive an increase of grace in which we are strengthened to face the struggles of life. Confirmation as the reaffirmation of baptismal promises represents the Reformation view. The BCP regarded confirmation as the opportunity for children come to years of discretion to ratify for themselves the promises their godparents had made on their behalf. Confirmation as commissioning for the work of Christian witness in the world reflects the concerns of the 1968 Lambeth Conference and the 1991 Toronto Consultation.

2.3.11 Confirmation in Melbourne

The understanding of confirmation in the Melbourne diocese is set down in An Anglican Pastoral Handbook (Sherlock 1988) and A Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans (Sherlock 2001) based on AAPB and APBA respectively. These handbooks provide theological perspectives on pastoral ministry as well as guidelines for pastoral policy and liturgical practice. They are based on Australian prayer books and canons but draw on a wide range of other resources.

A Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans (Sherlock 2001) justified confirmation on the grounds that all Christians should profess faith in Christ openly (APBA p.84, cf. Romans 10:9-13), the need for those baptised as infants to profess the faith for themselves (1992 General Synod Canon concerning Confirmation) and the nature of baptism as a sacrament of the Universal Church. ‘Confirmation offers the necessary opportunity for a baptised Christian to profess publicly the faith of the whole Church, represented in the person of the bishop, and to seek the strengthening grace of the Holy Spirit through prayer, with the laying on of hands’ (Sherlock 2001, p. 32). Sherlock affirmed baptism as the rite of Christian initiation and the secondary nature of
confirmation. Confirmation is not an optional extra, however, it is ‘a normal and necessary part of Christian formation towards full discipleship’ (Sherlock 2001, p. 57).

Sherlock acknowledged that baptism is the only prerequisite for admission to communion. He noted, however, that the ‘close nexus between confirmation and admission to communion has been eased but not severed’ (Sherlock 2001, p.34). The 1981 General Synod Canon of Admission to Holy Communion followed *The Book of Common Prayer* in requiring that those to be admitted to holy communion should be confirmed or ready and desire to be confirmed. A baptised, communicant member of another Christian church may receive communion on a temporary basis, as a guest. The ordinary requirement however is that those who receive communion should be confirmed. The canon required the priest in the charge of a congregation to remind any non-Anglicans who seemed likely to receive as guests indefinitely of these requirements.

### 2.3.12 Anglican confirmation today – a summary

Recent liturgical reforms have aimed to recover the ideal of a unified rite of Christian initiation: baptism, laying on of hands/anointing, holy communion. There is evidence which suggests that the laying on of hands and anointing may have been associated with baptism in some New Testament churches, nevertheless baptism was the sole rite of initiation. There is no evidence that the primitive church of the first and second centuries practised a ‘unified rite’ of initiation. Evidence for a post-baptismal rite is no earlier than the third century. Even Kretschmar (1977) who argued that the unified rite goes back to apostolic times, accepted that there is no evidence that it was the sole normative pattern of initiation. Buchanan (1993) pointed out that it is historically more accurate to say that baptism became ‘cluttered’ with other ceremonies rather than to talk about the ‘disintegration’ of a unified rite of initiation. Social change as well as liturgical scholarship provided the impetus for the re-evaluation of confirmation which took place in the late twentieth century.

The Australian Church has embraced the view that baptism is the sole and sufficient rite of Christian initiation. Provision has been made for non-Anglicans to be received into the Church without being confirmed. Nevertheless for the Anglican Church,
confirmation is a necessary part of Christian formation. The Australian Bishops’ Statement synthesised the medieval view of confirmation as a sacrament giving strength to live the Christian life, the BCP/Reformed view of confirmation as the reaffirmation of baptism promises and the late twentieth century view of confirmation as commissioning for ministry and witness.

2.4 Conclusion: the contexts of Anglican confirmation

The ecclesiastical context of this study of the meaning of adult confirmation reveals that while baptism is the sole rite of Christian initiation, as far as the Anglican Church of Australia is concerned, confirmation is a necessary part of Christian formation. However, the cultural context indicates that while the public confession/ reaffirmation of baptismal faith may be significant for confirmation candidates, they may be agnostic in their attitude towards the Anglican Church in whose fellowship they have affirmed that faith.

History and theology are essential to understanding confirmation. Confirmation in the Anglican Church has no single, clear cut meaning; rather a range of views within the Church reflect meanings from different eras in the Church’s history. A number of these views are synthesised in the Bishops’ Statement. Through the process of catechesis, clergy attitudes to confirmation influence the attitudes of those whom they present for confirmation so these views are also reflected in the opinions expressed by the research participants. One of the subjects interviewed in this project, Chris, a theological student, expressed the BCP/Reformed view. For him confirmation represented the reaffirmation of his baptism vows (see section 6.5.4 Chris: commitment reaffirmed). Ailsa and Andrew looked forward to the laying on of the bishop’s hand, expecting to feel the power of the Holy Spirit (see section 7.3.1 The candidates’ experience). This expectation reflects the sacramental view of confirmation. Confirmation as commissioning for Christian witness in the world is reflected in Esther’s comment that her confirmation represented ‘incorporation into the world of being a public Christian’ (see Esther section 5.4.14 Response to Summary of themes).

The historical context of baptism/ confirmation is also relevant to the current practice of catechesis. In the last twenty years the catechumenate has been revived as the means for
preparing candidates for baptism/confirmation. The catechumenal process is discussed in chapter 8 when considering the practical implications of this study (see section 8.3 What this means for the practice of baptism/confirmation in the Anglican Church).

This chapter has set out the historical, theological and social settings in which the research participants came to an understanding of their baptism/confirmation. The meaning of baptism/confirmation, however, is not restricted to what is written on the pages of the Prayer Book, it includes the experience of being baptised/confirmed. The way in which the performance of liturgy influences meaning will be explored in section 3.3 Baptism/confirmation as ritual.
Chapter 3 Theory

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Introduction

For my research into the meaning that adult confirmation candidates give to their confirmation I adopted a life history, case study approach in the interactionist tradition (Jones 1983; Plummer 1983; Minichiello et al. 1995) drawing on the insights of ritual theory (Turner 1969, 1972, 1976) and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott (1965, 1971). Faculty and fellow students questioned my use of an eclectic theoretical framework. Was such a framework necessary and were the different theoretical elements it comprised compatible with one another? In this chapter I show the type of theoretical framework demanded by the project and demonstrate how the approaches I utilised are compatible with one another.

3.1.2 The theoretical framework required by the study

In considering the stories of adult initiation candidates I needed a theoretical framework which would i) attend to the richness of the participants’ stories and accept them in the first instance on their own terms; ii) take account of the setting of initiation in the Church’s liturgy; iii) take account of unconscious processes; iv) take account of the experiences of the research participants and the meanings which they gave to them. For this reason I adopted a case study, life history approach drawing on Winnicott’s concept of transitional object/phenomena and Turner’s concept of liminality. Each approach represented a different school of thought. The case study, life history approach was informed by the symbolic interactionist tradition of social enquiry. This approach is characterised by a concern with the ‘lived experience’ of research subjects and the process whereby meanings are generated and modified in social interaction. Winnicott’s concept of transitional object (1965, 1971) was a development of object relations theory in the psychoanalytic tradition. In recent years this approach has been widely used in the
psychoanalytic study of religion (Jones 1991b). Turner’s concept of liminality (1969) was derived from anthropology and is widely used in the study of ritual.

3.1.3 The compatibility of the theoretical elements

Morgan and Smircich (1980) plotted models of social scientific inquiry on a continuum with subjectivist approaches at one extreme and objectivist approaches at the other. Models of inquiry may be classified according to the degree to which they regard social reality as a human creation or as a given which constrains human behaviour. A phenomenological approach regards reality as a projection of human imagination while a behaviourist approach assumes that social reality is a concrete structure. Although Morgan and Smircich did not refer directly to any of the theories I propose to use, it is possible to locate them on their epistemological continuum: all are concerned with human interaction and the generation of meaning. Symbolic interactionist writers treat social reality as a human creation which in turn constrains human behaviour. People transform themselves and their environment through interaction and respond to those transformations (Stone & Farberman 1970 in Maines 1977). (The characteristics of symbolic interactionism are discussed further in 3.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism – its characteristics.) Anthropologists such as Turner and Geertz are concerned with human interaction and the generation of meaning (see Turner 1969; Geertz 1983.) Ritual theorists draw on these insights, albeit in a specialised, liturgical setting (see Searle 1992.) Psychoanalysis is likewise concerned with meaning and with human interaction although it seeks to identify levels of reality which are not amenable to everyday common sense observation (see Rustin 1991, p. 124.)

There appears to be no fundamental problem about combining insights from psychoanalysis, symbolic interactionism and ritual theory. They adopt a common stance to social inquiry: regarding reality as socially constructed and the researcher as part of the field of research. Writers from these three traditions draw on one another’s insights. Symbolic interactionist writers have made important contributions to the literature on qualitative research methodology which are used by those outside the symbolic interactionist community. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000) are members of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionism (SSSI, 2002). Bogdan, co author of a widely used book on research methods (1984), has also written a life history in the symbolic
interactionist tradition (1974). Writers from the three traditions I draw from also referred explicitly to different theoretical perspectives. Rustin (1991), a psychoanalyst, noted the similarity between the analytical task and the task faced by field researchers in anthropology, citing the work of Geertz. The writings of Turner and Geertz are cited by symbolic interactionist writers (see for example, Denzin 1989a, 1989b, 1989c.) Turner (1972) regarded his insights into ritual as complementary with psychoanalysis, suggesting that Freud or Jung could contribute to an understanding of the non-rational aspects of liminality. Hameline (2003) pointed out that van Gennep’s analysis of rites of passage was the precursor to Goffman’s symbolic interactionist analysis of the micro-rituals of everyday life. Hoggett (2002), writing from a psychodynamic perspective, linked Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis with Winnicott’s concept of illusion.

Elliot and Meltzer (1981) concluded that psychoanalytic and symbolic interactionist perspectives on human behaviour are complementary rather than competing, as they conduct their analysis at different levels. The primary focus of interactionist writers is on the interpersonal whereas the primary focus of psychoanalysis is on the internal. Symbolic interactionists have stressed the tactics of demeanour, deference and negotiation in the process of constructing definitions of the situation and the self while psychoanalytic writers have stressed the internal tactics of ego defence in responding to conflicts and ambiguities in human relationships. According to a synthesized view: ‘in order to play the game of society, one must achieve some mastery of both interactional and internal dynamics’ (Elliot & Meltzer 1981, p. 363).

3.1.4 Conclusion

The proposed framework meets the theoretical demands of the study. A life history, case study approach retells the participants’ stories in their own terms. Ritual theory takes account of the study’s setting in the liturgy of the Church. Object relations theory takes account of unconscious process. The elements in the theoretical framework share a concern for human interaction and the generation of meaning and they produce complementary insights. In the following sections, A Life History, Case Study approach (3.2), Baptism/Confirmation as ritual (3.3) and Baptism/Confirmation as transitional phenomena (3.4) I will show how each strand contributed to the research.
3.2 A Life History, Case Study Approach

3.2.1 Introduction

In this section I show why I adopted a life history, case study approach to my study of adults confirmed in the Anglican Church. Listening to their diverse stories highlighted the need for an appreciation of subjective experience and an understanding of the way in which meanings are generated. These concerns characterise the life history, case study approach used by writers in the symbolic interactionist tradition. I show the influence of the study *The Polish Peasant* on the development of the life history approach and go on to discuss the characteristics of symbolic interactionism. The use of personal experience stories is basic to this approach; however the use of such stories raises the question of validity. Life stories are a way of making sense of the events of life, just as theory is a way of making sense of the stories of research participants. I conclude the section by discussing two approaches to the use of theory in life history studies.

3.2.2 A particular study – *The Polish Peasant*

The life history, case study method was pioneered in the United States by WI Thomas and F Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Published by the University of Chicago 1918-20 it was a five-volume study of the experiences of Polish immigrants in America. The study comprised letters, diaries and autobiographical statements, reports from court records and social work agencies, documentation from the archives of a Polish peasant newspaper and documents collected by social agencies in Poland and in the United States about migrants and would-be migrants.

The study was influential in the development of sociology in the United States. In 1938 the US Social Science Research Council (SSRC) selected *The Polish Peasant* for appraisal on the grounds of its significant contribution to sociology. The study was important for its use of letters and autobiographical material – ‘human documents’. In his appraisal of *The Polish Peasant* for the SSRC Blumer (1939) acknowledged that human documents do not meet the scientific criteria of representativeness, adequacy and reliability – nevertheless as sources of subjective experience they are invaluable for sociological investigation. ‘The effective use which has been made of them by Thomas and Znaniecki is ample demonstration of this point’ (Blumer 1939, p. 125).
3.2.3 The priority of life history and case study

Thomas and Znaniecki did not make an exclusive claim for a qualitative approach to social research. They allowed a place for quantitative studies but asserted the priority of the life history and the case study as ‘closest to the ground’.

The case study method and the ‘natural history’ method must not only precede the more scientifically acceptable method in order to produce realistic hypotheses and indicate what units should be defined and isolated; they must also be used as a general background of reference to the more limited statistical findings… (Thomas 1931, quoted in Rock 1979, p. 80).

As Blumer noted, human documents are the best source of subjective experience – the meanings which individuals give to the situations in which they find themselves. Even if an interpretation is wrong in point of fact, it still forms the frame of reference for behaviour. Thomas gave the example of an individual (institutionalised at the time he was writing) who killed several people because they had the habit of talking to themselves in the street and the murderer imagined that they were insulting him. ‘If men define those situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (Janowitz 1966, p. 301).

3.2.4 Symbolic Interactionism – its characteristics

The life history, case study approach characterised by *The Polish Peasant* came to be known as ‘symbolic interactionism’. According to Blumer (who is credited with naming the movement), symbolic interactionism rests on three premises: i) ‘human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’; ii) ‘the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction one has with one’s fellows’; ii) ‘these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters’ (Blumer 1969, p. 2). Symbolic interactionist sociologies are concerned with meaning (how we define ourselves and the situations we are in, how meanings are built up and modified in interaction with others); process rather than structure (how we acquire a sense of self, how we construct our life stories, how we adjust to others) and human interaction, ‘the joint acts through which lives are organised and societies assembled’
A basic tenet of the interactionist approach is that the individual and society are inseparable. One cannot understand the individual without reference to the society to which she/he belongs and one cannot understand society without reference to the individuals who make it up. Interactionist writings are concerned with lived experience. They are typically case studies, concerned with particular individuals and groups, and show no concern for theorising – hence Rock’s description of symbolic interactionism as ‘an understated sociology’ (Rock 1979, p. 1).

### 3.2.5 Symbolic interactionism – its philosophical antecedents

The interactionist approach was developed through relationships in the academic community in lectures and seminars rather than exclusively through publications. For this reason it is hard to say who was responsible for what ideas and exactly who were the intellectual antecedents of the interactionists. Rock (1979) argued that the interactionists’ concern with lived experience was an attempt to overcome the subject-object split and identified Kant and Simmel as key influences in addition to GH Mead (who contributed the concept of the conscious, reflexive self) and the American pragmatists. Other writers have identified a diverse range of thinkers, including Hume and Smith. (See Plummer 1991.)

### 3.2.6 Symbolic interactionism – different approaches

Meltzer et al. (1975) identified four varieties of symbolic interactionism, all of which hold to Blumer’s definition. Manfred Kuhn and his students at Iowa State University (the Iowa School) came closest to mainstream sociology. Kuhn used questionnaires and attitude scales to derive operational definitions for the key concepts of symbolic interactionism. His goal was a body of generalisations tested by empirical research. Blumer stayed close to the original vision of the Chicago School. His concern with subjective experience led him to reject operational definitions in favour of ‘sensitising concepts’: directions along which to look. Blumer argued that experimental techniques failed to catch the meanings which mediate how individuals respond to social situations. Instead he used participant observation, life histories, case studies, diaries, letters and in-depth interviews to get inside the experience of the social actor. Goffman studied human interaction as performance, focussing on the way in which we seek to manage
the impressions others receive of us. Dramaturgical analysis, as Goffman’s approach has been called, has been criticised for depicting a distorted view of human beings. People do not usually see themselves as putting on an act, except in special circumstances such as a job interview (Blumer 1972 in Travers 2001). However, service staff such as airline stewards may engage in deep acting, embracing their work role so completely that it becomes part of their self (Hoggett 2002). Ethnomethodology, the approach pioneered by Garfinkel, is the study of the methods by which people use common-sense reasoning to do everyday things. An important aspect of common-sense reasoning is the way in which people look for an underlying pattern in order to make sense of their world, what Garfinkel referred to as ‘the documentary method of interpretation’. Garfinkel (1967a) employed this concept in a study which showed how people who are led to believe that they are receiving advice on personal problems made sense of random yes/no answers given by ‘counsellors’. Other ethnomethodological studies have focussed on the routine activities of people at work. Ethnomethodology remains a relatively small research tradition compared with the other traditions in symbolic interactionism (Travers 2001).

As a distinctive approach to the study of human interaction, symbolic interactionism is fuzzy at the edges. Maines (1977) concluded that ethnomethodology differed significantly from symbolic interactionism in that it was concerned with how meanings come to be taken for granted rather than how shared meanings lead to social organization. Denzin (1989a) advocated interpretive interactionism, a post-modern variant which draws on the hermeneutic approach of Heidegger and Gadamar. Such an approach recognises that researchers bring their meanings and values to the problem being studied and acknowledges that the researcher participates in what is being studied. Prus (1996 in Travers 2001) contended that post-modern scepticism undermines the tenets of interactionism. (For a recent review of symbolic interactionism and post-modern ethnography see Travers 2001). Over the past thirty years the interactionist approach – however it is defined – has become increasingly popular in Australian academic sociology (Minichiello et al 1995).
3.2.7 Why I used a case study/interactionist approach

I was attracted to the symbolic interactionist approach and the use of the case study method because of their concern with meaning, the focus on lived experience and the prominence given to the stories of research participants. Plummer’s comments on the life history method resonated with me: ‘the researcher is merely there in the first instance to give “voice” to other people; in some circumstances the voices may then be interpreted.’ (Plummer 1983, p. 1). This is what I wanted to do.

An interactionist case study approach is ideally suited to the circumstances in which I conducted my research project because it deals with emergent meanings. Symbolic interactionism emerged in an era of rapid social change. The Polish Peasant study was devised to gain an insight into the experience of Polish migrants in the rapidly growing city of Chicago. (See Plummer 1983). In Australia the Anglican Church and other mainstream churches are struggling to respond to rapid social change. (See, for example, Kaldor et. al. 1994). The Christendom model of the Church is outdated. (See, for example, Mead 1991). The traditional Christian worldview and Christian values are increasingly alien to many Australians who derive their values and worldviews from a diverse range of religions and philosophies.

If it is to undertake its mission effectively the Church must take account of an eclectic range of values and worldviews. Much catechesis however still adopts a content approach focussing on what the rites mean for the Church. Hugh Montefiore’s Confirmation Notebook (2002), for example, now in its sixth edition, is ‘a guide to Christian belief and practice’. In the same way, Anglican, studies for adult inquirers or confirmation candidates authored by Graeme Brady, focuses on the content of Christian belief in the Anglican tradition. An interactionist, case study approach to initiation challenges a content approach to catechesis. It focuses on the understandings which the participants bring to the rites and the way in which participants in dialogue with the Church, create meaning for their initiation.

3.2.8 Generalising from case study research

How can insights from this research project guide those preparing adults for confirmation? The degree to which a single case study may be a basis for generalisation
is disputed. Stake (1998) argued that the focus of the study should be on the uniqueness of the individual case. Burns (1994) pointed out that there is no way of knowing to what degree the selected case is typical of the general population. Yin (1994) argued that case studies findings may be extrapolated to build theory. Berg observed, ‘once you read a good case study, you never see the world the same way again’ (Berg 1990, p. 65). This seems to be the key to understanding the value of the case study method. Generalisations are not made on the basis of any claim to empirical correspondence. The case does not have to be an exact microcosm of the world outside (contra Burns 1994). Just as research is about interaction between the researcher and the field of study so generalisability is about the interaction between the reader and the case study. The reader constructs generalisable insights from the individual case on the basis of resonance (‘Ah ha! That is an interesting insight that can help me in my problems with such and such a group’ cf. Morgan 1993, pp. 306-307). It is on this basis that my study of eight adult confirmation candidates in Melbourne may be of value to the wider church and human society in general.

3.2.9 Definitions: life history and case history

Denzin (1987b p. 183) defined the life history method as follows: ‘the life history, life story, biographical method presents the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as this person, group, or organization interprets these experiences.’ The case study has been defined in a number of ways (Berg 1990; Burns 1994; Stake 1998; Yin 1994). Common to these definitions is the view that the case study is an examination in depth of a single human system. Following Berg’s (1990) classification, mine were hypothesis-generating case studies designed to raise questions. Why did the research participants choose to be baptised/confirmed in the Anglican Church? What circumstances led them to take this step? What common threads ran through their stories? What meaning did they give to their baptism/confirmation? Did they feel that confirmation made them into Anglicans? What difference did baptism/confirmation make to their lives? Did they take up roles in the church after their baptism/confirmation, if so how?
3.2.10 Self stories, personal experience stories and life stories

Denzin made an important distinction between self stories and personal experience narratives. ‘Self stories are often mandated by a group. Alcoholics in AA, for example, are expected to be able to tell such stories and to base them only on their experiences. Personal experience narratives are seldom mandated in this manner.’ (Denzin 1989b, p. 187). Self stories may be equated with testimonies told to other members of the confirmation group during preparation or at a point in the baptism/confirmation service. Testimonies are often associated with the public faith commitments described by Kaldor (1995a, pp. 139-140). The stories which the research participants told me are better described as personal experience narratives. They were told in confidence and not mandated by their fellow confirmation candidates or by members of the church where they were confirmed or by the Church in general. During the interviews I tried as far as possible to take the role of student researcher rather than priest and representative of the Church in order that the research participants could narrate their personal experiences candidly. The personal experience stories with which my research was concerned were focused on a particular aspect of life: how the research participants came to be baptised/confirmed. Nevertheless I refer to them as life stories rather than giving them a special name such as faith stories.

3.2.11 Verification

Research based on life stories told in confidence raises the question of verification. As a researcher how can I know whether or not I am being told the truth? Is my demeanour distorting the research participant’s story? Denzin (1989c) highlighted the problematic nature of the issue by citing Garfinkel’s study of Agnes (Garfinkel 1967b). Agnes was an ‘intersexed’ person who told her story to Garfinkel in thirty five hours of conversations over several months yet nearly eight years later revealed that she had deceived Garfinkel and her physicians about the circumstances which led to her sex change.

Plummer (1983, p. 103) provided a checklist for sources of possible bias. Bias may be located in the informant (for example, Is there evidence of deception? What has been forgotten?), the researcher (for example, the influence of the researcher’s attitude and demeanour, researcher prejudice) and the interaction (the formality/informality of the
setting). Plummer concluded rightly that the truth is not to be found by excluding the sources of bias, rather, the task of the researcher is to bring them to awareness, describe them and suggest how they contribute to a specific truth. The fact of Agnes’ deception is not a problem; rather it is a source of data and a clue to another level of meaning. ‘It is precisely through these “sources of bias” that a “truth” comes to be assembled’ (Plummer 1983, p. 104).

3.2.12 The problem of validity and the role of story

Plummer’s observation raises a broader question. With the best will in the world, for the most truthful, self-aware researcher and research participant there are inevitable differences between: i) what happens in a person’s life; ii) how those happenings are experienced by the person whose life it is and iii) how that person tells their life story, influenced by the cultural conventions of story-telling, the social context and the audience (Denzin 1989c). All stories are cultural constructs. Our culture provides us with a number of fictional narratives according to which we may structure our stories. (This is one of the functions of fairy tales. See Bettelheim 1978).

The life story is not a misleading abstraction from the events of life, it is a way of making sense of the events of life. Polkinghorne (1988) pointed out that we are more likely to answer the question, ‘Who am I?’ with a story than with a simple predicate such as (in my case) ‘I am an Australian’, ‘I am a male’, ‘I am an Anglican priest’, ‘I am a doctoral student’. Our stories tell us who we are. We organise our life experiences into story form with a beginning, a middle and a (provisional) end in order to give our lives unity and meaning. ‘After I graduated in Business Studies, I took a masters degree in Organisation Development and then worked as a training officer. After I was ordained I became interested in how people with little church background return to the church for baptisms, weddings and funerals and I enrolled in the Swinburne Organisation Dynamics program.’ We construct our lives out of the events of the past in order to imagine what we want to become. ‘The life story is a redescription of the lived life and a means to integrate the aspects of the self’ (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 154).

The notion of illusion provides a further perspective on the life story. According to Winnicott (1965, 1971), illusion or transitional space occurs between the inner world
and external reality. (The notion of illusion is discussed further in 3.4 Baptism/confirmation as transitional phenomena.) Transitional space is the realm of culture, creativity and story. Illusion allows us to be creative and imagine a hoped for future. For this reason you cannot easily apply the categories of truth or falsity to a person’s life story. As Hoggett (2002, p. 20) pointed out, ‘If all goes well we are often able to prove the truth of our imaginings by making them come true.’

Denzin rejected as unhelpful the notion of truth in considering self-stories and personal experience stories. All stories are fictions. The truth is unknowable. ‘The sociologist’s task, then, involves studying how persons and their groups culturally produce warrantable self and personal-experience stories which accord with that group’s understandings of what a story should look and sound like’ (Denzin 1989c, p. 77).

There is nevertheless a reality which constrains and challenges our stories. We face the danger of constructing a self-deceiving story that is merely a projection of our desires, out of touch with reality. Gary, a self-defined addict and alcoholic interviewed by Denzin, fell into this category. Gary admitted lying to an AA meeting. ‘I’ve lied to myself for so long I don’t know what’s true and what’s false’ (Denzin 1989c, p. 75). The contrasting danger is to wander aimlessly among the fictional narratives provided by our culture and refuse to construct a self-story, accepting reality as a given over which we have no influence (Polkinghorne 1988).

### 3.2.13 The voice of the researcher and the role of theory

If as Plummer (1983) claimed, the role of the researcher in a life history, case study in the symbolic interactionist tradition is to give voice to other people, what about the researcher’s voice and what about the role of theory? The issues of the researcher’s voice, the role of theory, and the problem of validity are all related. Theory is not or should not be a misleading abstraction from the life story; rather it should help to make sense of what is there. There is no such thing as a subject’s ‘raw account’, uncontaminated by the researcher (contra Plummer 1983, p. 113). Research is the product of a relationship between the subject (research participant) and the researcher. Even if the account is in the research participant’s own words, the researcher’s voice is heard in the choice of the material selected for the study.
Plummer advocated what he called ‘systematic thematic analysis’. The research participant is ‘more or less allowed to speak for him or herself’ but themes are distilled from the account, partly derived from the participant’s emphases, partly derived from sociological theory. As Plummer (1983, p. 120) put it, ‘the researcher here is willing to comment upon, to interpret, and organise “the stories” into a more unified whole. Theorising becomes commentary, criticism, synthesis, theme, metaphor.’

Jones (1983) proposed using theory to challenge the participants’ common sense view of their own behaviour, along the lines of ethnomethodology. He suggested that the participants should receive an abstract of the researcher’s interpretation of their behaviour and an account of the theoretical framework. This practice allows the voice of research participants to be heard in their response to the researcher’s account, validates the researcher’s understanding of their stories and serves as a strategy for eliciting shared meanings.

3.2.14 Conclusion

In this section I have shown why I adopted a life history, case study approach to the study of adult confirmation candidates and located this approach in the wider field of symbolic interactionism. Interactionism is not concerned with grand theory, nevertheless there is no such thing as a theory-less account or a case study uncontaminated by the researcher.

This section lays the foundation for the Methodology chapter (chapter 4). Chapter 4 explains how I incorporated into my research design Jones’ idea that research participants should receive an abstract of the researcher’s interpretation of their behaviour and an account of the theoretical framework (4.3.3 Summary of themes). The contribution of case studies to the research report is discussed further in the Methodology chapter (4.6 The contribution of the case study). The capacity of story to give coherence to life events and convey an identity to the one telling their life story provided an important framework for understanding the interview data and my interactions with the research participants. (See 4.6.4 Rewriting the life story.)
3.3 Baptism/Confirmation as Ritual

3.3.1 Introduction
Confirmation is a public ritual of the Church which takes place within the church community gathered for worship. The message of the rite is conveyed not only by what the bishop and the candidates say but also by what they do and by the setting in which the rite takes place. These issues are addressed by ritual theory which, drawing on the insights of anthropology and psychology, attends to the structure of the rite and its character as performance. In this section I outline some of the implications of ritual theory for confirmation and introduce the concepts of liminality and communitas.

3.3.2 What is ritual?
If ritual is understood as stereotyped patterns of behaviour, the term may be applied to anything from the mating habits of birds to the rites of initiation in the Anglican Church (see, for example, Driver 1991, pp. 12-31.) Grimes (1990, p. 9) distinguished between rite, ritual, ritualising and ritualization. Rites are specific ceremonies, such as Christian baptism. Rites often form part of a larger whole, a ritual system that establishes the conditions under which the rites are performed. This is the case with the baptism rite in the Australian Anglican Church. ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion together with provision for the reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows and Reception’ is one of the services in APBA licensed for use in the Anglican diocese of Melbourne. Ritual is the concept of which the rite is a specific example. Christian baptism is an initiation ritual. Ritualizing is the activity of devising rites, such as, ‘Thanksgiving for a Child’ (APBA), a service devised to meet a pastoral need where parents want a church ceremony for their child but baptism is not appropriate. (The rite had its origins in ‘The Churching of Women’ service in BCP. Sherlock 2001, p. 41 indicated that the ‘Thanksgiving’ is to be distinguished clearly from baptism.) Ritualization is the process by which certain patterns of human interaction become interpreted as ritual. The way in which, according to Kavanagh (1984), the post-baptismal blessing and dismissal of the newly baptised evolved into the rite of confirmation might be an example of this. (For the setting in which this took place, see section 2.3.3 Anointing/laying on of hands in the post-New Testament Church.)
3.3.3 Ritual as performance

Although the above examples are from texts, ritual is primarily about what is done rather than what is written. Ritual is performance, that is, action and word. Ritual concerns the whole body: it is about sensing as well as thinking. Ritual is also the product of a community. Through ritual the community affirms its self-identity and the meaning of the ritual is disclosed as the community performs it. As Searle (1992, p. 57) put it, ‘ritual makes best sense … in an anthropology that sees the community as prior to the individual, and sees the mind coming to self consciousness only in interaction with the external world.’

Viewing ritual as performance raises important questions about confirmation. In 2.3 we examined confirmation primarily in terms of what is said during the rite. Following Searle, however, what is done in confirmation is the key issue rather than what is said. The fact that the candidate kneels and has the hand of the bishop placed on his/her head carries as much meaning as the words of the bishop’s prayer. The identity of the speaker/actor and the audience to whom the words/ actions are addressed are also important. Words are not to be discounted but the doctrinal content of the words spoken does not exhaust the meaning of the ritual, rather liturgical words find their meaning in the bodily performance of the ritual. Grimes (1990, p. 43) was aware of a possible disjunction between words and actions. ‘What if a given liturgical act has one meaning psychologically and another theologically?’ The Toronto Consultation affirmed that confirmation adds nothing to baptism which is the one sufficient rite of Christian initiation. The fact that the Anglican Church in Australia restricts the ministry of confirmation to bishops, whereas baptism is normally administered by the parish priest conveys a different message about the relative importance of baptism and confirmation, however.

3.3.4 Turner’s notions of liminality and communitas

Victor Turner was an influential figure in the growth of ritual studies. From his expertise in cultural anthropology he was keenly aware that ritual has a meaning apart from the meaning of the words which are said. Turner spent two and half years doing fieldwork among the Ndembu people of sub-Saharan Africa (Turner 1969). Turner took tribal ritual seriously and interviewed ritual specialists among the Ndembu in order to
discover how the Ndembu understood their own symbols. Turner argued that although tribal cultures may be less technologically advanced than western culture, in art and religion they are no less imaginatively and emotionally rich and complex. He showed furthermore how important religious beliefs and religious ritual are for the maintenance and transformation of social and psychical structure.

From his study of the Ndembu, Turner derived the concepts of communitas and liminality. Liminality is the state of being in transition or occupying a social ‘no man’s land’. Communitas is the community of equal individuals which emerges where there is an absence of social structure (anti-structure). Social structure is made up of the role relationships and status progressions that operate in a given society. This is the world in which men and women go to work and live their everyday lives. Communitas is the situation in which the rules and status differences of everyday life are suspended. In this state relationships are personal rather than dictated by role and status. In communitas, social structure gives way to what Turner called ‘anti-structure’. Turner emphasised that communitas is not the casual informality expressed by being on first name terms with one’s colleagues, rather it is a transformative experience in which those involved find a shared humanity (Turner 1969, p. 138). Communitas is found in the margins of society. It is characterised by poverty, weakness, lack of status and being an outsider. Turner (1972) gave three examples: the hippy counter-culture of Haight-Ashbury in the late 1960s; the order of friars founded by Francis of Assisi in the thirteenth century and the liminal rites (rites of transition) found in tribal societies.

Turner took the concept of liminality (Latin: limen, threshold) from van Gennep (1960). Changes in social position are marked by rites of passage. Rites of passage have three aspects: separation, margin, and incorporation. During the margin or transition those being initiated are in ‘no man’s land’. They are divested of the marks of their previous status, removed from the mainstream of social life and reduced to equality regardless of their pre-ritual status. (The process of training for ordination to the priesthood follows this pattern culminating in the seclusion of the ordination retreat.) It is in conditions of liminality that communitas emerges.

Liminality is the arena of myth and symbol where cultural norms are turned upside down. Describing the non-logical and non-rational character of liminality, Turner (1972,
p. 484) suggested a link with the unconscious. Like Winnicott’s transitional space, liminal space is where creativity, art and religious expression occur. (It is worth observing that poets, artists and musicians are liminal people: they live on the margins of society.) A balance between communitas and structure is essential for social well-being. ‘People can go crazy because of communitas-repression’ (Turner 1971, p. 491). The liminal is protected by cultural structures that include ritual and archaic forms. The liturgical reforms following Vatican II were designed to strip away archaic language and useless repetition. Turner argued that archaic language and repetition perform an essential function setting participants in the liturgy apart from everyday life (anti-structure) and enabling a special bonding experience to take place (communitas). In his critique of the reforms, Turner (1972, 1976) argued that the ‘useless forms and repetitions’ of the Tridentine mass were essential to its liminal character.

As well as pointing out the value of archaic ritual, Turner reminded us that initiation rites do not occur in isolation. They take place within a larger ritual system and may occur over a long period of time. Arbuckle (1987) described an initiation rite for boys from north Bougainville that took five or six years to complete. Turner (1972) also pointed out that the cultural form of communitas found on liminal occasions (such as baptism/confirmation) should correspond to an actual experience of communitas. For this to occur I suggest that the context and the preparation of the candidates are crucial. Eastman (1982) wrote of the profound impact of his own baptism at age 13 despite it being arranged as a hasty afterthought prior to his confirmation. I suggest that where baptisms are conducted in such circumstances the experience of the candidates is likely to be boredom rather than communitas. However impressive the performance, the effectiveness of the rite will be related to its context. This is clear from Arbuckle’s application of Turner’s concepts to religious formation in the Roman Catholic Church.

