

**“LEAVING AND MAKING HOME”:
STORIES OF TRANSITION WHEN MOVING INTO A
RETIREMENT VILLAGE**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
MASTER OF ARTS (PASTORAL COUNSELLING)

BY DIRK VAN DOORENE,
BACHELOR OF THEOLOGY (HONOURS), BACHELOR OF ARTS
(HONOURS)

JUNE, 2018

Abstract

This human research enquiry explores how older adults experience the transition of moving into a retirement village; what coping strategies they use during this transition and how pastoral counselling may assist with this transition. The conceptual framework of this research project is a pastoral counselling enquiry as an application of pastoral theology. The experience of moving is initially explored through a review of the psychological and theological literature on transitioning. “Leaving home” and “making home” is suggested as the essence of the experience when moving to a retirement village. A study is undertaken with participants who are churchgoers, over 70 years of age and have moved into a retirement village in the previous six to 18 months with their partner. A qualitative method is used for the study as the enquiry is interested in the experience of transitioning, which is heard in the voices of participants as they reflect on their experiences of “leaving home” (grief and loss) and “making home” (adjustment). Thematic analysis brings out the nature of the relationship between grief, loss and adjustment when moving into a retirement village as the researcher reflects on these narratives from a pastoral counselling perspective. Implications for pastoral counselling praxis emerge as the pastoral counselling researcher reflects on the dialectic between theory and practice in the experience of the participants.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Declaration of Originality	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
Conceptual framework of the research project.....	5
Psychological perspectives on “leaving home” - Grief and loss when moving into a retirement village.....	15
Psychological perspectives on “making home” – Adjustment when moving into a retirement village.....	17
Theological perspectives on transitioning into retirement village living.....	20
Chapter 3: Methodology	24
Qualitative research methodology.....	24
Role of the researcher.....	26
Procedure.....	26
Participants.....	28
Instrumentation.....	29
Data analysis.....	29
Ethical considerations.....	30
Chapter 4: Findings	32
Factors behind the decision to “leave home”.....	32

“Leaving home” and the experience of loss.....	36
Challenges involved in “leaving home”.....	40
“Making home”: Adjustment to life in the retirement village.....	42
Coping strategies for “making home”.....	46
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	50
The meaning of “home”.....	50
The experience of “leaving home”.....	51
The experience of “making home”.....	53
Researcher as witness and author.....	55
Implications for the practice of pastoral counselling.....	56
Implications for future research.....	58
Limitations of the research project.....	58
Conclusion.....	59
Bibliography.....	60
Appendix.....	66

Acknowledgements

There are so many who have journeyed with me in my vocational search for home. This search led me to this course in pastoral counselling. In particular, I am deeply grateful to:

My wife, Sharon, whose love affirms and strengthens me, and who models what it is to be a gentle and compassionate counsellor;

Our boys, Lance and Michael, who gift me with courage;

My mom, Carol, who was the first to create a home for me and who continues to pray and encourage me homeward;

My family and friends on both continents, who support me when my faith and hope is weakening and who cannot believe that I am still studying!

My supervisor, Helen Blake, who exemplifies what it is to be a pastoral counsellor, and who has offered encouragement, wisdom and commitment throughout this study.

The participants who shared their stories with me – thank you for opening up about “the move” and for trusting me with the stories of your heart.

Declaration of Originality

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the dissertation. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses."

..... (Signature) (Date)

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a minister of a large regional congregation for the last six years, the researcher noticed the ageing demographic of his congregation. Many of his pastoral conversations with older adults involved a decision-making process: “To move or not to move into a retirement village? That is the question!” To assist his congregation members in this transition, the researcher facilitated a workshop in 2016 entitled *Transitions - Making home in a Retirement Village*. Making the transition into retirement village living involves the twin processes of “leaving home” and “making home”.

The researcher invited to the workshop those who were considering moving into a retirement village; those who had decided to move and were preparing to move in the next few months and those who had already moved. In this way, he was hoping that the group would share the wisdom in the room. Stories of wrestling with the decision to move, the challenges in making the move and the experience of adjustment to retirement village living were disclosed in confidence. The participants acknowledged that moving into a retirement village has elements of both challenge and opportunity. These challenges were communicated emotively: some participants were adamant that they would not move while others expressed how good the experience was for them. As he listened to these stories, the researcher began wondering about the emotional and spiritual aspects of moving into a retirement village.

These stories also resonated with the researcher’s own experience of migration to Australia seven years ago and the grief, loss and adjustment associated with “making home” here. As the meaning of “home” has physical (material), cognitive, emotional and spiritual connotations for people, the researcher began to wonder how older adults live with the loss of leaving the family home and how they begin to make home in their new context.

As their minister and at times their pastoral counsellor, the researcher began to think about the implications of this workshop for his work in both of these roles and how he might understand this ministry better in order to serve his community more effectively.

This research project emerged out of the experience of the workshop and the recognition that older adults in his community, other church communities and Australian society as a whole are facing these decisions and transitions. According to the Property Council of Australia (2014, p. 3), 5.7% of the over 65 population in 2014, live in retirement villages. By 2025, it is estimated that this figure will more than double (p. i). Since there is a higher proportion of adults 60 and over who attend church (48%) compared with the proportion of people aged 60 and over in the general population (26%) (Powell, Pepper, Hancock & Sterland, 2017), churches are well positioned to assist with this transition by offering ministry expressed in pastoral care and pastoral counselling.

It is expected that this research study will contribute to the body of knowledge and overall well-being and mental health of older adults within the community and contribute to the best practice of pastoral counselling in this particular ministry context. The participants may be helped to better understand their own grief, loss and adjustment processes involved in moving into a retirement village through participation in the study.

The research questions in this study focus on aspects of transition in the stories of older adults who have moved into a retirement village. The following research questions have been developed through a search of the literature: “What aspects of transitioning are evident in these stories?” A second question explores more specifically the coping strategies older adults use when moving into a retirement village: “How do older adults adjust to life in a retirement village?” A third research question asks: “How might the research project contribute to best practice of pastoral counselling in such a ministry context?”

The following chapter provides a conceptual overview and theoretical foundation for this project, which is a pastoral counselling enquiry as an expression of pastoral theology. Transitions into retirement village living are viewed through this lens. A literature review of the psychological and theological perspectives on transitions is then provided. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study is outlined. This is a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to hear eight stories of transition. The participants are over 70 years of age, have moved into a retirement village in the previous six to 18 months with their partner and are members of a church.

The interviews were transcribed using a professional transcriber and data analysed by thematic analysis. The themes within the narratives are described in Chapter 4. In the final chapter, how these themes correlate with the literature; what discoveries emerged from the analysis and possible areas of further research into this ministry context are offered.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter sets out the conceptual overview and theoretical foundations for the human research study that are central to this paper. The researcher views the stories of transition, which are the subject of this study, through a pastoral counselling lens. In turn, pastoral counselling is informed and shaped by pastoral theology. This conceptual framework is first described by situating the study within a pastoral theology and pastoral counselling context. Thereafter, various theoretical perspectives on transitioning into retirement village living from psychology and theology are offered.

In this enquiry, the stories of transition into retirement village living are described in terms of “leaving home” and “making home”. These terms were adapted from a study of post-Apartheid migration of South Africans to Australia, in which the authors describe *transitions* as “leaving and losing home” and “homemaking” (Sonn, Ivey, Baker & Meyer, 2017, p. 41). The researcher’s experience of migration to Australia resonated with these emotive verbs of “leaving”, “losing”, and “making” as well as the meanings associated with “home”. By adapting these terms, the researcher wondered if these words could “open up” the participants’ experience of transitioning into retirement village living.

In this enquiry, the term “older adult” rather than “senior” is used to describe a person aged 70 and over (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 260). The reason for this choice is the large age differentiation within the cohort delineated by the term ‘senior’. McCoyd and Walter write that some authors separate early and later older adulthood; their preference, however, is to describe late midlife and early older adulthood as a single entity in which persons retire and reinvent themselves (p. 260). The older adult aged 70 and over has “completed the transition from a focus on work life to a focus on relationships and health” (p. 260). It is possible that there will be some of this age-group who are in the process of making this transition and others may not have completed this transition well. While there may be some who make this move earlier than age 70, in the researcher’s church community the majority are over 70. Some older adults may retire and then move within a short space of time (for example a year) while for others the time-frame is longer.

Conceptual framework of the research project

The conceptual framework of this research project is a pastoral counselling enquiry as an expression of pastoral theology. This conceptualisation is evident in Cooper-White's definition of pastoral counselling "as a distinctive form of counselling in which the full resources, theoretical knowledge, and clinical methods of secular psychology and psychotherapy are brought together with pastoral theological method and practice. Such an integration provides a holistic approach to psychotherapy that honours and integrates the spiritual dimension of each person's life and experience" (2004, p. 131). Pastoral counselling is, thus, a distinct form of counselling since it integrates psychological and theological theoretical perspectives. The following section describes how the researcher grounds this pastoral counselling enquiry in pastoral theology.

Pastoral counselling within the field of pastoral theology

Cooper-White's definition of pastoral counselling integrates the resources, theoretical knowledge and methods of psychology and psychotherapy with "pastoral theological method and practice" (2004, p. 131). The relationship between "pastoral" and "practical" theology is discussed below as this may influence what one understands by "pastoral theological method and practice".

Traditionally, pastoral theology was regarded as a sub-discipline of practical theology "concerned with the theory and practice of pastoral care and counselling" (Burck & Hunter, 2005, p. 867). Pattison and Woodward argue that both pastoral and practical theology take "contemporary people's experiences seriously as data for theological reflection, analysis and thought" (2000, p. 15). Additionally, they assert there are commonalities between pastoral and practical theology: both are concerned with practice and relating practice to the Christian theological tradition; the Church and its ministry is an important focus for both theologies; finally, both pastoral and practical theology are concerned with the "practices, issues, and experiences that bear upon or form a concern for the Christian community" (p. 6).

Although there is overlap between these domains, the consensus view amongst theologians is that pastoral theology is a sub-discipline of practical theology. In this

study, pastoral theology is used since the researcher is a minister in a congregation and the participants are churchgoers. The *methodology* of pastoral/practical theology is a “complex interplay of theory and practice” (Cahalan & Mikoski, 2014, p. 2) which is described in the following paragraphs.

Anderson (2001, p. 26) argues that practical theology seeks to “integrate theory and practice in an ongoing process of action and reflection”. Likewise, Calahan and Mikoski (2014, p. 2) make the point that theory and practice shape each other to form complex theoretical frameworks to explain human behaviour and thought. Groome (1999, p. xix) contributes a further insight into the connection between theory and practice in his use of the term “praxis” (a “reflective action”), which is “a practice informed by theoretical reflection or, conversely, a theoretical reflection that is informed by practice”. Groome’s point is that the word “practice” is too often understood as the application of theory and thus separated from theory. In describing praxis as “twin moments of reflection and action” (1999, p. 137), Groome hopes to avoid this dichotomy between theory and practice. Groome describes this connection as a “*praxis to theory to praxis* dynamic” (2011, p. 277) or a “*life to Faith to life* approach” (p. 274).

Thompson, Pattison and Thompson (2008, p. 23) add another dimension to this understanding of praxis as “action informed by correct analysis of the situation”. These authors define the process of making connections between belief and practice by “using insights and resources from one’s theological tradition and applied to contemporary situations and vice versa” (p. 7) as *theological reflection*. They argue that theological reflection “is central to, and perhaps even the defining element of, practical theology...” (p. 18).

There are varying ways of doing theological reflections, but they all include some form of reflection on experience, understanding experience through different theoretical lenses, reflecting on what has been discovered in this process, and developing relevant practical steps for action. For instance, Osmer (2008, p. 10) describes “four tasks of practical theological interpretation” as the descriptive – empirical (describing “particular episodes, situations or contexts”); interpretive (using insights from the social sciences to explain why these are occurring);

normative (using theological sources to interpret these contexts and guide action) and pragmatic (actions which will favourably influence these situations).

Green's process has four steps labelled experiencing, exploring, reflecting and responding (2009, p. 78). He makes a distinction between "theological reflection" and "doing theology", where "theological reflection" occurs when "the explored experiences are brought into engagement with the great traditions of the faith" and "doing theology" is the whole process in his "Doing Theology Spiral" (p. 26). This is described briefly below.

Green asserts that this way of "doing theology" is a spiral "which moves continually from action to reflection and from reflection to action" (2009, p. 19). One begins by becoming conscious of an experience and "of the feelings, emotions, and impressions that the experience engenders in us" (p. 19). An exploration or analysis of the experience takes place followed by a reflection (p. 21), that is, a "theological reflection". A response (or action) follows this process giving rise to a new situation or experience (p. 24).

This way of "doing theology" is relevant to the research enquiry as the researcher is curious about an *experience*, namely, what happens to people in their transitions to a retirement village. The experience of moving is initially *explored* through a review of the psychological and theological literature on transitioning. The participants' experiences are then given voice in semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher and then transcribed professionally. Applying thematic analysis deepens this exploration. *Reflection* on these emerging themes, the research process and the literature provides a detailed description of the experience of transition. This in turn gives rise to an *action*, which is a pastoral counselling response to moving into a retirement village. How pastoral counselling is conceptualised in this study is explored in the following section.