Arbuckle wrote Strategies for growth in religious life (1987) as a response to the apparent collapse of religious life after Vatican II. The pre-Vatican II hierarchical model of ministry that emphasized the priest’s role as ritual celebrant was replaced by an egalitarian model that emphasised pastoral skills. Arbuckle argued that reforms were pushed through too quickly and with too little planning, leaving those responsible for formation in state of shock. Formation should follow the van Gennep/Turner model. Arbuckle emphasised that all stages – separation, liminality and incorporation – are
essential to the process. Separation from the rest of the community should be dramatic. The liminal period should last for about a year during which novices should experience the values of their chosen religious community rather than merely learn about them. Incorporation into the community should likewise take place over a twelve-month period. Such a gradual process would allow the spiritual idealism of the novices to come to terms with the realities of daily life while minimising discouragement, guilt and cynicism.

3.3.5 Conclusion

Ritual studies have made significant contributions to an understanding of Christian initiation. Searle emphasised the way in which ‘doing’ in liturgy influences the meaning of ritual (3.3.3 Ritual as performance). Anthropology has highlighted the importance of structure. Turner’s concept of communitas is helpful in understanding what happens to those who participate in initiation rites. The drawback of these approaches however is that they focus on the ‘official’ meaning of the liturgy rather than what the liturgy meant to the participants. Grainger (1988, p. 55) exemplified this approach. ‘The Church makes its meaning clear in its own special way through its sacramental rituals.’ This is not so, as interviews with the baptism/confirmation candidates will demonstrate. As Grimes (1990, p. 42) noted, “the” meaning of “the” liturgy is a fiction because meaning is always meaning-to-somebody.’ The liturgy may have as many meanings as the number of people who participated in it.

Baptism/confirmation is a liminal event whereby the Church receives a candidate ‘as a member …of the body of Christ, as a child of the one heavenly Father, and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God’ (‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’ APBA p. 60). The next step is to apply the insights of anthropology and ritual studies to the initiation of the research participants. The case studies in chapter 5 tell the research participants’ stories of their journeys to baptism/confirmation. They also reveal that the participants were undergoing other liminal events in addition to baptism/confirmation. The concept of rite of passage is used in chapter 6 to explore the metaphors which emerged from the interviews and feedback from the Summary of themes. Chapter 7 examines specific issues raised by ritual theory. How does baptism/confirmation as a liminal event confer a new identity on the candidates? Searle emphasised the
importance of ritual as performance. What was the experience of candidates as
performers in the ritual? Does holy communion emphasise separation from the church
for unbaptised confirmation candidates? Before addressing these questions we now
examine the experience of baptism/confirmation from the perspective of transitional
phenomena.

3.4 Baptism/Confirmation as Transitional Phenomena

3.4.1 Introduction
For the research participants, confirmation was a powerful experience which could not
be explained in rational terms only. Not only were interpersonal dynamics at work
during the initiation ritual but also in my interviews with the research participants as we
talked about how they experienced the rite and about their journeys to
baptism/confirmation. (See the discussion at 4.3.1 In-depth interview.) These issues are
addressed by adopting a psychodynamic approach to baptism/confirmation.
Confirmation is treated as a transitional object, located in the intermediate area where
the individual’s inner world overlaps with shared external reality. In this section I
explore Winnicott’s concept of transitional object and the way in which it has been
applied to religious thought.

3.4.2 Illusion, disillusion and the transitional object
Illusion is basic to Winnicott’s concept of the transitional object (1965, 1971). For
Freud illusion was an escape from reality (see Meissner 1984, pp. 160-164). For
Winnicott (1971), illusion is the way in which we may come to terms with reality. He
proposed an intermediate area to which the inner and outer worlds contribute. It belongs
to both/neither and provides relief from the strain of relating the inner and outer worlds.
This intermediate area is the world of illusion.

At first mother and her newborn child form an undifferentiated unity. The mother
adapts instinctively to the needs of the infant. This gives the infant the illusion of
omnipotence, for each time the infant feeds it has the illusion that it has created the
mother’s breast. Gradually the mother lessens her adaptation. The infant becomes
gradually dis-illusioned and there is a growing awareness of its separateness from the mother. In developing the notion of the transitional object, Winnicott used a phenomenon that had long been recognised. Infants often acquire a treasured possession, usually a blanket, a piece of wool or a soft toy. Linus the character in the Peanuts cartoon strip and his security blanket are an example. The treasured possession stands for the mother’s breast. It is held and sucked and is particularly important at the time of going to sleep.

3.4.3 Transitional object and transitional space
The treasured possession or transitional object (Winnicott 1971) is part of the infant’s adaptation to external reality. It is the infant’s first recognition of an object as ‘not-me’ and makes possible the separation of the ‘me’ from the ‘not-me’. The transitional object inhabits the intermediate area between internal and external reality. Winnicott described this realm variously as transitional space and potential space (between mother and infant). Into this realm the infant gathers objects from the outer world and invests them with meaning from the inner world. Thus the transitional object is a paradox: it is illusory, created by the infant, but it is also waiting to be created (1971, p. 89).

Illusion and potential space are critical for the infant’s development: they form the basis of its relationship with the external world. Without the use of illusion, the idea of a relationship with an external object has no meaning (1971, p. 11). Winnicott described the potential space between mother and infant as ‘not a separation but a form of union’ (1971, p. 98).

3.4.4 Transitional phenomena and experience
Transitional space is the meeting place of the inner world and external reality where the external world is experienced. Winnicott described the growth of a sense of external reality through the use of transitional phenomena as being a ‘journey of progress towards experiencing’ (1971, p. 6). The use of transitional space depends on the experience of ‘good-enough’ mothering in early childhood. The infant needs to gain confidence in the mother’s reliability. For this to happen there needs to be continuity on the part of the mother in holding and handling the infant and continuity of the
transitional objects. The separating out of the ‘me’ from the ‘not-me’ opens up potential space between mother and infant that is filled with creative playing and the use of symbols (1971, p. 109). Because it takes place on the border of external reality and the inner world play is an intense, precarious experience (1971, p. 47).

3.4.5 Holding environment

The relationship with the mother in which the infant is able to use the transitional object provides a holding environment. The experience of being held by the mother can be replicated in the relationship between therapist and patient. The relationship forms a holding environment in which the patient comes to discover him/herself. The celebration of baptism/confirmation may also create a holding environment for the initiation candidate in which their view of themselves may be transformed. (For a discussion of how this may take place see section 6.1.5 Ritual as a holding environment and section 6.1.7 Danni: baptism/confirmation as a holding environment.)

3.4.6 Transitional space, culture and religion

As the healthy infant grows up transitional objects come to be decathcted and lose their meaning. The ability to invest objects and phenomena in the external world with meaning from the inner world remains, however. Play develops into wider cultural experience. Transitional space becomes the area for cultural appreciation and religious expression, the field ‘of play, and of artistic creativity and appreciation, and of religious feeling, and of dreaming’ – as well as fetishism, lying, stealing and drug addiction! (Winnicott 1971, p. 5).

The application of these concepts to an understanding of the Christian religion in general and to the rites of baptism/confirmation in particular is the concern of this section. In the area of religious experience Winnicott’s ideas have been developed in two different ways. Eigen (1981) and Ghent (1990) developed them into a theory about experiencing. Rizzuto (1979) and Meissner (1984, 1990) developed Winnicott’s ideas into a theory about objects. (This analysis follows Jones 1991a, 1991b who advocated a relational approach similar to that adopted by Eigen and Ghent. See Beit-Hallahmi 1995 for a survey of the way in which object relations theorists have treated religious
experience.) Both approaches have something to offer by way of understanding baptism/confirmation as transitional phenomena

### 3.4.7 Experiencing and faith

For Eigen (1981, p. 3) faith is about experience. Faith is ‘a way of experiencing which is undertaken with one’s whole being, all out, “with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, and with all one’s might”’ (cf. Deut 6:5). Winnicott located religion in the intermediate area of transitional experiencing where there is no clear realisation of the distinction between self and other. Eigen called this ‘transitional relating faith’. Taking as his starting point Winnicott’s paper, ‘The use of an object and relating through identifications’, he took the analysis one stage further and related faith to the acknowledgement of an autonomous other. Object relating as described by Klein involves a closed system of introjection and projection, putting the self in others and others in self. In this situation self is an isolate and the possibility of faith is foreclosed. One cannot use an object until one realises that it has an independent existence. This realisation is brought about by the destruction of the fantasy object and the birth of the real object.

Eigen compared the birth of the real object to the encounter between Job and God. ‘This may be something akin to Job’s and God’s wrath turning into joyous appreciation of one another’s mystery, a new found trust, wherein anything outside of the faith experience at that moment seems unreal’ (1981, p. 8). For Eigen, faith is a relationship based on an appreciation of the reality of God as the Other.

Drawing on Eigen’s paper, Ghent (1990) emphasised the undefended nature of faith. He developed Eigen’s notion of faith as ‘whole being’ experiencing. Arguing that faith underlies the basic conceptions outlined by Winnicott, he related it to the surrender of the false self. ‘Faith, surrender, the beginnings of creativity and symbol formation all intersect in the world of transitional relating’ (Ghent 1990, p. 214).
3.4.8 God as transitional object

Whereas Eigen and Ghent applied Winnicott’s concept of transitional phenomena to faith as a way of relating to God, Rizzuto (1979) applied the concept of transitional object to the representation of God. She presented four case studies in which she related the subjects’ psychic histories to their concepts of God. From the results Rizzuto concluded that God is a transitional object and like other transitional objects, inhabits transitional space. Nevertheless unlike other transitional objects, God is not a physical object such as a teddy bear or a blanket; God is created from ‘representations of primary objects’. Unlike other transitional objects that lose their meaning because play develops into differentiated cultural experience, God as Father is ‘increasingly cathected during the pregenital years and reaches his most appealing moment at the peak of oedipal excitement’ (Rizzuto 1979, p. 178). Although not the only mental representation to be commonly used as a transitional object, God has a special place in ‘our culture’. Neither atheism nor belief in God indicates any kind of pathology. Rather it shows the balance an individual has achieved in relationships with primary objects and with other relevant people. The God-representation is uniquely connected to one’s sense of personal identity. If the God-representation loses its meaning, it may be set aside without being forgotten. It remains available for further processing. It may be further elaborated, there may be regression to an earlier representation or the representation may be repressed. God may be abandoned as a meaningful transitional object but revived at a life-crisis and afterwards be returned to the ‘psychic toy-box’.

In explicating her theory Rizzuto used the difficult language of object relations theory. Her writing is most engaging and easiest to follow when comparing God to other transitional objects that are both created and found.

…throughout life God remains a transitional object at the service of gaining leverage with oneself, with others, and with life itself. This is so, not because God is God, but because, like the teddy bear, he has obtained a good half of his stuffing from the primary objects the child has ‘found’ in his life. The other half of God’s stuffing comes from the child’s capacity to ‘create’ a God according to his needs (Rizzuto 1979, p. 179).
3.4.9 Faith as a transitional object

Meissner followed Rizzuto in his approach to faith, God, the use of religious symbols and prayer. In fact Meissner’s treatment of God did not add anything to that of Rizzuto. Even though he wrote about ‘the experience of faith’, he treated faith as a transitional object, in contrast to Eigen and Ghent for whom faith was a way of experiencing and relating to God. Meissner argued in the following terms. A believer’s faith is not wholly subjective. It relates to the nature of the world, the purpose of life and the relationship between the world, the believer and a divine being. Nevertheless faith cannot demonstrate the independent reality of the spiritual world. Faith has the characteristics of transitional phenomena: ‘it represents a realm in which the subjective and the objective interpenetrate’ (Meissner 1984, p. 178). Furthermore, faith is the product of the community and the believer comes to faith in the context of a community. The believer nevertheless has to express his/her own individuality and own the faith for his/herself; in consequence the believer’s faith is always in tension with the faith (dogma) of the community. Faith is therefore both received from the community and created by the believer.

Meissner and Eigen adopted complementary approaches in applying Winnicott’s ideas to religious faith. Faith is both relationship, as outlined by Eigen, and dogma, as Meissner’s analysis implies. In the confirmation rite, the bishop says to the candidates, ‘I now ask you to affirm as yours the faith of the Church’ (APBA p. 89). When the confirmation candidates say the Apostles’ Creed, they are affirming both their faith-relationship to God and the content of that faith, that is, what we believe about God.

3.4.10 Baptism/confirmation as transitional phenomena

What evidence is there that baptism/confirmation may be usefully regarded as transitional phenomena? Baptism/confirmation as a form of religious expression belongs to the realm of transitional space. The Church is traditionally known as Mother. (‘No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother’ – Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, third century.) The use of a transitional object is dependent on good enough mothering, is a sign of growth and development by the infant and is the basis for relationships with the external world. Initiation depends on good enough nurture by Mother Church and is associated with spiritual birth and development. It brings the
candidate into a new relationship with God and with the Church: ‘…joined to Christ, and made members of his body, the Church universal’ (‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’ APBA p. 51.) Baptism/confirmation is also a commissioning for Christian witness and ministry so the candidate is brought into a new relationship with the world.

3.4.11 Conclusion

This section has surveyed Winnicott’s theories relating to transitional objects and transitional space and the way these theories have been developed by Eigen, Ghent, Rizzuto and Meissner and applied to religious thought. There is a prima facie case for regarding baptism/confirmation as transitional phenomena. The next step is to apply the concept of transitional phenomena to the baptism/confirmation of the research participants. Baptism/confirmation will be examined as a transitional phenomenon chiefly in regard to the relationship between the research participants and the Church. Transitional space is the realm of experience. How did the research participants experience their baptism/confirmation? How did baptism/confirmation function as a transitional object for the research participants? Did they use other rites as transitional objects? The stories retold in the case studies (chapter 5) reveal that the research participants were undergoing more than one life transition. Was there evidence of growth on the part of the research participants and of new relationships being formed? Did any of the relationships provide a holding environment in which the research participants were able to discover their new identities? These issues are explored in chapter 6: metaphors for initiation in which metaphors which emerged from the participants’ stories are blended with concepts from the conceptual framework and in chapter 7 in which the theoretical framework is used to analyse the structure of the initiation process.
Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction
Having established the purpose of the study and its theoretical basis, this chapter tells the story of how and why I conducted the research project and how and why I adopted a particular format for writing the research report. I outline the principal data creation techniques used, give brief biographical details of the research participants and the churches to which they belonged and discuss the data analysis process. Discussion of the data analysis process leads to a discussion of the format in which the results would be presented. My goal is to highlight the stories of the research participants. The goal is met by a combination of case study presentation and thematic analysis. It is a methodological assumption that the researcher participates in what is being researched. For that reason the chapter includes a discussion of how my status as an ordained minister and my own experience of confirmation influenced my conduct of the research project.

4.2 Concepts and philosophical basis

4.2.1 Implications of the theoretical basis for research methods
The purpose of my research was to discover what meaning adult candidates for Anglican confirmation gave to their confirmation, how they experienced the ritual and what place confirmation had in their continuing faith journey. I adopted a life history, case study approach in the interactionist tradition (Jones 1983; Minichiello et al. 1995) drawing on the insights of ritual theory (Turner 1969, 1972, 1976) and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott (1965, 1971). Such an approach i) attended to the richness of the participants’ stories and accepted them in the first instance on their own terms; ii) took account of the setting of baptism/confirmation in the Church’s liturgy; iii) took account of unconscious processes through a psychodynamic perspective; iv) took account of the experiences of the research
participants and the meanings which they gave to them. Because the project was concerned with the experience of candidates for Christian initiation and the meaning they ascribed to their experience, it assumed an interpretive or hermeneutic epistemology, that is, one that is concerned with meaning and purpose (Denzin, 1989b). Such an approach rejects the notion of an external, objective truth and asserts that facts cannot exist independently of interpretation and all knowledge is historically and socioculturally contingent. A hermeneutic approach does not seek objective certainty but rather empathetic understanding and intersubjective agreement, recognising that the researcher participates in what is being studied (Woolfolk, Sass & Messer, 1988).

### 4.2.2 The relationship between the researcher and the researched

Adopting a hermeneutic approach has a number of practical consequences for the conduct of research. Such an approach recognizes that the perspectives and biases of the researcher also form part of the research data. The research process is circular. There is no neutral viewpoint from which we can observe our own beliefs because we always operate within the framework of our own beliefs. (This insight is known as the hermeneutic circle.) Nevertheless it is the task of the researcher to bring his/her own beliefs to awareness. The research must account for the researcher’s influence and interpretive scheme as well as the interpretive scheme of the research subject. (This point was discussed earlier section 3.2.11 Verification.) My status as an ordained Anglican minister influenced my interactions with the research participants. (For a discussion of this issue see section 4.8 My role as a researcher.) My attitude towards confirmation was influenced by my experience as an adult convert to Anglicanism, however my assumptions about confirmation were in turn challenged by the research. (See section 4.10 My confirmation and how it influenced my view of the project.)

### 4.2.3 Research as a cooperative activity

If we are part of what we investigate, the researcher has to take account of his/her own influence and interpretive scheme. Acknowledging that we are part of what we investigate also has implications for the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects and the way in which the research project is set up. The relationship between the researcher and the researched is the key factor in the research project.
Morgan (1983) made this point arguing from quantum physics. Just as light may reveal itself as a wave or as particles depending on the way in which it is studied, so social phenomena may reveal themselves in different ways depending on the researcher’s mode of engagement. Also arguing from quantum physics, Pine (1989, p. 211) observed that ‘to some extent what is real depends on us.’ Research is not the process of discovering discrete, self-evident facts; rather it generates knowledge of the interaction between the researcher and the field of study.

Heron (1988) argued that research subjects should be regarded as stakeholders in the research project. This stance recognises both researcher and researched as intelligent, self-directed agents and takes account of the research subjects’ meaning and intention in what they say and do in the research project. Heron contrasted this approach with that of Asch (1952) in his experiment on recency and primacy in attitude formation. On the basis of choices made by two groups of research subjects, Asch concluded that early information was more influential than later information in forming impressions. Nevertheless he did not consult the research participants to ask why they interpreted the conditions of the experiment they way they did. Heron suggested that research subjects should contribute to hypothesis generation and to formulating the final conclusions. In a similar vein Atkinson, Heath & Chenail (1991) argued that the judgement of all stakeholders in research is required in evaluating the conclusions. This model of participatory action research is often applied in promoting social change (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy 1993; Stringer 1996).

The research project was set up in such a way as to include research participants as stakeholders. They contributed both to hypothesis generation and to the final conclusions. The invitation to take part contained a full explanation of the project and promised the opportunity for participants to reflect on what their confirmation meant to them (see Appendix I). The project aimed to uncover the meaning of confirmation for those who took part. The contexts for these meanings are outlined in section 2.2 The cultural context: the National Church Life Surveys and in section 2.3 The ecclesiastical context: the origin and history of Christian initiation. Nevertheless the primary data were generated in the research interviews. ‘The meaning of confirmation’ from the participants’ point of view is not something that can be directly observed by the researcher. It was the product of the relationship between me as researcher and the
research participants, created through the use of ‘My journey so far’ (the Faith Autobiography exercise) and the in-depth interview. As part of the process, I sent a summary of the themes emerging from the data together with my insights to each of the research participants (see section 4.3.3 Summary of themes.) This functioned as working hypothesis to be judged by those who had contributed the data. (For the concept of working hypothesis, see Lawrence 1977.) Harney pointed out that this is part of the hermeneutic dialectic of moving from ‘text’ to interpretation (M Harney, personal communication).

4.2.4 Ethical issues

According to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct on Research Involving Humans (1999) researchers have a responsibility to act with integrity, respect for persons, beneficence (minimising the risk of harm/discomfort to participants) and justice. Setting up the project as a cooperative activity, as discussed in section 4.2.3, was calculated to fulfil this requirement. Potential participants were fully informed as to what participation in the project would involve. Such an approach minimised differences in status and power. While my status as minister was part of the explanation of the project, I was careful to take the role of academic researcher. In section 4.8 My role as researcher, we will see how this was undertaken. The topic of the research was their experience of baptism/confirmation, something at which they were the acknowledged experts. The Summary of themes enabled participants to critique my working hypothesis and contribute to the research conclusions. Use of the Faith Autobiography pro forma gave participants control over their stories. It was given out before the interview thus giving participants an opportunity to consider what they wanted to say and what they might want to leave out. (See section 4.3.2 Faith Autobiography.) The project benefited those who took part because it gave them an opportunity to reflect on their experience of confirmation and its place in their faith journey – in line with Gray’s conception of social science as a transformative process (Gray 1989).
4.3 Research methods

4.3.1 In-depth interview

The principal data creation techniques used in the research study were the in-depth interview and the Faith Autobiography *pro forma* (see Appendix II My journey so far). Bogdan and Taylor (1984 p. 77) defined qualitative in-depth interviewing as ‘repeated face to face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words.’ The in-depth interview is suited to a hermeneutic approach because it focuses on meaning; it aims to understand the informant’s point of view in her/his own terms rather than according to predetermined conceptual categories. The in-depth interview focuses on the relationship between the interviewer and the informant so that both the interviewer and the interview schedule are research tools (see, for example, Mirvis & Louis, 1988).

Focusing on the relationship between interviewer and informant necessitates an acknowledgment of unconscious dynamics in the research relationship. Projection and projective identification were key concepts in understanding my relationship with the research participants. Projection involves depositing unwanted feelings in others. The recipient may take the exported feelings as their own (projective-identification). For an example of this, see section 5.2.3.1 Echoes of my own situation. I was nervous about my first interview, however I had no cause to be of envious of Chris. I had made the transition from Baptist layman to Anglican priest which he was attempting. Yet I struggled with anxiety which I take to be Chris’ anxiety about his application to be an ordination candidate and envy which I take to be Chris’ envy of my status as priest. At the time I did not recognise that these feelings were not my own and attributed them to remembered pain of my own journey to ordination. (For a further discussion of projection and projective identification see Spillius 1992.)

This psychodynamically informed, clinical approach to research was pioneered by the Tavistock Institute (de Board 1978). Bogdan and Taylor on the other hand, like other writers in the symbolic interactionist tradition, did not take account of unconscious processes.
4.3.2 Faith Autobiography

In-depth interviews were used in connection with a type of questionnaire. Candidates were asked to complete a Faith Autobiography pro forma (see Appendix II). The pro forma ‘My journey so far’ was based on an instrument devised in connection with faith development research (Moseley, Jarvis, Fowler & DeNicola 1993) although I did not follow faith development conceptualisation. (The concepts of faith development are outlined in Fowler 1981.) To complete ‘My journey so far’ the candidates listed the significant events in their faith journey, the calendar dates when these occurred, their age and significant relationships in their life at the time, how these events affected their view of God and of themselves. I also asked the candidates to portray their faith journey in some other way such as by drawing a picture. No one adopted this approach although two of the candidates submitted written accounts of their faith journey rather than complete the Faith Autobiography pro forma. The use of written and interview data enabled me to check validity. The purpose of comparing written and interview data was to provide a deeper understanding rather than to catch the respondent out in making a mistake or telling a lie. (The role of verification in uncovering bias or deception is discussed in section 3.2.10 Verification.)

The Faith Autobiography material was used as the basis for an in-depth interview. In addition to the Faith Autobiography material I used an interview guide to ensure that the following topics were covered:

1. How the decision to be confirmed was made.
2. The major influences in taking the decision (such as spouse, friends, vicar).
3. Where a group of adults were prepared for confirmation, the relationships between the confirmation candidates and the relationship between the candidates and their sponsors and those responsible for confirmation preparation.
4. The meaning of confirmation as given by the person leading the confirmation preparation.
5. Positive/negative emotions evoked by the confirmation process.
6. The experience of being confirmed. What did you expect? Did the experience meet your expectations? Did/do you feel different as a result of being confirmed?
7. Whether candidates believed that their faith had deepened since confirmation.
8. Whether/how confirmation has affected the candidate’s view of baptism.
9. Whether the candidate saw him/herself as a member of the Anglican Church.
10. The importance of holy communion in the candidate’s spiritual life.

The use of ‘My journey so far’ had a number of advantages. It gave candidates control over their story. They received the pro forma at the first interview when it was explained and they had an opportunity to ask questions about it. They were able to think about their story before the second interview and decide what they wanted to share and what they wanted to omit. Material written by the informant provided a source of data in addition to the interview. The pro forma also helped candidates to give shape to their story and share it with more confidence.

The interviews lasted for between sixty and ninety minutes. Initially the interviews were audio-taped, however I found that taking brief process notes was less intrusive and aided my concentration. The notes were written up later, usually immediately afterwards, otherwise within twenty four hours of the interview. I also kept process notes about the interview content as I experienced it.

4.3.3 Summary of themes

After the first round of interviews was complete I sent a personal letter to each research participant together with a summary of the research findings (Summary of themes – see Appendix IV). The letter gave the research participant’s biographical details and the main points they had made during the interviews. I asked whether the biographical details were correct and whether I had summarised their views accurately (see Appendix III Summary of themes letter). The Summary of themes outlined the four metaphors which emerged from the initial interviews: Returning to where I belong, Growing up, Making a commitment and Joining the family. It also included brief theoretical notes on liminality and transitional phenomena, the concepts that I had used to interpret the data. I asked whether the metaphors struck a chord and whether the theoretical notes shed light on what happened at their baptism/confirmation. The letters were followed up with telephone interviews. Following the telephone interviews I revised the metaphors on the basis of their responses.
Sending research participants the letter and Summary of themes had a threefold purpose. i) It was part of the collaborative research exercise. Participants had an opportunity to respond to my working hypothesis; ii) The Summary of themes and the follow up interview were parts of the process of constructing meaning. Meanings were not pre-given, waiting to be found, but emerged from the collaborative process (see the discussions in sections 3.2.12 and 4.2.3); iii) The Summary of themes and the follow up interview showed the development of attitudes over time as the research participants reflected on their baptism/confirmation in the light of subsequent life events. Research participants were given an opportunity to rewrite the story they had told during the initial interviews. (See the discussion of life story in sections 3.2.11 The problem of validity and the role of story and 4.6.4 Rewriting the life story).

**4.3.4 How the project was set up**

I was aware that negotiating entry would be an important issue in such a project because in my experience vicars guard their turf jealously. I contacted the convenor of the group revising the diocesan guidelines on Christian initiation. I also contacted the episcopal member of this group. His advice led to my contacting a large eastern suburbs evangelical church. I submitted an article on my research to the diocesan newspaper *The Melbourne Anglican (TMA)* in order to publicise my need for candidates. The editor rejected my article on the grounds that its publication would lead to a flood of articles from would-be clergy researchers! The two most useful sources of contacts proved to be the notices of forthcoming confirmations in the *TMA* prayer diary and my own personal contacts.

**4.3.5 How the project was undertaken**

Learning of a forthcoming confirmation, the initial step was to contact the vicar of the parish – usually by phone – and explain my research. If the vicar were agreeable I would send a number of copies of an explanatory letter for distribution to the confirmation candidates (see Appendix I). Those who were interested in taking part would give the vicar permission to pass on their contact details to me and I would phone to arrange a meeting.
Eight adult baptism/confirmation candidates took part in the project. I planned to interview each candidate four times, three meetings to take place as soon as possible after confirmation and a fourth, six months later. The first meeting was to get acquainted and address any concerns the candidate might have about participating. I also explained ‘My journey so far’ and asked the candidate to complete it for the second meeting. The second meeting was to give the research subjects a chance to discuss their Faith Autobiography, the confirmation itself, how the candidate was prepared for confirmation and how the candidate experienced the service. A third meeting was scheduled to allow candidates to raise any issues they thought were important and to cover any issues on the interview guide which had not been raised so far and a fourth six months later to hear their faith journey after confirmation.

The research program did not work out in the way I intended. My original intention was to interview prior to the baptism/confirmation. In most cases this did not happen. There were often practical difficulties in arranging meetings while the candidates were attending preparation classes. It proved easier to ask questions about the experience of preparation when the preparation was complete. The interview process started earlier than I anticipated. When I first began interviewing, I regarded the initial meeting as an opportunity to get acquainted, ‘sell’ my research and gain the interviewee’s agreement to participate. For the most part, however, those I interviewed appeared to have already decided to take part and were keen to start the interview right away. Three interviews allowed the same questions to be asked more than once over a period of time. This added to the richness of the data and acted as a check on validity. For some participants, however, ‘saturation’ (the point at which no new information was forthcoming, Strauss & Corbin 1994) was reached after the second interview.

Not all the research participants completed ‘My journey so far’. Some were concerned about the length of time this might take. Others were very generous with their time. Beth wrote her own Faith Autobiography. Chris supplied me with a copy of the essay he had written in support of his application to become an ordination candidate. Don did not write his Faith Autobiography or complete ‘My journey so far’.

Time available for interviews was another variable. I interviewed Esther during her lunch break for around 45 minutes rather than the hour or hour and a half I spent with
other participants. In consequence Esther and I met on five occasions. I met with all the candidates to hear about their faith journey after confirmation. This was planned to take place six months after the initial three interviews. Some participants, however, were hard to contact and the follow up interviews took place more than a year later. When I later summarised the research themes and sent them to the candidates for further comment I received responses from all the research participants.

Most of the interviews took place between December 1999 and January 2001. Later interviews were conducted with those who were hard to follow up. Don, May 2001; Danni and Chris, August 2001; Beth, May 2002. The Summary of themes was sent out in July/August 2003 and follow up was by telephone (email in the case of Esther who was in the USA).

4.3.6 Whom did I interview?

This subsection gives brief biographical details of the research participants and notes on the location, size and ecclesiastical tradition of the churches where they were prepared for initiation. In order to preserve anonymity I have changed the names of the research participants and the names of the churches. I asked the participants their ages and these are given to the nearest five years.

4.3.6.1 Research participants

Ailsa was baptised/confirmed in October 1999 at All Saints. She was about 30 years of age and had completed secondary education. Ailsa lived in the south eastern suburbs and cared for her three year old son, Jason.

Andrew was baptised/confirmed in October 1999 at All Saints. He was about 25 years of age. Andrew migrated from Sabah with his parents when he was seven. At the time of the interviews he had recently completed a double degree in Law/Accounting. Andrew lived with his parents in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne and worked as a lawyer. Andrew had no partner and no children.
Beth was baptised/confirmed at St Bede’s in May 2000. She was about 35 years old and had completed secondary education. At the time of the initial interviews Beth lived in the eastern suburbs with her partner, caring for her two children.

Chris was confirmed at St Catherine’s in November 1999. He was about 50 years of age. At the time of the initial interviews Chris was studying theology and had applied to be an ordination candidate. Chris had no partner and no children.

Danni was baptised/confirmed at St David’s in September 2000. She was about 40 years of age and had completed secondary education. Danni lived in the inner eastern suburbs with her partner Oliver. Danni and Oliver were married during the course of the interviews. Danni had a management role in a small publishing company.

Don was baptised/confirmed at St David’s in September 2000. He was about 35 years of age and had completed secondary education. Don lived in the inner eastern suburbs with his fiancée Jenny. Don and Jenny were married during the course of the interviews. Don ran his own lighting/sound/music business with a business partner.

Edward was baptised/confirmed at St Elizabeth’s in May 2000. He was about 25 years old and lived in the inner eastern suburbs with his parents. Edward was a university graduate and worked for a major newspaper. He had no partner and no children.

Esther was confirmed at St Elizabeth’s in May 2000. She was about 25 years old and lived in the northern suburbs. Esther was tertiary educated and worked at an Anglican agency in Melbourne. Esther was engaged to Noel and they were married during the course of the interviews.

4.3.6.2 The churches

All Saints is a medium sized evangelical church in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

St Bede’s is a medium sized catholic church in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

St Catherine’s is a small evangelical inner city church.
St David’s is a medium sized catholic church in the eastern suburbs.

St Elizabeth’s is a large evangelical church in the eastern suburbs.

A note about terminology: catholic - a church whose ministry values liturgy and the tradition of the church; evangelical - a church whose ministry focuses on Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Bible. Worship services at evangelical churches tend to be informal and minimise the use of a written liturgy.

The statistics from the *Yearbook of the Diocese of Melbourne 2000* indicated that the medium sized churches to which the candidates belonged had an average of around 100 communicants per Sunday. The small church was significantly smaller than that; the large church was significantly larger than that.

### 4.4 Data Analysis

My attempts to make sense of the data were grounded in reading and rereading the interview transcripts. I noted items that recurred and carried out a content analysis for significant topics. As I went along I attempted to develop hypotheses which I then checked against the data. This activity included a fair amount of frustration and false starts. Nevertheless the cycle of data analysis, hypothesis generation and refinement is part of the research process (Turner 1983; Martin & Turner 1986).

I noted that preparation for confirmation is a form of transition. This led to my interest in Donald Winnicott’s (1965, 1971) writing about transitional objects and Victor Turner’s (1969, 1972, 1976) studies of liminality and rites of passage. I noticed that some of those whom I interviewed were in transition in other parts of their lives. Andrew, for example, prepared for baptism/confirmation while he was in transition between university and work. Danni, Esther and Rob were in transition towards marriage. Ailsa seemed to be struggling to make a transition into new relationships. She struggled over the nature of the relationship with her partner – ‘Well he is sort of my partner. It’s on again, off again’ – just as she struggled in her relationship with God and in her relationships with her friends at All Saints.
Another major theme was the network of relationships which drew the candidates into the church and held them there. (This phenomenon was noted by Stark and Bainbridge 1980.) This was particularly apparent with Ailsa. She was drawn towards All Saints through membership of the mothers’ group. Friendships within this group led her to attend the church playgroup and then come to church.

The topics which emerged out of my study of the transcripts were organised into five principle categories:

1. References by the research participants to their experience. This included references to feelings of alienation or belonging, to the experience of being prepared for initiation and to the experience of confirmation.

2. Topics which related to an understanding of baptism/confirmation as a liminal experience or as a rite of passage. This included references to what happened at various stages in the process as well as references to baptism/confirmation as a ‘new beginning.’

3. The network of relationships which drew the candidates into the church. This included references to the major influences on the research participant’s decision to be baptised/confirmed, references to the research participant’s partner and family and references to being included in or alienated from these relationships.

4. The meaning which the candidates gave to their baptism/confirmation. This included references to how research participants understood their initiation; how baptism/confirmation seemed six months afterwards and whether or not the research participants saw themselves as members of the Anglican Church.

5. The diversity of the candidates. This included references to the diversity of major influences on the decision to be baptised/confirmed, statements by some participants that ‘I have always been a believer’ as opposed to descriptions by others of a ‘conversion experience.’

I attempted to find a statement that encompassed most of my discoveries. ‘Anglicans are not hamburgers’ highlighted the diversity of experience which the candidates encountered on the road to initiation and the variety of meanings which they ascribed to the experiences. ‘Meeting in the narthex’ viewed confirmation as liminal space. (The narthex is an area between the porch and the nave of the church where small group
meetings such as confirmation classes are often held.) ‘Networking to the kingdom’ focused on the network of relationship involved in the candidates’ initiation.

4.5 The research report

I lacked a clear focus for the research report. I wanted the report to retell the stories of the research participants in their own terms as well as to analyse the data. I also lacked a clear focus for my data analysis. I wanted the framework for analysis to arise out of the data and to encompass the majority of the data I had gathered. My attempts at analysis to date, however, were based either on pre-existing theory, such as liminality, or on categories that I assigned to the interview responses. The summary statements, such as ‘Anglicans are not hamburgers’ did not do justice to the variety of the candidates’ stories and excluded a lot of data.

Four metaphors emerged from a process of somewhat anxious free-association: baptism/confirmation as Growing up, Joining the family, Making a commitment and Returning to where I belong. I went back to the data and confirmed these impressions. Later I wrote to each research participant with his/her principal observations about their baptism/confirmation and a summary of the themes into which I had organised the interview data (see Appendix III Summary of themes letter and Appendix IV Summary of themes). This followed the model of research as a cooperative activity (as outlined in section 4.2.3) as well as the life history methodology proposed by Jones (1983). Following telephone interviews with the research participants I revised the metaphors on the basis of their responses. The stories of all research participants contributed to the formation of metaphors and to their revision. The final form of the metaphors was as follows: Belonging to myself, Returning/Starting over, Growing up, Joining the family and Making a commitment. In presenting the stories I blended my voice, theory from the conceptual framework and the voices of the research participants, in what Plummer (1983) called a ‘systematic thematic analysis’.

4.6 The contribution of the case study

The aim of the research report was both to retell and to analyse the stories of the research participants using their own terms and their own language. As tools of analysis
the metaphors were an improvement on my earlier attempts at analysis but they did not convey the unfolding of the participants’ life stories. I made the arbitrary decision to select four research participants and write their interview data as case studies. Discussion will now focus on the issues involved in organising the case study material and on the distinctive contribution which the case studies make to the project showing how meaning develops as the life stories unfold.

4.6.1. The presentation of case study material

Case studies are concerned with the particular. Each case study concerns different people and comprises data from interviews which occurred at different times and places as well as written material. For these reasons there is no standardised format for the case studies in this report. Nevertheless I have paid attention to certain issues. Each case study contains an introduction outlining how I made contact with the subject and a section describing the setting in which the interviews took place. I have also brought out my engagement with the case study subject where this came to the fore, for example the parallels between my situation and that of Chris and my presence at Esther’s confirmation. The principal aim is to tell the case study subject’s faith story so turning points in the journey to faith, what Denzin (1989a) called ‘epiphanies’, are highlighted.

4.6.2 Life story chronology and interview chronology

With regard to treatment of the material there is an inevitable conflict between the demands of presenting the material according to theme and attending to the demands of chronology. Chronology is an issue at two levels: the chronology of the life of the person telling the story and the chronology of the interviews which took place over several months/years.

The structure of the case study, that is, the way I wrote the case study, is affected when significant life story events take place during the interview period. Ailsa, Chris and Danni had been baptised/confirmed before the interviews began. I expected that with them interviews would largely involve looking back on events which had already taken place. For Ailsa and Chris, however, significant life story events took during the interview period. At the third interview (1 February 2000) Chris told me that his father
had developed cancer secondaries. When I contacted him in June 2000 to arrange a final interview he told me that he had been unsuccessful at Selection Conference and that his father had died and he did not want a further interview at this stage. These events were a watershed in the interview process and gave the fourth interview when it finally took place (18 May 2001) a very different quality to those which preceded it even though the same issues were discussed.

The critical events in Ailsa’s life story took place between the final interview (30 June 2000) when she was losing contact with All Saints and 29 July 2003 when I spoke to her about the Summary of themes. Since we were last in contact Ailsa had joined an Assemblies of God (AOG) church, and was planning to remarry. She and her fiancé were to be ‘rebaptised’ by immersion. These events were accompanied by a re-evaluation of her baptism/confirmation at All Saints and led on my part to a revision in the themes which I drew out of the case study data.

### 4.6.3 Unfolding the life story during the interview period

The passing of time impacts on the interview period when at a later interview a research participant reveals more information about events which were discussed at an earlier interview, thus changing their significance. Danni told me at the first interview (21 October 2000) that she was adopted and that she had a sense of divine encounter at her baptism/confirmation. The significance of these events was not made clear until later. Not until the third deferred interview (6 August 2001) did Danni tell me of the desolation she felt at being abandoned by her birth mother and the sense of acceptance by God and of ‘belonging to herself’ which her baptism/confirmation conferred. Danni’s response to the Summary of themes (24 July 2003) indicated a further shift in her account of what her baptism/confirmation meant. She now spoke of ‘belonging in the community …, being one of God’s children like everybody else.’

### 4.6.4 Rewriting the life story

Section 3.2.12 noted the importance of the life story as the means by which we identify ourselves and give coherence and meaning to life events. Life stories have a beginning (the past), a middle (the present) and a provisional end (a hoped for future). The
significant events which took place during the interviews with Ailsa and Chris altered the provisional end/hoped for outcome to their stories. This led them to re-evaluate certain life events and rewrite their life stories.

At the time of the first interview with Ailsa (31 December 1999) she was finding support within the All Saints church community and from the relationship with her then partner. These relationships were eroded during the interview period. When Ailsa responded to the Summary of themes (29 July 2003) she belonged to an AOG church and was engaged to be married to someone else. At the time of the earlier interviews the decisive turning point in her story was joining All Saints and her baptism/confirmation (‘This is it!’). Ailsa had rewritten her life story in the intervening period. The turning point was now joining the AOG church, her ‘rebaptism’ and forthcoming marriage. Joining the AOG church was now ‘the best thing I ever did.’

At the time of the initial interviews with Chris (January-February 2000) he defined himself as a potential ordination candidate. At the final interview (18 May 2001) Chris seemed to be struggling to rewrite his life story in a way that made sense of his non acceptance at Selection Conference and the death of his father.

It seems that Danni was also engaged in rewriting her life story. The disclosure at the third interview of the significance of her baptism/confirmation may have been a function of developing trust in the interview relationship or it may have been a redefinition due to life story revision. The further redefinition in her response to the Summary of themes (24 July 2003) is a clear indication that she had rewritten her story. Previously she regarded herself as having received a special experience, now she was like everyone else.

For Ailsa and Chris, significant life events took place during the interview period which caused them to alter the shape of their life stories. This was not the case with Esther. For Esther the turning points in her story were the Alpha Holy Spirit day – ‘this was my conversion experience’ – and her later decision to commit herself to God just as she had committed herself to Noel her fiancé. Nothing took place during the interview period to alter the significance of these events. During the interview period Esther got married, decided to make her first communion at the Anglican agency, and moved with her
husband to the USA but these events did not challenge her self-definition or the provisional end of her life story.

4.6.5 Themes and chronology

The controlling factor in organising the case study material was the subject’s life story. Some themes were raised more than once during the interview period. When a turning point in the life story occurred during the interview process, this determined how references to the same theme might be organised. For example, Ailsa repeated references to her Christian background: ‘I have always been a believer’ (14 January 2000; 29 July 2003). Ailsa first mentioned her Christian background in the aftermath of her baptism/confirmation the previous October when she was talking about turning points in her life story to that point (section 5.1.4 Second interview – turning points). The second reference was in the context of Ailsa’s response to the Summary of themes in which she told me that she now belonged to the AOG and was shortly going to be ‘re-baptised’ prior to getting married. This reference was shown in section 5.1.8 Response to Summary of themes. It occurred later in the interview process after a turning point in Ailsa’s story in the context of a very different attitude to her baptism/confirmation at All Saints.

Complementary statements made at different times in the interview process were, on occasion, treated thematically. At our first meeting (18 May 2000) Esther talked about her journey to faith. She began with her baptism as an infant, her move to agnosticism, dating Peter, attending an Alpha course, and the time she made a commitment to God. At our second meeting (25 May 2000) Esther spoke about marriage and its impact on her spiritual life. She described marriage as ‘the last step of the immature Christian in the journey towards becoming an adolescent Christian.’ This statement complemented what Esther had said earlier about her spiritual journey. The two statements were not separated by any developments in Esther’s life story: that is, nothing material occurred between the two interviews. As the reference to marriage related to her spiritual journey, it was included with comments made on 18 May at 5.4.3 Esther’s journey to faith.
During the initial interviews Ailsa talked on a number of occasions about her need for a partner and the difficulty of being on her own (19 December 1999, 21 January, 30 June 2000). These are grouped thematically in section 5.1.7 Relationships.

As the overriding goal was to tell the case study subject’s life story, the six month interview and the subject’s response to the Summary of themes were always dealt with separately even if the same questions were asked and received the same responses. The unvarying nature of the subject’s responses over time constituted a significant element to the subject’s story.

4.6.6 The complementary contributions of case studies and thematic analysis

The research project was concerned with stories. Its goal was to listen to the stories of those who had been confirmed and discover the significance of confirmation for their continuing life stories. The analysis of themes which emerged from the interviews constituted a synchronic study, examining the data frozen at one point in time. The case studies on the other hand provided a diachronic study showing how the way that the research participants saw their baptism/confirmation developed over time (cf. Yin 1994). They are able to show how people struggle to maintain their self-definition in the light of changed circumstances as Chris did or to redefine themselves in the light of events, like Ailsa and Danni. Both the case studies and the analysis of themes provide essential contributions to the research project.

4.7 Why I chose these four to write as case studies

Ailsa was of interest because she was typical neither of the research participants nor of the Anglican Church. Ailsa did not have a tertiary education. University graduates are over represented in the Anglican Church (and in Australian churches generally) as opposed to the community at large (Kaldor 1995a, p. 347). Ailsa was also the only research participant with children. In our interviews Ailsa described joining the church as ‘joining the family’. The tension between saying ‘I have always been a believer’ and her decision to be ‘rebaptised’ reflected the theme Returning/Starting over.
Esther was the only example of the category I intended originally to study. She was baptised as an infant and confirmed as an adult. Her responses showed that she saw her confirmation as ‘growing up’.

Danni had no church background and no tertiary education. Her responses showed an awareness of God yet were not expressed in orthodox Christian terms, for example, she described God as, ‘my guardian angel.’ Danni stated clearly that she saw her baptism/confirmation as ‘belonging’.

Chris was a ‘Switcher’ – someone who has moved from one denomination to another (Kaldor 1991 p.226). He came to faith in the Baptist Church but was studying at an Anglican theological college and had applied to be an ordination candidate. Chris regarded his confirmation as ‘making a commitment,’ as a reaffirmation of his baptism promises, and as a commitment to the Anglican Church.

This selection lacks gender balance (one man and three women) and omits the only candidate with a migrant background (Andrew). Nevertheless three of the four male candidates I interviewed described their baptism/confirmation in terms of ‘making a commitment’. I chose Chris for case study analysis because his situation as a former Baptist applying to be an Anglican ordination candidate paralleled my own some years ago before I was ordained. I decided that to write more than four case studies would blur the focus and upset the balance between narrative and analysis necessary for a doctoral thesis.

4.8 My role as researcher

My status as an Anglican minister was central to my interest in the research topic; it both enabled and endangered my capacity to carry out the research. My status as an ordained minister helped me to access confirmation candidates through Anglican Church networks and helped in building rapport with the candidates. My status was also a potential danger in carrying out the research. Ethical problems occur when the role of the researcher and the purpose of the research are not clear (Mirvis & Seashore 1979; Minichiello et al. 1995). While my status as minister formed part of my explanation of the project to prospective interviewees, I explained carefully that I was engaged in an
academic research project. I made the nature and purpose of my research clear before the interviews and endeavoured to take the role of researcher. I was careful not to slip into the role of counsellor or confessor. For example, by way of self-reminder I removed my clerical collar before interviews and when arranging a meeting I made it clear to the candidates that the meeting was for the purposes of conducting a research interview. I am not sure however that these measures were sufficient to indicate to the candidates that I was present in the role of student-researcher rather than as a priest!

The previous paragraph depicts me going about my interviews as a cautious, conscientious, slightly anxious beginner. This is only half true. Polanyi (1962) and Turner (1988) have discussed the role of tacit knowledge: practical knowledge and skills of which the practitioner is not consciously aware. From my parish work I was well used to talking with adults about baptism/confirmation. I was in familiar territory but in an unfamiliar role and the unfamiliar role separated me from an awareness of the skills that I was used to practising in the territory. On a number of occasions I thought that I was blundering around as a beginning researcher whereas I was unknowingly accessing my pastoral skills. For example, when I ‘forgot’ the tape recorder on the second visit to Ailsa (section 5.1.2 Second interview – turning points), it was likely a response to her depression and an awareness that taking brief process notes would help me to be more present to the situation.

It is likely that this ‘knowing more than I was aware of’ characterised my relationships with all the research participants. It is a well-known pitfall of research that research subjects may tell the researcher what they believe he/she wants to hear (Minichiello et al., 1995; see also the discussion in section 3.2.11 Verification). When planning my research I was concerned lest candidates tailor their stories to give a theologically correct account of their faith journey. My tacit knowledge of interviewing paid dividends. Candidates appeared to respond candidly to my questions, unexpectedly so in some cases. I was taken aback by the readiness and enthusiasm with which Esther shared her story. In contrast Edward appeared guarded and vague. At times he seemed to be editing his answers as he spoke. Nevertheless Edward was happy to answer my questions and told me that he would like to read the thesis. In the end I decided that Edward’s manner of response indicated his thoughtful and cautious nature.
I was concerned lest I put words into the mouths of those interviewed. Kuhn (1962) has described from an interactionist perspective, the problematic nature of the interview. Again, my tacit knowledge of interviewing paid dividends. The candidates spoke their minds, at least as far as they wanted to. At my final interview I asked Esther whether she wanted to tell me anything or ask me any questions. She replied that if she had wanted to tell me something she would have done. ‘That is the kind of girl that I am!’ Looking over the interviews, I felt that she spoke for all the candidates.

4.9 Outcomes I was expecting

In an earlier paper (Savage, 1999) I discussed why adults who have been baptised as infants seek ‘rebaptism’ and how the affirmation of baptism promises might be celebrated in such a way that the ‘power’ of baptism might be accessed while preserving the integrity of baptism as an unrepeatable event. It was my experience that adults seeking rebaptism came from within the worshipping community. The question of adults seeking an additional rite of initiation is not dealt with in this research project. Nevertheless, when I prepared the present study, I expected that adults seeking confirmation would be in a similar situation, coming from within the worshipping community and baptised as infants.

In the earlier paper I posed the question, ‘Given that the majority of Anglicans were baptised as infants, why do some as adults seek an additional rite of initiation into the worshipping community while for others participation in the worshipping community is enough?’ Given that confirmation is the rite in which those who are baptised reaffirm their baptism promises I expected that the present study would go some way to answering the question. I discovered however that the majority of those whom I interviewed had not been baptised as infants and came from outside the worshipping community. It may be then that those who seek confirmation are from different backgrounds and have different motivations from those who seek ‘rebaptism’.
4.10 My confirmation and how it influenced my view of the project

As a convert to Anglicanism, I associated confirmation with taking up an Anglican identity and I held to its importance with some intensity. This came home to me outside the research situation when I was talking with a group of adults who were taking Alpha and discussing the prospect of getting confirmed. Someone raised the question, ‘If I have been baptised as an adult, why should I be confirmed?’ Someone else responded that she wanted to call herself a Christian rather than an Anglican. These comments made me realise how strongly I felt about being Anglican and that I had assumed that confirmation involved professing undying loyalty to the Anglican Church.

Recognising my assumptions and the strength of my feelings I came to see that they did not tally with what I knew about confirmation. In contrast to professing undying loyalty to the Anglican Church, the word ‘Anglican’ does not appear in the confirmation liturgy. Traditionally the Anglican Church has understood itself to be a valid manifestation of the universal Church rather than a Church with distinct doctrines, although this has been disputed by Sykes (1988). (For a brief discussion see Wright 1998.) Confirmation is reaffirming your baptism promises in the presence of a representative of the wider church (the bishop), being strengthened with the Holy Spirit and commissioned for ministry and according to the Toronto Statement, there is no reason why someone baptised as an adult should be confirmed!

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has described the methods I used in conducting the research project and the broader methodological issues which explain why I adopted these methods. The chapter has also examined how and why I presented the research findings. The research data were created in two cycles: first through in-depth interview using the Faith Autobiography pro forma; second after the initial interviews were concluded, the themes and theoretical concepts were summarised and sent to each research participant for their response. A combination of case study and thematic analysis enabled the research participants’ stories to be retold in their own terms in a way that highlighted
both narrative (the unfolding of the stories) and the analysis of common themes. The next chapter (sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4) presents the stories as case studies.
Chapter 5 Findings: Case studies

5.1 Ailsa

5.1.1. Introduction
I contacted Ailsa through the vicar of All Saints whom I met at a conference in September 1999. He expressed interest in my research and told me that he had some adult confirmation candidates whom he thought might be interested.

5.1.2 Setting
All the interviews with Ailsa were at her home. The first interview (31 December 1999) was taped. For the second and subsequent interviews (14 & 21 January, 30 June 2000) I took brief process notes which I wrote up within twenty four hours. When I rang Ailsa to talk about the Summary of themes (29 July 2003) she was living with her parents and preparing to be married.

5.1.3 First interview – belonging, problems and reasons
At the first interview Ailsa welcomed me into the L shaped living room/kitchen. We talked at the kitchen table while her three year old son Jason watched television. Ailsa made a cup of tea. It was the second interview of the project. I was less nervous when giving the general explanation - who I am, the purpose of the research and the interview procedure - though I forgot to tape it. As Ailsa began to answer the questions her face lit up. She was not conventionally pretty but was an attractive, engaging person to talk to.

Ailsa was introduced to confirmation by attending an Alpha course. Alpha is produced by Holy Trinity, Brompton, an Anglican Church in London. The Alpha format is a communal meal, a talk by Nicky Gumbel about a key issue relating to the Christian faith shown on video and a small group discussion. Alpha has proved to be very
popular, not least in Australia where more than 200,000 people have attended an Alpha course in the last ten years (alphaustralia.org.au 24/2/03). Prior to taking the course Ailsa’s faith lacked focus and direction. She ‘had always believed in God and that kind of thing...even though I had a horrible past but I didn’t know where to take my faith.’ Ailsa took Alpha because it provided an opportunity to learn about the Christian faith, ‘to get an idea of what it is all about.’ She enjoyed the videos with Nicky Gumbel. ‘He was just great.’ There was a lot to learn but ‘he put it in such simple terms.’ After every session she always came away with something positive.

At the time she joined the Alpha course Ailsa had been worshipping at All Saints for two years. She loved Alpha because it gave her an opportunity to meet other people at All Saints and the meal provided a bonding experience. Socialising over the meal enabled the group to share spiritual experiences when discussing the video in a way that they might not have done otherwise.

Towards the end of the course the vicar asked Ailsa whether she wanted to be confirmed. At that time Ailsa had not even been baptised! It did not occur to her until the vicar mentioned it. Ailsa went on to be baptised and confirmed on 10 October 1999.

Ailsa was introduced to All Saints through a former school friend whom she met at her mothers’ group. When Jason was born Ailsa joined a group for first time mothers at the local health centre where Ailsa caught up with an old school friend. When a playgroup was started at All Saints her friend asked Ailsa to join. When one of the playgroup children was baptised at All Saints, Ailsa came along to the service. It ‘touched me in a big way.’ She enjoyed the singing and the prayers and could relate to what they were praying about. ‘It hit me in a big way and I thought, “This is it!”’ Ailsa told me, ‘I’ve been going ever since.’

Ailsa received support from her sister. ‘When I told my sister that I was going to All Saints, she said, “He [God] has had his hand on you for so long.” When I was baptised she was so happy.’ She also received support from a network of church related friends. Among those who attended All Saints Ailsa knew two old school friends who belonged to her first time mothers group as well as those she had met at the church playgroup. ‘So I knew quite a handful of people and then I got to know more and more and I felt like
part of the family.’ Ailsa already felt part of the church but being baptised and confirmed, ‘that’s it. I’m really in!’

I asked Ailsa what it was that she felt ‘really in.’ Baptism and confirmation gave her a greater sense of belonging. Most of those at All Saints had been baptised and confirmed ‘because they knew that’s where they belong and that’s what they wanted to do. They followed their faith as best they could...’ In consequence when she was baptised and confirmed she felt like everyone else.

Ailsa encountered a number of problems after her baptism/confirmation. ‘At the moment I am trying to renew my faith because it took a nose dive only about two weeks after my baptism.’ Ailsa said that a number of things happened that she could not cope with and led her to decide that she did not care about her faith: her ex-husband wanted to sell the home; there was trouble with Ailsa’s partner; she was not coping with Jason and with the problems of being a single parent; she struggled to make ends meet financially; a girl-friend rang up and questioned their friendship; Ailsa broke her toe and then finally tried to commit suicide. Following this Ailsa stopped attending church.

Ailsa said that things were better now but the stress had led her to take up smoking - her partner smokes. The relationship with her partner had improved since a mutual friend had brought them together for a meal to celebrate her birthday.

I asked Ailsa what happened to pull her back to All Saints. She said that close friends at church would ring up every day to see how she was going. ‘They were fantastic.’ One friend came over and brought her lunch and offered money. This made Ailsa realise that people do care. ‘They were forever quoting verses from the Bible, “read this; read this”, so I would read, and it was a help. “No matter what, God loves you and he won’t dish out more than you are able to handle.” Slowly things started to get better and I started to cope a bit better.’

Ailsa had recently been in hospital with a recurrence of fluid on the brain. She endured lumbar punctures every two days. The doctors had trouble finding her spinal canal and she was crying with pain. ‘I thought, “Pray. You've got to pray.” I lay on that bed and prayed and sure enough it worked! Am I imagining it or have my prayers been
answered? Sometimes I don't know. But ever since then I’ve got to hospital and I’ve prayed before the doctors come in and they’ve had no problem so I guess that renewed my faith a little bit.’ Ailsa said that she still had problems wondering whether it was a coincidence or not. She told herself that maybe she had to believe more.

When I gave Ailsa the Faith Autobiography pro forma I said that completing it helped you to see a pattern to events in your life. Ailsa responded that that during an Alpha discussion she realised that she had ‘a terrible past’ and that her niece was going through exactly the same stage that she had been through. Ailsa realised that she was here to put her niece ‘on the right road.’ As her niece told her in confidence what had happened, Ailsa was able to mentor her. ‘That is what I am here for. That is why these things happened to me. I went home from Alpha on cloud nine. There is a reason.’

5.1.4 Second interview – turning points

Two weeks later (14 January 2000) I visited Ailsa for our second interview. On arriving at the house I realised that I had left my tape recorder at home. On reflection that was probably a good thing. Ailsa seemed depressed. She had been in hospital for treatment on Tuesday and Thursday and in court on Wednesday over a dispute with her ex-husband. When I asked about the crisis that occurred two weeks after her baptism she found it hard to talk. She sighed, looked down and began to speak several times and tailed off.

Ailsa did not offer me a cup of tea as she had before. At our previous interview she told me that she was about to go to a New Year’s Eve party. I asked how the party had gone. She replied that she had been the only single person there and that she didn’t enjoy it. There had been an opportunity to spend the evening with her partner but it had fallen through.

Ailsa talked about her life following the headings on the Faith Autobiography pro forma. ‘I have always been a believer. I had a big influence from my sister [who was 11 years older than Ailsa]. Faith did not mean anything till my early twenties. I believed that there was a Jesus, God and the devil but it did not mean anything personally. I came
to maturity in my early twenties. I was a rebel in my teenaged years - alcohol, drugs, living on the streets for a while.

‘In 1988, at 17 I met my future boyfriend. He was not a Christian. He was a friend of friends of my parents.’ Her boyfriend had a strong influence on Ailsa. ‘Because of him I gave up smoking. He said, “You can have me or you can have your cigarettes.” I settled down a lot. I guess I became more sensible. We were together for four and a half years.

‘I asked him if I could go to church with my sister. He said, “Don't make it a regular thing. Don’t do it all the time.” At age 24/25 he became a born-again Christian. He met this girl through church just after we split up. It was really ironic.’

Ailsa attributed her interest in Jesus to the influence of her boyfriend. ‘I became more interested in Jesus. I went to church with my sister. She travelled around looking for the right one [church]. We went to St Matthew’s and the Church of All Nations out Berwick way.’

Ailsa’s marriage broke up shortly after her son was born. This put an end to her church attendance. ‘I stopped going after Jason was born. It was a nightmare. I had no support. [Ailsa and her husband] had only known one another for four months before we got married. Soon after we were married I decided that I didn’t want to be around him. He started going out before 8am and not coming home until 11pm. He said, “I have nothing to come home to.” When Jason was only 20 months old, I was sick in hospital. He left. My parents were a support - fantastic - and my sister too. She is a single parent; she has four girls.’ At the time of the final interview (30 June 2000), Ailsa still had a close relationship with her mother and her sister. In fact her mother phoned during the interview. Ailsa replied, ‘I can’t talk now. I’ve got someone here. Remember I told you.’ Ailsa was now a support to her sister who was having problems with her own daughter.

5.1.5 Third interview – baptism/confirmation
At our third meeting (21 January 2000) I asked Ailsa who were the major influences in taking the decision to be baptised and confirmed? ‘Definitely the vicar. He was a major,
probably the main influence. Probably my sister in an indirect sort of way, being a Christian herself...I did it for her. I was going to be baptised anyway but she was the first person I thought of when I said that I was going to be baptised.’

What does confirmation mean? ‘Confirmation is about confirming your faith.’ I asked Ailsa to explain. She went on, ‘Confirmation is agreeing to follow God’s word.’ Ailsa made it plain that baptism and confirmation go together. Confirmation is not a separate thing.

I asked whether her confirmation evoked positive emotions. Ailsa said that she had some photographs of her confirmation. As Ailsa showed me the pictures she said, ‘It was a big day, that one...I felt special.’ I asked how she felt when the bishop laid hands on her and prayed. ‘We were lined up and the bishop went along. It was not such a personal thing. I thought I might have felt overwhelmed, filled with the Spirit. But I was not disappointed. It was still my day, my baptism… I felt good about being baptised and confirmed.’

I asked Ailsa what had changed for her as a result of being baptised and confirmed. Did she feel different? She was evidently struggling with the new start which baptism and confirmation represented and the difficulties which confronted her shortly afterwards. ‘The only thing that I can say is that I am a Christian...I recently renewed a bit of my faith [after the bad experience two weeks after the confirmation.] The confirmation was a new start. Like turning over a new leaf. Some things I stopped doing. Now [after Ailsa’s recently difficulties] it’s back to where it was before. Now I talk to God and know that he listens. I’ve got so much work to do. I don’t know how it [confirmation] will change my ideas. Nobody’s perfect but you still try to be a better person. It has been really hard to have my niece here. She’s into everything. Talking about boys, drinking. She doesn’t act 14.’

Has your faith deepened since you were confirmed? ‘Yes...Even though it has taken a nosedive at times. Even when I was sick in hospital [when I had a lumbar puncture], I prayed. I would never have done that before.’
Ailsa saw herself as a member of the Anglican Church following her baptism/confirmation although her allegiance to All Saints was paramount. Membership of the family of Anglican Christians did not seem to be important. ‘Yes, I see myself as a member of the Anglican Church. I guess so. I never thought about it before. After I was baptised I really belong here. Definitely at All Saints. I suppose other Anglican churches as well. I’ve been to St Barnabas [Glen Waverley].’

5.1.6 Final interview – spiritual life six months later

At our final meeting (30 June 2000) I recapped our previous interviews and asked how baptism and confirmation seemed six months down the track. Ailsa replied that it did not seem to be much different to when we spoke last. ‘It had its ups and downs.’ She brightened up and said that on a couple of occasions, she had a great spiritual high. It happened ‘almost as though I didn't expect it to.’ It gave her a sense of meaning. ‘It made me realise that is the answer or that’s why. Two or three times that’s happened. Just a feeling that I got that eased my tension.’

On one occasion Ailsa was watching television in the evening and began to cry uncontrollably. ‘I’d had talks with my partner. (Well he is sort of my partner. It’s on again, off again.) I was feeling very lonely, alone. I pulled myself together and I just prayed to be filled with the Spirit and to take away the loneliness.’ Ailsa said that she felt very calm and peaceful and the overwhelming sense of loneliness had not reoccurred.

Another time she was listening to a song called, ‘A thousand angels cried.’ She liked the music but had never listened to the words before. It was about the crucifixion. God had to turn his face away as Jesus died. ‘I could picture it unfolding as I heard it. I started crying, I don't know why.’ I asked Ailsa whether the song moved her because she realised that God was aware of her suffering just as God was aware of Jesus suffering. She replied, ‘Yes, something like that.’

As far as baptism/confirmation was concerned, ‘I’m still here; still having a relationship with God.’
I asked Ailsa how things were with church. She shook her head. Ailsa had not been to All Saints ‘for weeks and weeks and weeks. Probably not since Easter.’ (The interview was on 30 June.) Ailsa missed the vicar badly. ‘I felt as if he was my father. I love my own father dearly but I could not talk to him about my problems. I could talk about my problems with [the vicar] and he would give advice if he could.’

Another reason why Ailsa had not attended church was that she found it hard to manage Jason on her own. On one occasion Jason was with the other children outside the sanctuary when he began to scream during the prayers. Ailsa got up and said, ‘I’m going to kill him.’ One women just looked at her and Ailsa thought, ‘Oh no. I’ve screwed it up again.’ Ailsa blamed her temper for such incidents.

Ailsa was losing contact with her network at All Saints. She kept in touch with a couple of friends but only infrequently. Ailsa stopped going to home group because she was falling asleep. I asked whether it was because of a health problem or because she was sleeping badly. Ailsa replied, ‘All of the above. I was bored. I wasn't getting anything out of it.’

I asked if there was any advice she would give to anyone who was about to be baptised/confirmed. ‘The most important thing [when things are going wrong] is to take a step back and pray. It keeps you in touch with reality. This stuff is happening and it’s happening for a reason. Don’t give up. If in doubt pray.’ I suggested that she say to any minister about to prepare a group of people for confirmation, that they should not leave the church soon afterwards. Ailsa replied emphatically, ‘Yes.’

5.1.7 Relationships

The difficulty of being on her own was a theme running through our conversations. Ailsa spoke about the difficulties of being a single mother: the problems of coping with her son and the problem of managing finances. She also spoke about the feeling of being left out when others had partners. At the first interview (31 December 1999) Ailsa said that she found it hard that her contemporaries at church were all married. There is one single girl who belongs to the band. ‘I am the only single parent and it is so hard.’ She told me that she was not used to being single. Ailsa acknowledged that she was not
left out - it was just the way she felt about it. At a later interview (30 June 2000) she pulled a wry face when she spoke about her sister’s partner.

Ailsa told me that the relationship with her partner coloured her relationship with God. Speaking of the relationship with her current partner, she observed, ‘When things are going well there, everything else falls into place. My relationship with God goes better. Maybe I have my priorities wrong’ (21 January 2000).

5.1.8 Response to Summary of themes

I had some difficulty recontacting Ailsa. She had moved house and was no longer in contact with the Anglican Church nevertheless I was able to send her the Summary of themes. Ailsa responded warmly to my enquiry when I phoned her on 29 July 2003. She confirmed her personal details and my summary of how she saw her baptism/confirmation (‘joining the family’) but she evidently did not want to talk about them. Having rewritten her life story, Ailsa did not want to revisit the earlier version. (These issues are discussed at 4.6.4 Rewriting the life story.)

I asked whether she could relate to the other themes and she replied, ‘I could probably relate to all of it’ but she wasn’t very forthcoming. I reminded Ailsa that she had told me in an earlier interview, ‘I have always been a believer’ and suggested that this related to ‘Returning to where I belong.’ She responded positively. ‘I have always believed in God and Jesus. My parents were regular church-goers from when I was a baby. But when I was quite young my parents stopped going. Something went wrong in the church. [14 January 2000 Ailsa told me that her sister had been involved with a cult.] It was up to me to reconnect with the church and with Christians.’

Ailsa found it hard to talk about her baptism/confirmation. ‘I am now part of the AOG. A friend took me there about two years ago. I have been there about two years and it’s the best thing I ever did.’ Ailsa found it very difficult at All Saints particularly after the vicar left. ‘I was dying.’ Things were different now. ‘At the AOG I am able to let down my guard and trust people.’

Referring to the Summary of themes I asked Ailsa whether she saw her baptism as making a public commitment to Christ? She replied, ‘It’s a tricky one. I don’t feel
comfortable speaking about it to some family members because I know their feelings about the Christian faith.’ [This related to what had ‘gone wrong’ in the church in the past.]

Ailsa told me that she was going to be married. ‘Before we are going to be married my fiancé and I are going to be baptised by full immersion.’ Ailsa acknowledged that her baptism in the Anglican Church was ‘symbolic’ but she implied that this ‘full immersion baptism’ was the real thing. I was delighted at Ailsa’s remarriage and delighted that she was again part of the Church although I felt conflicted at her ‘rebaptism’.

5.2 Chris

5.2.1 Introduction

I made contact with Chris through the vicar of St Catherine’s. In November 1999 I made a brief presentation at a deanery meeting outlining my research project and appealing for adult confirmation candidates. After consulting his candidates the vicar told me that five agreed to be interviewed. It was an embarrassment of riches. I did not have time to interview them all. The vicar had supplied phone numbers and brief biographical details. I chose to contact Chris because he was the only male. I wanted to achieve gender balance in my study and I suspected that it would be hard to find adult male confirmation candidates. I was also interested to learn that Chris was a theological student.

5.2.2 Setting and initial contact

I found Chris hard to contact. I phoned his flat several times without success. When at last I got to speak to him he said it was not convenient to talk. He gave me his mobile number and suggested a time when he would be available. When I called him back on his mobile he was in a pub. He told me that he was going away on holiday. I recontacted Chris on his return and made an appointment to meet at his college flat on 17 January 2000. The second and third interviews (25 January and 1 February 2000)
were also at his flat. The fourth interview (18 May 2001) was at a café in Carlton. I rang Chris to talk about the Summary of themes on 26 July 2003.

5.2.3 First interview

I found the interview a painful experience. I was nervous beforehand. The college was an hour’s drive from my workplace and I was anxious not to be late. Nevertheless Chris greeted me affably, invited me in and offered me a cup of coffee. We sat in armchairs in his small lounge. I outlined the purpose of the project: the faith journeys of adult candidates for confirmation in the Anglican Church and how it would be done: three interviews within a three month period then a fourth six months later. The interviews would be taped. I asked Chris whether he agreed to take part and he did.

The purpose of the first interview was to get acquainted, address any concerns the candidate (Chris) had about participating and explain the Faith Autobiography \textit{pro forma}. Chris was happy to go ahead after my brief introduction. I was nonplussed. The alternatives were to conclude and make an appointment to commence with the interview proper on another occasion or to begin with the task set for interview number two. Leaving at this point seemed a bit of a waste since the interview had taken so long to set up so I proceeded with the interview feeling rather unprepared.

Chris had been confirmed while doing a student placement at St Catherine’s. Confirmation was part of an application to be an ordination candidate in the Anglican Church. Chris talked at length about his Baptist background and his introduction to Anglicanism through a prominent evangelical Anglican church in London. He seemed nervous. He spoke in a slightly serious way and wound his arms around his head rather as he talked. After a while I realised that I had not switched on the tape recorder. I was frozen: I did not want to interrupt him and I did not want to miss what he was saying.

5.2.3.1 Echoes of my own situation

I found the interview hard. Chris said that he looked at the services for reception and confirmation and chose confirmation because ‘confirmation makes a firmer commitment to the Anglican Church.’ ‘The confirmation service makes no mention of the Anglican Church,’ I said to myself. Chris was able to make a choice between
confirmation and reception: I had no choice. Chris did not undergo confirmation preparation. My confirmation preparation reinforced my sense of being an outsider. I was the only male in the class. The others were ladies in their fifties and sixties with a long history in the Anglican Church. For most of them it was a refresher course. Chris seemed at ease with the Anglican hierarchy. He had already met the bishop who confirmed him ‘socially’. I wondered what that meant. Chris had been asked to join the staff of this eminent London church. (When I discovered later that he had been a chef, I felt less envious and threatened.) Chris rejected the baptism of infants and clergy wearing robes. I felt resentful that he was applying for ordination in the Anglican Church yet was picking and choosing what aspects of Anglican order he accepted. I wrote in my journal the next day. ‘Well, what would you expect in a Switcher who is going for ordination! I need to hang loose.’