Pastoral counselling as a distinctive form of counselling

A pastoral counsellor's theoretical foundation includes both psychology and theology (McMinn, 1996, p. 207; Benner, 2003, p. 14). Woodruff (2002, p. 94) describes this foundation as a "disciplined integration" of "a variety of forms of

psychotherapy” with “relevant theological and spiritual perspectives”. Likewise, Cooper-White’s definition of pastoral counselling integrates both “pastoral theological method and practice” and the resources, theoretical knowledge and methods of psychology and psychotherapy (2004, p. 131). Fundamentally, what makes pastoral counselling distinct from other forms of counselling is, firstly, the integrative foundation of psychology and theology, and, second, the integration in practice of Christian spiritual resources with psychotherapeutic interventions. The following section explores this distinctiveness.

Counselling is “a way of helping others that stresses the gentle stillness of the helper in listening, absorbing, containing, understanding and reflecting back...[Also] counselling tries to help the person who is seeking help to find their own ‘still small voice’ within” (Jacobs, 1993, p. 7). This understanding is applicable to both formal and informal counselling, where *formal* pastoral counselling occurs “within certain boundaries of time, frequency of meeting and most probably in the counsellor’s office” and *informal* pastoral counselling (or “counselling skills”) is “a less structured approach to listening and responding to people” (Jacobs, 1993, p. 36). McLeod and McLeod (2011, p. 16) describe such informal counselling as “embedded counselling”, which is the “application of counselling skills in informal and situated, or embedded settings” by those trained in “embedded counselling skills” (p. 28). Embedded counselling is thus “provided by people who are employed as teachers, nurses, social workers or in any other profession whose work involves interacting with people, and whose role incorporates a counselling dimension” (p. 16). Kwok (2016, p. 204) suggests that “people with emotional needs are more likely to have contact with clergy, teachers, and nurses than with professional counsellors and, therefore, have more opportunities to get help from these other human-service workers”. Embedded counsellors use empathic opportunities for brief counselling conversations (McLeod & McLeod, 2015, p. 32).

Jacobs also differentiates pastoral counselling from other forms of counselling in terms of the “specialist concerns with which the counsellor is especially equipped to deal” (1993, p. 32) and the context in which pastoral counselling takes place, that is, “a place, person or institution identified with religion or spirituality” (p. 33).

The “specialist concerns” of pastoral counselling arise from the pastoral counsellor’s unique assumptions about human beings. A pastoral counsellor within the Judeo-Christian tradition (in contrast to a secular counsellor with a spiritual focus) has a unique theological anthropology. Persons are viewed as created in the image of God and created in and for relationship, that is, created to be a “reciprocating self” (Balswick, Ebsytne King & Reimer, 2005, p. 9). Anstey (2017, 60) concurs: “human wellbeing is intrinsically interpersonal and relational”. Furthermore, the focus in pastoral counselling is a holistic one, which includes the client’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Benner, 2003, p. 56). Cahalan and Mikoski describe this holistic perspective in this way: “Human experience is not limited to ideas and the life of the mind, but involves other features of human knowing and embodiment – emotions, intuition, imagination, and relationality” (2014, p. 3). Dittes also views pastoral counselling holistically when he writes: “Expressed and coded in the language of events and emotions and concrete problems and particular human relationships, in daily comings and goings, is the status of the self, the fate of the soul that propels pastoral counselling” (1999, p. 5).

In addition to the pastoral counsellor’s theological anthropology, is the pastoral counsellor’s *personhood*. Townsend has found that the pastoral counselling relationship “is qualitatively different from what other therapists offer. This value expands the idea of pastoral attitude by focusing on a counsellor’s use of self in therapy. Most [of her] respondents referred to ‘pastoral presence’ as a personal relationship that extended beyond a therapeutic encounter to operate as ‘an avenue of grace’” (2011, p. 10). In similar vein, Dittes describes pastoral counselling as “more a matter of the heart or the soul than the head, more a matter of faith than works, an attitude and posture more than a technique or skill” (1999, p. xii).

The tension between pastoral counselling as a form of ministry and pastoral counselling as a professional activity is described in the following section. This raises the question of what makes an activity, such as pastoral ministry and/or pastoral counselling, “professional?” thus providing an integrated view of pastoral counselling.

Pastoral counselling as a form of pastoral ministry and as a professional activity

Pastoral counselling practice (what one does) is an extension of who one is (one's identity). Townsend reports that pastoral counsellors share that "being a pastoral counsellor" is "who I am (and not what I do)," and this statement was supported by three properties: "minister defines my vocation"; "my identity bridges psychotherapy and spirituality" and "my pastoral identity is the result of a process of formation" (2011, p. 3). Dittes offers an important perspective on the *identity* of the pastoral counsellor who is called for the duration of the counselling to *not* be a pastor in the conventional sense (1999, p. 75). He explains this as follows: The pastoral counsellor is called to "renounce the status, expertise, authority and responsibility that may, conventionally, seem to make counselling *pastoral* – to renounce this for the sake of making counselling *pastoral*" (p. 150). The pastoral counsellor suspends his/her own agenda, conventional roles and pre-existing knowledge and, instead, foregrounds the counsellee's experience and way of knowing.

Jacobs mentioned the religious or spiritual *context* of pastoral counselling is another of its distinct characteristics. Townsend also discovered in her research that the pastoral counsellor's understanding of her or his identity depended on the context of their professional practice. Those who practiced in congregational settings identified themselves using religious titles while those in public agencies used registration as their identification (2011, p. 6). In light of Townsend's study, vocation, training/ formation and the context of practice are three important aspects of professional pastoral counselling identity. The professionalism of pastoral counselling is located in who the pastoral counsellor is (identity, training, formation and resources) and what she or he does (practices and ethics). The practice of pastoral counselling during times of change is explored below.

The practice of pastoral counselling during times of transition

In order to articulate the practice of pastoral counselling, Dittes distinguishes four levels or facets of human development, namely, coping and functioning (behaviour); traits and habits (personality characteristics); self-regard; and context (1999, p. 29). He writes that "the level of self-regard *is* the business of pastoral counselling" (p.

33). In his view, the self-regard of the counselee grows when a nurturing environment or context is provided by the pastoral counsellor (p. 33). Dittes uses various words to describe the context which pastoral counselling provides: a “*virtual* life-space” (p. 43); “an emotional climate” (p. 45); “an encounter, an atmosphere” (p. 46); and a “witness” to “the life experience of the counselee” (p. 57).

Townsend also mentions the construction of “a context for therapy” when describing pastoral counselling practice. This includes two aspects: “how I behave with clients” and “theological/spiritual reflection” (2011, p. 3). The use of theological reflection has previously been discussed in this chapter. The pastoral counsellor could use Green’s theological spiral (2009, p. 24) to think through the counselee’s concerns in an intentional, disciplined and holistic way.

Of specific concern for pastoral counsellors is the issue of dual (or multiple) relationships; these are closely tied to boundary difficulties (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998, p. 226). Dual relationships (or multiple relationships) are a particular concern for pastoral counsellors within a faith community (Beaumont, 2009, p. 46) as the pastoral counsellor could potentially encounter clients in a variety of settings (Jacobs, 1993, p. 37). This could be confusing as there may be uncertainty about the role the counsellor is in at different times. This problem does not arise when counselling practice is conducted as a separate function to church ministry or in private practice settings, where the therapeutic relationship is limited to discrete sessions. Beaumont suggests obtaining informed consent from the client after discussing these “troublesome” dual relationships (2009, p. 48).

The *specific role* of a pastoral counsellor during times of transition begins with the recognition that transitions can be turbulent because they are times of adjustment, change, loss and grief. During transitions, the pastoral counsellor is engaged in grief counselling. Dittes (1999, p. 26) argues that “[a]ll grief counseling is pastoral counseling. All pastoral counseling is grief counseling”. He expands this view by describing two kinds of grief encountered during times of transition and crisis: “the sorrow over what is now finished” and “the pang over what is destined to remain unfinished” (p. 26). The latter “is the substance of pastoral counselling because it is the brooding shadow that always accompanies faith, hope, and love, the substance of all pastoral care” (p. 27). Lester (1995, p. 71) regards “hope” as a central feature of

pastoral counselling, which “distinguishes pastoral care and counselling from methods of therapy that are only problem-oriented, or solution-oriented”. The pastoral counsellor (formally or informally) seeks to help the older adult during times of transition to grieve their losses and to adjust to the challenges of living in a retirement village.

One of the key aspects in this process of transitioning is exploring and expanding the *meanings* of the move constructed by the older adult (Dittes, 1999, p. 21). Stories are central to one’s self-identity and the way one makes meaning of one’s life. By telling their story to an attentive listener, the person will begin to “reconstruct a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss, at every level from the simple habit structures of [their] daily lives, through [their] identities in a social world, to [their] personal and collective cosmologies, whether secular or spiritual” (Neimeyer, Klass & Dennis, 2014, p. 486). To offer help during such transitions, the pastoral counsellor might explore with the person their stories of transitioning; the symbols of space and “home” which are meaningful for them; and their feelings (and the meaning they make of them) as they narrate their move into a retirement village.

The pastoral counsellor may also help the older person develop their own “point of view about death” (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 261) by exploring their attitude and fears about death and dying. When deciding to move into a retirement village, an older adult may have thoughts about their mental health and/or death, which influence the person’s decision to move. All these aspects point to the spiritual dimension of a person’s experience which pastoral counsellors are able to address through their training in psychology and theology.

Spirituality and the role of pastoral counselling during times of transition

The terms “spiritual dimension” and “spirituality” are used interchangeably in this research project. Pastoral counsellors recognise “the spiritual dimension of each person's life and experience” (Cooper-White, 2004, p. 131). McIntosh (1998, pp. 6-7) argues that the early meaning of spirituality “is not connected with the cultivation of particular interior experiences, but with the *new network of communal relationships* and perception that the presence of God makes possible for each

spiritual person....The personal experience is not in itself the goal of spirituality” (italics added). The emphasis on communal relationships and new perception which spirituality provides especially during times of transition are pertinent to the research project. McCarthy (2000, p. 196) offers a comprehensive definition of spirituality as “a fundamental component of our human beingness, rooted in the natural desires, longings, and hungers of the human heart. It is concerned with the deepest desires of the human heart for meaning, purpose, and connection, with the deep life lived intentionally in reference to something larger than oneself”.

The spiritual aspect of pastoral counselling is given focus in Benner’s strategic pastoral counselling model which “requires that the pastoral counsellor be attentive to the way in which God is already active in the person’s life and the way in which the person is responding to this activity” (2003, p. 63). Benner argues that one’s spirituality “defines our humanness and is foundational to our being” (p. 63). For Benner, to make spiritual matters the focus of pastoral counselling requires, firstly, recognition on the part of the pastoral counsellor that God is present in the client’s life and, secondly, the pastoral counsellor focuses on listening to “the story behind the story”, which “is a story of ultimate concerns, basic anxieties, foundational commitments, and fundamental beliefs. It is a story of the heart” (p. 65). Benner also describes “the human spiritual quest as the deep-seated longing for place, a quest to find where we belong” (p. 66). This commentary provides an important insight into the transition of older adults into retirement village living as they continue on a spiritual quest for a place where they belong.

Benner’s definition of spirituality is “God-focused” and Christian-centred. A less religious definition of spirituality is what one considers as “ultimate” in one’s life (Emmons, 1999, p. 165). MacKinlay’s description of spirituality also expands this understanding by defining spirituality as that which is associated with a sense of meaning, purpose, hope and self-transcendence (2014, p. 112). MacKinlay argues that the tasks of finding meaning and self-transference are “closely associated with well-being and health in later life” (p. 114).

Another aspect to be included in a comprehensive description of spirituality is the need for relationship, which “is one of the most important aspects of being human” (MacKinlay, 2014, p. 112). Dittes (1999, p. 49) concurs: “We are created to live by

our relationships and belonging, by faith, hope, and love”. How such a network of relationships or connections in the church and/or retirement village (or elsewhere) helps older adults to cope with the transition into retirement village living is an area of enquiry in this project.

Finding meaning in transitions is, according to MacKinlay, a “central, and a crucial task of ageing” (2014, p. 115). In terms of “leaving home”, pastoral counsellors might enable older adults to grieve their losses by working “closely with the senior to determine what the loss means and, with the senior, create a ritual around that meaning” (Casey, 2012, p. 292). Casey suggests creating “a ritual for retirement so that retirees do not feel the loss of identity but feel that they are accepted into something new” (p. 292). In this way, the pastoral counsellor provides older adults with the opportunity to share their narrative (story) and they might use biblical stories and the lives of biblical characters to help individuals to find meaning in their lives following retirement and/or living in a retirement village.

Furthermore, a pastoral counsellor might explore the symbolism of “home” in order to understand the meaning for the person in “leaving and making home”. Doehring’s “theology of broken symbols” “provides many rich ways of understanding (1) how people internalize and construct religious/existential symbols such that those symbols become an embedded theology, and (2) the extent to which these symbols may break and potentially be reconstructed when people go through crises or transitions” (2006, p. 118). “Home” is understood as a “religious/existential symbol”. Doehring asks two pertinent questions: “How does the use of a particular religious symbol help the care seeker cope in the midst of a crisis? How does it help with long-term meaning making?” (p. 121) These are questions which the pastoral counsellor might have in the back of their minds as they explore with an older adult the meaning of moving into and living in a retirement village.

The researcher has explored various dimensions of pastoral counselling as well as the practice of pastoral counselling during times of transition. In the following sections, the theory of transitions from the perspective of psychology and theology is provided.

Psychological perspectives on “leaving home”- Grief and loss when moving into a retirement village

From a psychological perspective, “leaving home” includes, but is not limited to, the experience of grief and loss. Just as “leaving home” in early adulthood includes a sense of adventure and a new life ahead, so the older adult’s experience of “leaving home” may contain both elements of grief and loss, and the anticipation of a new beginning.