Chris’ situation closely paralleled my own both as a confirmation candidate and as an applicant for ordination. He had been brought up and come to faith in the Baptist Church yet had been confirmed as part of an application to become an ordination candidate in the Anglican Church. I too had been brought up in the Baptist Church. My father had been a Baptist minister. I too had come to faith in the Baptist Church. Like Chris, I had been drawn into the Anglican Church by experiencing the Anglican evangelical tradition. However the evangelical tradition forms only one colour in the Anglican spectrum. For me, confirmation meant letting go of my Baptist identity and embracing an Anglican identity. It involved confronting other hitherto alien traditions within Anglicanism and the painful investigation of what it meant for me to be an Anglican.

Transferring from one denomination to another while applying for ordination is asking for a two-fold acceptance – and risking a two-fold rejection. (I have never heard of anyone from another denomination being rejected for confirmation but I have heard of applicants for ordination who have been told that they are ‘not Anglican enough’.) Chris and I sought acceptance both as Anglicans and as ordained ministers-to-be. Coping with the anxiety this situation provokes is quite a challenge. The transition from lay Baptist to ordained Anglican was straightforward for neither of us. At the time of the interview with Chris I had been ordained to the priesthood but the issues we talked about reopened wounds that had scarcely healed. The anxiety and pain associated with
the two-fold transition may account for the woodenness that I encountered in my interviews with Chris. There were however dynamics at work in this interview that I was not aware of at the time. (These dynamics are discussed at 4.3.1 In-depth interview.)

5.2.3.2 Confirmation as a public reaffirmation of faith

Chris talked about what his confirmation meant to him. For him confirmation was reaffirming his faith in the presence of friends and family after his experience of divorce and depression. (He explained more about the divorce and depression in the second interview.) ‘I was able to stand up in front of, and some of those people knew, and I could say with confidence, “this is what I believe.”’ It was a significant occasion for Chris. ‘I found it a very, very important and very poignant thing to do.’

5.2.4 Second and third interviews

At the second interview Chris talked about ‘My journey so far.’ He did not complete the form but he talked about his journey to faith and gave me a copy of the essay he had written for the Examining Chaplains as part of his application for ordination. The essay outlined how he committed his life to Christ at a Leighton Ford crusade at the age of ten, his experience in the Baptist Church in Melbourne, his marriage, ten years in the UK, involvement in the Anglican Church in London, marriage break-up, return to Australia and sense of a call to ordained ministry. The interview covered the topics mentioned in the essay as well as his family relationships. Chris emphasised the religious divide within his family: his sister was a Christian missionary, his mother was a Christian but his father was not. The interview revealed a detail not mentioned in the essay. Chris had been ‘baptised’ twice! When he was baptised as a teenager in a Baptist church, Chris was not aware that he had already been baptised as an infant.

When we met for the third interview, Chris told me that he had recently learned that his father had cancer secondaries. The interview covered the topics on the interview guide, principally his experience of confirmation. Chris seemed to be struggling with a number of issues: the religious divide within his family, his father’s illness and his denominational identity – a Baptist seeking ordination in the Anglican Church.
5.2.5 Selection conference and its aftermath

Shortly after the third interview Chris attended a Selection Conference. At our first meeting when I explained that the final interview was to discover what changes confirmation had made, Chris had responded, ‘I hope that one of the changes is that I will be an ordinand instead of just a theological student.’ Things did not work out the way he had hoped however. In June I rang Chris to make an appointment for the final interview. He said that he did not want to talk. He had been unsuccessful at Selection Conference and then his father had died. Chris had withdrawn from semester 1 studies and deferred for semester 2 – although he hoped to reenrol in semester 1, 2001. I tried to encourage him by saying that I had not been accepted for ordination at the first attempt. Chris responded that he had prayed to know God’s will through the Selection Conference and would not be reapplying. I felt shocked at his news and sympathised with his decision not to be reinterviewed though I was anxious about the future of my research project. I asked whether I could recontact him in a month’s time and he agreed. Four weeks later I rang and left a message but he did not return my call.

5.2.6 The final interview

A year later I attempted to recontact Chris again. I had struggled with my research just as he had struggled with his vocation to ordained ministry. Listening to the tapes of Chris’s interviews I found them hard to transcribe due to background noise. (I decided for subsequent interviews to rely on note-taking.) I found it hard to get interview candidates and I was not clear about the direction of my research. However I was encouraged by my supervisor to persevere in making contact for the sake of completeness.

I rang the college and spoke to Chris. I emphasised the importance of an interview, however short, for completing my research. He agreed and suggested meeting at a café in Carlton.

I arrived at the café in good time, ordered a fruit juice and decided what questions to ask. I had completed a major review of the research data and decided for the sake of completeness to ask questions which arose for other candidates, even though they might
not be relevant in Chris’s case. The café did not seem the ideal spot for an interview. The interior was cramped. The tables were small and close together. There was no privacy whatsoever. There were a number of tables on the pavement but the weather was cool. There was some sunshine but rain threatened. I waited at a table outside. Chris greeted me. I did not recognise him. He was wearing sunglasses. We went in to the shop, ordered coffees and something to eat and returned to the table outside.

I asked what he was doing now and he didn’t respond so I mentioned that St Aldgate’s in Oxford were advertising for a chef, a role that he performed in London and we chatted about his involvement there. I went on to introduce the questions by reminding Chris how he spoken about the meaning of his confirmation: a public testimony of faith, ‘despite everything that has happened, I still commit myself to Jesus as my Saviour’, also that confirmation affirmed a commitment to the Anglican Church. Chris replied that these two aspects of confirmation were still relevant, even though he was no longer moving towards ordination. He worshipped at an Anglican church and took an active role there including preaching. I went on to say that he had answered my next question which was whether he had taken up a role in the church after confirmation. Chris said that the previous vicar of St Catherine’s was the vicar of the church where he now worshipped. I went on to remark that it was good to have someone to provide a home and opportunities for ministry when you no longer fit into the normal training rut.

I asked whether Chris’s faith had grown in the year or so since his confirmation. Chris said that he had just gone through ‘the worst year of my life.’ (That was a powerful statement since he had previously been through a marriage break-up and had been counselled for depression.) Chris said that he had been turned down for ordination and his father had died six weeks later. He was still struggling in his relationship with God. He said he didn’t know whether his faith had grown or not. Looking back his confirmation provided ‘an anchor’. Maybe it was ‘part of God’s plan’. I told him that looking over the interview data most of the candidates had gone through some kind of difficulty after their baptism/confirmation. Chris remarked that showed some kind of satanic attack.

The last prepared question was whether he felt he was joining anything at confirmation, if so, what? Chris said, No. He was baptised and felt part of the church already. He
quoted John Stott to the effect that he was a Christian first, an Evangelical second and an Anglican last. Nevertheless as confirmation was part of his preparation for ordination, there was a joining aspect to it. (He seemed to express regret as he said that.) He chose confirmation rather than reception because it expressed a commitment to the Anglican Church.

I asked whether there was any bonding with the other candidates at confirmation? Yes, there was a sense of being united in making the same commitment. Chris went on to say that even though there were some aspects of the Anglican church that he did not feel comfortable about: robing and the baptism of infants, the Anglican Church in Melbourne had a sense of mission which other churches lacked and there was a respect for communion which he found lacking in his Baptist heritage.

Finally I asked whether the interview had helped form his view of what confirmation meant. Chris said Yes. It was a help to be reminded of what he said at the first interview about confessing his faith publicly despite the terrible things he had been through and his clinical depression. I went on to ask whether there was anything more he wanted to say or to ask about my research. Chris said that he was still ‘committed to full-time service’ and was feeling frustrated that it did not seem to be on the horizon at present. We talked about how vacancies were filled. After our conversation came to an end I asked whether I could phone if there was any question which I had forgotten to ask and Chris agreed, though he was hard to get hold of.

No doubt my lack of confidence in the earlier interviews and the unresolved state of Chris’ application to be an ordination candidate contributed to the sense of stiffness when we met earlier. Chris opened up bit by bit. He arrived wearing sunglasses which he took off towards the end of our conversation. At the end he seemed to genuinely appreciate the interview. Some time later I was delighted to read in the bishop’s Ad Clerum (clergy newsletter) that Chris had obtained a position as pastoral worker.

5.2.7 Response to Summary of themes

Chris’ position as stipendiary lay minister meant that it was easier to recontact him than some of the other research participants. He agreed to verify the preliminary results of
my research. I emailed the Summary of themes and we talked about it on 26 July 2003. Chris confirmed that his personal details were correct and that he saw confirmation primarily as making a commitment. He hinted that he might have given a different view if he were being interviewed now – although he did not say what that might be. I asked what he thought of the other themes/metaphors for baptism. Chris replied that they were all valid. About the theoretical notes Chris responded that baptism was a transition into becoming a full member of God’s family the Church. Confirmation was for Chris, the reaffirmation of his baptismal faith. Even though his own baptism was a long time ago he still remembered how important it was for him – that was, of course, his baptism as a teenager in a Baptist church.

Chris was friendly but not very forthcoming. Nevertheless I appreciated his candour in agreeing to talk: he was in a difficult and painful situation. It seemed as though Chris was constrained by the story which he had shared with me earlier about his journey from Baptist layman to Anglican ordinand. As a stipendiary lay minister in an Anglican church he was not free to reject the story in the same way that Ailsa had rejected hers (see section 5.1.19 Response to Summary of themes). Chris had made the transition from Baptist to Anglican but not from layman to ordinand. He had not yet found a way of weaving his life-events into a story which provided him with a viable self-definition as far as a call to ministry was concerned.

5.3. Danni

5.3.1 Introduction
Danni was confirmed at St David’s in September 2000. I made contact with the vicar through the TMA Prayer Diary. He arranged for me to meet the candidates at the confirmation rehearsal and tell them about the project. Some weeks later he sent me a list of the names and contact details of those who had agreed to be interviewed. I rang Danni and she suggested that we meet at a café near her work.
5.3.2 Setting

The initial interview (21 October 2000) was at the café. The second interview (1 November 2000) and final interview (6 August 2001) were at Danni’s flat. Danni was a lady of great emotional energy. The story of her baptism and confirmation raised issues that touched her very deeply. I did not ask for a third interview. The two initial interviews were longer than usual and covered the questions that I planned to ask. Also I was a bit afraid of her emotional intensity. I emailed the Summary of themes and rang Danni to discuss it on 24 July 2003.

5.3.3 First interview - Danni’s journey to baptism/confirmation

The café was large and noisy. I arrived in good time, looked for somewhere to sit and fended off the girl who wanted to take my order. When I had organised myself I looked about for anyone who might be Danni. We recognised one another without difficulty – two people looking for one another! – ordered two coffees and got down to business. We chatted about the confirmation and I recapped the information given in the Invitation: three interviews of about one hour then a fourth interview six months later. I briefly ran through the questions given on the revised research design and then asked, ‘Where would you like to begin?’

Danni explained her initial motive for seeking baptism/confirmation. A friend had asked her to be godmother to her son who was going to be baptised at St Andrew’s Brighton. Godparents have to be baptised and Danni had not been. She was ‘under the hammer’, as she put it. She did wonder whether she wanted to go through with baptism but because she felt honoured to be asked to be this baby’s godmother, she decided to go ahead.

Danni joined the last meeting of the preparation class. The group already knew one another. The others asked her, ‘Were you having day classes?’ Danni felt guilty that they had put a lot into their preparation and she joined at the end of the program. However she had three sessions on her own with the vicar before joining the preparation class and she continued to meet with him afterwards.
Danni grew up in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Her parents did not attend church, however she was taught to believe in God and Jesus Christ. Danni and her brother were adopted. Her brother was baptised but she was not. She had recently discovered that this was because her adoption papers had not come through at the time of her brother’s baptism. She could not be baptised because she was a ward of the state. As she grew up she wondered about being baptised but was torn between feeling it would be ‘a bit of fun’ and feeling embarrassed because baptism was for infants. Nevertheless she felt that she had missed out because she had not been baptised. Her parents took her to Sunday School but when she decided she did not want to go, she stopped going.

I asked Danni why she was baptised/confirmed at St David’s. The story of Danni’s baptism was related to the preparations for her wedding with Oliver and their attempts to have children. Danni and Oliver were to be married at a Uniting church in a bayside suburb. The minister at the Uniting church lacked people skills and Danni did not want to enquire about baptism there. St David’s was just down the road from the small publishing firm where Danni worked.

This was Danni’s second marriage. She was 44. Oliver was 30. They had been together for six years. Danni had been on the IVF program but had three miscarriages. After she lost her baby four years ago Danni went into St David’s to pray and she wrote a prayer in the intercessions book. She told me that this was quite a meaningful occasion and she ‘took something of the church with her’ so that when the time came for her to enquire about baptism she returned to St David’s.

Danni said that she had ‘experimented with different kinds of church’ and visited a Pentecostal church with Oliver. The music was better than at the Anglican church. The band was great: the musicians were professionals. The sermon was less ‘holier than thou’ (as Danni put it) than at the Anglican church but the teaching was very ‘black and white’. For example, homosexuals die of AIDS because they are under God’s judgment. This aspect of the church put her off. There was speaking in tongues and ‘falling in the aisles’. Danni did not mind this but Oliver’s idea of church was formed as a grammar school student attending the local Anglican church. He ‘likes church to be normal.’
Danni told me that the pastor of the Pentecostal church visited her in hospital when he learned about the miscarriage and was very good.

I asked Danni about her experience of baptism and confirmation. It was ‘an incredible day…an intimate one-on-one experience with God.’ Even though she was only one of those being confirmed, she felt as though the ‘verses were being said for me. God was talking to me.’ This experience came out of the blue. ‘I did not think it would have that effect.’ After describing how she felt, Danni said, ‘isn’t that terrible!’ as though she felt guilty about claiming to have a special experience. Although she let the matter drop for the time being, in the final interview Danni went on to explain why the experience was so special.

I asked whether Danni had always seen herself as a Christian. To which she replied, ‘I suppose so. He (God) keeps popping up, doesn't he?’ (Danni spoke more definitely in her response to the Summary of themes.)

The interview ran for two hours rather than the hour that was arranged. Danni kept track of the questions but her answers focused on her difficult relationship with Leslie, her partner’s mother. At first Leslie resented her relationship with Oliver and was shocked to learn about the IVF treatment. Leslie told Danni that she would have a baby when she and Oliver were married, (‘you are the chosen one’). Danni’s relationship with her own mother was also difficult. Her brother was in Perth so the responsibility for caring fell on her alone. I felt a bit alarmed by the emotional pressure of our conversation but I managed to listen to what Danni was saying and to provide an emotional container.

5.3.4 Second interview – turning points and God as a Guardian Angel

We met again on 1 November – I had to rearrange the interview due to church commitments. The café was packed and noisy. After exhausting the possibilities for other local meeting places, Danni suggested that we go to her flat.

I was introduced to Oliver, who retired to another room to watch television. Danni made two cups of coffee, produced some almond bread and we sat down at the small living room table. Danni told me that she had not completed the Faith Autobiography because
she did not know what the questions meant and what I wanted. (I was surprised – I thought they were crystal clear. Everyone else had understood them.) Danni gave the death of her father as an example of a turning point. I suggested that she write down five turning points, in any order and then talk about them. Danni wrote:

- Losing her unborn child, 1996.
- Dad dying, in 1990 while she was still based at her parents’ home.
- First Marriage in 1989.
- Meeting Oliver (second husband to be) in 1994.
- Becoming a singer. Oliver urged her to do this in 1997 in the pain following the loss of her baby.

Danni spoke about each of the turning points. I felt rather nervous. It was very personal stuff and I wondered what Oliver thought of the interview. Danni did not know that he was going to be at home! I did not take notes.

When I was explaining the Faith Autobiography I suggested that Danni might find that as she examined the turning points that God had been at work before she was aware of him. Danni responded that she did not see God as interventionist or as responsible for the death of her child or for the failure of her first marriage. She regarded God as a Guardian Angel. (She wrote this on the form.) God was always there and strengthened her and helped her grow. For example, when she went into St David’s and wrote in the intercessions book, she asked God to strengthen her baby’s lungs, or if not, to give her the strength to cope with losing him. She told the story of how she went for an audition with the band. She had been taking singing lessons but had never performed in public. She did not tell the band about her lack of experience. Before the audition and before her first gig she prayed over and over again that God would give her the self-belief to do what she knew she had the ability to do. The first gig, a dinner dance, was a great success and she sang as though she had been doing it all her life. Afterwards she felt overwhelmed with the presence of God.
I thanked Danni for the interview and asked if we could meet again in six months’ time to review how things had gone since her confirmation. The interview ran for one and a half hours.

5.3.5 Final interview: Danni’s confirmation – reprise, ‘belonging to myself’

Both Danni and I felt ambivalent about continuing. The pressure of parish work and family commitments led me to wonder whether I should continue with the research. Danni was not very enthusiastic when I phoned about a further interview however I stressed that a follow-up interview would give me closure for my research. She agreed and we arranged to meet at her flat at 4.30pm.

Danni welcomed me into the flat. She had recently arrived home from work and there were bags of shopping all over the kitchen floor. Danni asked whether I would like a cup of tea. We chatted while she made two cups of tea and arranged four melting moments on a plate which she carried into the small living room. As before we sat at a round table by the window flanked by a keyboard and a music stand.

I had asked how the wedding had gone. Danni replied that it had gone very well, Oliver had enjoyed it, the guests had enjoyed it, Leslie had enjoyed it but Danni herself did not enjoy it. The weather was very hot - 38 degrees. Danni had arranged the wedding herself. Leslie was no help. Her own mother had been sick and was asking for help. In consequence Danni was not able to enjoy being a bride and was exhausted afterwards.

I asked Danni how the confirmation seemed to her now ten months down the track. She was glad that she had been confirmed. She felt ‘more complete as a person...more a certified member of the flock.’ But confirmation has not made any difference. ‘I can’t list any real changes in my life.’

I asked whether she had taken up a role in church. Danni replied, ‘No.’ She had no time: she was changing her job and gigs with the band meant that she was not home until 3-4 am on Sunday. But if she was honest it was a question of other priorities. If she had wanted to go to church she would have made time for it.
Danni talked about the sense of loss at leaving her job. She had worked to build up the small publishing firm. The boss now wanted someone to work full-time. She had offered the job to Danni in the knowledge that she would say no, hoping to save money by hiring someone younger with less experience. Friends and colleagues told her that she would have no trouble finding something else but Danni said that as she got older she found it harder to start again. ‘I hate being the new kid on the block.’

Danni went on to say ‘maybe losing the job may be a positive.’ She was becoming marketing manager for the band and this was taking up more time. It was becoming a business but it was also ‘something for myself’ - that she enjoyed. She did not need a job for the money but it gave her a sense of independence.

I asked Danni whether her faith had deepened. ‘I have as deep a faith as I have ever had but God is not more involved in my life than he was before my baptism.’ She talked to God as she did before - even though she did not talk to God in church. Danni contrasted her view of God with that of Leslie. ‘God gives you strength and faith in your own ability. God gives you the ability to problem-solve.’ According to Leslie, ‘what is meant to be, is meant to be. God is responsible for everything in your life.’ If things go wrong, it is the devil (‘old hairy legs’). According to Danni, if things go wrong, ‘shit happens.’

Nevertheless Danni’s confirmation was a significant occasion. She was surprised at being so emotional. ‘It was a truly spiritual day…a really great day - and I didn’t start out feeling great. I was at a gig until 3 or 4 am.’ She wondered how she would get through the occasion. She did not relate to the others being confirmed. They were on some other spiritual plane. They had been to the preparation classes and she had not. There was bonding going on that she was not part of! But she was impressed by ‘the music, the singing, the robes, the regalness…a real bishop!’ She had a sense of belonging, acceptance. She said to herself, ‘If God accepts me into his home and kingdom, then I must be OK.’ She could not understand her own reaction. ‘Why am I getting all teary?’ There was a sense of warmth and belonging. Danni compared it to ‘seeing the light’ in the Blues Brothers. ‘I felt complete. Spontaneous.’

Danni returned to the theme of the unexpected impact of the day and the special experience which she had talked about at our first interview. Before the service began
she felt tired and excluded but as it went on she gained a feeling of belonging. Danni mentioned this sense of belonging several times. I asked, ‘Belonging to what or whom?’ I expected her to say, ‘Belonging to God’ but she replied, ‘Belonging to myself.’ She quoted a line from Amazing Grace. ‘I once was lost but now I’m found.’ She gained a sense of her own identity. Danni talked about her birth mother ‘who did a runner on me - twice.’ Some aspects of her story were not clear but I did not ask any questions as it seemed to touch issues which were really close to home. I did not realise how moving this was until I typed up my notes.

Danni’s mother gave her up for adoption. Danni struggled with this - even though she knew it was very hard for single mothers. Every birthday Danni would remember her mother and wonder what it must feel like to give your baby away. But when she finally met her birth mother Danni was shocked and disappointed. Her mother did not remember her birthday: ‘it meant nothing at all to her.’ This experience had given Danni ‘a sense of not quite belonging.’ Confirmation gave Danni a sense of belonging. In Danni’s words, ‘it connected me with me.’ A theoretical understanding of God’s care was replaced by something that was real. Previously ‘I knew in my head that God is my friend and ally’ but now she had a sense of being made whole.

Despite initially not wanting to give a follow up interview, Danni engaged and was candid. The phone rang twice during our interview. She apologised when she went to answer and gave what appeared to be as brief a reply as politely possible. The second time it was Oliver. She told him that she was ‘having her confirmation interview.’

5.3.6 Response to Summary of themes

Danni responded positively to my request for a telephone interview. Danni seemed delighted about the way I had recounted her story. ‘You got God as my Guardian Angel!’ She responded positively to the note about baptism/confirmation as a holding environment. ‘Definitely – that describes what happened to me.’ She confirmed that baptism/confirmation gave her a sense of wholeness and acceptance which she had lacked hitherto. ‘I have always been a believer but getting confirmed made the circle complete. It gave me a sense of belonging, feeling secure.’ She also confirmed that her baptism/confirmation had healed the sense of isolation associated with adoption. ‘With
my mother giving me up for adoption, I grew up feeling on the outer…. Although I was
given up for adoption when I was a baby, there was a lot of stuff flying around
[contributing to a feeling of insecurity]. I was not adopted until I was four and a half.
That’s why I couldn’t be christened. I grew up feeling I was a bit of a loner. I didn’t
really fit in.’ Danni still felt the healing effects of her baptism/ confirmation three years
later. ‘After my confirmation these feelings [of insecurity and isolation] have pretty
much totally diminished.’

Some things had changed. Danni and Oliver had moved house and Danni was now
working full time with the band. Over time Danni had revised her life story. (See 4.5.4
Rewriting the life story.) Danni now gave a different interpretation to her sense of
belonging. ‘Confirmation gave me a feeling, not so much of “belonging to myself” but
of belonging in the community and in the world, being one of God’s children like
everybody else.’ Some things had not changed. Danni did not tell me that she had
become a mother and I did not ask.

5.4 Esther

5.4.1 Introduction

My introduction to St Elizabeth’s confirmation candidates was rather protracted. I wrote
to the vicar in December 1999 following a suggestion by one of the regional bishops.
This led to a meeting with the minister of the young adult congregation in January 2000
and a meeting in early May with the minister in charge of the youth service. The
confirmation was scheduled to take place at the youth service on 21 May. I was told that
my letters to Esther and Edward inviting them to take part in the research would be
passed on the youth worker preparing them for confirmation. I felt the lines of
communication being drawn very thin!

5.4.2 Setting

Despite having had to deliver my invitation through two gate-keepers, my first direct
contact with Esther was fortuitous and positive. I phoned the Anglican agency to
enquire about collecting one of their publications. By chance Esther answered the phone
and told me that she had sent an email accepting my invitation. The interviews were conducted at the Blue Dog a café close by the Anglican agency (18 & 25 May, 2 & 9 June, 19 December 2000). Esther had only 45 minutes for lunch but she was an enthusiastic and interested interviewee, familiar with the Anglican ethos and ready to talk about herself. In view of the brevity of the time available we had four initial interviews and I attended her confirmation at St Elizabeth’s. Esther emailed a response to the Summary of themes in late July 2003.

I covered the introductory issues as we walked to the Blue Dog for the first interview. Esther asked why I was interested in confirmation. I referred to the results of the National Church Life Survey about the positive effects of making a public faith statement and the fact that number of confirmation candidates had fallen dramatically over the past twenty years.

The Blue Dog is a large café which sells hot food or sandwiches. It was moderately full. We found a free table and sat facing one another. At Esther’s suggestion I said grace. Esther took off her glasses before we began to speak. She said, ‘You will want to take notes.’ This signalled the start of the interview!

5.4.3 Esther’s journey to faith

Esther had been baptised as a child but was ‘agnostic’ until she dated Peter (a young Anglican priest). Esther wanted to know why a man she was interested in was so interested in God. About two years ago she had gone on an Alpha course. (Alpha is described in Ailsa’s case study at 5.1.3.) At the ‘Holy Spirit day’ (a day-long session devoted to the Holy Spirit) she prayed for the first time, went into a corner and cried. ‘This was my conversion experience.’

Esther told me that as a result of Alpha she believed in God and believed in the Holy Spirit but she had problems with Jesus. She put this down to fear. ‘Believing in God does not commit you to anything; believing in Jesus does.’ One day when reading Acts, Esther felt that she should pray for the gift of tongues but was afraid of letting go. ‘Giving yourself to God is different to believing in God.’ She told her fiancé Noel that it
was strange that she had committed herself to him but not to God so she promised to commit to God. ‘I am now a Christian.’

For Esther marriage was ‘the last step of the immature Christian in the journey towards becoming an adolescent Christian.’ ‘I am so grateful that the man that I am marrying is able to help me grow as a Christian.’ Esther spoke of them growing together. ‘Noel and I remember God more often when we are together. If we find ourselves disagreeing about something, one of us says, “Why don’t we pray about it?”’

Esther’s family used to attend church in the regional centre where she grew up. Following a rift between members of the clergy team the family ‘went their separate ways.’ Esther belonged to GFS (Girls’ Friendly Society – an Anglican children’s organisation) but found the other members unfriendly and spiteful. At age 12 she decided to become an agnostic. She wanted proof for her belief in God. She prayed that it would not rain on her birthday. ‘God it’s your last chance.’ But it did rain. ‘So I dumped him.’ She contrasted her understanding of God/Christian faith as a twelve year old with her current understanding. ‘I did not understand very much. Now I can see answers to prayer everyday.’

I asked Esther about her family’s attitude to her confirmation. ‘My sister was ecstatic. She’s a Christian. She told me that she had been praying for me for years. My parents were reasonably indifferent.’ Esther said of her mother, ‘she doesn’t seem to care.’ She said that her mother doesn’t talk about God. She goes to church at Easter but only to take communion with her mother.

I asked Esther about her sister’s role in her spiritual journey. Her sister had lived in Canberra while Esther was at university. They did not meet very often but when they did, Esther and her sister would debate theological issues. Her sister used to reprimand Esther for swearing but since her remarriage she had ‘changed her faith’ and had ‘become more of a liberal’. Her sister was now more lax about attending church and ‘parties more.’ Esther said that she was now ‘not scared of being myself around her.’ Esther used to be angry that her sister’s faith cut her off from other people (for example, by reprimanding others for swearing). Esther said that she did not want her faith to have
that effect. She said that Peter was an example of being human. Some people thought he was too human and this put them off.

Esther spoke about a party that she went to on the day of her confirmation. There were a number of ‘alternative people’ there, lesbians and people who were ‘into crystals’. She was able to talk about her faith, listen to what they believe and ‘entertain the possibility of common ground.’ Afterwards they felt that ‘they had been heard by a Christian.’ Esther said that in retrospect she should have made a deal with them. She would read a new age book if they promised to read say, John’s Gospel. ‘My faith is strong enough for that. I read the *Celestine Prophecy*.’ When Esther came to leave she told these people that she was going to be confirmed. This provoked a strong reaction. ‘I had never been so confronted before!’

### 5.4.4 The Anglican agency

Esther had an administrative job in an agency which formed part of the Anglican Church in Melbourne. I asked Esther how she came to work for the agency. I suggested that an interest in/openness to the Church/the Christian faith would be a prerequisite for applying for the job. Esther said No. ‘Vicky [a receptionist at the Anglican agency] has no interest in the church.’ When Esther applied, working for the agency was ‘just a job - but a tiny bit more.’ Her first job after leaving university was in car hire administration. She was shocked that her colleagues were stealing from the clients. When she challenged them about it, they replied, ‘It’s like this everywhere.’ To which Esther responded, ‘No it isn’t.’ At the agency Christian ethical standards are upheld. ‘Christians are not all perfect but there is genuine care for one another.’

I remarked that there seemed to be a sense of community at the Anglican agency and I wondered whether being part of that community had helped her along the journey to confirmation. Esther replied that there are communities rather than one community. ‘There is us at one end and accounts at the other...We are a little family on our own.’ Two people, Wendy and Pauline had encouraged her. Wendy had done Alpha. When Esther wondered about doing Alpha, Wendy responded, ‘Oh do it; it’s great!’ Pauline was also an important presence at her confirmation and a support as she prepared for communion.
Esther did not find community in the preparation sessions at St Elizabeth’s. It was ‘just a bunch of people in a room for two and a half hours over two weeks. We didn’t really connect.’ The classes were hurried: an eight week course had been condensed into four hours. With the rush and the large number of people involved, ‘I feel that I am being processed.’ Esther conceded that the preparation helped her understand the Old Testament, otherwise, ‘it was just a waste of time.’ I asked Esther who was her community with regard to her confirmation. The bishop. ‘It was special because I knew him.’ She said that it was moving to see ‘all these people that I loved’ especially Pauline: ‘Pauline who was like a godmother. She’s always been encouraging me to take that step.’

5.4.5 Esther’s confirmation service

I attended Esther’s confirmation service at St Elizabeth’s on 21 May. I had a strange feeling of isolation. The church was full of young people of high school age. No one spoke to me as I entered except the welcomer and a young man who bumped into me whose apology was prompted by the welcomer. I sat at the side of the church and was reading when Esther came up to say hello. Afterwards I spotted the wife of the regional bishop sitting by herself in the pews. I went over to say hello. She was pleased to see me. ‘I always find this service the hardest. No one wants to talk to an old woman.’

There were nine confirmation candidates, three baptism candidates and two young people were received into the Anglican church. The minister led the service and conducted the baptisms. The bishop confirmed and preached.

What struck Esther most about the confirmation service? ‘Looking out and seeing the faces of people that I cared about. When I saw Pauline looking like a proud Mum, I cried.’ (Esther mentioned on more than one occasion how important it was that Pauline was at her confirmation.) Esther felt set free to focus on personal worship rather than on performance. As a worship leader at St Elizabeth’s, Esther had to concentrate on harmony yet at the confirmation service she was able to let go in worship.

Even though confirmation was a liberating experience for Esther, she found aspects of the service alienating. A number of things contributed to this. A couple of times during
our interviews Esther mentioned that the minister of the youth service refused to bless her cross, a gift from her fiancé for the confirmation. When asked the minister had replied, ‘I don’t know that I agree with that’ and said that he did not want it used as a good luck charm. The bishop had blessed the cross but Esther responded that the minister’s refusal ‘didn’t sit well with me.’ Esther seemed upset as she said this.

Another factor in her sense of alienation was that Esther was confirmed at the youth service yet did not feel that she belonged there. ‘Noel and I oscillated between the two services and so we felt detached.’ After the confirmation Esther and Noel took steps to find their community at St Elizabeth’s. ‘We made a conscious decision to go to the young adult service and it has been easier. People said, “Where have you been? We missed you.”’ She and Noel also started a study group.

Esther’s attitude to St Elizabeth’s was ambivalent. Ideally she would like, ‘the music of St Elizabeth’s and the theology of St Paul’s’ (the cathedral). I asked who or what embodied the ‘theology of St Paul’s’. She replied ‘something more liberal…I have come to realise that I love to get people to come to church. I am a bit of an evangelist. But I am a bit of a liberal thinker.’

We discussed the difference between the Anglicanism Esther experienced in the regional centre where she grew up and Anglican worship at St Elizabeth’s. Esther said that she would find a ‘high church’ boring, although she might enjoy going to a high church when she got older.

5.4.6 First communion

Esther decided to make her first communion at the Anglican agency rather than at St Elizabeth’s. If she had taken communion at St Elizabeth’s it would have seemed ‘industrial’, a term she had used before to denote being one worshipper among a large crowd. She was also concerned that she didn’t know how to take communion and feared that she would be clumsy and embarrassed. She spoke to Pauline about the possibility of taking communion on her own. Pauline told her that communion is about being part of a community and suggested that she make her first communion at the agency on Wednesday morning. Pauline helped Esther prepare for the service, telling her what to
say and what to do and when. There were about ten people present including the agency’s senior staff and Noel. The Director spoke about confirmation in his sermon. It was evidently an important occasion for Esther. ‘I felt so special that I was embarrassed.’

5.4.7 Six months later

I met Esther in December and we lunched at the Blue Dog for the final interview. I asked Esther how her confirmation appeared six months down the track. She replied that spiritually it made a difference. She now felt part of the worshipping community. Previously she felt she stuck out like a sore thumb when she remained in the pew and the others went forward for communion. Socially [in the way she related to other people] however, confirmation made no difference.

Although the confirmation class made her feel as though she was being processed; looking back it did provide some bonding for those who were being confirmed. She was being confirmed with people who ‘weren’t quite strangers.’

Esther observed that there were not many confirmations at St Elizabeth’s. ‘They do not take it that seriously.’ The church puts a lot of effort into evangelism and the goal is to make mature disciples. Esther wondered whether the church was not seeing much fruit for these efforts - unless confirmation was not seen as important for this end.

Esther reflected that she and Noel were not as regular at St Elizabeth’s Sunday worship as before they were married although they were committed to their small group. She noted how she had become more theologically conservative in her thinking (my phrase) as a result of her small group membership. The group was reading Left Behind by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

Esther told me that there was a chance that they would be going to the USA with Noel’s work in April next year (2001). And so it happened.
5.4.8 Response to Summary of themes

Three years later in her response to the Summary of themes (26 July 2003) Esther gave a further perspective on her confirmation. She corrected a minor error in her biographical details but confirmed my summary of her views on confirmation and embraced the notion of confirmation as a transitional object which she illustrated with a story from her early childhood. She wrote, ‘I liked what you wrote about confirmation serving as a transitional object. It reminded me of my earliest childhood memory. I was dependent on my bottle. One day I could not find it. I searched everywhere. I remember my sister helping me look under the bed etc. Finally my mother said, “Oh well, I guess you had better turn a year older today. We will make it your 4th birthday party today.” I was so happy to have a party that I got over my bottle.’ Esther found the bottle two weeks later but was told that she did not need it any more as she was now four. She then realised that the bottle had been hidden deliberately. Esther interpreted her confirmation in the light of that incident. ‘I see that my confirmation was a public “party” celebrating the “growing up” and letting go of old things.’

Although she liked the idea of confirmation as a transitional object Esther said that marriage moved her towards confirmation rather than confirmation moving her towards marriage. ‘The whole reason I finally asked Jesus into my life after toying with the idea for a year or so, was that I didn’t think it appropriate to be committed to a person for the rest of my life, but not to God. The confirmation was a public declaration of what I had already done in private.’ As a rite of passage Esther’s confirmation combined important elements of separation, transition and incorporation. ‘Separation from what is old and gone (although there certainly isn’t any mourning involved), transition into the new life and incorporation into the world of being a public Christian.’

It was good to hear that life was going well for Esther. She and her husband were ‘still incredibly happy…we have had our socks blessed off!’ I was interested to learn that Esther, the only cradle Anglican of the group I interviewed, was now attending a large community church.
5.5 Conclusion to case studies

In this chapter we have followed the stories of how Ailsa (section 5.1), Chris (section 5.2), Danni (section 5.3), and Esther (section 5.4) came to baptism/confirmation and how they regarded their baptism/confirmation in hindsight. We have noted how the four research participants responded to life events which occurred during the period of the interviews, how the life events influenced their relationship with me and influenced the way in which they told their stories. The case studies have also shown how each of the four responded to the Summary of themes: the digest of research findings which included notes on ritual theory and transitional phenomena as well as a summary of the metaphors which I had drawn out of the interview material. Chapter 6 moves from story to ‘systematic thematic analysis’. Sections in this chapter blend the metaphors with my story and with insights from the theoretical framework. The revised metaphors are Belonging to myself (section 6.1), Returning/Starting over (section 6.2), Growing up (section 6.3), Joining the family (section 6.4), and Making a commitment (section 6.5).
Chapter 6 Findings: Metaphors for Initiation

Four metaphors emerged from my reflection on data from the initial interviews. Each research participant received a summary of the metaphors and an outline of the project’s theoretical framework. The metaphors were then revised in the light of their responses. (See section 4.3.3 Summary of themes.) The revised metaphors are: Belonging to myself, Returning/Starting over, Growing up, Joining the family and Making a commitment. They are the result of collaborative reflection between the research participants and me. The following sections present the metaphors as a systematic thematic analysis (Plummer 1983) which blends themes from the participants’ stories and my story with insights from the theoretical framework.

6.1. Belonging to myself

6.1.1 Introduction

We have heard of Danni’s journey to baptism/confirmation and beyond (section 5.4). For her baptism/confirmation prompted the discovery of a new identity: a sense of self-discovery and self-ownership which she called ‘connecting me with me.’ For Beth who was baptised/confirmed at St Bede’s in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, baptism/confirmation was also about new identity. She told her life story and explained her experience of baptism/confirmation in terms of finding God and finding herself. Beth’s baptism/confirmation was also a personal declaration of independence. (More of Beth’s story is recounted in section 6.4 Joining the family.)

The sense of wholeness and independence Danni and Beth expressed is summed up in the phrase, ‘Belonging to myself’. In this section we hear how Danni and Beth found themselves and found God through baptism/confirmation. The section draws on Winnicott’s concept of holding environment to show how the baptism/confirmation liturgy provided a safe, caring place in which the discovery of self and God could take place.
6.1.2 Danni: ‘belonging to myself’

Danni described her baptism/confirmation in terms of belonging and wholeness. Section 5.3.5 Final interview: Danni’s confirmation – reprise ‘belonging to myself’ describes how this came about. Danni was tired and initially felt disconnected from the confirmation service, however she was drawn into the ceremony and experienced a sense of wholeness and of being accepted by God. The sense of being accepted replaced the sense of rejection which she had felt from her birth-mother. Danni called this sense of connection, ‘belonging to myself’ (6 August 2001). (Section 6.4.10 relates Danni’s new identity to a sense of divine recognition.) Danni later softened the claim that baptism/confirmation gave her a sense of belonging to herself and substituted the idea that it gave her a sense of ‘being one of God’s children like everybody else’ (24 July 2003).

6.1.3 Beth: ‘finding God and finding myself’

Beth spoke of ‘finding God and finding herself’ (15 August 2000). These are similar ideas to those used by Danni. For Beth ‘finding God and finding herself’ occurred in two phases. She experienced a spiritual awakening through a Bible study she attended in the regional centre where she was living and later when she was baptised/confirmed at St Bede’s. ‘Finding God and finding herself’ involved asserting her independence.

After separating from her alcoholic husband Beth went to live in the country where she had an aunt. She began to attend the local Baptist church and made friends with Jan an American lady who was trying to set up another Baptist church. Jan would visit Beth for Bible studies and through these studies Beth came to know Christ for herself. God had always been in her life but going to the country was the turning point. The freedom of leaving home enabled Beth to ‘find herself’ and to ‘find God’. She described the process in this way: Going away to the country was the ‘first time to find me without being told or threatened, “you can’t do this”, “you can’t do that”’ (8 August 2000). Finding God for herself involved asserting her independence.
Beth spoke in similar terms about the change which baptism/confirmation brought about. She was now fully included in worship and was able to take communion. ‘I feel that it is like, God recognises me. Before [I was baptised/confirmed] it was like being invited to the party and you didn’t know the host but now I do. But now I know him and he knows me. Before I felt like the person being brought along as a friend. You know, “Bring a friend”’ (15 August 2000).

In her response to the Summary of themes Beth described her baptism/confirmation as a declaration of independence (8 August 2003). Baptism/confirmation was ‘doing something for myself that I have always wanted to do.’ It represented ‘being independent.’ Confirmation gave her a new sense of being. ‘I feel like something changed in me. It’s hard to explain.’ She now accepts the views of others about God but goes her own way in regard to her faith. As she put it, she wanted ‘to be with God’ and her attitude towards others is now ‘accept that or get over it. Take me the way that I am and the way I want to be.’ A work colleague had confided in Beth about difficulties at home. Beth suggested that she should pray about it. ‘It works!’ The colleague responded by interrogating her about her belief but Beth was able to say, ‘I just know!’ Now when others take a different viewpoint from hers she is able to let them have their own opinion and refrains from engaging in petty arguments.

6.1.4 The holding environment

Transitional space is not only the sphere of religious activity, it is also the sphere of therapy. The use of transitional space depends on the experience of ‘good enough’ mothering in early childhood. Winnicott emphasised the importance of ‘holding’ as part of the care provided by the ‘good enough mother’. The term ‘holding’ refers not only to physical holding but also to the total environment provided for the infant. The infant’s emotional and psychological development depends upon reliable continuity of care while the infant is in a state of psychological dependence. The therapist provides an environment which ‘holds’ the patient in the same way as the mother holds the infant. The patient comes to trust and to accept the professional reliability of the therapist just as the infant gains confidence in the reliability of the mother’s care. The holding environment enables the patient to relax, let down his/her guard, talk nonsense and
‘play’. (For this to take place, the analyst must be able to play too.) Out of this creative experience comes a sense of self (Winnicott 1971, p. 56).

6.1.5 Ritual as a holding environment

The therapeutic setting could be the conventional analyst/social worker/counsellor/minister – client relationship in which the layout of the room, the ‘architecture’ also plays a part (Winnicott 1971, p. 55). Drawing on Turner’s work on ritual it seems reasonable to assume that the therapeutic relationship may be provided by the baptism/confirmation rite (cf. Willimon 2002). According to Turner (1969), ritual guards the liminal space, the setting for anti-structure where creativity, art and religious expression occur. (See 3.3.4 Turner, liminality and communitas). To link the ideas of Turner and Winnicott, ritual provides the holding environment, where antistructure occurs and worshippers may let down their guard and be drawn into communitas, a communion of equal individuals. Other writers have developed the notion of the therapeutic value of liturgical worship. (Jones 1991b also noted the similarity between Winnicott’s concept of transitional space and Turner’s concept of liminality.)

Nichols (1985) and Reed (1978) discussed the therapeutic value of liturgical worship. Following Turner, Nichols explored the notion of contemporary worship as anti-structure. Communitas is found on the margins of society and is characterised by poverty, weakness and lack of status. Turner argued that worship may address those aspects of our everyday lives that are marginal such as poverty, illness, divorce and unemployment and may draw us into an experience of communitas. Following Winnicott, Reed conceived of liturgy as a holding environment in which worshippers may regress to dependence and be renewed for participation in the everyday world.

6.1.6 Therapy and worship as wasting time and using time

Winnicott described a long treatment session with a distressed patient. He refrained over long periods from giving interpretations. The patient was free to experience and express her distress. For this to take place the session had to be without the pressure of time constraint. ‘It will be observed that in a fifty minute session no effective work could possibly have been done. We had had three hours to waste and to use’ (1971, p. 63).
Just as play is economically a waste of time while being extremely useful, the same can be said about worship. Dawn (1999) described worship as ‘a royal “waste” of time’ which has as a useful by-product that it changes the worshipper.

6.1.7 Danni: baptism/confirmation as a holding environment

There were parallels between the way Danni experienced her baptism/confirmation and the experience of Winnicott’s patient. Danni was a very focussed individual, skilled in events management. (At the final interview she told me how she had to make all the arrangements for her own wedding.) On the day of her baptism/confirmation however Danni was not in control. She felt tired and alienated and wondered how she would get through the occasion. Her state could be compared to the sense of formlessness that is the prerequisite to creativity (Winnicott 1971, p. 55). Danni expressed a child-like wonder at the pageantry of the ceremony. The wonder was followed by a sense of belonging and acceptance which triggered a deep emotional response that she could not understand. ‘Why am I getting all teary?’ Danni ‘used’ the opportunity for personal creativity. Out of this experience a new sense of self emerged.

Danni verified this interpretation in her response to the Summary of themes (24 July 2003). She agreed with the note describing the baptism/confirmation liturgy as ‘a safe, caring place’ in which worshippers may let down their guard and experience themselves differently. ‘Definitely – that describes what happened to me.’

6.1.8 Beth: breaking free and being held by God

We have seen that baptism/confirmation provided a holding environment for Danni in which she was able to discover a new identity. It is harder to identify an experience or a relationship which provided a holding environment for Beth. Nevertheless the final interview (14 May 2002) gave a clue. Beth explained the impact that baptism/confirmation had on her. ‘My whole way of thinking has changed. I can sort out my day to day thinking in a more rational way because there is someone there with me.’ Beth’s sense of God’s presence continued even when things went wrong. ‘I don’t say, “Where is God?” when bad things happen… When things are so bad that I don’t feel him in my heart, he is beside me with his arm around me.’ Beth felt she was being held by God.
For Beth the freedom of leaving home and going to the country gave her the opportunity to connect with God and with herself. The opportunity of breaking away from those holding her gave her the opportunity of feeling that she was held by God.

6.1.9 Conclusion

For some of those I interviewed baptism/confirmation represented a personal reordering which was summed up in the phrase ‘belonging to myself’. Baptism/confirmation gave Danni a sense of wholeness and personal connectedness that she had not experienced before. ‘It connected me with me.’ For Beth leaving home and an abusive marriage enabled her to find God and to find herself. Baptism/confirmation was a declaration of independence in which she owned her allegiance to God in the presence of family and friends – who might hold differing opinions. The baptism/confirmation service, the preparation sessions and the relationships between the candidates and significant others who encouraged them on their journey provided a holding environment in which a sense of ‘belonging to myself’ emerged.

6.2 Returning/Starting over

6.2.1 Introduction

The theme of ‘returning’ emerged in my conversations with the baptism/confirmation candidates I spoke to. There was however a tension between change and continuity as they told their faith journeys. The tension was most pronounced for Ailsa. Worshipping at All Saints and being baptised and confirmed there represented a return to the church-going of her childhood. Subsequently Ailsa slipped away from All Saints following a number of personal difficulties and later joined an AOG church. At our final contact Ailsa (29 July 2003) told me that she was to be ‘rebaptised’. This represented ‘starting over’ rather than ‘returning’. This section focuses on the stories of Danni, Ailsa, Don and Andrew – their sense of ‘returning to what had been there all the time’ and the tensions between change and continuity in their faith journeys. The sense of ‘returning’ is discussed in relation to Rizzuto (1979) who, following an analysis of clinical case studies, concluded that God is a transitional object to which we may return at times of life crisis. (Rizzuto’s analysis is discussed further in section 3.4.10 God as transitional
Ailsa’s rejection of her previous baptism and her determination to ‘start over’ is related to Pruyser’s (1985) analysis of ‘realistic’ religion in which there is a rejection of mystery and symbol.

6.2.2 Ailsa: ‘I have always been a believer’

As a child Ailsa attended church with her parents and older sister. Church attendance lapsed when her sister became involved in a cult and left home. Ailsa led a wild life in her early teenage years but her first serious boyfriend at age 17 helped her settle down. Of this period she wrote, ‘Aware and believed but not following my faith.’ Ailsa would discuss the Christian faith with her sister who by now had returned to the family. ‘Even before I was baptised or was going to church I would get very emotional talking to [her sister] about Christianity and Jesus and what it means and all this kind of stuff. I thought, “Well, there must be something in it for me”’ (31 December 1999). Although Ailsa was attracted to the Christian faith and acknowledged its reality she did not put her faith into practice. ‘I never took the step of finding a church to go to and follow my faith.’ Ailsa began to attend All Saints after the birth of her son. ‘I was going to church every Sunday. I was right in there every week, feeling great.’ She took Alpha because she wanted to know more about Christianity, ‘to get an idea of what it is all about.’ On the Faith Autobiography pro forma she wrote, ‘More aware + wanting to follow my faith. Baptised 10/10/99.’

6.2.3 Starting over rather than returning

By the time of our final interview (30 June 2000) Ailsa was drifting away from All Saints. She had not attended worship for several months. When we made contact to discuss the Summary of themes (29 July 2003), I discovered that Ailsa was worshipping at a local AOG church and was soon to be remarried.

Ailsa responded warmly to my enquiry. She confirmed that what I had written about the way she saw her baptism/confirmation was accurate but evidently did not want to talk about it. Ailsa said that she found it hard to talk about her baptism/confirmation now. ‘I am now part of the AOG. A friend took me there about two years ago. I have been there about two years and it’s the best thing I ever did.’
Ailsa told me that she was to be married in ‘ten and a half weeks time.’ Ailsa acknowledged that her baptism in the Anglican Church was ‘symbolic’ but she told me that ‘before we are going to be married my fiancé and I are going to be baptised by full immersion.’

The reader will remember from her case study that Ailsa acknowledged her Christian upbringing. ‘I have always believed in God and Jesus. My parents were regular churchgoers from when I was a baby. But when I was quite young my parents stopped going. Something went wrong in the church. [Her sister’s involvement in a cult.] It was up to me to reconnect with the church and with Christians.’ Nevertheless rather than reconnecting with the church and reaffirming her baptismal faith Ailsa was being ‘rebaptised’. She was ‘starting over’ rather than ‘returning.’

It is interesting to compare Ailsa’s view of her ‘rebaptism’ and marriage with Esther’s view of her confirmation and marriage as shown in her case study (5.4.8 Response to Summary of themes). For Esther her confirmation was ‘public “party” celebrating the “growing up” and letting go of things.’ Looking at baptism, confirmation and marriage as rites of passage, she wrote, ‘I think for me, the confirmation was a combination of all three rites of passage, if that is possible. Separation from what is old and gone (although there certainly isn’t any mourning involved), transition into the new life and incorporation into the world of being a public Christian.’ I believe that Ailsa and Esther were talking about the same thing. Both were celebrating a turning point in life and a commitment/recommitment to God. Esther acknowledged that her confirmation celebrated new life that had been effected in principle at her baptism and was to be lived out in a marriage partnership while Ailsa did not accept the validity of her earlier baptism.

6.2.4 Danni: ‘God has always been my Guardian Angel’

This sums up Danni’s view of God. At the first interview (21 October 2000) I raised the question as to whether she had always seen herself as a Christian. Danni replied, ‘I suppose so. He [God] keeps popping up, doesn’t he?’ Then she asked, ‘What is a Christian?’ I replied, ‘Someone who believes in God and loves Jesus.’ And she said, ‘Then the answer is “Yes.”’
Danni’s diffidence in answering my question was probably due to a lack of clarity about the way in which she saw God. At a later interview (1 November 2000), Danni said that she did not believe in an interventionist God; for example, she did not regard God as responsible for the death of her baby or the failure of her first marriage. She saw God as a Guardian Angel. (Danni wrote Guardian Angel in the ‘What has God been like?’ column on the Faith Autobiography pro forma). God was always there and strengthened her and helped her grow. The prayer for strength which Danni offered when she first visited St David’s and the prayer for self-belief which she offered at her audition and first gig with the band illustrate Danni’s view of God. (These stories are related in her case study, 5.3.4 Second interview – turning points and God as a Guardian Angel.)

Danni seemed unsure about the difference which baptism/confirmation had made to her life. ‘I have as deep a faith as I have ever had but God is no more involved in my life than he was before my baptism.’ Even though Danni believed that baptism/confirmation made no difference to her relationship with God, it made a difference to the way she felt about herself and the way she felt about God. She felt ‘more complete as a person…more a certified member of the flock – even though I don’t go to church.’

Responding to the Summary of themes letter (24 July 2003), Danni was delighted about the details that I had recorded from her story. ‘You got God as my Guardian Angel!’ She agreed that I had summarized her story accurately, nevertheless her view of God and of her own confirmation appeared simpler and blander than in the earlier interviews. Previously Danni had distinguished between the difference that her baptism made and the way that she felt about it. Her response to the Summary of themes was much less distinctive. ‘I have always been a believer but getting confirmed made the circle complete.’

**6.2.5 Don: ‘I have never fallen out of faith’**

This comment, which qualified the admission that he had no contact with the church when he went overseas for a year after leaving school, sums up Don’s spiritual journey. Starting from when he was four or five Don went to Sunday School in North Balwyn with a friend. Later he attended the church on his own. At Wesley College Don was very influenced by the school chaplain. He recounted what the chaplain told the boys
when he was in year 8: ‘there is nothing wrong with spirituality. Don’t be afraid to say that you want some guidance. Spirituality provides balance in your life.’ Don never missed a Friday chapel session, even when they ceased to be compulsory. When his parents moved to North Carlton Don attended St Peter’s, Melbourne. (‘You know. The high church’ 10 October 2000.)

The story of how Don came to be baptised/confirmed and the sense of wholeness and well being which resulted from it is told in the section, Growing up.

Listening to Don’s story I did not gain the impression of an unbroken line of church attendance, nevertheless belief in God and Christian values had remained an important part of his life (see the discussion in section 3.2.11 Verification). As he said, baptism/confirmation was ‘something that I had wanted to do for a long time.’ This was confirmed by his response to the Summary of themes letter (29 July 2003). Don and Jenny ‘returned’ to St David’s for their daughter’s baptism, however Don told me that they ‘do not go back as much as I would like to.’

6.2.6 Andrew: A submarine and a surface Christian

This heading captures the essence of Andrew’s faith journey. As a child in Sabah Andrew attended an Anglican Church with his family. The pattern of church attendance was broken when the family moved to Melbourne when Andrew was seven. When he got to high school Andrew began to attend a Baptist Sunday School. With regard to his baptism/confirmation, Andrew said that he felt as though he was travelling further on a journey which he had begun earlier at church and Sunday School but which had been interrupted. ‘I had lost it a bit’ (7 January 2000). Andrew acknowledged his time at university as a hiatus in his religious observance. He ‘put these things on the back burner.’ Andrew described himself as a ‘submarine Christian’ during this period, that is, he did not identify himself as a Christian publicly and he moved away from the set pattern of attending church on Sunday. The Christian faith remained a private reality for him nevertheless. ‘I never gave up religion and said, “No” to God. I still prayed regularly; occasionally read the Bible. I never lost the faith’ (7 January 2000). In a later interview (21 August 2000) Andrew described his spiritual condition at university as being ‘in sleep mode.’
Responding to the Summary of themes letter (28 July 2003), Andrew commented that his spiritual life showed a pattern of engagement and disengagement. Commenting on the ‘Returning’ theme Andrew said that he ‘had the commitment but it was never strong’. He was ‘returning to make a stronger commitment.’ He went on to elaborate, ‘the commitment was already there [before he was baptised/confirmed] but it was erratic. I was returning to the commitment that I had when I was younger’, that is when he attended Sunday School and church as a child. Andrew observed that fluctuating commitment seemed to be a pattern in his life. He was now returning to regular worship after three months of erratic attendance. Although he continued to be in contact with other Christians through his Bible study group, he tended to be ‘lazy’ about getting up on Sunday mornings!

6.2.7 Beth: A longed for return and reconnection

Beth was aware that God had always been at work in her life. Her baptism/confirmation was a longed for returning and reconnection. ‘Because my times with religion have been so short and far in [sic] between yet always a want to know more and be closer to god [sic]’ (Faith autobiography 15 August 2000). The time in the country marked a turning point. Her baptism/confirmation marked another turning point. Beth found the confirmation classes helpful: they ‘explained things I didn’t understand.’ She reaffirmed these views in her response to the Summary of themes letter (8 August 2003).

6.2.8 The odd ones out

Chris, Edward and Esther did not tell me that they understood their faith journey as a return to something that had been there all the time. For Chris, however, his faith journey seemed to be a matter of working through successive periods of disappointment and depression, first following his marriage break-up, then following the death of his father and being turned down at selection conference. In each case extreme personal difficulty was followed by a period of productive church ministry, first in London, then as a pastoral worker in Melbourne. Recontact with Edward to discuss the Summary of themes (2 August 2003) revealed that his journey involved a return to university – in order to study accountancy. There was no opportunity to discover whether returning had emerged as a theme in any other aspect of his journey. Esther responded to the idea of
confirmation as a transitional object (26 July 2003) by recounting a story about how on the eve of her fourth birthday her mother hid her feeding bottle. Telling this story in relation to her confirmation and engagement may indicate Esther’s return to dependence on others at times of major life transition.

6.2.9 Returning to the God-representation or starting over

The theme of returning and the tension between change and continuity as the baptism/confirmation candidates told their stories is reminiscent of the notion of God as transitional object (Rizzuto 1979). According to Rizzuto the God-representation is formed in infants from birth to the age of two years. Created from the representations of primary objects, it is uniquely connected to one’s sense of personal identity. Thus God is both ‘found’ in the primary objects in the child’s life and ‘created’ according to the child’s own needs. In later life, commonly in adolescence, the God-representation may be set aside, nevertheless it remains available for further processing. ‘Whatever the case, once created, our God, dormant or active, remains a potentially available representation for the process of psychic integration’ (Rizzuto 1979, p. 180).

All the candidates I interviewed came from homes where there was at least a conventional belief in the God of Christianity. They also attended Sunday School as children. Danni, Ailsa, Don and Andrew each spoke of returning to a relationship with God which had to some extent been set aside earlier in life. Their protestations: ‘I have never fallen out of faith’ (Don), ‘I have always been a believer’ (Ailsa), ‘God has always been my guardian angel’ (Danni), ‘I never lost the faith’ (Andrew) indicate that they had always been aware of the God-representation that they had abandoned ‘like a forlorn teddy bear…left in the corner of the attic’ (Rizzuto 1979, p. 179).

Baptism and confirmation represented returning to God (‘retrieving the teddy bear’) and was linked with an anticipated major life transition. For Don this was his marriage to Jenny. For Andrew it was the transition from university to work. Danni’s inquiry about baptism/confirmation was prompted by a request from a friend for Danni to be godmother to her son but it seemed to be linked to her forthcoming marriage to Oliver and to the desire for a child. Ailsa joined All Saints through a friendship network. She described her baptism/confirmation in terms of ‘joining the family’. During the
interviews she talked about the problems in the relationship with her current partner and how hard she found life as a single mother. It seems as though she was looking for a family in which she could find a permanent relationship.

Winnicott observed that the transitional object belongs to the world of illusion and is necessary to help the infant form relationships in the external world. Dreaming about the hoped for next stage in life, such as marriage, career, having a baby, involves illusion: taking objects from the external world and investing them with meaning from the inner world. It is as though Don, Andrew, Danni and Ailsa returned to God as transitional object, their God-representation, in order to receive help with the life transition.

What do we make of Ailsa ‘starting over’: the rejection of her baptism/confirmation at All Saints and ‘rebaptism’ by immersion at the AOG church? The most straightforward interpretation is that Ailsa left All Saints because it was unable to provide an adequate holding environment to support her through her personal crises. (This is discussed further in section 6.4 Joining the family.) Nevertheless Ailsa’s ‘starting over’ also appears to be linked with a rejection of the symbolic in favour of a more concrete view of the Christian faith.

Religious experience is the product of illusion, the intermediate area between the internal and external worlds. Religious illusion may be threatened by invasion from either side (Pruyser 1985). Invasion from the internal world leads to hallucination and untutored fantasy. Invasion from the external world leads to an over emphasis on the concrete and a rejection of mystery. Although Winnicott (1971, p. 3) regarded an over emphasis on the concrete as a hallmark of madness, Pruysr identified it as a cultural phenomenon associated with what Kierkegaard called ‘Christendom’. ‘In Christendom, pious people present their religious “finds” rather than their struggles with religion. Their car bumpers carry stickers with “I found it” messages…They pretend to know “what God says” and will tell you so, unasked. They present their convictions as churchly beliefs so self-evident that there is no room for doubt’ (1985, p. 186). The AOG tends to partake of a concrete ‘Christendom culture’. Ailsa renounced her baptism at All Saints for a more ‘realistic’ rite at the AOG church. Her All Saints baptism was
'symbolic’ but at the AOG church she was going to be baptised ‘by full immersion’. By implication this was ‘the real thing’ as opposed to the Anglican symbol.

6.2.10 Conclusion

Most of those I interviewed spoke about their baptism/confirmation in terms of returning/reconnecting. For Andrew and Don baptism/confirmation represented a reconnection with something that had been set aside earlier in life. For Ailsa it was a further step which enabled her to put her faith into practice. In that sense it represented a return. Among those who described their baptism/confirmation in this way there was a tension between their expressed sense of discovery/connection and their denials that they had ever been disconnected from God: ‘I have never fallen out of faith’, ‘I have always been a believer’, ‘God has always been my guardian angel’, ‘I never lost the faith’. The tension remained in the responses to the Summary of themes. It was most pronounced for Ailsa who acknowledged her Christian upbringing as a child while submitting to ‘rebaptism’. Andrew however acknowledged that his spiritual life was characterised by a pattern of engagement/disengagement. Ailsa, Andrew, Don and Danni were engaged in major life transitions. It seems likely that an aspect of their baptism/confirmation was returning to God as transitional object to receive help with this transition. Although Ailsa left All Saints due to the failure of the holding environment, her rebaptism at an AOG church seemed part of a search for a more ‘concrete’ religious experience than was afforded by her Anglican baptism/confirmation.

6.3 Growing up

6.3.1 Introduction

‘Growing up’ was the main theme for both Esther and Don as they spoke about their faith journeys and their experience of baptism/confirmation. Both were engaged to be married and both had a significant relationship with an older person of the same sex who guided them through the transition to baptism/confirmation/marriage. Growing up is a process of personal development marked by rites of passage. In this section the
6.3.2 Don: ‘growing up’ in emotional maturity and overcoming past hurts

Don began attending St David’s as part of the process of marriage preparation. He went to the confirmation classes with his fiancée Jenny who was already baptised/confirmed. Don came to interpret baptism/confirmation and marriage in terms of ‘growing up.’ Baptism/confirmation and marriage brought about a growth in maturity and a capacity to acknowledge past hurts and move on. Don verified this interpretation in his response to the Summary of themes (29 July 2003).

Confirmation is associated with growing up. It is a rite of passage marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. Don told me, ‘I have wanted to be baptised and confirmed since I was sixteen’ (10 October 2000). At a later interview (20 October) he said, ‘Maybe I wanted to do it as a child.’ Baptism/confirmation enabled him to receive communion and take an adult role in the church. It filled the ‘sense of something lacking’ (10 October 2000). Baptism/confirmation remedied something lacking from childhood and brought him towards maturity.

Emotional maturity is also associated with growing up. Don’s baptism/confirmation contributed to his emotional maturity. This was not only due to the marriage and confirmation preparation but also in response to the confirmation service itself. ‘I have been strengthened personally to deal with my emotions, partly through the teaching, partly through the experience of confirmation’ (20 October 2000).

Teaching about the Christian faith and practical instruction on how to manage his emotions contributed to Don’s emotional maturity. He was helped and reassured by the Christian teaching on love and forgiveness given during the confirmation sessions. The sessions ‘confirmed what faith all is about – forgiving, understanding, acceptance.’ The confirmation classes also gave Don insight into himself and skills to manage his emotions. ‘I accept things more…I can catalogue things better emotionally. Put them in the right place in my mind. I have a better understanding of my own emotions.’ The marriage preparation sessions gave him additional skills and self-insight. ‘I learned that
if I get upset, I can talk it through.’ This contributed to Don’s sense of wellbeing and ‘wholeness’. ‘I feel like I’ve got stronger resolve. I am emotionally and spiritually stronger since the class. I am more in tune with myself” (20 October 2000).

The confirmation service also contributed to Don’s growth towards maturity. He described it as ‘a personal and powerful experience…I felt like I had an aura for about a week afterwards’ (10 October 2000). Don told me that when the bishop laid hands on him he had a great sense of emotional release.

The capacity to forgive past hurts and move on is a characteristic of growing up. Don told me (10 October 2000) about a relationship some years previously which had ended when he found his then best friend and his girl friend ‘together’. The vicar’s confirmation class teaching on forgiveness helped him come to terms with what had happened and this was sealed by the experience of confirmation. Don went on to tell me how the previous week his current best friend and business partner had declined to be best man at the wedding. (He had felt awkward about standing up in front of so many people.) Don described how afterwards he had sat in the church for half an hour praying. He was then able to forgive his business partner and come to terms with what had happened. Don was close to tears as he told me of this experience.

There seemed to be a close parallel between being betrayed years ago by his best friend and the recent experience of rejection by his current friend and business partner. Don was able to forgive his business partner and move on just as he had been able to forgive those involved in the earlier incident. Don was aware of the emotional healing which had taken place. He said that he was proud that he had been able to make a commitment to Jenny after being betrayed by his then girl friend on the previous occasion.

Don told me that his growth in maturity had continued after his marriage to Jenny. He attributed the change to the three-fold event: baptism/confirmation/marriage, which he referred to as ‘the whole thing’ (10 May 2001). He referred to ‘what the whole thing has done for me.’ It included changes to his life style. Don now had his finances under control. He and Jenny were now doing ‘grown up things together.’ Don had also grown in his capacity to be assertive. His business partner had since apologised about declining Don’s invitation to be best man, nevertheless in Don’s eyes he had continued to avoid
Jenny. Don confronted him about this. Don reported that his business partner had since ‘made an effort’ in his relationship with Jenny. Don’s confidence in his ability to forgive had been strengthened. As he put it, ‘my belief in forgiveness has blossomed.’ He was able to face even the possibility of betrayal by Jenny. ‘If anything happens I can forgive and work through this.’

In his own words Don had ‘come of age, become an adult’ (10 May 2001). He associated this with taking the role of father. Don had recently attended the 21st birthday of the son of a prominent sporting identity. He was taken aback when the young man said in his speech that Don was the ‘father I never had’. Don went on to talk about having children. He had bought a second hand Marmot pram. The vicar had asked whether this was significant. Don did not say whether or not he and Jenny planned to have a family in the near future but he did say, ‘I am ready to have kids.’ He related parenthood to the teaching on God’s love and forgiveness he had received as part of his confirmation preparation. ‘You need love to bring up kids. You do not only need the love of parents but you need the love of God and the love shown by Jesus on the cross.’

Responding to the Summary of themes (29 July 2003) Don told me that he and Jenny now have a nine month old baby daughter whom they had taken to St David’s to be baptised.

6.3.3 Esther: growing up through the life cycle

Esther talked about ‘growing up’ as a Christian (25 May 2000). However this was linked to life cycle events such as growth in understanding and marriage rather than overcoming past hurts as in Don’s case. The story of Esther’s prayer for good weather on her birthday contrasts her understanding of God as a twelve year old with her understanding as a young adult. (See 5.4.3 Esther’s journey to faith.) Esther regarded marriage as a factor in her growth in Christian maturity. ‘I am so grateful that the man I am marrying is able to help me grow as a Christian.’ She was aware that Christian maturity is an on-going process and described marriage as the ‘last step of the immature Christian’ in the journey towards becoming an adolescent Christian.

The roles which Esther and her fiancé took up at St Elizabeth’s after the confirmation reflect the Growing up theme. Previously Noel and Esther had oscillated between the
young adult and the youth services. After the confirmation they made a decision to
worship at the young adult service and they began to host their own small group.
Hosting the small group involved taking up a leadership role within the church,
behaviour which is associated with attaining Christian maturity or ‘growing up’.

6.3.4 A holding environment where growth can take place

Jenny and the vicar of St David’s provided a holding environment for Don in which he
could grow in maturity. Jenny accompanied Don to the baptism/confirmation classes
and tolerated his idiosyncrasies – like wanting to be quiet during Sunday breakfast.
‘Jenny knows I have 10-15 minutes silent time after church’ (20 October 2000). The
vicar provided a holding environment for Don by teaching about love and forgiveness at
the preparation classes. This provided a container for his feelings of rage and betrayal
(which may have related to his natural temperament as well as to his experience with an
earlier relationship). Don saw his vicar as the ‘proud father’ (10 May 2001) just as
Esther saw Pauline as the proud mother.

Don verified this interpretation in his response to the Summary of themes (29 July
2003). When I asked him whether the note about baptism/confirmation as a holding
environment applied to him, Don replied, ‘Definitely’. Listening to Don talk about his
experience of St David’s it was clear that the services contributed to the holding
environment. Don told me that he enjoyed going to church. He enjoyed the environment
and the solitude. It put his mind at ease and gave him time for reflection. Don re-
emphasised the part played by Jenny. He described his baptism/confirmation as ‘a
celebration of what I had gone through with the support of my partner.’

Don was brought to a place where he could provide a holding environment for others. ‘I
am ready to have kids.’ A younger friend could say to Don, ‘you are the father I never
had’ (10 May 2001).

Esther’s fiancé and her friends at the Anglican agency, particularly Pauline, provided a
holding environment for her as she grew in her understanding of confirmation and what
it means to be a Christian. These friends encouraged her to take Alpha and Pauline
helped her to prepare for communion. It is interesting that she took her first communion
where these people were present. Later her small group provided a holding environment.

6.3.5 Marriage and baptism/confirmation as transitional objects

Both Don and Esther linked marriage and baptism/confirmation in the way that they told their faith stories. They also attributed their growth in maturity to their marriage and baptism/confirmation. Don viewed baptism/confirmation/marriage as one event. Esther related marriage to her growth as a Christian. For each of them baptism/confirmation assisted the transition to marriage as well as marriage promoting the growth in Christian maturity.

For Winnicott, the transitional object is essential in the development of personal relationships, helping the infant separate the ‘me’ from the ‘not me’. (See 3.4.4 Transitional object and transitional space). Baptism/confirmation and marriage functioned as transitional objects for both Don and Esther, assisting in the development of relationships with their future spouses and with others. After their marriage Esther and Noel led a small group at St Elizabeth’s. Don reported that after their marriage, he and Jenny were doing ‘grow-up things together’ and that he was able confront issues in the relationship with his business partner. Don’s experience relates to Winnicott’s description of creative living which he associated with transitional phenomena. Winnicott contrasted healthy, creative living: appreciatively coming to terms with the external world, with uncreative compliance, ‘a sick basis for life’ (Winnicott, 1971 p. 65).