A psychological perspective describes the experience of grief as “one’s response to an important loss” (Kelley, 2010, p. 8), one’s “personal experience of loss” (Worden, 2009, p. 37). Human beings “pay more attention to some losses than to others” (p. 11). Hence, all losses, not only death, can prompt a grief response.

Grief may be experienced in leaving the family “home”. Because powerful memories are attached to one’s home and possessions, older adults may experience feelings of sadness and loss when moving and giving away many of their possessions (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 272). Hence, the move into a retirement village can be a traumatic experience, even when the move may be to a more comfortable, safer home (p. 272).

Both “push and pull” factors guide the older adult’s decision-making when moving into a retirement village. When “pushed” by certain circumstances such as ill-health, older adults might experience a feeling of exile from “home”. Worden (2009, p. 241) adds that there is “anecdotal evidence” that older adults are at a higher risk of mortality when forced to move out of their homes following the loss of a spouse. However, this experience would differ from that of those who embrace the move. Some potential “pull” factors for moving might include less home maintenance, increased social connections and access to health care.

Furthermore, contemporary grief theory recognises a category of grief – disenfranchised grief – which “is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported” (Doka, 1999, p. 37). Such grief is minimised or invalidated resulting in the individual not receiving much needed support in their time of loss (Kelley, 2010, p. 13). Moving into a retirement village may become an instance of disenfranchised grief if the experiences of older adults are not validated

and supported. Unresolved grief may lead to complex grief, difficulties in adjustment and mental health concerns. Those who grieve may experience depression since, according to Kelley, there is “often significant overlap between depression and grief” (p. 17). It is, therefore, likely that a person's optimum mental health is to some extent dependent on resolving transitions and working through these losses. Transitions may also trigger unresolved losses of other kinds, resulting in the person struggling with multiple losses.

According to Kelley (2010, p. 21), coping with this kind of loss has not been sufficiently addressed by traditional grief theory. The second research question: “How do older adults adjust to the transition of moving into a retirement village?” seeks to address this issue. Strobe and Schut’s theory, the “dual process model of coping” (1999, p. 211), describes grief work (the loss orientation) and adjustment (the restoration orientation) in terms of “a dynamic process”, an “oscillation” (p. 215). Thus, adapting to the loss of a person involves balancing the demands of both of these orientations and one’s efforts to cope shift between these two (p. 22). In this research project, the “restoration orientation” describes the process of “making home” and adjusting in a retirement village. Furthermore, Kelley makes the argument that further research into the application of the dual process model to losses other than bereavement is needed (p. 22).

A further aspect of contemporary grief theory is the emphasis on seeking and finding *meaning* after grief, which Neimeyer (as cited in Kelley, 2010, p. 71) describes as the “central process in the experience of grief”. Kelley defines “meaning” as “the sense we make of a loss, how we fit the loss into our overarching worldview and system of beliefs, how we form coherence in our life narrative given the loss” (p. 41). Grief therapy involves interpreting the loss within a viable narrative framework (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 487). Through the sharing of their stories of grief and adjustment, individuals are helped to try to understand and articulate meaning in their lives (p. 76). Sharing stories of transition when moving into a retirement village thus form the basis of the raw data for analysis in this research project.

A final comment from a psychological perspective on “leaving home” is the contrasting way in which some theorists view grief and loss, either as a predominantly innate process (as described above) or as a stress response. In terms

of the latter view, individuals may use coping strategies to reduce its impact on their lives (Murray, 2001, p. 223), which is pertinent to “making home” in a retirement village.

Psychological perspectives on “making home”– Adjustment when moving into a retirement village

“Making home” in a retirement village is a process of transition and adjustment. Adjustment (or the “restoration orientation”) is the second aspect of Strobe and Schut’s model of coping (1999, p. 211). In light of their dual model, “leaving home” and “making home” is a “dynamic oscillation” (p. 215) in the transition to retirement village living. This section turns its attention to “making home”, exploring the aspects that lead to a restored or perhaps renewed orientation for those who have left their home.

Psychological literature from a developmental perspective observes that the experience of grief, loss and adjustment occurs at transition points across the human lifespan. Moving into a retirement village can be “a major life transition”, especially when the relocation involves relinquishing belongings, downsizing homes, and leaving families and friends (Rosenkoetter, McKethan, Chernecky & Looney, 2016, p. 858). McCoyd and Walter refer to losses due to development as “maturational losses” (2016, p. 2), many of which are also disenfranchised losses (p. 292). At these critical moments, one may be overwhelmed “by the losses that come with a transition or crisis” (Doehring, 2006, p.70). One of these transitions in older adulthood is retirement.

In the psychological literature, grief and loss are associated with retirement *itself*. McCoyd and Walter (2016, p. 238) provide examples of the losses related to retirement: the loss and transformation of identity; the loss of routine; the loss or change in work relationships and the loss of financial resources. Dittes (1999, p. 25) captures these losses succinctly: “Perhaps something (spouse, marriage, job, public image, nimbleness of mind, suppleness of healthy body) in which I have invested myself, something I have made a foundation for my soul, has crumbled or

disappeared, and I am desolate. It feels as though what I have lost is a part of myself, a central part. It feels that way because that is the way it is”.

Worden (2009, p. 240) writes that “all these changes, added to losses through death, need to be grieved. But the ability one has to grieve may be lessened as a result of many losses in an abbreviated time period”. Older adults deal with multiple losses, for example, the death of a spouse/partner; the loss of identity due to retirement; the loss of one’s abilities; the loss of independence and the loss of a sense of self (Casey, 2012, p. 290). Doehring (2006, p. 77) argues that “(t)he more types of losses – material, relational, intrapsychic, functional, role, systemic – a person experiences, the more complicated his or her grief will be”. In addition to experiencing multiple losses, many older adults also live with anticipatory loss. According to Overton and Cottone (2016, p. 430) anticipatory grief “is a form of grief that occurs when there is an expectation of a significant impending loss or death”. Such anticipatory grief may extend to anticipated loss of autonomy, agency and independence when older adults move from their own home into a retirement village.

Psychological studies have identified the main factors influencing the decision of older adults to retire and then to move into a retirement village. These factors include: “health, gender, economy, educational level, marital status and the quality of social networks” (Kloep & Hendry, 2015, p. 194). The individual’s adjustment to retirement village living depends on a number of factors, such as the person’s health, involvement in activities and motivation (Rosenkoetter et al., 2016, p. 858). In addition, they have found that “socialization, being with others, and perhaps even friendships are essential for a positive retirement life in these communities” (p. 865). Examining how older adults adjust to retirement village living is essential in advocating resources and seeking to address the needs of older adults optimally (p. 859).

Coping strategies used by older adults when “leaving and making home” in a retirement village are discussed in the following section.

An ecological perspective on transitions highlights that human beings exist within a socio-cultural ecological system. Human beings are continuously “engaged in making a space, niche or home for themselves within the social and cultural world in which they live” (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 263). According to these

researchers, negotiating a transition involves “building a new niche”, which is about “making home” in a retirement village. “Building a personal niche” or “making home” involves three interconnected activities: connecting with other people; “living within a set of stories that they tell about themselves, and which are told about them”; and being aware of the objects, spaces and territories that are meaningful for them (p. 263). The importance of these stories of transition is highlighted here as it forms the basis of this research project.

A possible outcome of transitioning well into retirement village living is achieving a sense of integrity (rather than despair) about oneself, which Erikson, a developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, described as the “major developmental task of later adulthood” (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 261). From this developmental perspective, transitioning well involves maintaining one’s “self-esteem in the face of the biopsychosocial challenges of aging” (p. 261). Furthermore, older adults oscillate between grieving their losses and adjusting to the new environment, a perspective based on Strobe and Schut’s (1999) dual process model of coping.

A further aspect of transitioning well involves what Kelley describes as the various “dimensions of religious coping” (2010, p. 108). These dimensions can be described in terms of one’s religious beliefs, religious practice and religious community. These aspects of religious coping helps individuals during stressful transitions by providing “meaning in the midst of loss” and spiritually connects one to others as one struggles with the loss (p. 112). Doehring (2006, p. 138) has also found that “[c]ommunal spiritual and religious practices can be intensely meaningful for those in the acute stage of a crisis”. Furthermore, Pargament describes coping as “the process that people engage in to attain significance in stressful circumstances” (1997, p. 90). Attaining *significance* during transitions describes those feelings and beliefs associated with one’s sense of worth and value as well as embodying the experience of caring and attachment (p. 92).

One of the necessary tasks older adults face in transitioning into retirement village living is developing a point of view about death. McCoyd and Walter (2016, p. 261) argue that “older adults lose friends, spouses, homes, and their own health and need to grieve these losses and try to make some meaning about them to formulate their own viewpoint about death, including a perspective about their own mortality”.

Such existential issues are part of the spiritual dimension of a person's life and may arise within a conversation to which the pastoral counsellor may be invited to share.

Theological perspectives on transitioning into retirement village living

Theology is “talk about God” (McGrath, 2017, p. 1). “Christian theology”, in turn, “is a form of theology that seeks to understand the world and human life in light of faith in the creative, reconciling, and renewing purposes of God revealed in the history of ancient Israel and in Jesus, as that history is interpreted in the Bible and further interpreted in the past and present thought of the Christian church” (Guthrie, in Hunter, 2005, p. 1266). The role of Christian faith and the church community in the process of transitioning into retirement village living is explored in this project.

This experience of transition is explored in light of the “creative, reconciling and renewing purposes of God” and the individual's social, political, cultural, historical and economic context (Guthrie, in Hunter, 2005, p. 1266). Theological reflection involves a “dialogue” between scripture, tradition, reason, experience and the social sciences. Groome expands this view by describing theological reflection as a “dialectical hermeneutic” between our story and vision and the Christian Story and Vision (2005, p. 196). Theological perspectives on transitioning into retirement village living would seek to understand the experience of moving into a retirement village in terms of this “dialectical hermeneutic”.

Groome highlights the importance of story, which is a recurring theme in this research project. Likewise, Kelley (2010, p. 86) affirms that “everyone has a story, and concepts of God may shape each person's story in profound ways”. Sharing one's story of transition can lead to a sense of freedom (Groome, 1999, p. 83). Groome writes: “Christian faith is grounded in human freedom, and the fruit of it is to live with, in, and for freedom, both here and hereafter” (p. 82). What such freedom looks like for each person depends on the individual's story.

In this enquiry, narratives of transition arise out of the stories of each person and the socio-cultural context in which these stories are lived. A pastoral counselling perspective recognises that one's *theology* also shapes one's stories of grief and loss: how one sees oneself, tries to make sense of pain and suffering, understands God and

cope with loss. Creation spirituality (Fox, 1983) is an example of a theology which views human experience in a holistic way. Such a holistic theology can encompass the complex nature of transitions and is expressed in terms of the *via positiva*, the *via negativa*, the *via creativa* and the *via transformativa* (p. 23).

The *via positiva* describes the dignity and value of persons as created in God's image, which forms part of the researcher's theological anthropology. From this point of view, human beings are created with immense value and are "originally blessed" in their humanity and personhood. This theological anthropology is holistic (it includes self, others and one's environment or context); and recognises that human beings are created for relationships (with oneself, God, creation and others), a view which values interdependence. Moltmann succinctly states that "being a person...means existing-in-relationship" (1981, p. 172). In terms of such relational interdependence, there may be older adults in this research project who are strongly independent, while younger individuals may be more interested in sharing life with others. The former group may resist the support and assistance of others and could remain isolated in a retirement community. This would pose a challenge to ministry in this context.

The theology of *via negativa* acknowledges and validates humanity's pain (Fox, 1983, p. 140). The grief and loss experiences of those who move into a retirement village are affirmed by the God who "suffers with humanity" in humanity's pain. The pain of loss, grief and sorrow is the "inevitable pain in a broken world" (Winter, 2012, p. 87). Concepts of exile found in the Old Testament narratives might provide helpful insights into the grief and loss experienced by an older adult. The pastoral counsellor witnesses to, and provides a space for, lament which is a biblical activity that expresses the raw pain of grief and disappointment. The pastoral counsellor offers empathic understanding and acceptance as older people navigate their griefs and losses.

In the theology of the *via creativa*, the relationships within the Christian understanding of God as Trinity emphasise the interdependence of the whole cosmos. "God is to be understood as Trinity both in the sense of coming to us and in God's very self. God is a Trinity of love" (Walker, 2017, p. 38). "What is being celebrated in trinitarian [sic] doctrine is the truth that neither the universe nor the

Creator is static; they are unfolding, pulsating, passionate, loving, creating, breathing, spiralling” (Fox, 1983, p. 214). This interdependence within the Godhead is described as *perichoresis* – “the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another and communicate eternal life to one another” (Moltmann, 1981, p. 175). Marmion and Van Nieuwenhove (2011, p. 14) assert that “[t]rinitarian theology in more recent times...exhibits an explicitly relational focus”. These authors argue that Trinitarian tradition has “left us two models or analogies for the Trinity, namely, the social and the psychological model” (2011, p. 201). A social analogy focuses on the Trinity as a “community of persons” and the consequences of this doctrine for right praxis. The psychological analogy, in turn, is based on the doctrine of *imago Dei*, that is, the human person is made in the likeness of the triune God’s image and likeness (p. 201). Bearing the image of this triune God, humanity is created for relationship and creativity. In the light of this theological understanding, relationships and a sense of belonging are given prominence in this research project.

Finally, the *via transformativa* is a theology of hope, visioning transformation through compassion and celebration. Dittes asserts that pastoral counselling regards people as both “as is” and “as if” (1999, p. 81) which is a view grounded in eschatological hope, the belief “that the new age symbolized by God’s incarnation has already begun, and that we can reliably offer to each other, in our faith, lodging in the kingdom” (p. 152).

This holistic theological perspective can further be described as “a theology of incarnational presence, a theology of a vulnerable God...” (Carter, 2014, p. 91). Such a Christian theology of “vulnerable incarnation” finds expression in the “incarnate Christ”, who exemplifies “the attributes of compassion, comfort, forgiveness, healing/wholeness and of presence” (p. 162). Incarnation, according to Dittes, is “a participation in the life of the counselee as it is, trusting in its integrity to find its way” (1999, p. 149). Walker (2017, p. 38) expands on this view as a “participation in God’s mission”, where “everyone is valued, compassion is shown, justice practised and peace in the full biblical sense of ‘shalom’ prevails”. Anstey writes that human wellbeing is “bound up with the wellbeing of the whole creation” (p. 63). This is relevant to the research project since pastoral counselling is a way of journeying with people in a compassionate, hopeful and incarnational way.

Balswick et al. (2005, p. 21) provide another theological perspective on human development in which they assert that human development moves towards a “reciprocating self” in reciprocating relationships. These researchers argue that their model is a “biblical model of relationality, where the created goal or purpose of human development is to become a reciprocating self – fully and securely related to others and to God” (p. 92). Thus, grief, loss and adjustment to retirement village living could be understood from relational, developmental and theological perspectives.

This chapter provided a conceptual overview of the research study and explored the psychological and theological literature pertaining to the experience of “leaving and making home” in a retirement village. The actual experience of transitioning into retirement village living is heard in the participants’ stories. How these stories are heard is the subject of the chapter to follow.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research project enquires about the experience of older adults when “leaving and making home” in a retirement village; what coping strategies are used during this transition and how pastoral counselling may assist with such transitions in the future. To hear these stories of transitioning the researcher has adopted a qualitative research methodology. The rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology is first described and then followed by an exposition of the methodology for this project.

Qualitative research methodology

McLeod asserts that there are “two broad styles of knowing that exist within Western culture and society”, described by Bruner as the “paradigmatic” and “narrative” (2011b, p. 2). A “paradigmatic” approach is related to the positivist physical sciences “which seek to explain how observable phenomena are the result of specific causal factors and processes” (p. 2). In contrast, “narrative knowing is associated with everyday accounts of human action, usually in the form of stories...” (p. 2). In similar vein to “narrative knowing”, Finlay’s “constructivist-interpretive” philosophical approach is a “naturalistic, relativist stance that recognises multiple meanings and subjective realities” (2006, p. 17). These authors describe human experience in terms of everyday (or naturalistic) events with many dimensions of meaning.

McLeod asserts that qualitative research is “a form of narrative knowing, grounded in everyday experience” (2011b, p. 15). It involves mapping and exploring “the meaning of an area of human experience” (p. i). Such a narrative approach recognises how one’s “sense of self is established through the stories that we tell about our lives, the stories that others tell about us, and the stories that we enact in their presence” (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 489). These stories capture the experiences and subjective meanings of the participants. Since the researcher has conceptualised the project in terms of prioritising and reflecting on the experience of transition (and taking action from that reflection), a qualitative methodology was chosen to hear these stories.

Qualitative research is based on several core assumptions and characteristics. Qualitative methodology enables one to investigate a phenomenon in detail (Morrow, 2007, p. 211) by exploring the various levels of meaning with regards to the topic of interest (McLeod, 2011c, p. 55). According to Morrow (p. 211), “it is also the most useful approach to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences”. Qualitative research makes “use of phenomenological and hermeneutic strategies for constructing meaning” (p. 63). A phenomenological strategy aims to describe the area of inquiry – the “thing itself”, while a hermeneutical strategy interprets a phenomenon from a particular perspective (p. 58). This project involves listening to the stories and experiences of older adults who have moved into a retirement village and interpreting this from a pastoral counselling perspective.

Qualitative studies also offer an in-depth investigation of an experience, enabling the researcher “to delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of human phenomena” (Morrow 2007, p. 211). For example, in their study *Mapping grief*, Machin and Spall used quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore and address various responses to loss (2004, p. 9). In the qualitative study, participants expressed “rich, individual, qualitative accounts of grief” (p. 12).

In contrast, *quantitative* approaches provide “a broad understanding of a phenomenon” (Morrow, 2007, p. 211), which generally focus “on quantifiable, objective measures and behaviours” (Farley & Evans, 2009, p. 5). An example of a “broad understanding” of the experience of transitioning into a retirement village is provided by Rosenkoetter et al. (2016) who used the Life Patterns Model as a framework for assessing the psychosocial adjustment of 240 older adults residing in three retirement villages (p. 859). These authors found that most residents reported high levels of self-esteem. However, their research was not able to explain what contributed to these positive feelings of self nor did it offer any insight into those respondents who reported low levels of self-esteem.

By following a qualitative methodology, the research questions were posed, data was gathered and then analysed in order to explore the meanings for older adults of moving into a retirement village. The emerging themes from the data were then compared and contrasted with existing literature (Morrow, 2007, p. 215).

Role of the researcher

An important feature of a qualitative enquiry is the involvement of the researcher in the research process. “Qualitative researchers accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences (and actively constructs) the collection, selection and interpretation of data” (Farley & Evans, 2009, p. 6). One form of qualitative research which recognises “that the research relationship involves an interactional encounter in which both parties are actively involved” (p. 9) is *relational research*. These terms describe the way the research is conducted and the attitude of the researcher to the participants. A similar attitude is also expressed in pastoral counselling, where the pastoral counsellor “joins with” the counselee in forming the therapeutic relationship. The researcher recognised this process at work when he joined with the participants in a respectful way and listened intently to their stories. However, while he maintained a relational attitude, he consciously adopted the position of a pastoral observer, mindful that in this context he was not in the role of pastoral carer or counsellor, but of pastoral researcher.

Furthermore, “[q]ualitative researchers recognise that their behaviour, and the relationships they have with co-researchers, have an impact on co-researchers’ responses” (Farley & Evans, 2009, p. 21). Such awareness requires the skill of reflexivity, which is defined as “a sensitivity to the researcher’s cultural, political and social context” (Bryman, 2016, p. 393). Reflexivity requires of the researcher “sustained critical self-reflection” (p. 21). In this study, the researcher is “both witness (in seeking to represent participants’ experiences) and author (in the way interpretations are made)” (p. 23).

Procedure

Having obtained ethical clearance for the project from Charles Sturt University, purposive sampling was used to obtain participants. The advantage of this type of sampling is that the sample is relevant to the research questions being asked (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Since a purposive sample is not a random sample, it “does not allow the researcher to generalize to a population” (p. 418). These participants are not representative of all older adults moving into a retirement village. Hence,

the sample has been chosen to represent “a perspective rather than a population” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). However, the research project could “provide a springboard for further research or allow links to be forged with existing findings in an area” (Bryman, 2012, p. 202). This particular type of purposive sampling, convenience sampling, has been chosen by the researcher for the accessibility to participants that it allows (p. 201).

Colleagues in nearby churches were emailed by the researcher to inform them of the study. Permission was requested for a written invitation to be extended to congregations for individuals to participate in the research study. The invitation was given in the church newsletter. Those individuals who wished to be considered as participants were invited to contact the researcher within two weeks of receipt of the invitation. The invitation stated that the first six to eight potential participants, who met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in the study, would be selected as participants in the research study.

At the start of the third week, an information sheet outlining the research study and criteria for participation along with consent forms were then sent to those potential participants who had followed up the invitation by contacting the researcher. The information sheet and consent form were written in accordance with the guidelines offered by Charles Sturt University (CSU).

Only two participants contacted the researcher. After consultation with his supervisor, the researcher sought permission, and approval was given, from the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to change the wording of the project from “Grief and loss when moving into a retirement village” to “Stories of transition when moving into a retirement village”. This resulted in a further three participants contacting the researcher.

Three additional potential participants contacted the researcher having obtained the invitation and information sheet by snowball sampling. These potential participants did not have any connections with the researcher and once he received the contact details of the participants, he was able to verify that he had no dual relationship with them.

The eight potential participants were then contacted by the researcher and the details of the research explained to them. Questions regarding the study were clarified. A 1-1.5 hour interview with those participants who agreed to participate in the study was then arranged with the researcher. The participants were assured that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research and until the researcher's dissertation is submitted for marking. At the time of the interview, participants signed the consent form.

Questions for the semi-structured interview were created by the researcher after consultation with his supervisor and research community. These interviews were held at the participants' residences, were audio-taped and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews and the findings documented in this dissertation.

Participants

The inclusion criteria for the project required that participants be over 70, having moved into a retirement village in the last 6 to 18 months with their partner and be a member of a church. Only one partner of a couple could participate. The rationale for this exclusion was the nature of the research, namely, possibly grief and loss, and adjustment into retirement village living. These are topics which might cause distress for the participants as the discussion could "open up" other griefs and losses which they have experienced or cause participants some discomfort (for example sadness or confused feelings). A duty of care towards the couple was felt by the researcher who rationalised that it would possibly be in their best interest if only one person participate in the research. In addition, the research project focuses on the individual's perception of the move. All of the participants were male and female from predominantly Anglo-Saxon lineage living in the north-western suburbs of Sydney, Australia. This sample was not deliberately homogenous; however, it reflects the predominant social demographic of the churches to which the invitation was extended in the north-western suburbs of Sydney.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The interview provided information about a participant's life experience expressed in their own words. This method does not rigidly direct the discussion, nor does it become intrusive as might be the case when a structured questionnaire is used. Instead it allows for rich and nuanced data to emerge. The interview questions focussed on central aspects of transitioning ("leaving home") and adjusting to retirement village living ("making home"). Questions also explored the role of spiritual and theological resources in "making home" and enabling this transitioning process.

The questions were used as prompts, allowing participants to tell their own stories in their own words with limited guidance. The interviews lasted between forty minutes and an hour and twenty minutes. The audio-recordings were then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. Copies of the transcriptions were mailed to participants, who had the option to review or edit their responses prior to analysis if they wished to.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from which various themes were identified. In this way, thematic analysis seeks to "uncover patterns of meaning in informant accounts of experience" (McLeod, 2011b, p. 145). These accounts convey "something significant about what the world (or the particular aspect of the world being discussed) means to a person" (p. 145). According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is a useful approach for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data (2006, p. 79). As a flexible approach to research, thematic analysis can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches while still offering a rich and complex account of the data (p. 78). In the process of analysing the data thematically, the researcher was mindful of his active role of identifying patterns, selecting which were of interest and then reporting these (p. 80). A software program for the thematic analysis was used by the researcher who followed Braun and Clarke's (p. 84) six phases of thematic analysis carefully:

familiarizing oneself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming various themes; and producing the report.

Themes in the data were identified in terms of the research questions. The process of data analysis was, thus, an iterative approach – “one in which there is a movement backwards and forwards between sampling and theoretical reflection” (Bryman, 2012, p. 420). By iteratively examining the data, “both the explicit and hidden meanings” (Farley & Evans, 2009, p. 145) of transitioning were described. At the time of analysis, it was expected that some of the themes would correlate with themes which arose from the literature review.

Ethical considerations

Prospective research participants were able to respond to an invitation in a church newsletter by contacting the researcher directly via email or telephone. The researcher was careful to recruit participants “at arm’s length”, ensuring he was not in a dual relationship with participants as minister and researcher, which might have influenced the responses of the participants with regards to issues of faith, grief and loss.

All prospective participants were “given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in a study” (Bryman, 2016, p. 138). Prospective participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time prior to submission of the dissertation. The identity of the participants remained confidential throughout the study. Any research notes and transcripts were kept in a locked filing cabinet for confidentiality and security purposes. The “list of participants and their identifier codes” were stored separately (p. 137).

Written informed consent for the audio-recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were received by the researcher. To ensure the participant’s identity was protected, all identifying data was removed. Pseudonyms were used when referring to participants in the report.

A further ethical consideration for this research project was the question of whether there was potential for harm to participants. Bryman (2016, p. 135) argues that “harm can entail physical harm; harm to participants’ development; loss of self-esteem; [and] stress”. Any possible negative outcomes to participating in the study were anticipated by the researcher. Since experiences of grief and loss, and transition can evoke a stress response, the researcher tried “to minimize disturbance both to the subjects themselves and to the subjects’ relationships with their environment” (p. 136).

The researcher sought to minimize potential harm by conducting the interview in a safe place; informing the participants that they could refuse to answer any interview question; and by using a semi-structured interview schedule which provided the participants with the opportunity to clarify their responses. Each participant received a transcript of their own interviews for them to review and change, if they wished to, prior to analysis. A summary report of the outcomes of the study was made available to each participant.

The methodology employed to hear the stories of “leaving and making home” has been described in this chapter. These voices are heard in the following chapter where the lived experiences of moving into a retirement village are narrated and interpreted.

Chapter 4: Findings

“Leaving and making home” has been suggested as the essence of the experience when moving to a retirement village. In this chapter, the voices of participants in the human research study at the centre of this research project are heard as they reflect on their experiences. Various themes emerged as the researcher analysed the research interviews and explored the experience of transition. Selected extracts from the research interviews give content to these themes¹. Five overarching, interrelated themes (with subthemes) emerged to describe the phenomenon of transitioning into retirement village living:

The factors behind the decision to move into a retirement village;
The experience of “leaving home” and the experience of loss;
The challenges involved in transitioning into retirement village living;
The process of adjustment in “making home” in the retirement village;
Coping strategies adopted by older adults when moving into a retirement village.