Esther embraced the notion of confirmation as a transitional object and told how her parents gave a 4th birthday party when they weaned her from the feeding bottle. (See 5.4.8 Response to Summary of themes.) Esther interpreted her confirmation in the light of that incident. ‘I see my confirmation was a public “party” celebrating the “growing up” and letting go of old things’ (26 July 2003). The notion of celebration mentioned by both Don and Esther echoed Winnicott’s observation that holding environments and transitional objects are linked to play.
6.3.6 Growing up and rites of passage

For Don and Esther marriage and baptism/confirmation were aspects of growing up. Marriage is a rite of passage associated with growing up. Esther acknowledged this and interpreted her confirmation as a rite of passage. ‘I think for me, the confirmation was a combination of all three rites of passage if that is possible. Separation from what is old and gone (although there certainly isn’t any mourning involved), transition into the new life and incorporation into the world of being a public Christian’ (26 July 2003). Marriage as a rite of passage involves taking on new roles. We have already seen that Don took on the role of father and Esther took on a new leadership role at church. For Andrew, Chris and Edward baptism/confirmation was related to joining the world of work and a choice of vocation, life choices which are also related to growing up. This relationship is discussed in 6.5, ‘Making a commitment’.

6.3.7 Conclusion

‘Growing up’ was the main theme in the faith stories of Esther and Don. For Don the experience of baptism/confirmation represented growing in emotional maturity; for Esther growing up represented growth into another stage in the life cycle. In this section we saw how their baptism/confirmation was associated with marriage. Baptism/confirmation and marriage functioned as transitional objects which enabled Don and Esther to grow in maturity. The network of relationships in which Don and Esther both prepared for confirmation constituted a holding environment in which they were able to grow up. From the perspective of anthropology, baptism/confirmation and marriage constitute rites of passage to adulthood, that is ‘growing up’.

6.4. Joining the family

6.4.1 Introduction

‘Family’ and ‘joining the family’ represented significant themes for the candidates I interviewed, although the ‘family’ metaphor played a different role in each story. Church and family served as alternative sources of allegiance and support. However, family served as the channel by which the Christian faith was transmitted and the Christian faith also served as the means by which relationships within the family were
transformed. In this section we will hear how the church/birth-family dynamics worked out for Ailsa, Beth, Esther and Don. Baptism/confirmation provided the experience of being held and supported by Mother Church. The new identity that Beth and Danni identified (‘belonging to myself’) was associated with ‘joining the family’ through baptism.

6.4.2 Ailsa: joining, losing and rejoining the family

Ailsa described the church in terms of a family. Her membership of the church family survived a series of personal crises which occurred shortly after her baptism/confirmation. Nevertheless ties were loosened after the vicar, a substitute father, left the church. Ailsa later joined an AOG church and became engaged to one of the members there.

Family and motherhood led Ailsa to All Saints: she began attending through friends who belonged to the Mums’ Group. She felt part of the church even before she was baptised and confirmed. Baptism and confirmation enhanced her sense of belonging. ‘That’s it! I’m really in!’ (31 December 1999)

Ailsa’s case study told how her church family supported her through a personal crisis. A couple of weeks after her confirmation Ailsa faced a number of problems. She decided that ‘she did not care about her faith’ and stopped attending church. Friends from church supported Ailsa during this period and she got through with their help. ‘Slowly things started to get better and I started to cope a bit better.’

Ailsa regarded the vicar as a substitute father who was able to give help and support that her own father could not. At the time of the final interview (30 June 2000) Ailsa had not gone to church for some time. She had not been comfortable at All Saints since the vicar left. Ailsa told how the vicar had returned to take a funeral at All Saints. When she saw him she began to cry and she realised how much she missed him. ‘I felt as if he were my father. I love my own father dearly but I could not talk to him about my problems. I could talk about my problems with [the vicar] and he would give advice if he could.’
At the conclusion of the initial interviews in June 2000 relationships with the church were loosening. Ailsa had stopped attending her homegroup and made only infrequent contact with friends at All Saints. Ailsa’s own family rather than the church family was now her support network. Ailsa’s relationships and attitude had changed dramatically by the time she responded to the Summary of themes (29 July 2003). She had joined an AOG church, was engaged to be married and she and her fiancé planned to be ‘rebaptised’. It seemed as though Ailsa’s church and birth families had come together.

6.4.3 Beth: transforming the family

Beth was brought up in a family in which church allegiance was associated with conventional morality. Her baptism and confirmation transformed relationships within her birth/extended family.

Beth did not use the term ‘joining the family’ to describe her baptism/confirmation, however ‘family’ was a recurring motif as she narrated her faith journey. It appeared most clearly when she described how she felt on leaving the country town where she was living and moving to Melbourne. The move meant leaving behind the Baptist church where she worshipped and her Christian friends. Beth said of that time, ‘I wanted my little family again and I couldn’t have them’ (15 August 2000). Beth’s ‘little family’ was her family of Christian friends.

Religion had a toxic effect within Beth’s birth family. At age seventeen she was pushed into a church wedding which Beth regarded as an empty observance. Beth’s mother had arranged a church wedding for her daughter to protect the family. I noted, ‘She did not want Beth to live in sin because of the shame it would cause the family’ (18 July 2000). For Beth her church wedding was a perfunctory religious observance. The marriage took place at a church in Ivanhoe which they only visited once and never went to again. At the time of the interview Beth could not remember where it was.

Religion appears to have been an undisclosed source of conflict for Beth’s parents. Beth remembers her parents as being strict with her and bickering and arguing between themselves. Religion used to be important in her parents’ lives but had been buried. Her mother was a Roman Catholic; her father, Church of England. When Beth told them
about her own baptism/confirmation she discovered for the first time that the Church of England had been very important to her father and that he had done some training for ministry. Her parents responded to the news of Beth’s baptism/confirmation by saying, ‘we’re not into church. We’re too old for all that’ (18 July 2000).

Responding to the Summary of themes (8 August 2003) Beth disputed that religion divided the family, nevertheless I believe that the evidence points in the other direction. Beth grew up at a time when the Roman Catholic-Protestant divide in Australia was deeply felt. She told me that her mother left her children to make up their own minds about religion. Beth believed that religion was more important to her father than to her mother. Her father had been an altar boy and still kept a Bible in his bedside table. Nevertheless he did not talk about his faith. Speculating as to why this might be the case, Beth told me that if her father said anything that her mother did not like, ‘she would cut him in three minutes.’

Beth’s marriage was not a happy experience. Her husband was an alcoholic. Beth left him after four years. When Beth told her parents that she was going to be baptised/confirmed at St Bede’s, she said, ‘This is more important to me than what my marriage was’ (18 July 2000). It was as though the church provided a more authentic family than her own and an alternative source of allegiance.

The church was not a substitute for her own family, rather it transformed relationships within the family. In Beth’s words her baptism/confirmation ‘set off a chain reaction.’ Her parents’ cool reaction to the news of her baptism/confirmation led Beth not to tell her sister. Nevertheless, her sister was hurt when she found out. In the end it was decided that Beth’s five year old daughter Emma would be baptised in the same service as Beth. Beth’s sister and brother-in-law were godparents. Beth told me that her brother-in-law was very excited about this. ‘I’ve never been a godfather before’ (18 July 2000).

Beth’s baptism provided the impetus for her brother-in-law to start attending church. She told me that he had been thinking about doing this for about six months. After her baptism he started attending a Christian Revival Crusade church. Bill took Cassie his fourteen-year-old daughter to an evening service. Cassie warned her father that if it was boring, she would never go again but in Beth’s words, ‘she was hooked.’ Cassie joined
the youth group and at the time of the interview wanted to be baptised. Arrangements were made but it did not take place. Cassie was away with a friend the Sunday evening of the baptism. However her father was baptised. Bill had gone to the service with a towel and a spare pair of trousers, ‘just in case.’

Beth spoke of the changes which had taken place since Bill and Cassie started going to church. ‘The house was a lot quieter. There wasn’t any shouting like there used to be’ (18 July 2000). Beth described Bill’s baptism as ‘the greatest experience’ for him. She expected that her nephew aged nine would be baptised later. Beth remarked that the life of this family was changed ‘just because they came and watched me get confirmed.’

6.4.4 Esther: faith transmitted by the family

Family emerged as a theme in Esther’s account of her faith journey. Esther grew up in a regional town and attended the local Anglican church with her family. At the age of 12, however, she decided to become an agnostic! Esther no longer attended church but remained in contact with the Christian community through her sister with whom she enjoyed debating theological issues. Family was the medium through which Esther first came into contact with the Christian faith and through which contact with the church was maintained.

Esther described her work group at the Anglican agency in terms of a family. Her work group family formed a network of supportive Christian relationships providing the support which her birth family failed to give. Pauline, Esther’s supervisor at the Anglican agency, played a key role in her faith journey. Esther’s mother did not attend the confirmation at St Elizabeth’s; Pauline, however, did attend. Esther described Pauline as ‘the Mum who didn’t come’ (25 May 2000). Esther said that she felt quite emotional when she saw Pauline clapping the confirmands after the prayer and laying on of hands. Esther made a similar point at a later interview (9 June 2000). ‘When I saw Pauline looking like a proud Mum, I cried.’ She commented, ‘Pauline has been there from the start of my journey.’ Wendy, another colleague, encouraged Esther to join an Alpha course.
Esther decided to make her first communion with her work group family. Pauline ‘the Mum who didn’t come’ guided her in this decision. At the time of her confirmation Esther regarded neither St Elizabeth’s nor her fellow confirmation candidates as her community. Because of its size Esther ‘felt a bit like a number’ at St Elizabeth’s (18 May 2000). The confirmation group was ‘just a bunch of people in a room for two and a half hours over two weeks. We didn’t really connect’ (2 June 2000). She told me that if she had made her communion at St Elizabeth’s it would have seemed ‘industrial.’ Esther consulted Pauline about the prospect of taking communion on her own. She was concerned that she didn’t know how to take it and feared lest she be clumsy and embarrassed. Pauline helped Esther prepare for communion, telling her what to say and what to do. It was at Pauline’s suggestion that Esther made her first communion at the agency. There were about ten people at the service including the Director (who preached and presided), Pauline and Esther’s fiancé, Noel. It was in this group which included her work colleagues, that Esther found her faith family.

6.4.5 Don: reconnecting with the family

Don saw the impact of his baptism and confirmation in terms of wholeness and interpreted the personal change as ‘growing up’. Nevertheless Don’s decision to be baptised/confirmed appears to have been prompted by his forthcoming marriage to Jenny. ‘It was the right time, the right place with the support of the right person’ (20 October 2000). ‘The right time’ was while he was preparing to be married. St David’s was ‘the right place’, the church where his parents were married and where he was to be married. ‘The right person’ was Jenny his fiancée who attended the preparation sessions with him. Don came to see baptism, confirmation and marriage as aspects of a single event. Don interpreted his initiation in term of ‘growing up’, yet it was ‘joining the family’ (his marriage to Jenny) which made it possible. Esther and Danni were also baptised/confirmed while preparing to be married.

The family theme was made explicit in the final interview (10 May 2001). Baptism/confirmation enabled Don to reconnect with his own family. This was facilitated by the vicar. He had returned to the UK on the death of his father and on his return preached a sermon in which he mentioned the importance of appreciating your parents. This helped Don to reconnect with his own father. He said that during the last six months (that is,
since his baptism/confirmation) he had felt more comfortable with his family and had made the time to visit his sister and his grandmother. This was a similar phenomenon to that described by Beth where her baptism/confirmation transformed relationships within her own family.

6.4.6 What part did family play in the faith journey of the other candidates?

Family played some role in the faith journey of all the candidates I interviewed. For Ailsa, Beth, Penny and Don it was a major motif; for the others while being important, they did not describe their baptism/confirmation in terms of it.

Andrew was brought up in a Christian family. His mother was the church-attending parent. She was Andrew’s link with the church when he fell away from regular attendance during his university studies. She supported him in his decision to be baptised/confirmed whereas his father was not interested. All Saints where Andrew was confirmed was her church.

Edward was less forthcoming than the others in his response to my questions, so it is hard to assess how significant his family were to his faith journey. Edward went to Sunday School although his parents did not attend church. Edward did not attribute any significance to the fact that he was sent to an Anglican school. Nevertheless Edward’s family appear to have been supportive. He told me that his sister attended a Baptist church and that he discussed with her the prospect of being baptised. He told me that his ‘family’ attended his baptism/confirmation at St Elizabeth’s – although he did not specify who came. He was disappointed that his two grandmothers were not able to be there so they must have been important to him.

Edward came to see his baptism/confirmation in terms of joining the family. At our last interview (3 January 2001) he said that he had come to see his confirmation as ‘a symbol of being included’ as well as a public faith commitment. Edward made this point again in response to the Summary of themes (2 August 2003). In retrospect his baptism/confirmation was ‘joining the family’. He was still at St Elizabeth’s and his
baptism/confirmation represented ‘developing friendships and relationships within the church.’

Danni’s parents did not attend church, however they took her to Sunday School for as long as she wanted to go. Danni’s adoption played a significant role in her faith journey. It was linked to her non-baptism as an infant and was central to her experience of wholeness at her baptism/confirmation as an adult. The sense of rejection that Danni experienced at being given up for adoption by her birth mother and her acute disappointment when they met was healed by the acceptance she felt at her baptism/confirmation. This is discussed in 6.1, Belonging to myself.

Chris referred to his church in London as his family. He talked about the support he received at the time of his marriage break up. One of the church wardens who was a barrister in the Family Court did the legal work for Chris’ divorce free of charge. The clergy also gave advice and support. ‘I guess [the church] as a family has been very important to me’ (1 February 2000). The church was a family to him at the time of the break up of his own family.

Chris presented his family as divided along religious lines. His mother was a Christian but his father was not. Chris told how before she was married his mother asked her minister if it was right for her to marry a non-Christian. The minister replied, ‘Yes, if you really love him’ (17 January 2000). Chris thought that this was wrong advice and told me that his mother now thought so too. As an infant Chris was dedicated at the Baptist Church and then baptised at the local Anglican Church to please his father’s family. Despite the religious division which Chris reported, his father attended the confirmation. His father died shortly after Chris heard that he had not been accepted as an ordination candidate. Chris verified these details in his response to the Summary of themes (26 July 2003).

6.4.7 Joining the family as a child and as an adult

‘Family’ and ‘joining the family’ represented significant themes for Ailsa, Beth, Esther and Don. One can join the family as a baby by birth or adoption or one can join the family as an adult through marriage. For Esther and Don ‘joining the family’ through
baptism/confirmation was linked with joining the family through marriage. For them, it was a rite of passage into adulthood, related to their decision to marry, a part of the process of growing up. (This was discussed in section 6.3 Growing up.)

Baptism, even as an adult, evokes the notion of joining the family as a child. The priest thanks God that the one to be baptised has been ‘called to new birth’ through baptism (APBA pp. 58 and 77). The congregation welcomes the newly baptised as ‘a child of the one heavenly Father’ (APBA pp. 60 and 79). The baptism rite then provides a holding environment in which the one who has been born of water and the Spirit is adopted into God’s family and held by Mother Church.

6.4.8 The church as holding environment

We have seen that in different ways and in different degrees the church provided a holding, supportive relationship for Ailsa, Beth, Esther and Don. Ailsa was held and supported by the church family as she encountered personal crises, but the holding environment proved unable to support her. With the vicar’s departure – the loss of the father – and the failure of her current relationship, Ailsa slipped away from All Saints. For Don, his fiancée and the vicar provided the key figures in his holding environment. For Esther, it was her fiancé and work colleagues at the Anglican agency. Beth’s Christian friends in the country provided a holding environment for her, as did the community at St Bede’s. (Nevertheless her experience of being ‘held’ was more extensive than the support provided by the church. See 6.1 Belonging to myself.) The experience of church as holding environment was not restricted to those who initially identified their baptism/confirmation as ‘joining the family’. Edward recognised this aspect in retrospect and Chris spoke of the support he received from the church at the time of his marriage break-up.

6.4.9 Baptism as death and new life

Death and new life are theological concepts underlying baptism. The concepts of death and birth/new life also occur in object relations theory (see, for example, Eigen’s account of experiencing and faith in section 3.4.8). In this section I offer a psychodynamic interpretation of Danni’s baptism based on her longing for a child in the
face of repeated miscarriages and her uncharacteristic helplessness at her baptism/confirmation. The theological concepts of death and birth/new life are given a psychodynamic reinterpretation.

Danni described her baptism/confirmation in terms of ‘belonging to myself’. Danni functioned as an adult. She was a very capable lady who shouldered the burden of organising not only her life but the lives of those around her. Danni provided care for her mother, ran the office at the small publishing firm where she worked, functioned as marketing manager and well as vocalist for the band and organised her own wedding! Nevertheless the theme of Joining the family was very close to the surface of her story.

When I wrote the field notes for my first interview (21 October 2000) with Danni I noted that the story of her baptism was related to her relationship with Oliver, their attempts to have children and their wedding plans. The most significant turning points in her life were the death of her father and the death of her unborn baby. Danni was on the IVF programme yet it seems as though she was trapped by death. Baptism is the sacrament of death and new life. In the baptism rite the priest prays that those who are baptised may be made ‘one with Christ in his death and resurrection’ (APBA p. 58).

Danni’s competence did not extend to her baptism/confirmation. She did not prepare her own baptism. She attended only one of the formal preparation sessions and was up late the night before the baptism. It seems that her baptism/confirmation came upon her unawares and the newness of it caught her by surprise, just as like a baby at its baptism. Danni needed to die and rise in baptism before getting married in the hope of bringing forth new life. She needed to become like a baby before she could have a baby. Regrettably it seems that Danni did not go on to have a baby. In any event she did not tell me so when I contacted her about the Summary of themes and I did not ask.

6.4.10 **A sense of divine recognition**

Both Danni and Beth described their baptism/confirmation in terms of ‘belonging to myself’. (See Metaphors for initiation 6.1 Belonging to myself.) For both of them the sense of self-discovery and self-ownership was linked to the sense of divine recognition they received on joining the family through the ritual of baptism/confirmation. Erikson
linked awareness of the divine in worship to the morning ritual in which a mother greets her baby, identifying herself and calling the baby by name.

The believer, by appropriate gestures, confesses his dependence and his child-like faith and seeks, by appropriate offerings, to secure the privilege of being lifted up to the very bosom of the divine which, indeed, may be seen to graciously respond with the faint smile of an inclined face (1978, pp.89-90).

Worship and the mother’s morning greeting are characterised by ritual and the sense of being held/lifted. This is a striking parallel with the experience of Beth who felt she was being held by God (6.1.8 Beth: breaking free and being held by God) and Danni who expressed child-like wonder at the pageantry of the baptism ceremony (6.1.7 Danni: baptism/confirmation as a holding environment).

The loss of the mutual recognition to which Erikson alluded is devastating for the infant and this is what happened to Danni. She struggled with the fact that her mother had given her up for adoption. Somehow the experience of baptism/confirmation repaired the loss at her feeling of abandonment by her birth-mother. Baptism/confirmation gave her a sense of being recognised by God and a sense of her own identity. ‘If God accepts me into his home and kingdom, then I must be OK’ (6 August 2001). Danni verified this interpretation in her response to the Summary of themes. ‘I grew up feeling I was a bit of a loner. I didn’t really fit in. After my confirmation these feelings have pretty much totally diminished’ (24 July 2003).

Beth’s description of the change that baptism/confirmation had brought about for her echo Erikson’s words about mutual recognition by God. ‘I feel that it is like, God recognises me’ (15 August 2000). ‘I know [God] knows me. I knew him [in the past]. I now felt that he knew me. I’m sure that he knew me anyway but now I felt it…It was like greeting God personally’ (14 May 2002). Beth already knew God but the sense of mutual recognition gave her a sense of ‘self’ which she did not have before. For Beth and Danni a new sense of self resulted from a sense of divine recognition at ‘joining the family’ in baptism/confirmation.
6.4.11 Conclusion

‘Family’ and ‘joining the family’ were significant themes in the interview data. Baptism/confirmation provided the experience of being held and supported by Mother Church. Ailsa described joining the church as joining the family. Edward came to see his baptism/confirmation in a similar way. Esther spoke of her supportive group of Christian work colleagues in the Anglican agency as her ‘family’. Ailsa and Esther both spoke of older Christian friends as father/mother figures. Chris received support from his church family in London at a time when his own family was breaking up. For Don, Esther and Danni baptism/confirmation was also a rite of passage into adulthood. They joined the family of the church through baptism/confirmation around the same time as they ‘joined the family’ through marriage. Danni and Beth found a sense of divine recognition through ‘joining the family’.

6.5 Making a commitment

6.5.1 Introduction

Andrew, Edward and Chris spoke of their baptism/confirmation in terms of making a commitment and verified this in their responses to the Summary of themes. For each of them, however, the theme had a different meaning. What they had in common was that for each of them baptism/confirmation was associated with transition to the world of work and a choice of vocation. This was the case for me also, as my confirmation was part of the process of applying for ordination. For the majority of those I interviewed, however, the notion of joining the Anglican Church was irrelevant. This section examines the different notions of commitment involved, compares the commitment of baptism/confirmation with the commitment of marriage and discusses how the rites of baptism and confirmation symbolise making a commitment.

6.5.2 Andrew: commitment to the Anglican Church

For Andrew baptism was an expression of commitment to a particular church. He had been involved with two churches during his faith journey. Andrew deferred his decision to be baptised until he could devote time to making the decision. After graduation from
university his vicar invited Andrew to take part in an Alpha course. This prompted Andrew to take the decision to be baptised/confirmed at All Saints.

Andrew regarded baptism as expressing a commitment to a particular church. ‘I believed that being baptised was an act of which you consciously did to say that you were making a commitment to that church’ (31 December 1999). Andrew had not been baptised before due to the competing demands of the Anglican and Baptist churches. In Sabah Andrew had been brought up in the Anglican Church. When he was about seven years old the family moved to Melbourne. His mother continued to worship at an Anglican church, however while at high school, Andrew began attending a Baptist Sunday school.

University was a very busy time for Andrew. (The effect of university on his Christian life is described at 6.2.6 Andrew: a submarine and a surface Christian.) Graduation resolved the competing demands on Andrew’s time. Freed from the pressures of study, Andrew felt it was now time to refocus on the Christian faith. The vicar’s invitation to join an Alpha course gave Andrew the opportunity to resolve the competing church demands. After the course he felt ready to make the commitment and was duly baptised and confirmed.

Andrew noted that in baptism the church also made a commitment to him (7 January 2000). (In the APBA baptism rite the congregation expresses their support for the baptism candidates in their baptismal calling to live as disciples of Christ APBA p. 56).

6.5.3 Edward: an all-embracing commitment to a Higher Power

For Edward, the essence of confirmation was making a public commitment. The commitment given in confirmation was distinguished both by its all-embracing nature – ‘such a big commitment – unlike any commitment that you have made before’ and by the one to whom the commitment was made – ‘A commitment to a Higher Power’ (7 June 2000).

The commitment which Edward gave when he was confirmed was also distinguished by the people in whose presence it was made. You ‘stand up in front of your family and
friends – everyone who means something to you.’ Edward expressed some
disappointment that some of those whom he had invited were not there to witness his
commitment. One grandmother was too frail to attend; the other was ill. Edward’s best
friend declined to attend. Edward described him as ‘anti-Christian’, although he
remained a good friend (7 June 2000).

The importance of professing their faith before family and friends was echoed by others.
For Chris reaffirming his faith in the presence of those people who were important to
him seemed to be the essence of confirmation. ‘I can stand in front of family and friends
and say, “This is what I believe. In fact, I am prepared in some way to put my life on the
line for it”’ (1 February 2000). For Esther too, the support of family and friends at
confirmation was important. She said that she was moved to see at the service ‘the key
faces of people that I cared about’ (19 June 2000).

6.5.4 Chris: commitment reaffirmed
Chris regarded his confirmation as a reaffirmation of his baptism promises. He chose
confirmation because it expressed a greater commitment to the Anglican Church. In
practice, however, Chris’s commitment was to the evangelical tradition within the
Anglican Church.

Chris had been baptised, both as an infant and as a teenager – although he told me that
at the time of his second ‘baptism’ he was unaware that he had been baptised. Like
Andrew, Chris described his confirmation in terms of commitment. Confirmation was
the reaffirmation of his baptism promises. ‘I wanted to stand up and say, “Yes, I am a
Christian, I do turn away from evil and do all the things that confirmation is about”
…which is virtually the same as baptism is about in both the Anglican and Methodist
Churches.’ He had already made a profession of faith as a teenager when he was
‘baptised’ in a Baptist church. Confirmation re-emphasised his commitment to Christ in
the wake of the collapse of his marriage and subsequent severe depression. ‘I can still
stand and say, “Christ is the centre of my life. I am here because of what he has done.”’
(17 January 2000).
Although Chris was emphatic about his identity as a Christian he was somewhat conflicted about his denominational identity and allegiance. His formation in Christian understanding and ministry had largely taken place in the Baptist Church in Australia. His exposure to Anglicanism had taken place in London where for seven years he had worshipped and engaged in lay ministry in a prominent evangelical Anglican church. His overseas Anglican experience led him to study at an Anglican college in Melbourne and to apply for ordination in the Anglican Church here.

Chris was ‘Anglican with a small a.’ ‘I really don’t want people to put Anglican above Christian’ (1 February 2000). Nevertheless his choice of confirmation rather than reception was based on his commitment to the Anglican Church. For him, confirmation ‘made a firmer commitment to the Anglican church than just reception’ (17 January 2000). (In fact the confirmation rite in APBA makes no mention of the Anglican Church whereas the rite of Reception is explicitly reception into communicant membership of the Anglican Church APBA pp. 95-98.)

For Chris, confirmation also represented a pragmatic commitment. Confirmation was part of his application to become an ordination candidate: to be an Anglican priest he had to be a communicant member of the Anglican Church. ‘The initial decision [to be confirmed] was purely a pragmatic one...In talking with [the Director of Ordinands] he said, “You need to become an Anglican.” He basically said, “The sooner, the better”’ (1 February 2000).

In another sense, however, confirmation was a principled commitment. Chris believed that Christians should commit to the denomination with whom they are worshipping. ‘I believe in the importance of the Church and I believe it is important to identify yourself with the Church. You can’t identify yourself with the Church Catholic. It doesn’t work. You have to identify yourself with a denomination’ – and the denomination with which he was worshipping was the Anglican Church.

This principle led to what might be called a functional commitment to the Anglican Church. Chris was an Anglican because he was worshipping and ministering in the Anglican Church. His ‘functional Anglicanism’ transcended the possibility of ordination. ‘So even if I wasn’t going to be ordained, I think eventually if I was going to
remain an Anglican I would have done something to become an actual member of the Anglican Church and that involves confirmation or reception.’ His commitment, however, was conditional and deferred. Without his ordination application, confirmation or reception would have happened, ‘eventually and it might not have been for another five or six years.’ Chris hinted that he remained a Baptist at heart. ‘I could say till I’m blue in the face “I’m a Baptist” but I don’t go to a Baptist Church.’

Chris’s enduring commitment was to the evangelical tradition. When asked about his commitment to the Anglican Church as opposed to the Church Catholic, Chris responded by quoting John Stott, ‘I am a Christian first, I am an evangelical second and I am an Anglican third. Let’s face it, if you get numbers one and two right, number three really doesn’t matter’ (1 February 2000).

There were some aspects of mainstream Anglicanism that Chris would like to change. One of these was the baptism of infants. It is not clear from the interview data whether Chris had problems with the baptism of infants per se or with the baptism of infants whose parents are not members of the church community. Another aspect of Anglicanism about which Chris felt uncomfortable was robing for worship. He put his objections in the mouth of a third person. ‘It is slightly alienating to have us walking around in robes, “looking like Druids”, as one of my friends says. He really can’t stand the fact that the clergy stand in the front of the church wearing these linen robes. He thinks it’s intolerable and it’s driving him away’ (17 January 2000). (For arguments from an evangelical Anglican perspective about the baptism of infants, see Owen 1990. For a discussion of the issues concerning clergy dress, see Sherlock 2001, pp. 5-7).

6.5.5 My commitment to the Anglican Church

My confirmation like Chris’s was associated with an application to be an ordination candidate in the Anglican Church. My father was a Baptist minister and I had been baptised according to the Baptist tradition. For me confirmation was part of a deliberate decision to embrace an Anglican identity. It represented a change of status. Confirmation made me a member of the Anglican Church. My personal history led me to regard confirmation as a commitment to Anglican identity. My concern with Anglican identity led me to investigate the ‘joining’ aspect of baptism/confirmation. I
asked candidates, ‘Did you feel that you were joining anything when you were confirmed, if so, what?’ Also, ‘Did you feel that you were joining the Anglican Church when you were confirmed?’

6.5.6 Membership of the Anglican Church

The minister of the young adults congregation at St Elizabeth’s told me that those enquiring about confirmation were not interested in joining the Anglican Church; rather they wanted to make a public testimony (11 January 2000). It is an over statement to say that the research participants were not interested in joining the Anglican Church, however it is true that, for most, Anglican identity was not a major concern.

For Andrew baptism/confirmation represented commitment to the Anglican Church. Commitment to the Anglican Church was one aspect of Chris’ confirmation. Don regarded membership of the Anglican Church as a significant aspect of confirmation. ‘I affirmed faith to the Anglican church by being confirmed’ (20 October 2000). The other research participants saw membership of the Anglican Church as largely irrelevant.

Some emphasised their primary commitment to their local church. When I asked, ‘Do you see yourself as Anglican?’ Edward replied: ‘I have to say “Yes” but it is not a feeling that is strongly ingrained. St Lizzie’s is Anglican and I come to St Lizzie’s’ (7 June 2000). Ailsa responded, ‘Yes, I see myself as a member of the Anglican Church. I guess so. I never thought about it before. After I was baptised I really belong here. Definitely at All Saints. I suppose other Anglican churches as well. I’ve been to St Barnabas [Glen Waverley]’ (21 January 2000).

For others their baptism/confirmation was about membership of the church as the people of God. ‘I feel officially part of it all. I have always wanted to be baptised/confirmed. I feel closer to God because I am understanding more too’ (Beth 15 August 2000). Danni felt ‘more a certified member of the flock even though I don’t go to church’ (6 August 2001). Esther now ‘felt part of the worshipping community’ (19 December 2000).
6.5.7 Making a commitment as a rite of passage marking adulthood

The themes discussed in this section came out of the interview data. Andrew, Edward and Chris stated clearly that by their baptism/confirmation they were ‘making a commitment’. Nevertheless this theme did not seem to fit with the others. The other themes: Belonging to myself; Returning/Starting over; Growing up; Joining the family were in different ways concerned with organic development. The ‘Making a commitment’ theme expresses something that is conscious and volitional but lacks the organic quality of the other themes. As I pondered over the data I realised that for Andrew, Edward and Chris to identify baptism/confirmation as ‘making a commitment’ implied that it was a rite of passage connecting with growing up and making a career choice.

For these three men baptism and confirmation was associated with moving into the world of work and choosing a vocation. A successful career choice involves making a commitment to a certain view of yourself (your abilities, likes and dislikes) and your vocation (its demands, values and life style). Making this commitment involves risking failure. You may find that you have misread yourself and your vocation. Alternatively your views may not be shared by those responsible for recruiting into your chosen vocation.

Andrew made a successful transition to his chosen career. He had completed a double degree in Law/Accounting and obtained a job as a lawyer with a large corporation. Edward’s initial career choice was not successful. He left university for a customer service job with a large newspaper. The job did not turn out the way that he had hoped, however, and around the time of our final interview he returned to university to retrain as an accountant. At the time of our final contact he was working for the financial control function of the state public service. Chris was confirmed while applying to become an ordination candidate. At the time of writing, however, his application had not been successful. Transition to the world of work and the commitment involved in the choice of vocation are traditionally associated with the transition into adulthood. This is particularly the case for males.
6.5.8 Commitment in baptism/confirmation and marriage

Making a commitment is also an aspect of marriage: to take someone as husband/wife, ‘to have and to hold from this day forward’ (*APBA* p. 661). Like transition to the world of work, marriage is also a rite of passage into adulthood. These elements were linked for Esther. She told me about a conversation with her fiancé in which she noted that she had made a commitment to him but had not yet made a commitment to God. Esther went on to tell me that she then promised to commit herself to God. In her response to the Summary of themes, Esther reaffirmed that her engagement prompted her decision to be confirmed. ‘I didn’t think it was appropriate to be committed to a person for the rest of my life, but not to God.’ (26 July 2003). This echoed her earlier comment that it did not make sense to be committed to Noel her fiancé but not to God (18 May 2000).

6.5.9 The ritual of making a commitment

How did the baptism/confirmation ritual ‘seal’ the commitment for Chris, Edward and Andrew? We noted earlier that the significant act for Chris and Edward was standing in front of family and friends and making/reaffirming their baptism promises. Standing is a symbolic act indicating steadfast public and personal commitment. The act of standing, the presence of significant people, and the words of commitment all seem to be important. Ritual combines symbolism and logic. It utilises both the left brain that examines, compares and concludes and the right brain that imagines, creates, symbolises and expresses emotion (Grainger 1988, p. 44).

The rational and symbolic aspects of ritual are evident in the responses made by Chris and Edward. ‘I wanted to stand up and say, yes, I am a Christian, I do turn away from evil and do all the things that confirmation is about’ (Chris 17 January 2000). ‘You become very conscious of the words you say in front of your family and friends and God’ (Edward 7 June 2000). ‘The actual baptism stands out for its symbolism. Water being cleansing’ (Edward 7 June).

6.5.10 Baptism/confirmation: a rite of incorporation

For the research participants, their baptism/confirmation expressed a relationship with God, with Christian friends at their local church and with family. Grainger (1988, p. 60)
contrasted baptism which he said was about naming and identity with marriage which is about giving and receiving love and concerns immediate personal relationships. Our candidates’ view of their baptism/confirmation is remarkably similar to Grainger’s view of marriage. Grainger observed that marriage is a rite of incorporation which in other cultures is preceded by rites of separation and transition. In the experience of those I interviewed baptism/confirmation represented their incorporation in the church, even though there was no preceding rite of separation.

6.5.11 Conclusion

‘Making a commitment’ was the dominant theme in the accounts which Andrew, Chris and Edward gave of their baptism/confirmation. The theme had a different meaning for each of them however. For Andrew, baptism was an expression of commitment to a particular church. For Edward, it expressed his commitment to God, ‘a Higher Power’. For Chris, confirmation was a two-fold commitment. First it was a reaffirmation of his baptism promises. Second it expressed a somewhat ambiguous commitment to the Anglican Church. What all three had in common was that baptism/confirmation was associated with transition to the world of work and a choice of vocation. For Don and Esther baptism/confirmation was associated with the transition to marriage. For some of the research participants, then, baptism/confirmation was a rite of passage to adulthood. The importance of making a commitment to God in front of family and friends was expressed by a number of those I interviewed. Baptism/confirmation was for them a rite of incorporation which emphasised immediate personal relationships.

6.6 Conclusion to metaphors for initiation

The metaphors for initiation are concerned with the research participants’ stories – the way in which they experienced their journey to baptism/confirmation. Sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 interpreted themes from the stories using insights from ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena. In the next chapter I apply these concepts to the structure of baptism/confirmation. According to van Gennep and Turner, rites of passage have a three-fold structure: separation; liminality; incorporation. How does this structure apply to the process of preparing candidates for baptism/confirmation and to the liturgy itself? Winnicott was concerned with the interplay between the internal and
the external worlds. Does this perspective yield any insights into the structure of baptism/confirmation? Finally, how do the research participants experience the structure of the rite and how useful are the concepts of ritual theory and transitional phenomena in making sense of their experience?
Chapter 7 Baptism/Confirmation as Ritual and as Transitional Phenomena

7.1 Introduction

The metaphors for initiation focussed on the research participants’ stories. This chapter moves away from story and focuses on the interplay between structure and the experience of the research participants. How was the initiation process structured? How did the research participants experience the structure of the rite and the formation which preceded it? How did the theoretical elements interpret the interplay of structure and experience? An analysis of the structure of the APBA baptism/confirmation rite (section 7.2) is followed by a discussion of the way in which research participants experienced kneeling and the laying on of the bishop’s hand (section 7.3). Section 7.4 focuses on formation: how did the research participants experience the period of formation and whether important aspects of formation took place outside the assigned period? The holy communion liturgy distinguishes between baptised communicants and unbaptised non-communicants. Section 7.5 examines how the research participants experienced this separation. Chapter 7 discusses these issues and concludes that the liminal structure does not explain the experience of the research participants who took part in the baptism/confirmation rite.