Factors behind the decision to “leave home”

Various factors led couples to their decision to leave their existing home and to move into a retirement village. *Health issues* were a significant reason.

Phil had “been badly injured in a car accident [and] had trouble going up and down the stairs”. He recalls his wife saying: “I really don’t want to move”. To this he replied, “Well, look, I really *need* to move” [italics added]. Now, he says: “[My] health is really impacting on her because I am getting worse. So she’s had a hard time with me and I’m certainly not getting any better, but I don’t know where it’s going to lead”.

Phil’s wife was “diametrically opposed” to the move and is “still touchy” about it seven months into the move. Phil’s emphasis on his *need* to move suggests that he feels guilty about his health issues forcing her to move before she was ready, and even now he is causing her distress.

¹ Please note that pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure the participants’ privacy.

In contrast, Margaret's "husband had major surgery...about four years ago. We had to have help with gardening and any maintenance of the house after that, so we had it all painted and spruced up, then decided [to] let it go. The timing was really perfect as it turned out". For them, she comments, it was "easy because of Mike's health and we just realised that we both like to be settled, if one or either of us was taken....I think I noticed how [he] has aged physically so I could see his need, but since he's moved in here, he's looking 20 years younger. His health has been good". In this exchange, Margaret initially grapples with death, but the move has given her a reprieve from confronting her fears.

Participants also had apprehensions about *future* health and other potential concerns. Margaret recalls that making a move alone is "what we wanted to avoid...I guess another reason that we brought our move forward to this point, my husband's best man and best friend died suddenly and it just really knocked him around, and he's been helping his [friend's] wife make adjustments". Again, Margaret has been thinking about the reality of death and in a sense, preparing herself for what lies ahead.

Peter, too, recognises that they moved into a retirement village "because if you suddenly get ill (it's what happens), you don't know. And then someone else might make the decision for you....If I got sick enough that Meryl couldn't look after me, I could go [to the nursing home] if they had a vacancy. If there is no vacancy, they will nurse you here at a cost in your own place until there is a vacancy". Gavin feels similarly: "That was one reason why we chose this village because the nursing home was going to be available – not that we wanna use it for many years, I hope, but it's there". These extracts highlight the vulnerability of the participants, with illness almost being inevitable and at the forefront of their planning. Loss and the grief that will inevitably accompany it, is never far away. The role of their partner as a companion in this unpredictable, transitional phase is consistently voiced.

Bill is concerned about the level of care in the future by making a distinction between different types of villages: "But these places, you lose some of your money over the years in their agreement. There are other places where you don't lose any money, but I don't think the level of care is there". Bill tries to balance the loss of finances with the need for adequate care when he no longer has the capacity to care

for himself. Similarly, Joan acknowledges the indirect costs of ailing health since their “house... needed a lot of maintenance which was going to cost a lot of money” and “because we were thinking, looking into the future, we knew we had to do something”.

The preceding quote suggests that by planning ahead, Joan and her husband are able to exercise their autonomy, at a time in their lives when it feels their autonomy is slipping away. Other participants echo the theme of *autonomy* which impacts both the decision and the timing of the move.

Peter recognises that “someone else might make the decision for you” and goes on to use humour to underscore his point: “Be nice to your kids 'cause they choose your nursing home”. [Laughing at this,] Peter adds how his adult children responded when he repeated this to them: “They said, ‘Dad, you’ve relieved us a lot because we don’t have to make this decision. You’ve made the decision’”. This extract poignantly highlights the unsettling discomfort experienced when there is a shift in balance of autonomy, from parent to (adult) children. Both Joan and Bill feel the same: “[They] can see that we’re so happy and we’re not reliant on them” and “we’ll make the decision to come here and that won’t be left to them, and then when we do come here, we’re well looked after”.

Participants also recognised that *downsizing and house maintenance* were important factors in their decision to move into a retirement village. Joan mentions that “the weight that lifts off your head when you haven’t got maintenance to worry about and things like that”. Peter agrees that “it was getting out of a house that was lots of work....I don’t miss climbing up on the roof or up the trees or mowing lawns or gardens or anything. No, I don’t miss that at all”. Martin comments that “they say you shouldn’t be getting up on a roof once you’re 60 or 55. And I had to get up on the roof to clear tiles – the leaves and everything else that gets in the drains and the gutters and things like that”. For Anne, also, “we’d been in [our home] for 45 years and there were maintenance issues and although it was a beautiful home and we’d maintained it, we needed money and we really didn’t have a lot of money to maintain it....[If it] got to the stage where we couldn’t mow the lawn or we couldn’t do this, couldn’t do that, it was up to us, that they [their adult children] weren’t going to step in and say, ‘Right. Well, I’ll be there once a week to mow the lawns or do

whatever'. So, whereas we could see that other people that we knew – they had a back-up". Likewise, Peter mentions that they moved because he "could see where we were heading, with no children here to look after us. My brother is not that far away. He's over there. And there's only two of us. So, what do you do? You got to look ahead...." Here the competing demands of home maintenance and finances becoming an increasing burden in the context of declining physical capacity – a burden which cannot always be relieved by children.

A further factor in some couple's decision was their experience of *caring for their ailing parents*. Gavin remarks that "there were a lot of things to be considered before the move. We had, for example, an attached granny-flat with Sarah's mum, who was into her 90s, and we felt that it was becoming a real hassle looking after her, because I think she'd reached a stage where she needed to go into a nursing home". Joan recalls in detail how "Jack's mum died about ten years ago, and my parents died within a very short period of time soon after.... [His mum] was in independent care and we had a terrible time at the end of her life clearing out her unit and that sort of thing. [My brother] was over in England when my dad died and we had horrendous problems putting the house on market, clearing up everything, and they had loads of stuff. We got to the garage after clearing out stuff and we're just exhausted. And the stuff we had to clear out was just horrendous. *We don't want that for our boys*" [italics added]. By moving when they did, Joan reflects how they are not a burden to their children, which is clearly very important to her.

The high modality language in these excerpts, express the emotional impact of moving parents and the participants' conscious decision to protect their own children from this experience.

Two participants remarked on the importance of *timing* in making this decision to move. Martin stresses the importance in moving "at a sensible age, [and] not leave it to the end of your age. Now, there's another couple at our church – Frank would be 85 and he's looking to change. Sorry, it's too late. You've left the run too late, because your problem is that when you move, it is not just the moving. It's the getting in your brain, it's the worry, it's the getting everything organised. What are you gonna take? What are you not going to take?" Joan also feels that they were "fortunate because some people have left moving in here too late and they're

encountering a lot of problems, whereas many of us that have moved in at this stage two are all about the same age”. Martin suggests that the later one leaves the decision to move, the harder it may be, not only because of the physical demands of a move, but also because of its emotional toll.

The recurrent subthemes behind the participants’ decision to move were health, downsizing due to maintenance issues and the desire to be autonomous (not reliant on one’s adult children). In this next section, the participants provide insight into what it is like to leave their home.

“Leaving home” and the experience of loss

The varied meanings of “home” for participants are captured in the following excerpts. For Joan, “home is where you hang your hat up” and is “security....We’ve been incredibly blessed each house we’ve been to. You look back and [say], ‘Oh that was a lovely house’”. Margaret says that “Mike being part of my life is virtually home”. Picturing her grandson chatting away happily with his grandfather in “the lovely area at the back”, was “very important” for Margaret in considering where to move. For her, “home is where you’re comfortable too, I suppose. We had a very heavy dining room suite and we let that go because it used to take two of us to practically lift a chair, and so we got an outdoor setting. So home has gone from some sort of furniture down to just anything that’s easy. You didn’t have much in a Parsonage – just the basics. Our homes were furnished with things that others no longer wanted, and so Mum and Dad never had very much at all”. The continuation of relationships, recalling of memories and making new memories constitute the meaning of home for Margaret.

Some of the participants had lived a very long time in their family home. Anne remembers how they had lived for “47 or 46 years in the other home. That's where our babies were...And it was a very special home. We had built it and then we had extended it and Sam had put a lot of individual features into it, particularly in the extensions”. Peter also mentions how his wife “loved the home we were in. It was a home that was 19 years old and we built it ourselves”. These extracts were spoken with a mixture of sadness and pride in leaving the home for which they had worked

so hard and its accompanying memories. Home is described as an extension of the family.

In most of the participants' stories, the theme of grief and loss when moving from their home was *implied*. Martin uses a visceral image to describe his wife's experience of moving from their family home, and in so doing conveys his awareness of how deep her pain runs: "moving out of there at 67 or 68 – hello! So, it's a big change, ripping the heart out of her". Phil recalls how huge the move seemed for his wife, who did not want to move "because she'd lived and knew all the neighbours in the street and everything. We might as well (could've been) going overseas as far as she was concerned".

Others were quite pragmatic about the move and seemed less emotionally connected to it. Peter comments how he "just walked away from it and I haven't thought about it since that day. I just walked away and said, 'That's it. It's gone. It's another part of my life that's there and someone's gonna be happy in it'". Yet he is aware that his wife is hurting: "[she] misses the big house... [and] bedrooms... [and] she's had a harder time to adjust". Gavin feels that "we both realised we have to do it. We would need to do something and make a decision about old age and how we're gonna run that and where we're gonna live and what we're gonna do". Martin says that "in my working life, I used to say, 'Right, I get that done out the way. It's finished. I'll look forward to the next one'. Okay, we've landed here. We've set up. Now, what's the next thing?" The researcher wondered whether this very rational way of processing the transition could mask a more vulnerable emotional response.

Family members (adult children and grandchildren) also experienced loss when the family home was sold and their parents moved. Bill comments that although his son had moved overseas for a while, when he returned "for years [he] would drive down our street on his way home". He also recognises that both adult children "were married out of there. It was hard for them. The new place, I don't think it ever had that feel". Bill recalls that the grandkids "were very sad that we left because they had wonderful times on the stairs and the new place had no stairs....They used to play games...Our son works in the entertainment business, [like] he's in his late 40s now, but he used to put on little shows for them and they'd sit on the steps". But for

Bill personally, the memory is precious rather than the house, since “I don’t hang on to houses and stuff like that”. Phil also feels that “what people hang on to are memories and memories are very important”. The power of memories and the process of remembering are evident in these excerpts, which contain some grief and loss. The *unspoken* grief is very present for the participants.

Margaret alludes to the loss of home experienced by her daughter when she recounts this story: “Our youngest daughter, the only home she had known was the [family] home. Her husband offered to put the apartment over his garage. I didn’t realise how disturbed she was by us moving”. When Margaret’s daughter came to see the new place for the first time, Margaret recalls how her daughter “was an emotional mess until she came in and saw the familiar things that we had at the other home and she loved it. So I’m pleased we didn’t allow that emotion to sway us and I’m pleased she didn’t let us know that it was that strong”.

These stories about their children’s experiences suggest that they were affected by their parents’ move. The transition was felt generationally as was a sense of loss that was not easily dismissed. The older adults were deeply affected by their children’s pain at the loss of their childhood homes.

There were also *different types of losses* experienced in the move. Giving up various *special items* was very hard for participants and they spoke of these things with deep fondness. These items were often symbols of lost experiences and interactions with loved ones in the family home. Joan feels that “there were certain things, books, [which] are incredibly hard to give up, incredibly hard”. Margaret plays the organ and the piano, which they had to sell. She reflects: “It was a lovely little piano. The girls all learnt on that and I loved it. It was a beautiful piano to play.... It was a lovely instrument but too big for here. So I now have a little keyboard. And the beauty of that is that I can carry it. It’s a portable one”. Here Margaret tries to rationalise the loss of something precious by referring to the practicality of the replacement. She also refers to the relational aspect, rather than the object per se, which has value: “anything that we let go, they are only things, whereas people are more important.... I reflect on a lot of things that we had at the other place, but then I realised we don’t need them now”.

With regards to furniture, Bill recalls that “we didn’t bring a lot but some of this furniture is here because it’s part of what we had in our home”. Anne responds similarly: “We retained some of our furniture and some furniture is new, but a lot of the furniture came with us, so that was good”. Martin also laughs recalling the purchase of new furniture: “What you see around here is all new furniture. So, we had our furniture we had since we’re married 49 years ago and with the money that we got – ‘that we saved from the agent’s fee, I’m getting new furniture. That’s it’. I couldn’t complain. So, I had to go along with it”. Margaret “was pleased we could bring those two rugs with us. Our middle daughter worked in what was Grace Brothers, that’s Myer now...in the rug department and she came home and said, ‘Mum, there’s a beautiful rug. It’s the nicest one there,’ and she said it’s been reduced by 40%, and she said, ‘I know you’d like it’. Here Margaret, who had to let go of other precious things, has hung on to a few that had meaning, and this seemed to help her.

The range and complexity of emotions attached to downsizing is conveyed in these excerpts. The excitement of buying new furniture is tempered by the loss of belongings that sometimes formed the backdrop to their whole family life. Some participants coped with the transition by selecting precious items which told an important part of their story, and brought the items and their meaning, into their new home. In addition, the purchase of new furniture suggests their commitment to something new.

Anne spoke of some other losses that no-one else mentioned. “One couple who we’d consider themselves close friends said, ‘Well, you’ll have a new set of friends now’....That’s sad”. Anne’s grief was palpable as she disclosed her feelings at potentially losing longstanding relationships, particularly when this loss was minimised by the implication that lost relationships were readily replaceable. Furthermore, downsizing brought with it the *loss of some space* as Anne experienced: “There’s no alternative. I can’t go and sit in another room or....I don’t have choices”. For Anne, the loss of space carries a much deeper loss, the loss of choice in some very basic decisions. More broadly, this speaks to the general shrinking of people’s worlds as they age.