As this chapter brings the theoretical elements of the study into the foreground, I begin by summarising the key ideas of ritual theory and Winnicott’s (1965, 1971) concept of transitional phenomena. Ritual theory involves two principal concepts. First, the importance of performance - what is done, as well as what is said - in conveying the meaning of liturgy (Searle 1992). Second, baptism/confirmation is a rite of passage with a liminal structure, ie. separation, liminality, incorporation (van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969). The key aspects of the concept of transitional phenomena are illusion and relationships. A transitional object belongs to the world of illusion: the intermediate area between the internal and external worlds. The infant takes an object from the
external world and invests it with meaning from the internal world. This process is the beginning of the infant’s exploration of the distinction between ‘me’ and ‘not me’ and is basic to forming relationships.

7.2 The structure of the rite

Grainger (1988) used the van Gennep/ Turner model (separation, liminality, incorporation) to analyse the structure of the baptism/confirmation liturgies in the Church of England’s *Alternative Service Book*. In this section we will follow suit with an analysis of the baptism/confirmation liturgy from the *APBA*, focusing on the unified initiation rite: ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’. We then look at baptism/confirmation as a transitional phenomenon.

7.2.1 Preparation

The initial sections of the service are preparatory. ‘Gathering and Preparation’ includes an explanation of the nature of baptism and confirmation and the role of godparents followed by the confession/absolution, the Gloria and the Collect. It is followed by the ‘The Ministry of the Word’: the Bible readings and sermon to which the baptism/confirmation is a response.

7.2.2 Separation

‘The Decision’ forms the rite of separation. It is preceded by ‘The Presentation’ in which candidates are presented by name to the priest/bishop. (This may be omitted where baptism/confirmation takes place in Morning/Evening Prayer.) ‘The Decision’ indicates separation from the false values of the world and bondage to the powers of darkness. The priest/bishop asks the candidates: ‘Do you turn to Christ? Do you repent of your sins? Do you reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust? Do you renounce Satan and all evil?’ and then bestows God’s blessing for a successful transition: ‘Almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness and lead you in the light of Christ to his everlasting kingdom.’ The congregation then expresses its support for the candidates and prayers are offered for the candidates and their sponsors.
The rubric preceding the rite of baptism emphasises the element of separation by providing for the movement of the priest and then the candidates to the font. ‘The priest comes to the place where the water for baptism is... Each candidate is brought to the water.’ Sherlock (2001 p. 87) noted, ‘When the Decision takes place away from the font, many find that a deliberate movement of the baptismal party to the font points to the journey of God’s pilgrim people.’

### 7.2.3 Liminality

‘The Baptism’ forms the heart of the ritual; the transition/process of change, which the rite is intended to enact. The priest prays over the water that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit ‘those who are baptised in it may be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection.’ Candidates and sponsors are asked to affirm their faith by reciting the Apostles’ Creed. (Sherlock 2001, p.88 noted that it is helpful if the congregation joins with them in this.) Then follows the baptism as the candidates are dipped in water or have water poured over them with the words, ‘Name, I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,’ to which candidates, sponsors and congregation respond, ‘Amen.’

### 7.2.4 Incorporation

In *APBA* ‘After Baptism’ forms a rite of incorporation. A rubric (‘when all have been baptised’) indicates that the signing with the cross does not form part of the baptism. (Sherlock 2001, p.89 noted however that the signing with the cross may occur in connection with each baptism.) The formula indicates incorporation: those who are signed are ‘marked as Christ’s own for ever’. The congregation’s welcome (‘We therefore receive and welcome you’) signifies incorporation into the worshipping community.

In the *APBA* unified rite, ‘Confirmation’ follows immediately afterwards. The candidates kneel and the bishop lays a hand on each praying that they may be strengthened with the Holy Spirit. In context it appears as a rite of incorporation. Baptism (membership of the church) is presupposed. Sherlock (2001, p.87) suggested that the Baptism/confirmation rite does not emphasise sufficiently that candidates come
to have their baptism confirmed. The allied rite of ‘Reception’ is carefully defined as incorporation. The bishop’s welcome acknowledges that the candidate is already a member of the Church. ‘We recognise you as a baptised and communicant member of the Christian Church’ (*APBA* p.96). Confirmation is followed by the Greeting of Peace and holy communion which following van Gennep (1960, p. 29) is also a rite of incorporation. (‘The rite of eating and drinking together …is clearly a rite of incorporation.’)

### 7.2.5 A cautionary note

When looking at the *APBA* text we need to bear three things in mind. First, liturgy is performed, not written in a book. Second, although *APBA* is the authorised text, the service is exegeted by *A Practical Commentary* (Varcoe 1997) and by Sherlock 2001. Third, the liminality model does not exist in a pure form. Van Gennep himself recognised this. His analysis of the eleventh century Roman rite of baptism included the following comment: ‘Thus ended the transitional period, which included at the same time rites of separation and rites preparatory to incorporation’ (p.94). In other words it was a bit of a mess.

### 7.2.6 Baptism/confirmation and identity

As rites of passage, baptism and confirmation are about a change of status. Baptism is receiving a new identity as a disciple of Christ: buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him to newness of life. The priest declares that the person baptised is ‘marked as Christ’s own for ever’ (*APBA* p. 60). Before and after baptism the candidate is exhorted to ‘live as a disciple of Christ’ (*APBA* pp. 56, 60). The congregation welcomes the newly baptised as ‘a member with us of the body of Christ, as a child of the one heavenly Father, and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God’ (*APBA* p. 60). Following the Australian Bishops’ Statement confirmation is about affirming one’s baptismal identity publicly and being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the Church to live it out in the world. For Browning and Reed (1995) also, confirmation is about identity. It is an occasion for clarifying one’s identity as a member of the community of faith and the nature of one’s ministry in the world.
7.2.7 Baptism/confirmation as a transitional object

In what way does baptism/confirmation as a transitional object relate to identity? Clarifying one’s identity is an aspect of play and creativity – and religion (Winnicott 1971, pp. 54-57). We have already noted that the initiation of a relationship between the infant and the outside world is dependent on ‘good-enough’ mothering at the crucial phase. Following Winnicott the clarification of baptismal identity on the part of the confirmation candidate is made possible by ‘good-enough’ Christian nurture (nurture by Mother Church) at the critical phase. Furthermore the nineteenth and twentieth century controversy over the origin of confirmation, whether or not it existed from the New Testament church, reflects the paradoxical nature of the transitional object as both found and created.

Viewed as a transitional phenomenon, baptism/confirmation is on the boundary between the inner and the outer worlds. Traditionally baptismal fonts are placed near the door of the church building (Davies 1972, p. 69), on the boundary between the inner realm of the church’s worship and the world outside the church. Baptism is the door of the church, the means by which we join its fellowship. At the conclusion of the rite, the bishop calls on the candidates and all other members of the congregation to ‘take part in the life of the church.’ In the dismissal and blessing which follow he tells them, ‘Go forth into the world in peace…’ (APBA p. 93). The neophytes are called to take up their role as members of the church in order that they may go and live out their baptismal identity in the world. Baptism/confirmation, then, is on the boundary. Through baptism we enter the church. From our baptism (and from confirmation as a reaffirmation of baptism) we go out of the church to live for Christ.

7.2.8 Conclusion

To regard the baptism/confirmation rite as a rite of passage and as a transitional object is to look at it through two very different lenses. As a rite of passage the baptism/confirmation rite shows the structure of transformation. Seen as a transitional object baptism/confirmation is about the meeting of the inner and the outer worlds. Nevertheless both show how baptism/confirmation effects a change in identity.
7.3 Kneeling and the laying on of the bishop’s hand

Having looked at baptism/confirmation from a structural viewpoint we will now look at the experience of the candidates as they took part in the rite. At the moment of confirmation candidates kneel while the bishop lays a hand on the head of each and prays. Ritual theory stresses the significance of bodily action. The candidates differed widely in their responses to kneeling and receiving the laying on of the bishop’s hand. This section examines the responses of the candidates and how ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena make sense of them.

7.3.1 The candidates’ experience

Don described confirmation as a ‘personal and powerful experience.’ The bishop laying his hand on his head was a high point in the service. ‘I felt like I had an aura for about a week afterwards’ (10 October 2000).

Ailsa commented, ‘it was a big day… I felt special.’ This feeling was not associated with any particular action. The laying on of the bishop’s hand seemed an anticlimax – although she denied being disappointed. ‘It was not such a personal thing. I thought I might be overwhelmed, filled with the Spirit’ (21 January 2000).

Andrew had been looking forward to the hand laying. He had been told that you ‘sometimes feel something at that point.’ He felt honoured that the bishop was praying for the Holy Spirit to strengthen him. ‘They were not empty words but someone was here to help me’ (7 January 2000). For him, the high point of the service was taking communion for the first time.

Taking communion for the first time was also a significant event for Beth. Her baptism and confirmation gave her a sense of assurance. ‘I feel officially part of it all’ (15 August 2000). This did not appear however to be linked to any particular event in the service.

Esther did not describe the hand-laying in terms of a spiritual experience. ‘It seemed so quick. It seemed like I was being stamped’ (9 June 2000). What made the experience special was her close acquaintance with the bishop (from her work at the Anglican
agency). The high point of the service for Esther was the love and support of her family and friends: ‘seeing the faces of people that I cared about.’ (It is worth noting that communion was not celebrated at the St Elizabeth’s confirmation service.)

Danni’s confirmation gave her a sense of belonging and acceptance that she had not known before. This was not linked to any particular action, rather the presence of the bishop and the pageantry of the service. ‘The music, the singing, the robes, the regalness … a real bishop!’ (6 August 2001).

### 7.3.2 Confirmation as performance

According to the performance theory of ritual, the action of kneeling and the laying on of the bishop’s hand should contribute significantly to the candidate’s understanding of what confirmation means. There was, however, a remarkable diversity among the candidates. The bishop’s action was significant for three of the candidates (Don, Ailsa and Andrew). Among those interviewed, the presence of family and friends appeared to be equally important. (Mentioned by Esther, Chris and Edward.) The references to posture were interesting. It was important for Chris and Edward that they stood and affirmed their faith.

The rubric in the confirmation liturgy specifies that candidates kneel before the bishop who lays a hand on each of them – yet neither Chris nor Edward mentioned this action as significant. For Chris the significance of his confirmation lay in standing and reaffirming his faith in the presence of his family and friends. Chris mentioned that one of his sponsors gently laid her hand on his back. ‘Just that touch I found very, very supportive.’ He mentioned the sincerity of the bishop’s prayer: ‘I felt that he really was praying for me’ (1 February 2000) but he did not mention kneeling and the laying on of the bishop’s hand. Edward also stressed the importance of standing before family and friends and making a commitment to God. The significance of the service was that it was a public act of commitment. The laying on of the bishop’s hand appeared to have no significance for him at all. When pressed, Edward acknowledged that kneeling expressed worship (7 June 2000).
7.3.3 Religious symbols as transitional objects

The concept of transitional object shows more promise in understanding the candidates’ differing responses. In his discussion of religious symbols as transitional objects, Meissner included religious gestures and prayers as well as concrete objects such as the crucifix, cross, bread, wine and water. (At a doctoral seminar in 2003 Professor Susan Long commented that this may follow Winnicott’s explanation of movements, sounds and objects as transitional phenomena). Such symbols are not subjective creations yet they are more than their physical characteristics. The meanings conveyed by religious symbols evolve from the experience of the material reshaped by the subjective belief and the meaning attributed by the believer. Religious symbols only achieve meaning and significance insofar as they are part of the intermediate psychic space of the believer’s illusory experience (Meissner 1984, p. 181). The biblical imagery behind the laying on of the bishop’s hand at confirmation connotes blessing-with-power and commissioning for ministry (Dunnill 1997, p. 5). This is the intended message of the rite, however, it was not heard by Chris and Edward for whom the ‘regalness’ of the bishop and the laying on of his hand had no significance!

7.3.4 Conclusion

Searle (1992) argued that the meaning of ritual is derived from words and actions (3.3.3 Ritual as performance). Words spoken cannot be understood in isolation from their context in the ritual. For Edward, ritual heightened the importance of his words. ‘You become very conscious of the words you say in front of your family and friends and God’ (7 June 2000). Candidates also derive the meaning of the ritual from the teaching that accompanies it. Ailsa and Andrew had been told to attach a special significance to the laying on of the bishop’s hand. The candidate’s inner world provides the framework in which the candidate experiences the words and actions of the ritual. Note that Edward disregarded the action of kneeling before the bishop and receiving his hand with prayer. For Edward the action was incongruent with his understanding of confirmation as public witness. As he experienced the liturgy the incongruence of the action was blotted out by the significance of the words.
7.4 The experience of formation

In their different ways, the concepts of liminality and transitional space are about relationship, movement and experience. The liminal stage is the point of transition in the rite of passage. It is through the use of transitional space that the infant moves from dependence to autonomy. This movement is dependent on the infant experiencing the mother’s reliability. Liminality is characterised by communitas, the experience of shared humanity – one’s relatedness to others. Winnicott (1971) wrote about the ‘maximally intense experience’ which belongs to play, religion, the arts and creative living. Arbuckle (1987) emphasised the importance of experience in religious formation. He applied the concept of liminality to the reformation of the novitiate in the wake of Vatican II. He proposed that the liminal period of formation should enable the novice to experience the call of God to discipleship, rather than learn about religious life.

Research into tribal initiation rites points to the importance of experiencing values, not just learning about them. So also in the early stages of the novitiate liminality process, the stress is on providing the space, the isolation, the communitas experience of fraternity in and through which the candidate can ‘taste’ the presence of God calling him or her to radical reorientation for service in His Church (Arbuckle 1987, p. 193).

I argued earlier (section 3.2.7 Why I used a case study/interactionist approach) that a purely content-based approach to catechesis is inadequate. Following Turner and Arbuckle, candidates for baptism/confirmation need to experience as well as to understand what it means to be a Christian. Looking at the candidates for baptism/confirmation, how did their assigned period of preparation help them to experience what it means to be a Christian and a member of the worshipping, witnessing community? Did significant experiences occur outside that assigned period?

7.4.1 The candidates’ experience

Ailsa and Andrew attended an Alpha course as part of their preparation for baptism/confirmation. In a case study on the use of Alpha in a Melbourne parish Nichols (2001, p. 43) observed that the focus of Alpha is on experience rather than understanding. This is borne out in Ailsa’s description. She enjoyed Alpha because it gave her an opportunity to get to know other people at All Saints. Meeting together for a meal provided a bonding experience. Ailsa acknowledged the content of the course,
nevertheless her emphasis was on the experience. ‘At the end of every week I always
came out with something positive. I learnt something new or just felt better about
myself. A couple of them I remember walking out – by the time I got to the car I had
tears in my eyes because it really affected me’ (31 December 1999).

Alpha helped Ailsa to reflect on her life experiences and make sense of them. She had a
close relationship with her 14 year old niece who was going through the adolescent
crisis that accompanies exploration of adult life. During an Alpha discussion Ailsa
realised that she had a ‘terrible past’ and that her niece was going through exactly the
same stage. Ailsa was here to put her niece ‘on the right road.’ As her niece tells her
things in confidence what has happened, she is able to mentor her. ‘That is what I am
here for. That is why these things are happening to me. I went home from Alpha on
Cloud 9. There is a reason!’ (31 December 1999).

As a university graduate in law and finance Andrew’s response was more cerebral. He
appreciated the content of the Alpha course. He told me that it covered topics such as
the reliability of the biblical manuscripts and how to pray and consolidated much of
what he already knew. After the Alpha course he felt ready to make the commitment
that baptism/confirmation involved. For Andrew the experience of intellectual enquiry
was significant. I asked him what advice he would give to someone taking Alpha with a
view to preparing for baptism/confirmation.

It depends on what their background is. If they are interested in the topic, keep an open mind,
take in what you want to take in. Some people may not be ready for it but I was like a
sponge…Stick with it for a bit longer until you know whether, ‘Yes this is for me’ or ‘No it is
not.’ If you are saying, ‘Yes’: you want to know why. If you are saying ‘No’, you also want to
know why you are saying, ‘No’. You shouldn’t go, ‘No, I’ll just give up’, because it is a
worthwhile investment of time (14 January 2000).

Don and Danni received preparation and were baptised/confirmed at St David’s. Don
was preparing for marriage at the same time as he was preparing for confirmation. The
two were related in their effect on him. He attributed his growth in maturity to his
baptism/confirmation and marriage. Nevertheless, on occasion, Don talked explicitly
about his confirmation preparation and what it taught him.
In describing the impact of the confirmation preparation Don used the language of experience. When he spoke about understanding he meant emotional understanding rather than intellectual comprehension. For Don the preparation sessions ‘reaffirmed what (Christian) faith is all about – forgiving, understanding, acceptance…I accept things more…I can catalogue things a bit better emotionally. Put them in the right place in my mind. I have a better understanding of my own emotions…I feel like I’ve got stronger resolve. I am emotionally and spiritually stronger since the class. I am more in tune with myself.’ Confirmation preparation had ‘realigned his faith’ (20 October 2000).

Danni did not talk much about the preparation sessions but they do not seem to have been a significant experience for her. She joined the last session and felt guilty that the others had put a lot into their preparation while she joined them at the end of the course. She did not bond with the other candidates on the day of the baptism/confirmation. Danni had definite ideas about God before the preparation sessions. ‘God gives you strength and faith in your own ability.’ (6 August 2001).

Esther and Edward were both prepared for baptism/confirmation at St Elizabeth’s. Both attended the two preparation sessions which lasted two and a half hours each and both found them disappointing. Edward said that he did not know anyone in the group. There was no sense of bonding because the age range (15/16 years old to 25/26 years) was too wide and the group was not together long enough (7 June 2000). Esther described the experience in these terms. We were ‘just a bunch of people in a room for two and a half hours over two weeks. We didn’t really connect.’ (2 June 2000). The sessions, however, gave her an opportunity to meet the other candidates beforehand so she was confirmed with people who ‘weren’t quite strangers’ (19 December 2000).

Conversations with Edward showed that his formation occurred prior to the formal preparation. The ‘St Lizzie’s cleansing service’, St Elizabeth’s Small Group Camp and Christianity Explained were turning points in his spiritual life. Edward described Christianity Explained at our first meeting (7 June 2000). Hitherto he had seemed rather withdrawn but he came alive when he began to talk about Christianity Explained. It was ‘one of the best experiences he had had.’
Christianity Explained is a series of six studies based on Mark’s Gospel which aims to provide a basic introduction for inquirers about the Christian faith. It was written by Michael Bennet, an Australian. Christianity Explained is often run in people’s homes. The course which Edward attended was held in the home of a couple from St Elizabeth’s. There were six in the group: one with a Muslim background, one with no church background (both had been brought along by friends); there was a girl who also went to St Elizabeth’s and there was Edward. ‘The basics [of the Christian faith] were explained for the first time in a way that I understood’ (7 June 2000).

Belonging to a small group was also an important part of Edward’s formation. Membership gave Edward the experience of belonging to St Elizabeth’s. ‘It was at small group that I became a member of St Lizzie’s in my own right. I had gone along to St Lizzie’s with one of my best friends. It was at small group that I got to know people’ (7 June 2000). Attending Small Group Camp advanced this process. Edward described it as ‘an intensive weekend with all people who were Christians.’ The hikes gave him an opportunity to have ‘in depth’ talks with other small group members. Small Group Camp gave Edward a deeper sense of belonging to a Christian community (15 June 2000).

‘St Lizzie’s cleansing service’ was a turning point in Edward’s spiritual life. On one occasion at the 7.30pm Sunday service the minister invited members of the congregation to come up and wash their hands in a bowl and be prayed for. The experience had a powerful impact on those who took part and left an impression on Edward. ‘The service stuck in my mind. It was a very positive experience’ (15 June 2000).

As in Edward’s case, Esther’s formation occurred before she attended the St Elizabeth’s confirmation preparation classes. As a child she worshipped with her family at an Anglican church. I have already told the story of Esther’s spiritual crisis at the age of 12 when she prayed for good weather on her birthday and it rained! Working at the Anglican agency proved to be a turning point in Esther’s faith journey. While she was at the agency she dated Peter the curate. Esther discussed her problems understanding the Bible with colleagues at the agency. Encouraged by Wendy and Pauline, Esther attended an Alpha course where she received her ‘conversion experience’. Pauline also
came to her confirmation. Esther went on to worship at St Elizabeth’s, attracted by the music and by the large congregation of young people.

As with Esther, Beth’s formation was not restricted to her association with the church where she was confirmed. Attending Sunday School as a child was a significant experience as were Bible studies and worshipping at the Baptist church in the country. (They are described in more detail in 6.4 Joining the family.)

Soon after her baptism/confirmation Beth faced a family crisis involving her 14 year old son. Mark (who has a learning difficulty) was accused of sexually assaulting an eight year old girl. The assault was alleged to have taken place a year earlier when Mark was staying with his father and with his father’s current partner and her daughter.

Beth was able to relate what she learned during the baptism/confirmation formation to the crisis she was going through. ‘I am still reading the books they gave me. It’s helped so much with what’s happening now… God knows what’s best and he will solve it… With what we are finding out and what’s coming out of the woodwork, my prayers are being answered’ (8 August 2000).

Beth did not talk much of the preparation sessions but spoke about the residual bond between the members of the group. Beth could not remember seeing a number of them since the confirmation. ‘But there is still a bond there. You say Hello if you meet in the street’ (15 August 2000). Beth spoke appreciatively of the vicar’s suggestion of a reunion picnic twelve months after the confirmation.

Chris did not undertake any formal preparation for confirmation. He had already completed two years as a theological student. Talking with Chris there was little sense that confirmation was part of his Christian formation (17 January, 1 February 2000). Rather confirmation was part of his application to become an ordination candidate. Formation took place as a young adult in Christian Endeavour and later as a deacon and Bible study leader at Baptist churches in suburban Melbourne. While in the UK, Chris took a lay training course at his church in London, became a fellowship group leader and served as pastor of the choir. On his return to Australia Chris took up lay leadership in a Baptist church in Western NSW (selection conference essay). Two year’s
theological study in Melbourne was also part of his distinctive Baptist/evangelical Anglican formation.

7.4.2 Conclusion

At the outset I asked whether preparation for baptism/confirmation helped the candidates to experience what it means to be a Christian and to be members of the worshipping, witnessing community. I also asked whether significant formation occurred outside the assigned period. For Ailsa, Andrew and Don their baptism/confirmation preparation helped them to reflect on their life experiences from a Christian perspective. This was also true for Beth: the reading material she received as part of her preparation helped her to face Mark’s committal hearing. For Esther and Edward formation for their baptism/confirmation occurred outside the assigned preparation period. This was also true for Chris who received no formal confirmation preparation. Significant aspects of Beth’s formation for baptism/confirmation occurred while she lived in the country. Danni did not report that her baptism/confirmation preparation had any impact on the way she saw her life.

7.5 Did holy communion emphasise separation from the church for the unbaptised candidates?

Following Turner and Arbuckle, preparation for baptism and confirmation is the liminal phase of initiation. Arbuckle emphasised that the liminal phase should allow initiation candidates to experience the values of religious life. In the previous section I examined how preparation for baptism/confirmation helped the research participants to experience what it means to be a Christian and to be members of the worshipping, witnessing community. Turner, on the other hand, emphasised the disconnected nature of liminality. Although the liminal phase prepares candidates for their new state, it also reminds them that they are not there yet. They are ‘neither here nor there, betwixt-and-between all fixed points of classification’ (Turner 1972, p. 393). We can see this aspect of the liminal phase in the fourth century catechumenate. Catechumens underwent repeated exorcisms which separated them from the non-Christian world. They attended the eucharistic assembly and had a special place in the church yet were dismissed after
the prayers offered for them during the prayers of the faithful (van Gennep 1960; Yarnold 1992).

Just as exorcism represented a rite of separation from the world, so the catechumens’ dismissal from the eucharistic assembly functioned as a kind of rite of separation, a reminder that they are not yet members of the church. (Neither van Gennep nor Turner used the term ‘rite of separation’ in this sense, however.) The baptism liturgy still distinguishes between baptised communicants and unbaptised non-communicants. Six of the eight candidates I interviewed were unbaptised during the preparation period and thus inadmissible for communion. Two (Chris and Esther) were admissible having been baptised previously. Whether or not the separation between baptised communicants and unbaptised non communicants was observed and how it was experienced by the candidates are two questions now to be addressed.

7.5.1 Ailsa: communicant and ‘already a member’

Ailsa was a regular communicant prior to and during her preparation for baptism/confirmation. She did not realise that communion was for those who have been baptised. Ailsa told me that ‘she felt a bit funny’ when she ‘realised that she should not be doing this’ [receiving communion]. The vicar reassured her however. ‘He said it was OK because I was going to be baptised’ (31 December 1999).

7.5.2 Chris: communicant and ‘formally’ not a member

None of the other candidates I interviewed regularly took communion before their baptism/confirmation with the exception of Chris. Chris did not report a sense of separation before he was confirmed. He was aware of a formal separation nevertheless: he needed to be confirmed in order to be an ordination candidate. ‘I am now entitled to be ordained, assuming I get through the selection process, whereas beforehand I wasn’t but as far as my relationship to the Church goes, no, there’s no change’ (1 February 2000).
7.5.3 Edward: not a communicant
Edward did not take communion while attending St Elizabeth’s prior to his baptism/confirmation. As a young person he used to take communion when attending church with his parents but as he grew older he felt less comfortable about going to church and less comfortable about taking communion (7 June 2000).

7.5.4 Andrew: not a communicant
Andrew felt a sense of separation because he had not been baptised/confirmed. It was reinforced when he said the creed. ‘We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’ (APBA p.123). In his words, ‘I realised this did not apply to me.’ Baptism/confirmation removed the feeling of separation. ‘I felt part of the church after confirmation because I can take communion’ (7 January 2000).

7.5.5 Esther: not a communicant
Esther did not take communion before her confirmation but would go to the communion rail to receive a blessing. At St Elizabeth’s where there was no blessing for non-communicants she felt she stuck out like a sore thumb when she remained in the pew while others went forward for communion. After her confirmation she felt part of the worshipping community (19 December 2000).

7.5.6 Beth: not a communicant
Beth did not take communion before her baptism/confirmation. Taking communion was a significant step for Beth. ‘I feel that it is like God now recognises me. I was like being invited to the party and you didn’t know the host but now I do. But now I know him and he knows me’ (15 August).

7.5.7 Don: not a communicant
Don reported mutual delight in receiving communion from the vicar for the first time after his baptism/confirmation. Previously Don was not a communicant: he did not ‘feel he had the right.’ Don had taken communion at his aunt’s funeral the year before but had felt uncomfortable about it afterwards (10 October 2000). One of the reasons he
wanted to be confirmed was because ‘it gave him the right to take communion.’ While attending the preparation classes Don would watch those who went to take communion and think to himself, ‘That’s what I will be doing’ (20 October 2000).

7.5.8 Danni: not a communicant
Danni did not take communion before her baptism/confirmation, taking communion for the first time at her confirmation (6 August 2001). She did not report that not taking communion gave her a sense of separation from the rest of the congregation.

7.5.9 Conclusion
Of the eight candidates interviewed, Ailsa received communion prior to her baptism/confirmation. Communion, therefore, did not signify her separation from the Church. Andrew, Beth, Esther and Don were not communicants before their baptism/confirmation. For them admission to communion after baptism/confirmation was valued and gave a feeling of belonging. Chris (who had already been baptised) was already a communicant. Edward and Danni were not communicants prior to baptism/confirmation but did not refer to any sense of separation.

7.6 Did the liminality model explain the experience of the candidates?
Arbuckle (1987) argued the need for a clear sense of separation between inquirers and initiates for the liminal process to be effective. For most of the research participants, holy communion signified that they were not yet part of the Church. There was, however, no clear sense of baptism as a liminal rite through which candidates joined the Church.

7.6.1 Already a member
A number of the candidates regarded themselves as belonging to the church prior to their baptism/confirmation. For them, baptism/confirmation reaffirmed membership of the church rather than bestowing membership of the church. This attitude was expressed
most clearly by Ailsa. Interviews with Ailsa indicated that because she belonged to the church Mum’s Group she felt part of All Saints very soon after first worshipping there. ‘I felt like part of the family.’ Her baptism/confirmation served to reaffirm her membership of the church family. ‘That’s it! I’m really in!’ (31 December 1999)

This notion is reflected in the responses given by other candidates. Even though it signified admission to communion, Edward had no sense of joining at his baptism/confirmation because ‘he already felt a member of the church’ (3 January 2001). Danni had a sense of separation from the other baptism/confirmation candidates and gained a feeling of belonging at her baptism/confirmation. However, she did not appear to regard the church as a relevant entity in her understanding of initiation. She ‘felt more a certified member of the flock even though I don’t go to church’ (6 August 2001). Don was conflicted as to whether his baptism/confirmation represented joining the church. When a lady congratulated him with the words, ‘Welcome to the God Squad’, he responded, ‘We are all part of God’s Squad aren’t we?’ (20 October 2000). However when I asked him if he thought he was joining anything, he replied, ‘I think I was joining God’s club’ (17 October 2000). The fact that Don did not receive communion prior to his baptism/confirmation did not seem to have any bearing on his answer. The situation was slightly different for Esther and Chris who had been baptised many years prior to their confirmation.

The lack of a sense of separation from the church may be due to the fact that many of those I interviewed felt that they had always been Christians. ‘I have never fallen out of faith’, declared Don. ‘I have always been a believer’, declared Ailsa. ‘God has always been my Guardian Angel’, declared Danni. ‘I never gave up religion and said, “No” to God’, declared Andrew. (Andrew was aware nevertheless of a sense of separation from the church.)

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has applied ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena to the structure of initiation in order to understand how the research participants experienced their baptism/confirmation. A significant number regarded themselves as members of the church prior to their baptism/confirmation. They saw their baptism/confirmation as
a rite of incorporation, affirming that they were, in Ailsa’s words, ‘really in’ rather than as a rite of initiation. It appears that the meaning that the research participants gave to ritual actions was more important than the ritual actions themselves. Contrary to Grainger (1988), the Church does not make its meaning clear through its sacramental rituals. In the following chapter we look at the practical implications of this and other findings from the research
Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis, drawing out practical implications for the practice of initiation in the Australian Anglican Church and suggestions for further research. Most of the research participants did not regard baptism/confirmation as joining the Church: rather they saw themselves as belonging to the Church already; neither were they concerned with becoming Anglicans. For the majority, however, the exploration of baptism/confirmation paralleled the exploration of another life transition. The research participants came to an understanding of baptism/confirmation by talking about it. While these issues would be addressed by the use of the catechumenal process, the initiation liturgy should reflect the ‘return’ motif which emphasises incorporation as well as the tradition Exodus motif which emphasises separation.

8.2 Overview

The aim of the research project was to listen to and retell the stories of those who have been confirmed in order to gain insight into the meanings which adult Anglican confirmation candidates give to their confirmation, how they experience the rite, and the significance which confirmation has in their faith journey. The aim of the report has been to retell in their own terms the stories of eight people who shared with me the stories of their own journey through baptism/confirmation. These eight varied in age, gender and social background and they told varied stories.

The ecclesiastical and cultural contexts for confirmation are outlined in chapter 2. Contemporary society and its attitudes towards the Church and the Christian gospel form the cultural context. The Anglican Church and its practice of Christian initiation form the ecclesiastical context. The practice of confirmation is derived from reflection on the New Testament teaching about Christian initiation undertaken in the context of the Church’s history and its contemporary situation.
The theoretical framework used to interpret the research process and the research findings used a life history, case study approach drawing on the insights of ritual theory and the concept of transitional phenomena proposed by Winnicott. This framework is outlined in chapter 3.

The research participants came to understand their confirmation by taking part in a series of in-depth interviews, by completing the Faith Autobiography pro forma (Appendix II) and by responding to a summary of the provisional research findings. The Summary of themes which was sent to each research participant analysed the metaphors used to describe their journeys to confirmation and outlined the theoretical concepts used to understand the meaning-making process (see Appendices III and IV). The interviews, the Faith Autobiography pro forma and the Summary of themes generated shared intersubjective meanings. The research methodology is discussed in chapter 4.

The findings in the research report are presented in three forms, each of which gives a different emphasis to the experience of the research participants, the elements of the initiation process and the theoretical framework. First, the stories of four research participants were retold in case study form (chapter 5). This approach presented the stories of the research participants in their own terms and showed the development over time of the way in which they came to understand their baptism/confirmation. Second, the stories of all research participants were presented as a ‘systematic thematic analysis’ which drew on insights from the theoretical framework (chapter 6). Third, the theoretical framework was used to analyse the structure of the initiation process (the formation period and the rite) in order to gain insight into the experience of the research participants as they journeyed through baptism/confirmation (chapter 7).

8.2.1 Generalising from the results

These findings are not presented as a statistically exact representation of reality. They are the result of in-depth interviews with eight adults who were about to be/ had been baptised/confirmed in Anglican churches in Melbourne. Social phenomena reveal themselves in different ways according to the researcher’s mode of engagement. Had another researcher interviewed eight different confirmation candidates there is no guarantee that they would have come up with the same results (see the discussion in
Nevertheless when I shared my insights with the research participants, they ‘hit a chord’ with them and I hope that they will ‘hit a chord’ with readers too perhaps as they think about their own baptism/confirmation or about occasions when they attended a baptism, wedding or funeral. (Generalising on the basis of personal resonance is discussed further in section 3.2.8 Generalising from case study research.)