Most of the participants (and by extension their families and friends) experienced a sense of loss when transitioning. What differed among the participants were the type and the number of losses, and the way in which they could be acknowledged as significant. In the following section, the researcher explores some of the challenges associated with moving into and living in a retirement village.

Challenges involved in “leaving home”

Unexpected health issues can affect one’s expectations about adjustment to the new life. For Anne and her husband, their hopes had changed once they had moved: “we thought we were going to be a lot freer and [would] do some more travel and that didn’t happen last year. We virtually, as soon as we got here, I got health issues, so – yeah. But anyhow....” Anne tailed off as she spoke and was unable to find words to express how she felt about their unmet hopes and dreams.

In contrast, Peter regards the move as enabling a single focus and access to additional resources when his wife had unexpected medical issues: “So we could just concentrate on one thing, which is her and her medical issues, and the people in here have been marvellous and the chaplain is just absolutely brilliant”. Peter’s comments focus on the positive and it is thus difficult to know what he might have felt.

The processes involved in *deciding, selling and buying* were a second significant challenge for some.

Anne describes the process in this way: “once the wheels were set in motion, you're just caught up and you just had to keep going forward”. For Joan, buying off-plan was stressful: “This was only half-way built when we bought off the plan, so we couldn’t come and see what it was like inside”. She read through the contract several times and conveys “[we] came in with our eyes wide open because they explained it in the sales process very clearly and our solicitor went through it very clearly. [However] we lost a lot of sleep during that time”. Gavin acknowledges that “they sort of made our decision to sell and we spent quite a lot of time looking around at various retirement villages before we settled on this one, and we’re quite happy here”.

The *financial considerations* in selling and buying a home were challenges for some of the participants. Phil feels that “the price of retirement villages has gone through the roof...and the cost of living is going up... [We] had some problem selling our house [which] put more pressure”. He recalls how a “friend that refused to sell and then when she went in a nursing home, the family went back to the developer and said, ‘We’re ready to sell now’. And he offered them about 20% for the price of the house”. Bill found the process of selling the house very quick: “So it was only a matter of three days”. Margaret remembers that their “home didn’t sell. We had it with an agent. We had ten open houses and it got to a point where it was becoming crucial for a sale as we needed the money to buy here”. Martin, on the other hand, felt that “the market was right to move. The price here was reasonable”. Bill says that he and his wife would “give it a go, and it all happened very quickly”. Phil recalls how management “gave us six weeks to sell our house which is a bit pressuring”. These extracts suggest a sense of vulnerability when making important financial decisions when control is perceived to be in the hands of agents and the housing market.

Spouses were affected differently by their decision to move. For some, this process created significant interpersonal strain.

Martin says that his wife “kicked and screamed, did not want to come whatsoever, loved the house we were in....She worries that there's a lot of people who say you're living in an ‘old person’s place’. But you can close the doors. You can go on holidays. Don’t have to worry”.

Phil uses more emotive imagery to describe the intensity of the impact: “ [I] wanted to move, but Mary didn’t. It certainly put a lot of stress on our marriage...The tensions in the house were certainly there, really big time, and having been married to my wife as long as I have, I thought our marriage might’ve even combusted up over it. She just didn’t want to go now, just didn’t want to go”. Phil acknowledges that “it was a very strange time on our relationship and ...once you set the ball in motion, you almost can’t change your mind”.

Likewise, Anne conveyed this intensity through her repetition and rhetorical questioning. She was concerned for Sam “because he had put so much into the house and everybody kept on saying ‘he's never going to leave....He's never going to

leave. You're never going to get him out of that house. He's never going to leave'....And then they kept on saying, 'What's he going to do when he gets there? What's he gonna do when he gets there?' And so, yeah, that was a worry. But he has adapted very, very well”.

Most of the participants experienced multiple challenges in their move into a retirement village. They were also able to tell stories of adjustment to their new life and these subthemes are described below.

“Making home”: Adjustment to life in the retirement village

Most of the participants reported others' *perceptions* of a “retirement village”, which invariably carried negative connotations, suggesting perhaps that it was selling out to old age. Participants in turn countered these perceptions with their own experiences or perceptions which were largely positive. These provided a rationale for their decision to move or normalised life in a retirement village. Joan recounts: “it's amazing the number of friends that think ‘Oh, you're in a retirement village now’”. This has made them feel “a bit uncomfortable about it sometimes, but we know within our hearts we've done the right thing and we were meant to come here, so it sort of washes off your back really”. Joan surmises that “perhaps, they think it is sort of putting you in the mindset of getting older and could be a bit of worry about mortality and things like that”. Phil recalls his wife's description of retirement villages as “God's garden...because we're waiting to be planted”. Martin reflects that his friends “poo-pooed the whole idea and [said], ‘What are you doing that for? You don't need to move’. Well, their life is different. They've got children around them. They've got aunties and uncles around them and things like that. So, hello, we're in a different situation. So that's the reason why we [moved] – and I'm sure they understand now”.

Bill says of their retirement village: “These days there are people here in their 50s. The people are still going to work. They've moved in here for security. The others because they want to travel and they have no commitments to leave behind, that's what they do. So it's not that stigma of, ‘Oh, you're going to go’. It's just somewhere to go and live. I think I'm living in an apartment like this and our

daughter and son-in-law have just moved into an apartment in the city....We're in here, we've got people around us if we need for social connection, or for security, or for care....Many people do a lot of voluntary work in there. So it's just changing the place of living". With a smile, he recalls how his daughter "took us out for lunch the day before we moved in here and put on Facebook: 'Before they move into 'the facility,' she called it". In contrast to the other participants, Peter sees a retirement village as "an old people's home".

One of the issues in the move was dealing with the *frustrations of technology*. Joan shares that she is thankful that they have moved now and "not having to leave it later, because [in] all the other moves it was just a case of ringing up [telecommunication company] and saying "Can we have a new phone number?" and that's all you had to deal with as far as technology was concerned". Phil utilises humour to convey his frustration: "[we've] been here seven months and we still haven't got a satisfactory landline....If I take my mobile phone, go into the bathroom, stand on the toilet on one leg and hold the phone up", he gets a signal. Margaret, too, had a problem with the connections: "For some reason they couldn't get the internet and phone to work together". Martin had a more positive experience, recalling how, when they came to an information evening, "we had a fellow from [telecommunication company] here, [who said]: 'We'll look after you'. We'd been with [another telecom] for many years. They had all the problems. We didn't have any. And they never came to look after them".

The relationship to the *management* was another area of adjustment for some of the participants. Phil reflected on management policies: "This place has some interesting troubles in how they organise themselves, it was very stressful in the beginning, but having been here now, I understand why. They have things like you can't even move a pen in here until the final settlement and they've got all of the money, right". Living in another retirement village, Joan remarks that "you also had support from the office, and maintenance and things like that". Gavin felt that the management in his retirement village are "very approachable....They're very pleasant people". While the relationship with management structures provided benefits in some areas, it also underscored the loss of autonomy and independence inherent in retirement village living.

Living in community in close proximity to one's neighbours was an area of concern for many of the participants and some found it harder than others. Bill recognises that they "are free to do what we want". His one concern is that he "plays the piano sometimes, not very often these days, but I hope I don't annoy [them] and I say to them, 'Do I annoy you?' 'We can't hear it.' That's good". Phil says that "it's like buying a house in any other street. You don't know what your neighbours are going to be like".

Peter knows that they have a "totally different relationship with the neighbours.... We're not in each other's pockets. We live our separate lives, or get together and have a cup of coffee once a week maybe, which is very social". For Peter, "it's not our house.... We just can't do what we wanna do". For him, "the easiest thing we did here was furniture. The harder thing is [getting] used to living in a community". Bill feels that "there's enough other things going on here, then you can pick and choose. Some of these people, we never see. They don't go to anything, so that's their choice but we've still retained our life outside there".

Anne found it difficult to connect with her neighbours because she has "to buzz them or ring them and say, 'I'm coming down'. It's locked between floors. For security, but it's really, really secure. And I think, 'Oh, do we need all that?' That, to me, takes away the caring because I mean it is independent living". In spite of the obstacles, Anne feels that "everybody is lovely and we have good camaraderie with other people and it's really good". Peter remarks, with his characteristic humour, that he does not "hide that fact that I live in a maximum security retirement village". The different experiences and attitudes to community living may be reflective of different personality styles; however, it was evident that it required a measure of adjustment from all the participants to find equilibrium between togetherness and separateness that suited them.

Participants sought to *make meaning* of their move into a retirement village. Anne's grief shines through as she shares that after a year in the retirement village: "It's not home, but it's a nice place to live". She acknowledges that "people say, 'Oh, the first time you go on holidays and you come back, that's when you sort of feel at home or it takes 12 months to feel at home'". She expands on finding the meaning of home: "once I got my Mixmaster and my Magimix in the kitchen and I found that

my new small oven still made the same biscuits, I was happy. Sorry. That's so stupid”.

Anne apologises for her comment and is perhaps embarrassed by it. The researcher observed her looking into the kitchen as she spoke. Her concluding clause, mixed with laughter, suggests that Anne simultaneously recognises and minimises the significance of this seemingly mundane activity in her transition. Yet, making biscuits using *her* recipe, *her* mixers, opened up *her* grief in leaving *her* kitchen and *her* home and began a discovery of *her* new home. The researcher resonated with this experience, communicating to Anne how his wife had felt more at home in a new country when baking the family's traditional biscuits. Reflecting on this reflexively, such empathic attunement seems appropriate for the relational researcher.

Anne also recognises that they still need to “get the story going” in the new place, for “we can't remember the children running up and down the lawn or somebody doing something silly or crazy or all that sort of thing. There's not the history attached to it yet. And there won't be that sort of history, *but there'll be something*” [italics added]. Anne powerfully juxtaposes the grief of a dislocated history and missing memories with the hope of a new story and new memories in a new home.

A significant factor that supported adjustment for some is *moving within close proximity to one's previous support structure*. Bill recognises “if we'd moved into one of those places, away from what we were used to, that would've been different. But Mary can still go to the same shops”. Margaret acknowledges that “I think it was easier to make that transition because we were still in the same community, kept the same doctor, dentist.... “ She feels that moving nearby was the right decision for her: “I don't think, I would have coped with it as well. I think that'd be very difficult for anyone having to start afresh with friendships”. Peter also recalls that they “didn't have to change our church, we didn't have to change our doctors, our friends. Our children are not here and we decided years ago we weren't gonna follow our kids”. Anne shares that they “still do the shopping in the same area”. It appears that for many of the participants and their partners, the familiarity of their broader environment provided security and that adjustment was supported by maintaining some constancy in the midst of transition.

The participants felt that overall the move was *a positive experience*. Bill recalls that he and his wife “didn’t have any sleepless nights at all and you would think – well, I would’ve thought - that maybe when we drive past – because we had that place built, that was our place and we drive past it now and I think, ‘I’m glad we’re out of there....Everything just went through. So it just seemed to me that it was meant to be’”. Margaret reveals that “this is where it was to be and very happy with our decision. I wish we’d done it sooner”. Likewise, Martin feels that they “just settled quite easily, very quickly”. Anne remarks that “it’s good. Sam is really, really enjoying it. He goes down to the garden. There’s a community garden and he loves making things and doing things and there’s a big men’s shed....” Without negating the validity of the participants’ conclusions, the researcher wondered whether this positive summation helped participants to reconcile any unprocessed grief or regrets under the auspices of the greater good of the final outcome.

In the final section, the coping strategies the participants used to adjust to retirement village living are highlighted.

Coping strategies for “making home”

The participants recognise that *the retirement village community helps one to adjust*. Joan remarks that “the fact that so many others moved in at the same time too, we were all going through similar problems, like with [telecom.] or different things like that. So that brought you all together”. Bill agrees: “Everybody is in the same boat. It was easy. We have some fantastic neighbours around us”. Peter reflects that “all the new people we hadn’t met until we moved in here have been so supportive in everything”. Joan echoes a similar sentiment: “We’ve got similar interests and we’ve formed good friendships and it’s the sense of community and support that you’ll go on with for the rest of your life”. Anne feels that “everybody is very friendly and there were really no issues”. Phil affirms that “the people here are absolutely welcoming and lovely”. Having a common story, common interests and even common frustrations seemed to significantly contribute to making home. The researcher noted with interest the strongly positive, perhaps even idealising language, used in these descriptions and wondered about their function.

Joining in community activities gives purpose and structure to the new life. Martin mentions that “they have a walking group here. There’re exercise groups and things like that”. Similarly Peter offers that “there’re lots of things here because [we’re] encouraged to do things here, and we go walking groups and Bible studies if they want to and they have a church service and they have the garden, and they have aqua aerobics, and yoga, and meditation and exercises. And I go to the gym every day....I work in the [community] garden every other day down there”. Joan, however, values choice: “if you don’t want to get involved in anything, it doesn’t matter”.

Phil recognises that while the transition caused them stress as a couple, their relationship has also been *supportive* and “because we’ve always had parallel paths (but different paths) and that’s helped us cope”. He laughs as he quotes his wife: “retirement is twice the husband but half the money”. Martin recognises that “to see Jean happy, to see her come on board, to see her integrate, to see her fulfil some of the things that she wanted to do in the past – now, we can do it. And now she doesn’t think of home as our old home”.

Many of the participants used *humour* in their descriptions of transitioning. Peter’s humour has already been noted. Anne can laugh: “[There’s] far less to clean”. Martin joking states that “it’s a busy life, no time for retirement”. The researcher wondered about the value of humour for these participants as they faced the difficulties of “making home”. The humour may function at several levels – perhaps it is a deflection from more painful emotions which were difficult to disclose to the researcher, or even for the participants to acknowledge to themselves. This may be a helpful coping mechanism if used flexibly with other coping strategies; however, it may be problematic if it prevents any expression and processing of the grief which accompanies major life transitions.