8.2.2 The relationship between the metaphors and the theoretical concepts

Five metaphors for baptism/confirmation emerged from the stories and the responses to the Summary of themes: Belonging to myself, Returning/Starting over, Growing up, Joining the family and Making a commitment. Drawing out the metaphors and relating them to the theoretical concepts was messy. There was no ‘one on one’ relationship between metaphor and theoretical concept and some metaphors appeared to be subsumed by others. The feeling of ‘belonging to myself’ was related to a sense of recognition by God on ‘joining the family’. (See sections 6.1.2 Danni: ‘belonging to myself’ and 6.4.10 A sense of divine recognition). Making a commitment was related to making a rite of passage into adulthood (Growing up). (See sections 6.3.6 Growing up and rites of passage and 6.5.7 Making a commitment as a rite of passage marking adulthood.) On occasion a theme could be usefully understood in relation to more than one concept. Growing up involves personal growth which takes place in a relationship which provides a holding environment. (See section 6.3.4 A holding environment where growth can take place.) Growing up also involves a rite of passage (going out to work, choosing a vocation, getting married) and a change in social status. (See section 6.3.6 Growing up and rites of passage.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to myself</td>
<td>Baptism/confirmation as a holding environment in which personal reordering may take place. Sense of belonging to myself related to a sense of divine recognition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning/Starting over</td>
<td>God as the transitional object to which we return at life crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up</td>
<td>Growing up took place within a relationship which provided a holding environment. Baptism/confirmation, marriage and going out to work constitute rites of passage into adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining the family</td>
<td>Church/network of Christian friends as a holding environment. Baptism/confirmation provided a sense of recognition by God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a commitment</td>
<td>Rites of passage into adulthood, such as marriage, involve making a commitment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**8.2.3 The structure of initiation and the theoretical framework**

The research participants’ stories and the meaning that they give to their baptism/confirmation emerge in the transitional space between the structure of initiation and the research participants’ inner worlds. The meaning of baptism/confirmation is not determined by the structure of the rite, rather it evolves from the experience of the participants reshaped by their beliefs and the meanings that they attribute to the rite (cf. Meissner 1984). Nevertheless the structure constitutes ‘the message of the rite’ (Grainger 1988), the Church’s official meaning. Focussing on the structure enabled a comparison of the research participants’ understanding of their initiation with the Church’s meaning. Baptism is the rite of Christian initiation, the Church’s ‘joining’ ritual. Comparing the research participants’ view of their initiation with the Church’s view showed that although the baptism/confirmation rite is structured according to a separation-liminality-incorporation pattern, the candidates did not interpret the rite as joining the church – they felt that they belonged already.
8.2.4 Parallel transitions

Liminal theory is concerned with the process of making transitions within the social system, from one status to another. The concepts of transitional phenomena are concerned with intra and inter personal relationships. For most research participants the transition represented by baptism/confirmation was associated with other expected life transitions. This can be understood in terms both of liminal theory and of transitional phenomena. Thus baptism/confirmation is both a transitional object – assisting candidates to make a transition to the next stage in their lives and also a rite of passage to adulthood.

Not all expected transitions took place and not all were acknowledged. For Esther, Danni and Don baptism/confirmation was associated with the transition from singleness to marriage. For Andrew and Edward, it was the transition from university to work – although Edward did not acknowledge that. For some, the hoped-for transition did not take place. Edward’s job with the newspaper proved to be a false start which necessitated a return to study. Danni did not become a mother. Chris did not become an ordination candidate. Ailsa’s relationship with her then partner did not develop.

The link between baptism/confirmation and life transition does not hold true for Beth. Nevertheless the theoretical framework can provide insight into what baptism/confirmation meant for her. Beth was facing a crisis involving her teenaged son. Rizzuto (1979) observed that it is at times of crisis that we may retrieve our god representation from the psychic toy box. (See section 3.4.10 God as a transitional object.) Parenting teenagers is a life cycle event and so it is helpful to see Beth’s baptism/confirmation in the context of Westerhoff and Willimon (1980) and Browning and Reed (1995) who related confirmation to faith development and the life cycle.

The models of confirmation advocated by Westerhoff and Willimon (1980) and Browning and Reed (1995) focus on the link between life transitions and the renewal of baptismal faith. For Westerhoff and Willimon confirmation is a renewal of baptism vows and a commissioning for ministry for those in the middle years of adulthood. It is at this stage of life that a person may integrate the intellectual questioning of adolescence with the emphasis on feeling and relationships characteristic of childhood. Browning and Reed built on the model advocated by Westerhoff and Willimon. For
them, confirmation is a reaffirmation of baptism vows which may be repeated as an individual progresses from stage to stage in the life cycle. The research participants in my study faced the issues of marriage, children and vocation which are characteristic of young adulthood.

8.2.5 The value of a holding environment

Two of the metaphors, Belonging to myself and Growing up, concerned personal growth and development. Those who described their baptism/confirmation in this way experienced a holding environment in which this growth took place. For Don and Esther, it was the relationship with their spouse-to-be and with a parent-substitute, an older person of the same sex. For Danni, it was the experience of the baptism/confirmation service. For Beth, it was the sense of being held by God. The metaphor Joining the family expressed the need for a holding environment. For Ailsa, the holding environment at All Saints gave way. This together with the failure of her relationship with her then partner probably contributed to her leaving the church.

8.2.6 The meaning of baptism/confirmation created by the research process

The research methodology was based on the understanding that the researcher is part of the field of research and that the ‘meaning of confirmation’ is the product of a relationship between the researcher and the research participants (see section 4.2.3 Research as a cooperative activity). The in-depth interview, the Faith Autobiography pro forma and the Summary of themes enabled the research participants to work out what their baptism/confirmation meant. These instruments helped the participants to write/rewrite their stories (see section 4.6.4 Rewriting the life story). This was acknowledged by the research participants (see, for example, 5.2.6).

8.2.7 Research participants not concerned with Anglican identity.

The research participants tended to see themselves as members of their local church or as part of the world-wide Church rather than as Anglicans (see section 6.5.6
Membership of the Anglican Church). This is in line with Kaldor (1994) (see section 2.2 The cultural context: the National Church Life Surveys).

8.3 What this means for the practice of baptism/confirmation in the Anglican Church

8.3.1 The catechumenate

These discoveries raise a number of practical and theological questions. The first question is practical. How can the church community preparing candidates for initiation create a holding environment in which candidates can explore the transitions in which they are involved? The importance of a supportive environment for those exploring a faith commitment has been stressed elsewhere. Sherlock (2001) advocated the use of the catechumenal process for baptism/confirmation. The catechumenal process follows the pattern: inquiry, formation, candidacy, reflection. The GBRE ‘Cat Book’ outlines the process in detail drawing on the van Gennep/Turner liminality model. (Using the Catechumenal Process in Australia, GBRE 1999 cf. Hill 1991 which came out of the Anglican Church in Canada and Ball 1992 which originated in the Church of England. The Book of Occasion Services 1994 outlines the way in which the catechumenal process is implemented in the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.)

In the inquiry stage, the ‘Cat Book’ advocates home-based small group meetings at which newcomers and ‘oldcomers’ can get to know one another and share stories. The group provides a safe place (a holding environment) in which inquirers can risk questioning their lives, as they are and as they could be, and catechists (lay instructors) and clergy help them discern how God is at work.

Discerning life transitions will be part of this process and may continue in the reflection stage which follows baptism/confirmation as the candidates consider how Christian ministry engages with the new possibilities in their life (such as, vocation, marriage, new single state, parenthood). This process will also involve clergy and catechists helping the newly baptised/confirmed come to terms with transitions which did not eventuate (such as, a broken relationship, the loss of a baby, failure to find suitable employment). (Watts, Nye & Savage 2002 is a helpful resource for clergy and
catechists, drawing out the pastoral implications of Fowler’s faith development model and outlining approaches to pastoral care and counselling.)

The catechumenal process involves reflection on scripture, the creeds and the sacraments as well as sharing stories and engaging in worship and ministry. Involvement in the catechumenate will help candidates discover the meaning of baptism/confirmation for themselves as well as explore their own life transitions and implications for their life and Christian ministry.

The research participants’ lack of interest in a distinctively Anglican identity raises a practical issue. The catechumenal process adopts a liturgical model for Christian formation. Transitions through the stages of inquiry, formation, candidacy, reflection are marked liturgically. (Hill 1991, Ball 1992, The Book of Occasional Services 1994 and GBRE 1999 all provide liturgical resources.) Although the dominant model for the revived catechumenate is the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1986), it can be argued that a liturgical approach to Christian formation is typically Anglican. (See, for example, Griffiss 1997 who envisions the Anglican Church as a sacramental worshipping community.) Use of the catechumenal process will preserve and hand on an Anglican way of being church. First and foremost however the Anglican Church is, as the research participants recognised, part of the world-wide Christian Church.

8.3.2 A New Model of Initiation

Analysis of the data revealed that the liminality model did not adequately reflect the experience of research participants, a number of whom regarded their initiation as a return. In this section I argue the need to understand initiation as a homecoming to God. Regarding initiation in this way stresses God’s initiative and God’s accepting love. Such a view complements the traditional Exodus model which stresses sin/human need. Regarding initiation as a ‘return’ understands it as a move from incorporation (an experience of God’s accepting love) to separation (a change in lifestyle). Following a critique of Cotton’s (Cotton & Stevenson 1996) distinction between Exodus and Exile paradigms, I identify those liturgical resources appropriate for a baptism/confirmation service which reflect the view of salvation as an Exodus from sin and those which
depict salvation as a return to God. Finally I explore the practical implications for regarding initiation as a ‘return’. How does the move from incorporation to separation take place? How should a bishop acknowledge this understanding in addressing adult baptism/confirmation candidates?

8.3.2.1 The need for a model which reflects the participants’ experience

Grainger (1988) asserted that the shape of the Church’s rituals is able to convey effectively the message of the ritual. I have already contested this on theoretical grounds (section 3.3.5 Conclusion). A review of the interview data also cast doubts on Grainger’s assertion. The rubric of the APBA confirmation rite indicates that the candidate kneels to receive the laying on of the bishop’s hand. Contrary to Grainger’s thesis, some research participants did not regard kneeling as significant and stressed the importance of ‘informal’ actions not specified by the rubric. Chris and Edward emphasised the importance of standing and affirming their faith. Chris appreciated the touch of a friend’s hand during the confirmation.

These unexpected highlights emphasise that liturgy is enacted, not written in a book. Harris (1992) noted that liturgy planners emphasise the sensory aspects of the rite but sometimes neglect what is important to the participants. Participants must do it their way and should be actively involved in planning the service (cf. Sherlock 2001, p. 80, para E3.1). The interview data also served as a reminder that we are all different. Performance theory emphasises the importance of both actions and words, yet for Edward, the ritual was defined by the words spoken.

The interviews revealed the communal aspect of ritual (cf. Searle 1992). A number of research participants mentioned how important it was to them that family and friends were present. The candidates confessed their faith in the midst of the worshipping community who acted as support (the hand of a friend) and as witness to their confession.

Separation, liminality, incorporation is not an adequate model for explaining the research participants’ understanding of their own initiation. According to the canons of the Anglican Church only the baptised are admitted to holy communion. Holy
communion should therefore emphasise that unbaptised, non-communicant worshippers are not full members of the church. Interviews indicated that the neophytes did not feel a strong sense of change of status. Although they had a strong sense of incorporation after their baptism/ confirmation, the majority felt that they belonged to the church already. A number regarded their initiation as a return: ‘I have always been a believer.’

8.3.2.2 The need for a model which creates community as well as emphasising separation

Despite the widespread application of the liminality model in contemporary study of Christian ritual (see, for example, Webber 1986; GBRE 1999), it is arguable that such a model is not generally appropriate. The liminality model presupposes a strong community whereas contemporary western society lacks a strong sense of community. The correlative of a strong sense of community is strong social control. Turner developed the liminality model following a study of the Ndembu people of Zambia. According to Douglas (1996), shared religious symbols such as are found in Ndembu society (or in a religious order) are characteristic of strong social control which involves a strong sense of community. The rejection of ritual is a characteristic of societies in which social control is weak and a sense of community is lacking.

Contemporary western writers see that a major task of the church is to create community (see, for example, Warren 1995; Giles 2001). I have noted that the initiation candidates became part of the worshipping community through a network of relationships: such as, taking a child to the church playgroup (Ailsa); planning to be married in church and taking a course of marriage preparation classes (Don); being asked to be a godparent (Danni); looking for a Sunday School (Beth). Giles (2001) noted that joining the church often follows the pattern: friendship-invitation-welcome-involvement-commitment. This pattern points to the need for the church to make points of entry for those outside as well as a dramatic rite of separation for those who wish to join (cf. Arbuckle 1987).

8.3.2.3 Two emphases in the story of salvation

The liminality model was taken from anthropology and applied to the rites of baptism and confirmation. This model does not reflect the experience of the research participants
and it is questionable whether the model is generally appropriate for the Church in contemporary western society. People differ in their experience of salvation. Some people come to faith in Christ from an awareness of their own need while others are drawn by God’s accepting love. Cotton (Cotton & Stevenson 1996) argued that the Bible presents two narratives of salvation. Although both stories share the same theological reality, they reflect differences in spiritual experience. Both stories should be represented in the Church’s liturgy in order to affirm the experience of those who have followed different paths to faith.

Salvation is a journey with God and to God. The Exodus story depicts salvation as a journey to a new and unknown Promised Land; in the Exile story, however, salvation is a journey back home. Cotton distinguished between the two stories on the basis of Jeremiah 23:7-8 which, he argued, establishes the Exile as an alternative to the Exodus paradigm for the way in which God works to bring salvation.

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.’ Then they shall live in their own land.

In both the Exodus and the Exiles stories God is the lead character and God’s action is decisive and sufficient for human salvation. In both stories there is a portrayal of human need: the people of God are found languishing in a foreign land. The theological order in the stories recognises that God’s saving work is primary. The two stories, however, reflect different orders of spiritual experience.

According to Cotton, the Exile story begins with a sense of being found by God. We are in a ‘foreign land’, out of relationship with ourselves and with our neighbours, drawn by a sense of God’s overwhelming, accepting love. Cotton illustrated the shape of the Exile story from Isaiah chapters 40-55. God’s word of comfort declares that ‘our warfare is ended, our iniquity is pardoned’ (Isaiah 40:2). The story depicts God gathering and leading his people gently through the desert. It also describes the ministry and redemptive suffering of the Lord’s Servant (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12)
which awakens a sense of sin. ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isaiah 53:6).

The Exodus story depicts salvation as a journey to a new and unknown Promised Land; in the Exile story, however, salvation is a journey back home. The Exodus paradigm emphasises separation: the destruction of enemies initiates a journey to a new, unknown promised land. In the Exile story this pattern is reversed. ‘God is portrayed as the one who unifies rather than separates out…the thrust of the story is to include rather than exclude’ (Cotton & Stevenson 1996, p. 42). Furthermore the Exile story emphasises God’s initiative rather than human need. ‘Our confession is not an entry requirement to that story, for God has already begun his healing work in us’ (ibid).

Cotton argued that the Exile story can accommodate repeated conversions in a way that the Exodus story cannot. I may need to return from Exile repeatedly throughout my life. By contrast, the Exodus (the flight from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea) is an unrepeatable event. For this reason, the Exodus story does not allow for repeated conversions.

Although Cotton cited Jeremiah 23:7-8 as the theological justification for the Exile paradigm, his understanding of the paradigm was not derived from Jeremiah. Cotton derived the idea of salvation as a journey back home from Handel’s Messiah. He referred to the popularity of the Messiah and its place in the culture and tradition of many Church of England people. Cotton described the opening of the Messiah as ‘on awakening we find ourselves in a foreign land’ and we hear the command of God to speak comfort to our people (‘Comfort ye my people’). God gathers his people and leads them home.

Cotton argued that the Exile paradigm begins with forgiveness rather than confession. The book of Jeremiah, however, attributes the exile to Israel’s sin (see, for example, Jeremiah chapter 13). According to Jeremiah, Israel’s restoration is God’s gracious response to Israel’s repentance (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

Cotton drew on Isaiah chapters 40-55 for his presentation of the Exile paradigm. Isaiah 40-55, however, does not present the Exile as an alternative to the Exodus in the way
that Cotton implied. The hymns of praise which describe God making a way for his people to return from Exile allude to the events of the Exodus (see, for example, Isaiah 43:16-21). God’s ‘new thing’ in bringing his people out of exile is the reality towards which the Exodus pointed (Ackroyd 1968). It is in this light that Jeremiah 23:7-8 should be read. The return from Exile is not an alternative to the Exodus; rather it is the fulfilment of the Exodus.

Cotton argued that the Exodus story was not able to accommodate repeated conversions. On the contrary, it is in order that the Exodus might be a repeated experience for God’s people that the Passover was instituted. The ritual makes God’s saving action present again to those who take part (‘You shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’” Exodus 13:8). (I am indebted to Dr Charles Sherlock for this wide-ranging critique of Cotton’s understanding of the Exile paradigm.)

Cotton pointed out correctly that the Church uses Exodus imagery in her liturgy. The Church’s use of Exodus imagery is, however, grounded in a Christian reinterpretation of the Exodus which is found in the New Testament. This is where Cotton’s analysis founders. He did not take sufficient account of the way in which the Exodus was reinterpreted in the Old Testament by the exilic community and in the New Testament by the Christian community. For the most part, Cotton argued directly from Israel’s deliverance from Egypt to a Christian experience of salvation. Israel’s slavery in Egypt was not due to Israel’s sin; it was the result of dynastic change (Exodus 1:8). For the New Testament writers, Jesus’ death and resurrection brought about a new Exodus (Luke 9:31; 1 Peter 2:9) – redemption from slavery to sin. For the New Testament communities, this is the reality to which the Exodus pointed and Christ was, in fact, present in the Old Testament events (see 1 Corinthians 10:4 which states that Christ accompanied Israel in the wilderness). The Exsultet is a liturgical example of the Western Church’s reinterpretation of the Exodus. Christ is ‘the true Pascal Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of sin.’ The Easter Vigil is identified as the Christian Passover. ‘This is the night when you brought our ancestors, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.’
Although Cotton was misguided in his analysis of the Exodus and Exile paradigms, he was undoubtedly correct in asserting that the New Testament depicts salvation in differing ways. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) depicts salvation as a return home to God in which God’s accepting love is paramount. The Gospels’ description of Jesus’ ministry in which he associates with tax collectors and sinners also reflects this view. For example, in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) a sense of sin is presented as secondary to God’s accepting love. A contrasting picture of salvation highlights human sin and God’s holiness. In Luke’s account of the call of Peter, the apostle responded to the abundant catch of fish to which Jesus had directed him by saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man’ (Luke 5:8). In Romans, Paul proclaimed the Good News of salvation as God’s gift through Christ’s death and resurrection after expounding the bad news of humanity’s unrighteousness and injustice (Romans 3:21-31 cf. 1:18-3.20).

Cotton was also correct in asserting that differing emphases in the way that the story of salvation is told, affirm different spiritual experiences. Luke’s account of the call of Peter and Paul’s letter to the Romans both emphasise sin/ human need. They reflect the experience of those who came to faith out of an awareness of their alienation from God. In the parable of the Prodigal Son and the story of Zacchaeus, God’s accepting love is to the fore. These stories can affirm the experience of those who had the benefit of Christian nurture early in life and have always had a deep sense of being with God.

8.3.2.4 A liturgy of Exodus and a liturgy of return
Cotton cited the Prayer of Thanksgiving over the Water in the \textit{ASB} baptism rite as an example of the Exodus story in liturgical form. A similar prayer is to be found in the \textit{APBA} rite, ‘Holy Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’. Both prayers link the Exodus story, the life of Jesus and baptism today. The first section of the prayer in \textit{APBA} has a creation emphasis lacking in its \textit{ASB} counterpart. The prayer in \textit{APBA} continues:

\begin{quote}
We give you thanks that through the waters of the Red Sea you led your people out of slavery into freedom, and brought them through the river Jordan to new life in the land of promise…
\end{quote}
We give you thanks for your Son Jesus Christ: for his baptism by John, for his anointing with the Holy Spirit…

We give you thanks that through the deep waters of death Jesus delivered us from our sins and raised us to new life in triumph…

Pour out your Holy Spirit in blessing and sanctify this water so that those who are baptised in it may be made one with Christ in his death and resurrection. May they die to sin, rise to newness of life, and continue for ever in Jesus Christ our Lord… (APBA p. 58).

The prayer links Israel’s Exodus journey from slavery to freedom, Jesus’ baptism by John and our journey from sin and death to life by being made one with Christ (Romans chapter 6).

The ‘return’ motif which Cotton identified in the Exile story echoes the sense of returning expressed by a number of research participants after their baptism/confirmation. While the Exodus story is dominant in the Church’s liturgy, Cotton pointed out two liturgical examples of salvation depicted as a return to God. The ‘return’ motif occurs in the phrase, ‘when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home’, taken from a post-communion prayer found in AAPB and APBA.

Father of all
we give you thanks and praise
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love,
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ’s body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.
Keep us in this hope that we have grasped;
so we and all your children shall be free,
and the whole earth live to praise your name. (APBA p. 143).

The ‘return’ motif can also be found in the Song of Zechariah, the Canticle traditionally recited at Morning Prayer.
Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel:
who has come to his people and set them free.

The Lord has raised up for us a mighty Saviour:
born of the house of his servant David.

Through the holy prophets, God promised of old:
to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us,

To show mercy to our forebears:
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

Free to worship him without fear:
holly and righteous before him, all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High:
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation:
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God:
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death:
and to guide our feet into the way of peace (APBA pp. 10 & 384).

Cotton argued that the Song of Zechariah emphasised God’s initiative. Zechariah praised God for the gift of a Saviour. The Canticle also depicts salvation as a return. The stanza, ‘And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High: for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way’ identifies John the Baptist (‘And you, child’) as the one who will prepare the way for the Lord to bring his people home (Isaiah 40:3).

We can relate the differing emphases in the story of salvation to our insights from ritual theory. Where the story uses Exodus imagery and emphasises sin/human need, this
corresponds to the familiar pattern of separation-liminality-incorporation. Baptism marks an end to our old life of bondage. We then take our place among the people of God. Where the ‘return’ motif is emphasised, God’s accepting love is to the fore. The first step is an awareness that we have been drawn to God. This corresponds to a pattern of incorporation-liminality-separation. The baptism and confirmation liturgies should include both emphasises so that worshippers and participants might recognise that the liturgy ‘speaks for them and to them’.

8.3.2.5 What in practice is a move from incorporation to separation?
We have noted that the Exodus motif emphasises separation whereas the ‘return’ motif emphasises incorporation. Both emphasises are necessary as baptism involves both incorporation into the community of the Church and separation from one’s old way of life. In practice incorporation and separation may occur concurrently. For example, a candidate may be drawn into the church through membership of a church-run ‘recovery group’ for those with a drug or alcohol abuse problem. In this case incorporation into the new community may accompany separation from the old lifestyle. The ‘return’ motif assumes a movement from incorporation to separation. Where a young person has been drawn into the community through a membership of a church basketball team, incorporation (in the form of joining the youth group and attending the youth service regularly) may precede separation – the new lifestyle which faith in Christ demands.

Stevens (2005) raised the issues of separation and incorporation in his discussion of how to recruit volunteers to staff church programs. He advocated recruiting volunteers from outside the church as a form of outreach. This strategy identifies incorporation as the first step in joining the church. Separation often represents a problem. Neophytes become so incorporated in the church community that they lose contacts with the community outside. Stevens (2005) observed, ‘Many of your seasoned volunteers (those who have been in the church for a number of years) won’t find anyone because all of their friends are already serving. They’ve “tapped out” all of their relationships and haven’t been nurturing new relationships with the unchurched.’

The initiation liturgy needs to include both Exodus and ‘return’ motifs. Cotton has demonstrated how The Song of Zechariah and the post-communion prayer, ‘when we
were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home’ contain ‘return’ motifs. How may the structure of the rite express the movement from incorporation to separation, characteristic of the ‘return’ motif? The structure of ‘Baptism, Confirmation in Holy Communion’ (APBA) represents primarily the Exodus motif. (See the discussion in section 7.2 The structure of the rite.) Nevertheless elements of the liturgy may be taken to represent a ‘return’. ‘The Presentation’ has the promise of functioning as a rite of incorporation. The introduction of the candidate by the sponsors to the congregation and the presiding minister may serve to show that the candidate is already a member of the worshipping community. Archdeacon Bill Ray, former Director of the GBRE (personal communication 16 June 2004) pointed out that such an approach would emphasise the bishop’s charge to the congregation (p. 69) which sets out the baptismal life into which the baptised are called to live.

8.3.2.6 What form would the bishop’s sermon take? How would a bishop who understands the power and the importance of the ‘return’ motif communicate this understanding in a baptism/confirmation service? The bishop’s address will focus on baptism. Baptism is the Church’s rite of initiation, the once-for-all, transforming event into which we are called to live daily. Confirmation is a commitment and commissioning to live into one’s baptism. Confirmation does not point to itself, it points to baptism.

Different experiences of God but one baptism. There are two main ways of understanding our baptism; either as a journey home to God or as an Exodus journey out of slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Those who have always been aware of God’s accepting love may find it easier to understand baptism as a homecoming. Those who come to faith out of a sense of alienation from God may find it easier to understand baptism as an Exodus. (Some may identify aspects of both stories and find themselves somewhere in between.) Experiencing baptism as homecoming is as valid as experiencing baptism as Exodus. Each understanding has its characteristic strengths and each has its characteristic temptations. For those who have always had a sense of God being in the midst of their life, there is a temptation to believe that salvation is their natural birthright. Those for whom baptism represents an Exodus may be tempted to equate salvation with a dramatic conversion experience. Perhaps the bishop should give
two different exhortations which relate to the two stories and the experiences they represent, just as the BCP gives different exhortations to those who are summoned to holy communion according to their circumstances. Nevertheless there is one baptism, even though we may experience it in different ways.

One baptism which joins and divides. In baptism we are joined to Christ and set apart from our old way of life. New life demands separation, ‘stripping off the old self with its practices’ (Colossians 3:9). In his letters Paul wrote his converts, ‘Live as the new people that you became at your baptism.’ We face the same daily struggle to live as new people. But we are not meant to struggle on our own. We are members of a new community. Hilary Clinton wrote, ‘It takes a whole village to raise a child.’ It takes a whole church to make a Christian. It is only as members of the Church, the body of Christ, that we can discover and live out this new life.

One baptism to which we return. Baptism points to the once-for-all, transformation to which we continually return. A baptised infant has the full spiritual DNA of a mature, ministering Christian. There is no spiritual endowment enjoyed by World Vision Australia CEO Tim Costello or Archbishop Rowan Williams that a newly baptised baby does not possess, albeit in an undeveloped form. Confirmation does not ‘top up’ our baptism to equip us for adult life. Confirmation is a return to our baptism, to discover more of the inheritance in Christ that we received when we were baptised. Those who were baptised as children but return to faith having drifted away from the Church do not need to be rebaptised – they are returning to their baptism. The bishop’s exhortation to follow the calling to ministry and witness (APBA p. 69) does not only apply to those who have been confirmed, it applies to all the baptised.

8.3.2.7 Conclusion
This section has shown how, by incorporating the ‘return’ motif, the baptism and confirmation liturgy can reflect the experience of initiation candidates who regard their baptism or confirmation as a homecoming. While baptism/confirmation involves both separation and incorporation, the Exodus motif emphasises separation and the ‘return’ motif, incorporation. In practice, however, incorporation and separation may occur concurrently. A helpful adult baptism/confirmation sermon would acknowledge
differences in the spiritual experiences among the candidates while affirming that salvation is the result of God’s primary action and that baptism points to the once-for-all transformation to which we may return throughout our lives.

8.4 Suggestions for further research

The theoretical and methodological issues raised by this study are applicable to other rites than baptism/ confirmation. For example, a case study, life history approach utilising psychodynamic and ritual theory might be applied to the process of graduating from university. The study would address questions such as, How did the students perceive their journey to graduation? What did graduation mean to them? How did they experience the ritual? Nevertheless as indicated in chapter 2 Context this present study addressed a specific issue, that is, the creation of shared intersubjective meanings at the boundary of an ancient institution (the Anglican Church) and an environment over which it has had a long, though declining, influence (Australian culture).
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Appendix I An invitation

An invitation to take part in a research project about confirmation in the Anglican Church.

Project Title
‘Confessing their faith’: an enquiry into the meaning which Anglicans confirmed as adults give to their confirmation and the place confirmation has in their faith journey.

Investigators
Rev’d Ian Savage BA (Hons), MSc (principal investigator); Dr Lynette Willshire (supervisor)

What the project is about
As part of my Professional Doctoral studies in Organisation Dynamics at Swinburne University of Technology I am planning a research project on confirmation. The purpose of the project is to discover what meaning baptised adult candidates for Anglican confirmation give to their confirmation and what place confirmation has in their faith journey. As someone who is considering confirmation, I am writing to you to invite you to participate.

In the Anglican tradition confirmation is the rite (church ceremony) at which those who have been baptised as infants affirm the baptism promises which their parents and godparents made on their behalf. At confirmation the bishop prays for those being confirmed and commissions them for service. Those baptised in another Christian church may be received into the Anglican Church through confirmation.
The aim of the research is to listen to the stories of those who have been confirmed and develop working hypotheses about the meaning which adult Anglican confirmation candidates give to their confirmation, how they experience the rite and the significance which confirmation has in their faith journey.

Participants in the research project will be interviewed four times. Three meetings will take place as soon as possible after the confirmation and a fourth, six months later. The first meeting is to get acquainted and to address any concerns you may have about participating. I will also ask you to reflect on your faith journey and record it in summary on the form: My Journey So Far (see attached). The second meeting is to hear you talk about your faith journey, talk about the confirmation: how you were prepared for confirmation and how you experienced the service. A third meeting is scheduled to allow you to raise any issues they think are important and for me to cover any issues on the interview guide which have not been raised so far. The fourth meeting six months later is to hear about your faith journey after confirmation.

Interviews will last for between sixty and ninety minutes and will be audio taped and transcribed. Audiotapes will be kept in a secure place in the Graduate School of Entrepreneurship. The tapes will not be published or displayed publicly. Your anonymity will be preserved in the research report by changing your name and identifying details from your story (for example, the church where you were prepared for confirmation).

You will be free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time. Any questions regarding the project entitled ‘Confessing their faith’ may be directed to the Senior Investigator Dr Lynette Willshire of the Swinburne Graduate School of Management on telephone number (03) 9214 5277. If you feel that you have been treated badly during the study or if you have a query that the Senior Investigator is unable to answer you may contact the Director of the Graduate School of Management on (03) 9214 5529. Complaints may also be directed to

The Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218
HAWTHORNE VIC 3122
Phone: (03) 9214 5223

As far as I know there has been no study of confirmation in the Australian Anglican Church. The research will help the Church devise more effective adult education programs as well as contribute to the literature on the place of the Anglican Church in Australian society. Participation in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on your faith journey and what confirmation means to you. I hope that you will be willing to ‘tell your story’ as part of this research.

The Rev’d I.D. Savage
An agreement to take part in the research project ‘Confessing their faith’

I (the participant) have read (or, as appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information given in ‘An invitation to take part in a research project about confirmation in the Anglican Church’. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the interview/activity may be tape recorded as a data source for the researcher(s) but that the recordings will not be published or publicly displayed.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers on the condition that anonymity is preserved and that I cannot be identified.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT

SIGNATURE

DATE

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

SIGNATURE

DATE

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## Appendix II My journey so far

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Where have I been? geographically, socially…</th>
<th>Who have been the important people in my life?</th>
<th>What was I doing?</th>
<th>Turning points in my life.</th>
<th>World events…</th>
<th>Community events</th>
<th>What has God been like?</th>
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Appendix III Summary of themes letter

Dear Danni

This letter is long overdue! Nearly four years ago we talked about your confirmation as part of my doctoral research at Swinburne University. You told a fascinating and moving story of how you came to be confirmed and what the occasion meant to you. Most of you said that you would like to see what results I came up with, so here is a summary of the results.

I have changed your name and identifying details to preserve confidentiality. I have written ‘baptised/ confirmed’ because most of you were baptised and confirmed in the same service. Do the metaphors (‘Returning to where I belong’, ‘Growing up’, ‘Making a commitment’ and ‘Joining the family’) strike a chord with you? I have included some theoretical notes (‘holding environment’, ‘transitional object’, rites of passage and rites of incorporation). Do the notes shed light on what happened when you were baptised/confirmed?

I would also like to check your biographical details. Are they correct for the time of the interview? Have I summarized your views accurately?

Danni was baptised/confirmed at St David’s in September 2000. She was about 40 years of age and had completed secondary education. Danni lived in the inner eastern suburbs with her partner Oliver. Danni and Oliver were married during the course of the interviews. Danni had a management role in a small publishing company.

Previously Danni had felt as though she did not really belong. Her baptism/confirmation gave her a new identity which she described as ‘belonging to myself.’

For Danni, God had always been her Guardian Angel. Danni believed that baptism/confirmation made no difference to her relationship with God although it affected the way she felt about God and the way she felt about herself.

For Danni baptism/confirmation took place during preparation for marriage.

For Danni ‘joining the family’ of the church through baptism/confirmation took place around the same time as she ‘joined the family’ – in a different sense – through marriage.

Your circumstances may have changed since we were last in contact. You may have got married, moved away or changed your job and no longer be a regular worshipper at the church where you were baptised/confirmed. Nevertheless I would like to hear from you and know what you think. I need answers to these questions to tie up the loose ends of my research!
At the moment I am vicar of Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Hampton Park. I am trying to finish my thesis in my ‘spare time’ outside parish work!

Best wishes

Ian Savage
Appendix IV Summary of themes

‘Confessing their faith’: an enquiry into the meaning which Anglicans confirmed as adults give to their confirmation and the place confirmation has in their faith journey

Whom did I interview?
I interviewed four men and four women between the ages of 25 and 50 who were baptised/confirmed in Anglican churches in Melbourne.

Metaphors for baptism/confirmation
Four metaphors emerged from the interviews: ‘Returning to where I belong’, ‘Growing Up’, ‘Making a commitment’ and ‘Joining the family.’ The metaphors indicated how the research participants saw their baptism/confirmation, although not all the metaphors were important for everyone.

1. Returning to where I belong

The majority spoke about their baptism/confirmation in terms of reconnecting with something or someone that had always been part of their life. One person told me that God had always been in her life but baptism/confirmation gave her a sense of ‘belonging’ in worship. For another baptism/confirmation gave a new identity which she described as ‘belonging to myself.’

Baptism/confirmation as a ‘holding environment’
The ritual of the baptism/confirmation service provided a ‘holding environment’, that is, a safe, caring place in which to gain a sense of ‘belonging to myself.’ Unhurried worship enables worshippers to let down their guard and may have the effect of transforming the way they relate to themselves and to others.

2. Growing Up

Baptism/confirmation was part of ‘growing up.’ For a number of those I spoke to baptism/confirmation was linked with marriage. Baptism/confirmation and marriage gave one person a growth in maturity and a capacity to acknowledge past hurts and move on. Another spoke of ‘growing up’ as a Christian through confirmation and marriage.

Baptism/confirmation as a ‘transitional object’
Baptism/confirmation marked a life transition. ‘Transitional object’ is the term used to describe the beloved teddy bear or security blanket which helps the baby move from total dependence on mother to the next stage in development. Baptism/confirmation acted as a ‘transitional object’, aiding the transition from singleness to marriage or from university to work.
Baptism/confirmation and marriage as rites of passage
Traditionally baptism is a rite of passage for infants, while confirmation is for adolescents and marriage is for young adults. The progression from baptism/confirmation to marriage was an indicator of growing up.

3. Making a commitment

A number saw their baptism/confirmation in terms of ‘making a commitment’ whether it was a commitment to a particular denomination or to God or by reaffirming their baptism promises.

The ritual of ‘making a commitment’
Ritual is made up of words and actions. Standing is a symbolic act indicating steadfast public and personal commitment. The act of standing, the presence of significant people, and the words of commitment were important elements in the ritual.

4. Joining the family

‘Family’ and ‘joining the family’ represented significant themes although ‘family’ meant different things for different people on different occasions. For some, joining the church was ‘joining the family’ while for others the church served to divide their families of birth. A number ‘joined the family’ of the church through baptism/confirmation around the same time as they ‘joined the family’ – in a different sense – through marriage.

Baptism/confirmation: a rite of incorporation
Rites of passage are usually divided into rites of separation (such as funerals), rites of transition (such as baptisms) and rites of incorporation (such as weddings). Those who were baptised/confirmed emphasised the importance of relationships: a relationship with God, relationships with Christian friends at their local church and relationships with family. The emphasis on relationships is usually a characteristic of rites of incorporation such as weddings rather than of rites of transition such as baptism.

Ian Savage July 03 (not for publication)