Another subtheme in participant responses is the importance of *maintaining interests and relationships* outside of the retirement village. Joan recognises that “we’ve maintained our outside interests as well as our church connections which are important”. Bill feels the same: “We still retain the same friends we have, but that’s changing. We’re doing more with people from here because they’ve got changing interests for various reasons”. Anne affirms that maintaining these outside interests

was “a definite decision that we made before we came, that we would still go to the same church. We’re not involved in a huge lot of things. We lead a pretty quiet life, but we have maintained all our connections”. Martin shares that “past friends are still there”. It seems that participants valued and prioritised relationships as a bridge between their lives before and after the move which provided continuity in their life stories.

Participants also shared how *spiritual resources* helped them in the transition to retirement village living. Joan affirms that “we’ve learned all the way along that God provides for you....We knew it was the right decision all the way along because we knew God was leading us....I had a little card that I gave to another person who moved in here at the same time from our church: “Where the will of God may lead you, the grace of God will follow,’ and I kept on saying that over and over and reading a book by Joyce Meyer *Be Anxious For Nothing*....But I had an inner sense of peace all the way through, and if I woke up during the night, I would just read a chapter or something of Joyce Meyer’s book and I felt completely calm about it”. Joan highlights how her adjustment was an ongoing process and how she repeatedly drew on her faith and shared her faith as a means of coping with the transition. Likewise, Bill recognises that it was the right move “because everything in the end worked out” and Anne reveals that “God had another plan for us”. Martin feels that ‘God had a hand in it’. I said to my wife, ‘If it's God’s will, it will be opened up’”. The participants’ spirituality (expressed in these extracts) provided them with a certainty regarding their decisions and any unexpected outcomes. The researcher wondered if their understanding of God being in control provided security when the transition required the giving up of control on so many levels.

Margaret affirms that her *church community* offered her invaluable help: “There are so many from our church that had made a similar move here, and the same people say, ‘I’ve got a trailer. I can help’ and it’s just that lovely warmth in our church family. I’m sure that we would’ve found it very different without that help”. Peter comments: “I believe that we might need the doctors and we might need the drugs, but we also need their support and our faith and the faith of our friends praying for us”. Church communities offered practical, emotional and spiritual support which altered the adjustment process for many of the participants.

The actual experience of “leaving and making home” was heard in the stories of the participants. These stories were explored using thematic analysis and have been presented here in distinct sections. However, it is evident that these themes are interrelated and can be seen as a web of meaning rather than distinct. In the following chapter, the researcher reflects on these narratives from a pastoral counselling perspective.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The experience of transitioning into retirement village living straddles the twin experiences of “leaving home” and “making home”, which are encounters of grief, loss and adjustment. As an application of pastoral theology and of Green’s model of “doing theology” (2009), this study has, in previous chapters, *explored* this experience. In this final chapter, the meaning of this experience is *reflected* upon from a pastoral counselling perspective and *action* proposed.

The meaning of “home”

The meaning of *home* for the participants in this study was at the heart of their experience of transitioning. What constitutes “home”? Home has many interrelated layers of meaning, which are evident in their stories. Home contains the memories of raising children, of being family, of baking and sharing meals, and of enjoying adult children and grandchildren “performing” on the steps of their home. Home is also a place, a niche, a physical structure, a context for living, and an extension of oneself and one’s family. It was evident from the transcribed excerpts that “home” is a relational descriptor, containing memories and dreams. To be “at home” is to find a sense of belonging with one’s partner, children, grandchildren, friends, oneself and God. A story of home is, in many ways, “a story of the heart” (Benner, 2003, p. 65). Some have described home idiomatically as “where your heart is”. In light of the multilayered nature of home, why do older adults “leave home” and what happens emotionally and spiritually as they make this transition?

Participants highlighted five reasons for deciding to move into a retirement village: present health issues; future health concerns and the provision of care in a nursing home; retaining a sense of autonomy in the process of moving; the responsibility of house maintenance and downsizing; and the personal experience of caring for ailing parents. Many of these factors are maturational challenges which relate to the current health issues of the participant and/or their partner. Participants did not want to make the move alone in the future, hence health concerns were a frequent catalyst in this decision-making process.

Rosenkoetter et al. (2016) describe moving into a retirement village as “a major life transition” (p. 858), especially when the relocation involves relinquishing belongings, downsizing homes, and leaving families and friends. Six of the eight participants in this project had moved out of the family home into the retirement village and faced the challenges and opportunities of this “major transition”. It is evident from this study that transition involves negotiating the multilayered meanings of “home” for oneself, a process which oscillates between grief, loss and adjustment.

As a “religious/ existential symbol” (Doehring, 2006, p. 118), the meaning of *home* is constructed in a particular way, which reflects an “embedded theology”. During times of transition or crisis, this symbol “may break and potentially be reconstructed” (p. 118). This theological understanding points to a potential role for the pastoral counsellor in supporting older adults as they grieve the broken symbol and then attempt to reconstruct it.

A significant challenge in reconstructing this symbol in a personally meaningful way is the perception and judgement of others of retirement villages, which reflects the broader socio-cultural context and prejudices with regards to age. Referred to variously as “God’s garden”, a “facility”, a “maximum security village”, “old people’s home”, and you go there when “you’re about to go [die]”, participants had the challenge of reframing their own understanding of living in community.

The experience of “leaving home”

The experience of grief is one’s “personal experience of loss” (Worden, 2009, p. 37). “Leaving home” may contain both elements of grief and loss, *and* the anticipation of a new beginning for the older adult, which is connected to their having a choice to move or not to move. The psychological literature highlights various types of losses, for example, maturational loss due to retirement (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 2); anticipatory loss of illness and death (Overton and Cottone, 2016, p. 430); disenfranchised loss (Doka, 1999, p. 37); and the loss of a sense of autonomy (Rosenkoetter et al., 2016, p. 859). Although grief and loss are associated with retirement in the psychological literature, since the participants in this project had

retired on average 10 years before their decision to move into a retirement village, retirement itself was not a factor in their decision to move.

In light of the literature review, the researcher anticipated grief would be experienced by the participants in leaving the family home. As the participants shared their stories of transition, they were attempting to make meaning of “leaving home”. When asked about what was difficult about moving into a retirement village, a question anticipating a sense of loss, participants shared about parting with special items (for example books, an organ, piano, and furniture); less space in the new home; concerns about friendships; the pain of a partner struggling to adjust and the difficulties of the move experienced by their adult children.

In these narrations, participants did not use the words “loss” or “grief” nor venture too deeply into a discussion around their sense of loss. It seems that older adults struggled with the initial title of the project (“Grief and loss when moving into a retirement village”) as only two participants responded to the invitation after several attempts. The change in title to encompass “Stories of transition” opened up the possibility of disclosing experiences of grief, loss *and adjustment* without explicitly naming it as such. The researcher wonders what it is about this generation which makes speaking about the phenomenon of grief and loss difficult. Were they struggling to find the words to describe “things of the heart”? Are the terms grief and loss reserved only for bereavement?

While it seems that this generation does not identify with the “grief and loss” expression, there are *examples of grief and loss* throughout this enquiry – most of which are implicit. Moving into a retirement village brought one of the participants a reprieve from confronting her fears about death (anticipatory loss). A common theme for older adults was concern about the loss of their autonomy. By planning ahead “while they could”, older adults were able to exercise their autonomy, at a time in their lives when it felt their autonomy slipping away. Linked to this sense of autonomy and agency is the desire on the part of some participants not to be a burden on their children. Furthermore, the competing demands of home maintenance and finances increased with the loss of physical capacity.

“Leaving home” involves downsizing which results in giving up various special items. “Making home” elsewhere involves keeping meaningful items which have a

story behind them, or buying new items as a way of creating another story. The range and complexity of emotions attached to downsizing was conveyed in their stories.

A participant was also concerned about losing longstanding friendships, particularly when this loss was minimised by the implication (from some of those friends) that lost relationships were readily replaceable. Another loss mentioned was the loss of space, which speaks to the general shrinking of people's worlds as they age. The researcher wondered how these experiences of loss are grieved, and what role pastoral counselling might offer in this process.

The researcher noticed an emotional reservedness in the participants' stories. There was a consistent underlay of feeling; however, the participants seldom expressed their grief and loss directly. There were glimpses of emotion, for example, when a participant shared about his adult son entertaining the children on the stairs of their home and when another participant felt the potential loss of friendship. More often, humour was employed when discussing emotional content, perhaps to keep their emotion at a safe distance. During the interview process, the researcher consciously maintained the position of a pastoral observer, mindful that he was not in the role of pastoral carer or counsellor, but of researcher. Avoiding the dual role of pastoral researcher and counsellor was an ethical choice the researcher made, even though richer data might have been generated through a deeper exploration. As a pastoral counsellor it would be appropriate, perhaps even an imperative, to invite these deeper emotional expressions of grief.

The experience of “making home”

While all the participants described the move as a positive experience overall, they acknowledged areas of challenge as they sought to make meaning of their experience. These challenges included unexpected health issues; the impact of the move on the marital relationship; financial considerations and the move itself.

The impact on the marital relationship was an important finding in this research enquiry. The role of their partner as a companion in this unpredictable, transitional phase is consistently voiced. Partners were affected differently by the decision to

move. Some participants expressed concern as to how their partner would adjust to living in a retirement village while others remarked how smooth the decision to move and the adjustment was for both of them.

Upon reflection, the stories suggest that the disparity between partners' experience of the transition was reflective of their different developmental needs (for example, one participant was retired and unwell while his partner was healthy and still working) and different attachment to their home (emotional attachment to home as opposed to rational decision-making with regards to the house). Other factors which might account for this disparity include personality styles, gender roles and early life experience all of which could be further explored.

The second research question enquires as to how older adults adjust to life in a retirement village and what coping strategies they use to "make home" there. Three common areas of participant response to the *process* of adjustment were: difficulties with technology; living in community and maintaining support structures. Adjusting to retirement village living was understood as a process, described by a participant in this way: "It's not home, but it's a nice place to live....People say, 'Oh, the first time you go on holidays and you come back, that's when you sort of feel at home or it takes 12 months to feel *at home*'" (italics added).

Having moved, participants were concerned about living in close proximity to their neighbours, yet they also affirmed that they could live their separate lives, and participate in the activities which interest them. They also acknowledged how the community helped them to settle. The psychological literature stresses the "quality of social networks" (Kloep & Hendry, 2015, p. 194) and "friendships...for a positive retirement life in these communities" (Rosenkoetter et al., 2016, p. 865). McLeod and McLeod emphasise three interconnected activities in "building a niche" or "making home" in a retirement village: connecting with other people; telling one's story and finding meaningful objects or spaces (2011, p. 263).

These authors highlight the importance of relationships, social networks, and of connecting with others in enabling older adults to adjust to retirement village living. This was borne out in the participants' stories of involvement in the community, support and friendship among their neighbours and maintaining relationships outside of the village. The participants also valued specific items and the memories

associated with these in making the transition into a new space. In addition, purchasing new items was a way of creating a new story. Another common theme in participant responses was the importance of moving within close proximity to one's previous support structure and in maintaining their interests and relationships outside of the retirement village.

Participants also shared how spiritual resources and the church community helped them in the transition to retirement village living. Kelley describes the various "dimensions of religious coping" (2010, p. 108) in terms of one's religious beliefs, religious practice and religious community. Some participants found that their beliefs and church community were important resources for coping with the transition. In the researcher's experience, as a minister, the most prominent aspect of "religious coping" is the church community, since the relational support is highly valued. This observation is consistent with McIntosh's insight that spirituality is about the "network of communal relationships and perception that the presence of God makes possible for each spiritual person...." (1998, pp. 6-7) This image of interdependence has its theological foundation in the Christian understanding of God as Trinity and in the theological anthropology of human beings as essentially relational. Furthermore, religious practice expressed in communal worship and ritual provides continuity and familiarity which is grounding in a time of transition.

The process of "making home" thus includes creating a space where, as one participant shared, you "hang your hat". Home, in this sense, is where you belong, where you are at ease with yourself, surrounded by reminders of your story, and where you are emotionally and physically secure. The stories of each participant revealed the importance of interdependence: maintaining a sense of autonomy while at the same time being a part of the community.

Researcher as witness and author

In this enquiry, the researcher is "both witness (in seeking to represent participants' experiences) and author (in the way interpretations are made)" (Farley & Evans, 2009, p. 23). This role is similar to that of the pastoral counsellor who is a witness to a counsellee's experience (Dittes, 1999, p. 57). While there is a similarity, the

researcher was consciously aware of prioritising his role as researcher during the interview process. At times he recognised that he may have been unnecessarily constrained by the role of researcher thereby limiting his engagement with the participants. The data may have yielded more layers if the researcher had offered a more relational presence.

During the interviews, the researcher was aware that being a minister may influence the responses of the participants when they are asked about the role of one's spirituality (practices, beliefs and community) in coping with transitions. There was only one instance where the researcher felt this influence may be occurring. One participant mentioned how things had not entirely worked out as they had hoped, since after moving they encountered some health concerns. Thereafter she says: "God had another plan for us (laughs)". The researcher had not picked up on this in the interview and upon reading the transcript was curious as to the laughter that went along with the statement.

Implications for the practice of pastoral counselling

Action (or response) follows reflection in Green's model of "doing theology" (2009). How might a pastoral counsellor respond to a person in the transition to making home in a retirement village? Dittes writes that the foundation of pastoral counselling is *witnessing* to a person's experience (1999, p. 57). He goes on to describe pastoral counselling as "more *a matter of the heart* or the soul than the head, more a matter of faith than works, an attitude and posture more than a technique or skill" (1999, p. xii) (italics added). To witness to a person's transition into retirement village living is to listen for the twin aspects in the story of "leaving home" and "making home" and being present to the complex, unspoken emotions within the stories.

Witnessing in this way *validates* the experience of "leaving and making home". If this experience of moving into a retirement village is not validated, it can become an instance of disenfranchised grief, that is, grief which "is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported" (Doka, 1999, p. 37). A way of validating this experience is through the use of ritual. Doka defines *ritual*

“as highly symbolic acts that confer transcendental significance and meaning on certain life events or experiences” (2002, p. 135). Thus, rituals provide a structure for containing and expressing emotion (p. 135). This is part of grief counselling, which, according to Dittes, is the basis of all pastoral counselling (1999, p. 26). The pastoral counsellor may invite counsees to create their own ritual acknowledging the transition or highlight the significance of rituals that the counselee may have unknowingly created themselves and deepen this part of their story.

The pastoral counsellor informed by a theology which recognises “pain as pain” (*via negativa*) while at the same time affirming an incarnational view of the “vulnerable God” (Carter, 2014, p. 91) is able to signpost hope. Within congregations particularly, a minister trained in pastoral counselling, is uniquely positioned to have significant conversations with those who are making this transition and who most likely would not seek counselling in private practice. As an “embedded counsellor” (McLeod & McLeod, 2011, p. 28), the minister as pastoral counsellor creates the space for older adults to tell their story and the story they do not tell. In these pastoral conversations, people in this transition phase are given the opportunity to express their emotion and name their grief, thereby validating what they may be feeling but are finding difficult to express. By doing so, the self-regard of the “counselee” can grow (Dittes, 1999, p. 33), thus strengthening their sense of autonomy and agency.

The astute pastoral counsellor would be mindful of how transitions have far-reaching effects which may surface at different times or in different contexts. When pastoral care is offered during times of bereavement, the pastoral counsellor would be aware of how this hidden grief might be a part of the bereavement of older adults and this may be an opportunity to reflect on this transition period. During times of transition, the pastoral counsellor might support couples in naming and processing the interpersonal challenges. If it was needed, they could be referred for more specialised counselling.

Furthermore, a deeper level of pastoral counselling may involve an exploration of the unspoken fears of ultimate loss – one’s own death. The loss associated with transitions can be a window into these fears, which are often unspeakable. The intuitive pastoral counsellor might provide words for this experience, thereby giving

permission for the counselee to speak those words aloud; or alternatively to find words that they did not have. In so doing, the pastoral counsellor can help older adults to develop their own “point of view about death” (McCoyd & Walter, 2016, p. 261). Margaret, for example, grapples with her husband’s major surgery and the death of her husband’s best man. The possibility of death is on her mind. Moving into a retirement village as a couple, has given them a new lease on life and the assurance that when either of them go, they are provided for - a temporary reprieve from confronting her fears. This is an important developmental task for this age-group and yet the participants had little to say about it. As a pastoral counsellor, one could hear in their unspoken words possible allusions to death, which are pertinent at this point in their lives and worth further exploration.

Implications for future research

Multiple factors could impact the transition into retirement village living including personality, attachment styles, and socio-economic status, which could all warrant further research. This project does not enquire directly into the gender differences in transitioning into retirement village living; however, the stories made clear reference to gender differences to various aspects of the transition. This is an important area of potential research.

The findings in this research revealed the marital relationship as both an area of support and challenge. This theme was not explored or developed further in this project. Interviewing both partners would draw out gendered perceptions of the transition and the complexities of relational conflicts about such a difficult matter.

Finally, an interesting area of further exploration would be the manner in which this age-group identifies and expresses their emotions.

Limitations of the research project

All of the participants were from predominantly Anglo-Saxon lineage living in the north-western suburbs of Sydney, Australia (referred to as the Hills District). This sample was not deliberately homogenous; however, it reflects the predominant social

demographic of the churches in the Hills District to which the invitation was extended. In light of the sample, this research is limited. There is scope for a study of this kind to be replicated in other demographics so that the benefits for the aged care sector could be better targeted in city and regional communities.

Conclusion

Transitioning into retirement village living involves “leaving and making home”. This process is an oscillation between loss and adjustment. Older adults are primarily concerned about future health and care issues when choosing to move into a retirement village. Adjusting to life in a retirement village involves continuity and change. Pastoral counsellors witness these aspects of the story by listening for the meanings emerging from this transition by creating a space where stories of hope and loss are honoured. In this process people are able to make sense of their experience in new and, perhaps, deeper ways. By artfully integrating the disciplines and practices of psychology and theology, the pastoral counsellor is well positioned to bear witness and support people making this developmental transition, without pathologising or overlooking the significance of this transition.

Bibliography

- Anderson, R. S. (2001). The discipline of practical theology. In *The shape of practical theology: Empowering ministry with theological praxis* (pp. 23-34). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.
- Anstey, M. P. (2017). "And God saw it was good": The creation of wellbeing and the wellbeing of creation. In G. Ambler, M.P. Anstey, T.D. McCall & M.A. White (Eds.), *Flourishing in faith: Theology encountering positive psychology* (pp. 55-64). Oregon: Cascade.
- Balswick, J., Ebstyn King, P. E., & Reimer, K. (2005). *The reciprocating self: Human development in theological perspective*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Beaumont, S. (2009). Pastoral counselling anyone? Those troublesome dual relationships in pastoral counselling. *St Mark's Review*, 208(2), 45-58.
- Benner, D. (2003). *Strategic pastoral counseling: A short-term structured model* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burck, J.R. & Hunter, R.J. (2005). Pastoral theology, Protestant. In R.J. Hunter (Ed.), *Dictionary of pastoral care and counselling* (pp. 867-872). Nashville: Abingdon.
- Cahalan, K.A. & Mikoski, G.S. (Eds.). (2014). *Opening the field of practical theology: An introduction* (pp. 1-10). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Casey, B.N. (2012). Pastoral care regarding losses for seniors: Creating rituals, personal narratives, and practices to draw seniors closer to God. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 24(4), 289-300.
- Cooper-White, P. (2004). *Shared wisdom*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- Corey, G., Corey, M.S., & Callanan, P. (1998). Managing boundaries and multiple relationships. In *Issues and ethics in the helping professions* (5th ed.) (pp. 223-263). California: Brooks/Cole.
- Dittes, J.E. (1999). *Pastoral counselling – The basics*. London: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Doehring, C. (2006). *The practice of pastoral care – A postmodern approach*. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Doka, K.J. (1999). Disenfranchised grief. *Bereavement Care*, 18(3), 37-39.
- Doka, K.J. (2002). The role of ritual in disenfranchised grief. In K.J. Doka (Ed.), *Disenfranchised grief* (pp. 135-147). Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.
- Emmons, R. A. (1999). *The Psychology of ultimate concerns: Motivation and spirituality in personality*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Finlay, L. (2006). Mapping methodology. In L. Finlay & C. Ballinger (Eds.), *Qualitative research for allied health professionals* (pp. 9-29). West Sussex: Whurr Publishers.
- Finlay, L. & Evans, K. (2009). *Relational-centred research for psychotherapists*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
- Fox, M. (1983). *Original blessing: A primer in creation spirituality*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Green, L. (2009). *Let's do theology – Resources for contextual theology*. London: Mowbray.
- Groome, T.H. (1999). *Christian religious education - Sharing our story and vision* (2nd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Groome, T.H. (2011). *Will there be faith? A new vision for educating and growing disciples* (pp. 261-298). New York: HarperCollins.
- Guthrie, S.C. (2005). Theology, Christian. In R. J. Hunter (Ed.), *Dictionary of pastoral care and counseling* (pp. 1266). Nashville: Abingdon.

- Jacobs, M. (1993). *Still small voice: A practical introduction to counselling in pastoral and other settings*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Kelley, M.M. (2010). *Grief – Contemporary theory and the practice of ministry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Kloep, M. & Hendry, L.B. (2015). Pathways to retirement. In L.B. Hendry, *Developmental transitions across the lifespan: Selected works of Leo B. Hendry* (pp. 192-200). New York: Psychology Press.
- Kwok, W. (2016). Narrative therapy, theology, and relational openness: Reconstructing the connection between postmodern therapy and traditional theology. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 44(3), 201-212.
- Lester, A.D. (1995). Future stories and hope. In *Hope in pastoral care and counselling* (pp. 59-71). Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Machin, L. & Spall, B. (2004). Mapping grief: A study in practice using a quantitative and qualitative approach to exploring and addressing the range of responses to loss. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 4(1), 9-17.
- MacKinlay, E. (2014). Baby Boomers ageing well? Challenges in the search for meaning in later life. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 26(2-3), 109-121.
- Marmion, D. & Van Nieuwenhove, R. (2011). *An introduction to the Trinity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M. (2000). Spirituality in a postmodern era. In J. Woodward & S. Pattison (Eds.), *The Blackwell reader in pastoral and practical theology* (pp. 192-206). Oxford: Blackwell.
- McCoyd, J.L.M. & Walter, C.A. (2016). *Grief and loss across the lifespan. A biopsychosocial perspective*. New York: Springer.
- McGrath, A.E. (2017). *The Christian theology reader* (5th ed.). West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

- McIntosh, M.A. (1998). *Mystical theology: The integrity of spirituality and theology*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
- McLeod, J. (2003). *Doing counselling research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- McLeod, J. & McLeod, J. (2011a). *Counselling skills - A practical guide for counsellors and helping professionals* (2nd ed.). Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education.
- McLeod, J. (2011b). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd Ed.) Los Angeles: Sage.
- McLeod, J. (2011c). Hermeneutics and phenomenology: The core of qualitative method. In *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* (pp. 55-63). Los Angeles: Sage.
- McLeod, J. & McLeod, J. (2015). Research on embedded counselling: An emerging topic of potential importance for the future of counselling psychology. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 28(1), 27-43.
- McMinn, M. R. (1996). Forgiveness. In *Psychology, theology, and spirituality in Christian counselling* (pp. 205-235). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.
- Moltmann, J. (1981). *The Trinity and the kingdom of God*. London: SCM Press.
- Morrow, S. (2007). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: Conceptual foundations. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(2), 205-208.
- Murray, J.A. (2001). Loss as a universal concept: A review of the literature to identify common aspects of loss in diverse situations. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 6, 219-241.
- Neimeyer, R.A. (2014). The changing face of grief: Contemporary directions in theory, research, and practice. *Progress in Palliative Care*, 22(3), 125-130.
- Neimeyer, R. A., Klass, D., & Dennis, M.R. (2014). A social constructionist account of grief: Loss and the narration of meaning. *Death Studies*, 38, 485–498.

- Osmer, R. (2008). Fours tasks of practical theology. In *Practical theology: An introduction* (pp. 1-29). Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Overton, B.O. & Cottone, R.R. (2016). Anticipatory grief: A family systems approach. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 24(4), 430-432.
- Pargament, K.I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping*. London: Guildford Press.
- Park, S. (2006). An evolving history and methodology of pastoral theology, care, and counseling. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 9(10), 5-33.
- Pattison, S. & Woodward, J. (2000). An introduction to pastoral and practical theology. In J. Woodward & S. Pattison (Eds.), *The Blackwell reader in pastoral and practical theology* (pp. 1-19). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Patton, J. (2005). *Pastoral care - An essential guide*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- Powell, P. (2015). *Story whispering: An introduction to biblical-narrative therapy*. North Parramatta: Pastoral Counselling Institute.
- Powell, R., Pepper, M., Hancock, N. & Sterland, S. (2017). *2016 NCLS Attender Survey [Data file]*. Sydney: NCLS Research.
- Property Council of Australia - National overview of the retirement village sector (2014). Retrieved from https://www.grantthornton.com.au/globalassets/1.-member-firms/australian-website/industry/hac/pdfs/gtal_2014_hac_national-overview-of-the-retirement-village-sector.pdf
- Rosenkoetter, M.M., McKethan, T., Chernecky, C. & Looney, S. (2016). Assessment of the psychosocial adjustment of well elderly residing in retirement communities. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 37(11), 858-867.
- Sonn, C.C., Ivey, G., Baker, A. & Meyer, K. (2017). Post-Apartheid South African immigrants in Australia: Negotiating displacement, identity, and belonging. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(1), 41-54.

- Stroebe, M. & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23(3), 197-224.
- Thompson, J., Pattison, S. & Thompson, R. (2008). *SCM study guide: Theological reflection*. London: SCM Press.
- Townsend, L.T. (2011). Research report: A grounded theory description of pastoral counselling. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 65(3), 1-15.
- Walker, C.C. (2017). *Thinking the faith. Living the faith: An introduction to Christian theology*. Sydney: UCA Assembly.
- Winter, R. (2012). *When life goes dark: Finding hope in the midst of depression*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Woodruff, C.R. (2002). Pastoral counselling: An American perspective. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 30(1), 93-101.
- Worden, J.W. (2009). *Grief counselling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health Practitioner* (4th ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Appendix

Interview Questions

1. How did you come to a decision to move into a retirement village?
2. What was your experience of moving?
3. What was difficult about moving into a retirement village?
4. What has helped you to cope with the challenges of the move?
5. What role has your church played in this transition?
6. How have your personal beliefs affected this transition?
7. How have you settled in to living in a retirement village?
8. What has made it easier or more difficult to settle in?